

# What Is Conversational Philosophy? A Prescription of a New Theory and Method of Philosophising, in and Beyond African Philosophy

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## Abstract

In this paper I discuss the meaning of the theory of conversational philosophy. I show that its background inspiration is derived from an under-explored African notion of relationship or communion or interdependence. I argue that conversational philosophy forms a theoretic framework on which most ethical, metaphysical and epistemological discourses in African philosophy—and by African philosophers—could be grounded. I call this framework the method of conversationalism. I unveil some of its basic principles and show its significance in and beyond African philosophy.

**Keywords:** Conversational philosophy; Africa; African philosophy; intercultural philosophy; conversationalism

## Introduction

There was a time, during the early period in the history of African philosophy, when some actors—specifically those now categorised as ethno-philosophers—thought that the practice of African philosophy was something that ought not to extend beyond Africa both in focus



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and in agency (cf. Kagame 1956; Keita 1991; Mbiti 1969). Incidentally, that consciousness has been seriously challenged and rendered obsolete by those now categorised as members of the universal school (cf. Bodunrin 1984; Hountondji 1996; Wiredu 1980). The erroneous idea that African philosophy is a culture-bound enterprise has since given way to a more charitable conception of African philosophy as a field motivated in a place but transcending the place.

In the recent time, a handful of theories have been articulated and a host of concepts formulated in African philosophy. Some of these include the modern revival of ubuntu thought, especially by philosophers in southern Africa. However, the majority of ideas have emerged from West Africa. The list includes: Kwasi Wiredu's *Conceptual Decolonisation* (1995); Pantaleon Iroegbu's *Uwa Ontology* (1995); Innocent Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda Ontology* (2004); Ifeanyi Menkiti's *Afro-Communitarianism* (1984); and a host of others. Some impressive ideas have also emerged from East Africa, notably, Odera Oruka's *Human Minimum* (1989/1997) and others. Indeed, the list is long, but gazetting these ideas is not my main purpose here. What I rather want to show is that despite the obvious universal applicability of these ideas, their formulations were not intended to galvanise support for a cross-border engagement. One could, therefore, say that these ideas were articulated for discussions within the frame of African philosophy. But this is the challenge because philosophy should never be exhausted within the encounters of a given place. It is not supposed to be a place thing alone; it is also an inter-place activity.

The reason why philosophy in our time ought to be an inter-place activity as well, is because different cultures are fast attaining intellectual maturation. Reason, which is the driver of philosophic thought, first exerted a centrifugal force on itself; which saw it self-divide into many units and manifest these units in different human cultures. The development of various human cultures can be likened to the maturation of these units of reason, culminating in the emergence of different philosophy traditions. But this reason is somewhat restless. As it matures in different cultures, it is bound to exert yet another force on itself; this time the centripetal force in order to unite these different manifestations of itself to the centre. This is the great movement of philosophy from the peripheries to the centre. We may call this destination intercultural philosophy. Part of my goal in this work is to demonstrate how African philosophy, as a cultural particular, makes this journey. Different philosophy traditions may have different ideas of what counts as viable ideas in philosophy, this does not

subtract from the quality of philosophy they do. However, it is only those traditions that are truly rigorous that can transform their discourse from the periphery to the centre. I have no doubt that intercultural philosophy is the future philosophy. It seems inevitable that someday, philosophy in various traditions must converge to live out the destiny of reason—a coming together of all. African philosophy, therefore, must show its stamina to thrive both within its geography and beyond. In this work, I will employ the theory of conversational philosophy as an index in African philosophy to demonstrate this. I will discuss conversational philosophy as a theory, outlining some of its principles and claims. Thereafter I explore conversational philosophy as a method of thought called conversationalism, focusing on its potentials as an unbranded mechanism for studying reality. I will show—using conversational philosophy as an index—that African philosophy as a tradition is capable of crossing borders and reaching the goal of intercultural philosophy. The article is concluded by highlighting intercultural philosophy as the future philosophy.

### **The Theory of Conversational Philosophy**

A number of scholars are associated with the development of this train of thought, known as conversational philosophy (CP) in African philosophy. Some of the seminal ideas can be found in the works of those who call themselves members of the Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP) (see Chimakonam 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Edet 2016; Nweke 2015, 2016). Conversational philosophy is a strictly formal intellectual engagement between or among proponents (called *nwa nsa*) and opponents (called *nwa nju*) who engage in an arumaristics<sup>1</sup> on a specific thought in which critical and rigorous questioning and answering are employed to creatively unveil new concepts and open up new vistas for thought (Chimakonam 2015b, 19; 2015a, 463).

