

Socrates and *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* in Conversation

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Abstract

The debate on the non-philosophical and non-scientific character of classical African intellectual tradition has spread for so long and become a dominant locus. In the context of the multicultural relations that currently map and shape the contours of human identity, it is now fashionable to appraise cultures and identities not in isolation or with reference to uniqueness but in terms of confluent epistemologies, mutual and inter-related intellectual historical identities. This trend toward networking global intellectual history is laudable, as globality narratives on knowledge production fundamentally entail harmony, shared lifeworld, humanity imaginaries and essences as core moral-epistemological values. Against this background, this article engages in an intercultural analysis of *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* in classical *Yorùbá*-African thought, and Socrates in classical Greek thought, to discover the areas of Afro-European thought confluence in the philosophies of these two historic figures. Consequently, this article uncovers the historical and textual evidence in the oral literature of the *Yorùbá* that validates the ancient philosophical thoughts of *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* as no less sophisticated *vis-à-vis* that of Socrates in ancient Greek philosophy. This article argues that the classical philosophies of both Socrates and *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* are mutually sympathetic with fundamental lessons for developing contemporary intellectual canons of intercultural philosophy.

Keywords: conversational approach; Greek philosophy; intercultural philosophy; *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*; Socrates; *Yorùbá* philosophy

Introduction

Global intellectual culture has been largely characterised by a deep historical sense of Eurocentric hegemony. Over the course of time, Western philosophy, especially Greek intellectual tradition, has been regarded as a prism and blueprint of intellectualism with much vilification of traditional African philosophy as mythology and folk wisdom of less global attention. Greek philosophy prides so high in Alfred North Whitehead's



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(1979, 39) writing that he characterises European philosophical tradition as “a series of footnotes to Plato.” This revered representation of Greek civilisation as the most resounding in terms of intellectual accomplishment, where Socrates is a prominent figure, is eloquently captured by Sanya Osha (2018, 104):

On the basis of the pure rationality of ancient Greece and the hegemony it represents in global intellectual culture, Sophocles becomes the exemplar of comedies and tragedies; Greeks’ culture is then considered the apogee of artistic perfection; Herodotus and Thucydides are regarded as historians par excellence; Homer becomes the standard bearer for bards engaged in epic poetry; and [Socrates], Plato and Aristotle are crowned as the ultimate rhetoricians. In short, the whole of ancient Greek culture and civilization are anointed the most accomplished ever seen.

The dominance of ancient Greek thoughts and Western philosophy, broadly, in intellectual history is not accidentally frivolous. It is strategically designed to be so by the hegemonic voicing of such intellectual tradition, while denying the possibility of an indigenous African cerebral tradition. From Thomas Hobbes, Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, to Thomas Jefferson, so much denigration and silencing of Afro-indigenous contributions to intellectual history have been voiced by some notable Western minds.

Hegel was intrepid enough to conclude that “Africa is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. ... Egypt ... does not belong to the African Spirit” (Hegel 1956, 99). Much as Theophile Obenga, an Egyptologist, tries to show that Hegel’s analysis of the place of Africa in his philosophy of history is invalid, he admitted that “this view of the Hegelian philosophy of history has become almost a common opinion and an academic paradigm in Western historiography. A popular narrative in Western intellectual discourse is the assuming belief that great breakthroughs, discoveries, and civilization cannot be produced by African (Black) people. This also implies that Africans have never made any kind of contribution to world history” (Obenga 2004, 33).

The foregoing has been the prime reason, among many others, for the lack of dignity and worth for the intellectual achievements of the “man of colour” (Fanon 2008). While many scholars, both of African (Asante 1990; Diop 1974; Nabudere 2011; Obenga 2004; Onyewuenyi 1993) and non-African descent (Bernal 1987–2006; James 1954) have contested the Eurocentric domination of global intellectual space by advocating Afrocentrism as alternative and unique epistemic options, my attempt in this paper is not to tread this path. Rather, I am motivated to contribute toward networking global intellectual history through engaging in an intercultural philosophical study of *Ọ̀rúnmilà* in classical *Yorùbá*-African thought, and Socrates in classical Greek thought. An incredibly interesting attempt before now is Sophie Oluwole’s (2014) *magnum opus*, *Socrates and Ọ̀rúnmilà: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*. Inspired by Oluwole’s (2014, 19) charge on “further studies of Western and African philosophy aimed at the promotion of Inter-Cultural Philosophy,” this article provides a fresh

extension of the arguments of Oluwole in her *magnum opus*. As intercultural philosophy involves engaging in conversation with ideas or historic figures “from across cultural and philosophical schools of thought” (Littlejohn 2020, 3), I aim to present for a dialogue the salient ideas in the philosophies of Socrates and *Ọ́rúnmìlà* beyond Oluwole’s landmark.

On the supposition that globality narratives on knowledge production fundamentally entail harmony, shared life-world, humanity imaginaries and essences as core moral-epistemological values, I explore in this essay, through the method of conversationalism, the commonalities and differences in the thoughts of *Ọ́rúnmìlà* and Socrates as grounds for promoting the rational capacities that unite the human race across the board. Conversationalism is “a method that begins from the premise that realities, though independent, exist in a network of interrelation in which the ideas of difference and equality are inherent, and do not exist as isolated units” (Chimakonam 2017, 23). In this regard, my aim in this paper is not to reinforce hegemonic and unique epistemologies; rather it is to discover the areas of Afro-European thought confluence in the philosophies of Socrates and *Ọ́rúnmìlà*. While conversationalism promises a certain degree of epistemological alignment between two seemingly opposed variables, it states that “fundamental differences will always persist due to opposing ontological loyalties of the variables” (Chimakonam 2017, 18). On the strength that the method of conversationalism promotes intercommunication and inter-recognition of truths emanating from different contexts, this essay engages Socrates and *Ọ́rúnmìlà* in conversation.

Following this introduction, the next section of this essay provides a discussion of Socrates, his salient philosophic ideas and method. The section that follows employs the same approach for *Ọ́rúnmìlà*, by bringing to the fore the undervalued ideas and thoughts of *Ọ́rúnmìlà* on thematic issues of philosophic relevance. In the fourth part, the cerebral semblance between these ancient sages of philosophy will be foregrounded. Its objective is to exhume the common denominator that cuts across all humans. In the fifth part, this common denominator is employed to give some leverage to the discourse on multiculturalism and how its evolving canons can be a pivot for improving global relations without an attenuation of rooted identities. The concluding part of the article motivates direction for some future research on this exercise.

