

International Session:

An Introduction to Africana Philosophy: The history and current developments in Africana philosophy

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In this workshop, we shall introduce contemporary African philosophy. Firstly, it is important to make it clear that it is impossible to introduce all Africana philosophies, as it is a vast continent with the longest human history, in a single workshop. There are too few books and articles on African philosophy written in Japanese. Most Japanese audience, even specialists of philosophy probably do not even know what kind of philosophy exists in Africa. Outside of the African continent, with the exception of the Negritude movement in the Caribbean and several philosophers of political philosophy and feminism currently active in North America, the writings of African diaspora philosophers have not been translated or even introduced to non-African readers. Even the historical contexts for understanding African philosophy are not sufficiently well known.

We need to correct this terrible ignorance. First and foremost, we need to acquire information and knowledge about African philosophy. In this workshop, we shall the history of and current developments in Africana philosophy and discuss some important topics by two speakers: Professor Tanella Suzanne Boni (University of Abidjan) and Professor Mickaella Perina (University of Massachusetts, Boston).

There are several reasons for this ignorance about Africana philosophy in Japan. One is, of course, the fact that Africa is geographically and historically distant from Japan. The other reason is the negative effects of Western-centeredness when philosophy was introduced to Japan. Since the Meiji Restoration, Japan has been modernizing on the model of Western countries. While this has brought about a change in the feudal society, it has also brought about a follow-up to the evil Western system of colonialism and imperialism. The Japanese people have not yet been able to truly criticize the negative aspects of Western modernization.

The distinctive feature of contemporary African philosophy is that it has been closely associated with anti-colonialism and the independence and liberation movements. It is inseparable from political discourse, and has produced philosophers who are politicians, as well as literary figures and poets. Contemporary Africana philosophy has some features in common with modern Japanese philosophy, such as Westernization and resistance to it, or the universality and particularity of one's own culture. However, it also has characteristics that are in some ways in contrast to those of Japan. As the issues change and develop over time, Africana philosophy is creating a new conceptual framework that relativizes the Western framework. It is a stimulating intellectual movement that deserves attention in the future. The presence of Africa in the world is gradually increasing. Economic development is the main reason for this, but in the field of philosophy, too, from the

beginning of this century, a number of substantial anthologies have been published by prominent publishers such as Blackwell, Routledge, and Oxford University Press. In addition, many other books on Africana philosophy have been published. They are full of ideas from new angles that can contribute to contemporary world philosophy. The abstracts of the three presenters are as follows.

Tetsuya Kono : I shall first draw a simple schematic diagram of contemporary Africana philosophy, and then develop a discussion of the relationship between philosophy, writing, and oral dialogue. I shall examine the forms in which the outputs of philosophical reflection and critical thinking are realized, and to consider the possibility that they are not expressed only in writing.

Tanella Suzanne Boni: Because it is rather poorly known, one wonders what African Philosophy is or what it is not. The question of its existence was the subject of a debate in the 1970s. If it exists, what are its objects, its methods, its content? Two major trends emerged: what has been called "ethnophilosophy", the study of traditional, oral wisdom, ways of life, concepts from local languages on the one hand, and on the other hand, philosophy as a way of philosophizing through texts. This last tendency was defended by Paulin Hountondji. However, in some African countries, such as Ethiopia, philosophy was both oral and written. But a long time before this debate, there were already some founding texts, those of Tempels and Alexis Kagame. Perhaps we have to go back to ancient Egypt to find the origins of African philosophy. The fundamental question that I would like to address here is that of the evolution of "African philosophy". How it was conceived yesterday and what it has become today. Can we still speak of "African philosophy" in the singular"? It is undoubtedly necessary to insist on the presence of many philosophers. And philosophizing in Anglophone Africa is not the same as philosophizing in Francophone Africa. What makes the difference?

Mickaella Perina: A stimulating way to think through the Afro-Caribbean philosophical tradition and appreciate its distinctive contribution is to a) engage with the concepts produced by its thinkers, put them in context and in conversation with each other and b) to examine them critically and take them seriously enough to be opened to allow them to perhaps disturb our own world views. In this paper, I engage critically with *Caliban's Reason, Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, (to my knowledge the first book dedicated to Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a field of study and published 20 years ago. I discuss its groundbreaking contributions and explore both its advantages and possible limitations to uncover concepts and methods. I propose an intra-cultural analysis that takes the Caribbean as the foundational environment in relation to which Afro-Caribbean thinkers have understood themselves, others, society, and the world and offer new ways of seeing, thinking and being in the world. My analysis focuses mainly on the distinctive contribution of Afro-Caribbean thought initially expressed in French, a contribution that is part (with similarities and differences) of Afro-Caribbean philosophy (a broader tradition rooted in the broader Caribbean understood as linguistically, politically, culturally, and socially diverse).