

Philosophical Conversations:

Conversational thinking is articulated as a new approach to philosophical inquiry. It has two strands: conversational philosophy and interrogatory theory with conversationalism and interrogationism as their respective methodic ambience. The former is a method of philosophic thought that involves critical and creative engagement of a philosopher with other actors geared toward increasing literature, developing concepts and building systems, the latter is the methodic ambience of interrogatory theory and is a method of social thought that involves deconstructive and reconstructive engagement of a philosopher with social structures and social agents geared toward building strong social institutions and correcting faulty ones. This journal adopts and promotes this approach to philosophizing for African philosophy. Readers are encouraged to submit their conversational piece (maximum of 2000 words) on any essay previously published in this journal or on any controversial topics, thoughts or authors for publication. The aim is to enhance the evolution of new epistemes in African philosophy. The subject column for the email submissions should read “Manuscript for Conversations”.

Conceptualization:

To converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information. Here, we employ the term in a slightly more technical sense. Philosophical conversation for us is not a mere informal exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones. This process involves a ‘creative struggle’ which is the African philosopher’s struggle against the postcolonial imaginary to create systems, new concepts and open up new vistas of thought. Contrast this with ‘destructive struggle’, a fixation on the precolonial originary which destroys any chances of creating something new. Not all philosophic engagements qualify as conversational thinking; for the latter, there are canons and themes that must guide the discourse. Conversational thinking thus is more than a dialogue; it is a rule-guided encounter between proponents (Nwa-nsa) and opponents (Nwa-nju), engaged in protestations and contestations of thoughts in place and in space. A conversational school therefore would be any circle of like-minded philosophers who adopt this approach in their practice of philosophy. For us, in The Conversational School of Philosophy – The Calabar Circle, this should now define not only the new era of African philosophy but the practice of philosophy generally in our Age. We encourage colleagues in other universities to establish their own circles.

**UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AFRICAN
MAGIC AND AFRICAN SCIENCE: A CONVERSATION WITH
CHRISTIAN EMELOLU**

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Chukwueloka S. UDUAGWU, MA
Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract

In the spirit of conversational philosophy endorsed by the Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP), I am obliged not to venerate ideas but to interrogate and scrutinize them in search of loopholes to be filled and weak points that needed to be strengthened in order to achieve what Jonathan Chimakonam calls theoretic sophistication and promote Global Expansion of Thought (GET). To promote GET in African philosophy which has to do with embedding theories and principles with cultural contents like the idea of African science but making them universally applicable, one needs to ride on the wheels of the tools of Conversational philosophy. The primary aim of this short piece is to converse with Christian Emedolu on his article "From Magic to African Experimental Science: Towards a New Paradigm" and interrogate his ideas to assess their theoretic sophistication

Keywords: Emedolu, African Magic, African Science, African Philosophy, GET, Conversationalism

Introduction

The primary aim of this short piece is to converse with Christian Emedolu on his article "From Magic to African Experimental Science: Towards a New Paradigm" [Filosofia Theoretica, Volume 4, Number 2, Pp. 68-88] and interrogate his ideas to assess their theoretic sophistication. Generally, in human society, it is obvious that a human being is greatly influenced by religion. This is why sometimes, certain types of knowledge are referred to as superstition, mystical power and magic such as the making of rain, the healing of human bone dislocation using chickens as *via-media*, "*ikwu-ekiri*" (an Igbo expression for travelling by fire, water and air) and so on. Mbiti explained that, "every African who has grown up in the traditional environment will, no doubt, know something about this mystical power which often is experienced or manifests itself, in form of magic" (1970, 194). Note that it is not all forms of knowledge in Africa that are experienced or referred to as magic. The fundamental question that has been a great concern to me is,

can African magic be experimental as African science? Does African magic solve a given African problem in a scientific way? Can African magic be taught or passed on from one general to another? What are the differences between African magic and African science? Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine how Emedolu's analysis of African magic as the "mother of African science" adds a new dimension of understanding to science. My contention is that the discussions in Emedolu's paper call for a clear understanding of the difference between African magic and African science. I shall therefore try to make the demarcation between African magic and African science more explicit. This is the major aim of this conversation.

Interrogating Emedolu's standpoints on African magic

Emedolu's paper "From Magic to African Experimental Science: Towards a New Paradigm" has raised certain issues on African magic. If I understood him well, I think he is of the opinion that magic is dynamic and keeps updating (69). I find it difficult accepting this conclusion. This gives the impression that there is no limit to magic which might not be correct. For example, what would a sufficiently advanced magic be called? I think the line between magic and science is thin. An illogical practice enshrouded in illusions and false manifestations is what magic is. Science on the other hand is a practice that is systematized and follows the research tradition of empirically demonstrable protocol. Emedolu did not clearly make this methodical distinction. Although scholars like E. Ekeke and e. Ekpenyong (2009) and Godwin Itorobong (2011) have variously attempted to discuss the themes of magic, witchcraft, science and non-science with regards to their differences and similarities, I think the major line of difference lies in method. I am of the view that magic cannot update and still remains magic especially when one talks of this update in terms of method. As a result, any sufficiently advanced magic might as well become science. For example, among the Igbo, magicians perform some of their arts to give the illusion of disappearance and re-appearance using some physical structure they built. They create the impression to make things disappear and re-appear, even though in reality, this is not the case. The architectural structures they use help them to make this illusion seem real. However, with time, advancement in method gave birth to what the Igbo call *ikwu-ekiri*.