Socrates in Classical Philosophy: Intellectual Contribution to Philosophy

Biographical profiling of Socrates informs that he was born in 486BC (Cayne 1992). During this time, people of different races populated the city of Athens, where he lived (Kenny 2006, 13). Socrates, though popularly known as a philosophic sage, excelled in other facets of life besides his vocation in philosophy. He was a soldier in the war he witnessed between Athens and Sparta. In the instructive words of Anthony Kenny:

Among those who served in the Athenian heavy infantry was Socrates the son of Sophroniscus, who was thirty-eight when the war began. He was present at three of the

important battles in the earlier years of the war and won a reputation for bravery. Back in Athens in 406, he held office in the Assembly at a time when a group of generals was put on trial for abandoning the bodies of the dead at the sea-battle of Arginusae. It was illegal to try the generals collectively rather than individually, but Socrates was the only person to vote against doing so, and they were executed. (Kenny 2006, 25)

Apart from being a war veteran, he held political offices as well as taught philosophy. His teachings had considerable influence on Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies. In spite of being renowned as a teacher of great repute, Socrates had no personal writings of his own. Ideas known today in philosophical literature as those of Socrates are the approximate representations of his views recorded by his students and contemporaries such as Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon and Aristophanes (Oluwole 2014). This difficult situation of having a clear and accurate framing of historical Socrates and the views accredited to him by the writings of his students and contemporaries is termed the Socratic problem¹ (Santas 1964). However, I dwell on the writings of Plato, for the simple idea that Plato spent a lengthy time of his learnership under Socrates' tutelage compared with Aristotle, Xenophon, and Aristophanes. Besides, the chronology of Plato's writings offers a sustained clarity on Socrates. The essence of my choice is motivated by the idea that a classification of Plato's writings shows a clear demarcation of writings, which some assume were written by Socrates himself, not Plato.

However, there is a very important tradition about Socrates that is pertinent for the purpose of drawing a semblance with *Òrúnmìlà* in the latter part of this article. It concerns the reputation for wisdom. Socrates is known for asking more questions than providing answers to such questions. In a paradoxical and gadfly manner, he claims to have no answer to the fundamental questions he raises in dialectical conversation with others. In fact, Socrates once said: "I know you won't believe me, but the highest form of Human Excellence is to question oneself and others" (Luce 1992, 12). Life must be given self-critical appraisal both in terms of one's own perception of realities and attitudinal dispositions, because for Socrates "an unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato 1997b, *Apology* 28 [37e–38c]).

Historically, "in classical Greece great attention was paid to the oracles uttered in the name of the god Apollo by the entranced priestesses in the shrine of Delphi. When asked if there was anyone wiser than Socrates, a priestess replied that there was "no one" (Kenny 2006, 26). Upon hearing this verdict, Socrates proceeded to engage those who had a reputation for knowledge and wisdom in Greece (Stumpf 1979) only to concede that indeed the entranced priestess was correct—all these people did not recognise the

1 The Socratic problem entails that in the absence of verbatim recording of the views of Socrates, the possibility of exaggerations, biased interpretations and false claims cannot be ruled out in what is called "Socrates' view." Despite this, the works of Plato, Aristophanes and Xenophon have more basic views of historical Socrates than many contemporary commentaries. In this article, Plato's *Apology*, together with other commentaries, shall be reference points.

limits of their knowledge and what is beyond them but “he alone realised that his own wisdom was worth nothing” (Kenny 2006, 26).

Unlike his Athenian philosophical predecessors who were more interested in finding the foundational principles, origin and primary constitutive elements or entities of the universe, Socrates was concerned with protesting against the way and forms in which the divine origin of moral laws was formulated and misinterpreted. His interest was to assist Athenians to understand and correctly cognise the dictates of G/god. He, therefore, questioned political and religious authority in Athens and taught Athenian youths the art of critical reasoning. Since “a society is the battle place of ideology” (Harris 1988), the ideology in Socrates’ teachings influenced the political life in Athens. Consequently, Socrates was accused by the Athenian authority of corrupting the youths in Athens with the use of propaganda and “supportive rhetoric” (Harris 1988, 129). The aftermath of the accusation was the sentence of Socrates to consume the hemlock. He died from hemlock administration at the age of 70 (Russell 1962).

Socrates’ most important contribution to Western thought was perhaps his dialectic method of inquiry, known as the Socratic method, which he largely applied to the examination of key moral concepts such as good and justice (Kenny 2006, 21). The Socratic method is a negative method of hypothesis elimination, in that better hypotheses are found by steadily identifying and eliminating those which lead to contradictions. It was designed to force one to examine one’s own beliefs and the validity of such beliefs. The method has implications for his foray into other areas of philosophy. In other words, the development and practice of this method was one of Socrates’ most enduring contributions. Through this method, Socrates earned a mantle as the father of political philosophy, ethics or moral philosophy, and as a figurehead of all the central themes in Western philosophy.

The Socratic method works through a series of questions posed to help a person or group to determine their underlying beliefs and the extent as well as the limit of their claims to knowledge. Perhaps it was this method that he employed against those who had a reputation for knowledge in Greece before his admittance that “he alone realised that his own wisdom was worth nothing” (Kenny 2006, 26). The assertion that for Socrates, wisdom has no worth, is not synonymous with the Sophists, especially Georgia’s conviction that “nothing can be known” (Omogbe 1999, 7). Socrates did not say he knew nothing at all. His divine mission was to assist the Athenians to know how to arrive at the definition of virtue, recognise instances of it and live by it. Socrates neither said that everybody is ignorant nor that nobody can possess knowledge, as the Sophists defended.

The ideas of Socrates on ethics are deducible from his emphasis on virtue (Warburton 1999). Socrates perceived virtue as “the wisdom of god,” and justice as the greatest good. Indeed, for him, “moral excellence was more a matter of divine bequest than parental nurture” (Taylor 2001). He understood virtue as “the most valuable of all

possessions; the ideal life is, therefore, the one that searches for Good. Truth lies beneath the shadows of existence, and it is the job of the philosopher to show the rest how little they really know” (Taylor 2001, 15). For Socrates, virtue is knowledge; meaning that knowledge is both a necessary and sufficient condition of virtue. Socrates held that wrongdoing was a consequence of ignorance and those who did wrong knew no better (Omogegbe 1999, 21). Virtue and good actions follow from knowledge. In Socrates’ supposition, if a man knows what is evil, he will not do it for no one ever does evil knowingly. Thus, if a man does evil, he does it out of ignorance. It needs to be expatiated, the idea that by knowledge, Socrates means deep personal conviction. If a man is really deeply convinced that something is evil, he will not do it and if he is really deeply convinced that something is good, he would do it; there is no voluntary wrongdoing.

