

Do the Works of the Nationalist-Ideological Philosophers Undermine Hume's and Kant's Ideas About Race?

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Abstract

As a response to the question posed in the title, this article presents a critical assessment of how the works of the nationalist-ideological philosophers can be seen as evidence against David Hume's and Immanuel Kant's ideas of race. Hume and Kant have certain ideas about race; if these ideas are true, then there is—and indeed, can be—no African philosophy. But there is African philosophy—that of nationalist-ideological philosophy; therefore, Hume's and Kant's ideas about race are incorrect.

Keywords

nationalist-ideological philosophers, African, philosophy, African philosophy, race

Introduction

According to David Hume, nature has made some people have higher levels of mental capacities than others. Hume used the Negro as an example of those who do not have mental capacity. Hume asserts, in his renowned footnote,

I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites.¹ There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences . . . Not to mention our colonies, there NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. (Hume, 1882, p. 252)

In a similar vein on a geographical standpoint, Immanuel Kant classified humans into different classes: “white” (European), “yellow” (Asians), “black” (Africans), and “red” (American Indians). From a psychological standpoint, then, within Kant's classification, the American India that inhabit America, the Africa, the Asia, and the Hindustan appear to be incapable of moral maturity because they lack talent—a gift of nature” (Eze, 2001, pp. 97-98; Eze, 2003, pp. 438-439). In Kant's table of moral classifications, the “Americans are completely uneducable because they lack ‘affect and passion,’ the Africans escape such a malheur, but can only be ‘trained’ or ‘educated’ as slaves and servants” (Eze, 2003, pp. 438-439). Kant's view was that the African deserves this kind of “training” because he or she is lazy,

prone to jealousy and hesitation (ibid). Kant argued that “the African is all these because, for climate and anthropological reasons, he or she lacks ‘true’ (rational and moral) character” (Eze, 2003, p. 439; Kant, 1978, p. 264). In 1761, Immanuel Kant (1997a) wrote,

Montesquieu is correct in his judgement that the weak-heartedness that makes death so terrifying to the Indian or the Negro also makes him fear many things other than death that the European can withstand. The Negro slave from Guinea drowns himself if he is to be forced into slavery. (pp. 62-64)

Kant goes further to attribute to the supposed grades of superiority and inferiority of race to the presence or absence of “talent.” Taking skin color as evidence of a racial class, Kant said that “white skin, it seems, is only the concrete, physical evidence of this racial superiority . . . skin colour reveals race as species class and morally, as ‘difference in Character’”.² As such, skin color, for Kant, is evidence of rational superiority or inferiority.

In response to Hume and Kant, my aim in this article is to show that the works of nationalist-ideological philosophers are evidence that Africans are not irrational or inferior Whites. I will discuss the works of the nationalist-ideological philosophers as evidence of the existence of African philosophy, and hence as a refutation of Hume's and Kant's

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ideas of the Negroes/Blacks, as captured above. My reason for choosing this trend is that the nationalist–ideological approach actually helps to untie African from the yolk of colonialism by showing that intellectual superiority and inferiority are something that varies among individuals. Some persons are more gifted intellectually than others, and this is not due to one’s race or color. Even among people of the same race, some display higher ingenuity than others.

In the first part of the article, I will briefly explain the idea of nationalist–ideological philosophy. I will explore the reasons that necessitated the development of nationalistic–ideological philosophy. In the next part, I will discuss the nature of nationalist–ideological philosophy, examining the ideas of Consciencism, Communalism, Humanism, Cultural Life, Negritude, Black Consciousness, and Pan-Africanism. I will show that the existence of nationalist–ideological philosophy is evidence of the existence of African philosophy and hence serves to refute Hume’s and Kant’s ideas that Blacks are irrational and inferior to Whites. Against Kant’s idea that Africans “can only be ‘trained’ or ‘educated’ as slaves and servants,” I will argue that the philosophical knowledge that some African philosophers have acquired has falsified his ideas.

Nationalist–Ideological Philosophy

Nationalist–ideological philosophy emanates from the ideologies of national liberation movements. It arose before the independent era in Africa. And it also arose out of the conviction that political independence must be accompanied by “a true mental liberation” (Bodunrin, 1991, p. 64). In essence, it started off as a fight against colonial imperialistic ideologies in Africa. This philosophy “advocates mental liberation and a return to African humanism” (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013, p. 46). The conviction that informs this philosophy is that European model and its ideologies were not appropriate for Africa. The nationalist–ideological philosophers used a practical way to convey their ideas through economic, political, social, and cultural transformation. Thus, it is not surprising to note that “Nkrumah was deeply convinced that Africa must rationalize the dominant intellectual strands in Africa’s historical experience and reinstate what was noble and everlasting in traditional African society” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 176). Nationalist–ideological philosophy is an attempt to deal with the problems of national and socialist revolutions or African revolution (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 183).

What Necessitated Nationalistic–Ideological Philosophy

Nationalist–ideological philosophy was born out of the struggle for liberation of Africans from colonialism. Serequeberhan (1991, p. 3) explained that colonialism set the communist-social structure of African societies on the path to ruin, suppressing the stable indigenous African societies, a situation that left Africans wallowing in a miasma of confusion in

trying to fit in the shoes of their colonizers. Thus, the rich and solid traditional African life and culture were distorted, because of colonialism. Africans lost their identity at the expense of colonial powers. The aftermath of colonialism propagated “pseudo” ideas such as the conception that traditional beliefs and social structures (culture and language) are flawed; hence, there is a need for “civilization.” This created the idea of Africans being inferior to the Europeans. Nationalist–ideological philosophy was necessitated by the ravages of colonialism and the need for Africans to liberate themselves politically, and decolonize their minds from pseudo-ideas like White supremacy and Black inferiority.

