

African Philosophy and the Creative Arts in Africa: What should they Mean to each Other and Why?

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Abstract: One of the underemphasised aspects of African Philosophy is how creative arts in Africa should be brought to bear in the effort to advance this tradition of philosophy. My aim in this work is to address this concern. I do this by exploring the basis for a synergy between African philosophy and artistic creativity in Africa. I discuss whether there is any relationship between the two and whether both can re-enforce each other. To do this, I (A) first clarify the ideas of philosophy and art implied and applied in this work and (B) apply this to address four questions, namely, (B1) Can wisdom be loved beyond pen and paper? (B2). How philosophical can or should creative arts be? (B3) How creative can or should African philosophy be? (B4). How philosophically African can creative arts be? I draw my claim from the above questions to argue that African philosophy can promote its course by heavily expanding philosophical wisdom through creative art and exploiting the art of wisdom in Africa, which is hugely embedded in creative art.

Keywords: African philosophy, creativity, creative arts, synergy, wisdom

Introduction

A robust engagement of philosophy and creative art has been lacking in African philosophy. Primary literature that has mapped out different schools of thought and canons of discourse in African philosophy has often neglected the need to engage and involve creative art more seriously in formulating and producing knowledge that should fall under the discipline of African philosophy. This state of African philosophy is quite ironic given that art is a significant ethics of the African world where life is probably more celebrated than interrogated. A glance at the literature that has mapped out different schools of thought in African philosophy almost from its inception as an academic discipline includes Bodunrin ('The question of African philosophy'), Wright (*African Philosophy*), Oruka ('The fundamental principles in the question of African Philosophy'; Oruka ('Four trends in current African philosophy'), Wamba-diaWamba ('La philosophie en Afrique ou les défis de l'Africain philosophe'), Hountondji (*African Philosophy: Myth and reality*), etc. All this literature would validate this claim. They identify ways of doing African philosophy that exclude creative art. Creative art broadly means all forms of creativity that include or go beyond literary creativity – pottery, sculpture, paintings, photography, etc. Although lately the artist school of African philosophy has been added to the extant schools of thought in the discipline, it has not achieved the robust literature that other schools of thought, such as ethno-philosophy, critical current of thought, or even philosophical sagacity have achieved.

But what distinct role can be assigned to creative art in advancing the critical discourse on African philosophy and why? In this work, I intend to answer this question and advance this

aspect of philosophical research by providing literature on the critical engagement of African philosophy and creative art. My purpose is to uncover, recover and assist the readers to discover how and why creative art should find a more urgent place in the project of African philosophy. To do this, I (A) first clarify the ideas of philosophy and art implied and applied in this work and (B) apply this to address four questions, namely, (B1) Can wisdom be loved beyond pen and paper? (B2). How philosophical can or should creative arts be? (B3) How creative can or should African philosophy be? (B4) How philosophically African can creative arts be? I therefore draw from the above questions and the answers I shall provide to illustrate how African arts reflect these roles and how African philosophy can promote its course by exploiting the art of wisdom in Africa through creative arts. By addressing these questions, I will show how and why African philosophy and the creative arts can or should exploit their potential to serve the interests of each other and expand the frontiers of knowledge and wisdom.

The idea of philosophy and the idea of creative arts

Philosophy has had what can be called a coordinating definition as the *love of wisdom*, which arises through its Greek root words *philos* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom). It is from this that all other definitions or conceptions of philosophy have taken their root. Some views drawn from at least two philosophers, Kwasi Wiredu and Martin Heidegger, can help substantiate this claim.

For Wiredu, philosophy provides the intellectual foundation and basis for meaning. This function and nature of philosophy are so crucial that “if man shall not live by bread alone but by word of God”, as Jesus Christ submitted, “even less shall he live without a philosophy: for how, otherwise, shall he attain the very conception of God? How shall he attain a conception of value – of what to live for?” (cited in Oladipo 28). Similarly, for Heidegger, philosophy defines and directs the collective wisdom of a people by providing the best grounds and terms for self-concept. Heidegger (*Basic Writings* 130) thus claimed:

Philosophy is that thinking that breaks the paths and opens the perspectives of the knowledge that sets the norms and hierarchies of the knowledge in which and by which a people fulfil themselves historically and culturally, the knowledge that kindles and necessitates all inquiries and thereby threatens all value.