This is similar to the modern day Western Science fiction ideas of tele-transportation or time travel. *ikwu-ekiri* carries the same idea of disappearance and re-appearance of bodies as is magic but in this case, it is actual rather than illusory. One can say that the elementary magical idea has sufficiently advanced into science. This is because, the method

has changed and became scientific. Ikwu-ekiri was originally done using something like an aquatic technology in which a water hole is created with a magnetic effect of electric current and sundry physical properties. The complete procedure is never fully known to non-initiates nor open to inspection since science in traditional Igbo society is practiced by an elitist secret society. For this, many are wont to label them magic and I think this is what Emedolu has done in this regard. Ikwu-ekiri was an ingenious invention by the anonymous Igbo scientists of old developed as a means of travelling or escaping imminent danger and it was used largely by the inventors—those called Dibia (members of a secret society) who are at once physicians, technologists, scientists, soothsayers, sorcerers, etc. (Chimakonam 2012). The person intending to travel from point A to B usually very long distances that would rather take weeks or months to accomplish on foot will slip into the machine called opu and in a speed of nearly 100km per hour will cruise to his destination. But the initial aquatic technology i.e. water-based model of opu was found not to be completely safe. Cases were reported about some of the travelers that returned from long distance journeys dead as a result of cold or what is medically called hypothermia; while some suffer from one cold-related disease to another till they die. The water-based technology was effective for only short distances. To make up for these shortcomings, it was later discovered by another anonymous Igbo scientist that a fire-based model has speed higher than that of a water-based technology and is safe proof from the unforgiving hypothermia. But again, extremely long distances proved unsafe once again through this model. Sojourners returned with strange diseases we now know to be caused by heat and exposure to extremely high temperatures such as heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramp, sunburn, etc., some of which result in death. Again, Igbo scientists of the Dibia fraternity began to work on other models. It was reported that an earth-based model was abandoned because it was too slow. However it was an air-based model developed eventually that proved very safe and fast. My point here is to show how a practice that began like magic can eventually developed into science.

Emedolu also posits that the logic is that while science gradually increased, magic rapidly diminished until interest in it fades away (73). This is not tenable because the logic of science is different from the logic of magic. African science is seen as a body of systematic knowledge that has what Chimakonam (2012) calls *Mmeputa Isiokwu* or the articulation of research problem through this, its research sojourns towards a systematized knowledge riding on the crest of a three-valued logic system. Magic on the other hand, also has its logic which is referred to as *otigheberu anya ahughiuzo* (the more you look the less

you see). With this method which directly appeals to human emotions and desires, it is unlikely that magic will ever fade away. One thing though is that it may not remain as attractive as science does.

Emedolu went further to state that contemporary science still retains some magical charms as much as the modern science did. He stresses that to an innocent mind scientific experiment even as we know it today, is as magical as ever (73). Is Emedolu trying to equate magic with attitude of befuddlement in this passage? This calls for clarification from the author.. Of course, we know that any sufficiently advanced technology tends to befuddle the mind of a non-scientist, is this what Emedolu refers to as magic? One thinks of magic as pseudo science or an art that lacks systematicity and defies demonstrable empirical protocol which is what sets it apart from science. I am hesitant to subscribe to Emedolu's treatment of magic as a mere attitude of awe or befuddlement which an unschooled mind exhibits. It is a practice of some sort.

According to Emedolu, magic is associated with witchcraft, occult and mystical practice, yet he concludes that magic does not have any scientific status. In traditional African society, magic is mainly done for the sake of fun by creating the illusion of make believe, it does not have actual results. Once magic goes beyond fun and illusions and begins to create actual results it becomes something else. Witchcraft and many other occult practices create actual results and so cannot be called magic. Again, Emedolu appears to mix some things up here. This surely calls for further clarification.

Conclusion: On the Difference between African Magic and African Science

One of the aims of Emedolu's paper is to make a clear distinction between African science and African magic. However, this aim was not achieved. The basic difference I want to point out between the two is that African magic is done for fun or for the sake of fun in the society by creating the illusion of reality. Its method is a systemless practice enshrouded in illusions and false manifestations just as the method of science is a practice that is systematized and follows the research tradition of empirically demonstrable protocol. Emedolu failed to establish this distinction. For this slip, he equates magic with witchcraft and other dark arts which are harmful to the society. Ordinarily, magic is not harmful to the society. It is done to display wit and exercise the intellect. In traditional African societies, magical displays are mainly used to entertain people in cultural activities such as the famous Igbo yam festivals, masquerade festivals, *ekpe* festivals and so on. It is done to bring joy and happiness in the society—it is a game. Unlike African

magic, African science aims at solving empirical problems in the society. Magic is a sport and does not have similar aims as science. It is based on some of these objections that I, following the method of conversational philosophy question the theoretic sophistication of Emedolu's espousal of the subjects of magic and science in the African place..

Relevant Literature

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