However, the notion of “conversational philosophy” was first used by Richard Rorty in Western philosophy (Rorty 2007, 120–130). According to Rorty (2007, 124), conversational philosophy is a substitute name for continental philosophy. Rorty suggests this name change in order to end the undue cultural conflict between the analytic and the continental traditions among Western premier universities, where the structuring of philosophy curricula along the line of one or the other has restricted the depth of philosophy education. As he put it: “I

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1 Arumaristics is a type of encounter that involves the reshuffling of thesis and anti-thesis, each time at a higher level without the expectation of synthesis. See the section on conversationalism as a method for more details.

suggest we drop the term ‘continental’ and instead contrast analytic philosophy with *conversational* philosophy” (Rorty 2007, 124). For Rorty, this division is inimical to the philosophic education of students in Western universities who are tutored to discriminate against one or the other of the two traditions.

However, I employ the notion of conversational philosophy in a different way. My formulation speaks to the idea of philosophy within and across the borders, or what are called 1) Cultural philosophy; and 2) Intercultural philosophy. Therefore, conversational philosophy is what happens at two levels of philosophical discourses highlighted above. The first level can be described as “micro” in which philosophers within a specific geography engage one another on questions such as: What does philosophy mean in this place? What are the basic ethical, epistemological, metaphysical and methodological assumptions in this place? What are the conceptual accumulations in this place? How does philosophy honour its debt and duties in this place? In the section on the method of conversationalism, I will discuss the nature of the conversational engagement.

The second strategy, call it the “macro” level, is where philosophers—rising from their different traditions—attempt to cross the borders to engage one culture with others in order to globalise thought. This is where the significance of conversational thinking is most apparent. For example, we may ask: When philosophers from different traditions cross borders, what do they take with them? Do they take their basic ethical, epistemological, metaphysical and methodological assumptions with them? This question, to the best of my knowledge, has not been addressed by the advocates of intercultural philosophy. We must understand that the geography of philosophy presupposes some cultural moorings and when philosophers from these places move across borders, they inevitably carry a certain baggage of cultural conditionings. Are all these instances of cultural baggage something we would be confident to admit in an intercultural discourse? I contend that we may be able to admit all except one. Philosophers of different traditions can come to the table of intercultural discourse with their ethical, epistemological and metaphysical assumptions, but not with their methodological framework. The reason is because, in philosophy, method is everything!

Different methods underlie different ethical, epistemological and metaphysical assumptions. To use one’s method to evaluate another’s assumption—articulated with a different method—can only lead to two possibilities, namely: the falsification of another’s assumption;

or the falsification of another's method. But we cannot proceed in this way with two negative outcomes. One way to interpret this scenario would be to take a step back and look at the method used in such evaluation as imposing one culture's epistemic categories on another. A true intercultural philosophy cannot proceed this way. When we take a handful of what happens out there as intercultural philosophy, what do we see? We see cultural impositions in various forms. Most often unbeknown to the actors, they struggle to observe the conceptual accumulations of other traditions through their own cultural straw lens. Intercultural discourse, therefore, ends up as a pseudo European philosophy where what is sanctioned as epistemically correct, is that which aligns with the basic assumptions of European thought. This is all about a problem of method. Some thinkers have drawn attention to the danger of universalising the cultural particular of a given tradition of philosophy (see Dussel 1985; Hebga 1958; Janz 2009; Serequeberhan 1991).

To overcome this challenge for intercultural philosophy, I formulate an intercultural method called conversationalism, which is divested of any form of cultural centrism. At the intercultural arena, actors from different places would be required to employ the same method in evaluating the ethical, epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of others. This supplies the much needed balance and epistemic justice sorely lacking in the intercultural literature out there. Only in following this conversational strategy, or any other like it, can we say we have begun a true intercultural discourse.

