Odera Oruka's Criteria for Philosophic Sagacity: It's Contributions and Difficulties

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ABSTRACT: Philosophic sagacity is often regarded as the ability to navigate complex and abstract questions with wisdom, insight, and intellectual acumen. It plays a pivotal role in shaping human understanding of existence, morality, and knowledge. Its contributions lie in offering profound solutions to dilemmas that challenge conventional thinking, guiding ethical conduct, and fostering critical reflection on the nature of reality. Through its emphasis on deep contemplation and reasoned analysis, philosophic sagacity encourages individuals to transcend immediate impulses and seek broader truths, thus promoting intellectual and moral growth.

However, the practice of philosophic sagacity is fraught with difficulties. One of its primary challenges is the ambiguity of the very concepts it seeks to clarify - truth, justice, and the good are often elusive and subject to varying interpretations across cultures and contexts. Furthermore, the philosopher's capacity to reason and advise is often constrained by personal biases, the limits of language, and the inaccessibility of absolute knowledge. The pursuit of sagacity may also lead to intellectual isolation; as the insights it uncovers can be difficult for others to accept or apply in everyday life. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, the value of philosophic sagacity remains indispensable in the search for a deeper understanding of life and existence.

KEYWORDS: Philosophic sagacity, intellectual acumen, wisdom, insight.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophic sagacity, often seen as the embodiment of profound wisdom and deep intellectual insight, plays an essential role in shaping our understanding of the world around us. It represents the capacity to not only grasp complex concepts but also to apply this understanding in ways that foster moral and intellectual growth. Throughout history, philosophers have sought to untangle the mysteries of existence, ethics, and knowledge, offering guidance that has transcended time and culture. However, the pursuit of philosophic sagacity is not without its challenges. The very nature of philosophical inquiry, with its reliance on abstract reasoning and the exploration of uncharted intellectual territories, introduces a range of difficulties. These include the inherent ambiguity of key concepts, the limitations of human understanding, and the societal resistance to unconventional ideas. Exploring both the contributions and the challenges of philosophic sagacity sheds light on its enduring importance in our quest for deeper truths and more thoughtful lives.

This paper discusses the contributions and difficulties of philosophic sagacity. The first part of the paper will deal with the criteria of philosophic sagacity and the second part, focuses on the contributions and difficulties of philosophic sagacity as an approach to African philosophy.

CONCEPTUALIZING SAGE PHILOSOPHY

Basically, sage philosophy or sometimes referred as philosophic sagacity is a method of doing philosophy introduced and practiced by Odera Oruka. It is an approach whereby a professional philosopher visits a traditional community to identify sages for the purpose of engaging them in philosophical dialogue in the form of oral conversations on any given philosophical subject in order to bring forth the philosophical ideas embedded in their thoughts. It emerged, in part, as a reaction against ethnophilosophy and also partly against professional philosophy.[1] The proponents of sage philosophy headed by Oruka are professional philosophers (those trained in modern approach of doing philosophy-western tradition so to say). However, they denied the

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[1] O. P'Bitek, "Fr. Tempels' Bantu Philosophy," 15-17.

implication created by the professional philosophers to limit philosophy to modern Africa and take traditional Africa as incapable of it.[2]

The term sagacity consists of thoughts of persons acknowledged as wise by their respective communities as having or showing insight and good judgement over certain issue. In another sense, sagacity is a body of basic principles and tenets that underlie and justify the beliefs, customs and practices of a given culture. It is important to note that sagacity and sage philosophy are at times used synonymously because sage philosophy, as understood by Oruka, constituted of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and it is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom (well-known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths) and didactic wisdom (an expounded wisdom and rational thought of some given individuals within community). While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is often critical of the communal set up and its popular wisdom.

