

## AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHER: GBENGA ADEBOYE IN FOCUS

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### Abstract

*While researches, discussions and debates etc. about the ontological nature of African Philosophy were evolving, destructive criticisms were more evident than constructive ones, even from Africans. These ontological debates, especially in philosophical scholarship, have posed many questions thereby trying to relegate African Philosophy to mere cultural thought system. Some of the central objections are lack of individual figures to whom ideas could be attributed, and documentation. These objections are apparently against the traditional African thought, the raw data processed to become contemporary African Philosophy, which seems to have taken care of the objections raised by some scholars. While considering works by African Philosophers as sharp responses to the sceptics of African Philosophy, there is the need to examine some works, although not done by trained Philosophers, but whose works are philosophical. This paper, therefore, attempts to introduce and discuss GBenga Adeboye's works within the context of philosophy. This endeavour is believed to expound some of his works and subject them to philosophical scrutiny. This paper argues, using the methods of analytic description.*

**Keywords:** *Funwontan*; ontological debate; African Philosophy, *funwontanism*.

### Introduction

Professor Kolawole A. Olu-Owolabi, in his inaugural lecture titled *My People Perish for Lack of Philosophy* delivered at the University, has identified two categories of philosophers; they are academic and non-academic philosophers (Olu-Owolabi, 2011: 3). By further understanding of this categorisation, it is easy to interpret that academic trained philosophers are individuals who have been trained with the philosophic rigour and they, in return, impact philosophic rigour as a method of training philosophy at, mostly, various philosophy departments across universities. Non-academic philosophers are those who have no formal philosophic training, but whose works are considered philosophical. Individuals under this category may have formal education, whereby they have had encounter with the teaching of philosophy or they have read works of philosophers. Their encounter with these works would have inspired them to cause their works into existence.

These works, upon reading and understanding and examination by philosophic minds, are discovered to possess philosophical ingredients. For instance, figures that are usually discussed under philosophic sagacity and nationalistic ideological philosophy of Odera Oruka did not have philosophic training. Inasmuch as it is permissible to discuss many of these figures and their works, discussing the personality that is the subject-

matter of this present paper is equally permissible. This is an for Africans to know themselves, and especially their intellectual heritage and content. This will serve the injunctive purpose of “African know thyself” (Strickland, 2023: 160).

This paper is an attempt to make a case for a broadcaster whose works are philosophical and who can be referred to as a 'philosopher'. It shall be argued in the paper that the title, 'philosopher' is not (and should not be) restricted to scholars who have undergone training strictly in philosophy. Some of his works shall be referenced to show that they have some philosophical elements. Although, this work commences researches on Funwontan's philosophy, it should, however, be maintained that it is a continuous exercise. The paper shall conclude that Adeboye is a philosopher in his own right with referent instances from some of his works.

### **The Man, 'GBenga Adeboye**

Philosophy is no longer an alien field of study in many Nigerian institutions. African Philosophy is taught and practised in these institutions of learning, bearing in mind its significance. In the teaching of African Philosophy, attention is focused on the works of scholars who had their trainings in Philosophy. It, however, neglects individuals who are either not academics or whose works are not within the scope of philosophy, but are philosophical. Hence, the choice of this topic is to research on one of such individuals, 'GBenga Adeboye, who, although, was an ace broadcaster, but whose works are perceived to be philosophical.

Elijah Olugbenga Adeboye was born in 1959 in Oḍ?òmu, Osun State. Although, he used to claim 'Oḍégbón' as his hometown because his mother was from GBòngán; he would prefer to be referred to as an indigene of Oḍégbón, a new word formed from Oḍ?òmu and GBòngán. He had both Primary and Secondary Education at Modákéḗlfe and Ile-Ife. He had a Diploma in Yorùbá from the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos. He joined the broadcasting train in 1980 (Adeboye, 2003a) and from that period he remained a household name in broadcasting for, especially people leaving in Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta. People of other communities did not get to know of him until in the early 1990s when he had become an ace broadcaster and his records distributed, sold and aired on radio, and subsequently his video clips shown on television stations. He was popularly known as Funwontan. He died precisely on April 30, 2003. His works remain in the mind of his listeners till date. This man would refer to himself as 'Philosopher' in many of his works (Adeboye, 1994; Adeboye, 1996; Adeboye, 1999a; Adeboye 1999b; Adeboye, 2003b). Each listener with different intentions; when I first had interest in his works, it was not with the motive of studying him and, especially his works from the philosophical point of view. I was just an 'enjoyer' of his works. I developed interest and conceived the idea of researching on him when I was to write my B. A. Long Essay. The topic, however, was not approved on the ground that it would take my supervisor some months to listen to his works for adequate understanding. I resigned to fate and chose another topic. Since then I had had in mind that I would be a scholar working extensively on Funwontan.