The idea of conversational thinking begins from the premise that philosophy has many traditions conditioned by different cultures that inspired them, but that it is possible for these traditions to get involved in a relationship of a kind that I have described as the Global Expansion of Thought (GET) (Chimakonam 2015a, 466–468). This is what some people regard as intercultural philosophy. Intercultural philosophy, therefore, is what happens when reason emanating from different places converges at a borderless epistemic point. The tool of reason is something that drives thought. This tool splits itself up into multiple units, scattered in different cultures, in what can be described as the cultural manifestation of reason or simply, philosophy traditions. This process of splitting up may be described as the centrifugal movement of reason, as stated earlier. But at maturation, these different manifestations of reason, which have formed different traditions of philosophy, are expected to seek reunion with the centre. It is at this point that reason also exerts yet another force on itself, namely the centripetal force. This force attempts to draw reason in its cultural manifestations together in

a bid to globalise those cultural thoughts. Successfully teamed together, the activity of intercultural discourse ensues among these different traditions of philosophy creating new ideas and spinning out new concepts in a process known as creative struggle, therefore in this context, the philosopher's struggle against knowledge hegemony to dethrone the dogma of one standard and usher in a multi-perspectival complementary epistemic order (Chimakonam and Egbai 2016, 106).

There are two main inspirations behind the concept of conversational philosophy. The first is the under-explored notion of relationship found mainly among the various sub-Saharan African peoples. The second is the root word *arumarụ-ụka*, derived from the Igbo language spoken by well over seventy million people whose ancestral land lies in the West-African country of Nigeria, east of the Niger River. To the first, the idea of relationship or communion or mutual interdependence is something that speaks to our best human ideals. We want to belong to a common unit; we want to be loved, helped and protected by others. Interestingly, it seems more research is being done on this notion of relationship in the recent time by African thinkers. Scholars like Pantaleon Iroegbu (1995) and Innocent Asouzu (2007a) have appealed to this notion in developing *Uwa Ontology* and *Ibuanyidanda Ontology* respectively. Scholars like Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984), Kwame Gyekye (1997), Polycarp Ikuenobe (2006) and Bernard Matolino (2014) have employed it in constructing socio-political theories of individual-community interaction. Thaddeus Metz (2011, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2017), specifically, has exploited it in developing what he calls an African theory of relational ethics. In southern Africa, several scholars working on ubuntu thought have also appealed to this notion in developing various strands of ubuntu ontology and ethics. A few to mention include: Mogobe Ramose (2005), Leonhard Praeg (2014) and Fainos Mangena (2016). It is possible that scholars from other places like Asia, South America and even Europe are also thinking within this concept. The point I want to make is that the notion of relationship speaks to some of our best human ideals, whether in Africa, or Europe, or Asia, or America, or anywhere—there are human communities.

The second inspiration, *arumarụ-ụka*, will be discussed in the next section when I unfold the methodical ambience of the theory of conversational thinking. On the whole, due to the cultural moorings of diverse philosophy traditions, it makes practical sense to weave a universal method for intercultural philosophy. I will seek to do so from using the notion of

relationship which, as I have explained, is something that cuts across quite a number of cultures in the world. Explicating this method shall be the focus of next section.

### **The Method of Conversationalism**

As universal as this notion of relationship could be in philosophical thinking, it does appear that adequate attempt is yet to be made, to the best of my knowledge, to formulate a method of thought from it. It would, therefore, not be out of place to attempt to systematise the idea of relationship into a method of philosophising and intercultural philosophy specifically. Asouzu's method of complementary reflection,<sup>2</sup> which prescribes how one may think in a complementary way, is the only attempt that comes very close. However, his attempt still comes short of a clear formal expression. Besides, it was presented as custom made for his theory of *Ibuanyidanda Ontology*. Asouzu did not extend his method to intercultural philosophy. Here, I take up the task of formally articulating a method of intercultural philosophy on the basis of the notion of relationship for the field of intercultural philosophy specifically, but which can be employed by philosophers working on diverse topics in any part of the world. I have called that new method "conversationalism," bearing in mind that to converse is a form of engagement and this is a relationship of some sort. It will be my burden in this section to show how this relationship-driven procedure can amount to a veritable method of thinking in intercultural philosophy.

To be specific, what might such a method of philosophising—based on the notion of relationship—look like? Conversationalism as a method is not a procedure for an informal exchange of opinions between people or cultures; that may be the literal meaning of the "word" conversation—something that can describe what the Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka did with his famous theory of philosophic sagacity.<sup>3</sup> Here, I deal with the "concept" conversationalism and not the "word" conversation.

The idea of conversationalism traces back to the Igbo notion of "*arumaru-uka*," which roughly translates to: "engaging in critical and creative conversation." This notion has two senses; 1) as a noun, "the act" (but *not* the state) of engaging in critical and creative

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<sup>2</sup> See Asouzu, Innocent. 2004. *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and beyond African Philosophy*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 269–434.