Drawing from the above assertion, sage philosophy can therefore be split into two categories: popular or folk sagacity and philosophic sagacity. Popular or folk sagacity because it consists of well-known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths. On the other hand, philosophic sagacity is didactic in the sense that, it is an expounded wisdom and a rational thought of some given individuals within a community. It is a reflection of a person who is both a sage and a critical thinker. From such understanding, it follows that sage philosophy and philosophic sagacity are not exact synonyms. That is because, while it is true that all instances of philosophic sagacity belong to sage philosophy, not each and every instance of sage philosophy would qualify as philosophic sagacity as there could be instances of folk sagacity. In his later works, Oruka makes this distinction very clear, though some scholars have continued to mistakenly equate sage philosophy with philosophic sagacity.[3] In philosophic sagacity the position is therefore that, in traditional Africa there are individuals who are capable of critical, coherent and independent thinking.

Although philosophic sagacity retains some basic principles of professional philosophy; however, unlike the professional school, philosophic sagacity is an exposition of the beliefs and wisdom of individuals who have not been 'spoiled' by the Western educational system. It points to the fact that, the traditional Africa had a room for the individual to think independently and at times even critically against the communal consensus. It is, therefore, an expression of the view that among the various African communities, individuals exist who, despite the fact that they have not had the benefits of modern education, are nevertheless critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgement by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of communal consensus.[4] Central to this approach is the researcher acting the part of a philosophic-provocateur but staying in the background as much as possible and yet now and again 'provoking' the sage by offering him an alternative view to his argument.

A PHILOSOPHIC SAGE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND CATALYST FOR CHANGE

As presented above, a sage as generally understood by Oruka, is an opinion leader, who is frequently consulted by people, because he is versed in the wisdom and traditions of his community; has the capability of narrating such belief very faithfully to the minutest possible detail and is wise within the conventional and historical confines of his culture. In this way, a sage is a custodian of the traditions of his people.[5] He or she acts as a mirror reflecting his or her communities' wisdoms and traditions.

The fact that, not all sages are critical thinker prompted an instructive distinction between an ordinary sage and a philosophic sage. The former is the way of thinking and explaining the world by *Popular Wisdom;* it can be called 'philosophy' only comparatively at the first-order level because the thoughts (sage) do not go beyond folk wisdom, but stops at the practical commonsense level, that is, knowledgeable in the beliefs and ideas of his community. Folk sages, therefore, are 'experts' or well-informed only of their communal traditions and practices. However, philosophy strictly speaking, sagacious reasoning demands one to sail extra miles beyond folk sagacity and hold a critical stance against such (popular) wisdom; it is the way of thinking and explaining the world by *Didactic Wisdom.* It is an expounded wisdom because one makes an independent and critical assessment of what people take for granted. In this sense, as a philosophic sage it is not enough to be versed in the communal wisdom and tradition like an ordinary or a "culture philosopher";[6] but be capable of rationally critical and opts for or recommends only those aspects of the

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[2] D. Masolo, "Decentering the Academy", 237-238, Available at
https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?hl=en&publication_year=1997&pages=237-238&author=Dismas+Masolo&title=+Sagacious+Reasoning%3A+Henry+Odera+Oruka+in+Memoriam+ accessed, Jan. 2025.
[3] Oruka, O. "Sage Philosophy: The Basic Question and Methodology", 23-25.

[4] T. Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse,* 17-18.
[5] M. B. Ramose, "Philosophy: A Particularist Interpretation with Universal Appeal", 145-160.
[6] N. Kai., "Philosophy and the Search for Wisdom," available at
https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?hl=en&volume=16&publication_year=1993&pages=5-20&issue=1&author=Kai+Nielsen&title=%E2%80%9CPhilosophy+and+the+Search+for+Wisdom%2C%E2%80%9D accessed December, 2024.

