

CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY OR PHILOSOPHY IN THE CARIBBEAN?

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The all-pervasive advent of globalisation has, somewhat paradoxically, spawned regionalism and parochialism in many parts of the world. This tendency towards regionalisation and parochialism has been particularly pronounced in the context of culture and ethnological-cum-intellectual movements and traditions. More specifically, in terms of the theme of this paper, it can be seen that this intellectually driven anti-globalisation thrust has been directed towards attempts to forge *native* philosophical systems of thought and ideas to withstand the process of globalisation that is taken to be intent on suppressing authentic culture and subsuming everything into one vast, boundless mass. The underlying thought here is that globalisation is shepherding us towards a homogenisation and effacement of difference that would ultimately lead to the cultural annihilation of *the other*: that is, the end of cultures and traditions. From this perspective, the unspoken end of globalisation is the unveiling of the 'end of history' – to use Alexandre Kojève's apposite phrase.

Predictably, Caribbean intellectuals have been similarly, if not more than others, affected by these debates and issues, for, as Maryse Condé observes, the third world countries, "especially the Caribbean countries, seem to be the most concerned with this future since they lack political and economic power. They make headlines only when there is a hurricane, an earthquake, or other catastrophe" (1). Globalisation has brought into forced contact technologically advanced countries and communities with less developed nations, and it should not, therefore, be surprising to see the erosion of local cultures and traditions of thought in such a confrontational encounter. The situation is further accentuated for the intellectuals in the Caribbean by the history of the region that was brutally forged through the unconscionable act of slavery: a process that was accompanied by the cultural decimation and alienation of the slaves. The new 'natives' of the Caribbean have already seen what it is to be forced into servile imitation of the creeds and codes of 'Eurocentrism,' and it seems as if globalisation is only a contemporary incarnation of that cultural assimilation, obviously with less crudity but more insidiousness.¹

Patently, this is one type of material and historical interpretation of globalisation that does not leave much room for a less cynical and more benign view of globalisation as an attempt to reach out beyond national and linguistic borders and barriers. Nonetheless, this is a point of view that does chime with a significant number of third world intellectuals in general and Caribbean thinkers in particular, and it is amid this rush of resistance to stem the growth of globalisation that one should see some of the attempts to construct national and regional philosophical edifices. It is interesting to note that among all the human cultural artefacts and achievements, Philosophy has possibly played the most prominent part in this exercise of resistance and reconstruction. This has been partly due to the fact that historically speaking most branches of learning began as areas of philosophical enquiry and throughout its history

¹ The use of scare quotes is intended to indicate that there is yet to be a clear and cogent conception of 'Eurocentrism' that could usefully serve an explanatory role. For example, in Rajani Kannepalli Kanth's recent work, 'Eurocentrism' is characterized as "*none other than the constellar paradigm of Euro-capitalism, in its rich contusion of allied, conjunctural elements made up of capitalism, patriarchy (i.e., misogyny) misanthropy, racism, colonialism, anthropocentrism, and recharged Christian ideology – or modernism, in a word*" (91). As can be seen, the explication is more of an angry man's hit list than an attempt to identify a consistent explanatory strand in the concept of 'Eurocentrism.' More damagingly, it trades one problematic concept with a host of equally difficult and intractable terms. However, among the few exceptions, Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism* is a serious and sober attempt to furnish a consistent theoretical orientation for the epithet. Yet, as it is discussed later, even Amin's approach is as much 'Eurocentric' as the 'Eurocentrism' he inveighs against.

Philosophy has been the foundation of scientific advance, from Archimedean Physics to Information Technology.² But, more importantly, cultures have been founded on philosophical speculation, and philosophical works have exerted enormous influence in the worlds of art, religion and politics, and have been celebrated among the greatest works of literature.