Upon realization of independence, many African leaders embarked on a quest for solutions to contemporary problems in Africa. They saw a need to restructure the disfigured and distorted African society. Consequently, nationalist–ideological philosophy can be understood as a reaction to the debased African sociopolitical system which was created by colonial powers. It is a response to Western capitalist systems, economic imperialism, Marxism, and Western socialism. Nationalist–ideological philosophy set out on the quest to reestablish and restructure the African social context after colonialism. As Makumba (2007) avowed, this trend, “coming from the African worldview, was understood by Africa’s pioneer ideologies to be a worthy response to what had become a dehumanizing and exploitative situation brought about by colonization” (p. 135).

Nationalist–ideological philosophy is geared toward defining a unique African political system which not only decolonizes the African but also equips the nationalist–ideological philosophers with solutions to contemporary African problems. This political system is based on traditional African socialism, humanism, familyhood, and the existential situation in Africa (Coetzee & Roux, 1998, p. 96). The proponents of this trend include African leaders and statesmen such as Léopold Sédar Senghor (from Senegal), Kwame Nkrumah (from Ghana), Kenneth Kaunda (from Zambia) Julius Nyerere (from Tanzania), and Jomo Kenyatta (from Kenya), among others. The trend is embodied in the various manifestos and political writings produced by these statesmen and leaders during the African liberation struggle. The philosophical foundation of this trend, as Makumba puts it, was “influenced by the political and social urgency of their environment” (Makumba, 2007, p. 134). These social and political urgencies led these optimistic statesmen to formulate philosophical blueprints for the reconstruction of their respective countries, culturally, politically, socially, and economically.

The Nature of Nationalist–Ideological Philosophy

Nationalist–ideological philosophy, in essence, is an attempt “to evolve a new and if possible, unique political theory based on traditional African socialism and familyhood which Nyerere calls *ujamaa*” (Njoroge, 1986, p. 96). Nationalist–ideological

philosophy can be referred to as a philosophy of transition, “a voice crying in the wilderness,” calling all Africans to consciousness of their own identity and personality (Makumba, 2007, p. 150). It is a social synthesis of contemporary African reality and African social values. This social synthesis of the nationalist–ideological philosophy is geared toward political, economic, social, religious, and cultural situations of pre– and post–independent era. Nationalist–ideological philosophy according to Serequeberhan (1991, p. 20) consists of the “manifestos, the pamphlets and political works produced by the liberation struggle.” It encompasses the whole gamut of national liberation literatures and the African anti-colonial struggles in which pan-Africanism is inclusive. As a result, the literature that has been produced in this time constitutes the basis of “an African philosophical discourse on politics” (Serequeberhan, 1991, p. 20). In other words, “the political and philosophic output of the African anti-colonial struggle as a whole has to be understood as the originative grounding that is presupposed by contemporary African intellectual works as such” (Serequeberhan, 1991, p. 20).

The role of nationalist–ideological philosophy is that of

assuming a leading position in the questions of the best options befitting Africa’s divergent conditions of social and political organization and re-examination and re-appraisal of traditional culture in the hope of identifying and preserving what is useful and worth developing from what is obsolete and fit for dustbin. (Njoroge, 1986, p. 96)

According to the proponents of this movement, there is a necessary connection between theory and practice, which is praxis; in a nutshell, it means a unification of theory and action. Nationalist–ideological philosophers are philosophers of action. These philosophers of the pre– and post–independent era saw that theory alone could not solve the problems of Africa, thus identifying the need to come up with a pragmatic way of solving African problems. From the foregoing, it is clear that these philosophers aimed at radical transformation of political, economic, social, and cultural aberrations in African because of the impact of colonialism. It aimed at decolonizing the minds of Africans so that they could—and can—reassert themselves in the world. According to Mbonjo (1998, p. 183), the hallmark of nationalist–ideological philosophers is their ardent zeal and clarion call for all Africans to return to their values and shun everything Western that is not in conformity with this noble goal. Njoroge further asserts that the nationalist–ideological philosophy could also be called “political philosophy” (Njoroge, 1986, p. 88).

The Philosophical Ideologies of the Nationalist–Ideological Philosophers

What these African political thinkers have developed and thus have offered to Africans are ideas such as consciencism,

communalism, familyhood, negritude, humanism, nationhood, unification, socialism, and pan-Africanism. Below are brief explanations of their ideologies.

