

# Introducing Intercultural Philosophy

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## Abstract

*This essay attempts to introduce intercultural philosophy not as a new branch of philosophy but as a new approach to philosophy necessitated by the real situation of the world and the relations between various philosophies and cultures. Cultures, despite their geographic locations, have a lot in common. In their developments most cultures reciprocally influence each other. No culture is the pure culture of a given nation or region. Assuming that the idea of one's own culture to be fictitious and understanding philosophy as embedded in specific cultures whose specificity, however, is relative, it attempts to show the advantage of doing philosophy interculturally.*

*Through a critique of Eurocentrism, it pleads for a dialogue between philosophies and cultures. The dialogue could enable philosophies and cultures to learn a lot from each other, thereby enabling them to broaden their horizon. The lessons that they learn from each other is important in tackling the common problems encountered by humankind.*

*Key words: Intercultural philosophy, dialogue, polylogue, Eurocentrism, ethno philosophy, globalisation.*

## What is Intercultural Philosophy?

It is well known to those who have some acquaintance with philosophy that philosophers hardly agree on a definition of philosophy. Every philosopher would probably consider philosophy to be the highest and most profound product of human intellect. But despite that, no two important philosophers would agree just on one meaning of philosophy. The reasons for this are many. Every philosopher would have his/her own specific approach to philosophy. Socio-historical and economic factors in which a philosophical ideas emerge are important. Particular, personal preferences and class interests and choices of the individual do play an important role in one's understanding of philosophy. Since that understanding in its turn determines the task that is going to be given to philosophy, this would only underscore why different philosophers disagree on the meaning of philosophy. While the list of the reasons as to why philosophers may not agree on one meaning of philosophy could still continue, I think it is important, to mention that

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individual philosophers just like their philosophies are to a considerable degree products of their own culture. For instance Plato's, or Kant's, or Marx's philosophy cannot be thought of outside of the socio-cultural set-up in which they came into being. This is particularly true when we take culture in the broad sense of meaning virtually as everything that mankind has brought into existence as opposed to things that exist by nature. In fact as Wimmer remarks, "Every proposition of philosophy which is intended or proposed to be universally valid possibly is culturally bound; culturally particular propositions, however, are not sufficient in philosophy according to their propositions." (Wimmer 2002: 12-13) So it is right to argue that philosophy, while striving for universal validity, is also embedded in a specific culture. Philosophy moreover derives its ways of expression from the culture in which it is embedded. Its ways and methods of raising questions and attempting to answer them have their roots in the cultures in which they evolve and develop. It is clear that cultures are not natural. Cultures are determined by the specific situations in which they come into being. These situations considered from the point of human kind are different. We could therefore say that it is also due to the fact that philosophies come into being in different cultures or better still they bear the stamps of different cultures that their philosophies are also different.

I would only like here to bring to the attention of my reader that different philosophers understand philosophy variously. I do not plan to list these various understandings. Since I began by asking what intercultural philosophy is, I don't want to make the list longer by adding another definition. It is known that philosophy has many branches. In philosophy we talk of, for instance, ontology, epistemology, ethics or we can enumerate the various fields of philosophy such as philosophy of religion, law, science, etc. Intercultural philosophy is not one such thing.

In the first place, intercultural philosophy is a new approach to philosophy that makes its point of departure the critique of the way philosophy was understood and undertaken up to now. For various reasons – and the etymological definition is one of them – there have been attempts that consider philosophy the exclusive possession of the West European tradition. Intercultural philosophy is therefore the attempt to counter the Eurocentric understanding that philosophy sprang from one source like a river and flows in one direction until it culminated with the “absolute” idea of Hegel. Eurocentrism refers to the philosophical and cultural attitude that

Europe alone is the centre of philosophy, culture, history and the like. It considers Europe to be the centre and source of genuine philosophy and culture and that they should expand to other areas since European culture alone is the authentic human culture and European philosophy the only universal philosophy. Various characters are attached to this way of understanding philosophy, the main ones being that it is male, white and Christian. I would here like to refer to R. A. Mall where he says,

Intercultural philosophy is first and foremost the name of a philosophical attitude, a philosophical conviction that no one philosophy is the philosophy for the whole of the human kind. ... Intercultural philosophy is, in other words, the name of a new orientation in and of philosophy, and it accompanies all of the different concrete philosophical traditions and forbids them to put themselves in an absolute monolithic position. (Mall 2000: xii)

Thus intercultural philosophy is a new attitude to philosophy that would like to bring in a radically new understanding different from how philosophy has been understood and practised so far. We know expressions like Western or European philosophy and how this philosophy has taken itself to be the only philosophy that human kind deserves to know and also can be philosophy properly so called. Much of the teaching and research in philosophy in the Western world concentrates more or less on the Western philosophy with the simplistic assumption that there are no other philosophies. This approach has made the teaching of philosophy in other parts of the world also a mirror image of what it is in the West. It creates philosophy departments and philosophical thinking in its own image (be it in Africa, Latin America or else where) although this has started to change some how very slowly and reluctantly.

