TITLE

THE CONCEPT OF FALLIBILITY IN THE THOUGHT OF KWASI WIREDU

BY

AIRO AKODHE

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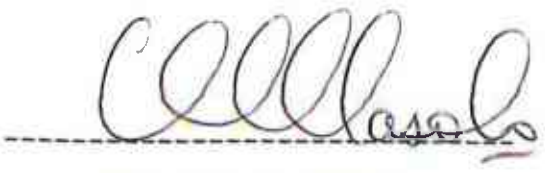

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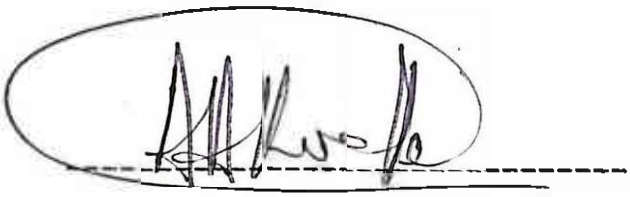

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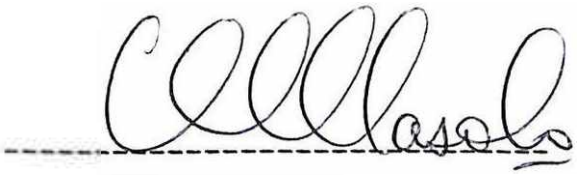

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ABSTRACT

The present research work seeks to offer a descriptive and analytical treatment of the philosophical concept of fallibilism in the thought of Kwasi Wiredu.

The general argument is that Kwasi Wiredu is a fallibilist philosopher and this is what leads him to propound his rather controversial conception of truth as a synonym of opinion.

The first chapter is an attempt to carry out a historical survey of the development of fallibilism in philosophical discourse. The same chapter also attempts a sort of a literature review of those contributions made by other fallibilist philosophers together with reactions to Kwasi Wiredu's works within the African Context.

The second chapter attempts to put fallibilism in philosophical perspective. It does this by discussing fallibilism in relationship to other philosophical concepts and doctrines e.g. skepticism, pragmatism and empiricism.

The third chapter attempts to describe the epistemology of Kwasi Wiredu in terms of its relationship to fallibilism. It isolates the salient points of Wiredu's epistemology.

It does this by first describing Wiredu's 'philosophical paradoxes' viz. 'truth as opinion' and 'to be is to be known'. The chapter also examines Wiredu's arguments for his claim that his conception of truth as opinion is innocent of subjectivism. Further, it discusses what is considered a "monistic" conception of truth. Finally it examines Wiredu's arguments for the claim that his conception of truth as opinion does not undermine the law of Non-contradiction.

It is the fourth chapter that attempts to offer a critique of Wiredu's epistemology as presented in the previous chapter. In this chapter, an attempt is made to apply Wiredu's epistemology to man's practical experience. Different criticisms of Wiredu's epistemology are introduced in order to examine the credibility, and plausibility of his ideas. Finally, Wiredu's epistemology is categorized as "psycho-epistemological" and, is then analysed within the context of this Categorization.

The fifth chapter is an evaluation of Wiredu's epistemology. In this chapter, three philosophers are selected for the purpose of a comparative analysis. Further on, the originality and challengable points of Wiredu's epistemology are critically examined.

The conclusion is a resume of what have been described and discussed in the whole work. The major ideas in Wiredu's thesis are stressed and the credibility and plausibility of his contribution re-examined

INTRODUCTION

1.0. General Introduction

My philosophical interest in Kwasi Wiredu developed in an interesting way.

During the first year as an under-graduate student at the Universtiy of Nairobi, Karl Marx was regarded as the greatest philosopher who ever lived. Consequently, students spent most of their time reading texts written by Karl Marx. This was not peculiar since Karl Marx was then the subject of political discussions in different circles.

During my second year, a change occured in my philosophical perspective. It is at this time that I was introduced to more and more philosophical ideas. The philosopher who won my heart most at this stage was Immanuel Kant. After a study of his ethical and epistemological thoughts, I began to look at myself as more of a Kantian .

This, however, was not the end of my philosophical development. I got introduced to Karl Popper's political philosophy around about this time. Popper's political philosophy interested me more because I looked upon him as a man who claimed to have refuted my earlier "idol" (Marx). Popper's refutation of Marx's philosophy did not, however, convince me. But Poppers simple style encouraged my interest into his other philosophical ideas. It was in this way that I got introduced to Popper's epistemological thoughts. Popper's

epistemology was so admirable that for some time I kept on looking at myself as a "Popperian".

Though I had got introduced to the philosophy of John Dewey during my final year as an undergraduate, John Dewey's philosophical works struck me as "too technical". Consequently, I never ventured into any serious study of John Dewey's works. Infact I thought that such a technical philosophy remained the concern of "career philosophers". My interest in philosophy at the time reflected the prevalent tendency to develop interest only in those ideas we could easily grasp.

But then an interesting occurence took place in my life. I was awarded a scholarship to pursue an M.A. degree course in philosophy. It is then that I realized that no particular philosophy could henceforward be dismissied as "too technical". I had joined the ranks of those whom I had hitherto thought were "career philosophers." It was, therefore, during the first year in graduate school that I studied and analysed John Dewey's philosophy. It was also during this time and particularly after studying Masolo's paper ("Kwasi Wiredu: Truth and the question of African Philosophy) that I discovered an interesting affinity between Dewey and Wiredu and the latter's place in an epistemological tradition which goes back to Plato.