Consciencism

Consciencism as presented by Nkrumah is the philosophy of the African revolution which upholds the ideology of socialism and the redemption of African humanist society of the past (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 177). Nkrumah defined consciencism as

the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest Western and Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. The African personality is itself defined as the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. Philosophical consciencism is that philosophical standpoint which, taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out of the conflict in that conscience. (Nkrumah, 1970, p. 79)

Consciencism is both revolutionary and evolutionary. Consciencism is revolutionary when it deals with colonialism and capitalism. On the contrary, consciencism is evolutionary when it is “considered in relation to the traditional African society, whose guiding principles of egalitarianism and the concern of all for each it seeks to reassert and enthrone and regards as fundamental to any society or social order” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 177). In other words, there are two main values found in the traditional African society which need to be guided or taken care of by the philosophical consciencism. The first is the idea of egalitarianism that all of us belong to the same species without any discrimination. The second is that each person is responsible for the other as long as we live in a community. Consciencism has as starting point the idea that in every society, there is a kind of explicit or implicit ideology. And this ideology defines a social cohesion toward a desirable society (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 178). Hence, consciencism is meant to guide African ideology. In his own words, Nkrumah affirms that “philosophical consciencism builds itself by becoming a reflection of the objectivity, in conceptual terms, of the unfolding of matter” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 179). This leads us to the ethical perspective of the notion of philosophical consciencism. Hence, it follows according to philosophical consciencism “that each man must be treated as an end in himself and not just as a tool or a means to an end” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 180). In this respect, Nkrumah writes, “The cardinal ethical principle of philosophical consciencism is to treat each man as an end in himself and not merely as a means. This is fundamental to all socialist or humanist conception of man” (quoted in Mbonjo, 1998, p. 180). Thus for Nkrumah, philosophical consciencism will serve as the solid theoretical foundation on which a truly unifying ideology for all Africa can be built (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 182).

Thus understood, consciencism could not and cannot accommodate colonialism. The reason is that colonialism is “a doctrine of exploitation and a doctrine of alienating” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 21). This implies that colonialism is a means by which a colonial power secures material advantages for her own economic development. It is considered as a crude form of imperialism, which is the “policy which aims at creating, organizing and maintaining an empire” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 22). As a result, African political thinkers, reject colonialism, as well as the idea that it is to bring civilization to a people or to prepare them for self-rule. At the Casablanca Conference of January 7, 1961, Nkrumah made a speech which reads,

For my part, I must say that as long as I live, and as long as any little vestige of colonialism and imperialism remains in Africa, I shall prosecute a ruthless war on these monsters, a war in which there shall be no truce. Colonialism and imperialism have no honour, no shame, no morals and conscience. The devastation which they have brought in Africa is without parallel anywhere in the history of the world, but now Africans have arrived on the scene. We have arrested their progress and are determined to give them battle with all the forces of our command until we have achieved the total liberation of the African continent and have built a strong Union of African states. As I have always stated, and as I will continue to proclaim, I can see no security for African states unless African leaders like ourselves have realized beyond all doubts that salvation for Africa lies in Unity. (Quoted in Obeng, 1979, p. 2)

Communalism

African traditional worldview encompasses “an attitude towards the human person, which can only be described, in its social manifestation, as being socialist” (Makumba, 2007, p. 139). Hence, African communalism was considered the “socio-political ancestor of socialism” (Makumba, 2007, p. 139). Nyerere calls this Ujamaa, meaning familyhood. This idea of African socialism is opposed both to capitalism and to Marxist socialism. A family, according to Nyerere, embraces the whole human society. So it is “the foundation, and the objective, of African socialism . . . the true African socialist system regards all men as his brethren—as members of his ever-extending family” (Makumba, 2007, p. 140). In fact, capitalism “seeks happiness through the exploitation of one person by another, and Marxist socialism seeks happiness through conflict between persons” (Makumba, 2007, p. 140). On the contrary, African socialism rooted in African communalism is “an attitude of the mind” (Makumba, 2007, p. 140). Its foundation lies in the principle of human equality which “has to be applied to the different sectors of society, namely economic, social and political” (Makumba, 2007, p. 141) and based on love and sharing.

Humanism

In the same line as Nyerere’s ideas, Kaunda calls the attitude toward the human person African humanism. This is because

Africa is human-centered and that ideology conquered colonialism (Makumba, 2007, p. 143). Central to Kaunda’s humanist claim is that humanism is rooted in human person in relation with God. As a result, African humanism is closely related to Christian anthropology, where the human person is truly human “only before God and that the spiritual dimension is an integral part of the human personality” (Makumba, 2007, p. 143). Humanism, as it is with the role of any society, seeks to uphold and protect the dignity of the human person. It is a form of socialism that is based on political, social, cultural, and economic aspects of the life of a human person and geared toward the improvement of the human life. Kaunda saw a connection with Christianity, and he advocated religious beliefs as fitting complements to traditional African society. Humanism was a tool to break away from the colonial heritage and to develop and reconstruct an African identity.

Cultural Life

Amilcar Cabral sees cultural life as an element of resistance to foreign domination (Wolfers, 1979, p. 141). For him, there is a dependant and reciprocal connection between cultural factor and the economic and political factor in the behaviors of human societies.

In fact, at every moment of the life of a society, culture is the result, with more or less awakened consciousness, of economic and political activities, the more or less dynamic expression of the type of relations prevailing within that society. (Wolfers, 1979, p. 141)

Again, there is a characteristic common to every kind of imperialist domination, which is “the denial of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violent usurpation of the freedom of the process of development of the productive forces” (Wolfers, 1979, p. 141). In this regard, who knows what would have been the technological and economic development from the different African cultures if they were not destroyed? The point is that according to Cabral,

culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence it exerts on the evolution of relations between man and his environment and among men or human groups within a society, as well as between different societies. (Wolfers, 1979, p. 141)