In a report prepared for UNESCO in 1984 A. J. Smet wrote,

Most if not all of the twenty-eight universities to be found in black Africa today were created after those countries gained their independence. Their programs are largely based on those to be found in Europe depending on the dominant ideology of each country. They rarely include a course in African philosophy. (Smet 1984: 87)

Indeed in a book published some years after Smet's book, Kimmerle says more or less the same thing with reference to the philosophy curriculum in Senegal. Kimmerle said, "The organization of the philosophy courses in Senegal corresponds largely with the one that is usually taught in France. This has its historical roots in colonialism." (Kimmerle 1991: 23 My translation from German)

The focus of this new attitude in philosophy revolves around a few points. If we look at what is presented as the history of culture and philosophy in universities and other academic, it is predominantly Eurocentric. This Eurocentric approach has narrowed down the scope and task of philosophy, thereby hindering dialogue between various cultures and philosophies. It would be a task of intercultural philosophy to broaden this horizon through a critique of Eurocentrism to arrive at a situation where different cultures and philosophies enter into a dialogue. The importance of such a dialogue can be understood particularly at this juncture in human history when the tendency in the world is globalization.

What becomes clear from the foregoing is that it is a philosophy that sprang from a specific culture, in a particular geographic region, etc. that elevated itself to the universal. Greek or European philosophy is a particular philosophy that is based on a given form of life, addresses specific problems of that region and so on. It is this particular phenomenon that assumed the form of the universal and relegated other philosophies to being only particular that deserve to be swallowed by the universal. So philosophies that claimed to be universal are actually dependent on particular cultures and are themselves particular. One of the tasks of intercultural philosophy is overcoming this phenomenon. The purpose of this is to create a situation whereby various cultures will approach each other with the sense of equality and having to contribute something to human culture and development. This is a result of the fact that, intercultural philosophy is open, tolerant and pluralistic in its approach. This approach enables the recognition that true and universal philosophy is the possession of no one particular race or culture. It is the point that it is not prejudiced towards any one of the philosophical traditions or does not give a privileged position to some philosophies that gives it such a role. It does not say, like Husserl for example, that true philosophy is European philosophy. On the other hand it is easy to see the contradiction involved in the expression that says that

universal philosophy is European philosophy. For me this is just the elevation of the particular to the universal.

Hence instead of being a new philosophy along the ones that we know so far, intercultural philosophy attempts and intends to be a new dimension that has the goal of liberating philosophy from its centuries-old stereotypes. The stereotypes found with philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Husserl and many others, that true philosophy is only the European one has to be overcome if philosophy has to have any significance and relevance outside of the lecture halls of philosophy. It is therefore a laboratory attitude whose goals can be considered to be twofold.

Western philosophy considers itself to be the only true philosophy. Through this it imposed a limitation upon its own self. This limitation has been the one-sidedness of Western philosophy that hindered it from understanding other philosophies, cultures, systems of thought and the like. In considering it self to be the only true philosophy that has been able to evolve universal understanding, universal categories and values, Western philosophy took upon itself an impossible task that it is never able to meet. The idea of understanding that it has been promoting is one-sided. Understanding others cannot be conceived irrespective of being understood by others. As R. A. Mall says, to understand and to be understood constitute the two sides of the same hermeneutic coin. To make themselves understood and present their philosophy and culture as universal Westerners of different kinds, missionaries, philosophers, anthropologists, etc. undertook a lot of things including learning the languages of the people whom they tried to convert, or "civilize", and so on. But without recognizing the other this effort was only in vain. Why should I waste my time and energy to understand somebody that does not in the last analysis recognize me as his/her equal? If he/she comes only to give and I to take, I would be reluctant to enter into any kind of binding relation with such a person.