Socrates emphasised the unity of virtues. To have one virtue, say for instance, courage, is to have all other virtues. This understanding of virtues as coextensive in Socrates’ thought does not mean being virtuous is about having good intentions. Rather, it is having the ability to do the right thing at the appropriate time. Virtuousness is a constitutive means of achieving happiness.

At the epistemic level, Socrates pointed that admittance of ignorance is a precursor to knowledge. While being against epistemological absolutism, Socrates boldly declared self-ignorance: “I am wiser than this man; for neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either” (Plato 1997b, *Apology* 6 [21b–21e]). He has avowal of ignorance, which is a call for modesty in human claims to knowledge. Wisdom in Socrates’ view exclusively belongs to the god, and it is different from human knowledge. True wisdom entails accepting how limited humans are in knowledge.

With the main thrust of Socrates thus articulated, we turn to make a similar exposition of *Òrúnmilà* ideas as well.

Òrúnmìnology: The Philosophy of Òrúnmilà

In this section, I seek to discuss what I called “*Òrúnmìnology*.” *Òrúnmìnology* is an instance of Afrikology, which according to Dani Nabudere (2012, 78), is “an epistemology of knowledge generation and application that has roots in African cosmology and worldviews.” Unlike Afrikology that draws its inspiration from Egyptology, *Òrúnmìnology* is the philosophy rooted in *Òrúnmilà*’s reflective thoughts as chronicled in the *Ifá* corpus. Just as what the world knows about Socrates may be gleaned from the writings of his disciples, the same may be said of *Òrúnmilà*, whose thoughts have been compiled within the verses of the *Ifá* literary corpus. Therein, he is depicted in an *Odù Ifá* (i.e., *Ifá* chapter) as an extraordinary persona, though with controversial characteristics. There are contentions in *Yorùbá* oral tradition regarding the being of *Òrúnmilà*; he has been identified as either a mythical being or a historical

personality. While this paper is persuaded with the later characterisation, in the main, an analysis of *Òrúnmilà* as a mythical personality is first presented.

In *Odù Ìwòrì Méjì*, a chapter in *Ifá* corpus, a mythological narration was presented about *Òrúnmilà* on how he was sent along with other *Òrìsàs* (deities) to *Ilé-Ifè* by *Olódùmarè* (God) to establish the world. By being branded as a deity with *imò ìjìnlè* (deep knowledge and wisdom of things), his special mandate was to use this wisdom to organise the society and deliver unto humankind the divine message of *Olódùmarè*. But then he was mocked for lack of children. After performing some rituals, he soon gave birth to eight children, each of whom became an important king of *Yorùbá* city-states, most of which still exist today. After his children had grown up, *Òrúnmilà* summoned them for a festival. They all came to join him and paid their respects, but the youngest child challenged *Òrúnmilà*'s authority by coming to the festival with the same symbols of authority which his father wore and refused to bow to him. *Òrúnmilà* was incensed by this rejection of his authority, so he withdrew to the foot of a particular kind of palm tree and climbed up into heaven. As a result, the earth fell into chaos, women could not get pregnant, those who were pregnant could not deliver, the sick did not recover, the rain stopped falling, the rivers dried up, the crops failed, and even the animals started behaving strangely. Everything was falling apart.

As later explained in *Odù* (chapter of *Ifá*) under consideration, the people begged *Òrúnmilà*'s children to convince him to come back, and they went to perform divination. *Òrúnmilà*'s children made the prescribed sacrifice and went to the foot of the palm tree their father had climbed and began to implore him to return to earth, reciting a litany of his praise names. However, *Òrúnmilà* had made up his mind not to return to earth. But pitying his children, he told them to stretch out their hands so he could give them something to ease their distress. He gave them the sixteen *ìkin*, the palm nuts used in *Ifá* divination, telling them: "For all the good that you want in this world, this is the one you must consult." When they returned to *Ilé-Ifè*, things started to go well again, and they attained all the good things they were seeking.

However, there is a secular explanation that construes *Òrúnmilà* as a human being who was born and raised at Oke Igeti in *Ilé-Ifè*, South-Western Nigeria. This paper aligns with this conception of *Òrúnmilà* in view of its historical plausibility. In this understanding, *Òrúnmilà* is characterised as a legend and a historical personality born around 500 B.C. (Emanuel 2000, 233, Oluwole 2017; 44). While Jakuta (meaning a stonemason) is the name of *Òrúnmilà*'s father, his mother is called Alajeru (a recipient of sacrifices). As a being with flesh and blood, his physical attribute is described in a verse in *Oyeku-Meji* thus: "*Òrúnmilà*, you are black as if dyed in indigo. You are dark like the blacksmith. You are really a parody of beauty!" (cited in Emanuel 2000, 355). Ola Longe (1998) shares this perspective of historical *Òrúnmilà* that turned legend when he distinguishes *Òrúnmilà* from *Ifá*. For him, the *Ifá* corpus "... was originated and codified by *Òrúnmilà* who lived in *Ilé-Ifè*, several centuries ago" (Longe 1998, 15). The need to clarify the deity from the corpus is important because of the temptation to strictly

construe *Òrúnmìlà* as a mythical figure that never lived, and because of the popular conflation in the usage of *Ifá* and *Òrúnmìlà* as though they are synonymous. For this reason, Kola Abimbola (2006) explains the ground for the interchangeable use of the name as well as the proper characterisation of each term:

Ifá, who lived for hundreds of years, and visited many parts of the world, bequeathed the *Ifá* divination system to humanity. Another name of *Ifá* is *Òrúnmìlà*. The word *Ifá*, however, is used to refer to the *Orisa* [divinity] himself, his instruments of divination as well his system of divination and literature. The name *Òrúnmìlà* refers solely to the divinity himself. ... *Ifá* priests and priestesses were counselors, physicians, historians and philosophers of ancient *Yorùbá* land. (Abimbola 2006, 119)