It is against these backgrounds that one may see the recent calls for the formation and articulation of a philosophical school *in* and *for* the Caribbean. What is very significant to bear in mind in this sequence of events is that although there has been a consistent tradition of intellectual works in the Caribbean, there has not been a similarly *self-conscious* philosophical endeavour among the Caribbean intellectuals. For example, even philosophically sensitive Marxist thinkers like C. L. R. James were keener on offering exegesis on Hegel and the more difficult and abstruse parts of Marxist philosophy to audiences less philosophically capable than themselves rather than formulating a particularly Caribbean rendition of Marxism.³ Clearly the emergence of the need and desire for a 'native' philosophical system of thought in the contemporary community of Caribbean thinkers in contrast to its conspicuous absence in the previous generations is an interesting issue that requires its own separate analysis and genealogy. However, the focus of this paper is the *very idea* of Caribbean Philosophy: namely, what is, or more precisely, what can be Caribbean Philosophy?

Senses of Philosophy

The success in determining the content and contours of Caribbean Philosophy is very much dependent on a prior clarification of the notion of Philosophy, since the term 'philosophy' has turned out to be one of those expressions that despite appearances does not have a univocal meaning and has been collecting a motley of meanings around itself. The multivocality of Philosophy has been partially responsible for a number of disagreements and disputes, if not sheer misunderstandings, over the nature of philosophical movements pertaining to particular geographical or ethnic boundaries. The first step, therefore, is to unveil the various guises of this word.

One can basically distinguish three senses of Philosophy: namely, *lay*, *educated*, and *technical* connotations of the phrase.⁴ In the lay use of the word, either Philosophy refers to the presence and availability of an explicit and articulated *rationale for a course of action or belief*, or it designates a *worldview*, or more specifically a *view on the purpose of life or existence in general*, held by an individual or a community of individuals. The former is too broad and imprecise to be of any use in offering an adequate framework for constructing Caribbean Philosophy. The other alternative, however, looks more promising, since whatever conception of Philosophy one might maintain it should somehow address the all-important issue of one's place and purpose in the universe. Yet, even this conception of Philosophy does not seem sufficient to provide a rigorous infrastructure for a comprehensive philosophical edifice: for, not all problems and puzzles of Philosophy can be reduced to or exhausted by the issue of life's purpose and, more significantly, the very question itself depends on a number of fundamental assumptions that are in themselves very much open to severe philosophical scrutiny if not

² To give a recent example, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, was very much preoccupied with the issue of whether there was any reason to believe that the laws of arithmetic were true. The logical method devised to help answer this question provided the foundation for the development of the computer.

³ See, for example, C. L. R. James' Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin (London: Allison & Busby, 1980).

⁴ I should hasten to add that in my usage these classificatory terms are purely descriptive and are devoid of any prescriptive or evaluative weight.

outright rejection. It betrays an attitude of complacent anthropocentrism.

In the educated variety of the phrase, Philosophy may be used in at least three different ways. It could simply mean the *history of philosophical ideas and doctrines*; in this usage, philosophy is effectively equated with its history. Although this understanding of Philosophy happens to be rather widespread, it suffers from a twofold shortcoming. First, it is somewhat circular as it relies on a prior understanding of the very phenomenon in question, viz. Philosophy itself, in order to use its history as its defining characteristic. In a nutshell, one must already know what Philosophy is in order to identify its history. Second, though philosophers are interested in and should pay attention to the historical development of ideas and theories that they work with, history of an idea is neither necessary nor sufficient for philosophical investigation.⁵ Generally, this historical rendition of Philosophy leaves us none the wiser about the nature of Philosophy.

However, the claim that history of an idea is neither necessary nor sufficient for philosophical investigation may be taken into task. It may be objected that ideas cannot be divested from their historical roots and beddings: their history is constitutive of their signification and justification. In response, even if one ignores the highly controversial and disputable 'historicist' presumption of the objection, the onus of proof is on the shoulder of the objector to show that such a presumption is indeed warranted.⁶ But, that obligation in itself is a philosophical enterprise that cannot be decided prior to an illustration of what Philosophy is supposed to be; otherwise the objector would be embroiled in a vicious circle. Moreover, such historicist approaches cannot comport themselves comfortably with contemporary Caribbean intellectuals in particular, since in their search for a philosophical standpoint Caribbean thinkers have been trying to rid themselves from the yolk of 'Eurocentrism'; yet calling on one of the most cherished nineteenth century products of 'Eurocentrism', i.e. historicism, is tantamount to a blatant self-betrayal. It would, therefore, be ironic to appeal to 'Eurocentric' historicism in order to assert one's indigenous philosophical identity.