It is of course a deception when one refuses to recognize others and considers only oneself to be the only authentic being. This being can manifest itself in whatever form, but it is difficult to accept when a culture or a philosophy says I am the only authentic philosophy. One of the liberatory tasks that intercultural philosophy tries to undertake is to enable Western philosophy to realize that there are other philosophies, systems of thought and cultures. By enabling Western philosophy to go beyond the

self-imposed boundaries it is the task of intercultural philosophy to bring it in tune with the thoughts of humanity in its totality or universality.

Just as it would enable Western philosophy to go beyond the self-imposed barriers, it would also enable the philosophies, which are outside of the west European traditions to have their say in a common and globalized world. Philosophies from other parts of the world are relegated to a second-class and are given names such as systems of thought. The non-European cultures, particularly the African ones are designated as "primitive." As a result it is declared that no genuine philosophy could emerge from these cultures. By assuming that a culture is as important as another culture, intercultural philosophy enables the cultures that have been rejected hitherto to come into the concert of the cultures of human kind.

There are good reasons to do this. The one important point in this regard must be the understanding of culture. Culture as we know is very broad and embraces virtually all of what human kind has produced in the attempt to survive. The attempt to realize a certain form of life in a given space and time can be considered to be culture. Such an understanding avoids a hierarchy of cultures. It is also important to note that cultures themselves are not closed and self-sufficient entities. Human interaction in various forms has been taking place for a rather long part of the history of human kind. That would avoid the idea of one's own pure culture. The idea of "my own pure culture" has been described by Mall as fictitious. Cultures are neither hierarchical since they are equal nor pure since they have evolved through a continuous interaction. In fact Kimmerle claims that,

... all the cultures that exist today are of the same age because they have been in existence from the beginning of mankind up to now. Being of the same age they have also done their tasks as cultures and they should therefore be considered as equal. One culture can take something from other cultures. (Kimmerle 2002: 44 My translation from German).

The second liberatory aspect of intercultural philosophy hence lies in the attitude towards cultures that are outside of the West European cultures. Cultures that are outside of the West European tradition should be taken as equal with other cultures and have been doing the tasks that are expected of any culture. This would enable the cultures to remove the false idea that

they have about themselves and understand themselves for what they really are. Removing the false idea that one has about oneself would be liberating her/him from the false idea that one entertained.

The intercultural approach must be an attitude that must be adapted by all philosophies or philosophers. The implications of the liberatory aspects of intercultural philosophy are not only for philosophical theory but also for other practical areas and issues. The assertion that cultures are not hierarchical is important from the point of view of particularly the cultures that are made into the peripheries. It is also important in terms of looking for solutions of the problems that humankind faces at present. This would simply call for a kind of an approach that is humane in looking for solutions to human problems. Its contribution in rendering possible a life, which is worthy of human beings, can only be underlined. By underscoring that philosophical truth is the possession of no one culture or race or individual alone, the liberatory mission of an intercultural philosophy would play a role of protecting every philosophy from ending up in the types of absolutisms that we know from the likes of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Husserl and many others. As Mall writes the practical implications of interculturality not only for philosophy but also for religion, politics and others is significant.

He writes,

Interculturality has a four-fold perspective: philosophical, theological, political and pedagogical. ... interculturality under philosophical optics means that the one *philosophia perennis* is no one's possession alone. ... There is, therefore, more than one place from which philosophy originated. It is a prejudice to think that philosophy has a preference for a special language, tradition or culture. From the theological perspective interculturality is interreligiosity – based on the firm conviction that the one *religio perennis* is also no one's possession ... under political optics, interculturality is another name for a pluralistic democratic attitude with the conviction that political wisdom does not belong only to one group, party or ideology. All philosophies of history with absolutistic claim of possessing the only true, real message are politically fundamentalistic and practically dangerous. The pedagogical perspective is the most important one, for it prepares the way for the practical implementation of the inner culture of interculturality. (Mall 2000: 6)

Intercultural philosophy viewed from the standpoints of different philosophies and cultures aims at understanding and being understood. A departure must be taken from the “usual” Western ways of understanding.

The attempt to understand, as P. Tempels did with the Baluba people of the Congo, requires, on the one hand, understanding the culture, language, behaviour, mentality, etc. of the people. The missionary therefore tries to understand all aspects of the lives of the people to be “civilized”. This alone is not enough, however. Thus, the missionary also tries to teach his language to the would-be “civilized”. The purpose of this is to hear in his own very language what they think. Since the ultimate purpose is “civilizing,” understanding in this context is only one directional while it ought to be at least two-directional. It wants to understand but cannot be understood. Because they have nothing worthwhile to offer, the local Baluba people for example have to abandon what they have and accept the “superior” or “universal” thought of the missionary. Understanding here serves no purpose of getting closer to each other and understand the respective contribution of every one but that the others reject what they have and accept what is deemed universal. It is this type of approach that intercultural philosophy wants to avoid. Hence methodologically intercultural philosophy has to unravel itself through dialogues.<sup>2</sup>

Dialogue would give the opportunity for philosophies from different cultures to come with whatever they have and enhance the process of mutual understanding. To that effect it can be argued that it provides every philosophy with a better opportunity to realize its potentials.