Negritude

In the Francophone case, the story has often been told, and the centrality of the race of negritude cannot be ignored. Negritude was one of the first anticolonial moments concerned precisely with the idea of race in Africa. “Central to the concept of negritude is the idea of suffering through servitude, either directly through slavery or indirectly through

colonization” (Wolfers, 1979, p. 27). Césaire and Senghor both experienced the sufferings of racial segregation as young students. Hence, for them, there was a need for awakening the Black person as a process of converting the victims into consciousness of reshaping their destiny. Césaire coined the word “negritude.” His idea of negritude originated in history, and it was one of bitterness and discomfort (Wolfers, 1979). Thus, “Negritude emerged as a concept with different resonances in, and applicable to, different contexts. Yet, the re-evaluation of blackness and of the pan-African experience constituted a denominator common to all its variants” (Berkday, 2010, pp. 206-207). Césaire defines negritude as “the sum of the cultural values of the black world as expressed in the life, the institutions, and the works of black men; the sum of the values of the civilization of the black world” (Wolfers, 1979, p. 44). Senghor (2001), in his work “Negritude and Modernity or Negritude as a Humanism for the Twentieth Century” explained negritude as a “philosophy that postulates cultural action adapted to the spiritual and sociological conditions of the black man” (quoted in Wolfers, 1979, p. 144). He further explains that negritude has a double meaning: “subjective and objective, particular and universal, topical and eternal” (Senghor, 2001, p. 144).

Objectively, as a civilization, negritude is the totality of values; not only those of the peoples of black African, but also of the black minorities of America, or even of Asia or the South Sea Islands . . . Subjectively, negritude is a will to take on the values of the black world, to live them oneself, after having impregnated and actualized them, but also to make them live in and through others. (Senghor, 2001, p. 144)

“The supreme value of black African civilization is life forces” (Wolfers, 1979, p. 45). African values show that blood bonds are of great significance because of vital realities, but not just because of race. Senghor holds that “the family in Africa encompasses all persons descending from a common ancestor who is responsible for the flame of life transmitted to his descendants” (Wolfers, 1979, p. 48). As a result, negritude is all about pointing out the African values and their authenticity. For instance, Senghor stipulates that

Black man’s emotivity is due neither to inherently superior sensory faculties nor to inherently inferior rational faculties, but to a particular attitude toward the external world and its apparent complexity. Essentially positive and dynamic, this attitude is a direct result of the notion of life force and its intensification and the tendency to relate to the external world as to a network of interacting forces. (Wolfers, 1979, p. 75)

It is important to underscore that Senghor may have been disingenuous, but he is not at all innocent of the ongoing modern racial battles “over the meaning of reason and humanity when he notoriously defended a thesis that, *on the surface*, is unsurpassably droll: ‘Emotion is Negro, and reason Greek’” (Eze, 2001, p. 41). According to Eze, “it is as if

Senghor said, ‘Well, you keep your Reason; we have our Emotion. Besides, our Emotion is superior to your Reason’” (Eze, 2001, p. 41). Senghor’s theoretical work illustrates how race plays itself in modern discourse.

Black Consciousness

Steve Biko says that “the basic tenet of black consciousness is that the black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him foreign in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity” (Biko, 1971). What Biko is trying to bring to the awareness of the African masses is the injustice wrought on him by the apartheid era. His main point is that Africans should seek to reject injustice and recognize her value, and Africans should stop feeling inferior in their own home. In other words, he is insisting on a sense of superiority instead of inferiority among Blacks. According to Biko, White people “must be made to realise that they are only human, not superior. Same with Blacks. They must be made to realise that they are also human, not inferior” (quoted in Biko, 1978b). What Biko is saying is that the White masses that colonized and forced apartheid on the Black masses should not treat Blacks as their inferiors. His idea is that the White masses are not better than the Blacks; in fact, all people are equal and should be treated as such. Biko further said that by merely “describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being” (Biko, 1978a). Thus, it is the responsibility of the Blacks to fight against oppression.

Pan-Africanism

According to Appiah (1992),

for the generation that theorized the decolonization of Africa, then, “race” was a central organizing principle. And, since these Africans largely inherited their conception of “race” from their New precursors, we shall understand Pan-Africanism’s profound entanglement with that conception best if we look first at how it is handled in the work of the African-American intellectuals who forged the links between race and Pan-Africanism. (p. 10)

The idea of African unity that these African political thinkers were all emphasizing and advocating is mainly expressed in the movement of pan-Africanism. The latter has as a basic premise that “the people of Africa and of African descent throughout the globe, constitute a common cultural and political community by virtue of their origin in Africa and their common racial, social and economic oppression” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 121). Furthermore, pan-Africanism holds that in order to bring about effective action for the liberation and development of Africa, a political, economic, and cultural unity is necessary (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 121). Thus defined,

pan-Africanism started to develop in the nineteenth century, when the countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone were formed to “create a homeland in Africa for American Slaves and return them gradually” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 123). However, the expression “pan-Africanism” came into use with Henry Sylvester Williams from Trinidad and William Edward Burghardt Du Bois of the United States (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 125). The essential elements of pan-Africanism were “national self-determination, individual freedom and democratic socialism” (Mbonjo, 1998, p. 126). It is in this sense that one can say that African unity “can only become a reality when national self-interest and continent-wide unity come together” (Makumba, 2007, p. 147).

African Philosophy and Philosophical Pride: A Response to Hume’s and Kant’s Ideas About the Negroes/Blacks

The philosophical writings of the nationalist–ideological philosophers and some modern African intellectuals arose as a result of the intellectual racial discrimination and anti-African prejudices in the works of some European thinkers like Hume and Kant. The works of some nationalist–ideological philosophers have helped tremendously to show that Africans are capable of intellectual exercise. Many works of Africans or African philosophers have been done just to show their contrast from that of the West, and to show that they are intellectually capable of engaging in the discourse.

