

Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò

Rewriting the History of Modern Philosophy

**On Philosophy of History, Political
Philosophy and Liberal Education
in 19th Century West Africa**

**AMO
LECTURES**



Nº 10

ANTON WILHELM AMO ~~LECTURES~~

The ANTON WILHELM AMO ~~LECTURES~~ are edited by

Olaf Zenker

Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò

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and Liberal Education in 19th Century West Africa

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Preface
Anton Wilhelm Amo Under Erasure?
~~Lecturing~~ on an Im/Possible Otherwise

OLAF ZENKER

Anton Wilhelm Amo is considered to be the first and for a long time the only Afro-German academic scholar and philosopher. According to the biographer Ottmar Ette (2020: 14–17), Amo was born around 1700 in what is now Ghana and was enslaved as a child. Via Amsterdam, he ended up as a “human gift” from the Dutch West India Company at the court of the Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, where he was baptised “Anton Wilhelm” in 1708¹ using the first name of the Duke and his son, respectively (Mabe 2020: 15). When arriving in Wolfenbüttel he was already called “Amo”, which some hold to be a patrilineally transmitted African name (Menn and Smith 2020: 4), whereas others regard it as a then-popular Latin-derived name imposed on enslaved Africans at the Dutch fort in today’s Ghana (Mabe 2020: 13–14). The very name “Amo” thus embodies and symbolises the spanning and traversing of a hierarchically structured, overdetermined, yet polysemic Afro-European space, simultaneously identifying an original thinker of the early Enlightenment and signifying a larger post/colonial predicament.

While being on record for serving as an African court servant – a “*Kammermohr*” (Firla 2002) – Amo also received his first formal education in the context of the court in Wolfenbüttel, including literacy in Latin, even though the details of his schooling remain in the dark (Ette 2020: 28–29; Menn and Smith 2020: 18–19). Documentary evidence shows him enrolling in 1727 at the University of Halle at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Law Faculty, where he completed a first disputation in 1729 (Menn and Smith 2020: 19). This legal disputation *De iure Mau-*

1 According to Stephen Menn and Justin Smith (2020: 15 fn 38) who consulted the original chapel register, some works (e.g. Firla 2002: 56, Ette 2020: 14) falsely date Amo’s baptism to 1707.

rorum in Europa (“On the Rights of Moors in Europe”) is considered lost, if it ever was written down. However, a contemporaneous summary indicates that it engaged with ancient Roman sources about the enfeoffment of kings of “Moors” under the Roman Emperor, thus deriving legal implications for the rights of free and enslaved Africans under Roman Law practiced in Germany in the 18th century (Menn and Smith 2020: 1–2, 10–12). Evidently Amo was well versed in canon law as well as in various secular legal forms, natural law and legal history, enabling him to examine the legal position of people of African descent in these contexts. However, little is known about this disputation, which – as Jacob Emmanuel Mabe (2020: 18) points out – anticipated important Pan-Africanist and postcolonial debates around the rights of humans under conditions of structural inequality and oppression.

In 1730, Amo moved to the University of Wittenberg where, within weeks, he was admitted as *Magister* allowing him to teach while further pursuing his own studies.² Continuing his work in philosophy, Amo also expanded into numerous related disciplinary fields. Notably, he studied medicine with influential physicians shaping the future direction of his scholarship that became increasingly situated at the intersections of philosophy, medicine and anthropology (Ette 2020: 59). In 1734, he received his doctorate in philosophy for defending his major philosophical work *De humanae mentis apatheia* (“On the Impassivity of the Human Mind”). With this inaugural dissertation, Amo made an original, radically dualist medico-philosophical contribution to the debate on the relationship between body and soul: By *mens humana* – the human soul – he refers exclusively to the spiritual soul of the Aristotelian tradition, which is distinct from the sensitive and vegetative soul and even more strictly separated from the body. In fact, he sees the latter two parts of the soul as functions of the body itself. Rather than using “apatheia” in the stoic tradition emphasising abstention from the emotional overvaluation of non-moral goods, Amo conceptualises this Greek term differently, namely as an “impassivity” of the human mind: sensation and the power of sensing are seen as belonging to the body rather than the human mind, as the latter cannot be acted on by sensed objects. For this reason, Amo also denies the soul the ability to feel because of its immateriality (Menn and Smith 2020: 3-4, 101–111).

2 For discussions contextualizing Amo’s move from Halle to Wittenberg in the broader political and intellectual debates between pietism and early enlightenment philosophy at the time, see Ette 2020: 31–109, Mabe 2020: 31–42 and Menn and Smith 2020: 51–60.

In 1736 Amo was admitted to the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Halle as a lecturer. While teaching in Halle, he completed a final and much more extensive work in 1738, *Tractatus de arte sobrie et accurate philosophandi* (“Treatise on the Art of Soberly and Accurately Philosophising”). In this magnum opus, Amo unfolds his own teaching after providing an overview of the traditional fields of knowledge. He conceives of philosophy as the continuous quest for wisdom beyond intellectual dishonesty, dogmatism and prejudice as well as the perfection of human beings in all areas, from natural existence to eternal happiness. In addition, Amo criticises those contemporaries who see philosophy only as an act of theoretical understanding without any connection to its practical side and pragmatics. For Amo, philosophy is essentially working on the virtue of wisdom – and this proves its worth in action. In this respect, philosophy cannot be reduced to pursuing purely theoretical knowledge. It also has an inescapable practical relevance (see Mabe 2020: 43–67).³

In 1739, Amo left Halle for the University of Jena, where he started teaching a broad spectrum of subjects, including physiognomy, chiromancy, geomancy, astrology and cryptography (Ette 2020: 119). Little is known about the following years. Racist hostility in a mocking poem cast shadows over Amos' situation around 1747. During this time, he is said to have left Germany for West Africa. Until at least 1753 he lived in Axim in what is now Ghana, where the Swiss traveller Henri-David Gallandat reported meeting him as a locally respected philosopher, astrologer and soothsayer (Menn and Smith 2020: 2). Later, Amo moved, or possibly was moved, to the Dutch-controlled Fort San Sebastian in Shama, where his tombstone can be found noting the year of death as 1784 (Hamann and Schubert 2022: 129 fn1).

With the departure of Amo from Jena, his texts were relegated to the margins of European intellectual history, even if never entirely lost. As Stephen Menn and Justin Smith (2020: 2, 39–51) chart in much detail, scattered references to Amo can be found since the 18th century including, for instance, a discussion of his life and work by the philosopher and physical anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1787). This, in turn, was taken up by the French cleric and abolitionist Henri Grégoire (1808) who approvingly engaged with Amo's intellectual achievements in his *De la littérature des Nègres* (“On the Literature of the Negroes”). Other abolitionists of this era equally drew on Amo as an exemplar counterproving prevailing racist stereotypes, as propagated for instance by David Hume ([1772]

3 For recent engagements with Amo's philosophy see: Ette 2020; Mabe 2020; Menn and Smith 2020 and Knauß et al. 2021.

1994: 86), that Africans had allegedly never made any noteworthy intellectual accomplishment.

Within the African and African American traditions of the 20th century, Amo emerged as an occasional reference, as in a passing mention by W.E.B. Du Bois (1939). Kwame Nkrumah, the Ghanaian political leader and Pan-Africanist thinker, in his influential 1964 book *Consciencism* engaged with Amo's ideas in the attempt to conscript the latter as an early representative of Nkrumah's own fusion of Marxism-Leninism and traditional African thought (see Menn and Smith 2020: 45–48). Within African(a) philosophy, some scholars, such as Kwame Gyekye, have denied Amo the label “African philosophy” (Gyekye 1987: 34), since he responded intellectually to contemporary European philosophers rather than African conceptual schemes, whereas others, such as Paulin Hountondji, have characterised him as an “African philosopher in Germany in the Eighteenth Century” (Hountondji 1996: 111–130).

In Germany and especially at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg created in 1817 through the merger of the Universities of Wittenberg (founded in 1502) and of Halle (founded in 1694), Amo was rediscovered in 1916. Wolfram Suchier, a librarian in Halle at the time, brought Amo's memory to public attention again with an article in the *Akademische Rundschau* (Suchier 1916). He referred to Amo as a student and a “private lecturer” in Halle, Wittenberg and Jena and described him in racialising terms as a “*Mohr*” (“Moor”). Amo was presented as an outstanding person with an exceptional biography and thus brought out of oblivion.

According to Menn and Smith (2020: 48), the greatest single contribution to Amo scholarship – not only at Martin Luther University, but for the 20th century in general – was made by the East German scholar Burchard Brentjes. A university lecturer on the archaeology of the Near East in Halle since the 1960s, Brentjes was politically involved in organisations boosting solidarity between Eastern Bloc countries, the Arab world and decolonising states in Africa and beyond. A close friend of Nkrumah, Brentjes published a comprehensive collection in 1968 of facsimile reproductions, sources and studies on Anton Wilhelm Amo (Amo and Brentjes 1968). The latter is introduced as „Antonius Gvilielmus Amo from Axim in Ghana“ and as a student, doctor of philosophy and *Magister legens* at the Universities of Halle, Wittenberg and Jena. A few years later, Brentjes (1975) characterises Amo as the “first African philosopher in European universities” as well as “the black philosopher in Halle”, as the subtitle of his small monograph indicates (Brentjes 1976; see also Brentjes 1977). In 1975, a bronze plaque dedicated to the memory of Anton Wilhelm Amo was also placed at the main campus of Martin

Luther University (next to the street “Universitätsring”), identifying him as the first African student and lecturer in philosophy at the Universities of Halle, Wittenberg and Jena 1727–1747.⁴ In 1994, the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg started awarding the Anton Wilhelm Amo Prize annually for outstanding theses.