An alternative reading of the educated sense is to take Philosophy as a systematic study of the *fundamental principles and assumptions of a discipline*. The enterprise is primarily directed towards an unraveling of both methodological and theoretical suppositions of a discipline. Two of the best examples, among many others, in this case are the works of Emilé Durkheim and Werner Heisenberg in Sociology and Physics respectively. Durkheim and Heisenberg were very much cognizant of the significance and explicit recognition of the foundational principles and postulates of their fields of research, and part of their immense contribution to their respective disciplines was through a thorough analysis of those elemental tenets. As it can be seen, this sense of Philosophy is more suited to academic disciplines and subjects than cultural entities. For, although one could easily apply the same sort of philosophical skills and concerns to the corpus of any culture, the outcome of such a philosophical examination lacks the type of immediacy and emotive commitments inherent in issues concerning cultural identity and ethnic self-assertion. Also, cultures due to their inevitable protean and eclectic nature do not lend themselves easily to such philosophical scrutinies that require a high degree of epistemological and ontological monolithicity.

The third strand in the educated sense of Philosophy is to construe Philosophy as an *elaboration*

⁵ Otherwise, among other considerations, one would be very much vulnerable to committing the *genetic fallacy*: that is, confusing the plausibility or implausibility of the *content* of an idea with the process of its *genesis*.

⁶ One of the most damning objections against historicists is their ineluctable denial of the possibility, or their inescapable commitment to the impossibility, of *meta-epistemological* evaluations. The other side of the same critical coin is the problem of *self-refutation*: if every claim and belief is historically tainted, so is this claim itself! Is there, therefore, any reason to believe in historicism?

of an ideological framework. Some of the best examples of such a rendition of Philosophy are economically based doctrines like Marxist and Capitalist ideologies, religiously based dogmas like fundamentalist ideologies, or politically based credos like Fascism.⁷ However, because of their highly selective bases of formation and overly evaluative orientation, ideologies fail to capture the all-inclusive aspects of cultures and cultural identities. It seems as if they were consciously contrived to cater for a 'one-dimensional life'. By the same extension, ideologies founder on, if not expressly forbid, cross-cultural dialogues and pollinations. But, more importantly, in virtue of their excessive exclusionist approach, ideologies do not allow much room for, let alone foster, self-criticism, viz. one of the most critical qualities of a philosophical outlook.

Finally, there is the technical sense of Philosophy. At the very outset, it should be admitted that even defining Philosophy in its technical sense is fraught with difficulties, despite the existence of the discipline for several millennia. Part of the problem stems from the fact that Philosophy has turned out to be an all-encompassing discipline in virtue of its ability to subject any topic or issue to a philosophical examination. The discipline resists to be straitjacketed by a specific subject matter as other disciplines can be. This is somewhat echoed in the Aristotelian conception that Philosophy studies everything in general and nothing in particular.⁸

Aristotle couched his characterisation in such a way to enable him to capture the *sophia* or wisdom of *his* philosophers in terms of the knowledge of 'the first principles and causes.' But, nowadays, epistemic sobriety and modesty have forced us to realise that the attainment of such knowledge is too ambitious an aim even to entertain. What, however, Philosophy in its technical sense has come to offer is a systematic method for *critical examination of concepts and conceptual constructions*. It is through the application of concepts and conceptual schemes that we lay our hands on reality with its multifarious manifestations. Philosophy not only opens us to the understanding of this mapping of concepts onto objects but also provides us with the means of probing the propriety or otherwise of those very concepts and their constructions.

There are two features of this disciplinary or technical sense of Philosophy that are noteworthy for the present purposes. One is its *a priori* approach to the critical analysis of concepts and conceptual connections. Although philosophers deploy and to a not too inconsiderable extent depend on *a posteriori* findings, they are not themselves qualified to engage in empirical enquiries – unless they have been appropriately trained to carry them out. The second feature that prominently stands out is that this *a priori* approach to Philosophy is implemented primarily through *arguments* and patterns of *rational justification*. It is this emphasis on a pattern of rigorous, rational discourse that sets Philosophy apart from, for example, poetry and other literary endeavours.⁹ Similarly, it is in virtue of the *a priori* and argument-based method of Philosophy that there are significant affinities between Philosophy and Mathematics.