Though Kwasi Wiredu had been introduced to students quite early, we only analysed his philosophy in as far as it was African. The other areas of his contributions were generally regarded as "technical" and we paid very little attention to them. It was again in graduate school that we made an attempt to analyse Wiredu's conception of truth. And it was then that I discovered the connection between

Wiredu and the preceeding philosophical tradition. I then began to look at Wiredu as a universal philosophical figure.

Kwasi Wiredu is still considered (at Nairobi University) as the single most sophisticated of all African philosophers. Few students ever venture to make close analysis of his arguments. It is for this reason that the present work attempts to offer a simplified interpretation and description of the single-most recurrent philosophical doctrine in his works. The success of this research thus lies in its potential to accelerate interest in the works of Kwasi Wiredu among philosophy students at this university. Our hope is that somebody else will be challenged by this work to undertake an equally simplified study of Kwasi Wiredu's logic which forms another interesting area in his philosophical contributions.

A summary of the contents of the present work is done below It should be noted nonetheless, that the scope of this work encompasses only the concept of fallibilism. Philosophy students and any others interested in more in-depth studies of Wiredu can benefit from the exhaustive list of his works that appears in the bibliography.

1.1. WIREDU: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

a) His Life

Kwasi Wiredu was born on the 3rd of August, 1931. After Secondary education at Adisadel College, Cape Coast, Ghana, he studied Philosophy at the University of Ghana where he graduated with B.A. Honours in Philosophy in June, 1960. He then did his graduate work at University College, Oxford, his thesis supervisor being Gilbert Ryle. He was also tutored by Strawson and Stuart Hamphshire. Wiredu then graduated from Oxford with B.Phil in Philosophy in June, 1960. His written examination being in the Wider fields of Metaphysics and Epistemology, Kant (as a chosen authority) and political philosophy (comprising the philosophy of politics, the philosophy of history and the philosophy of law). His thesis topic was on "Knowledge, Truth and Reason".

After graduating from Oxford, he lectured in Philosophy at the University of Keele, North Staffordshire, England, and then the University College of North Staffordshire for one year before returning home to the University of Ghana in the Summer of 1961. Apart from a brief break in the 1966/67 academicyear during which he was attached to Birbeck College, University of London, as a visiting fellow, Wiredu remained at the University of Ghana until 1984 when he went to U.S.A. for a teaching appointment at the University of South Florida where he is stationed to date.

Wiredu's teaching career has included courses at various levels in the following subjects: Logic, Philosophy of Logic, Ethics, Epistemology, Metaphysics, African Philosophy, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Special Paper) and Ideologies With Special Reference to Africa (at graduate level).

As a visiting Professor at UCLA, he gave courses on Contemporary Analytic Philosophy, African Traditional Metaphysics, Traditional African Philosophy of Morals and Politics and Third World Political Thought with some attention to Afro-American thought. He also gave a graduate seminar on Socialism, Communalism and Democracy in Contemporary Africa.

Wiredu's prominence as a reknowned philosopher in Africa is evidenced by his promotions from a lecturer at the University of Ghana in 1961 to a senior lecturer in 1971 and an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy from 1974. Also during the period 1979-80, he held a visiting full professorship in Philosophy at the Universty of California, Los Angeles. He has also served as an external examiner at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda; University of Nairobi, Kenya; University of Ife, Nigeria; University of Ibadan, Nigeria University of Lagos, Nigeria; University College of Fourah Bay, Sierra Leone and at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia.

b) **His Works**

Wiredu's first published philosophical work known to us, is his outstanding essay 'Marxism, Philosophy and Ideology' which first appeared in The Legon Observer, Accra, 1966, but is now included in his auspicious collection under the title, Philosophy and an African Culture (Cambridge University Press, London, 1980).

This essay is a brilliant critique of the Marxist philosophy particularly in relation to its practical application in politics. Wiredu argues here that an attempt to put Marxism to practice leads to its application as an ideology. And an ideology of

the state is necessarily authoritarian. Authoritarianism is the mark of all contemporary Marxist regimes. He condemns such regimes on the basis of his anti-authoritarian stand.

Philosophy and an African Culture forms a significant primary reference to the present study. This book is a representation of Wiredu's philosophical development and commitments. The articles are carefully collected and arranged in order of their subject matter. They include concern for African philosophy and the trend of philosophical activity in contemporary African context, the application of philosophy for discussing problems arising out of doctrines and theories such as ideology, mysticism and political philosophies and, finally, an exposition of his own conception of truth. There is also an attempt at a philosophical answer to the recurrent philosophical question: what is philosophy?