### **African Philosophy: Ontological Debate Revisited**

It is very obvious now that the debate about whether or not there is African Philosophy exists has already been buried (Adésùyì, 2014: 83). The debate is, nevertheless, still mentioned especially when teaching undergraduate classes African

Philosophy. Teaching this, at least, at undergraduate level, shows that it is directly or indirectly still significant. Each time Teachers of African Philosophy come before their students to introduce the course, they mention the way Westerners have tormented Africans in terms of scholarship, denying anything 'deniable'. As recalled by Chinua Achebe (2012: 38), in those days, when manuscripts were being sent, they usually did not see the favour of Western publishing firms. There usually "were several of instant rejections" (Achebe, 2012: 38). Some would not even bother to read it, "jaundiced by their impression that a book with an African backdrop had no "marketability"" (Achebe, 2012: 38). By marketability, apparently, what was meant was that these works produced by Africans were not in line with their literary culture. One other issue raised by Teachers is that even the Western trained African Philosophers have similar idea. Bodunrin (1981: 161-179) is a typical example. These are the scholars Olusegun Oladipo (2000) refers to as the Universalist.

As earlier mentioned, the debate on the ontological status of African Philosophy is often revisited. In a way, it serves as the introductory aspect of African Philosophy. The argument has caused many 'positive' issues in teaching and practising African Philosophy. For instance, it has generated into dividing African Philosophy into schools of thought and periods (Ogunmodede, 2001; Uwala, 2004: 1-13). It is hoped and believed that the debate is gone finally as opined by Moses Makinde (2010: 437). It should be emphasized that, although the debate is gradually going into extinction, at least, in principle, some other important things are still to be discussed. One of such is who an African Philosopher is. This is because African Philosophy is now a full grown field as evident in various works. If argued that it is still in the making (Wiredu, 1980: 86), then, the same can be said of other philosophies in the world, even those of the west. Since philosophy will not be a static field, but a field whose existence is a continuous one; it is always in the process of becoming.

If it is agreed in principle that the debate of whether or not African Philosophy exists has gone into extinction, what is needed is to show those who are really African Philosophers. The trio of Sogolo (1988: 109-113), Makinde (1988) and Òkè (2002: 19-35) have engaged themselves in rigorous arguments on this. All their attempts are to establish some important criteria for a person to be given the title African Philosopher. It must be noted that the first foundation of their debate is Oruka's (1981 and 1990) *Four Trends in African Philosophy*. Oruka (1981) started this through his analysis of the trends. Given this, each of the trends tries to identify some philosophies and perhaps, Philosophers that practise them. He identifies four as ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalistic ideological philosophy and professional philosophy. There is no controversy over the last two, except that the trio of Sogolo (1988), Makinde (1988), Òkè (2002), and lately Adésùyì (2015) have responded to the question 'who is an African Philosopher?', within the context of the fourth trend, professional philosophy/philosopher. Oruka's analyses of the trends tend toward pushing forward the argument in favour of philosophic sagacity. He makes case for philosophic sagacity that has its foundation on ethno philosophy. By implication, the former is justified by the latter. In other words, the former is explainable in the light of the latter.