What can be read from these philosophers is that philosophy stands at the root of whatever claims to be and overhauls the human mind, either of the individual or the social group. It stands as the basis of any claims to reality and sustains such claims. Philosophy basically searches for what has not been heard, known, or seen or what has been heard, known, or seen rightly or wrongly and accounts for why this is the case. For this reason, it applies the method of criticism and logical evaluation of beliefs and assumptions. But while philosophy applies logic, logic does not summarise philosophy precisely because there is no single logic. Logic itself is limited. Thus, only a limitless love of wisdom can adequately capture the idea of philosophy because in transcending any given or state, it seeks to locate a higher, worthier, and better acceptable given.

Based on the above claim, it can be held that philosophy amounts to a determined *professional love of wisdom*. By professional love of wisdom, I mean to take the advancement of wisdom as a career to advance the quality of thought, to think for the public, and to apply one’s love for wisdom to address issues not just as it touches on the individual, but as it would be desired by the society. Here, philosophers apply their skills to address the ethical and social demand for wisdom from and by their societies and think about the thoughts of the society. To do this, the philosopher develops specific critical and interpretative skills to engage the world. The philosopher also reads the works of those that society has recognised for their outstanding wisdom, those we would typically call great philosophers, such as Socrates, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Aristotle, Spinoza, etc., and attempts to interpret, critique, and advance their ideas especially as they

address the fundamentals of wisdom. In addition, the philosopher also engages the problems of life by reflecting on them.

But understanding philosophy in the above sense might raise some concerns. This concern is to know the extent to which philosophy demands the creative input of other aspects of learning. What is the place of creativity in philosophy? What forms of formulation can explain the relationship between creative arts and philosophy? It seems that these concerns and questions can be best addressed by looking at the meaning and nature of creative arts and the relationship between philosophy and the creative arts. By engaging both disciplines at this level, a conception of the nature of the relationship between philosophy and creative arts can be achieved. To do this, the work will provide a descriptive definition of creative arts.

A descriptive definition of creative arts can conceive of arts as works that advertise human expression and enable human beings to manifest their idea of the world as desired and directed through the creative impulse of the human mind. Creative arts can also be defined as the expression of sentiment or feeling that can enable anyone or everyone to hear and express the same. The Collins English Dictionary defines creative arts as “imaginative, creative and non-scientific branch of knowledge considered collectively, especially as studies academically”.

But not all arts are creative. The art of engineering and the art of mathematics are good illustrations of this. It requires art and skill to imagine how a bridge should look like, just as the art of imagination is involved in different forms of mathematics. But these are not creative art. What is held to be creative arts would usually demand the inventive capacity of the individual with an imprint of what stands as unique. Creative arts, which underline the wider intellectual works that fall under the arts, generally perform several functions. But at least two broad functions can be outlined: the personal and the social function. At the personal level, art performs an individualistic function of providing the basis for expressing the uniqueness of the individual, the belief and disposition to life issues in general. In addition, art gratifies the artist’s soul and provides leisure for the spirit. At a social level, art serves to entertain the public, educate society, and provide an avenue for expressing the concept of beauty that a society may have.

The above submission is a form of descriptive definition of the function of creative arts. It may not be effective for the professional or scientific demand of the term and a theoretical definition of the subject. So, what is creative art from a professional perspective? If an attempt is to be made to achieve a professional definition of creative art, several controversies could be found. These controversies would revolve around (a) the nature of arts, (b) the social criteria of creativity, (c) the question of originality, and (d) the outcome of arts. These controversies are also embedded in the discourse on arts in general. Mark Runco claimed that originality and effectiveness are two standard criteria in defining creative arts. But this does not mean that the two items are exactly the same. Originality implies the virtue of innovation and invention. Similarly, effectiveness may take different forms, such as usefulness, fit, and appropriateness. Be that as it may, it could be argued that creative arts is about bringing something new into being. Glevance and Beghetto (75) claimed that creative art should be marked by “open-endedness, nonlinearity, pluri-perspectives and future orientation”.

In an interview with sixty-four artists, Judith Glück, Roland Polacsek-Ernest, and Flootje Unger (55) provided another insight into the nature of creative arts. The author disclosed that the artists interviewed agreed that “the creative person should have many ideas”. The interviewers revealed that intentional novelty rather than value should define and characterise creative art. Overall, what can be read from these scholars is that what seems to direct creative art includes skill, imagination, and inspiration behind the work. Whether creative art comes as visual, graphic, musical, storytelling or performative arts, the underlying character is that the virtues of skill and inspiration must characterise such a project.

