

SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Sanya Osha. *Kwasi Wiredu and Beyond: The Text, Writing and Thought in Africa*. Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 2005. Distributed by Michigan State University Press and by African Books Collective, Oxford, UK. xxvi + 209 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$24.95. Paper.

Scholarship of substance and originality is always to be welcomed, and this book certainly has much to offer. Using the work of the distinguished African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu as both his negative and positive inspiration, Sanya Osha sets out to recast the strategy for African conceptual decolonization in more radical and comprehensive terms than he finds in the cumulative oeuvre of Wiredu.

I am not sure that Wiredu has ever explicitly identified himself as the “analytic” philosopher Osha assumes he is. Certainly throughout his career Wiredu has consistently repudiated the attempt to link his approach to philosophy in the African context with logical positivism (see O. Oladipo, *The Third Way in African Philosophy* [Hope Publications, 2002] for Wiredu’s essay, “Brief Remarks on Logical Positivism”), but this is an indictment that Osha resurrects. This is not to say that he thinks Wiredu does not rightfully deserve to be regarded as an African philosopher of supreme importance who has made fundamental contributions to the discipline. But Osha argues that Wiredu’s penchant for working with and through the languages of Africa (particularly Akan/Twi) as a basis for scrupulous critical comparisons with Western philosophy imposes too narrow and binary a focus for a conceptually comprehensive assessment of the disastrous historical, social, economic, political and psychological consequences Western imperialism continues to inflict upon Africa; he constantly invokes the motif of “violence,” and not in a simplistically metaphorical manner. Osha therefore rejects what he terms “analytic philosophy” as an adequate vehicle for conceptual decolonization, and embraces instead a more Continental philosophical approach as a basis for arriving at a new strategy. This involves elements of hermeneutics (“deeper” understanding) and of postmodern and postcolonial thought and an insistence that an appreciation and account of historical and social contexts are essential if philosophy in the African context is to have the liberating impact that Osha argues it must. Along the way he provides stimulating critical synopses of the work of an impressive array of contemporary intellectuals who are associated with these movements: Appiah, Hountondji, Mbembe, Mudimbe, Ngũgĩ, Said, and Spivak, to mention just a few.

I suspect that Wiredu might deplore Osha’s presumption that, in the African context, the analytic and Continental approaches to philosophy must replicate the irreconcilable divide that has sometimes been the case in the Western tradition. As he explicitly acknowledges in *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge, 1980): “It is worth remarking [also] that analy-

sis is not the only method open to philosophy. . . . Analysis takes its material (the concepts to be analyzed) as antecedently ready made. But there is no reason why a philosopher should remain professionally incurious about the origin of concepts" (162). Wiredu's endorsement of Dewey, which Osha himself acknowledges, implies a priority for a genetic approach to the origin of such concepts.

I also suspect Wiredu might caution philosophers about presuming academic competence in so many different disciplines—economics, history, literature, political science, psychology, sociology. They would be on safer and more productive ground by initiating interdisciplinary collaborations with scholars in those subjects rather than appropriating them as their own.

Overall, nevertheless, this makes for a challenging and stimulating read, and therefore it is a book to be recommended highly. That said, I cannot resist a few final caveats: the implication that the relevance of Wiredu and his work should somehow be consigned to the "past" because its contemporary relevance is diminished; the adamant insistence that cultures based on orality cannot achieve intellectual significance; the wholehearted embrace of the work of the American philosopher Richard Rorty, who continues to insist upon the absence of philosophy from all cultures except those of the West.

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Barry Hallen. *African Philosophy: The Analytic Approach*. Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 2006. vii + 361 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$34.95. Paper.

Barry Hallen argues that the analysis of how concepts are used in ordinary language is an essential methodology of analytic philosophy. Such an approach, he maintains, constitutes "African philosophy, insofar as it may deal with the analysis of African languages (or meanings) and the evaluation of African beliefs expressed in these languages" (86). In his view, deriving a philosophy from African languages will not begin until we can correctly understand and translate the relevant meanings. He then applies this method to examine concepts such as "knowledge" and "beauty" in Yoruba.

The book is divided into four parts. The first critically examines the views of the philosophers Richard Rorty and Paulin Hountondji and of social anthropologists who deny that Africans have a legitimate philosophy because their beliefs are based on "tradition." The characterization of