There is, however, a crucial consequence to this *rationality constraint* that sheds light on a very important aspect of Philosophy, which in turn should contribute towards a more accurate appreciation of its nature. What the rationality requirement does is to bestow a highly

⁷ But, it should be noted that in some cases, like the Italian fascism fashioned by Mussolini, the credos might also be based on some pseudo-religious views.

⁸ Aristotle's actual statement is that the "wise man knows all things, as far as possible, although he has not knowledge of each of them in detail" (*Metaphysics*, 982^a 9-10).

⁹ This is not meant to imply that poetry, for example, is not rational or it cannot be used to philosophise but to highlight the point that the *modus operandi* of such pursuits is more in the line of imagination and stream of consciousness. It goes without saying that there is in fact a lower bound of rationality that is constitutive of any human activity.

prescriptive quality on Philosophy in the sense that over and above developing and delving into *descriptive* accounts of issues and matters of concern, Philosophy censors descriptions that fail to conform to rational prescriptions. That is, ideas and thoughts are retained or rejected on the basis of their rational justification, not on the grounds of who or what subscribes to them. Philosophy is indeed a normative discipline *par excellence*.

This critical or prescriptive part of Philosophy is what separates that discipline from its kindred kinds like Cultural or Philosophical Anthropology. The latter is only concerned with descriptive accounts and explanations of what a community of people may maintain, whereas one of the primary functions of Philosophy is to ascertain to what extent beliefs and convictions under its purview are rationally justifiable. Naturally, it is through this commitment to rationality that Philosophy seeks and secures *generality* and *universality*. Therefore, Philosophy cannot be characterised or constrained by continental or cultural contours. It is an anathema to Philosophy to be confined to geographical or ethnological boundaries that are by nature *specific* and *particular*.

Finally, in concluding this section, another way of emphasising the point that Philosophy deals in generality and universality is to review a token number of philosophical issues to show that they certainly transcend cultural and regional parochialisms:

A) The Liar Paradox: is the sentence, "This sentence is false," true or false? If the sentence is true, then it is false, because what it says is that it is false. Thus, if it is true, then it is false. But if it is false, then it must be true, since it is just what it says it is. Hence, if it is false, then it is true. Either way we are committed to a contradiction. Basically, what the paradox highlights is that the concept of truth despite its apparent transparency is a problematic concept, and in certain contexts, especially in self-referential ones, it gives rise to serious puzzles and paradoxical outcomes.

B) The Paradoxes of Entailment: it can be shown that some of the deductive rules of reasoning and inference that we use are liable to lead us to two paralysing paradoxes: (I) a contradiction entails any proposition: that is, one can argue that, "A married man is a bachelor. Therefore, grass is green"; (II) a necessary proposition is entailed by any proposition: that is, one can argue that, "Grass is green. Therefore, two plus two is four." Obviously the two arguments are absurd, but they follow from apparently innocuous logical laws that happen to be quite ubiquitous.

C) The Paradox of Confirmation: a statement like, "All ravens are black," can be confirmed with the observation of a black raven. But, the statement is logically equivalent to its contraposition that, "All non-black objects are non-raven," which is confirmed by the observation of a non-black non-raven object like a white shoe. As the two statements are logically equivalent, whatever confirms one confirms the other. Therefore, a white shoe as a piece of evidence equally confirms that, "All ravens are black"! In other words, we are absurdly but unavoidably steered towards sanctioning the assertion that Barbadian ornithologists, for example, need only to check all the non-black shoes in the shoe shops of Bridgetown to confirm that, "All ravens are black."