Regardless of the synonymous usage of the terms, this article admits that the *Ifá* corpus is a product of *Òrúnmìlà* and his disciples regarding a wide array of topics of interest, with a distinct method and varied philosophical outputs. As an ancient *Yorùbá* thinker with extraordinary gifts who lived through a thick and thin period of his time, people deified him to the status of *Orisa* (god). However, given that there are oral traditions which identify the originator of *Ifá*, as an exceptionally wise man whose fame brought him several disciples and apprentices from far and wide (Oluwole 1994), it makes more sense to take to the historical persona than the mythical image of *Òrúnmìlà*. Amongst the numerous apprentices that studied under his influence, *Òrúnmìlà* chose only 16 of them and their names coincide with the elder 16 *Odù* (book of) *Ifá*. The younger 240 *Odù* could, therefore, be reasonably regarded as members of the later generation of disciples and apprentices trained by the first 16 and others. Each *Odù* has 16 verses (in modern language, chapters). Each verse generally occurs as poetry intermittent with prose (Oluwole 1994, 7). The pertinent question here is: Which of the ideas, beliefs, and doctrines contained in the 256 books with over 4 000 chapters were expressed by the historical *Òrúnmìlà*? This is what Sophie Oluwole (2014) rightly calls the “*Òrúnmìlà* problem”; with a greater dimension than the Socratic problem because none of *Òrúnmìlà*’s immediate disciples or their descendants wrote anything. It is, therefore, important to engage *Òrúnmìlà*’s thought, through a heuristic exploration of *Ifá* corpus, an oral tradition of the *Yorùbá* that is now largely documented.²

I commence with an endogenous philosophical gaze at the epistemology of *Òrúnmìlà* as documented in the corpus. There are concepts such as “truth” and “knowledge” in the *Ifá* corpus; an understanding of these concepts will show that *Òrúnmìlà*’s philosophy is penetrative and sophisticated, even when it has not received much attention from concurrent academia. This is demonstrated for instance, in *Odù Okanran-turupon*:

It is through learning *Ifá* that one understands *Ifá*
It is by missing one’s way that one becomes acquainted with the way

2 The orature of *Ifá*, where the thoughts of *Òrúnmìlà* can be found, include classical texts such as: Wande Abimbola’s (1976) *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*; Abosedo Emmanuel’s (2000) *Odun Ifá: Ifá Festival*; Ayo Salami’s (2002) *Ifá: A Complete Divination*; and Afolabi A. Epega and John N. Philip’s (1995) *The Sacred Ifa Oracle*.

It is the road that one has not walked before that makes one wander here and there.³

The foregoing *Oḍù* is targeted at the idea of trial and error, which is characteristic of the method of science. To attain higher truths and knowledge of things, one must be prepared to make and overcome initial errors or gaffes. However, proper guidance and tutelage are still required for the successful attainment of knowledge. *Òrúnmìlà* was not oblivious that an improper guide or tutor can mislead a learner. This outlook is even more obvious in *Odu Irete-Ogbe*, where *Òrúnmìlà* noted: “If we teach a person to be wise, he will be wise, if we teach a person to be stupid, he will be stupid.”⁴

Furthermore, the insistence on absolute and unshakeable truths is disregarded as ignorance within the *Ifá* corpus. Hence, *Òrúnmìlà* maintained a fallible outlook in his epistemology. Specifically, in *Oḍù Ìwori Ogbè*, *Òrúnmìlà* and his disciples harped:

As today is seen, tomorrow is not seen likewise
That is why the babaláwo performs divination every five days.⁵

The epistemic importance of divining every five days is to allow for dynamism and change in claims to knowledge. *Òrúnmìlà* was against absolutism of knowledge and claims to incorrigible truth, whether by mortal beings or even from terrestrial sources. Hence, the idea of intermittent divination is to guide understanding of reality, inform praxis, and planning. Knowledge is so wide an area of human thought that no one can be its sole custodian and the possessor of all-encompassing wisdom. In *Òrúnmìlà*'s words: “Anyone who says ‘I am all wise, I am all knowing’ deceives nobody but him/herself. For it is only in a community of fools that such a self-conceited person is paraded as a sage” (Oluwole 2014). The detestation against epistemological absolutism can be further distilled in a popular *Ifá* verse, where *Òrúnmìlà* instructed about human limitation and eagerness to learn new facts of reality as an intellectual virtue. The verse reads:

He who knows this may not know that.
The truth of this principle is illustrated by *Òrúnmìlà*.
Òrúnmìlà went to learn from Amosun, his own children.⁶

The thrust of the above is that neither status, age, nor experience provides a sufficient basis for any claim to infallible knowledge. This is the paradoxical self-acclaimed

3 Translation culled from Afolabi A. Epega and John N. Philip, *The Sacred Ifa Oracle* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 412.

4 Translation culled from Oludamini Ogunnaike, “Sufism and Ifa: Ways of Knowing in Two West African Intellectual Traditions.” Doctoral dissertation (Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2015), 307.

5 Translation culled from Wande Abimbola, *Ifá Divination Poetry* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1977), 170.

6 Quoted in Sophie B. Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy* (Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2014), 143.

ignorance of *Òrúnmìlà*, especially when one takes into cognisance the deification of his historical personality in *Yorùbá* pantheon to a god of wisdom.

While tinkering on truth, *Òrúnmìlà* shared some witty ideas on the rarity of truth among people. In *Odù Qwọnrin Dagbọn*, we read:

Truth is a sacred water from *Ilé-Ifẹ̀*
There are not many who drink from it.⁷

However, just like Socrates, *Òrúnmìlà* also made a connection between truth and virtue. This is striking once we pay attention to the role of character (*ìwà*) in his teachings. In a fair rendition in the English Language, *Òrúnmìlà* and *Ọsa-Otura*, in the *Odù* bearing the latter's name, dialogued thus:

Ọsa Otura says: "What is Truth?" I say: "What is Truth?"
Orunmila says: "Truth is the Lord of Heaven guiding the earth."
Orunmila says: "Truth is the Unseen One guiding the Earth. The wisdom Olódùmarè uses."
Ọsa Otura says: "What is Truth?" I say "What is Truth?"
Orunmila says: "Truth is the character (*ìwà*) of *Olódùmarè*. Truth is the word that cannot fall. *Ifá* is Truth. Truth is the word that cannot spoil. Truth surpasses all. Blessing everlasting."
[... Following the conversation, *Ọsa-Otura* and *Òrúnmìlà*] said they should come and speak the truth.
"Speak the truth, tell the facts;
Speak the truth, tell the facts;
Those who speak the truth are those whom the gods will help."⁸

The foregoing is basically on truth—and truth is an epistemic issue, as shown in the dialogue between *Òrúnmìlà* and *Ọsa Otura*, one of his disciples. More so, the *Odù* pointed out that the dialectical method can also be found in the classical reflections of *Òrúnmìlà*, as is the case with Socrates. Closely knitted with it is the complementary method, which is evident in the *Yorùbá* saying that: "When the right washes the left and the left washes the right, a cleaner hand will emerge." In the foregoing *Odù*, it is the complementary method of give and take through dialogue that underlies the discourse. The same method also implies that no one should be rendered useless based on age. Complementarity is redolent in the outlook provided by *Òrúnmìlà* in *Odù Ọyẹ̀kú Méjì*, where it is documented that:

A child is not tall enough to stretch his hand to reach the high shelf
An adult's hand cannot enter the opening of the gourd

7 Translation culled from Oludamini Ogunnaike (2015), *Sufism and Ifa: Ways of Knowing in Two West African Intellectual Traditions*, p. 282.