Sages, according to Orukean School, are those who are knowledgeable in folk wisdom of community. They also try to reflect on them and bring out the ones that are compatible with reason. These sages are most likely not acquainted with western

civilization/education (Oruka, 1991: 33-34). If this is correct, the implications are that one, there would not be any sage. Although, it is not maintained that everybody is educated or influenced by Western civilization, but from all indications majority of people, especially the upcoming ones are most likely going to be influenced by western civilisation. Two, if it continues, philosophic sagacity suffers self-stultification. It is viewed that Oruka's idea of this trend is not to allow this trend to suffer. Since it is not in line with Orukean School to allow this suffer a self-defeat rather to triumph, sages can still be found even among the educated ones. It is equally possible to see another version of philosophic sagacity. Barry Hallen (2002: 5-10) mentions some figures like Hotep, Zara Yacoob and Amo. Amo was a trained philosopher. These individuals belonged to the ancient/pre-colonial period. Can we identify some other people who are sages even within this contemporary period? Of course yes. Denying this is denying the possibility of having sages again, since it cannot be argued that sagacity is necessarily periodised, relativised or contextualised.

One of the reasons why Africans are denied of philosophy is lack of written documents. The question that comes to mind is 'must documents be necessarily written?' Are there no other means to documentation? Of course there are others. One of such is oral preservations. In those days, people would memorise so many things. It is discovered that access to any knowledge or information of those period was a difficult task. There was no chance for objectivity. There is an improved version of this which is recording of voices of this oral information. Listening to these and reasoning out the important theme and understanding the philosophy inherent become easier. The objectivity is also well pronounced. In this regard, not only the initiates will understand what entails, but also non-initiates would also do as well.

When the word 'Philosophy' was invented, perhaps by Pythagoras (Preus, 2007: 1), it was not exclusively reserved for the Westerners. To this, it will not be appropriate to deny some people this all important phenomenon. Also it will not be appropriate to deny the works of some people as not philosophy work or that such work is not philosophical because it is not contained in written document. There could be other means of accessing and assessing works apart from printing. Media has given that insight long ago. People have access to news and information on print or electronic media. This same set of people can also analyse works that are philosophical not through print alone, but also through electronic. In fact, it makes the analysis more convenient. It may be objected that analysis of such work becomes a pseudo-analysis. The possible reason that will be given is that rigorous philosophical works should be analysed on paper. Of course, this may not be denied; what is only argued is that more people would have had access to the philosophical ideas of such a person if it had been thrown open. On the other hand, there is no such stipulation that says philosophical works must be necessarily 'papered'. The use of pen and paper is not a compulsory condition for practice of philosophy. Their use is, nevertheless necessary. What is important is the arrangement and production of the ideas. Hence, questions about means through which they are accessed and assessed should not have arisen. Instead, concentration should be on the ideas being considered to see their philosophical imports.

### **Introducing GBenga Adeboye as an African Philosopher**

It is not a thing of necessity to practise African philosophy the way others do; just like it is argued by African Philosophers that it is not a must that African philosophy is practised, taught and done the way Westerners do theirs. There has not been any paradigm standard of doing African philosophy. Western trained African Philosophers have only argued for this favourite because of their affinity with their mentors. They would not want to bite the fingers through which they had been fed. It, therefore, means that one would want to follow the tradition with which he is trained. One is not, however, obliged to do so, given the philosophical 'liberty' one has, although the liberty is not strictly total anyway.

This is why GBenga Adeboye falls into the category of a figure being considered as an African Philosopher. No one is denying the fact that he has not had any training in philosophy. That he has not had any training in this field does not make him a non-Philosopher. One good example of Adeboye in the history of philosophy is Thales. No one can establish the fact that Thales had any training in philosophy; yet his philosophy is first introduced to students in their first year in philosophy class, especially in the History of Ancient Greek Philosophy. If Thales can be qualified to be conferred with the title of Philosopher, then, Adeboye will also qualify as well. Another example is Obafemi Awolowo, whose works have been treated as philosophical (Makinde, 1988; Òkè, 1988: 238-73, Makinde, 2002). He was not trained a philosopher, but his works have been considered philosophical, and taught thus.