From the preceding, a plausible distinction can be made between what can be called created arts and co-creative arts. Created art means those works of art that have achieved a particular form of finality such that they are already available for the senses to consume. Such arts include paintings, sculptures, drawings, paintings, etc. Co-creative art means those works of art that would spur and lead to more creativity in the sense that their consumption can lead to a reformulation of the same in a different way. Examples of these include literary works, theories, and intellectual formulations.

In light of the preceding, it can be claimed that philosophy and creative arts share some common boundaries that can be exploited to advance their course. This smacks the fact that philosophy demands the application of the creative imagination of the thinker in the same way creative art appeals to such virtues and principles as beauty, which is a valued aspect of philosophical reasoning. Indeed, this demand of philosophy can best be captured through the views of Friedrich Nietzsche when he claimed that a philosopher is “a man who never ceases to experience, see, hear, suspect, hope and dream extra-ordinary things” (quoted in Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 10). Nietzsche’s view, which arguably reflects the imaginative and creative dimension of philosophy and its broader conception, is that philosophy justifies itself by and through the extra-vision of items, ideas, values, and entities. Creative artists would likely aim at something new or extra-ordinary, which is why originality is at the heart of the creative arts. This is a meeting ground of philosophy and creative arts.

B1. Can wisdom be loved beyond pen and paper?

The first question I shall seek to address in relation to finding a synergy between creative arts and African philosophy is whether the love of wisdom professed by philosophy can go beyond pen and paper. This question is quite imperative as creative art hugely involves a way of communicating knowledge and wisdom that goes beyond pen and paper. I also seek to address this question because one of the major charges levelled against African philosophy at its earliest inception was that traditional African society had no writing culture, and since there cannot be said to be philosophers where there is no writing culture or philosophy, it is implausible to claim that there is African philosophy. But this charge has since been debunked by Omeregbe (‘African philosophy: Yesterday and today’). An interesting aspect is whether the charge itself is proper, especially if it is discovered that there are aspects of philosophy that go beyond written words and documents. Zen Buddhism, an aspect of Indian philosophy, claims that certain insights into reality may indeed defy words and expression. If this is the case, how may one locate this? What if it is discovered that there may indeed be such aspects of wisdom that may defy pen and paper? How may one express these without recourse to such modes of knowledge such as creative arts?

To address the above questions, I abstract from the nature of concepts through which philosophical knowledge is expressed. Human understanding is a hugely conceptual project where ideas and things are named and organised through a form of meaning. But concepts do not just emerge. Concepts are built, made or founded on other concepts. Consider the concept of the radio – an organised technological invention that produces sounds, words, music, etc., through waves. Let us imagine a society where this technology is new. It would seem that the people in this locality would have a way of describing and locating this technology through which it conveys meaning to them and through which they can relate to the concept. In such a community, as in some traditional African societies, radio simply translates to ‘iron that talks’. This is the case in the traditional Igbo Nigerian community. Hence the expression “igwe na-ekwu okwu”.

But this concept only captures the sound production aspect of radio. It does not reflect the waves that produce the sound and the other forms of technology applied in the design. Thus,

the community that applies this may not know anything about the many processes that come together in the making of radio technology. But the community may have the concept of sound and speech, which are the essential output of radio technology. They may assign the aspect of waves to spirits wishing or hoping to find a synergy between the spiritual and physical in the radio mechanism. For the technology that invented the radio, the concept of 'iron that talks' may not make any sense. There is nowhere in the world that an iron talks. The concept of an iron that talks is totally different from the meaning of the radio, which is the process of transmitting sound through waves and the device associated with it. But this is not the case with the new radio community.

The instance with technology can also apply in other forms of life where each language may have to fabricate the form and ways of naming an item, an idea or an object in order to come to terms with it. Consider the illustration of a community where someone may call his brother's wife my wife. This expression could literally mean that the woman is married to two people. But this is not the case. The woman is just a wife of one person, but there is a conceptual given where this notion of wife has been absorbed, which warrants that the concept of wife be extended to another relation. Such would basically be a communal world where community undergirds and/or defines every form of interaction. This understanding may not fit into the conceptual scheme of a community of a people who do not have this understanding of human beings.