<sup>3</sup> See Oruka, Odera H (ed). 1991. *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Nairobi: Acts Press, 45–56.

conversation; and 2) as a noun, “the mechanism” for engaging in critical and creative conversation. Both senses of the word describe a form of critical and creative relationship between or among parties. If we anglicise the word, the adjective “arumaristic” may be derived to qualify any relationship that is characterised by any of the two senses of the word above. And from this adjective, the noun “arumaristics” may be coined to describe a procedure for reasoning in which thesis and anti-thesis complement rather than conflate and maintain their individualities in order to frustrate the emergence of synthesis. It is from the English translation as “conversation” that the concept conversationalism—as a description of the method—is adopted.

As a method, conversationalism is a formal procedure for assessing the relationships of opposed variables, in which thoughts are shuffled through disjunctive and conjunctive modes to constantly recreate fresh thesis and anti-thesis each time at a higher level of discourse, without the expectation of the synthesis. It is an encounter between philosophers of rival schools of thought and between different philosophical traditions or cultures in which one party, called *nwa-nsa* (the defender or proponent), holds up a position and another party, called *nwa-nju* (the doubter or opponent), questions the accuracy of the position in light of the demands of arumaristics, cross-culturalism and transculturalism. I will explain these demands momentarily.

There are a few things that are worth noting in the conversational type of engagement. First, conversational relationship is not a dialectic relationship in which components of thesis and anti-thesis come together to form the synthesis. It is rather an arumaristic relationship in which the struggle between thesis and anti-thesis is not between two competing positions, which culminates in the emergence of a new position (synthesis). In an arumaristic relationship there is only one position at a time and the party that holds and defends it is called *nwa-nsa*, as already stated. The philosophic duty of the rival party, called *nwa-nju*, is to question the viability of that position within the framework of conversationalism in order to reveal its loopholes and creatively fill up the lacunas. Thus, while conversationalism promises a certain degree of epistemological alignment between two seemingly opposed variables, fundamental differences will always persist due to opposing ontological loyalties of the variables. This perpetuates the reshuffling of thesis and anti-thesis and frustrates the emergence of synthesis initially expected.

Second, in a conversational relationship, thesis does not emerge out of the womb of synthesis; it is re-invented by *nwa-nsa*. The incessant questioning by *nwa-nju* compels *nwa-nsa* to do constant evaluation of his position in light of new ideas and where necessary, he makes needful re-adjustments to his position. This is, in my estimation, a procedure that accounts for knowledge growth and intellectual progress. What happens in a relationship between X and Y within the framework of conversational thinking can be described as complementation rather than synthesis. Both complement themselves in that while the one needs the other to re-invent itself at a higher level of discourse, the other needs the one to fulfil its philosophic duty. In the end, what happens is a continuous progress in thought. They do not reach a compromise by contributing components towards the formation of a new order—this is what synthesis is about in a dialectic relationship.

Third, in a conversational relationship, the thesis has a transgenerational life-span. It keeps being re-invented and grows in sophistication, unlike in a dialectic relationship where the life-span of a thesis is generational. It fizzles out in each generation allowing room for the emergence of another thesis to take its place.

Further, having discussed the concept of arumaristics, I want to enunciate two main principles of conversationalism, namely: 1) conversational thinking as multicultural; and 2) conversational thinking as transcultural.

1. The first is that the method of conversationalism is necessarily multicultural. It implies that there is room for every culture. Philosophy in our time has to cross borders. One fundamental thing that will keep philosophy relevant in this Age, and probably for all time to come, is the idea of “relationship.” Conversational relationship is not what happens when two or more variables come together; it is the actuality of a critical and fruitful encounter amongst these variables that leads to the opening up of new vistas and the unveiling of new concepts. The notion of relationship we talk about is something central to most human problems in our world today. A few good examples include problems that result from bad relationships like terrorism, corruption, war, conflicts, violence, environmental pollution, poverty, bad leadership, and so forth. Indeed, human beings have not yet found a way to trivialise this notion in their day-to-day living; not even the recent technological sophistications could sever the dependence of one human on another. If this is the case, then the

human mutual interdependence, interrelation and interconnection—when viewed from the lens of philosophy—inevitably have to become cross cultural. We have to accept others, understand them, be willing to engage fairly and objectively with them, if we wish to have a more peaceful world. In today's contracting geographical spaces, it has become increasingly unavoidable for people from different parts of the world to relate. There is no better way of stringing healthier relationships among people from different cultures than to orchestrate an exchange of their cultural philosophies. Heinz Kimmerle insists "that philosophy must either become intercultural, or else become nothing more than an academic preoccupation void of societal relevance" (Kimmerle 1994, 31).