Wiredu is, however, still continuing his philosophical contributions at the time of undertaking this study. His ongoing work includes discussing some of the issues which form the focus of the present

work. His last philosophical contribution known to us was entitled "Are there Cultural Universals?". This paper was presented in Symposium of the XVIII World Congress of Philosophy held at Brighton, England, August 20-27, 1988. Given this dynamism coupled with all the problems involved in a study of a living philosopher (It is remembered that Ludwig Wittgenstein is famous for having reversed all his earlier philosophy putting his disciples in an embarassing position of having to either reverse with him, or hold on to a philosophy whose chief apostle had disowned), the present work encountered immense problems with respect to an exhaustive presentation of Wiredu's thought as is contained in the

numerous, but scattered contributions he has continued to make on different philosophical issues. In this work, however, we have limited ourselves to those texts relevant to our scope.

As indicated by the titles of his works which are listed in the bibliography, Wiredu's concern covers a wide range of contemporary philosophical issues. These include a discussion of logic as in such works as 'Logic' and ontology' Part 'I-V'. A note on modal Quantification, Ontology and the Indenumerably Infinite' etc. There are also Critiques of other philosopers' works such as his 'Kant's Synthetic a priori in Geometry and the rise of Non-Eclidean Geometries,' 'On Reductio Ad Absurdum' and 'Carnap on Iterated Modalities. In addition to these Wiredu's analytical approach has influenced his recent interests in studying traditional values and concepts as evidenced in his 'Mind in Akan Thought', 'The Akan World View etc. Finally there's a general application of philosophical discourse to the African context as in 'Death and After-Life in African Culture', 'Philosophy and Ideology in Contemporary Africa', 'On the Question of the right to die. An African View etc. While noting such diverse concern, the objective of the present work limits us to a study of fallibility as concept in Wiredu's philosophy. Therefore all digressions which might occur during the course of this work shall only be incidental. The problems involved in the concept here are primarily to do with the credibility and plausibility of Wiredu's epistemology.

1.2. A HISTORICAL SURVEY

Fallibility is a crucial epistemological problem. It is usually considered as opposed to dogmatism since it represents the position that we may be mistaken in our beliefs and we should always resist absolutistic truth-claims while being ever ready to alter our beliefs should we be confronted with contrary evidence.

The concept can be traced back to ancient Greece and, more specifically to the philosophy of Parmenides who observed that 'most mortals have nothing in their erring intellect unless it got there through their erring senses'[1]. Taking his cue from the Socratic observation that 'All that I know is that I know nothing', Plato took up the issue of absolute truth, and in his allegory of the cave[2], Plato divided human knowledge into opinion (doxa) and knowledge (episteme) demonstrating that men could not obtain absolute knowledge but remained in perpetual condition of opinionated knowledge.

Subsequently the Greek skeptical schools, namely the academic skeptics and the pyrrhonian skeptics, attempted to demonstrate that absolute knowedge was impossible and that men could be content only with a position of absolute doubt. Seizing the skeptic arguments, Rene Descartes challenged such an epistemological position which entailed an absolute state of doubt. Descartes then constructed a

philosophical method which, originating from an absolute state of doubt, arrived at a state of absolute indubitability. This was through his Cogito argument. The Cartesian Cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am) was to him an absolute truth which could be asserted with the certainty of mathematical propositions. But the Cartesian method did not suppress skepticism. His 'methodological doubt' still remains a significant epistemological starting-point.

The philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels also contained significant fallibilistic dispositions. This was mainly directed against the absolutistic philosophy of Hegel. Because of their love for science and the method of scientific investigations, Marx and Engels scoffed at the dogmatic pretence of philosophy. Both came to claim that they had discovered a scientific analysis of social reality. This was through their famous theory of scientific socialism.

Later in the history of philosophy, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey developed pragmatism as both a theory of truth and a method of scientific investigations. Pragmatism developed an even stronger commitment to fallibilism. The pragmatists' love for ceaseless inquiry entailed the view that absolute knowledge is unattainable.

The development of the scientific method as the sole means of achieving certainty and the love of science among scholars led to the development of a philosophical movement popularly referred to as 'Neo-positivism'. Otherwise also called Logical positivism, this movement rejected a priori speculations and sought to confine itself to the data of experience.

Verification thus became the cardinal principle of all scientific investigations. Whatever could not be verified became meaningless or, in their wording, 'Non-sensical'. Such a strong case of empiricism has been formidably challenged by Karl Raimund Popper. Popper substituted verifiability with falsifiability in scientific investigations. As we shall see below, all scientific hypotheses must withstand endless attempts at their refutation. Scientific truths are thus 'provisional' since they may become false should they be falsified.

This is just a cursory glance at the historical development of fallibilism in philosophical thought. But it is a development that we intend to demonstrate as succeeding in the epistemological thought of Kwasi Wiredu.

In the epistemological thought of Kwasi Wiredu, all truths can be said to be fallible since they emanate from the element of point of view. For him truth is synonymous with opinion and since an opinion cannot be said to be absolute, our truths remain conjectural in the Popperian sense. This view has not escaped philosophical scrutiny, critics have offered objections to and different interpretations of Wiredu's philosophy and, specifically to his rather controversial conception of truth. We will give the views of Odera-Oruka as an example of one such criticism below.