The philosophical writings of some modern philosophers like Hume, Kant, and Hegel aroused psychological defensiveness by most modern African intellectuals when they came across intellectual racial discrimination and anti-African prejudices. Appiah, for example, writes, “Few contemporary readers are likely to be undisturbed when they discover the moments when Africa is banished from Hegel’s supposedly universal history and when Hume declares, in the essay on ‘National Characters,’ that blacks are incapable of eminence in action or speculation” (Hume, 1997, p. 400), and Kant’s classification or hierarchical chart on the different “races.” Appiah’s statement, the idea of race, and other colonial and neocolonial exploitation and degradation of African humanity, reawakens the existence of African philosophy. I use the term “reawakens” because African philosophy existed, even before colonization. It was as a result of the Europeans’ misinterpretation of African cultures, ideas, and ways of life that Africans reinforced their ideas so that the Europeans could better understand their philosophy. This was done after many African scholars assimilated European culture and lifestyle, through education.

The term “Africa,” while generally taken to refer to a particular geographical area located at the South Pole, has been bedeviled by different ill conceptions. Terms like “the land of Darkness,” “the dead end,” “the cold-less,” or “sunny-land” have been used to describe the continent. As Mogobe B. Ramose (2003) noted, these derogatory expressions of some

anthropologists point to the fact that the history of Africa is mainly the history of West European experience of “Africa” and only incidentally is it the story of the peoples of the continent about themselves. By implication, all that arises from Africa is thought to be barbaric and unworthy of being counted among the credence of human achievement. To this end, the likes of Hume and Kant would categorize Africans as irrational beings who are unable to engage in critical reflection upon their own experience. This thought of African backwardness further drove Europeans, albeit their greed for African’s wealth, to invade the continent with the idea of civilization. From this backdrop, the existence of African philosophy is denied. The above also imprints in Kant’s and Hume’s minds their wrong views of Blacks. They see Blacks as irrational and inferior to the Whites. But this is a false idea.

Etymologically, philosophy is the love of wisdom. It is an art of critical reflection upon lived experience. Taken as such, African philosophy ought to seek to reflect critically upon the lived experience of the people. So, when we talk about African philosophy, we are talking about works that relate to Africa. It can be philosophical works from Africans that contribute to one’s understanding of Africa and Africans, based on the person’s experience of African culture. According to Oruka, African philosophy in the above sense “is considered in the terms of African past, current, or potential contribution to philosophy in the strict meaning of the term” (Oruka, 2002, p. 120). One thing to note from these ideas on African philosophy is the contextual specificity of African philosophy. This is necessary taking into consideration that African philosophy has long been silenced by the West. In response, Africa must speak up for herself and about herself. This is crucial also for the need to divest Africa and her mode of thought of any *undue* colonial influence. As Wiredu (1984) aptly noted, this task must be carefully carried out with a double critical stand toward both what is Western and African. African philosophers must not shy away from taking a critical stand toward elements within their cultural worldview that is inimical to rational thought, nor should they accept as axiomatic any conceptual work from the West. On the contrary, both traditions can offer philosophers materials upon which they can conduct their reflection. Thus, African philosophy can be seen as written and unwritten/oral reflection of thinkers based on the ways in which African people of the past and the present critically make sense of their existence, heritage, religion, customs, their tradition and culture, and the world they live in.

As a reminder, we should note that the contextual specificity spoken of earlier should not be taken to be a report of cultural or communal worldview of a community within Africa. This is what Oruka (2002) called ethno-philosophy. In the face of criticisms from outside Africa, African philosophy must outgrow collective worldview. Because philosophy is primarily about independent thought of persons about phenomena of their experience, the works of the trend in African philosophy can be useful to professional philosophers as a material for

reflection. More importantly, contextual specificity should take into consideration the diversity of African cultures; as it is sometimes said, “there is not one Africa but many.” In this light, Wiredu (1996) made a point by alluding that African philosophy “have to be intensive studies of those elements of culture that play significant roles in the constitution of meanings in the various African world views” (p. 159). This is a call for particularistic studies that avoid hasty generalization.

To this end, one may object that this culture of specificity can hamper intra-African and international philosophical dialogue. This objection need not concern us given that a particularistic study done in a culture that interprets the language of that culture can spur a similar project in another. This would throw light on concepts with which communication can be carried out. After all, dialogue presupposes understanding of differences as well as similarities. “If we understand ‘philosophy’ as the tradition to which Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Hume, Kant and Hegel belong, then at least the following concepts are bound to be regarded as central to that canon: beauty, being, causation, evil, God, gods, good, illusion, justice, knowledge, life, meaning, mind, person, reality, reason, right, truth, understanding, and wrong,” we will understand that both Western and African philosophers have engaged themselves in an ongoing task on these concepts, based on their own view and understanding, in search of similarities and differences (Appiah, 1992, pp. 86-87). No doubt, that not all cultures have the above concepts, but any philosopher talking or discussing about any of this concept, engage with it in contrast and in connection to his or her own culture. I think that many works of Africans or African philosophers with have been done just to show their contrast from that of the West.