2. The second is that the method of conversationalism necessarily has to be transcultural. Here, we simply mean the idea of one seeing itself in the other or, one transcending its cultural centrism in judging, willing and acting towards the other and vice versa. In conversational thinking, there is no hegemony or lop-sidedness of the superior/inferior type. If we are to have a philosophy of the future—the type which Michel Foucault (1999) talks about when he discusses the crisis of Western thought as being identical to the end of imperialism—then, the West must find a way to set aside their cultural centrism, which fuels the crisis of thought in Europe, and think of the transcultural ideals of tolerance, equity, justice and complementarity. Foucault eminently declares the crisis of Western thought as the end of the era of Western philosophy. He predicts that if philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside Europe (Foucault 1999, 113). Conversational philosophy, which promotes the ideals of intercultural discourse, may have been born outside Europe but it is by no means Afrocentrist. In fact, one reason why it is born outside Europe is because the notion of relationship which undergirds it, is receiving the most philosophical attention in African philosophy at the moment, as indicated earlier. It is in this connection that Heinz Kimmerle (1994, 31) explains that "the philosophical contribution to a renegotiation of the relationship between cultures is decisive for the status of philosophy today." The conversational strategy of philosophy which is culturally unbranded may, therefore, be one narrow path into the future of philosophy as a discipline undergoing new evolution. It would not be out of place to say that this new, if you like, cosmopolitan presentation of philosophy, is set to position philosophy as a rainbow discipline.

In the next section, I will go beyond the territory of African philosophy and focus on bringing out the intercultural dimension of conversational philosophy.

### **Conversational Philosophy in and Beyond African Philosophy**

Conversational philosophy is not only effective within a pre-defined border like the African philosophy geography; I have demonstrated its capacity to also cross borders and drive the promise of intercultural philosophy. A few important questions that must be asked as we think about the prospects of intercultural philosophy are: Do we take our methods with us when we cross borders? Or: Do we weave different methods from different traditions together? Or: Do we formulate a custom method for intercultural engagements? In a true intercultural philosophy, the answer to the initial two questions would be a definite “no!” When we take the methods of our particular places into a multi-cultural setting, cultural hegemony of some sort is likely to arise. Also, we may fall into the error of measuring the thoughts of the other with the wrong instrument. Additionally, to synthesise competing methods is a bad logical idea. Therefore, we are left with the option of formulating a new, universal method for intercultural engagement that is at once rigorous, complementary and devoid of ethnocentrism. Conversationalism becomes the fruit of such an attempt.

The intercultural philosophy I propose is inclusive and complementary in nature. It recognises the existence of different traditions of philosophy in different places and argues that all these different traditions house ideas that can be critically and creatively harnessed for the benefit of humanity. However, to realise these ideas outside their various ports of conception, an intercultural platform is required. The idea of intercultural philosophy is not new; it has been around since the twentieth century. As early as 1899 the Indian thinker Brajendranath Seal (1899) had realised that facts of history as well as philosophical ideas could be contextualised, which will make the idea of comparative study significant and that of intercultural philosophy possible. He demonstrated this with the comparison of Vaishnavism and Christian thought. However, it was Paul Masson-Oursel, in his book of 1923 titled *Comparative Philosophy*, who systematically birthed the idea of not only the possibility of different traditions of philosophy as opposed to a dominant centrist view of the time, but of their constructive comparison thereof. Since then, one or the other philosopher has oscillated between one rationality and many. In the last couple of decades, however, three

names have stood out as the noisiest advocates of intercultural discourse, namely: Heinz Kimmerle (1994); Franz Wimmer (1996, 2007); and Ram Adhar Mall (2000a, 2000b, 2015).

Despite their stellar contributions to the development of intercultural philosophy as a burgeoning academic field, there is one thing at which they all failed. In their architectonic structure of intercultural philosophy they paid little attention to the question of choice of method. They assumed quite in error that all that was needed to have an intercultural discourse was the coming together of different traditions of philosophy. While Kimmerle and Mall posit dialogue as the veritable method of such discourse, Wimmer opted for polylogue. In the end, they all failed to see the challenge of conceptual impositions or epistemic hegemony that might arise if we crossed borders with the methods developed in our particular places. This constitutes the core of Asouzu's criticism of Kimmerle and the rest who are at the forefront of intercultural philosophy (Asouzu 2007b, 24–42). This insightful vision of the necessity of a custom method for intercultural philosophy was not lost to me; hence I advocate a procedure known as conversationalism.