In what follows, however, the works of George Berkeley, John Dewey and Karl Popper are used to ullustrate that these works are cardinal to the understanding of the historical development of Fallibilism. They are also introduced to give background of Wiredu's own philosophical idea of truth. Berkeley, for instance is important for having introduced the problem of subjectivism in the theory of

knowledge. Dewey, on the other hand, had carried forward Berkeley's subjectivism while blending this with his own empirical approach to the theory of knowledge. Dewey's approach very much like Berkeley's, did not ignore the significant role of the subject. Finally Karl Popper's works represent the view that even scientific knowledge contain a high level of probable doubt. This, as we shall see, is compatible to Wiredu's epistemology

There is then a look at Odera Oruka's objections and Masolo's interpretation of Wiredu's work as part of a survey of philosophical reactions to Wiredu's epistemology within the African context.

1.3. Fallibilism as an Epistemological Problem

George Berkeley's epistemology is of some significance to a study of the concept of fallibility in Wiredu's thought. It is to Berkeley's epistemology that Wiredu owes his paradox; To be is to be known.

In A Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge, (1710) and Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous, (1713), Berkeley propounds and defends his own controversial paradox, 'esse est percipi' which implied that, for physical things to be said to exist, they must be perceived.

Berkeley's epistemology thus entailed an interpretation of extreme immaterialism and a charge of skepticism. But Berkeley eluded both charges by introducing the idea of an ever perceiving infinite spirit -------God. Thus physical things do not lapse into non-existence the moment we do not perceive them because the omnipresent God is ever perceiving them. For him, then, existence coincides with perception.

Berkeley's epistemology contained a small measure of subjectivism. It was meant as a critique of the radical empiricism of John Locke. But it can also be understood as a critique of our every day application of language, i.e. to say that x exists should mean the same as that we perceive it. His subjectivistic epistemology, however, merged the subject and the object of knowledge-. The end-result was a moderate type of empiricism which demanded that we could only assert the existence of an object we are currently perceiving. It is probably this kind of a 'mild' empiricism which Wiredu has seized to construct his theory of truth based upon the significant role the knowing subject plays in the knowing process.

Berkeley was the precursor to the branch of philosophy which deals with the analysis of language--- linguistic philosophy. In his own analysis of language, he showed the difference that exists between the knower and the known thus highlighting the possibility of error in our knowledge of things. There is more on Berkeley in later discussions of his influence on Wiredu's epistemology.

Also significant to this study is the philosophy of John Dewey. In his Essays in Experimental Logic (1916), Reconstruction in Philosophy (1919), and Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, (1938), Dewey argues in support of a brand of pragmatism he calls 'Instrumentalism'.

Instrumentalism, according to Dewey, is a theory of knowledge essentially in terms of the biological and psychological values that the knowing process plays in human affairs. This he attempts to employ as a guide in directing the application of human intellectual activity to contemporary problems.

In his view, experience is constituted by the interaction between a biological organism and its environment. He then adopts the empirical method of acquiring knowledge but departs from the classical theory of experience notably that of William of Occam, David Hume, John Locke, John S. Mill and more recently, Bertrand Russell. Dewey does not identify experience with sense-content, as was characteristic of traditional British empiricism. He attacks the view that experience is a passive registry of raw-data already furnished. Instead, he holds that experience necessarily includes inference and a temporal stretch.

According to this argument, experience can neither be an exclusive affair of knowledge nor a material of science.

Knowing as an activity goes on within experience and is controlled by the conditions of empirical inquiry. But the organism also sustains other equally significant relationships with the environment and these also belong to experience.

By knowledge, Dewey means a process of inquiry which 'terminates in the conditions which remove need for doubt'[3]. Consequently, knowledge denotes the Warranted outcome of an inquiry initiated by the knowing subjects' recognition of a problematic situation. Inquiry is, thus, necessitated by conditions in which doubt is no longer needed or felt. Such conditions breed truth for to Dewey, truth is nothing but Warranted Assertibility .

The essential ingredient in the acquisition of knowledge, therefore, is the perception of relations and in particular the perception of the relations between our actions and their empirical consequences. This is where experience comes in, since experience involves a

deliberate interaction with environmental conditions while such interactions are the mark of scientific thinking. Action, on the other hand, involves overt activity aimed at bringing about anticipated results. Such results are the test of different hypotheses. The hypothesis which works is the true one for Dewey holds that 'Confirmation, corroboration, verification, lie in works' consequences'. This is inscribed in his famous quip, 'handsome is that handsome does'.

Dewey's major concern with the construction of a pragmatist theory of truth makes him embrace and reconcile the idealism of Kant and Berkeley. These were philosophies which placed the knowing subject in a special relationship with the object of knowledge and so represented a germ of subjectivism and relativism in epistemology. Relativism and subjectivism can by derivation lead to fabillity. Though Dewey avoids an explicit discussion of fallibility, his philosophy, based on the concept of endless inquiry represents an anti absolutistic theory of knowledge as we shall see below.

The epistemology of Karl Raimund Popper best represents the concept of fallibilism though without popularising the term. In his, now famous, The poverty of Historicism,(1944), The Open Society and Its Enemies Vols. I & II (1944) Conjectures and Refutations (1963) and Objective Knowledge (1972), Popper propounds philosophical arguments which, taken together, reveal his commitment to fallibilism in both scientific and philosophical knowledge. Specifically in conjectures and Refutations, Popper contends that (even) scientific knowledge proceeds from 'Conjectures' which are in turn governed by constant attempts to refute them.