The idea of “African philosophy” as a field of inquiry thus has its contemporary roots in the effort of African thinkers to combat political and economic exploitations, and to examine, question, and contest identities imposed upon them by the Europeans. (Eze, 1998, p. 217)

The arrival of the colonizers in Africa marked the interchange of modernity and tradition. It is in light of this interchange that I would like to congratulate nationalist-ideological philosophers for acting as a backdrop to subsequent philosophical undertakings which were in aid of either redefining or redeeming the African self-concept and ultimately human nature.

How Is the Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy and the Existence of African Philosophy an Indirect Response to Hume’s and Kant’s Ideas About the Negroes/Blacks?

According to Mogobe B. Ramose, “the struggle for reason—who is and who is not a rational animal—is the foundation of racism” (Ramosé, 2003, p. 3). David Hume and Immanuel

Kant are good examples of the above statement. Hume believed that “some races have high levels of mental capacities and that others do not” (Eze, 2001, p. 66). Kant believes that “white skin, it seems, is only the concrete, physical evidence of this racial superiority skin colour reveals race as species class (*Klassenunterschied*) and morally, as ‘difference in Character’ (“*Verschiedenheit des Naturcharakters*”)³. In 1785, Kant argued that

the presence of an inflammable “substance” phlogiston in the African’s blood makes the skin colour “black” and, by analogy and extrapolation is assumed to be responsible for the skin colour of other “race” or “racial” distinctions. He nevertheless maintained throughout a hierarchical extrapolation of these colour differences. (Eze, 2003, p. 441; Kant, 1997b)

From their ideas, it is quite clear that race is a real issue that affects Africans in various ways. Arguably, the issue of race can be cited as a prime factor that makes “African Philosophy labour under this yet-to-end exploitation and denigration of African humanity. It challenges the long-standing exclusion as the negative ‘other’ of reason and of the western world in the major traditions of modern Western philosophy” (Eze, 1998, p. 219).

Nationalist-ideological philosophy and trends of African philosophy can be conceived as an indirect response to Hume and Kant. To emphasize this point, I will say that the nationalist-ideological philosophy has helped tremendously in the restoration of African pride. The writings of the philosophers in this trend are a visible example, and it encompasses the whole gamut of African values in her political, economic, and cultural values. They disentangled African society “from its yolk of colonialism, and then revert to former cardinal principles of traditional African” (Ochieng-Odhiambo, 2010, p. 151).

Kant explains that Africans “can only be ‘trained’ or ‘educated’ as slaves and servants.” Against this idea, the nationalist-ideological philosophers and other African philosophers/scholars show that they can assimilate European culture and lifestyle, through education. This is evident today in the way Africans live, in the nature of their studies, and their communication with others. It was as a result of the Europeans misinterpretation of African culture, ideas, and way of life that the nationalist-ideological philosophers reinforced their ideas so that the Europeans can better understand their philosophy. Following this view, the existence of African philosophy can also be considered as refutation of the ideas of Hume and Kant. To emphasize this point, Eze says that

African philosophy as a field of inquiry thus has its contemporary roots in the effort of African thinkers to combat political and economic exploitations, and to examine, question, and contest ideates imposed upon them by Europeans. The claims and counter-claims, justifications and alienations that characterize such historical conceptual protests and contestations indelibly mark the discipline of African philosophy. (Eze, 2001, p. 217)

Against Hume's and Kant's ideas that Africans are inferior to the Whites and are irrational beings who are unable to engage in critical reflection upon their own existence, I will say that in this case the nationalist-ideological philosophers used their mental and rational capacities to address and articulate issues concerning Africa. And this is no different from what the Europeans or modern Western philosophers have done. All human being, as rational animals, are endowed with these capacities, and all societies are confronted by these ultimate questions. Because we apply reason in all that we do, reasoning does not belong to anyone; it is part of nature.

Senghor "advocated some kind of symbiosis within the African context, for some dominant suppositions within both the West and Africa context" (Ochieng-Odhiambo, 2010, p. 151). Senghor stipulates that

Black man's emotivity is due neither to inherently superior sensory faculties nor to inherently inferior rational faculties, but to a particular attitude toward the external world and its apparent complexity. Essentially positive and dynamic, this attitude is a direct result of the notion of life force and its intensification and the tendency to relate to the external world as to a network of interacting forces. (Senghor quoted in Wolfers, 1979, p. 75)

The above explains his idea of the meaning of reason and humanity. The above reaction from Senghor is an example that better describes and informs us how the concept of race has affected some Africans. It explicitly shows Africans' awareness of racial consciousness and their intellectual urge to defend it, without the foreknowledge of them being racist at the same time. And this was what works and writings of the nationalistic-ideological philosophers actually defended. Therefore, against Hume's and Kant's misunderstanding of Africa, I would like to say that the conceptual transformations that have been happening through the centuries, in both Africa and Europe, attest to the fact that our articulation of reality is a highly contested terrain.