8 Quoted in William Russell Bascom (1996), *Ifa Divination Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press), 1969), xii.

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The work an adult begs a child to do
Let him not refuse to do.
We all have to work to do for each other's good ...⁹

Ọ̀rúnmìlà's contributions to the notion of self-critical awareness are not to be easily wished away in light of its connection with the notion of truth as character, *ìwà*. Character is an important theme in *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*'s moral thought. In *Odù Èjì Ogbè*, we glean:

Coming into the world is easy
Later, when returning, the last gasps are difficult
There is no comforter
No one to whom we can complain, what remains is the work of one's hands
Gentle character is what Èlẹ̀dùmarè likes ...¹⁰

The foregoing *Odù* beckons on the cultivation of improved morality and character through critical self-awareness and examination. The recognition of the difficulty of cultivating improved character is acknowledged by *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* when he admonished in *Odù Ogbè-Yònú* that:

Indignation does not bring forth anything good;
Patience is the best of character.
A patient elder has everything;
The truth of this thesis is adequately demonstrated
in the incidence of destiny that lacks character.
Nurturing as well as exhibiting good character is difficult;
No destiny is bad in pristine *Ifẹ*;
It is only nurturing and exhibiting good character that is difficult.¹¹

Inquisition on *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*'s metaphysical thought is instructive. His metaphysics straddles between the principles of duality to complementarity. Duality simply means reciprocity of the opposites. For instance, duality in *Ifá* corpus is shown by the arrangement of *Ifá* divination rope (chaplet) into alternate forms of two similar or contrary "*odus*" (chapters), each of which is meant to complement the other, such that through imaginative empathy contraries or opposites are symbiotically harmonised.¹² In *Ifá* corpus, there is the primordially of spirit and matter as exemplified in the doctrine of pantheism, in which *matter* is the body of *spirit*, while "spirit" is the vital life-force that animates matter. Without matter the potentialities of spirit will lie waste; and

9 Translation culled from Wande Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976), 145.

10 Translation culled from Oludamini Ogunnaike (2015), *Sufism and Ifa: Ways of Knowing in Two West African Intellectual Traditions*, 291.

11 Translation culled from Ademola K. Fayemi, "Human personality and the Yorùbá worldview: An ethico-sociological interpretation." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 9 (2009), 170.

12 Omotade, Adegbindin. *Ifa in Yorùbá Thought System* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2014), 39.

without spirit matter will lie dormant. Hence, the vibrancy of matter is made possible by spirit, just as the potency of spirit is made visible by matter. The physical and the non-physical must complementarily interrelate for existence to be meaningful.

In *Oturupon Meji*, the verse speaks of complementary duality as a basic feature of nature:

Good sight requires two eyes just as safe walk demands two feet;
Two buttocks rest comfortably beneath recumbent hips.
But can you hear the clapping of one hand, or the sound of one foot marching?
Because one man differs from the next, is good reason to confer personal names.¹³

Though that narration is on natural phenomenon, it touches on the interrelationship of matter and non-matter components of reality in general. This interrelation is what Oluwole describes as complementary dualism.¹⁴ The basic assumption of this metaphysical position, according to her, “is that the two features of reality [matter and non-matter] have an inherent relationship” (Oluwole 2014, 182–183), such that both are “inseparable and complementary in nature and function” (Oluwole 2014, 139).

From the exploration of some of these *Odùs*, the rendition that *Òrúnmìlà* is a wholly mythical entity loses substance. Oluwole (1994, 9) shares a similar conviction thus: “The mythic origin of *Ifá* does not therefore necessarily detract from the belief that *Ifá* once lived as a man of great wisdom, a consulting oracle of a sort.” *Òrúnmìlà*’s contribution through the dialectical method with his disciples inspires Longe (1998, 11–4) to aver that “*Ifá* is recognised by the *Yorùbá* as the repository for *Yorùbá* traditional body of knowledge, embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore.” Similarly, Oluwole concurs that the *Ifá* literary corpus is a “concrete example of African philosophy” (Oluwole 1994, 7).

Following the above exposition of *Òrúnmìlà*’s philosophy, in the next section, I provide a comparison of some of the ideas of Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà*.

13 Translation culled from Abosede Emanuel, *Ifa Festival (Odun Ifa)* (Lagos: West African Book Publishers Ltd., 2000).

14 Sophie B. Oluwole. *Socrates and Orunmila: Patron Saints of Classic Philosophy* (Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2014), 182

Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* as two patron saints of philosophy¹⁵

Having exposed the personalities and ideas that are suggestive of philosophy in each of Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* historically, it is important to examine the striking similarities and differences between these two classical minds.

It is not incidental that whereas Socrates was acclaimed as the wisest man in the Greece of his epoch, *Òrúnmìlà* was reputedly known as the “father of *Ifá* wisdom.” Both Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* had disciples and engaged others or taught in dialogues using allegories, metaphors and myths. They expressed themselves in an intoxicating mixture of poetry and prose, and proposed principles.

Consider for instance, Socrates’ understanding of the immortal nature of the soul in relation to his mythical last utterance before his death in the “*Phaedo*.” Socrates, in his myth of last judgment in the “*Gorgias*” described the transformation of human souls at death. Summarily, he told the tales of how Zeus judges the souls of the dead, punishing the wicked and rewarding the just (Fussi 2001). Socrates urged that the myth is worth keeping, “and from these stories, on my reckoning, we must draw some such moral as this” (Plato 1925, *Gorgias* 523a4–524a8). On this conviction, Socrates gave his last words after drinking hemlock and at the point of death: “Crito, we owe a cock to Asklepios—Pay it and do not neglect it” (Plato 1977, *Phaedo* line 118). Instructive to note in these metaphoric and mythical expressions are the personality of Asklepios, symbolic representation of cock, and the parallel between his charge to Crito and his earlier view regarding the transformation of humans at death in the “*Gorgias*.” Asklepios, known as the good physician, was Apollo’s son and “a chthonic deity, a god in touch with the earthly underworld, the world of spirits, like Demeter, Pluto, and Orpheus who were worshiped at Delphi” (Bailey 2018). In ancient Greek mythology, a cock symbolised rebirth and afterlife. Besides being the traditional thanks offering given to the healing god, Asklepios, it is a symbol of hopeful proclamation of the coming of a new day; a new life (Thucydides 1972). Socrates’ belief in transformation of the soul after death is reinforced in his famous last words, which are simply offering thanks to Asklepios and pointing to the afterlife (Bailey 2018).