But in Objective knowledge, he views knowledge as an evolutionary process which develops through an endless attempt at refutation thus rejecting all sorts of absolutism in human knowledge. In doing this, and by introducing his principle of falsifiability, Popper seriously undermined the foundation of logical positivism. He also claimed credit for having solved the Humean 'problem of induction' as shall be seen in a later chapter.

Popper's 'Epistemology without a knowing subject'[5] grounded 'objective' knowledge in a realm he called 'World III'. By doing this, he shifted the burden of infallibility from the shoulders of men, systems and ideologies to some sort of a utopic realm. In his epistemology, therefore the role of the knowing subject is relegated to that of a tool in perpetual quest for objective knowledge which is essentially unattainable. His was an attempt to refute the earlier assertions of the logical positivists. His principle of falsifiability therefore replaces the logical positivists' principle of verifiability.

Odera Oruka's criticism of Wiredu's thesis Truth as Opinion is probably the most famous of such criticisms in print. In an article entitled 'Truth and Belief' found in Universitas, Odera's major contention is that Wiredu's characterisation of truth as opinion entails the danger that varied opinions, however 'Wicked and Stupid' may be posited as truths and no arbitration would be possible between conflicting opinions. He adds that if truth is identical with belief as he interprets Wiredu to imply, then there can never be such a thing as 'false belief', which exists anyway. Though himself a confessed adherent to 'anti absolutist' truth philosophy, Odera is careful when handling matters of truth and cautions that the kind of fallibility which entails the view that truth is identical with opinion is as

extreme as that which holds that truth is absolute and so, might lead to such consequences as political anarchism in practice. He says "..... I am afraid that the position that there is an absolute truth is liable to lead to intolerable moral, social or political consequences."[6]

Though Wiredu claims to have answered Odera's objections in a chapter of his Philosophy and An African Culture (London) 1980, entitled 'In Defence of opinion', this research work contends that Odera raises significant philosophical questions to Wiredu's thesis in particular and to his fallibilism in general. From Odera's objections, the following questions can be raised where is the dividing line between true and false opinion? If this should lie in rationality, as Wiredu asserts, then upon whose judgement do we base this rationality? Or is such a rationality self-evident? In our interpretation, what Odera is saying is that Wiredu's thesis, stretched to its limits, leads to infallibility.

In yet another article entitled 'For the sake of Truth' and meant as a reaction to Wiredu's rejoinder, Odera grapples further with Wiredu's identification of truth with opinion. He accuses Wiredu of attempting to 'downgrade the concept of truth and exalt that of Opinion'. Through a careful logical analysis, Odera attempts to show that Wiredu's 'point of views' do not offer a definite answer as to whichever point of view is likely to yield a higher degree of plausibility. He goes on to make a distinction between 'truth of opinion' and 'independent truth' and proceeds to distinguish between a strong thesis which identifies truth with opinion and a weak one which holds that truth is expressible only in an assertion and so is expressible only as an opinion. In his interpretation of Wiredu, he feels that Wiredu postulates the former while he

should really postulate the latter.

In arguing his 'Neutral View of Truth', Odera concedes that absolute truth is unknowable. But he argues further that all truths are limited and confined to their contexts and thus infers that 'every truth - claim can be true or meaningful only on a given criterion'. His 'Neutral View of Truth' distinguishes the general statement 'T is true' from personal commitments such as ' I am committed to the point or belief that T is true' . The former, he contends, refers to an objective criterion independent of the knowing subject. A distinction should thus be made between the two as confusion between them is what leads to the identification of truth with opinion or belief, yet "..... for the sake of truth, this should not be done."[7]

D.A. Masolo has also undertaken a critical study of Wiredu in an article entitled 'Kwasi Wiredu; Truth and the Question of African Philosophy'. Based largely on Wiredu's Philosophy and An African Culture, (London) 1980, this article attempts to look at Wiredu's book as one coherent whole which reveals his philosophical thought.

Masolo discerns 'two arguments in the book' namely one on knowledge and valuation, and the other on the status of ethno-philosophy. In his interpretation of Wiredu's general approach to knowledge, action and evaluation, Masolo contends that Wiredu's epistemology logically leads to a pragmatist defence of African traditional philosophy.

In line with this contention, Wiredu's epistemological stand point entails the argument that all societies formulate their knowledge around the central objective of practical results. He observes that

"..... Wiredu's arguments is about errors quite often made in applying a set of techniques of knowledge of reasoning developed in the context of a particular life style to the solution of problems inherent in another lifestyle radically different from it".[8]

Masolo thus interprets relativism in Wiredu's epistemology and ties it up to Dewey's 'Warranted assertibility'. He then goes on to endorse Wiredu's thesis of 'truth as opinion', but only if it embraces relativism. Masolo implicitly brings in the weight of Western philosophical movements notably phenomenological and existentialist arguments, reaching the conclusion that knowledge is always a result of an interaction between the Res (Object of knowledge) and the Intellectus (subject of knowledge).

His interpretation is here akin to Dewey's 'Empirical naturalism'. As we have noted, Dewey merges the living organism and the environment as a necessary condition for knowledge. But Masolo differs from Wiredu in the latters' assertion that his conception of truth is innocent of relativism.