There are concepts which might defy such as formulation as claimed above. Consider the concept of eternity, infinity, limitlessness, etc., or even the concept of bisexuality that is taking root in the Western thought scheme. It would seem that concepts such as these might be better expressed in a manner that leaves the mind continually engaged to understand it. At the individual level, there may also be occurrences that may defy words and may qualify for what the Northern Igbo dialect of Nigeria may call 'Onum' – what cannot be understood. At this level, creativity comes in to supply these and provides the starting point to make meaning out of these experiences. It is here that creative art therefore comes in.

Creative art provides an understanding of what cannot be named or may be named poorly. Creative arts, such as drawings, paintings, collages, etc., produce such forms of thinking. These can help to express thoughts that might not otherwise be expressed. The implication of this is that as knowledge and wisdom advance their course through pen and paper, it may well be that other dimensions are not captured by and through this process. This is where creative art comes to play a vital role. Thus, on its own, it seems that creative art might qualify as a form of philosophy or philosophical knowledge seeking to supply what is missing in pen and paper designed for wisdom, which is what written philosophy stands for.

The next question to address in the effort to provide the ground for a synergy between philosophy and art and how to apply them to illustrate how and why this should add to the tradition of African philosophy is: How philosophical can creative arts be? I address this question in the next part of the work.

B2. How philosophical can or should creative arts be?

To address the question of the philosophical nature of creative art, I intend to consider the aspiration of creative arts to see how philosophical it is or how or whether it demands philosophy to achieve its objective. In this sense, the concern is whether the objective of creative arts implies that it should apply philosophical wisdom – broadly defined as that manner of thinking that expresses a desire for wisdom or seeks to intuit or inform the mind with the desire for wisdom – to achieve its mission. I will apply what has been called the intuition that drives the artist to address this concern. That is, whether the motivation that drives the artist has philosophical roots.

Creative art brings together the expression of emotion, feeling and reason, all tied and united together in one object such that it (creative art) has a unique power for the being of the human.

In this sense, creative arts serve as the visible expression of the human faculties and the measure of self-appreciation of the inner tendencies that provide the force and justification for existence. It provides a medium where and how the spiritual and inner longings of the human being find their expression and where the will-to-be and what-it-is-to-be are made visible. To create is to bring about life – to wish for life. So, creativity is an expression of life.

Be that as it may, at least two outstanding functions of creative arts bring out its philosophical potential. First, creative arts can serve the course of truth, which is the goal of philosophical wisdom. The second is that creative arts can lead to a disinterested outlook on life from where the quality of universality can emerge. By this, I mean that the overall desire for universalism can best be achieved through creative arts because it is a medium that subdues personal or sectional interest in favour of universal appeal. It does not mean that all creative arts function this way.

Spanish philosopher Jose Gasset (60) claimed that *aletheia* is philosophy's original name. Philosophy, he claimed, attempts "to place us in contact with the naked reality itself". But truth as a concept has been problematic because it is unclear how to measure it. However, creative art is a medium which can lead to truth or at least to facts that can lead to truth. Creative art does this by allowing the artist to function directly from their feeling (unmediated by other competing needs), which assists in revealing the truth in the best sense. Creative art also illustrates the worldview of a people and, by so doing, functions as a practical philosophy of a worldview. Creative arts is a physical illustration of the considered opinion of art because creative arts is often a meditated expression of the mind.

While all humans encounter the world with an inner disposition to fundamental principles that enable life, knowledge, feeling, reason, courage, etc., it is the immediate world of the individual – what Martin Heidegger called the facticity of *Dasein* – that enables the manifestation of these virtues and principles. Creative arts bring out the truth that can be achieved through the immediate world of the individual. A possible illustration of this is the art of humour and the art of masquerade. It is very likely that the worldview of a people can be read through what is considered humorous for them and what is not, just as a masquerade can reveal the worldview of a people. For example, there is an art of humour called *njakiri* among the Igbos of Nigeria. This humour ethics approves the use of contemptuous harsh words on an individual – based on the individual's approval anyway – intending to promote the virtue of courage. A deep reading of this art will locate how courage and self-will assume a strong virtue in Igbo life, perhaps more than other virtues. Consider again the art of masks and masquerades. Masks and masquerades often reflect the fundamental beliefs of a people, such as their sense of the spiritual or the core values of their world. A further illustration from the Igbo tradition of Nigeria shows that the *Ijele* masquerade, usually as tall and massive as a building, is often held to be the highest, biggest, and most revered masquerade. While many reasons for the birth of the *Ijele* masquerade may not be clear, it can be upheld that it illustrates the sense of greatness of the Igbo.