In a related sense, *Òrúnmìlà* used metaphors and myths in the explanation of nature and fundamental reality. Like Socrates, who believed in immortality of the soul and the goodness of death, *Òrúnmìlà* used metaphoric association of a stream and pond to give

15 The usage of the phrase “Patron Saints” to depict *Òrúnmìlà* and Socrates, respectively, is not original to this paper; it is used by Sophie Oluwole (2014). According to this description, instead of using *Baba Ifa* (father of *Ifa* Corpus) to represent *Òrúnmìlà*, and father of Greek wisdom to define Socrates, Oluwole chooses the catchy phrase—“Patron Saints.” This choice is in accordance with “the practice in the early Christian Church by which prominent philosophers ... were later canonized as saints, and more particularly with the suggestion of Erasmus to include Santa Socrates, *Ora pro nobis* ... in the liturgy of the Catholic Church” (Oluwole 2014, XIV). I have found this canonisation useful; hence adopted in this paper.

coherence to the meaning and justification of death and life. In *Oyeku meji*, he narrated thus:

Wish for long life might be glorious when unharmed
 Being helplessly alive when life has lost its meaning is most horrible
 Anytime death comes, wittiness requires being grateful to its creator
 Why should man experience death after all?
 Life-trusteeship is bestowed to humans by the creator as a blessing
 Life is a stream of water; it flows out and back
 When it is stagnant, it becomes a pond, full of threatening impurities
 When the stream flows outward; it is birth
 When it flows backward; we call it death
 Death is a necessity for rebirth in new life.¹⁶

From the above narrative, the main metaphoric symbol is “stream,” albeit different descriptions which result in “life”; “death”; and “rebirth.” Stream as a metaphoric symbolic representation of both life and death in a binary structure, which means that as a stream essentially constitutes flowing water, life and death will continuously interplay endlessly (Fayemi 2014). The point of eschatology in both Socrates’ and *Òrúnmìlà* opens a vista of conversation that is yet to be taken seriously in intercultural philosophy between Western and African classical figures. Language is one possible explanation for this lacuna. Because of the style of their language, it is difficult to separate their literary secular claims from their religious doctrines, as well as their metaphors and jokes from serious thinking. Each of them survived within the classical age when every human thought and knowledge belonged to the system known as philosophy and there was no compartmentalisation of knowledge. None of the two classical minds propounded a metaphysical or epistemological doctrine as absolute, especially on the nature of reality and knowledge. Both recognised the limitations of human reality in the attainment of absolute truth. Indeed, Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* were both concerned with the good life of individuals as well as that of the society.

Another striking semblance between these intellectual personae is the dearth in written work. Neither Socrates nor *Òrúnmìlà* wrote. The contributions of Socrates to the philosophical enterprise are based on writings by his students and peers. His philosophical works can be seen in Aristophanes’ *Clouds and Birds*, Xenophon’s *Symposium* and *Memorabilia*, Plato’s *Republic*, *Protagoras*, *Apology*, *Parmenides*, among others. Like Socrates, *Òrúnmìlà* did not write any book, but his philosophical works are captured in the oral tradition of the *Yorùbá* people known as *Ifá*. *Òrúnmìlà* is known as the father of *Ifá*, “*Òrúnmìlà* baba *Ifá*.” *Ifá*, it should be restated at this juncture, is not a mere divination system but a literary compendium of the *Yorùbá* intellectual and cultural heritage. It is the storehouse of *Yorùbá* history, mythology, knowledge and

16 Quoted in Ademola K. Fayemi (2014), “Hermeneutics of Death in *Yorùbá Ifa* Corpus.” In Danoye O. Laguda (ed.) *Death and Life After Death in African Philosophy and Religions: A Multidisciplinary Engagement* (Harare, Zimbabwe: African Institute for Culture, Peace, Dialogue and Tolerance Studies), 260.

thought system. As a symbolic personality of wisdom, many people wanted to learn at his feet. According to Oluwole (1994), *Ọ̀rúnmilà* only chose 16 apprentices who documented his thoughts in 16 major Odu (books). Later generations of *Ọ̀rúnmilà* disciples produced 256 Odu (books), which are subdivided into several verses. The crucial question here is: Which of the ideas, beliefs, doctrines, and statements contained in the 256 books with over 4 000 chapters were expressed by *Ọ̀rúnmilà*? This is what Oluwole (2014) rightly tagged “the *Ọ̀rúnmilà* problem.”

Not until recently, scholars like Wande Abimbola, Abosede Emmanuel, Ayo Salami, Omotade Adegbindin, amongst others, began the documentation of the *Ifá* oral tradition; it had remained in the oral form, known as oral tradition. It is, therefore, safe to infer that their philosophical thoughts were concealed in oral tradition. And precisely because of this, there is the persistence of “the Socratic problem” and “the *Ọ̀rúnmilà* problem” in each philosophical tradition. This problem is expressed in terms of the dilemma regarding what these philosophers said with exactitude. The understanding of their thoughts and ideas is, at best, inferred from what “others said they said.” But most importantly, both sages detested and consequently condemned the state of ignorance and lack of self-knowledge.

Despite Socrates’s and *Ọ̀rúnmilà*’s conviction that human beings have knowledge out of their personal experiences, each gave credence to the gods as having the greatest knowledge. Socrates claimed that the gods have the greatest exclusive wisdom, which is different from that of humans. Similarly, *Ọ̀rúnmilà* attested to “*Ifá*” as the gate-keeper of wisdom.

The Socratic dialectical method involves an attempt to help people birth the knowledge in them, hence making him a mid-wife. The *Ọ̀rúnmilà* method, on the other hand, is like that of a student-teacher conversation as seen in *Ọ̀sa-Otura*, where *Ọ̀rúnmilà* was explaining the nature of truth. This method also involves a cross-fertilisation of ideas between different people for the purpose of solving problems. The Socratic dialectical method, according to Aristotle, is regarded as the essence of scientific method; hence, its survival and continued relevance in contemporary times. This point may not accurately reflect *Ọ̀rúnmilà*’s method of conversation, which has suffered neglect for centuries.

Socrates emphasised that knowledge is virtue and prescribed that we seek knowledge so as to become virtuous. Wrongdoing is caused by a lack of knowledge. *Ọ̀rúnmilà*, on his own part, stressed the need to seek and teach each other wisdom rather than engaging in acts of stupidity and buffoonery. He also maintained that one should consult the wisdom of ancient thinkers when perplexed about what to do.

