



Sophie Olúwólé's Major Contributions to African Philosophy

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the contributions to philosophy of Nigerian philosopher Sophie Bọ́ sẹ̀ dé Olúwólé (1935–2018). The first woman to earn a philosophy PhD in Nigeria, Olúwólé headed the Department of Philosophy at the University of Lagos before retiring to found and run the Centre for African Culture and Development. She devoted her career to studying Yoruba philosophy, translating the ancient Yoruba Ifá canon, which embodies the teachings of Orunmila, a philosopher revered as an Óríṣá in the Ifá pantheon. Seeing his works as examples of secular reasoning and argument, she compared Orunmila's and Socrates' philosophies and methods and explored similarities and differences between African and European philosophies. A champion of African oral traditions, Olúwólé argued that songs, proverbs, liturgies, and stories are important sources of African responses to perennial philosophical questions as well as to contemporary issues, including feminism. She argued that the complementarity that ran throughout Yoruba philosophy guaranteed women's rights and status, and preserved an important role for women, youths, and foreigners in politics.

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