beliefs and wisdoms which satisfy rational scrutiny.[7] Hence can be considered philosophy at the second-order level. Unlike the first order which often is conformist and a representative world outlook of a people or a given culture, second-order philosophy is a critical reflection of an outlook; critical of the communal set-up and popular wisdom. Kwasi Wiredu has also recognized such distinction between a folk sage and a philosophic sage, though he uses different terms. He asserts that there are two types of exponents of traditional philosophy. There are the traditional reporters of the communal philosophy and there are the indigenous thinkers of philosophic originality.[8] Wiredu goes on to decry the fact that some scholars have proceeded as if folk philosophy exhausts the whole range of traditional philosophy, ignoring the thoughts of the indigenous individual thinkers in traditional society. It is noticeable that, since the traditional Africans are aware of the fact that, not every person is a sage; so one cannot merely be hand-picked in market places; what is plain then is that, the leading criterion in identifying the sage is the maturity of age and of judgement.[9] The reason for age factor is that, traditional Africans largely associate wisdom with life-experience, so the more the age the more the experience one is likely to accumulate over time. It is for the same reason elders qualify most. In fact, it is unconceivable among the traditional Africans for the youth to be considered a sage.[10]

Usually, when we speak of 'sagacity', we usually have the image or idea of wise or sound judgement which is achieved through and increases with old age. Thus, 'sagacity' involves the acquisition and use of skill that presupposes wisdom of a practical nature. To be sagacious, then, is to possess the ability to put knowledge of a practical nature into good use.[11] However, we are not merely concerned with the question as to how the concept 'sagacity' is put into use. We are certainly concerned more to show how a sage may in some cases also perform the role of the critical philosopher given that a person may be wise and yet not have the ability to philosophize at the second-order level.[12] Therefore, whereas all sages are philosophers at the commonsense, first-order level, only a relatively small number acquire the ability to philosophize at the second-order level, the so called philosophic sages.[13]

Thus, as an important critical component and a criterion to identify sages as philosophical, he or she must display the tendency to express dissatisfaction with the status quo belief system of their communities.[14] It is such dissatisfaction that motivates the philosophic sage to advance the knowledge that everyone has by subjecting it to scrutiny in order to determine its validity and worth. While philosophic sages may still share with others some customary practices and beliefs, or aspects of them, unlike other members of their community, they emphasize rational explanations and justifications of courses of action. Hence, they owe greater loyalty to reason than to custom for its own sake. As a result, not only are sages often a source of new knowledge, but they are also a catalyst to change within their communities. Not every member of society carries out these kind of elaborations and conceptual clarifications of the principles that underlie what the majority live at the pragmatic level only as custom. While the philosophic sages are committed to critical inquiry and to the rational grounding of values and beliefs, other indigenous sages, who may be wise in some sense, but not critically oriented, act as repositories of the statements of the beliefs of their communities, which they have learned and can repeat, or teach, to others exactly as they are supposed to be remembered. That is why Oruka considers the ordinary sage as relatively intelligent because of their ability to present the commonly shared knowledge of their community, including not only their very complex theories about the origin of the universe and the subsequent development of material and non-material entities in it, but also a community's startling astronomical system.[15] They are good narrators of traditionally imposed beliefs and myths and may even explain such beliefs and values with great detail and may even expound on the relation between the mythical representations and the lessons in and for society that they are intended to illustrate. Nevertheless, they are first-order thinkers since they are only representatives and narrators of the collective memory of their community; their own voices are submerged into a communal mode of expression. Hence, what mark their typical different from the philosophic sage is the absence of any personal direct reflections on the issues at hand.[16] They (philosophic sage) are capable of the critical, second-order type of thinking about the various problems of human life and nature; persons, that is, who subject beliefs to independent rational reexamination and who are inclined to accept or reject such beliefs on the authority of reason rather than on the basis of a communal or religious consensus.

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[7] T. Okere, *African Philosophy: A Hermeneutico-Historical Inquiry into the Conditions of its Possibility,* 71-72.

[8] K. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, 23-24.

[9] M.P. Gail, "The Wisdom of African Sages", Available at
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07393149908429854?journalCode=cnps20 accessed December, 2024.

[10] B. Gutema, "The Role of Sagacity in Resolving Conflicts Peacefully." 57-58.

[11] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, 51.

[12] K. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme,* 14-15.

[13] F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 78-79.

[14] S.B. Masud, "Sage Philosophy: Revisiting Oruka's African Ideology", available at
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0021934710380205?journalCode=jbsa accessed on December, 2024.

[15] M. Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, Available at
https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/283585.Conversations_with_Ogotemm_li accessed on December, 2024, 34-37.