Renewing this local tradition of Amo scholarship and remembrance, the ANTON WILHELM AMO LECTURES have been organised annually since 2013 at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg by the Research Clusters “Society and Culture in Motion” and “Enlightenment, Religion, Knowledge”. They feature internationally acclaimed scholars presenting their ongoing research on themes connected to or emanating from the work of Amo. Dedicating a named lecture at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in honour of Anton Wilhelm Amo seems highly apposite, given that this was, after all, his *alma mater*: Amo studied and attended lectures here, worked here as a scholar and lectured extensively both in Halle and Wittenberg. What better way than to use the format of a public “Lecture” to take seriously Amo as a scholar and to “re-member” his academic legacy that, by and large, has been neglected? This gesture is in harmony with the recent impetus of scholarship paying increasing attention to the actual content of Amo’s work rather than primarily engaging his remarkable life as a form, treated mostly “as a datum to comment on the 18th-century discussion of the equality of the races, the origin of the human species, and slavery” (Heckmann 1990: 155). In this spirit, the ANTON WILHELM AMO LECTURES deliberately offer a space for engagements with Amo’s *oeuvre* – his specific ideas and interventions that have been under erasure in Euro-modern intellectual history for far too long.

At the same time, this can only be one aspect of the work that the AMO LECTURES can and should set out to accomplish. Menn and Smith’s well-intended proposal – to better leave the historical moment of Amo’s racist 18th-century life-world and form of life behind and “to pay attention to what Amo in fact has to say, to who he was and to the social world he inhabited” (Menn and Smith 2020: 3) – might ultimately be proposing false alternatives. While there is the danger of sliding into a tendentious tokenism, reducing Amo to an identitarian exemplar of a peculiarly racialised politics of academic work (rather than taking seriously the academic work of politics Amo set out to accomplish), there is another danger to

4 See Hamann and Schubert 2022 for a critical appraisal of Amo research and memorialisation during GDR times, mobilising the notion of “(post)socialist coloniality” to highlight the ambivalent colonial logics in the diplomatic relations between the GDR and the Republic of Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah and thereafter.

miss out on the broader ethico-onto-epistemological conditions that historically shaped and perspectivised Amo's work beyond the surface of its content (see also Hillgärtner and Kaczmarek 2021: 197). Put bluntly: in light of contemporary demands from within postcolonial and decolonial theories to delink from "modernity/coloniality" as a Western ethico-onto-epistemological formation writ large and universalised under colonial expansion (Quijano [1989] 2007; Mignolo 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018), the question arises as to what an extent *the epistemic format of the "Lecture"*, as a potential *pars pro toto* of that overall Western formation, operates merely within or truly beyond its limiting confines. In other words: in what ways does "lecturing" as a modality allow imagining and enunciating an alternative existence that transcends the limitations scripted into the historical conditions of possibility, both for Amo's academic career and his contemporaneous and subsequent marginalisation and relative oblivion? Can a "Lecture" evoke, and bring into existence, the political potentialities of an otherwise – understood as a *chiffre* for both apprehending submerged forms of life that have persisted against all odds and for sensing that which may have been prefigured but not yet fully formed (McTighe and Raschig 2019)? Can "lecturing" deliver on "the will to be otherwise" (Povinelli 2012), possibly through reflexively teaching a lesson of the *leçon* ("lecture")?

In order to keep open for reflection and discussion, within the forum of this series, the uncanny simultaneity of an absent-present potential for "lecturing" on an im/possible otherwise on, with, through and beyond Amo's work, the AMO ~~LECTURES~~ take inspiration from Jacques Derrida's concept of "under erasure". Drawing on Martin Heidegger, Derrida ([1976] 1997) introduced the visual technique of crossing out a word while keeping it legible and in place – thereby putting it *sous rature* ("under erasure") – in order to signal its inadequate yet necessary nature. In similar vein, the ANTON WILHELM AMO ~~LECTURES~~ use the academic format of a "Lecture" named in honour of Amo while crossing out the term and thus putting it "under erasure" in order to highlight its ambiguous existence as both the means for critical reflection and – metonymically standing in for the Western epistemic formation itself – the potential object of such critique. This way, the AMO ~~LECTURES~~ offer a space for reflection on, and a calling into being of, an otherwise that, it is hoped, is as pregnant with present and future possibilities as it is scarred with the impossibilities of the past.

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Abstract

In recent work, I have been concerned to reinscribe into the history of modern philosophy the contributions of those I have styled “excluded moderns” from the African corner of the intellectual globe. This lecture, contrary to the bastard periodization that dominates the historiography of African ideas, presents evidence of philosophy of a standardly modern variety being done in West Africa in the 19th century that could not answer to the problematic categories of “traditional” or “precolonial” African philosophy. I introduce three thinkers who lived and worked in West Africa during the period whose ideas belong in the annals of modern philosophy. I look at the works of James Africanus Beale Horton, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Alexander Crummell focusing specifically on their political philosophy, philosophy of education, and philosophy of history, respectively. It is time the narratives of the history of modern philosophy took seriously the essential hybridity that defines it. The continuing failure to do so makes it impossible for honest teachers of philosophy to deliver its history and register truthfully the biographies of its contributors located in a particular neck of the global woods – West Africa.

Keywords: Anton Wilhelm Amo, Edward Wilmot Blyden, James Africanus Beale Horton, Alexander Crummell, philosophy of history, political philosophy, liberal education, problem moderns, excluded moderns, modernity, modern philosophy

Introduction

In ongoing work (Táíwò 2010a, 2010b, 2018a, 2018b, 2023), I have been concerned to reinscribe into the history of modern philosophy the contributions of those that I have styled “excluded moderns” who originated from and sometimes did their work in the African corner of the intellectual globe. I cannot think of a better place to begin this lecture than with the person, Anton Wilhelm Amo, in whose name it is chartered, elements of whose life and legacy and the difficulties attached to both continue to be evidenced in our own time and, sadly, remain

pointers to how not to do philosophy in Africa or constitute the archives of Euro-American philosophy, going forward. This also ties in with the rubric for the series that Professor Olaf Zenker has shared channeling the conflicted relationship between Amo's work and the narratives of the ferment within which his work derived meaning, if not identity. I shall say more about this presently.

No, I have not read Amo's *Apatheia of the Mind*. But I have kept abreast of discussions about him since my introduction to him and his work in my graduate student days at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Nigeria, in the early 80s of the last century. It is with the late Kwasi Wiredu's commentary on the *Apatheia* that I shall be concerned here.

In the article, "Amo's Critique of Descartes' Philosophy of Mind" (Wiredu 2004), Wiredu did two things. First, he assessed, as a matter of debate, the strength of the case made by Amo against Cartesian philosophy of mind. I am sure that in the vast literature of Descartes' interlocutors going back to the 18th century when Amo conducted his research and recorded his results from a lofty academic position in an accredited institution till this moment, one is unlikely to find a single joining of issues with Amo as an interlocutor in that discourse.¹ Those who are interested in the philosophy of mind should take a look at Amo's critique and Wiredu's assessment of it. Amo's reflections hold more than antiquarian interest and Wiredu's discussion brings them to our contemporary debates about Cartesianism. I draw the implications of this neglect for the present discussion in a moment. Second, and this is what interests me, Wiredu speculated on what might have been the origin of Amo's understanding of the nature of mind. Additionally, he considered the issue of where Amo's work belongs in the annals of philosophy: African, European, or what else? This is where my difficulty stems from and provides the entry point for this essay.

Wiredu's responses bother me. First, he speculated that what Amo eventually settled upon as the nature of the mind, the point on which he diverged from Descartes, and its relation to the body, may plausibly be traced to what may have survived in his consciousness from his brief, and it was very brief, life as an Akan child before he was transferred to Europe as a slave: he was about three years old at his exit from present-day Ghana's shores.

A philosopher supplies the ratiocinative basis of his views in his own pages, and that is what is germane to their cognitive evaluation. But when puzzles such as the one just

1 Again, I have referenced this sort of absence in our own time with the cold reception that the absolutely superlative work of the late Ghanaian Platonist, Professor J.T. Bedu-Addo, another of my worthy teachers has been given (See Táiwò 1993).

mentioned – why Amo was so insistent on the absence of the faculty of ‘feeling’ in the mind – arise, it is legitimate to be curious about their psychological provenance. Inevitably, one must inquire into circumstances transcending his pages. Granted that we are on shaky ground here, it may still not be altogether irrelevant to note in this connection that, even though Amo was removed from his motherland in his infancy, he retained an uncompromising sense of pride in his origins, usually adding to his name the title ‘Afer’ (the African). Did he, perhaps, retain more than pride from his place of origin? [...] Perhaps, then, the non-sensate conception of mind was a kind of ‘cultural survival’ in Amo’s psyche, kept in place by the sheer depth of his attachment to his motherland (Wiredu 2004: 204–205).