D) The Problem of Consciousness: as humans, we are all conscious beings, but consciousness is not something we can observe directly other than in ourselves, and then only in retrospect. But, in what ways it is possible for a subject to be made the object of its own awareness. Also, in a broader sense, consciousness acts as a conduit for us to acquire experiences and feelings, and it plays a fundamental role in human nervous system. Yet, we have no conception of our physical or functional nature that allows us to understand how it could explain our subjective or phenomenal experiences.¹⁰

E) The Problem of Intentionality: intentionality is the mind's capacity to direct itself onto things. Beliefs, thoughts, desires, fears, wishes and a number of other mental states

¹⁰ For the sake of simplicity, other concepts of consciousness have been perforce omitted from this somewhat laconic illustration.

exhibit intentionality in the sense that they are always directed on, or at, something. Intentional mental phenomena point outside themselves, in effect to something else: whatever they are of or about. To put it simply, some of our mental states are capable of representing the reality to ourselves in one way or another. But, how is that mental representation possible? The depth of the problem could be better appreciated if it is borne in mind that physical objects and events, including our brains, do not stand for or represent anything. They are just what they are. Yet, our brains have given us the ability for representation or intentionality. That is: how can one part of the physical world have significance, or meaning, or content – how can it be about another part?

The moral of this expository digression is that philosophical problems are of such nature that no matter what language one speaks, what culture one belongs to, or what part of the globe one lives in, they are issues that beset any human mind. They are questions that demand and deserve rational frameworks for their resolution.

Non-Senses of Philosophy

There are two other interpretations of Philosophy that in this type of discussion are frequently put forward as alternative candidates to the above technical sense of Philosophy. The purpose of this part is to essay and assay these rival substitutes.

Sometimes Philosophy is defined as a body of exegesis and elaborative exercises organised around a *shared set of canonical texts*. In this construal, Philosophy is taken to be a kind of expository or explanatory investigation into the systems of thought or ways of thinking of a group of people represented through certain canonical texts and scripts – or in some cases even ‘scriptures.’ It is, therefore, the canonical texts that set the tenor and theme of those traditions. Now, because of the canonical status of such sources presumably achieved through some sort of communal consensus within each culture, what these philosophies share in common is that their philosophical perspectives and points of view comprise an integral part of their respective cultural traditions. Yet, interestingly, anyone can become a member of any of those philosophical traditions, not by privilege of birth or background, but by working within the relevant canonical confines of each school.

There are, however, a number of major difficulties with this culturalist rendition of Philosophy. First, it renders the word ‘philosophy’ totally *ambiguous* by tying its connotation to different canons in different cultures. As the word ‘bank’ is ambiguous and shifts in its meaning between a financial and a geographical connotation, the meaning of ‘philosophy’ shifts from culture to culture depending on the particular canonical precepts prevalent in each one of them. Hence, strictly speaking there is no single meaning to the word ‘philosophy,’ and in fact the thought that different philosophical schools have anything in common more than sharing an ambiguous title is to commit the fallacy of equivocation.

To eschew equivocation, one might be tempted to argue that the different canonical texts belonging to different cultures share a number of, presumably crucial, canonical codes that are not culture-specific in content, thereby conferring a uniformity of meaning on the word ‘philosophy.’ However, such *aculturalist* ripostes fly against the initial spirit and substance of the attempt to define Philosophy in terms of a shared set of canonical texts, and would be grossly guilty of self-contradiction. The dilemma seems to be between the devil and the deep blue sea! But, this quandary of culturalist conceptions of Philosophy should alert us to the very important issue of *canonicity*, which seems to be the bulwark in the philosophical edifice of the culturalists. What in fact needs to be addressed is the following twofold question: what exactly constitutes canonicity and how do texts acquire their canonical status? To avoid either self-contradiction or equivocation, the culturalists have to concede that there is more to the canonicity of certain texts than mere historical contingencies, thus paving the way for the technical sense of Philosophy, as sketched above, to get underway.

The second serious problem with this culturalist ersatz arises from inadvertently or otherwise

characterising Philosophy in terms of conformity with certain canonical codices. That is, one's membership of a particular philosophical school is contingent upon one's adherence to its canonical texts. This, however, compromises the critical aspect of Philosophy that was discussed above. Philosophical reflections extend beyond descriptive accounts and apologia; they derive their value from questioning and critical ruminations. It is this inalienable normativity of Philosophy that largely affords its *autonomy*. Undoubtedly there are apologetic philosophers and philosophical treatises, but they are recognised for what they are. Also, the insistence on culturally informed canonical orthodoxy not only is detrimental to the disciplinary autonomy of Philosophy, but also betrays the *personal autonomy* of its practitioners. There are ample historical cases to show that the tyranny of tradition is inimical to the progression and evolution of philosophical thought – a progress sustained through the preservation of the personal autonomy of philosophers.