[16] C.S. Momoh, "African Philosophy… Does it Exist?" 130.

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It is important to note that, one is not necessarily born a sage; there are those who have become sages having learnt from the wisdom of the wise.[17] Oruka observed that, being a sage, does not necessarily make one a philosopher, some of the sages are simply moralists and the disciplined, die-hard faithful to a tradition. Others are merely historians and good interpreters of the history and customs of their people.[18] Thus the ordinary sages are spokesmen of their people, but they do not rise beyond the sphere of ordinary wisdom. This is precisely why, according to Oruka, they are "culture philosophers". They are sagacious, but not philosophic. Consequently, they are not able to cope with any foreign innovations that encroach on their culture. The sages here are usually poets, herbalists, medicine men, musicians, fortune-tellers, and the like.

On the other hand, a "philosophic sage" is not only wise, but also capable of being rational and critical in understanding or solving the inconsistencies of his or her culture, and coping with foreign encroachments on it. Such people are not simply sagacious elders, but philosophic sages - they rise beyond the sphere of sagacity to the realm of critical thought. In this respect they are potentially or contemporarily in clash with the die-hard adherents of the prevailing common beliefs.[19] Such sages that have risen from the realm of mere sagacity to philosophic heights are also capable of conceiving and rationally recommending ideas offering alternatives to the commonly-accepted opinions and practices. They transcend communal wisdom.[20] Their reflections serve as a source of reform to their people, and offer insightful solutions to issues, questions and fundamental problems. Therefore, using the power of reason rather than the celebrated beliefs of the communal consensus and explanation, the philosophic sage is said to produce a system within a system and an order within an order. Still on comparing 'philosophic sagacity' with 'ordinary sagacity' or 'culture philosophy', Oruka observes that, beliefs or truth – claims within a culture philosophy are generally treated as absolutes. Philosophic sagacity, however, is often a product of a reflective re-evaluation of the culture philosophy. The few sages who possess the philosophic inclination make a critical assessment of their culture and its underlying beliefs. So, nothing human is taken as absolute.[21] Thus, basing on the individual critical power, the ordinary sagacity or culture philosophy belongs to the first order activity, while philosophic sagacity is a second order activity - a critical reflection on, if not a rebellion against, the first order conformity. It is generally open-minded and rationalistic. Its truths are given as tentative and ratiocinative, not as God sent messages.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PHILOSOPHIC SAGACITY

Through his approach – philosophic sagacity, Oruka's concern with the preservation of indigenous thought suggests that he desired to keep the professional school of philosophers separate from that of the philosophic sages to ensure the preservation of the intellectual integrity, not only of the sages, but of the African heritage as a whole. With sage philosophy, Oruka can be said to have attempted to bridge the gap between ethnophilosophy and the professional philosophy. We may recall that the professional school argues that philosophy, at least by its methodological procedures (by that they mean logic, rigour, criticism, analysis, rationality, argumentation, and literation) is a universal venture that cannot be tied to any particular culture. On the other hand, ethnophilosophy school argues that philosophy is significantly an expression of the culture that produces it. Oruka maintains that the existence of the sage-philosophy refutes both the view that African philosophy is only folk wisdom and the view that seeks to restrict philosophy only to written professional philosophy.[22] This means that, sage philosophy sets out to refute the one-sided methodological approaches of ethnophilosophy on one side and academic professional philosophy on the other. Sage philosophy, therefore, enables interactions between culture and philosophy. Through sage philosophy, the professional philosopher is led to discover philosophy in cultural forms using its (professional) universal methodology of philosophizing. In fact, Oruka believed that professional African philosophers could interact with their sagacious counterparts, provided there was sufficient room for each to flourish separately.[23] This idea suggests that he desired to expand the location of legitimate philosophical activity beyond the institutional confines of the academy, which he considered to be intricately connected to the colonial legacy. It is in this regard that the idea of African Sage philosophy has provided an important intervention in the development of contemporary African philosophy, addressing many crucial issues African philosophers continue to face in the wider context of postcolonial cultural inquiry, of which philosophy is only a part.