It is the requirement of a dialogue that those who enter into the dialogue must see themselves just as partners in the dialogue. That means that first of all they are equal partners. Hierarchical and paternalistic approaches among the partners to the dialogue guarantee failure just before the whole project takes off the ground. Intercultural dialogue thus guarantees the equality of the partners to the dialogue, and the openness of the outcome of the dialogue. Hence the ways of understanding are not

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<sup>2</sup> There are not many philosophers involved in intercultural philosophy. Kimmerle, Mall and few others talk of dialogue while Wimmer uses the term polylogue. Wimmer prefers polylogue because this enables discussion between philosophies from different cultures. Dialogue can also serve the same purpose, but dialogue assumes a discussion between two views or persons, etc. Since in actual fact those who come to the discussion are obviously more than two, polylogue expresses the method more accurately. “*Polylog*” *Zeitschrift fuer interkulturelles philosophieren* is established by Wimmer to serve the purpose of doing philosophy interculturally.

limited to discursive language alone. The motive behind the dialogue must also be clear. It is not just dialogue for its own sake. It is not to convert or indoctrinate the other or impose views on the other.

The partners to the dialogue meet each other with the assumption that each one of them has something to say that is useful or new to the partners in the dialogue. Our ideas, philosophical or otherwise, are embedded in our respective cultures. Because we belong to different cultural backgrounds, there are things that we do not know. It is the role of our dialogue partner to tell us this thing.

The expression of philosophy in an intercultural way through dialogue will thus give it a new form. Philosophy has been for far too long monological. It is this monologue that is wrongly given a universal *Gestalt* and this philosophy has been taught and spread as *the* one and only one. It is this established phenomenon that intercultural philosophy has to supersede. The supersession of the monologue can be realized through an intercultural dialogue/polylogue. It would be reasonable, I assume, to consider a philosophy that unfolds in this way as universal. Instead of elevating a philosophy embedded in a specific culture to the universal, here we will be able to formulate philosophical ideas or theses through the participation of those who have to contribute something to the dialogue. One of the rules that Wimmer formulated with regard to intercultural dialogue indicates the way this dialogue could be possible. Wimmer wrote,

Do not expect philosophical theories to be well founded, whose authors stem from one single cultural tradition." Formulating the same negative rule positively he wrote, "Where ever possible, look for transcultural overlapping of philosophical concepts and theories since it is probable that well-founded theories have developed in more than one cultural tradition. (Wimmer 2002: 33)

## Why Do We Need Intercultural Philosophy?

In attempting to introduce intercultural philosophy, I have tried to underline its importance. Its importance is both for the cultures and (as a result) for the philosophies that had occupied a central absolutist position on the one hand and for those that had been marginalized on the other. It liberates, in other words, the Western European philosophy from the self-deceptive act of considering itself to be the only philosophy for humankind. At the same

time it provides the marginalized cultures and their philosophies with an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with all the possible cultures, thereby enabling them to contribute their share in creating a culture and philosophy that will realize a new life worthy of human beings. Today's world is a world that has truly become interdependent. Economically, culturally and in other respects one form of life and activity is increasingly becoming the dominant trend. The term globalization is on every body's lips. However, there are forces and tendencies of regionalization that work counter to globalization. When we consider the forces that are working against globalization in different ways and from different angles, it is difficult to accept that globalization is realizing itself at a pace and with an ease with which its proponents believe it is taking place. It is a phenomenon that obviously favours the rich countries against the poor countries and within the rich countries themselves, it is the few rich who are drawing the most benefit from globalization. This can be observed through the kind of opposition that globalization faces from regional organizations. Summits of so called G-8 countries or meetings of the WTO and similar organizations face serious oppositions every time there are such meetings. Of course the regionalizations that we find in different parts of the world also show that globalization is not embracing all regions or countries equally. When, for example, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, nationalism became a strong rallying point among many republics of the former Soviet Union, is it possible to say that the world is becoming one global village? In Africa in many spots and in Europe in places like former Yugoslavia and other places what all the attempts at independence, self-determination and the quest for identity show is that obviously the world is not on a rapid journey of becoming a global village.