Having examined some of the similarities between these two classical philosophers, it is imperative to also consider cases of radical departures between them. It is insightful to commence with the claim that Socrates is a philosopher of world repute, and his

philosophy is taught and included in the curriculum of Western philosophy in universities across the world, Africa inclusive. *Òrúnmìlà*, on the other hand, is a bolt from the blue, an obscure intellectual figure, which is conventionally depicted as a mythical personality in the *Yorùbá Ifá* divination system. He strikes no intellectual recognition in African philosophy in the continental African and diaspora space, and he is not included in the curriculum of ancient African philosophy, whether within the interstice of African universities or outside. His thought is considered not qualified as theoretical or practical knowledge. Oluwole (1994, 2014) has been very critical and perceives this neglect and non-inclusion of *Òrúnmìlà* in the curriculum of ancient African philosophy as unjustified and as a product of an unquestioned and uncritical acceptance of ancient Greek cum Western intellectual superiority over Africa.

While there is controversy surrounding the exact personality of *Òrúnmìlà*, there is no scepticism on the historical personality of Socrates. In the face of the varied traditions regarding the personality of *Òrúnmìlà*, evidence abounds concerning the physical features, lifetime as well as events that shaped Socrates. These are not too hard to glean in Western texts on ancient philosophy. From these texts one can deduce that “Socrates lived all his life in Athens” (Kenny 2006, 25). It is not true to say that he was not an itinerant teacher. But *Òrúnmìlà* was an itinerant teacher who moved from one settlement to the other and developed the art of divination as a system of documenting important elements of human experiences. Where there are numerous traditions that portrayed Socrates as a poor person who was hardly capable of providing for his family, *Òrúnmìlà* was reported as being prosperous enough to feed the large group of his associates.

Whereas several generations of thinkers after Socrates, in the Western world and beyond, have continued to criticise, review, add and subtract from the philosophical leagues and traditions of Socrates with great interest and enthusiasm, this unfortunately, is not the case with *Òrúnmìlà* in African philosophy. Only very few African scholars have started engaging him, philosophically, in recent times (Adegbindin 2014; Nwosimiri 2020; Ofuasia 2019; Ogunnaike 2015). Despite the various factors that can account for this near neglect of *Òrúnmìlà* in philosophical scholarship, it is incontestable that the “overwhelming influence of Christianity and Islam in contemporary African living” (Fayemi 2012, 317) is prime. Instead of discovering, reconstructing, and reviewing the intellectual legacies of *Òrúnmìlà*, generations of African thinkers/descendants have condemned, despised, and repudiated his thought system; perceiving it as a residue of barbaric mysticism, which ought not to be revisited in the current age.

The philosophy of Socrates has in no small means contributed to the development of philosophy in Europe, while that of *Òrúnmìlà* is now inspiring further inquisition in Africa and the diaspora. A cursory look into their philosophical works reveals that they held very similar ideas, but a major distinguishing factor is the language. While the ideas of Socrates have been interpreted long ago, the works of *Òrúnmìlà* and other ancient African philosophers are just being translated and engaged in contemporary times.

With the historical and philosophic underpinnings of each of Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* juxtaposed, it is not otiose to demand the practical utility and relevance of their insights. In a fast-paced world that currently maps our existence wherein identities are more conflated and mixed, what can we learn from the two philosophic-sages that seem so aloof, racially, temporally and culturally? Does an intercultural framing of their thoughts say anything about a common denominator—rationality among the *Homo sapiens*, irrespective of place of origin? Does the demonstration of the common denominator (rationality) between Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* say anything to support the thesis of the multiculturalists? Perhaps to know whether there is any connection, it is important to tell what exactly the term “multiculturalism” connotes.

Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* within the domain of multiculturalism

From the discussion thus far, rationality is a feature of humanity not limited to one group nor lacking among some others. The dearth of rationality has been one of the justifications put forward for colonialism. It is in line with this reasoning that Claude Ake reports:

... more emphasis was placed on the justification of colonialism as a service to the colonized people. What service? Essentially the service of civilizing them. That is why colonialism was “popularly” referred to by colonizers as a civilizing mission. According to the theory, the civilization of the native, includes among other things, bringing them Western education, the benefits of Western technology, bringing them into the stream of human history, getting them to discard their “barbaric culture” and generally redeeming a way of life captive to ignorance, poverty, and disease. (Ake 1981, 83)

However, the preceding sections have served to sharply show that this “barbaric culture” is a product of human intellect too. To be adjudged by the one as barbaric is a failure to understand diversity and radical uniqueness that does not conform to the culture one is accustomed to. It is the failure to see the uniqueness and originality of the African culture and structure that informed the “barbaric” warrant as well as the Eurocentric denigration of the Africans. It calls for concern how African states have had their indigenous ideas, institutions, kingdoms, and pace of politico-economic development truncated. In the words of Ifeanyi Menkiti:

...in the case of Africa, the kingdoms simply ground to a halt, and what replaced them were territories created by an act of imperial will, not something that organically evolved. This dissolution of peoples by imperial will, and the subsequent attempt to impose on the space, which was formerly occupied by the dissolved peoples, a new order of governance patterned after European national needs and political understandings, lies, it has been argued, at the base of Africa’s current problems of state malfunction. (Menkiti 2002, 36)

Such as the foregoing is tempted to revive the discourse on colonial subjectivity and inferiority of Africans, multiculturalism as a platform for fostering people of diverse cultures and traditions, lays emphasis on what unites humanity rather than what divides.

Multiculturalism entails acknowledging the validity of the cultural expressions and contributions of the various groups (Rosado 1996, 4). Caleb Rosado's conception of multiculturalism is instructive. According to him:

Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society. (Rosado 1996, 3)

It is important to take a critical look at some of the key implications that present themselves in the above quotation. The first is recognition of the rich diversity in each society. In many societies today, racial/ethnic minorities, the physically disabled, and women, have not been given the same recognition as others (Rosado 1996, 4). "The one-sided approach to history and education has been a testimony to the fact [of epistemic injustice that pervades North-South intellectual discourses]" (Swan 1995, 182).