Philosophic sagacity points to the fact that, even in traditional Africa, there are individuals who are capable of critical, coherent and independent thinking. It therefore retains the basic tenets of the professional philosophy. However, unlike the professional school it is an exposition of the wisdoms and beliefs of the individuals who have not been schooled in the formal educational system. More cautiously, it consists of wisdoms and views of those who are not professionally trained philosophers. Asserted

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[17] H.O. Oruka, "Sagacity in African Philosophy," 383–393.
[18] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, 177
[19] F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, *Trends and Issues in African Philosophy,* 178.
[20] B.B. Janz, *Philosophy in an African Place*, 82-85.
[21] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy,* 178-179.
[22] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy,* 33-35.
[23] T. Serequeberhan, "Reflections on In My Father's House", 110-118.

somewhat differently, philosophic sagacity is an expression of the view that among the various African communities, there exist individuals who are philosophical, notwithstanding the fact that they have not had contact with the so-called Western philosophy. Oruka's findings demonstrate also that, traditional Africa had both folk wisdom and critical personalized philosophical discourse and that literacy is not a necessary condition for philosophy, so that philosophers exist in both literate and non-literate societies.[24] It further suggest that, literacy in and of itself does not constitute a measurement for philosophizing. It similarly demonstrate that, folk philosophy as a first-order activity is not philosophy proper. What Oruka refers to as first order activity is what he calls "culture philosophy" which includes set of beliefs, taboos, customs, notions, religious rituals and the myths that provide justification for and to the culture philosophy.[25] That means, the individual art of discourse is not necessarily a philosophy, just as every mode of thought is not philosophy, because a mode of thought could still constitute a mythological, poetic or literary discourse, rather than a philosophical one. The point is that not every sage is a philosopher.[26] In other words, just like professional philosophy, it embraces the condition that, philosophy must be critical, a reflective discourse and not conformist. Another important remark is his assertion that, 'sagacity' does not exclusively depend only upon the maturity of age but also of judgement.[27]

There is also the recognition of free thoughts. According to Oruka, both sage and the professional philosopher (interviewer in this case) should be allowed to discuss the question or topic freely. The researcher is free to raise objections and challenges. The two (the informant and the researcher or philosopher) are supposed to discuss as partners in an argument.[28] The relevant point here is for the sage's contribution to be sufficiently philosophical, such that the effort provokes and generates further discussions and even controversies. It is along this line of thought that Masolo agrees with Bodunrin that the possession of the philosophical ability by Oruka's sage, namely Mzee Mbuya, is not enough. There must also be evidence that he was engaged with other sages in organized systematic reflections on the said thoughts, beliefs, world views and practices.[29]

Thus, like Socrates who the Athenian elders described as 'corrupter of the youths and traditions' Oruka molds the philosophic sage as a 'troubler of traditions'. There is significance for this portrayal. First, in order to be described as true 'philosophy' sage, philosophy is intended as a second order activity; hence the rebellious or critical attitude of the sage towards what he defines as irrational. Second, sage philosophy is intended to avoid the pitfall of ethnophilosophy which Oruka describes as "folk philosophy" or "culture philosophy" which often requires communal consensus for its validity but which lacks logic, reason, or scientific curiosity as well as individuality.[30] While ethnophilosophy describes African philosophy mainly as traditional communal thinking as it can be found in proverbs, fables, special features of African languages[31]; Oruka maintains that sage philosophy sets itself up against ethnophilosophy. He avers that sage philosophy is critical-reflexive activity sandwiched in logical rigorousity and tied always to individual thinker.[32]