The second sense in which creative arts should be desired to be philosophical is that it carries or is at least supposed to carry a disinterested outlook in its mode and manner of expressing truth. With this quality, it can do minimal damage in pursuing and expressing truth. What is implied here is that a work of art should appeal to the best expression of the human mind for which it will serve as a rational ideal and which the intellect will aspire to reach the truth expressed or implied. The view expressed here is that it is by fulfilling this function that a work of creative arts is and becomes genuinely philosophical.

Consider music and dance. It is most likely that they would motivate a wide appreciation across cultures irrespective of several other aspects of the same culture, which may be held to be unacceptable. For instance, one would not need to be an American to appreciate the music and dance style of Michael Jackson, even as one may differ or disagree with some other aspects of American culture.

Indeed, in its original conception, philosophy is supposed to appeal to some mental leisure. The search for wisdom, because it is desired to have practical consequences implicitly or explicitly, is assumed to provide an intellectual bond between emotion and reason. But philosophy has severely ignored this aspect, thereby defending the course of knowledge rather than the course of wisdom. Creative arts have what it takes to bridge this gap.

B3. How creative can or should African philosophy be?

The above discussion introduces us to the next question, which demands articulating how philosophical works should apply the benefit of creative expression and potential from the African worldview. By this, it means how philosophical works can respond to or use the potential of what it means to be creative within the African context to advance its course. To address this question, I will proceed by making an important distinction between what can be called philosophy in Africa and African philosophy.

Philosophy in Africa is the presence of philosophy as an academic endeavour in Africa. It is usually applied in an academic sense to express the formal recognition of philosophy as a department of intellectual enquiry in African universities. Within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa (perhaps with the exclusion of South Africa), this recognition is said to have first been at the University of Nigeria in 1961, Makerere University in Uganda, which was founded in 1922 but first started teaching philosophy in 1967, and the University of Ibadan in 1972. In this context, philosophy is seen purely and entirely in the context of the extension of philosophical programmes of instruction from the Western academy to Africa and as a reflection of the methods of instruction and the goals of discussion implied and applied therein to Africa. This does not mean that philosophy did not exist in Africa if one should appeal to the idea of philosophy as a worldview. Indeed, in its immanent form, that is, a desire to attain some level of meaning in life and a level of understanding about the universe, in the broad sense of the term at which human beings will usually appeal to reason to follow or reject a course of action, philosophy had always existed in Africa. But formal philosophising demands further qualities; hence, there is a technical sense of the word that defines the activities of philosophers. It is this technical quality that was absent in Africa, at least in its formalised manner, and it is its introduction to Africa, at least in an academic sense, that is implied when we talk of philosophy *in* Africa.

On the other hand, there is the emergence of African philosophy in Africa. African philosophy means the African practice of philosophy and the desire to create and achieve a tradition of formal enquiry of philosophy through this inheritance. What is meant here is the effort by African philosophers to apply the African situation (broadly conceived) to demonstrate the best terms through which it can be held that a professional love of wisdom can also be obtained in Africa. Here, we discuss applying philosophy's technical demands to Africans' worldviews. Broadly conceived, African philosophy amounts to the effort to account for how thinking in the African world has demonstrated a specific measure that illustrates that wisdom has been valued and applied in the search for how best to interpret life in general and how it should be lived in addressing distinct human concerns. It is the effort to demonstrate that the virtue of wisdom, however it is held to be, has a space in the intellectual culture and traditions of modern Africa.

African philosophy is thus an academic discipline that arose as a reaction to the general contempt for African culture and reason. It attempts to demonstrate that Africans have a philosophical foundation for their beliefs and assumptions. It is equally an effort to document and demonstrate the underlying foundations of these assumptions. Its contemporary origin is usually associated with the publication of an important work entitled *Bantu Philosophy* in 1956 by Placide Tempels, a Belgian priest. This treatise was an attempt to interpret the worldview of the Baluba people of Congo. It was published as a philosophical justification of the difference between the worldview of the Baluba people of Congo and those of the Western world and an

effort to account for this difference within the realm of philosophy. Tempels' work opposed the ideals of the colonial administrative policy in Congo, which portrayed Africans as "an empty vessel, requiring education in the spheres of religion and civilization in order to be rendered truly human" (Deacon 103). This resulted in "his banishment from Congo by the Colonial administration and the Catholic Church because of this work, due to their notion of Tempels as posing a threat to their policies and practices" (110). The intellectual offence Tempels committed, or so it was held, was that if the African was recognised as having a "philosophy", the African could, by implication, be said to have civilisation. This notion presented a threat to the superiority of the Europeans, as justified by enlightenment philosophy, as well as to the economics of the colonial mission (110).