Absent a dubious preoccupation with identity, why would we be interested in looking for trace survivals of a culture in the consciousness of an individual who barely in his conscious life lived in that culture? How could we even persuade ourselves that such an explanation might be remotely plausible?

When it comes to the issue of pedigree, that is, whether his work is an exemplar of African philosophy, the situation is no less problematic. In what universe of discourse did his work have meaning? Who were his interlocutors? What ferment did his work empty into? To none of our questions would it be remotely plausible to answer “Africa or African” or any of their cognates. These are no idle questions. Yes, he did return to Ghana in his twilight years, but we have no evidence that he became a part of an intellectual ferment of the sort that had been his home all his life in Europe and there are no surviving records of his reflections in the immediate context of Ghana. In short, he was, to all intents and purposes an “African European” which makes it curious that he did not make it into Olivette Otele (2021) devoted to that theme. In accepting to contort ourselves into funny shapes in the mistaken belief that we are rehabilitating a thinker and giving him his due in the history of philosophy by christening him an African philosopher, if by that is meant more than the sheer accident of birthplace, we end up, even if unwittingly, letting off the hook his successors in the culture to which he belonged who for all sorts of ignoble reasons decided to orphan him and his heritage. Let us be very clear, in denying him membership of that culture, his deniers had no other justification than his epidermal inheritance and their illogical belief that that made him not a Saxon, German or European, thinker. When we go along with that judgment, we, too, become complicit in the *racializing* of thought when we should be *historicizing* same, about which, see below.

This is why this goes to the very heart of my work. It has been my object since I stumbled on the issue while working on a different book but which work issued in my *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Táíwò 2010a) to take seriously and stop beggaring when we are not shaming those Africans, both in the

continent and the Diaspora it has spawned across the globe, who have found cause to embrace modernity and its core tenets and make themselves worthy interlocutors in its many discourses from philosophy to religion, from music to literature, from the fine and performing arts to language. We shall see presently how, once we allow free rein to the African imagination and stop constricting it with unhelpful, sometimes gaudy, politics of identity, the path is open to engaging the widest swathes of African intellectual contributions regardless of our agreement or nonagreement with them. It is in that spirit that I call on us to engage the thinkers highlighted in this essay.

Geography may be neutral enough when it comes to placing thinkers and their ideas, but I am persuaded that temporalities are the least problematic for these purposes. When Amo was writing, what he was writing, the ferment within which he wrote, those who were his interlocutors, the dominant ideas they traded amongst themselves, their relations to ideas that came before them, and his audience would be located in that temporality that we generally call “modern” or, more specifically, “early modern” European philosophy. If it was not only those who looked a certain way or operated in only one register, Caucasian, who were paragons of that culture, and who took part in the discourse that arose around Cartesian themes, it stands to reason that any narrative of that discourse or period that omits the contributions of those like Amo who were European but not Caucasian or “white”, as we now characterize that identity, must remain incomplete, possibly false. This has been the object of recent work that I have been doing on the history of philosophy, specifically, the history of the philosophical discourse of modernity.

First, I challenge the dominant narrative of Euro-American philosophy by identifying those that my friends who invited my contribution to an anthology on philosophy and race tagged “problem moderns” and counterposing to them those that I called “excluded moderns” (Táíwò 2018a). The former are the founders of what is referred to as the canon, such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant, who performed the original exclusion by their racializing thought, sometimes by way of obvious non sequiturs that we persist in dressing up as worthy of engagement. I don’t. The latter are those excluded from the narrative even though they were full participants and worthy interlocutors in the discourse, their only reason for exclusion being their epidermal inheritance, such as Amo, Phyllis Wheatley, David Walker, Ottobah Cugoano, and Olaudah Equiano, to mention only a few (Táíwò 2018a).

Then, I focus on African scholars who are complicit in our exclusion by our blithe acceptance of the racialization of thought which we enact by our conflation of modernity with Westernization and both with colonialism. I argue in this work that the discourse of modernity that is almost identical with the modern period in

the history of philosophy is one to which thinkers of African descent from Anton Wilhelm Amo and Olaudah Equiano in the 18th century to Alexander Crummell, James Africanus Beale Horton, and Edward Wilmot Blyden in the 19th century, J.T. Bedu-Addo, Kwasi Wiredu, and Obafemi Awolowo in the 20th century, contributed and, for that reason, ought to feature in its annals. To the extent that they are not accommodated in the narratives of the discourse, we have reason to believe that those narratives are incomplete, inadequate, and possibly incorrect.

Finally, I deal with African scholars' attachment to what I call in *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (Táiwò 2022) "a bastard periodization" that makes us rest content in having only three periods in African history either of events, institutions, practices, and ideas. On this understanding, the works of Amo, Equiano, Phillip Quaque, Cugoano, all excluded moderns, automatically become orphaned in the African narrative, too, because they don't fit into the "pre-colonial" category devoted not to a real temporality but an identity-inflected, difference-based search for African phenomena characterized by what Biodun Jeyifo has called "absolute autochthony" (Jeyifo 2018). We must separate ourselves from this and open the spaces of African intellectual engagements in the widest manner imaginable.

The first obstacle that we have to get rid of is what I now call the *metaphysics of difference*. This is the idea that Africans are so radically different from the general run of humanity that in talking about Africans and things African we need a language other than that with which we routinely talk about the rest of the world. The Absolute Other has been laid to rest or, at least, muted in other areas; it is alive and kicking in African Studies. It remains legal tender in much of African and Africanist scholarship about Africans and things African. And Africans are the guiltiest in peddling this myth: "We are unlike Westerners," "We are a different people," "We are communal; they are individualistic"; the alibis proliferate (Táiwò 2015: 60).

Once we abjure the metaphysics of difference, historicize modernity, and shamelessly appropriate the benefits of the Gregorian calendar, as do the rest of the world in routine fashion, our philosophical landscape immediately begins to teem with interlocutors from ancient Egypt and Nubia, Asia Minor, and other points east, the Mediterranean continuum, and Europe. Simultaneously, Africa stops being a loud absence from all those chronologies comparing happenings, ideas, and historical actors in synchrony across the globe. We immediately make it possible to see how events in Mansa Musa's Mali compare with those in the Aztec Empire and the Nordic countries, not to talk of India or the Korean peninsula in any given time frame.

This is what I mean by rewriting the history of modern philosophy by taking seriously the disquisitions of modern thinkers working in West Africa in the 19th century. I already have another candidate for attention in the 18th, Phillip Quaque, who was the first African to be ordained a minister in the Church of England (Adélékè Adéèkò 2017). I can do this because I have no truck with identity, and I don't think that looking for "pure" African stuff holds any promise of illumination to our understanding. As we see in the history of civilizations, the addiction to purity is always the path to death. Only the hybrid survives! Think of the present fortunes of the English, increasing, and French, declining, languages, respectively, in our world. I rest my case.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, speaking at the University of Cairo in 1967, made the case for this truer, more cosmopolitan, nonracial identity of philosophy even if we wish to style it "Western" or "Euro-American".

I shall pause briefly at the philosophical and the religious levels. We shall note first of all the debt Hellenic thought owes to Egyptian thought, as attested by the Greek writers themselves, the greatest of whom is Plato. In commenting on Plato, the Egyptian Plotinus merely renders Africa its due: human reason, which has refound its autonomy to reach toward Unity, through *Love* and the love of *Beauty*. Without leaving Egypt, let us point out that it was in Alexandria that the foundations of the Christian conception of the *Word* and the *Trinity* were cast in an African spirit. If the Romans had not destroyed the 700,000 volumes of the Alexandria library, no doubt the face of the world would have changed.

But Berberland took up the torch, with a Pleiad of writers and thinkers, the greatest of whom was St. Augustine. Without the Africans, and especially St. Augustine, Christianity, under the influence of analytical reason, would have become, like Roman religion, a rational system of formulas and practices. It was the Bishop of Hippone who gave it its soul, its spirituality, by bringing it back to its Semitic roots. Thanks to the ideas rethought and relived, of charity and the *creative Word*, both of which are African. It was St. Augustine who effected the most dynamic symbiosis of discursive reason and intuitive reason: 'Believe in order to understand, and understand in order to believe.'

As Arab civilization moves closer toward the West, Morocco and Andalusia will continue the work of cultural emancipation and development. In the XIIth century, the Cordovan Averroes (Ibn Rosch) will give us not only his famous *Commentaires d'Aristote* (Aristotelian Commentaries), but also *Philosophie et Théologie* (Philosophy and Theology), to which we must add *L'Accord entre la Religion et la Philosophie* (The Harmony between Religion and Philosophy). The role of Averroès in the liberation of Arab-Berber thought is decisive. Supported by texts of the *Koran* which recommend the rational development of sciences and philosophy, Averroès, following in the footsteps of Plotinus and St. Augustine, attempts a union of reason and faith. In a more definite, rigorous effort of thought, he tends toward a more radical intellectualism; he places himself beyond the physical, in the *metaphysical*.