The third misgiving about ethnological interpretations of Philosophy is the almost total disregard by a good number of their proponents for the *interdisciplinary* nature of Philosophy, especially in the way that philosophical positions thrive on empirical findings and theories. This interdisciplinary outlook of Philosophy becomes more pronounced when one looks at the cases where scientific theories have directly influenced and informed philosophical theories. In relation to Physics, for instance, problems of space and time are two of the best examples of this interdisciplinary transaction. However, Cognitive Science has recently produced a plethora of hypotheses that have drastically affected many a philosopher's approach to the domain of mind and mental phenomena.¹¹

Notwithstanding the above afflictions, the other trouble with this culture-specific interpretation of Philosophy is its inapplicability to the Caribbean context. Basically, the unsuitability is due to the realisation that there are apparently no canonical texts in the Caribbean that could form the basis of such a philosophical movement. The absence of such a canonical core makes the conception utterly unworkable for a nascent Caribbean school of philosophy.

Nevertheless, the culturalist cause may not be lost completely. There is a second culture-oriented interpretation of Philosophy that can also easily overcome the present problem of the unavailability of a shared set of canonical texts in the Caribbean. Once this alternative culturalist view of Philosophy is pressed into action, we can expect to see even the eventual emergence of canonical texts, thus securing a more solid basis for Caribbean Philosophy in future.

This alternative culturalist view of Philosophy usually goes under the rubric of *ethnophilosophy*. What ethnophilosophy promotes is the *reconstruction of implicit philosophy behind the habits, customs and beliefs of a society*. Effectively, what this culturalist variant implies is that it is the cultural or national affiliations that determine philosophical homelands. Again, on this understanding, Philosophy is culture- or country- specific. Therefore, what Caribbean philosophers should do in nurturing their burgeoning discipline is to embark upon a delineation of philosophical thoughts underlying various facets of the Caribbean culture.

Like the other culturalist conception of Philosophy, this other embodiment also suffers from several shortcomings. Similarly, it fails to respect the normativity, the personal and disciplinary autonomies, and the interdisciplinary aspect of Philosophy. As to other complaints, for one thing, the ethnophilosophical definition runs the risk of *circularity* by relying on the very concept that it is supposed to explicate. One must already possess a sense of what Philosophy is before being able to draw it out from any cultural phenomenon. The second criticism is that ethnophilosophy is guilty of, what Paulin Hountondji calls, the *myth of unanimism*. It is ideally

¹¹ They include topics such as agnosia, aphasia, autism, computational composition of mind, concepts and concept acquisition, modularity of mind, pathological beliefs, self-deception, various types of nativism etc.

assumed that cultures are homogeneous entities as if each one speaks with a unanimous voice. But they lack homogeneity, and none speaks with unanimity. The myth often arises from the projection of one's own ideas and values onto a culture or tradition. The problem is more pressing in the Caribbean context owing to its chequered history of amalgamation. The assumed unanimity or homogeneity is more imaginary than real.

Thirdly, to add another myth to the inventory of ethnophilosophers, they readily commit the *fallacy of essentialism*. This is the mistake that each culture comprises a diachronic core of immutable, definitive and exclusive doctrines that could be prised out through a process of careful considerations. Cultural essentialism is, at best, a non-verifiable hypothesis arrived through an over-interpretation of facts or, at worst, a mythological fantasy. Moreover, there is a conflict between the motivational and doctrinal objectives of contemporary ethnophilosophers. Ethnophilosophy has emerged as a response to the hegemonic ambition of 'Eurocentrism': that is, ethnophilosophy is propounded as an affirmation of the existence and validity of alternative philosophical systems. But, according to one prominent critical articulation of 'Eurocentrism,' the appellation denotes a culturalist doctrine that "assumes the existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different peoples" (Amin vii). Yet, this is exactly the very idea of essentialism that underpins ethnophilosophy.