Kant further attributed the supposed grades of superiority and inferiority of race to the presence or absence of "talent." Skin color for Kant was proof of rational superiority or inferiority. His position on the importance of skin color was obvious in a statement he made on the question of the reasoning of a Black person: "This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid".⁴ As such, Skin color has been the primary common sense criterion for racial classification, membership, and identification. "Skin colour differences are taken for granted as evidence of racial difference, if not considered to be racial differences in themselves, then skin colour is assumed to be the evolutionary result of ancestral geographical environment" (Zack, 2002, p. 42). According to Zack, there are problems with this assumption, one being "using an evolutionary geographical model to explain skin colour differences." Zack further explains the problems when she states that

People with dark skin are present in cold climates, and light skin is not necessarily an adaptive advantage in cold climates that have less sunlight, because recent evidence suggests that vitamin D can be stored in the body. Even more recent evidence suggests that skin color differences around the globe are adaptive responses to the amount of ultraviolet light present. UV light is necessary to produce vitamin D-3 and folate, which support fetal growth, and more of it is absorbed by lighter than darker skin. Too much UV light causes skin cancer, and too little retards fetal growth and bone development. (Zack, 2002, p. 42)

Zack further asserts that there are two important problems when we use skin color as the basis for race. The first problem is an obvious one; it is based on the idea that "apart from custom, there is no reason to believe that skin colour differences are in themselves, or in combination with other biological differences, sufficiently important to provide a basis for a human subspecies, or racial, taxonomy" (Zack, 2002, pp. 42-43). The second problem is that "while skin colour is accepted as a foundation for racial difference in society, in nature there are no distinct groups. Furthermore, the geographical continuity of human skin colour is not an isolated pattern of human phenotypical difference" (Zack, 2002, p. 43).

"Race," in Kant's view, is based upon an ahistorical principle of reason (*Idee*) and moral law (Eze, 2003, p. 441). In 1761, Immanuel Kant wrote,

Montesquieu is correct in his judgement that the weak-heartedness that makes death so terrifying to the Indian or the Negro also makes him fear many things other than death that the European can withstand. The Negro slave from Guinea drowns himself if he is to be forced into slavery. The Indian women burn themselves. The Carib commits suicide at the slightest provocation. The Peruvian trembles in the face of an enemy, and when he is led to death, he is ambivalent, as though it means nothing. His awakened imagination, however, also makes him dare to do something, but the heat of the moment is soon past and timidity resumes its old place again. . . . The inhabitant of the temperate parts of the world, above all the central part, has a more beautiful body, works harder, is more jocular, more controlled in his passion, more intelligent than any other race of people in the world, that is why at all points in time these peoples have educated the others and controlled them with weapons. (Kant, 1997a, pp. 62-64)

What the above simply shows is the reaction of different races when any of them was being forced into slavery. The Negro slave from Guinea decided to drown himself because he was being forced into slavery, while the Indian women decided to burn themselves on the same account of slavery. Other races also had their own reaction when they were being forced into slavery. So the idea of all suicide as irrational is one way to understand the broader view of Kant's argument as ahistorical. Despite this background, I however think that the actions of the individual (Kant's examples) show that they were aware of what they will go through if they were subjected to slavery. In my view, this can be used against

Kant's argument on human knowing, because reasoning is a free gift to humanity. How we as humans and individuals use it is up to us. Whether we make a wrong judgment or a right judgment, what counts at the end is the fact that we made use of it. In the above case, the different examples of people that Kant mentioned could identify with the "I." That very act of identification makes them a thinking thing. Their consciousness had reached the objective existence, which in turn made them to be more aware that it was better to die, than to be enslaved and tortured to death in the hands of the Europeans. According to Hill and Bernard (2001, p. 465), "people often do terrible things from blind sentiments and impulse, not because they did not think about the outcome of their actions, but because they are merely taking means perceived as necessary to achieve ends prompted by their non-rational inclinations" at that point in time. This is the reason why Hill and Bernard argued that Kant was obviously aware of but ignored. This also is a claim I concur with on the basis that as humans, we must first have a concrete consciousness of who we are and what we want to do. This is to say, we cannot know or be conscious of something without participating in that thing and being participated in by that thing. Consciousness paves the way for reasoning. When one is conscious of something, it creates room for thoughts about that particular thing before one's action follows. One's mind/reasoning/thought has to work in a coherent way with one's actions. The action of that Negro and that of the other people that Kant used as an example better explains a reasoning that coincides with their actions. Thus, in the face of slavery they thought of what to do to escape slavery and this for me is coherent reasoning in display.

Against Kant's idea of human classification, Appiah asserts that the classification of human beings does not reflect any deep facts about humans in general. In other words, the concept of race does not reflect any deep facts about human beings. Human beings as we know have different purposes to achieve in life, so the classification of humans does not tell us which races we should value, as "the numbers in the Dewey decimal system does not correspond with qualities of utility or interest or literary merit" (Appiah, 1992, p. 38).

"The notion of race that was recovered would be of no biological interest—the interesting biological generalizations are about genotypes, phenotypes, and their distribution in geographical population" (Appiah, 1992, p. 37). Besides the above biological classification or generalizations, the notion of race would be of no biological interest because all humans are linked with each other and there is no need to classify people into different races based on human descent. According to Appiah, if there arises any need for the classification, "we could just as well classify people according to whether or not they were redheaded, or redheaded and freckled, or redheaded, freckled, and broad-nosed too, but nobody claims that this sort of classification is central to human biology" (Appiah, 1992, p. 37). Appiah further argues that "the

appeal of race as a classificatory notion provides us with an instance of a familiar pattern in the history of science" (Appiah, 1992, p. 38). Scientists started the idea of classification and categorization based on their folk theory of the world. Gradually science developed and became the sole tools for a deeper understanding of things around us. Thus, "in early chemistry, colour and taste played an important role in the classification of substances; in early natural history, plant and animal species were identified largely by their gross visible morphology" (Appiah, 1992, p. 38). Because of the above and scientists' methods of discovery and organization, classification becomes a special activity. "The benefit we gain is that we are able to make generalization of greater power and scope" (Appiah, 1992, p. 38), but the disadvantage is that we seem to always classify things that do not need to be classified.