Adeboye's works are philosophical in their own ways. Although, there seems to be many jokes in his works, there are numerous ideas that are thoughtful and reflective in those works. It may be argued that Awolowo wrote books and these works of his are the ones read and analysed by scholars. GBenga Adeboye has not written any book, but his works are in audio and video cassettes for people to listen to and analyse. In this regard, one can begin to see the similarity between books and these media gadgets. Apart from the fact that they both are means of preservation, they can as well stand the test of time. A book has pages, with titles, year and place of publication. This is what serves as document for those who hold onto it. They may be in volumes like Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Volumes 1 and 2, and other series of examples that one may think of. It may be reprinted, edited and re-edited. It has pages such that when reference is made to such a book, the page and other necessary things are quoted. Can this be the same for electronic media gadgets? Yes. Electronic gadgets, like audio and video tapes have titles, year and place of production; there may be volumes. Production and publication here mean the same thing. It, however, does not matter in which context it is used. Each record can be quoted through time, minute and seconds. These represent the necessary and relevant documentations needed. If the record is divided into tracts, the tracts can be quoted, otherwise, the minutes will be quoted. This is now made easier with CD. This is helpful, if one considers the urgent need as opined by Wande Abimbola (1977: 9).

GBenga Adeboye has produced many works in his life time. Knowledge is easy to gain, but wisdom is harder (Hallen and Sodipo, 1986). Knowledge precedes wisdom; it is the accumulation of knowledge that becomes wisdom. Anybody can claim to have knowledge, but not every knowledge claim becomes wisdom. In Adeboye's works, there are categories of things, there can be found some ideas that are philosophical, and some that are not philosophical, but are mere jokes. In them, as well, there are many that are

jokes, but are philosophically impregnated. An instance is the “analogy/allegory of killing chicken” (Adeboye, 2001: Track 2, 05: 37-10:25) relevant in the contemporary social and political philosophy and relationship among relations.

The analogy here is like an explication of a relationship between two siblings. The elder is privileged to send the younger an errand. Adeboye presents a hypothetical case of one elder brother who asks his younger one to help him prepare chicken for meal. The ability or otherwise of the younger one to prepare the chicken properly for the meal should determine the possibility of the trust that should be reposed in him. In addition, his attitude towards this is also important. These should be the determining factors for anybody to occupy any public office, especially elective positions. An important point to note is that he must neither complain nor ask how it should be prepared. Any attempt to ask how to prepare such disqualifies him from being a leader in any capacity. No doubt this should attract philosophical scrutiny, and this is why this instance and other similar impregnated philosophical ideas in his works are philosophical.

There are some of his works that have existential significance (Adeboye, 2001). In some other works, there evident elements of Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics or Moral Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy, Existentialism, Philosophy of Religion and to a reasonable extent, some forms of analysis and logicity. (Adeboye, 1996a: 1; Adeboye, 2001). There are numerous instances of his ideas that are philosophically impregnated. If asked what is his view, school of thought or philosophy, without disturbing one's brain, it is *funwontanism*, a view that can be interpreted to mean an all-encompassing phenomenon, a developing area in African Philosophy that shall receive adequate attention in due course.

## Conclusion

It is still possible to deny that Adeboye does not qualify to be referred to, and treated as, African Philosopher. Questions may be raised concerning the perspective from which his works can be viewed. There are, at least, four perspectives through which philosophy can be studied. They are historical, socio-cultural, etymological, and attitudinal. From all indications, any philosophy/philosophical work will fall within the confinement of any of these. Hence, Gbenga Adeboye's works fall within the confinement of socio-cultural perspective. It must be borne in mind that the philosophy that is well understood and practised is that which is a product of one's culture, given the fact that every individual is a product of his/her culture.

The purpose of this paper here is, of course, not enough to explore Adeboye's works that are philosophical. It, therefore, means that researches and works are on-going to explore this from philosophical point of view. What has been done so far is to establish the fact that he is qualified to be African Philosopher, even if he cannot be reckoned with in the universe of strict Philosophers. It is to also note that it is not enough to jettison works of individuals that are neither in prints nor in books. We can take the rigour of listening to works through other means of documentation, as least, electronic gadget. When carefully listened to and examined, some of Adeboye's works are philosophical. They contain elements of core branches of philosophy and, of course, some applied areas.

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