Philosophic sagacity, therefore, encourage individuals to possess the intrinsic capacity of critical reflection, that is, the ability to reconstruct creatively. This critical mental state cultured in the sage and the critical attitude to the past are some of the qualities that make him not to simply accept ideas of the past but critically rework and enrich them with new experiences. But then, internal state of the mind does not act alone or in isolation. Changes in the external environment do give impulses to the development of the internal contradictions necessary for philosophical leap but its direction depends on the sage's ability to deploy reason philosophically. Such a method encourages inter-subjectivity and testing the veracity of ideas through intracultural method of philosophizing. That allows the sage to create, recreate or reintroduce concepts. The probing questions of the academic philosopher (external influence) awaken the consciousness of the sage unto attempting to exceed the boundaries of what he had known. This leads him into questioning his own thought and beliefs. Thus, the sage's ratiocination depends on both external influence (the professional philosopher) and on the internal state of his mind (philosophical reason). The internal and external influences act on each other to bring forth critical reflection. Thus, philosophical sagacity does not only lead reason to reflect on the received wisdom of the past but to reimagine and recreate it philosophically.[33]

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[24] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy,* 43.

[25] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy,* 52.

[26] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy,* 6.

[27] P.M. Mosima, *Philosophic sagacity and intercultural philosophy Beyond Henry Odera Oruka*, available at https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2870338/view accessed December, 2024.

[28] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, 60.

[29] D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 239.

[30] B. Chaungo, "Odera Oruka and the Sage Philosophy School: A Tribute, in *Sagacious Reasoning*, 21.

[31] M. Makinde, "Philosophy in Africa", 9.

[32] G. Azenabor, "Problem of Principles and Methodology in African Philosophy: A Critique of C.S. Momoh, 13-15.

[33] A. Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions", in Journal of Black Studies, available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/002193470103100401?journalCode=jbsa accessed January, 2025.

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Given a general attitude that a sage is one wise person in an illiterate or technologically underdeveloped community whose residents depend much on the oracular sayings of seers to keep up with the mysteries and surprises of life.[34] Such view seems to present technological advanced communities as barren of sages or having no need of one. Oruka himself had looked for sages in illiterate communities but he cautioned that he only did that to counteract the belief that there were no philosophy in traditional African communities.[35] As a result of his research, he affirms that, sages exist in all cultures and classes no matter whether a culture is literate or non-literate; technologically advanced or underdeveloped. There are no special area or community where we must look for sages; there are sages in all societies and in various aspects and classes of society.[36] This implies, although the method of sage philosophy was invented for African philosophy, it is not to be limited to Africans; rather it can be applied even in technologically advanced Western and Westernized societies. Nonetheless, Oruka did not believe that one can be a sage in another's cultural forms because in his conviction philosophic sages are those critically rational in their wisdom; but then their wisdom must take departures from their cultural forms and enriched through one's life-long experience.

SOME DIFFICULTIES WITH PHILOSOPHIC SAGACITY

In his article "*Contemporary African Philosophy*" Lansana Keita offers a criticism that, the whole idea of philosophic sagacity is more or less tantamount to a self-contradiction.[37] His objection is based on the techniques employed by sage philosophy which include among other things, the practice of formulating and preserving ideas by means of writing. Thus, proof of the existence of philosophic sagacity would readily be achieved by writing and electronic tape recording.[38] However, writing and electronic tape recording are the very issues that are downplayed in philosophic sagacity, and hence to prove philosophic sagacity by using them amounts to a contradiction. But, I think, Keita's conclusion is not warranted because within the philosophic sagacity the distinction between the philosophic sage and the interlocutor (interviewer) is fundamental. It is often the philosophic sage who lack the skill of writing and/or has not put his thoughts on paper. Their thoughts are usually rooted in the culture of the people.[39]

The interlocutor, on the other hand, is often a trained philosopher: one who is not only capable of philosophizing, but capable of reading and writing as well. It is the interlocutor who writes down the thought of the philosophic sage and that material is readily used to prove philosophic sagacity. The interlocutor in this respect plays the role of a journalist. The crucial point is that it is the philosophic sage (and not the interlocutor) who should have as little Western influence as possible, so as to push to the periphery any suspicion that he may be smuggling Western techniques into African philosophy.[40] Hence the fact that one proves philosophic sagacity by presenting the thoughts of the philosophic sage is not by any rational limits irrational, or by any consistent standards inconsistent. On the other contrary, it is irrational to argue and insist, as Keita does, that it is inconsistent to prove that an individual's thought is philosophical by presenting the individual's thought on paper, just because the individual himself or herself did not put them on paper. Keita's claim would only make sense if the philosophic sages themselves were the ones who made the claim that the art of writing and tape recording were foreign to philosophic sagacity as an approach to African philosophy, yet they (the philosophic sages) went on to prove philosophic sagacity by such means. But as it were, this is not the case, even in the slightest instance. Keita's criticism on philosophic sagacity should therefore be rejected on purely logical grounds.[41]