From the foregoing, it is the case that as Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* are products of the ancient Greek and traditional *Yorùbá* cultures, respectively, their ideas are not only instructive but also relevant to contemporary societies. No one culture is essentially backward or "barbaric" nor is the historically conditioned ideas emanating from one intellectual space inferior to those of others. The common denominator among all humans that persists across all cultures is rationality¹⁷ and this is something that unites even when factors such as skin, colour, culture, and upbringing are crucial too. When people of diverse cultures interact, there is bound to be cross-cultural fertilisation. It is in this spirit that Friedrich Heckmann upholds that multiculturalism is an interpretation of the concept of culture: there are no "pure" original cultures. Each culture has incorporated elements of other cultures; cultures are the result of interaction with one another; culture is continuous process and change. For him, "the cultures of immigrants are opportunities for the enrichment of one's own culture" (Heckmann 1993, 245).

When rationality and its diverse dimensions are taken seriously, the truth and relevance of the multicultural thesis that what unites us are much stronger than what divides us, becomes explicit. Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* have been juxtaposed in this study to further enhance the perspective of the multiculturalist. In a fundamental sense, multiculturalism is a contestation of hegemonic intellectual dominance of the West against the denigration of the intellectual worth of African intellectual culture. Reacting to the

17 The fact that rationality is a common denominator should not be taken to mean what constitutes rationality in the thoughts of Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* is essentially the same. While reason is not the only component of rationality in *Òrúnmìn*ology, spirituality, energy and feelings are its necessary complements. In Socrates, such quadruple understanding of rationality is less appreciated, as reason is essentially privileged in matters of rationality.

seemingly canonical view that philosophy commenced among the ancient Greeks and the only valid form of philosophy could be found nowhere else, Obenga reiterates:

It is a mere prejudice to believe that the philosophical epoch of humanity begins first among the Greeks in the fifth century BC. This prejudice implies that other ancient people did not engage in speculative thought. Undoubtedly, speculative thought transcends experience, but it always attempts to explain, interpret, and unify it in order to systematize it. Speculative thought, using aphorisms, allusions, metaphors, negative or positive methods, and dialectics, can be oral or written, and it is necessarily connected with the problems of life. (Obenga 2004, 31)

In a related development, Chinese scholar Fung Yu-Lan perceives philosophy as “systematic reflective thinking on life” (Yu-Lan 1976, 16). Taking cognisance of this concise and precise conception of philosophy, the African is not excluded from the arena of reflective thinking. Since s/he is in possession of a rational faculty, this attests to the existence of a common denominator that cuts across the *Homo sapiens*. This point is cogently elucidated in Godwin Sogolo’s remarks:

The mind of the African is not structurally different from that of the Westerner. Also, the contextual contrast between Western thought and traditional African thought, which considers only the former as a suitable material for philosophical reflection, rests on false premises. The truth is that both are similarly marked by the same basic features of the human species. The difference lies in the ways the two societies conceive of reality and explain objects and events. (Sogolo 1993, 74)

This paper, in its heuristic analysis of the contributions of *Ọ̀rúnmilà* to classical *Yorùbá* philosophy and Socrates to classical Greek philosophy, takes as axiomatic Sogolo’s (1993, 74) proposition that “... both are similarly marked by the same features of the human species.” Sogolo’s point on the differences in how reality is viewed and explained in both societies is taken to a discriminatory height in Oluwole’s evaluation of the philosophies of Socrates and *Ọ̀rúnmilà*, where she ranks higher *Ọ̀rúnmilà*’s complementary duality metaphysical principle over that of Socrates, that is based on a monistic-oppositional view of reality. In her words:

Complementary duality is the most conceptually adequate antidote against the enigma of innumerable unfounded religious, philosophical, scientific, moral, economic, political, ethnic, national, international, and worst of all intellectual terrorisms brought about by treating Western monistic traditions of thought as absolute positions against which there are no other intellectually cogent alternative traditions of thought. (Oluwole 2014, 181)

This paper departs from Oluwole’s approach of ranking the intellectual merits of the ideas and principles espoused by both Socrates and *Ọ̀rúnmilà*. While acknowledging the points of similarities and differences in their contributions toward knowledge, this paper disinters as more fundamental the ideal of convergence of thought in some respects as critical to multicultural understanding. Such a conversation mollification of

ideas across borders has a greater chance of accentuating the global character of philosophy across climes and ages without ingrained superiority-inferiority complex in Global North and South intellectual exchanges. The thrust of this essay is that humans should not be segregated along skin and demographic profile, as the rational feature is indicatively commonplace.

In the end, to say that one culture is superior and higher than the other is to neglect the more fundamental question of how rationality has been variously deployed in various societies to improve human existence. The fact of rationality, which is a human endowment, presupposes that rationality will be deployed in various coordinated ways to advance the interest of societies. Western societies have advanced beyond African societies because of the pragmatic-existential ways rationality has been positively used to organise resources at their disposal and better the lot of their own people. While many African societies need to do more in this regard, it should be noted that rationality is one common feature that unites humanity, and which should be given serious attention in the African world. Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà*, two sages of two radically different cultures and traditions, have been used as a mould to account for this conviction.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have facilitated an intercultural conversation between Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* in ancient Greek and *Yorùbá* societies with a view to unpacking the areas of Afro-European thought confluence in their philosophies. This article provides evidence in the *Yorùbá* orature that validates the ancient philosophical thoughts of *Òrúnmìlà* as no less sophisticated *vis-à-vis* that of Socrates in ancient Greek philosophy. The similarities in their thoughts are more of degree and less of kind. From the historical and philosophical exposition of each of these historic figures, rationality is a feature of the *Homo sapiens*, irrespective of skin colour and era of existence. While this essay is redolent of the perspective that the world needs to learn from *Òrúnmìlà Hom*, much as they have from Socrates, it does not wish away the locus that this cross-fertilisation of ideas of radically different cultures further justifies the groundwork of multiculturalism; wherein emphasis on the common denominator of humanity is placed higher and above what exhibits intolerance and divergence. Hence, while it is important to revisit the intellectual contributions of Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* in contemporary philosophy, it does not come as a surprise that rationality is not something unique to some peoples, while lacking in others. Rather than emphasising or elaborating over human differences, we concede to *Òrúnmìlà* that we all need one another in this world and must strive to put our differences aside for an improved social cohesion to ensue.

The classical philosophies of both Socrates and *Òrúnmìlà* are mutually sympathetic with fundamental lessons for developing contemporary intellectual canons of intercultural philosophy. More ancient thinkers in African oral traditions deserve to be studied, analysed, criticised and their positions should be subjected to philosophical scrutiny *vis-à-vis* other classical figures in other ancient philosophical traditions—African, Chinese, Indian, European, Jewish, and Islamic, among others. Such intercultural interrogation

of ideas, both classical and contemporary, has the potential for promoting mutual intellectual enrichment of trajectories of thoughts, historical conditions of their evolutions and overlaps in different traditions of philosophy.

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