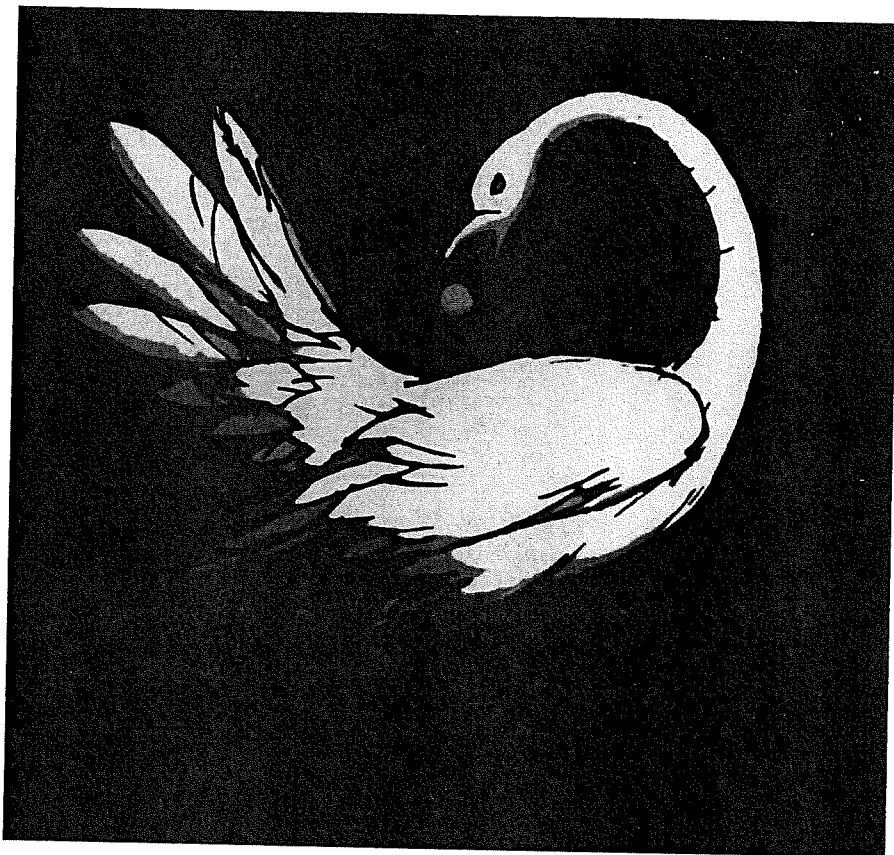


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Sage Philosophy: Its Methodology, Results, Significance, and Future

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Introduction

For historical reasons, African sage philosophy focuses on the views of traditional indigenous sages. I will not attempt to expound these reasons immediately, as my first concern is to shed some light on the nature of sagaciousness.¹

Most people will agree that a sage is a person who is exceptionally wise. In addition to exceptional wisdom, Henry Odera Oruka suggests a second criterion for sagaciousness. A true sage, he urges, must habitually use the gift of wisdom for the ethical betterment of his or her community. Consequently, he or she has to be consistently concerned with the ethical and empirical problems arising in his or her community with the intention of finding insightful solutions to them. In Oruka's view, the second criterion is what distinguishes a sage from a sophist (1990: xvii-xviii).² I agree.

Three works stand out as sage philosophy's most widely accepted specimens: Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* (1965), Odera Oruka's *Sage Philosophy* (1990), and B. Hallen's and J. O. Sodipo's *Knowledge Belief & Witchcraft* (1997).³ This chapter revolves around these classics. I have chosen this classical approach for its double advantage. Besides familiarizing the reader with the general character of sage philosophy, it exposes him or her to some of the major substantive issues that have arisen within this trend of African philosophy.

Methodology

Every work of sage philosophy involves a professional philosopher interviewing some person whom he or she regards as a sage. The conjunction of this chapter's opening statement and the two criteria of sagaciousness provides a threefold methodological checklist for any philosopher desirous of contributing to this trend of African philosophy. Such a philosopher must ensure that all his or her interlocutors are traditional, exceptionally wise, and satisfy the ethical criterion. Let us now examine the extent to which the authors of our classics have utilized this checklist.

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