The major task of the present work is to attempt a description and an interpretation of Wiredu's epistemology in terms of its contribution to the doctrine of fallibility. In doing this, we are greatly indebted to the philosophical works already reviewed. These works formed a great inspiration for the identification of the present problem and our ability to understand and interpret Wiredu's thought as presented in this work.

1.4. A SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

In the chapter that follows, an attempt is made to put fallibility in historical perspective. This is done by relating the concept to various philosophical schools and thought. The central objective is a survey of the historical development of the concept in philosophical discourse.

The presentation then proceeds in a chronological order. We thus start with a discussion of fallibility in relation to skepticism. We define skepticism as "a radical philosophical view that raises doubts about the adequacy or reliability of the evidence that could be offered to justify any proposition". We trace the history of skepticism from ancient Greek philosophy to the more recent skepticism of Bertrand Russell We also examine the strong skepticism of Rene Descartes and his contention that, through systematic doubt, he could arrive at indubitable knowledge. We conclude this sub-section by pointing out that, traditional skepticism as a radical philosophical view, has since lost most of its sting. In its stead fallibility has arisen as a revision of traditional skepticism.

Secondly we discuss fallibility in relation to empiricism. The scientific method of empiricism implies that all subjects of scientific investigations must be amenable to specific tests and laws. Hence experiments and observations are the mark of scientific investigations The results of such investigations have been thought to constitute absolute truths.

But the doctrine of fallibility has come to inspire the nature of scientific findings. Contemporary philosophers of science have come

to agree that the results of scientific investigations are fallible. This attitude to science is a negation of the positivist position. We attempt to trace the development of this attitude from the skeptic philosophy of David Hume, and his 'destruction of empiricism'. We then introduce Immanuel Kant's attempt at the solution of the Humean crisis and his introduction of subjectivism in scientific knowledge. Subsequently, we bring in Popper's forceful arguments for the fallibility of scientific knowledge. Our argument is that Wiredu's conception of truth as opinion is in line with this epistemological tradition.

Further, we discuss fallibilism in relation to pragmatism. Pragmatism is a philosophical movement which tends to define truth as consisting in the usefulness of belief. Pragmatism has contributed substantially to philosophic and scientific method of investigation by stressing that the end-result of such investigations are not absolute truths. We note Wiredu's own close affinity to the pragmatist philosophy.

Towards the end of chapter two, we discuss fallibility in recent philosophy. We argue that fallibility has become a necessary philosophical mood. In undertaking this particular line of argument, we draw mostly from contemporary African philosophers' contribution in the definitional debate on African Philosophy. We infer in agreement with Masolo's paper cited above, that Wiredu's commitment to fallibility is in line with the rebuttal of ethno-philosophical approach characterising the first phase of philosophical activity in Africa

In the third chapter, we attempt a description of Wiredu's philosophy as we understand it. We here present a descriptive analysis of his two 'philosophical paradoxes' namely; 'To Be is To Be Known' and 'Truth is

opinion'. We argue that the acceptability of these paradoxes is cardinal to an understanding of Wiredu's conception of truth. From here we examine his argu ments for the two paradoxes 'truth as opinion' and 'to be is to be known' and also his claim to an objective conception of truth. The latter as we shall see, is contrary to the general understanding of objectivity.

And it is for this reason that most of his critics have interpreted relativism and subjectivism in his conception of truth. It is noted that "Objective truth" is often applied to mean that truth which is independent of the subject. Such truths as have been attributed to empirical science are meant to be independent and evident only to an interested researcher. Wiredu does not deny the existence of such truths, but he argues that the moment we know them they become part of our points of view, otherwise they remain conjectures.

We also discuss his attempt to dissociate from what we choose to call a 'Dual conception of Truth'. The dual conception of truth holds that some truths exist independently of cognitive beings, while some belong to the cognitive being, thus implying that there are two truths which constitute distinct entities. Finally, we present Wiredu's arguments for the claim to a non-contradiction of the Law of Non-contradiction' and 'The law of excluded Middle'. Wiredu's thesis tends to suggest that truths, being opinion, are changeable and varied, contrary to the two laws. These laws, taken together, hold that there is only one value to all propositions, truth or falsity. And to suggest that truth may change is tantamount to suggesting that what is true may be false, which is a contradiction. These laws have won many adherents prominent among whom is Bertrand Russell who observed, in an example which re-inforces the laws, that;

"At present, we do not know whether there is life elsewhere in the universe, but we are right to feel sure that there either is or is not."[9]

Our fourth chapter develops the discussions in the third chapter. In this chapter we attempt a critical analysis of the concept of fallibility in Wiredu's thought. We first of all attempt an application of the concept in practical reality. This we do by introducing Wiredu's moral and political philosophy which is based upon his anti-authoritarian conception of social reality. His anti-authoritarian conception of social reality is attributable to his conception of truth as opinion which we shall see as constituting the basis of his epistemology. We then bring in Wiredu's own distinction between what he calls "The formal significance of Truth" and "The substantive nature of belief". The latter refers to the circumstances prevailing in social milieu.

circumstances it is argued, affect various truth claims. The measure for validity of truth claims must thus take into cognizance the circumstances prevailing. The former refers to the technical analysis of truth as in logic and mathematics. These are truths which aim at universality. But they are not in harmony with what Wiredu calls 'epistemological determination by circumstances. They are therefore what his conception of truth does not concern. Such a concern thus ignores the scientific method based upon 'observed facts' and 'evidence'. We examine the consistency of such concern given Wiredu's respect for the scientific method.