This controversial beginning captures what is called *African philosophy* today and which functions variously as an effort to interpret the African world and illustrate the wisdom behind the African thought scheme and how the wider worlds stand to function better by appropriating the wisdom from the African experience. But African philosophy has developed to transcend these reactionary origins and the divide implied. Indeed, part of the argument that can be advanced to critique this origin is whether it was necessary to respond to colonialism in the first and/or to think (of) Africa on its own terms. Should wise people react to anyone who does not understand them, does not ask questions or considers the actions or ideas of the wise as being foolish? On what intellectual authority was colonialism anchored upon to have merited the attention given to it by African philosophers?

After the effort to broadly capture the different schools of thought in African philosophy, let me next locate how creative philosophy can be in Africa by discussing how creative arts can enhance African philosophy. I shall discuss this in relation to major schools of thought in African philosophy. I do this with the belief that African philosophy is the most authentic manifestation of philosophical wisdom in the African world. This is because it advertises a formal adoption of the demands of formal philosophising as a desirable art in Africa. Here, I submit that the idea of African philosophy carries within it that touch of relevance that shows that Africans now appreciate the professional demand for wisdom. I argue that it could have been ridiculous to imagine someone from an African village who would, like Socrates, wake up early in the morning and move from one village to the other in search of the meaning of life in traditional African society. Such a person who would have thought themselves to be wise would, at best, have been considered foolish to carry such a trade. But at present, almost in the tradition of Socrates and with professionalism, people devote their lifetime searching for wisdom as an art and seeking to live just by practising this art.

To address the issue of expanding the relevance of African philosophy through creativity, let me further state that I shall do this in relation to three schools of thought in African philosophy – the ethno-philosophical school, the nationalist ideological school, and the school of professional philosophers. I am applying these three schools of thought because I believe that their concern captures and reflects the focus of all other schools. Let me also state that my interest and the illustrations I will give will be from literary creative arts.

Regarding ethno-philosophy, creativity can be applied in fashioning stories that illustrate African beliefs and through which the philosopher can sift the beliefs and values of African worldviews. Ethno-philosophy holds that African philosophy should consist in engaging the ethno-cultural worldviews of Africans. This could be done through stories. These stories could include fictional creations and myths. Romanus Egudu produced such a work when he documented several myths from the Igbo people in his work, *The Calabash of Wisdom*. In the same vein, Marcel Griaule, an anthropologist, has taken an appreciable step in this direction through his work, *Conversations with Ogotemméli*, which is essentially an account of the mythology of the Dogon people of Mali. African philosophy can advance these myths and legendary tales by

demonstrating how and in what manner their didactic message and meaning demand and deserve a place in modern African society. By so doing, it would not just be a matter of seeking to unearth the hidden assumptions of the African worldview but doing so in a manner that applies the structures of African modernity to relive these myths and make them more desirable and significant.

Similarly, the nationalist ideological philosophy can profit from the demands of creative art by illustrating the import of its message through art. By doing this, this school of thought can translate the demands and desires of this ideological orientation in a more appreciable way to a larger audience. Nationalist ideological philosophy holds that African philosophy should be founded on the ideologies of African nationalists and political leaders. This can be done through creative arts. Several works of creative arts can be described as political or imbued with political potentialities, as can be read through many works, such as Peter Bürger (*Theory of the avant-garde*). The point is that while politics in arts could be minimal in the sense that the goal of arts is usually to appeal to human emotion and plausibly win a broad audience, there is still a desirable synergy between both. Given the concern of the nationalist ideological school of thought, which is that of fashioning out a blueprint for the governance of the African states, there is the need to explore the role of arts in achieving the goals of this school of thought through creative arts by locating the very ideals and messages expounded by this school. By so doing, arts apply politics for moral and social engineering and imbue politics with a more reflective ideal in the absence of which politics severally becomes war without bloodshed (or even sometimes with bloodshed). The benefit of applying creative arts to advance this school of thought is that it moderates the tension that is often fuelled by raw politicking because it conveys the message demanded through which creative arts can produce an impact on the human mind and, by implication, on the human person.