Concluding on this discourse, Appiah states that

The truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us. As we have seen, even the biologist's notion has only limited uses, and the notion that Du Bois required, and that underlies the more hateful racism of modern era, refers to nothing in the world at all. The evil that is done is done by the concept and by easy—yet impossible—assumptions as to its applications.

To call it "biologizing" is not, however, to consign our concept of race to biology. For what is present there is not our concept but our word only. Even the biologist who believe in human races use the term *race*, as they say, "without any social implication."⁵ What exists "out there" in the world—communities of meaning, shading variously into each other in the rich structure of the social world—is the province not of biological but of human sciences. (Appiah, 1992, p. 45)

It is important to underscore that the outlook of Appiah's argument in defense of the concept of race lies on his idea that race is an illusion and that the concept of race cannot do anything for us. More so, the biological idea of race is of limited use because what biologists seem to suggest about genetic idea of race based on the idea of classification is different from the historical theory of evolution. Thus, Appiah believes that race is relatively unimportant because it does not explain the biological difference among human beings.

An unmistakable feature of the African continent is its cultural and ideological plurality. We cannot subscribe to any essentialist notion of African thought, except that, as members of human race living on the African continent, we can all account for an innate capacity to use our mental and rational capacities. I believe that there are some questions which have been accorded greater emphasis in African and those that need more emphasis, depending on the particular era of African history. The concept of race is one of these questions. The arrival of the colonizers in Africa marked the interchange of modernity and tradition. Out of this contentious union there are some questions, one of which is the

underlying concern of the concept of race and African identities. It is to this regard that Chinua Achebe said,

It is, of course true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African. But, at the same time, there *is* an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and a certain meaning. Because if somebody meets me, say, in a shop in Cambridge, he says "Are you from Africa?" Which means that African means something to some people. Each of these tags a meaning, and a penalty and a responsibility. (Quoted in Appiah, 1992, p. 173)⁶

According to Appiah (1992),

meaning is not always one we can be happy with, and identity is one we must continue to reshape. And in thinking about how we are to reshape it, we would do well to remember that the African identity is, for its bearers, only one among many. (p. 177)

Masolo also gives a better explanation of African identity using the word "return" in Césaire's book. According to Masolo, the word "return," which appears in the title of Césaire's poem, *Return to My Native Land*, is a term

which symbolizes many aspects of the struggle of the peoples of African origin to control their own identity . . . a symbolic call to all black peoples to rally together around the idea of common origin and in a struggle to defend that unifying commonality . . . —a uniting idea of common origin for all black peoples. (Masolo, 1994, p. 2)

This commonality became their identity tag and a language that expresses African's unification. This is exactly what the nationalistic-ideological philosophers and the existence of African philosophy have actually shown.

Conclusion

As a refutation of Hume's and Kant's ideas of the Negroes/Blacks, the main aim of this article has been to show that the works of nationalist-ideological philosophers are evidence that Africans are not irrational or inferior to Whites. I started with a brief explanation on the nationalist-ideological philosophy. As I said earlier, my reason for choosing the nationalist-ideological philosophers and their thoughts and writings is that these works actually helped to untie African from the yolk of colonialism. The nationalist-ideological philosophers are the ones that started the movement of change. This trend is a viable alternative because the philosophical ideology of these philosophers is an ardent call for all Africans to return to their values. I explored the reasons behind nationalist-ideological philosophy. I then proceeded to discuss the nature of nationalist-ideological philosophy. Following from that, I discussed the philosophical ideologies of the proponents of the trend, one after the other. In the following section, I argued that the philosophical pride that

some African philosophers and the existence of African philosophy have acquired has falsified Hume's and Kant's ideas that Blacks are irrational and inferior to the Whites. I concluded the article by explaining why I think the nationalist-ideological philosophy is a refutation of the ideas of race of Hume and Kant.

Author's Note

The underlying research materials related to my article can be accessed from a wide range of already published materials like books and articles in academic journals.

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Notes

1. "We should keep in mind, therefore, that when Hume says that some races are inferior to others, and the evidence for this is that the inferior ones lack the science and the arts, he is saying, in effect, that members of the inferior races are ontologically (psychologically) and functionally (cognitively) deficient" (Eze, 2001, p. 66).
2. Kant, *GS*, Vol. 8, "Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrassee," [Definition of the concept of a human race], p. 138; or see Fritz Schultze, *Kant und Darwin: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Entwicklungslehre*, [Kant and Darwin: a contribution to the history of developmental doctrine] Jena: Hermann Dufft, 1875.
3. Kant, "Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrassee," (1785), in Schultze, *Kant und Darwin*, pp. 136-138; or see Eze, *Achieving out Humanity*, p. 102. 2001.
4. Kant, Observations on the feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime (Observations) [1764], trans. John T. Goldthwait, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, p. 110; or see Eze, *Achieving out Humanity*, p. 102. 2001.
5. Nei and Roychoudhury, "Genetic Relationship and Evolution of Human Races," 4.
6. Achebe (1982).

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Ovett Nwosimiri is a Nigerian. His primary areas of research are in philosophy and ethics. His main concern in this paper is to explain the works of the nationalist-ideological philosophers and to give a critical assessment on how some of their works can be seen as evidence against David Hume's and Immanuel Kant's ideas of race.