Another problem is that during the interview, the interviewer may frame his questions in such a way that they determine the answers. In Plato's works Socrates successfully employs this method.[42] In order to overcome or minimize this problem, one has to abstain from asking leading questions, and as much as possible play a passive role during the dialogue. The interviewer should provoke the sage and then let him or her take the initiative in the encounter. D.A. Masolo acknowledges this criticism and cautions that, while this kind of interview may be closer to a philosophical dialogue and be able to bring out the individual thoughts of the sages interviewed, we need to be aware of the dangers involved, for the outcome may not always be successful.[43]

Another objection against Oruka's recommendation to use tape recorders to preserve the original thoughts of the sage while collecting his views is that, the use of tape recorders in collecting views reduces sage's freedom to think and express himself freely and that may cause him to become apologetic. That may lead to the problem which may be called 'problem of disequilibrium'. That means, on encountering a professor in conversation, the 'illiterate' sage may become timid and shrink his thought in a manner apologetic towards the professor. For this reason, it may be necessary for the professor to disguise his social status in order to achieve parity with the 'illiterate' sage. But then this may trigger ethical problem, namely: Is it right for a

[34] B. Chaungo, "Odera Oruka and the Sage Philosophy School: A Tribute, in *Sagacious Reasoning*, 94.

[35] F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, "The Evolution of Sagacity: The Three Stages of Oruka's Philosophy," 19–32.

[36] H.O. Oruka, *Philosophy, Humanity and Ecology*, 101

[37] K. Lansana, "The Search for a Method in Contemporary African Philosophy", 46-48.

[38] G. Azenabor, "Schools of Thought in Contemporary African Philosophy", 32-33.

[39] A. Graness, - K. Kai, eds., *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam, 45-46.*

[40] P. Bodunrin, "The Question of Africa Philosophy", 21.

[41] B. Hallen, "Phenomenology and the Exposition of African Traditional Thought", 34.

[42] P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, 68-70.*

[43] D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, 24-25.

professor to disguise his identity while conversing with an illiterate? Most times, conversations between unequals may undermine conversation, by becoming impositional on the one side and apologetic on the other side. Conversational parity is therefore crucial to any type of conversational philosophy such as philosophical sagacity.

Another difficult is with the presentation of findings, translation (interpretation of sage's ideas) from original (sage's language) to the language of the global audience. There is a big challenge in the process of translation which may involve the imposition of the translator's own conceptual apparatus on the culture of the philosophic sage. This is because the professional philosopher, may sometimes not be very conversant with ethnic language of the sage and hence may unwittingly dresses up the response of the sage in the nuances of Western audience. The point is that it may be difficult to avoid confusing the information or idea elicited from the informant on the one hand, and the interpretation given to it by the translator on the other. This is very troubling; given the fact that Oruka wants the thoughts of the sages to be transmitted with the least amount of distortion. To overcome this hermeneutical problem, some have suggested the interviewer to be well acquainted with language of both sides.[44] Alternatively, to let sages familiarize themselves with the global language to enable them communicate their own ideas directly. However, the danger with this is that, it is likely to westernize the sages and render their thoughts un-African. I think, rather than train the sages in Western languages; the professional philosophers involving in sage philosophy should learn the language of the sages. Actually, that is what happened when some Western philosophers wanted to reconstruct ancient Greek philosophy. Besides that, however, even when indigenous languages are translated, there is still the problem of correctness in the translation. As mentioned by Sogolo, Quine in his *"Principle of indeterminacy of Translation";* is said to have emphasized certain areas of discourse in which it is impossible to convey the exact meaning of an original assertion into a translated one. The difficulty here, according to Quine, is more evident when dealing with a system involving beliefs, worldviews and other social values, all of which are culture dependent.[45] The point is that in translation the original meaning may not be conveyed. All we have, at times, is a mere reductionism. This is precisely the point made by Masolo, when he talks of the untranslatability of some tribal expressions into English.[46] As espoused by Sophie Oluwole, the method of philosophic sagacity could be made fertile for the establishment of discourses of philosophy directly in African languages.[47]