Concerning professional philosophy, creativity can be applied to advance this school of African Philosophy by documenting philosophical ideas through stories, novels, dramas, and poetry. Here, African philosophers can borrow from philosophical practices in other cultures. For example, in the history of Western philosophy, several philosophers documented their positions through creative works. There was Socrates, whose ideas were written in the form of a literary dialogue through his pupil Plato. Friedrich Nietzsche projected the idea of the superman around whom he advanced his theory of an ideal human being in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Some of David Hume's works – *Dialogues concerning natural religion and natural history of religion* and *Dialogue concerning natural religion* – are dialogues. Others included Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote plays to convey his philosophy and Albert Camus, whose ideas were documented through novels. These philosophers aligned creativity to their project of philosophising and, for this reason, deserve to be emulated in the African instance. Thus, there is the need to adopt and apply these formulas to draw attention to philosophical ideas of the African world, and this will not only popularise philosophy but will equally make it a more valuable means of improving and enhancing the quality of the African mind. As a matter of fact, storytelling is a significant avenue for transmitting wisdom in traditional African society. So, reliving this art more through African professional philosophy appears necessary.

African philosophy must therefore interpret its mission beyond the purely esoteric level at which philosophical discourse was inherited in Africa to seek popular relevance through the arts. Apart from attending to the theoretical concern of philosophy and documenting ideas through scientific theories as demanded by scientific journals, there is also the other demand of what Ugwuanyi (*The poverty of jealousy*) has called "taking philosophy to the street" by way of valorising the African public with wisdom ideals to improve the wisdom content of the society. This could come through paintings, drawings, sculptures, carvings, etc.

B4. How philosophically African can creative arts be?

Finally, I engage the subject of African Philosophy and the creative arts with reference to how philosophically African creative arts should be. By this, I mean the extent to which it is desirable to draw inspiration from philosophical concerns and intuitions in an African way, that is, as harboured by Africans, to advance the culture of creative arts. Here, I mean the concept of wisdom as it is implied in the African worldview and what it would mean to be in love with wisdom within and through the demands of the African world and apply this to advance the creative arts. I map out and elaborate views that illustrate how creative arts could explore the provisions of the African worldview to create works of art that will advance the idea of wisdom and what it means to be a lover of wisdom in an African context. I further explore how it can enhance the desired relevance for the African world.

Before I address this desire, it is essential to note that this is not the first work to engage African philosophy in relation to creative arts. Several scholars preceded me in this endeavour. Although they did not claim to be philosophers in this effort, their views are considerably philosophical. Philip Meek (555) provides a solid view that can summarise the attempt to engage African philosophy with regard to creative arts when he writes:

At some risk, it may be said that African peoples articulate their philosophies through dance and masquerade performance, in sacred sculpture and speech, and on textiles and ceramics. The “invisible” ontologies and truths become “visible,” not through print but through the visual arts and dance; they are given voice through sacred musical instruments and the esoteric speech of masks. The study of African arts has progressed far beyond earlier studies in which all carvings were only “fetishes” with “magical” power. In fact, most scholarship on African arts is primarily concerned with the complex systems of thought that underlie and are revealed by the arts of African peoples.

Meek’s view is instructive to the effort to capture how philosophically African creative arts should be because it gives valid insight into how philosophically African creative arts have been. For instance, in the Igbo community of Nigeria, it was common to raise moral concerns and issues through the night masquerades (Ohaeto), just as it is common today to apply music to engage social norms, values or vices. But arts also have a deep metaphysical dimension. For instance, Achebe (436) suggests that “the purpose of art is to channel a spiritual force into an aesthetically satisfying physical form that captures the presumed attributes of that force”. In engaging African creative arts through the Igbo world, Achebe suggests that the Igbo world is essentially one of “restless dynamism and its an outward, social and kinetic quality” (435). Similarly, applying *Ikenga* as an illustration of Igbo art, Nzegwu (423) suggests that “*Ikenga* shows that human individuals are endowed with divine creative powers”.