To develop this new method, I harvested ideas from different traditions, for example, I have taken: the idea of critical analysis from the analytic tradition; the idea of transgenerational formulation of *problematique* from the continental tradition; the idea of result-orientedness from the American tradition; the idea of common destiny from the Asian tradition; the idea of mutual exchange and cooperation from the Latin American tradition; and the idea of relationship from the African tradition, and so forth. Thus in a conversational orientation of intercultural philosophy, none of the different traditions is in itself inferior or superior to the other. Hence, none should be jettisoned as illegitimate or accepted as sacrosanct. They should all be studied with an open mind in search of plausible ideas for the progressive development of the intellectual heritage of humanity. It appears, therefore, that these basic ingredients grafted from different cultures purvey the cosmopolitan outlook of the conversational philosophy and thus make it our best bet for cultivating intercultural philosophy. As Von Hamid Reza Yousefi (2007, 121) explains:

Intercultural philosophy is based on the fact that other peoples also possess Reason and rationality. The answer to the oft-posed question “what’s the good of intercultural philosophy” is found here. Accordingly, one of the tasks of intercultural philosophy is to question and relativize the self-erected claim of the universality of views from

reductive philosophy in terms of the history of ideas, philosophy and development. In so doing, a dialogue may be conducted as equals between traditions of thought.

This equality, this horizontal relationship, is not a given; it is something that has to be constructed. Most theorists in intercultural philosophy, as I have earlier indicated, tend to take it for granted that an intercultural discourse is guaranteed once a quorum of cultures is formed. Note, however, that this is incorrect. There can be an encounter between or amongst different cultures of philosophy without an intercultural discourse occurring. To obtain a true intercultural discourse, certain conditions must be met. Five of these conditions are: 1) There must have occurred a centrifugal movement of reason that will necessitate the centripetal movement of reason at maturation of its different cultural manifestation. 2) Once the unity of reason is restored, actors must diligently follow the three stages necessary for intercultural discourse. At stage one is communication: private or culturally reflected assumptions have to be communicated by each side to others. In intercultural discourse, there are actors on different cultural sides and unless these actors express their thoughts to one another, intercultural engagement cannot materialise. 3) The second stage is hermeneutics: after actors have expressed their cultural ideas to others, intercultural discourse also requires that each side interprets the ideas which the other cultural sides have expressed as they understand it. There should neither be veneration nor uncritical presuppositions. Intercultural philosophers owe one another the duty to assess, examine, question and pass epistemic judgements on the ideas which other cultural places have expressed. 4) The third stage is conversation: intercultural encounter is not completed or exhausted in one expressing their ideas and interpreting the ideas expressed by others, Each side also has to engage the other on one key front, for example, K has to further engage J on J's interpretation of K and vice versa. In other words, there necessarily has to be a critical and creative encounter in order to unveil new concepts and open new thought vistas. This is the actual conversation, and the platform for this engagement necessarily has to be balanced, equal, fair and just to all. 5) Besides the three stages, there are the legal parameters. There are rules of engagement in intercultural discourse. The first is that a true intercultural engagement has to be cross-cultural, i.e. not only crossing borders but involving as many cultures of philosophy as are available. The second rule is that it has to be transcultural, i.e. transcending particular centrist visions. The third is the rule of mutual respect, i.e. one must not express itself as an absolute instance or attempt to universalise its particular. The fourth rule is the principle of charity, i.e. one must

not interpret the other's perspective as inferior or subordinated or interpret itself as superior and dominant.

On the whole, if any one of these conditions is not met, it is hard for there to be a true intercultural engagement. This is because the goal of intercultural philosophy, which is to orchestrate a centripetal movement of reason from its different cultural manifestations in order to restore the unity of thought, would have been defeated.

## Conclusion

This paper explored conversational philosophy as a theory in African philosophy. I brought out its methodic trajectory, discussed some of its principles and showed its theoretic relevance in and beyond African philosophy. I demonstrated that it accommodates the manifestation of reason in the African place and its transition to the global place. This article contends that its methodic ambience, called conversationalism, could well be our best bet for a universal, ethnically non-committed method for a true intercultural discourse. I showed that reaching intercultural philosophy should be the target of reason from its various cultural manifestations. Finally, I marshalled out basic principles of conversationalism and articulated what I called rules of engagement for a proper intercultural philosophy.

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