These three names, among dozens of others. What must be remembered is that all European philosophy, from St. Thomas Aquinas to Kant, found inspiration in the Af-

rican thought of Arab-Berber authors and, first of all, from those three outstanding figures. Philosophy and Christian religion as well.

But I have already detained you too long. I shall simply point out in passing the contributions of the Arab-Berbers to *Democracy*, with Tertullian and St. Cyprian; to *History*, with Florus and Ibn Khaldoun. Permit me to say a word about the last two. Trying to assign a reason for every fact that he advances, Florus is perhaps the first to create a philosophy of history. Ibn Khaldoun creates the sociology of history, or rather, *historical materialism*, by explaining facts by customs and the latter by environment, by geography and the ethnic group.

Perhaps you are saying, we readily detect the influence of the Arab-Berbers on Indo-Europeans; we fail to see how it affected the Negro-Africans. I shall not insist on this influence because it is obvious. On our religious life, for more than one-third of black Africa is Moslem. On the Kushitic and Upper Sudanese languages, where the religious vocabulary, even among the Christians, is often Semitic or Berber origin. On our mores and, what is more important, on our modes of thought. As I have often insisted, commentary on the *Koran* had already involved us in abstraction before the European penetration (Senghor 1971: 84–86).

There, in a capsule, is the history of what we facilely but problematically call “Western” philosophy, the author fully cognizant of the many and diverse hands that had tilled its soil. Notice how Senghor wove into his description Asia, Africa, and Europe. And his account is based on sound historical foundations. I am suggesting that taking seriously our thinkers rather than chasing slights from inferior and even superior Euro-American minds is likelier than not to issue in more substantive philosophizing and a more honest accounting of the history of ideas. Orientations like Senghor’s equip us with more tools to call to account those often-truncated chronicles of philosophy based on the racialization of thought.

In this discussion, contrary to the bastard periodization that dominates the historiography of African ideas, I present evidence of philosophy of a standardly modern variety – which is by no means the only one we should care about – being done in West Africa in the 19th century that could not answer to the problematic categories of “traditional” or “precolonial” African philosophy. I introduce three thinkers who lived and worked in West Africa during the period whose ideas belong in the annals of modern philosophy. I look at the works of James Africanus Beale Horton, Alexander Crummell, and Edward Wilmot Blyden, focusing specifically on their political philosophy, philosophy of history, and philosophy of education, respectively. It is time the narratives of the history of modern philosophy took seriously the essential hybridity that defines it. The continuing failure to do so makes it impossible for honest teachers of philosophy to deliver its history and register truthfully the biographies of its contributors located in a particular neck of the global woods – West Africa.

I have identified three core tenets of modernity: the principle of subjectivity, the centrality of Reason and the idea of progress (Táíwò 2010a). In their diverse ways, our three thinkers embraced these tenets and the many implications they yield for their views of human nature and its place in the world. Reason was what set humans apart from other creatures and even as all three agreed that this was a divine gift, none of them thought that our understanding of the world or how we explain phenomena, human or otherwise, should be guided, much less determined, by authority, tradition or revelation, the trinity that was originally overthrown by modernity undergirded by the Enlightenment. Both individuals and societies were to be judged by these criteria and their respective places on the scale of civilization thus determined. It is no accident that Crummell was the founder of the American Negro Academy. Blyden was one of the pioneer academics in West Africa and one of the earliest, with Horton, to call for a university to be established in the region. The part of his work that we highlight below testifies to his embrace of the centrality of Reason.

The principal justification for my remaining unimpressed by the claims of those who are wont to yield Reason to Western or European ownership and are content to begin to manufacture alternative essences for Africanness is that such thinking emerged from the metaphysics of difference which was an original invention of racists to deny the oneness of humanity. Reason in modernity is an essential attribute of humanity and, syllogistically, you cannot be human and be without Reason. So why anyone would think to allow racists to own what belongs to the species eludes me. It is significant, on this note, that those who wish to present Senghor as a metaphysician of difference on account of his pronouncements on reason and emotion need to go back and read their Senghor again.

This point bears emphasis because, thanks to the conflation we earlier referred to, it is almost sacrilegious, if I may be permitted a religious reference, for an African-descended person to acknowledge that there ever was a time that their societies were backward, uncivilized even. The situation is not helped by the racist traducers of African humanity who claim ownership of civilization tout court and only reserve primitivity and sub-human status for Africans. What complicates the situation is that all three thinkers under review here did concede that the Africa of their time was backward and this they did using language that was indistinguishable from that of their fellow moderns, problem moderns, that is, like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and G.W.F. Hegel. This is a very hard pill to swallow for those, for instance, who lionize Blyden, the originator of “the African personality”, the stout defender of African values who, at a later point in his career, asked black peoples to forswear Christianity and embrace Islam instead. This explains the stu-

died neglect of these aspects of his writings. The same is true of the near total silence on the part of African scholars regarding the works of Horton. That is about to change in a big way with a dissertation on him and a contemporary Egyptian philosopher by my now former student, Zeyad El Nabolsy. When it comes to Crummell, he is forever interpreted from the standpoint of Africana Studies but never as part of the discourse of African philosophy, a notable exception being Kwame Anthony Appiah. Yet, there was a thinker who lived in Monrovia and taught at the college there while he was an ordained minister of the Episcopalian Church.

Identity is a terrible thing to be wedded to. It was what led to the racializing of thought in the first place that in turn led to the exclusion of Africans from a discourse to which many of them were top notch contributors. The error is compounded when they are further denied by those looking for some special identity marked by absolute difference on the African side of the divide. I have no truck with either. If an idea is modern in ways to be specified and agreed upon, the demographic, including linguistic, pedigree of its promoter is irrelevant. This means that when all three thinkers granted that theirs was a benighted inheritance, they were not conceding anything to racists. This standpoint was not limited to Africans (See Raouf Abbas Hamed 1990; Ibrahim Abu Lughod 1963). Let's think of them as resident contrarians of their societies who were convinced that their societies needed some remediation. What is more, their historical approach, as opposed to dubious genetic or biological ones favored by racists, allowed them to compare their societies to others, including those in Europe; to show that the patterns exhibited by theirs can be explained by clear historical circumstances and were unquestionably remediable. It also meant that they freed themselves from the constraint of thinking that acknowledging lack and seeking to remedy same from comparative human experience elsewhere is wrong or to be shunned.

James Africanus Beale Horton and Political Philosophy

Let's begin with Horton. Unlike now when serious scholars talk nebulously about "precolonial African political philosophy", Horton lived in a colony but did not date his historiography by it. Indeed, even as Freetown was a colony – think the irony – it was one only in an administrative sense. The most important framework for living and thinking for his dominant demographic was Christianity and because he lived with the direct experience of the heterogeneity that marked the political systems across West Africa during his time, he could not have spoken of such

unhelpful agglomerations as “the African political tradition”, “African traditional political thought” or ethical or legal, and so on (John A.A. Ayoade and Adigun A.B. Agbaje 1989; Guy Martin 2012). It was a time when full colonialism had not been imposed and the British were dithering as to what to do with their growing acquisitions along the coast. Many African polities that would later come under colonial rule were still independent and self-governing. It was also a period teeming with many and varied constitutional experiments in his neighborhood.

To begin with, when it came to political arrangements, West Africa did not present to Horton as an undifferentiated jumble of so-called traditional societies. Rather, he distinguished polities that were akin to his own that he adjudged “civilized” from those that lacked the modern prototypes that he preferred. Whatever umbrage we might otherwise take at his calling various polities in his region uncivilized, he was not about to dismiss those societies as lacking formal government as his racist opponents were wont to do during the same period. Amongst those uncivilized polities he discovered

fixed and established Governments, although rude and barbarous; that the obedience to the supreme power in many cases is implicit, the right of property is enforced by adjudicature; and, although the power of the supreme head has been used with extreme despotism, as in Dahomey and Ashantee, yet still it is as truly a political Government as that of France or England [...].²

Examining Western Africa in its entirety, we find it to be composed of a number of political communities, each ruled by a national Government, formed in many cases of distinct nationalities occupying determined territory; but some national communities are broken up into innumerable fractional sections, governed by rebel chiefs, or satraps; others depend upon a political body whose sovereign chief rules over life and property; and others, again, are under well-regulated civilized government. But in order to develop these different nationalities a true political science, it is necessary that the inhabitants should be made acquainted with the useful arts, and the physical conditions which influence other more civilized and refined political Governments.

What, it may be asked, are the different forms of government now in existence on the West Coast of Africa? The two principal forms are the monarchical and the republican [...].

Among other political native communities we find that in some the form of government resembles very closely a limited monarchy – in others a democracy, in which all the caboceers or headmen stand almost on equal terms [...] (James Africanus Beale Horton 1969: 3–4).