But in this chapter, we also discuss Odera-Oruka's forceful objections to Wiredu's observation that the conception of truth as opinion naturally entail tolerance in politics and religion. We examine the two philosophers views noting the similarities between their positions.

We follow this by the introduction of a popular philosophical problem concerning the objectivity of moral prescriptions. Moral prescriptions have been said to be subjective. Various philosophers, notably C.L. Stevenson and A.J. Ayer, have understood moral laws to consist in individual revulsions and not on any objective standards. Nevertheless, we contend that Wiredu's arguments entail the view that what is practicable is 'ipso facto' objective. And following the arguments of John Dewey, fallibility, if it is a moral prescript, might be said to be objective.

Finally, we critically analyse what we call Wiredu's psycho-epistemological approach to truth - claims. This is the approach that takes into cognisance the individual mood, beliefs and convictions. It is also the approach that we consider the most intriguing since it entails certain contradictions that we highlight.

The major task of the fifth chapter is to carry out a critical evaluation of Wiredu's epistemology in the light of relevant philosophical theories. First we discuss possible influence on Wiredu's epistemology, by comparing in particular Wiredu's thesis with Polanyi's epistemology.

At the end, we have a conclusion which is a recapitulation of the arguments contained in the present work. In this section, we also carry out an evaluation and draw conclusions from our discussions of Wiredu's philosophy.

1.5. Methodology

The present work is an exercise in Analytic Philosophy. It aims at the clarification and an understanding of Kwasi Wiredu's epistemological stand in regard to the nature and characteristics of truth as an important value in the act of knowledge. The exercise of clarification is carried out through analysis of language and concepts used in theories in order to determine their meanings and uses in specific texts. In this work, therefore, we engage in the analysis of the language, concepts and other ideas used by Wiredu in his explanation of or claims about truth in order to determine his definition of this important concept. The concept of Fallibility which this work directly analyses denotes an aspect of the general problem of truth.

To do this, we shall do only library research. We shall use primary sources, that is, Wiredu's own works, as well as secondary sources about Wiredu's thought and general epistemological works related to the problem of truth and its complex nature.

1.6. Theoretical Framework

Wiredu's thought finds its filiation in the contemporary and wide debate on the commensurability between different systems of rationality. The theory of commensurability states that there is only one and standard set of principles on the basis of which different systems

of thought can be subjected to rational judgements. This statement takes a position which could be termed a super-realist position in regard to the principles of truth and to the principles of which are used to establish truths. We call this super-realist because its statement rejects diversity of systems and methods of establishing truths, be it from historical or from the anthropological perspectives of diversity.

In this work, we argue that although Wiredu sometimes appears to adopt a position closely related to the super-realist one in regard to his attitudes to Science, his theory of truth as opinion establishes the principles of fallibility as a fundamental characteristic of understanding the nature of truth. We demonstrate that Wiredu defines truth in a fashion that combines both pragmatism and dialectism yet differs from either of these two schools taken singly. We further argue that the doctrine of fallibility is the underriding theory in Wiredu's papers "Truth as opinion" and "To be is to be known". This present work then, is an analytic exercise which aims at exposing Wiredu's position in regard to the wider issue of relationship between truth and the bases of rationality.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Popper's Objective Knowledge, Oxford University Press, London W.I., 1973, p.2.

2. Plato — Republic, Penguin classics, Desmond Lee's TRAD, London, 1987, pp. 316-325.

3. Dewey, J., — Logic: The Theory of Inquiry., Holt Rinechart & Winston, New York, 1938, p.7.

4. Dewey, J., — Reconstruction in Philosophy., New American Library New York, 1957, p.128

5. Popper, K.R., — Objective Knowledge, op. cit., Chapter 3.

6. Odera Oruka, H., "Truth and Belief" in Universitas (Ghana), Vol.5, No.1, Nov.1975, p.181.

7. Odera Oruka, H. "For The Sake of Truth" (Unpublished Paper) p.24

8. Masolo, D.A., "Kwasi Wiredu: Truth and the Question of African Philosophy". (Unpublished paper) p.4

9. Russell, B., — An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth, Allan Unwin London, 1966, p.288.

CHAPTER II

FALLIBILITY IN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1. FALLIBILITY AND SKEPTICISM

> "Fallibilism is a revision of traditional skepticism and is thus a reformulation of skepticism in a more acceptable manner"
>
> - Charles Sanders Peirce -

Skepticism in its traditional form has since lost much of its sting. Nevertheless, 'philosophical skepticism' persists and still forms one of the canons of epistemology with its most significant proponent being Bertrand Russell with his famous substitution of 'articulate hesitation for inarticulate certainty.[1] Skepticism as a philosophical problem can be traced back to Ancient Greece. The early Greek thinkers developed a set of arguments to establish either that there is no sufficient and adequate evidence to determine if any knowledge was possible and hence that one ought to suspend judgement on all questions concerning knowledge.[2]

According to Richard Popkin, the two views listed above are representative of the views of 'Academic Skeptics' and 'Pyrrhonian skeptics' respectively. Academic skepticism arose from the Socratic observation that 'All I know is that I know nothing' which was lent credence by the earlier philosophy of Parmenides. Academic skepticism was a reaction against the knowledge claims of the Stoic

philosophers. In the stoics various works, notably those of Cicero, Diogenes, Laertius and Saint Augustine, the aim was to show by a group of arguments and dialectical puzzles that the dogmatic philosophers could not know with absolute certainty the propositions they claimed to know. They formulated a series of difficulties to demonstrate the inadequacy of the knowledge we gained by way of senses, reason and standards we set to judge the truths or falsity of our judgements. The Pyrrhonians, on the other hand, proposed to suspend judgement on all questions, on which there seemed to be conflicting evidence, including the question whether or not something could be known.

