

Title: Gikuyu Ethnophilosophy from the perspective of Leonardo Polo's Transcendental Anthropology

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to see how the Transcendental Anthropology of Leonardo Polo can shed light on the ethnophilosophy of the Gikuyu people.

I will highlight the similarity between the view of the human person according to L. Polo's triadic structure of the human person and that of one of the conceptions of African philosophy called ethnophilosophy, based on Gikuyu proverbs using the work of Dr. G. Wanjohi: *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gikuyu Proverbs*.

According to L. Polo's Transcendental Anthropology the human person is composed of a triadic structure with the lowest level being the natural level. This is the level where we find man's passions and desires what man has in common with animals. It is also the level of the external and internal senses. The next level is the essential level; this is the level where man is distinguished from animals because we find here intellect and will both of which are spiritual capacities. At the highest level we have the personal level which is composed of the 4 radicals: personal co-existence, personal love, personal knowledge and personal freedom.

Academic African Philosophy is relatively recent especially in comparison to Western Philosophy yet it has already been classified into a number of different conceptions, the four main conceptions being ethnophilosophy; philosophic sagacity; nationalist-ideological philosophy and; professional philosophy (Oruka 1981, pp 1-7). Ochieng-Odhiambo says that ethnophilosophy is called thus because it uses a method that resembles that which is ordinarily used in cultural anthropology (ethnology) to get the basic underlying principles of the reality and behavior of the African and then describes it in philosophical language (Ochieng-Odhiambo 2009, pp 73). Dr. Wanjohi adds that '... (it) is a philosophy which, in a non-literary society, expresses a people's world-view and culture...' (Wanjohi 1997, pp 76)

Dr. Wanjohi claims that the Gikuyu proverbs demonstrate philosophy in two ways: Firstly, that they are reflective and critical which are characteristics of philosophy in the second order sense

as opposed to philosophy in the first order sense which is considered to be more descriptive and relative. Secondly, that the proverbs refer to both basic and applied philosophy.

In the Gikuyu proverbs one can discover a distinction similar to that found in the triadic structure where at the highest level the proverbs refer to a level similar to the personal level with great importance given to the good relation to God who is known as *Ngai* and with man in relation to others. Further there is a clear distinction given to the level of the intellect and will which is lower than the level of relation to *Ngai* but higher than the level of passions and desires which we can compare to the natural level as defined in Transcendental Anthropology.

References:

Wanjohi, Gerald. *The Kihoto World-view: The Wisdom & Philosophy of Gikuyu Proverbs*. Nairobi: Kolbe Press, 1997.

Ochieng-Odhiambo, F. *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy Press, 2009.