Because of the presence of this treasure trove of constitutional types, Horton did not have to dredge up any romantic notions of modes of governance in West Africa,

2 The importance of this observation cannot be overstressed. That he found them no different from their equivalents in France or England meant that his judgment was comparative based on his preferred benchmark for civilized governance: governance by consent.

at least. Meanwhile, scientist that he was and seized as he was of the idea of seeing his continent march from backwardness to civilization – that was the linguistic currency back then from Africa to Asia to even parts of Europe – by which most meant modernity, the challenge for him was deciding the best and the fastest route to his preferred mode of social living. As part of his research into various aspects of life in West Africa and deploying his skills as a statistician, he explored themes from epidemiology to meteorology. He took the same approach to his interest in how life was organized in his region in his time. To this end, he conducted a survey of modes of governance across the region, came up with a taxonomy of sorts and a ranking based on his own preference.

Proper legislative science is entirely unknown to them; they possess no means by which a continuous and profitable revenue can be brought into their imperial coffers; no proper determination of political causes, and, consequently no established principle which might be made to form a guide to the Legislature in the making of new laws or the alteration of old ones, and thus for ages they have shown no improvement in the executive administration; and possess no legal status, and no generalized principle of international law (Horton 1969: 5–6).

We may knock him for his preference, but it is suspect if not downright sloppy scholarship that prefers instead to talk of “traditional African political thought or philosophy” or its many just as unilluminating equivalents. Again, unlike the colonialism-inspired anthropology – not the academic discipline that later developed with its many divergences and debates – that manufactured a flattened African reality marked by absolute alterity that many of us now use to talk about African phenomena, Horton knew, as we seem neither to know nor care now, that African societies and their intellectual and material cultures were not all equal or characterized by the same level of development at any given time. Because his preference was for the modern liberal representative democracy better realized in a republic, he graded the modes of governance he found as better, the more they were founded on the consent of the governed, and less desirable, the more distant they were from that criterion. It is not for nothing that his severest critic in our own time, Emmanuel Ayandele, has designated him “the father of political science in Africa” (Ayandele 1971).

It is no surprise, therefore, that he was an inspiration for and the stoutest intellectual sponsor of one of the most significant attempts at liberal constitution making outside of Europe in the modern age. Our scholars continue to ignore the constitution of the Fanti Confederacy to the detriment of their scholarship and knowledge production in our continent. In the same vein, the study of political philosophy is diminished because the world is not educated about the role that

African thinkers have played in its evolution and young African minds are misled by dubious binaries, the worst being that between tradition and modernity, that obfuscate rather than illuminate. No, there never was a time that Africans, as a group, ever evinced an orientation that anything human was alien to them. That attitude is owned by the denizens of the decolonizing industry cramped by their preoccupation with identity defined by the metaphysics of difference.

Horton offered as evidence of the progress towards creating a modern society that had been made by Sierra Leone, his homeland, especially in the original colony of Freetown where he was born and educated. And he declared that African societies were no different from those of other humanity that had once been great but had fallen on hard times and had to build back up:

But we have seen European nations who in years long passed were themselves as barbarous and unenlightened as the negro Africans are at present, and who have exhibited wonderful improvement within the last century. This should urge the Africans to increased exertions, so that their race may, in course of time, take its proper stand in the world's history (Horton 1969: 58).

The reasoning here is *historicist*, not *racialist*. Neither the rise nor the decline of a nation, people, or civilization has anything to do with their racial character or some defect in their genetic/racial make-up. Furthermore, being backward at a given time of a people does not mean that they have always been backward. Nor does it mean that such backward state offers us a living example of what an advanced civilization contemporaneous with it used to look like (Zeyad El Nabolsy 2023).

Here is a recommendation from him prompted by the resolution of the Select Committee of the British House of Commons in 1865 which considered what Britain should do with her colonial possessions in West Africa which said that the ultimate purpose of British colonialism should be to suit the colonies for self-government down the road. Horton seized on this idea to advise the British government. If “as it is proposed,” the aim was “to teach the people self-government” then, “there must be chosen either a monarchical or a republican form of government.” As someone who had worked in the Gambia and, as indicated previously, had studied the native structures of governance, he cautioned that “a republic is unsuited to the taste of the people, so it is at Sierra Leone. It will never have among the native inhabitants, who have always looked up to their kind, the same influence and effect.” In what seems to me a stopgap measure, based on what he considered the need to educate the electorate to the requisite temperament for self-governance undergirded by liberal principles – a commitment to the improbability of the backward African that racialist thinkers had convinced themselves was an impossible

and needless task – he suggested that “a national government should be selected, which should be made so powerful and influential as to create an interest in its support, extensive and strong enough to counterbalance all other influences.” It is a mark of his sophistication that, anti-monarchist that he was, he was open to using forms of governance that the people were used to move them to a future without monarchs or, minimally, with constitutional monarchs. “A Monarchical government, then, will be the only form, and the king should be elected by universal suffrage, and supported for some time by the British Government; he should for a short period be initiated into the art of governing, by serving a subordinate position of a governor over the Colony and its Dependencies, whilst the English Governor should act as Governor-General of all the Coast” (Horton 1969: 89–90).³

A constitutional form of government must form the basis of his administration, consisting of a House of Assembly which should be composed of men elected by the people, as it will be difficult for his Government to stand without popular confidence, and the only means by which that can be secured is by giving the people the power of election of one branch of the Legislature; they will be required to direct their attention to the internal government of the State, to sanction the amount of duty to be levied on foreign importation, and regulate the trade with foreign nations, and the imposition of stamp, postal, and other duties. Each member should possess landed property, be over the age of twenty-two, and be properly educated. Besides the House of Assembly, there should be the senate, consisting of men above the age of thirty-five years, and having extensive means, and who may be recognized by all as possessing good practical common sense. The senator should be chosen by the king-elect, and should retain office so long as his character is unimpeachable, either for life or a period of not less than ten years, and then be eligible for re-election [...] (Horton 1969: 91–92).⁴

I am refraining from assessing these recommendations. I enter them into the record to indicate how much more complex our discourses in political philosophy would be in an African scholarly landscape that tears into Horton’s preferences, from his apparent exclusion of women to his age specifications, to the recommendation of a constitutional monarchy, and so on. Rather, the discussion continues to be dominated by the inanities of so-called traditional political thought, including the denial that liberal representative democracy has a place in Africa more, in recent

3 For those who are interested, he was writing at a time when the United Kingdom itself was going through various reforms that would culminate in the conveyance of the superior power to the House of Commons in the early decades of the 20th century. His insistence that the monarch be elected by universal suffrage was both a signal of his opposition to ascription and preference for governance by consent.

4 We again see the comparativist methodology that dominated his analysis. Some of the conditions he specified for membership of parliament from education to property ownership were applied in both the United Kingdom and the United States when he was writing. And these provisions made it into the Fante Constitution of 1871.

times, for its pedigree – Eurocentric – than for earlier prattle about how it is incompatible with African culture, almost always conceptualized in the singular.

Edward Wilmot Blyden on Liberal Education

Let's now consider Blyden's justification for an embrace of liberal education. Unfortunately, the latter part of his life where he became a trenchant critic of racism, a position he always shared, has edged out the other portions of the life of a mind and a life defined by erudition, cosmopolitanism, a near polymath, a polyglot, and one of the most important thinkers of the 19th century, period. All these dimensions of a richly textured life have been panel beaten into the dull life of an opposition thinker driven by his black identity, conditioned by "the African personality", his coinage, and rendered illegible to the world of ideas as a worthy influence to be cultivated by one and all in the domain of the mind. What a shame!

This is the place to remind us of something that is there in the literature but is likely to elude us once we proceed from a racializing standpoint. Our three exemplars in this discussion were all participants in a race discourse in the 19th century that took race for granted and did social, philosophical, historical analyses framed by the idea. Whether they deployed it for good or ill, they all accepted the reality of races. Those like our exemplars who pushed back against racism agreed that they were progeny of a race that, like other races, had its own gift to share with common humanity and slavery and creeping colonialism had held Africans back from fully developing this gift and sharing it with the world. It was in part this idea that, I am almost convinced, W.E.B. Du Bois clumsily appropriated in "The Conservation of Races" (1996) and which he spent considerable energy thereafter trying to clarify as the world began to cast doubt on the idea of race and its utility for making sense of phenomena. That is why in their works, they always spoke in comparative terms, and they never fell into the trap of talking as if African humanity represented a different species. More than that, they actively combatted the idea.

We can now see why they had no difficulty as we seem these days to do with acknowledging the shortcomings of their societies, nay, their race. On the contrary, because what exercised them was their burning desire to see Africa recover from the predations of slavery, they were never reluctant to borrow from the rest of humanity.

Again, as we saw with Horton in his foray into political philosophy, unrestricted by the appeal of indigenous modes of governance, we can imagine Blyden

aghast at a lot of the perorations on offer in our time regarding the superiority of “indigenous” or “traditional African education” by those driven by the binaries that we repeatedly disavow in our work.