This does not of course undermine the fact that cultures are largely becoming closer to each other. There are clashes of cultures but at the same time an enormous rapprochement and exchange between cultures takes place so much so that some cultures are becoming swallowed up and losing their identities. Although the process of the formation of a uniform culture seems to have begun its success, it cannot yet be certain owing to the dynamics of today's world, viz. the forces of globalization vs. that of regionalization.

In the face of these contradictory tendencies and dynamics it seems that there is no clear-cut understanding of how the future will look like. The

proponents of globalization seem to have been convinced of its inevitability and want us to wait until the march of capitalism has put us all in the global village. The opponents of globalization on the other hand seem to be convinced that it is not going to work the way the proponents suggest and try to do all they can to hinder its march. In other words there seems to be a lack of a common agenda and helplessness particularly among politicians whether it is in the developed world or in the so-called developing world as to how the future should unravel itself. Intercultural philosophy as a new approach in philosophy would have a role to play in this situation. It would shed light on the problems of globalization. In fact it could be argued that intercultural philosophy is necessitated by the conditions of the time. The established philosophies that we know lack the disposition of bringing different philosophies together to enter into a dialogue. This shows the shortcomings that they have. The shortcomings can be transcended if the philosophies help each other in both understanding and proposing solutions. The intercultural approach differs from other philosophies in that it is open to listen to all philosophies before it proposes a solution. In a situation where the issue or the problem concerns all, the solution must be sought from and by all - at least from those who claim to have something to say regarding the problem.

Philosophy could probably contribute a lot by trying to initiate dialogue among cultures and philosophies. By its own very nature philosophy reflects or at least has the intention to reflect on any problem that is of concern to human kind. Globalization is of concern to all of us in that it affects all of us. This phenomenon that affects all of us should definitely be of concern to philosophy. Philosophy in general and intercultural philosophy in particular would like to reflect on globalization owing to their perspectives and the fundamental ideas that they could put forward which in turn would enable us to understand the phenomenon of globalization. Philosophy, however, cannot contribute much, as suggested, unless it is able to adapt an intercultural approach. I don't think that the usual West European approach that Western philosophy alone is universal, Europe is the only centre and that philosophy keeps on dealing with its usual themes can help this process. Western or Occidental philosophy as understood to mean the philosophy that started in ancient Greece and is considered to be evolving continuously until the contemporary period does not tell the whole truth. Many historians of philosophy treat the history of

philosophy in the West as constituting a single whole that has been linearly evolving from simple to complex. In view of the fact that such an approach cannot give us the full picture of philosophy, philosophy must assume a non-centrist position and must be ready to listen to what others have to say. The same is expected of those philosophies and cultures that have been hitherto marginalized.

This approach must emanate from a clear understanding of the situation. The Western world is no more in a situation where it can dominate the world alone. The civilizing mission of the yester years cannot materialize any more as they used to do. To understand this one has to simply see the problems that the Western world in general and the USA in particular are facing from terrorism. The environmental problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, poverty, diseases like AIDS, and many other problems can no more be the problems of one country or region. Kimmerle says,

All cultures are now, more than ever before entering into self-contradiction and as a result are becoming self-reflective. This creates a better situation for intercultural philosophy. Cultures are not closed entities. This has led to a situation where the specific nature of every culture has to be understood and carefully considered. (Kimmerle 2002:18 My translation from German.)

Another point that incidentally needs to be mentioned here is this self-reflection that is being forced up on philosophy. The conditions of life and the situations led to where cultures are required to be self-reflective. But this on the other hand means that this situation has enabled the birth of a philosophical thinking that has a new orientation. It is from this self-reflection and the attempt to overcome the contradiction that induced self-reflection that a philosophy emerges. The contradictory situation that cultures encounter today is becoming, to a very large extent, common to all cultures. This sends all cultures on the search for solutions. The mission of searching for the solution can only be a shared mission for all cultures. In other words it is this situation that creates a favourable condition for intercultural philosophy.

## The Significance of Intercultural Philosophy

We have tried to outline the essence, methods and necessity of intercultural philosophy. Now we turn to see its significance particularly at the present juncture of the history of humankind.

The first and one of the very significant aspects of intercultural philosophy is its attempt at expanding the horizon of philosophy. Philosophy had been for far too long identified with one culture, some languages and the like. In short philosophy was taken to be synonymous with European philosophy. This has limited the scope and horizon of philosophy. The limitation of its horizon has contributed to the fact that it also remained largely academic. Probably one of the reasons why it is limited to the academic ghettos has to do with the limitation of its horizon.