What one can learn from these views about arts is that arts in the African thought scheme have a deep spiritual meaning and implication and that considering the view that philosophy is about locating how meaning is constituted and thereby creating and clarifying meaning, it could be said that arts is central to the effort to understand African philosophy at least in its traditional form or at least that African arts should aspire to have a philosophical character. As philosophy suffers the travails of modernity and post-modernity that seek to completely dislocate knowledge from its mental source to a technological source, it seems that African creative arts can deploy its tool to ensure that African philosophy improves through the quality ascribed to creative arts.

In addition to achieving the function outlined above – that is, applying its potential to animate and enhance philosophical wisdom – creative arts demand other functions. Creative arts must advance the transitional aspect of wisdom in Africa. This demand addressed to creative art implies the need to support the advancement of fresh thinking that addresses the African condition. This wisdom ethics deserves to be appreciated because, without this, the goal and

measure of philosophy as an enterprise devoted to the promotion of wisdom will suffer some crisis of worth and value. The claim here is that what it means to be a wise person in an African cultural context in the last hundred years may not be what it means to be a wise person in current Africa and that the values and ideals that should determine this ought to be known. Thus, the nature, culture and structure of what wisdom means suggest that creative arts, if they aim at being philosophical or exploiting the benefits of philosophical wisdom in Africa, must understand the context in which they operate and carry out their project with this in vision. For instance, creative arts must realise that African countries inhabit different cultures, and for this reason, a philosophically grounded work of art must seek how best to produce a work that will appeal to the different cultures in Zimbabwe, Ghana, or wherein all the cultures will find themselves adequately represented or respected. The implication is that works of art must go beyond advancing the concerns of a limited audience or perspective to address the concerns of larger groups.

Another option to achieve philosophical orientation for creative arts in Africa is to create works of art that carry the total weight of the African experience, which can amount to a social voice that embodies history, reason, and continuity in the African context. Such works can demonstrate how wisdom has continuity within the African world – that is, modernising and advancing creative arts in Africa to match the demands of African modernity. By this, I mean how, through creative arts, it could be seen that Africans are faithful to wisdom inheritance in Africa by transmuting the ancient/traditional/endogenous wisdom of Africa into the modern/contemporary/global demands of the term, at least in such manner that shows an advancement of wisdom ethics within the African world.

There is another desirable option through which creative works can profit from the African experience. This is that of applying creativity in Africa to advance the idea of aesthetics within its demand in the African world. Here, I mean the ability to construct and reconstruct the ethics of beauty within the demands of the African world. The demand here is to demonstrate how it can be held that what is within the African world is enough to produce what should be held to be beautiful within the intellectual and productive resources of this world. Here, philosophy within the African context would wish to know how valid it is to hold that beauty can be imported, such as when the resources and machines that define a form of beauty are not founded within the immediate world of the people. African philosophy would wish to interrogate the wisdom that represents this idea of beauty and the psychology of this theory of beauty in relation to the spiritual security demanded by the human person. These demands fall collectively within the nature and challenges of the African social world. Some of these challenges include (i) the challenge of social reconstruction, that is, of raising a society with a robust social will and a desirable image of the social self; (ii) the challenge of identity and dignity, that is, that of articulating the distinctive desirable mark of Africanness and the grounds on which the mark recommends that it should live to be the best of which it can and should be; (iii) the challenge of African aesthetics, that is, to illustrate that what is held to be beautiful is rationally justifiably so, and not as held by a concept of beauty rooted outside the African worldview or at least as advanced from this worldview.

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been to provide views and positions through which it can be held that philosophy and creative arts have plausible grounds for synergy in Africa. This is with the view to advancing the project of African philosophy through this study. This is urgent since African philosophy has sought more of its relevance through an appeal to a considerably objectivist cum scientific option than the creative option. In this way, the faculty of reason has been more invoked in the effort to build an African philosophical tradition than the faculty of

imagination. Hopefully, this effort will lead to fresh and more comprehensive thoughts in this direction. This work desires that more pieces that appeal more to the method of creative arts would emerge from African philosophy through some inspirations that may be gained through this effort.

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Notes

- ¹ This includes Cole (*Mbari, art and life among the Owerri Igbo; Icons*), Douglas (*African art as philosophy*), Glaze (*Art and death in a Senufo village*), Nooter (*Secrecy*), Thompson (*African art in motion; Flash of the spirit*), Thompson, Robert Farris, and Joseph Cornet (*The four moments of the sun*), Vogel (*Aesthetics of African art*), Diop ('African art: debates and controversies around a concept'), and Nzegwu ('Art and community').

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