We need be reminded that Blyden lived in an era where what is now derided as “Western” or “Eurocentric” education was in its infancy in most parts of the continent, indigenous systems of education were overwhelmingly dominant, and Islamic education was widespread. If anyone was in a vantage position to make an informed comparative assessment of the different types of education as well as their relative advantages and disadvantages in real time, it was Blyden. He was not reticent to admit that he and his colleagues were borrowing their template from Europe and America but even as he declared that they would “adhere as nearly as possible” to this antecedent, “experience has already suggested, and will, no doubt, from time to time suggest such modifications as were required by our peculiar circumstances” (Edward Wilmot Blyden 1994: 85). Given that the idea of a university was exogenous to the country that Liberia College was located in and that it took some time to create “a public sentiment in its favour,” he was convinced that the next task was for the institution to do its “generative” work (Blyden 1994: 83). What was the content of this generative work? Building on the “indigenous sympathy and support without which it cannot thrive” and raise

men, aided by instruction and culture in this College, imbued with public spirit, who will know how to live and work and prosper in this country, how to use all favouring outward conditions, how to triumph by intelligence, by tact, by industry, by perseverance, over the indifference of their own people, and how to overcome the scorn and opposition of the enemies of the race – men who will be determined to make this nation honourable among the nations of the earth (Blyden 1994: 84–85).

I can only hope that no one suggests that the sentiments expressed in the preceding passage belong to any region or any group, racial or otherwise in the world. Additionally, it is not implausible to suggest that the objective articulated in it is no less relevant, urgent even, in our own time, irrespective of what part of the world we happen to live in.

Consistent with his belief that modernity, for which Christianity was the vector in West Africa, in spite of the ravages of the slave trade and slavery that Africans had been prey to, and the racism that infected some of its educational institutions and materials, held the best mode of social living that would move Africa to progress fastest, he was unabashed in his embrace of and praise for liberal education.

Before I let Blyden make his case for liberal education, one cannot but be impressed by his prescience and profundity when it comes to his anticipation of what would be the result if we allow ourselves to be dominated by what is now the

cornerstone of much that goes under the rubric of decolonizing discourse in our day: chasing slights and allowing ourselves and our paths to be defined or, at the least, dominated by the animus directed at us by our racist detractors. First, he cautioned:

[We] cannot be assisted in our work by looking back and denouncing the deeds of the oppressors of our fathers, by perpetuating race antagonism. It is natural, perhaps, that we should at times feel indignation in view of past injustice, but continually dwelling upon it will not help us. It is neither edifying nor dignified to be forever declaiming about the wrongs of the race. [...] Such a habit, when it ceases to excite pity, begets contempt and ridicule. What we need is wider and deeper culture, more intimate intercourse with our inferior brethren, more energetic advance to the healthy regions (Blyden 1994: 105).

Then he concluded:

The time is past when we can be content with putting forth elaborate arguments to prove our equality with foreign races. Those who doubt our capacity are more likely to be convinced of their error by the exhibition, on our part, of those qualities of energy and enterprise which will enable us to occupy the extensive field before us for our own advantage and the advantage of humanity – for the purpose of civilization, of science, of good government, and of progress generally – than by any mere abstract argument about the equality of races. The suspicions disparaging to us will be dissipated only by the exhibition of the indisputable realities of a lofty manhood as they may be illustrated in successful efforts to build up a nation, to wrest from Nature her secrets, to lead the van of progress in this country, and to regenerate a continent (Blyden 1994: 107).

For us to accomplish the latter, what he called liberal education is a *sine qua non*. I insist that this is no less relevant in our day than it was when those words were originally written by Blyden. Does anybody seriously want to suggest that Africa is no longer needful of building up a nation in different regions, wresting from Nature her secrets, especially that, and leading the van of progress in the regeneration of our continent? That these are not the topmost concerns of the leading lights of the decolonizing industry is an indictment of their entire discourse. At his inauguration as a Professor at the Liberia College, he wasted no time in staking his ground.

The fear need not be entertained that a course of study in this Institution will unfit men for the practical duties of life, render them proud, and distant, and haughty, and overbearing. Such is not the effect of a true education. I am aware that there prevails with some – and perhaps not entirely without foundation – the opinion that the effect of superior education is to inflate men and render them impracticable. This is not, however, the legitimate effect of true knowledge. They are utter strangers to the genial influence of literature upon the social sentiments, who suppose that men must be distant, and haughty, and cold, in proportion as they are profound [...].

Every country has its peculiar circumstances and characteristics. So has Liberia. From this fact, it has often been argued that we need a peculiar kind of education; not so much colleges and high schools, as other means, which are more immediately and obviously connected with our progress.⁵ *But to this we reply, that if we are part of the human family, we have the same intellectual needs that other men have, and they must be supplied by the same means.* It shows a painful ignorance of history, to consider the present state of things in Liberia as new and unprecedented, in such a sense as to render dispensable those most important and fundamental means of improvement, which other countries have enjoyed. *Mind is everywhere the same; and everywhere it receives its character and formation from the same elemental principles.* If it has been properly formed and has received a substantial character, it will work out its own calling, solve its own problem, achieve its own destiny (Blyden in Hollis R. Lynch 1971: 220) [My emphasis].

Again, we see affirmed here that comparative perspective that made them not shrink from acknowledging the deplorable state of their societies. But that acknowledgment was a call to arms, an invitation for all hands to be on deck to end that state and birth a more salubrious one for their people. If, as he claimed, “mind is everywhere the same” why would we be in the business of looking for some culture-based definition of the mind and then proclaim that only certain minds are suited for certain types of education? Notice that it is the mind, not a people, that, “if it has been properly formed and has received a substantial character, it will work out its own calling”.

It can not be denied, that the studies which shall be pursued in this Institution are of great utility to this country just now. The college course will include all those studies by which a people's mind and heart are formed. We shall have the study of language [...] a study which [...] aids greatly in the training and discipline of the mind. We shall have the study of mathematics and physical science – which involves, of course, a study of the laws of nature, and the acquirement of the essential preliminary knowledge of all calculations, measurements and observations, on the sea and on the land. We shall have – besides jurisprudence and international law – the study of intellectual and moral philosophy, by which is gained a knowledge of the mind, and the laws of thought, and of our duties to ourselves, to our fellowmen, to society, and to God. But we need a *practical* education in Liberia. True; and so did the first settlers of North America. And does not the college course supply such an education? *What is a practical education? It is not simply preparing a person specially for one sphere of life. It aims at practical results of a more important character – at imparting not simply skill in keeping accounts – in pleading at the bar – in surveying land – in navigating a vessel – but skill in exercising the intellect accurately and readily, upon any subject brought before us. The skill secured by a college education, is skill in the use of the mind* (Blyden in Lynch 1971: 222) [My emphasis].

5 A rallying cry of many in the decolonizing industry who want to equate what Blyden was calling for here to so-called Western contraptions and colonial impositions.

I have refrained from paraphrasing Blyden because for a thinker so identified with black nationalism, the original coiner of the idea of “the African personality” (Blyden in Lynch 1971: 195–204), the same one who eventually turned his back on what some call Western civilization, these words might ring false or doctored. Additionally, by encasing liberal thinkers like Blyden in the concrete of identity defined by difference, we inadvertently deny ourselves and, by extension, the world of a mind whose expostulations remain as relevant today as when they were originally written deep into the 19th century in West Africa. Again, these are ideas that cannot by any stretch be accommodated under so-called precolonial or traditional African philosophy. Indeed, what should be obvious is that once we get past the oppositionist mentality that dominates much of decolonizing discourse, we begin to see the tremendous damage being done to how we think about and live life in contemporary Africa. Does anyone seriously want to suggest that the model canvassed by Blyden has no place in our current situation? Even if that were true, what is scholarship if it does not tend towards robust engagements with ideas and theories with a view to securing for ourselves and our students the best and the most resilient of such? As I am always concerned to point out, I have my own ideas about these issues but that is not what is at stake here. I am merely directing our attention to the rich repertoire of ideas occurrent in a particular time in a particular place that is often not reflected in the annals of our discourses. Given ongoing debates across the globe on the continuing relevance or lack thereof of liberal education, it sells Africa and its intellectual heritage short when we give the world the wrong impression that materials such as we represent here are somewhat an incongruous presence in the annals of African philosophy.

Blyden did not stop there. At a time that their racist traducers were denying that Africans were human much less capable of profound thought, Blyden, as did his contemporary, Horton, was arguing for a university in West Africa. “The more I reflect upon the subject, the more I am convinced that we have no thorough and permanent reform – no proper development and growth – without the means being afforded of a liberal education to the youth” (Blyden in Lynch 1971: 226).

Now to give the people the opportunity and power of a free and healthy development – to bring out that individuality and originality of character which is one of the sure results of an advancing civilization and culture, the University is most important. The presence of such an Institution with able African teachers brought, if necessary, from different parts of the world – even a Negro Arabic Professor from Egypt, Timbuctoo or Futah – would have great influence in exposing and correcting the fallacies upon which our foreign teachers have proceeded in their utter misapprehension and, perhaps, contempt of African character (Blyden in Lynch 1971: 227).