Finally, in closing this section, I would like to allude to another internal inconsistency of ethnological interpretations of Philosophy, which also should shed some light on the genealogy of cultural essentialism. Ethnological approaches are generally predicated on the *organicity of the social*. The philosophy of a culture, alongside other components, is deemed to be an integral part of that organism, and it is in virtue of this ultra holistic constitution of cultures that strictly speaking there are as many philosophies as there are cultures. What is, however, noteworthy is that the idea of organicity of the social owes much of its theoretical genesis to Hegel for whom society was a homogeneous whole where each part was *pars totalis*.¹² In the Hegelian social fabric, each pattern is equally qualified to express the internal essence of the whole and each compartment is capable of manifesting the self-presence of the entirety in its own distinctive manner at any given historical moment. But, Hegel's conception was rooted in his philosophy of history: a philosophy of history that even to this day remains the most 'highfalutin' statement of European self-confirmation in opposition to other 'races.' In other words, the very philosophy of history that underscores the organicity of the social has churned out the most elaborate rationalisation of European ethnocentrism. The irony here is that ethnophilosophy as an antidote against 'Eurocentrism' is sustained on the very doctrinal nourishments that nurture Hegelian cultural exclusivism of Europe. Ethnophilosophers thus reject 'Eurocentrism' by simultaneously subscribing to it.¹³

Sense of Caribbean Philosophy

There seems to be, however, a way of contextualising Philosophy that Caribbean philosophers might avail themselves in order to confer an unproblematic sense on the phrase Caribbean Philosophy. The new characterisation still functions within the boundaries of the above technical sense of Philosophy, but extends it by further defining or subdividing Philosophy in terms of a *set of issues and problems*. This extension should, therefore, provide the basis to contextualise Philosophy for the Caribbean by focusing on the topics and themes of concern and interest in the Caribbean culture. The subjects may cover a range of issues such as slavery, race, creolisation (both linguistic and social), social consciousness and ethical norms that could be laid open to philosophical scrutiny. In virtue of this subject-based orientation, Caribbean Philosophy would obviously have a lot of overlap with traditional and standard sub-disciplines

¹² For a textual account of Hegel's notion of the organicity of the social or *Sittlichkeit*, see, for example, Charles Taylor's *Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975).

¹³ A paradigmatic instance of this predicament is Samir Amin's [Eurocentrism](#).

of Philosophy like Moral Philosophy, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Language, and even Philosophy of Biology.

In this formulation, Caribbean Philosophy is as plausible as any other subdivision of Philosophy such as Philosophy of Mathematics, Philosophy of Physics, and Philosophy of Psychology. The latter branches of Philosophy are created around clusters of issues and problems that dominate each domain respectively – with their predictable intersections and indispensable interfaces. Nevertheless, there are two sets of worries whose neglect and superficial treatment may alienate Caribbean Philosophy from the mainstream Philosophy and its specialties. The first concern relates to the fact that invariably each sub-discipline of Philosophy forms a cohesive entity that enjoy a high degree of epistemological, including methodological, as well as metaphysical uniformity. But, this type of uniformity is almost absent in the case of cultures as social entities. Secondly, cultures as social entities involve subjective and phenomenal experiences and elicit emotive engagements that deflect detached and objective appraisal of the issues under consideration, which are necessary for an unbiased philosophical perspective.

Some of the dangers inherent in the subjectivity and emotive attachment to a culture are the politicisation of and conceptual legislation over what could or could not be subjected to philosophical examination and how critical such examinations could be. Openness and unfettered ability to criticise are the prerequisites for the preservation of the autonomy and integrity of both the discipline and its practitioners. There is always the peril of transforming cultures into ideological bodies and imposing an extremist social constructivist theory of cognitive capacities: these are tendencies that change cultures into what Paulin Hountondji calls closed systems and waylay them into self-imprisonment. Such approaches stifle the vibrancy and variegated development of cultures and ultimately lapse into cultural solipsism. However, the antidote against such ailments is the recognition of the generality of cognition and communication that not only underlies the technical sense of Philosophy but also undermines the grounds underneath the attempts to regionalise or restrict Philosophy to cultural confines.¹⁴

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