The question whether philosophy itself should be only academic or something, which has relevance to real life, is itself a philosophical problem. There are people who would like to keep philosophy as far removed as possible from real life and deal only with abstractions and speculations. This position, as much as it is worried with the purity, rigour and “non-partisanship” of philosophy has, however, contributed to its irrelevance, largely when practical social, political and economic issues are concerned. It is also largely the philosophy that made itself synonymous with European philosophy that played the important role in this respect.

Looking at this situation, it is important for philosophers to ask themselves why they do philosophy. Doing philosophy cannot have a goal, which is beyond life and society. As H. O. Oruka says,

Philosophy after all is always for life and not life for philosophy. Philosophy is a response to society and to social problems even though some philosophers have attempted to divorce philosophy from society and to study the subject in a vacuum. But this does not rule out the fact that philosophy is a response to social problems. Even to study philosophy in a vacuum is also a way of responding (negatively perhaps) to the social conditions of one's society. (Oruka 1997: 35)

Indeed it is the way in which it understands itself that makes intercultural philosophy important from the perspective of globalization.

Globalization is understood differently by people in different parts of the world. It affects them also differently owing to the different effects it has on their lives. But the way intercultural philosophy helps here lies in its idea that understanding and being understood should be taken as the two sides of the very same phenomenon. It is by criticizing the way philosophy has been understood hitherto and was done that intercultural philosophy attempts to accomplish its tasks. Its basis is that since cultures have a lot in common, it is easier and better if they treat each other interculturally and try to understand human problems also from intercultural perspectives. The apparently abstract problems of philosophy are in some way connected with life. That refers to Oruka's point that philosophy is for life. Intercultural philosophy, by criticizing how the mainstream Western philosophies understood themselves, pleads for an intercultural philosophical hermeneutics that tries to understand the real situations in which philosophies come into being. Moreover it is the requirement of the time that, taking into account their situations, philosophies and cultures, are forced to reflect on their very situations. That is the point that places intercultural philosophy in a better position to understand human problems and contribute to their solutions. In so doing it gives to the proponents of globalization the perspectives of its opponents. This would enable the proponents to understand it from the side of the opponents as well and hence have a more complete picture of it. Once this is achieved it would be important for both to look for solutions that would be acceptable to both sides.

Intercultural philosophy should be able to remove this restriction of the horizon of philosophy with its assumption that philosophy could emerge in all human cultures; philosophy knows so many languages and its methods are varied. If we want to speak of universal philosophy in the proper sense of the term, it is this expansion of its horizon that is indispensable. We are living in a world that is increasingly becoming too small and largely interdependent. Despite the fact that there are forces and tendencies that are working against globalization, it cannot be denied that the world is interconnected to such a degree that, when a part of it is affected, the other parts cannot remain unaffected. As we all know, despite the accusations and counter-accusations of who damages the environment largely, environmental problems, are a threat to the whole of humankind. Today we can speak of spots of the globe where HIV/AIDS has become pandemic. But

it is not a problem of these spots alone. It seems that every body will agree that HIV/AIDS is a threat to humankind. Poverty and hunger are the problems of many regions in the world, particularly Africa, Asia and Latin America. But in a situation where they have affected all these regions and hundreds of millions of people, it is impossible to consider them as the problems of these regions alone; they are global problems and threats. Then there are a range of problems that are problems of the developed world, such as emigration, terrorism and the like. The list of the problems could be longer but it is important to pause and think that what all these show is simply the degree to which the problems have become complex and the whole world interdependent.

Here we cannot exaggerate the role of philosophy in this situation, while we cannot at the same time deny its contributions. It is clear that both the direct and indirect uses of philosophy are educational. It is owing to the fact that philosophy enriches our imagination and shows us different alternatives that we resort to philosophy to understand certain problems. When intercultural philosophy is considered as a new approach in philosophy, its importance lies in the fact that it gives all philosophies the opportunity to address the concerned problem – globalization, poverty, etc. It in a way enables the bringing together of a collective wisdom to address a problem. Through the collective wisdom we would be in a position to understand each other better. This would therefore avoid a situation where one would impose a solution on the other.