Finally, he averred, “The object of all education is to secure growth and efficiency, to make a man all that his natural gifts will allow him to become; to produce self-respect, a proper appreciation of our own powers and of the powers of other people; to beget a fitness for one’s sphere of life and action, and ability to discharge the duties it imposes” (Blyden 1994: 85). When it came to what subjects would dominate the course of instruction at the college, again, Blyden did not pull his punches. It would be interesting to place this advocacy against current polemics in the decolonizing literature concerning these matters. Here is Blyden:

The instruments of culture which we shall employ in the College will be chiefly the Classics and Mathematics. By Classics I mean the Greek and Latin languages and their literature. In those languages there is not, as far as I know, a sentence, a word, or a syllable disparaging to the Negro. He may get nourishment from them without taking in any race-poison. They will perform no sinister work upon his consciousness, and give no unholy bias to his inclinations. [...]

A great deal of misapprehension prevails in the popular mind as to the utility, in a liberal education, of the so-called dead languages, and many fancy that the time devoted to their study is time lost; but let it be understood that their study is not pursued merely for the information they impart. If information were all, it would be far more useful to learn the French and German, or any other of the modern languages, during the time devoted to Greek and Latin; but what is gained by the study of the ancient languages is that strengthening and disciplining of the mind which enables the student in [...] life to lay hold of, and, with comparatively little difficulty, to master, any business to which he may turn his attention (1994: 97, 100).

In the foregoing we have anticipations of current debates in an era dominated by Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and clamoring by politicians and businesspersons who do not desire to contribute their share as used to be the case of the cost of the reproduction of labor power that liberal education is without utility. They desire to turn universities into vocational institutions and education into nothing more than job training (On this, see Táiwò 2018c). Blyden offers us in his reflections some solid rejoinders to such arguments. Additionally, arguing with him can only enhance, not impoverish, the quality of our discourse.

He did not neglect to address the gender issue. This was another element of 19th century philosophy that we must pay attention to. Article 23 of the Fanti Constitution had specific provisions for girls’ education, too, for reasons similar to what Blyden offered for not leaving girls behind.

I trust that arrangements will be made by which girls of our country may be admitted to share in the advantages of this College. I cannot see why our sisters should not receive exactly the same general culture as we do. I think that the progress of the country will be more rapid and permanent when the girls receive the same general training as the boys; and our women, besides being able to appreciate the intellectual labours of their

husbands and brothers, will be able also to share in the pleasures of intellectual pursuits. We need not fear that they will be less graceful, less natural, or less womanly; but we may be sure that they will make wiser mothers, more appreciative wives, and more affectionate sisters (1994: 102–103).

As in the rest of this writing, the thrust has been more expository than critical. The idea is to seed our discourse in the annals of modern philosophy with contributions that are rendered illegible to our discourse by those whose preoccupation with identity identified by the metaphysics of difference makes them amenable to obliterating vital parts of their own memory not to talk of intellectual heritage.

Alexander Crummell and the Philosophy of History

Let us now conclude this discussion with the reflections of Alexander Crummell on the evolution of society, how societies and their members and values, institutions, and practices change through time. These are the warp and woof of the sub-discipline of the philosophy of history. Crummell subscribed to what has been described in the historiography of the period as Providential Determinism under which slavery was the wilderness that they had to go through to get to the light of modern [Christian] civilization that became theirs as an unintended consequence and which they were duty-bound to take back to their heathen sisters and brothers left in Africa. This was their answer to the “why us?” question regarding the misfortune of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Certainly, their racist detractors had sundry contrary explanations. This is a point that often escapes commentators. They did not experience Christianity as an imposition and in ways that pioneered some 20th century developments, most notably, the Rastafarian movement, oppressors are never completely in a position to determine in which direction the oppressed might take what they receive from their oppressors. Incidentally, while the entire era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade witnessed repeated efforts at justifying slavery with the Christian Bible, enslaved persons and other Africans used the same book to fight slavery and excoriate its defenders. It was the source of their simultaneous opposition to slavery and embrace of Christianity with the latter supplying what we may call in the words of a Negro spiritual, “a balm in Gilead”. Christianity gave them a new look on life, a new metric by which to measure their world, and a blueprint with which to remake their societies and ensure that never again would their descendants fall into that same hellhole. They were morally compelled by that same faith to return to Africa and pull their fellow Africans away from the heathenish ways of their progenitors and bring them the light of civilization. Many in

the decolonizing industry and others who engage in the wild goose chase after racial purity are wont to ignore, when they do not detract from, the role of African American missionaries in Africa, the most successful being the work of the American Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church.

This had implications for how they thought societies evolved, what explains their state at any given time, and how their trajectory might be tracked, going forward. Crummell was one of the most forceful in this respect. And this has made him the focus of some severe criticism from my friend and top scholar of African American history, Tunde Adeleke. Because Crummell, among others, was convinced that the path to a glorious future for Africa lay in people like him returning from their sojourns in any part of the globe to Africa to join the movement for progressing the continent. Part both of Blyden's and of Crummell's plans was to attract expatriate Africans in the Diaspora to return to build Liberia and help civilize Africa, their original homeland.

Africa lies low and is wretched. She is the maimed and crippled arm of humanity. Her great powers are wasted. Dislocation and anguish have reached every joint. Her condition in every point calls for succor – moral, social, domestic, political, commercial, and intellectual. When shall flow aid, mercy, advantage to her? Here arises the call of duty and obligation to colored men. Other people may, if they choose, forget the homes of their sires; for almost every European nation is now reaping the fruits of a thousand years' civilization. Every one of them can spare thousands and even millions of their sons to build up civilization in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, or Victoria. But Africa is the victim of her heterogeneous idolatries. Africa is wasting away beneath the accretions of civil and moral miseries. Darkness covers the land, and gross darkness the people. Great social evils universally prevail (Alexander Crummell 1862: 219–220).

With this and similar passages in the writings of those that we have called excluded moderns, there is a serious problem with how we deal with what appears to be a convergence between them and problem moderns concerning Africa's place in the march of civilization. It is either we regard them as self-haters who have embraced the hatred directed at their race by their racist traducers or they are suffering from what would later be called colonial mentality that made them acquiesce in the image of them contrived by white supremacists. On either of these two options, it would be difficult indeed for those of us opposed to racism and any other kind of supremacist ideologies to look kindly on their ideas. But, as we pointed out earlier, these are not the only options available to us. Let us imagine them as contrarians within their societies who were desirous of seeing their societies take a different trajectory towards progress. After all, as modern thinkers, they embraced the idea of progress which, in the sphere of philosophical anthropology, meant a solid faith

in the improbability of human nature. Add this to their comparative methodology that made them insist that Africa had not always been backward nor was the state of the continent a consequence of a genetic defect of their race and you have the best key to distinguishing between *historicist* thinkers who believed that Africa was no different from other places and peoples in the world that had undulated between advancement and decay, on one hand, and *racialist* thinkers who are convinced that race and its consequences explain Africa's place in history for all time.

Certainly, we should not be carried away by the rhetorical flourish of the parson designed to elicit a positive, possibly guilty, response from his audience who could not be bothered about a continent that had sent their parents and grandparents to untold hardship represented in chattel slavery in the Americas. I am not sure that we pay sufficient attention to the collective hurt that enslaved people had experienced and the resentment towards those who sold their forebears that they would harbor when one considers some of the negative sentiments towards the continent that showed through the writings of thinkers like Crummell and Blyden. This is another reason for a more nuanced approach in our scholarship respecting the transatlantic slave trade and its consequences. Simultaneously, the tenor of Crummell's declaration shows that he, too, shared with the problem moderns the view that Africa and Africans were backward and needful of the infusion of civilization from outside. This is Tunde Adeleke's reason for saying that these thinkers were more "American" than "African" and they were no less imperialistic in their approach to and design on Africa than those that we have dubbed problem moderns. Scholars of race/racism are yet to take seriously this problem of how to read people like Crummell and other excluded moderns in their relation to the racial insults of the problem moderns which they, too, seem to share with the latter. This is the problem that has so far escaped attention from the scholars of race/racism in philosophy. It deserves attention from philosophers. That said, clearly our excluded moderns never accepted nor praised slavery. They were in no doubt as to the evil that slavery was.

Christianity-encrusted modernity was an unintended consequence and one which the slave owners stoutly resisted. Thinkers like Crummell appropriated Christianity despite the slave owners' machination, not because of them. The same goes for their embrace of modernity. For Adeleke,

Crummell's philosophical response, from the very beginning, bore the imprints of *normative European assumptions about Africa*. Consequently, his professed pride in being African was negated by both his proclamation of American identity and his later profession of alienation from *Africa's barbarism*. In a sermon in 1845, he referred to Africans

as a heathen and superstitious people who needed to be redeemed through Christianity (1998:73) [My emphasis].

As plausible as Adeleke's interpretation is, I contend that there is an equally plausible and, I daresay, more convincing one that, as we said earlier, places these ruminations in the context of a member of a society taking a critical approach to her society and severely assessing same with a view to jolting her compatriots to a recognition of what may be wrong with their society even when such a critic does not have a ready to hand solution. Indeed, Crummell was concerned that a continent as endowed as Africa was not taking advantage of this wealth, was not adding value to it and, by so doing, prosper its inhabitants. This is the point of the following passage which almost anticipated a line of argumentation that would later form what F.D. Lugard, the archphilosopher of British imperialism, called "the dual mandate" in Africa (1922).