Furthermore, there is problem of pseudo-sages - who had cajoled people to believe them as sages. So, it might not be easy for the professional philosopher to identify and differentiate the alleged sages from the genuine ones.[48] This is a problem as it may be difficult to tell who qualifies and who's not and that will ultimately affect the findings. Similarly, Oruka has been charged of doing ethnophilosophy and social anthropology, both of which utilize oral literature and the interview method. Nevertheless, Oruka had argued that philosophic sagacity distances itself from this criticism because whereas social anthropology and ethnophilosophy in their methodology get as many similar answers as possible and establish a common belief or get a common representation of the information received from the informants, philosophic sagacity does not have the objective of a communal consensus on any question or problem.[49] Rather, philosophic sagacity identifies individuals, who are acknowledged as wise in the community and dialogue is made with them, showing that their ideas go beyond mere communal wisdom and that they offer critical explanations to issues and problems. However, as presented by Wiredu there is an enduring relationship between ethnophilosophy and philosophic sagacity as he put it;

"there is an intimate relationship between the thought of the individual sage philosophers and the communal world outlooks of their people. It is the communal thought which provides a point of departure of the sage philosopher. It provides, in fact, his philosophical education and must in many ways determine his theoretical options. On the other hand … the communal thought itself is the pooling together of these elements of the thought of individual philosophers of the community that remains struck in the common imagination".[50]

Since the philosopher is not an ethnographer, one does not have to go to the field to interview people in order to do philosophy. Oruka he has been accused of putting words into his informants' mouths, and coming out with a refined story about his people's traditional views, and that the whole exercise is un-philosophical.[51] Thus, since the conversational approach, as it was with Socrates is a joint production of both the sage and the interviewer or "midwife", the professional philosopher may end up injecting his own thought into those of the elders or sages, just like Plato did to Socrates. Then it becomes difficult to draw the line. The problem here, according to Bodunrin, then becomes that of authorship. Who owns the new idea or product - the sage or the philosopher? But then, Oruka, while granting this observation, adds that, we must also grant, as a matter of historical fact, that nearly all philosophers, including even the professional ones hold their philosophies as joint works with those philosophers who

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[44] K.C. Anyanwu, "Philosophical Significance of Myth and Symbol in Dogon World-view", 19.

[45] G. Sogolo, *Foundations of African Philosophy*, 27-28.

[46] G. Sogolo, *Foundations of African Philosophy*, 22.

[47] S. Oluwole "Oruka's Mission in African Philosophy", 160- 161.

[48] H.O. Oruka, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy,* 101.

[49] W. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa,* 1962, 35.

[50] M. Makinde, "Philosophy in Africa", 109.

[51] P. Bodunrin, "The Question of Africa Philosophy", 168.

initially inspired or provoked them. Most of the philosophers come to create new ideas or style of philosophy only as a result of responding to the ideas, style or works of some other philosophers or persons.[52] It follows that the outcome of the professional philosopher's interview with the sage or African elder no less belongs to the sage or elder than the thoughts of professional philosophers reacting to others belong to them.

CONCLUSION

As we terminate our discussion, we can say that sage philosophy, despite its challenges, it is philosophically significant for its approach and it has become a useful avenue in assisting to formulate and fosters cultural reawakening anchored in a peoples' cultural experience and tradition. However, in order to generate and sustain further philosophical discussions with African themes, it needs to enhance further discussions by expanding the scope of the audience. To achieve that, the thoughts of sages need to be documented in written form in order to guarantee its availability for future discussions. With that, it will be able to influence later generations with a well-founded thoughts subjected to critical analysis; just as the thoughts of ancient Greek sages, like Socrates, have done.

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