While one part of the world faces problems that are associated with scientific and technological advancement the other part of the world faces problems that emerge due to lack of it. It is essential to overcome these through a common approach. The ones that suffer from problems associated with development can learn a lot from others. Obviously those who suffer due to the lack of science and technology have to and can appropriate a lot from the advanced nations. If they avoid repeating the mistakes that the advanced countries have made by putting a lot of emphasis on the material aspects of life that could be an important lesson for all. It is in this situation when the whole world faces so many problems in common and seeks common solutions that an intercultural dialogue becomes important. Indeed, as Oruka says,

When development is not to be one dimensional (techno-dimensional) but two dimensional (techno-cultural-dimensional), philosophy has an important role to play in it. Culture as a way of life of a people needs 'a standard of appeal', it needs a basic principle, an ethic that justifies and defends it. This ethic should be rational and open to significant changes. But it cannot be so unless it is a philosophical postulate and guided by a constant philosophical inquiry. (Oruka 1997: 44-45)

The requirement of development that is multidimensional assigns an important role to philosophy. Oruka is not referring to intercultural philosophy here. Philosophy as a rational and critical enterprise can play this role. But if it is an intercultural philosophy whose essential feature is the new approach that looks for solutions on the basis of the collective wisdom of philosophies embedded in different cultures, then it can play an even more important role.

What has to be realized in the final analysis is that a philosophy emanating from a particular culture alone is not in a position to facilitate the understanding and consequent solution of these problems. Understanding the problems does help in seeking the solutions to the problems. This is possible if we are in a position to bring together the philosophical potentials of all cultures. When the potentials of all cultures are brought together through dialogues an opportunity can be created to address the problems. Questions like, where are the moral boundaries of the use of nuclear energy, moral problems associated with poverty, the idea of the human minimum, the moral problems involved in using nature or the environment without concern for nature and the future generations and many such problems can openly be put forward. There are obviously cultures with accompanying moral norms and codes for instance that do not take nature as an object that is merely there to be exploited. It is such and many other potentials that intercultural philosophy would be able to unravel. If the view that puts mankind at the centre and pleads for the control of nature is eventually leading to a disaster there is a lot to learn from other non-monotheistic religions and moral thoughts. In pleading, therefore, for an intercultural dialogue what intercultural philosophy aims at is rendering possible a rapprochement between the various cultures and philosophies and that may show a direction to the future where the others and nature itself are not considered as things that need to be brought under control but indispensable

partners that should work towards the realization of a peaceful and fruitful common future. Mall Wrtes,

There is much to learn from the impartiality that reigns supreme in nature. It is an irony of human history and culture that the so-called "animistic" *Weltanschauungen*, [World-views] which were decried as primitive by the so-called enlightened cultures and revealed religions, are today best suited to serve the cause of an ecological peace of which world peace in its various aspects is a part. Asian religiosity pleads for positive attitude and essentially religious emotion not only toward human beings but also toward all living creatures, nature and even inanimate things. (Mall 2000: 22)

Mall suggests here that if the cultures that see nature as a mere object of exploitation are exposed to cultures and philosophies that see nature positively and try to harmonize with it, then these cultures could overcome their shortcoming, since it is a shortcoming to see the source of one's life as a mere object of exploitation and engage in an act of self destruction. An intercultural encounter between philosophies and cultures would place all cultures in a better position to manage, or master human problems.

Another significance of intercultural philosophy is that it is able to overcome the one-sidedness displayed by Eurocentric philosophy and ethnophilosophy. The shortcoming of Eurocentrism is that it wrongly elevated the particular to the universal. Such a project may serve the interests and ego of the European, but it is not possible to take this as a world philosophy or culture. It has an imperialistic and missionary role that has the ultimate goal of swallowing other philosophies and cultures. The reasons behind elevating the particular to the universal are not philosophical or academic. Kant had no philosophical reasons whatsoever to say that the white race is the only race that could be the subject of history. From among the many negative things that Kant said against the blacks and people who are not white, the following can be read.

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the

lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour. (Quoted in Serequeberhan 1997: 148)

I don not think that Kant had any philosophical or scientific reason(s) to say these. This is a purely racist prejudice that is not in any way reasonably founded. Similarly the Christian religion does not denigrate other religions and give them derogatory names, which they do not know and accept, such as paganism, animism, primitivism, etc. for religious purposes or in order to better serve the will of God. The reasons behind denigrating the others, therefore, are other than religious. They are rather imperialistic and colonialistic and are mostly driven by economic and other interests aimed at dominating the others.

Ethnophilosophy is the other side of Eurocentrism. It attempts to react to the denigrating prejudices of the Eurocentric approach, but it at the same time tries to establish one centre by removing another. The solution to the problems created by Eurocentrism should not be establishing a competing centre that does not listen to others. It must rather be a situation where every centre comes with what it can possibly offer without assuming an absolutist position. An absolutist position is impossible due to the real situation that has to do with the nature and situation of cultures.