The 'dual mandate' refers to the responsibility that it had pleased God and history to bequeath to Great Britain, to make available to Europeans and the rest of humanity the riches and resources of Africa, which "lay wasted and ungarnered [...] because the natives did not know their use and value. Millions of tons of oil-nuts, for instance, grew wild without the labour of man, and lay rotting in the forests. Who can deny the right of the hungry people of Europe to utilise the wasted bounties of nature, or that the task of developing these was, as Mr. Chamberlain expressed it, a 'trust for civilisation' and the benefit of mankind?" (Lugard 1922: 615) [...] On the other hand, Great Britain needed to bring the light of civilization to the blighted heathenish peoples of the "Dark Continent": "As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of modern civilisation, and led the wild barbarians of these islands [Britain, that is] along the path of progress, so in Africa to-day we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilisation" (Lugard 1922: 618) (Táiwò 2010a: 130-131).

Crummell was concerned that the riches of Western Africa where he lived, and the "millions of dollars being made on the coast of Africa" were not flowing into African coffers. It testifies to the embrace of modernity which our thinkers under reference in this work assimilated to Christianity and was synonymous with civilization that their sense of who owned what of the world's resources was not predicated on geographical or racial identity. Rather, because humanity is one, everyone has a right, as a creature of God, to every portion of the earth as long they add value to it via their labor. This is the import of the following passage from Crummell, with its Lockean echoes.

Now all this flows into the coffers of white men. I mean nothing invidious by this. I state a fact, and am utterly unconscious of any unworthy or ungenerous feeling in stating

it. ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness[sic] thereof;’ and this ‘fulness’ *He has given to MAN, irrespective of race or color*. The main condition of the obtainment of it is intelligence, forecast, skill, and enterprise. If the black man – the black man, I mean, civilized and enlightened – has lying before him a golden heritage, and fails to seize upon and to appropriate it, Providence none the less intends it to be seized upon and wills it to be used. And if the white man, with a keen eye, a cunning hand, and a wise practicalness, is enabled to appropriate it with skill and effect, it is his; God gives it to him, and he has a right to seek and to search for a multiplication of it, and when he secures it a right to the use of it, responsible, however, both to God and man for use of right means to the ends he has before him, and for the moral features of his traffic (1862: 231).⁶

This passage is redolent with a lot of modernist justifications for land grabs in the Americas and Africa. Notice how Crummell distinguished implicitly between uncivilized blacks and civilized ones taking care to exclude the former from his discussion. The rightful exploitation of Africa’s resources on behalf of common humanity as mandated by God then became the charge of people like him just the same way that Lugard would assert in later years, as I just indicated. It is difficult to *racialize* this stance; racializing it is implausible. Crummell did not think that he had become white, by no means. Indeed, the case against racism in philosophy is made stronger and sharper by our inscribing the elements that we do in this essay into the discourse. For when we lump thinkers like Crummell together with racist problem moderns, we end up almost biologizing racism and anti-racism, respectively, and make it almost impossible for an African-descended person to embrace any ideas that are to be found on the other side of the biological divide.

Might Crummell have anticipated Frederick D. Lugard? If yes, does that make him, too, a colonial racist? The answer to the latter question must be negative. The difference is clear. What this means is that when racists like Lugard used a similar argument to justify rapine and plunder underpinned by racism without any thought given to the fate of their victims, we should be more circumspect in thinking that such arguments are essentially racially motivated. Certainly, Lugard was a dyed-in-the-wool racist (See Táiwò 2010a, chapter 4, for a full analysis). In deploying this argument, Crummell was issuing a clarion call to his fellow diasporic Africans to turn their newly acquired consciousness and civilization to the service of their original homeland so that their compatriots could move in tandem with the rest of humanity on the march to progress that was the signature of modernity. In the one case, Crummell’s, it underwrote a program of liberation from backward-

6 Compare the Frontispiece to (Lugard 1922).

ness and all the ills begotten by that state of being; in the other, Lugard's, the argument licensed subjugation and rape of another.

I would like to note, in passing, the continuing relevance of Crummell's complaint even as I write this with the plundering of Africa's resources now by countries as varied as China, Turkey, Qatar, and Russia. He was unapologetic in his insistence that people like him, *contra* Adeleke, beyond their sheer humanity, had legitimate rights to Africa's resources. "We are all descendants of Africa," he proclaimed, "and hence we claim a special interest in, and a peculiar right to, her fruits, her offerings, and her gifts. But after all, how very limited is our participation therein!" (1862: 89).

I am not satisfied, – I tell you the truth, – that the wealth of this, our Africa, should make *other* men wealthy and not ourselves. It troubles me in the night, and in the day it vexes me, that of all the moneys poured out here for fish, and meats, and shoes, and merchandise, so little stays at our own water-side (1862: 90, see also 234, 290).

This is why I insist that we, too, should follow them in their refusal to racialize modernity and historicize it instead. They remained stout comparativists who always thought Africa in tandem with common humanity elsewhere. It explains Crummell's belief – the core of his philosophy of history – that (1) Africa could be great again; (2) the path to that recovery lay in Africans, with the aid of their Diasporic contingents, being the ones in control of exploiting for themselves and humanity at large the enormous resources housed within the continent; (3) Africans must, like other peoples, look beyond their borders for better models of how to live and organize their societies. This was the context for the valorization, for example, of the English language and its impact in creating new nations out of the motley traditions of particularism to be found in his West African neighborhood (See Crummell 1862: 9–54; Kwame Anthony Appiah 1992). The English language was, for Crummell, a key component of the larger instrument for the change that Africa needed which, he was convinced, must come from elsewhere. He believed that societies do not routinely contain within themselves the impetus for change. And if a particular society has been closed in on itself for a long time, it should come as no surprise that it risks becoming backward and stagnated. Of course, we know Crummell's historiography of Africa was essentially incorrect, but can see how this error led him on the path represented in the following passage.

And, indeed, if you will examine the case, you will find no cause for wonder at this universal prevalence of benightedness through all Africa. I know, indeed, that the fact is often contrasted with the advance of both Europe and Asia in enlightenment; and the inference drawn, that is, of negro inferiority, as the cause of the seeming organic wretchedness of that vast continent. But you will remember that the civilization of all races

has been conditioned on contact. It is the remark of a great German historian – perhaps the greatest historian of modern times: “There is not in history the record of a single indigenous civilization; there is nowhere, in any reliable document, the report of any people lifting themselves up out of barbarism. The historic civilizations are all exotic. The torches that blaze along the line of centuries were kindled, each by the one behind” [Niebuhr] (Crummell 1862: 107).

Here is the force of comparativism. No society is exempted from the danger of ossification if it depends solely on its internal dynamics for its long-term survival talk less of progress. Hybridity rules when it comes to the progress of civilizations. Léopold Sédar Senghor, in our own time, also made this the cornerstone of civilization sophistication. In this light, the quote from Niebuhr is particularly instructive. Recall what we said earlier about the rule of hybridity in the evolution of civilizations and their ebb and flow. As participants in conversations that were not structured, much less limited, by identity-driven anxieties, staking their place in the shared humanity that racism denies, Crummell and others like him were not willing to do what is routinely done these days, especially by our decolonizers: yield to a certain segment of the human family the ownership of a common inheritance. I beg to differ.

Conclusion

What I have done in this essay is to seed the bed of our discourse with materials that are easily available but for reasons some of which I have offered remain unapprehended by scholars at the present time. I have limited myself to West Africa. A more expansive orientation enables us to apprehend and work with the debate concerning the relationship between Islam and modernity, inaugurated by Napoleon’s ill-fated invasion of Egypt in 1798, and has continued in our day as reflected in the works of Mourad Wahba (2022), Fatima Mernissi (1992), and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im (2008), all scholars who have grappled with similar issues to those we have canvassed here in works that are very illuminating.

As important as this task is, it is merely an opening to a much more expansive future in which we (1) separate ourselves from the racializing of thought motivated by identity considerations; (2) take seriously the heterogeneities that have always marked the trajectories of the history of philosophy which I have, in other writings, called the essential hybridity of modernity when it comes to our era; (3) embrace the fact that African and African-descended thinkers have never been mute presences in the evolution of Western philosophy even as its mainstream always strives

to erase their contributions to the discourse; and (4) render a more honest accounting of the history of philosophy to our various audiences.

The ideas of the three thinkers we have focused on in this essay have resonance beyond the boundaries of their racial identity, their geographical location, and the ignorant perorations of even their own racial kin who think that certain ideas that form a part of human intellectual inheritance should be donated to just one portion of it. Whether it is the preference for the political discourse of modernity, or the supremacy of liberal education, or the necessity of borrowing for civilizational growth, what is clear is that the insights to be garnered from our engagements with Horton, Blyden, and Crummell promise reward whether we are reading them in Lagos, Bangkok, Seoul, or Buenos Aires. The problems of which they treat are not “African” but eminently “human” problems. Beyond this lie the immense opportunities for, beyond inscribing the writings of African thinkers into the record, expanding the boundaries of discourse in every area of scholarship to enhance the quality of scholarship, not to talk of public conversations, regarding philosophical anthropology, modes of social living, and principles of social ordering in our various societies across the African continent. Therein lies the ultimate promise of rewriting the history of philosophy.

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