So while Eurocentrism and ethnophilosophy represent opposite sides of the philosophical spectrum, what they aim to achieve rather makes it impossible for philosophies to come together and bridge the gap between them with the very purpose of cooperating in seeking solutions to human problems. Eurocentrism as is well known takes Europe, its culture and philosophy as the only perennial culture and philosophy, while intercultural philosophy would like to argue that perennial philosophy is the exclusive property of no one race or geographic region.

In African philosophy ethnophilosophy is represented by philosophers like P. Tempels, J. Mbiti and others. In the absence of individual philosophers who could articulate their thoughts in writing, the proponents of ethnophilosophy thought of carving out philosophies from the common consciousness of a people. Ideas taken from proverbs, aphorisms, songs, etc. are paraded as the philosophy of a people. In African philosophy those that are said to be professional philosophers like Hountondji rejected ethnophilosophy.

I am not concerned here with a general evaluation of ethnophilosophy, although it could be argued that ethnophilosophy could be an important source of wisdom in a broader sense. My purpose here is to show that just like Eurocentric philosophy says, European philosophy is the only true philosophy, ethnophilosophy makes itself a centre which is found on the opposite side of the philosophical spectrum and attempts to hinder intercultural encounters between philosophies. The point therefore here is that intercultural philosophy could be an alternative to both. It criticizes the absolutistic positions of both. But it does not deny that something useful can be learnt from both.

Indicating that the alternative to both Eurocentrism and ethnophilosophy is the intercultural approach, Wimmer states.

Such an alternative consists in a procedure, which is no longer merely comparative or dia-logical, but rather polylogical. Questions of philosophy – questions concerning the fundamental structures of reality, the knowability, the validity of norms – have to be discussed in such a way that a solution is not propagated unless a polylogue, between as many traditions as possible has taken place. This presupposes the relativity of concepts and methods, and it implies a non-centric view to the history of human thinking. (Wimmer 2002: 33)

Intercultural philosophy is a new way of doing philosophy whose end result is to exploit the potentials of all the possible cultures and philosophies to contribute to the understanding of today's problems. The usual ways of understanding and doing philosophy have not been very useful. The monological approach through which Occidental philosophy considered itself to be the only universal philosophy and its attempt to measure all thinking, philosophical or otherwise, through its own paradigm is not very helpful in the face of the huge problems that humankind faces. The monologue does not appeal to many people today. The days when Occidental philosophy considers itself to be the only philosophy will not surely last for a long time. Those who are supposed to take this monologue and echo it are increasingly becoming reluctant. This philosophy alone and the approach that has been considered to be normal are not useful anymore in a globalising world. Ethnophilosophy, by doing the opposite of what Eurocentrism is doing, is not helping the situation either. It becomes irrelevant for the very same reasons that Eurocentrism is. That is why intercultural philosophy could be

an alternative to both Occidental philosophy and ethno philosophy. It invites dialogue to understand each other. Through understanding each other we understand our problems better. That could pave the way for solving the problems as well.

### **Conclusion**

We know that at present philosophy is largely taken to be synonymous with European philosophy. A careful consideration of what philosophy really is, however, shows that philosophy is not the exclusive property of no one race, region, language and the like. Philosophy is about life and for life in the last instance. That would mean that where there is life, there would be a philosophy of some sort. If we look at the real situation we would realize that the assumption that there is only one centre of philosophy is absurd. Outside of the West European tradition we can think of philosophies in Egypt and the East even by the standards that are acceptable to the West. In other words, even in a situation where there is a bias that favours the West, it is possible to recognize the existence of philosophical thought outside of the West European tradition. This is without taking into account the various oral traditions.

In view of these it is essential to recognize the existence of different philosophies and different ways of thinking. It is misleading to equate philosophy with Western philosophy alone. In order to overcome this misleading approach it is essential to adapt an intercultural approach, which by widening the horizon could give an opportunity to all or most of the philosophies of humankind.

Moreover, it is necessary to realize the relevance and importance of various cultural traditions and their philosophies for understanding the present situation. The contribution of various cultural traditions and the philosophies embedded in them is essential not only to understand but also to seek solutions to the problems that humankind is facing today. It is with this in mind that we plead for an approach to philosophy, which is intercultural. An intercultural approach to philosophy has a big potential to release the energy contained in the various cultural and philosophical traditions.

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