Thus skepticism, like fallibility, arose as a cure for all shades of dogmatism. But skepticism became 'a purge that eliminates everything including itself'. For when a skeptic asserts that 'nothing can be known', he involves himself in asserting that he is certain that 'nothing can be known' which is a contradiction of his own assertion.

Skepticism understood as a "philosophical view that raises doubts about the adequacy or reliability of evidence that could be offered to justify any proposition"[4], found its most radical formulation in the hypothetical-skepticism of Rene Descartes. Descartes owed a lot to the Pyrrhonian skepticism for the construction of his 'Methodical doubt' and the 'Cogito' argument. He took the skeptics' arguments to give forth philosophical certainty. In this, he claimed to have discovered something 'so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the skeptics could not shake it'.[5]

The Cartesian method started with the rule;

> "to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognise to be so; that is to say, carefully avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgements, and to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt".26

This method he found in his 'methodical doubt'. According to the 'Methodical doubt', everything that enters the mind can be reduced to illusions but the 'I' who thinks it is irreducible in this manner. Hence the phrase 'Reductio Ad Absurdum'; which involves the cartesian 'Cogito Ergo Sum' (I think, therefore, I am). This proposition Descartes held could be known with the certainty of Mathematical and scientific propositions.

The skeptic attitude did not, however, come to an end with the Cartesian method. On the contrary, the Cartersian 'methodical doubt' has been incorporated to form a cardinal starting point for scientific research. Bertrand Russell, for instance, has applied this method in his epistemology. Russell regards epistemology as a 'critical scrutiny of what passes as common sense'.[7] What is thought to be obvious often turns out to be deceptive and false and, as Wiredu has put it; "The problematic arises and can only arise, from the unproblematic".[8] It is this spirit that Russell carried forward when he observes that philosophy 'Substitutes articulate hesitation for inarticulate certainty' and goes on to critically question what he calls 'Naive Realism' i.e. the doctrine that things are what they appear to us.

Skepticism has been largely toned down and tamed to become an important starting point for epistemological inquiry. As Kai Nielsen points out, philosophical skepticism of Hume and Russell 'can only be taken seriously as a doctrine concerned with the grounds for our knowledge-claims, it is not something that can be lived and genuinely believed. That is to say, we can have Cartesian methodical doubts but not real doubts'.[9]

The foregoing point does not apply to fallibility, fallibility can be lived as a pragmatic conception guiding social, political, religious and academic activities. Should we realise that our 'truths' are 'ad hoc' propositions that only hold because they have withstood attempts at refutations and that they are the results of our rational deductions arising from perpetual interaction with the external environment as Dewey had held. Then fallibilism can guide practical activity without being relegated to a mere methodology. This is why the motto of the present sub-topic, attributed to Peirce, claims that fallibility is a 'revision of skepticism'.

But there are certain similarities between the two philosophical concepts. Among these is the rejection of dogmatism, authoritarianism and absolutism and the acceptance of the significant role the individual plays in the knowing process and hence the possibility of error in human knowledge. Indeed to err is human. But whereas Cartesian doubt aims at the attainment of knowledge of absolute metaphysical truths and the basis of stoics religious dogmatism, fallibility in Dewey, Peirce, Popper and Wiredu aims at the refutation of the assertions of philosophical dogmatists. It aims at the discovery of a method for the pursuit of truth without claiming too much. Fallibility, like

skepticism, becomes a method, but the fallibilistic method does not seek to know the essence of things, it only attempts to analyse the workability of our beliefs and knowledge.

2.2. FALLIBILITY AND EMPIRICISM

> "In science, it is observation which plays the decisive part. But observation is a process in which we play an intensely active part"
>
> - Karl Raimund Popper-

The empirical method of acquiring knowledge has been acknowledged as the mark of all sciences. Empiricism implies that all scientific knowledge must be subjected to experiments and observations. The results of scientific investigations are said to be true knowledge when they pass the tests imposed on them by researchers.

The empirical method of science had won support among philosophers until the time of David Hume. Hume advanced a very radical empirical principle of knowledge. His philosophy implied that we could only assert with certainty those matters which we had observed in actual life. Consequently, he introduced a radical form of skepticism which threatened the foundation of all empirically tested knowledge.

According to the Humean philosophy, our certainty must be restricted only to the sphere of representations of the human consciousness. Therefore pure skepticism is only avoidable when certainty is predicated

of experience, and this experience is not transcended in any way. But in Hume's view, the transcending of experience is impossible, since all facts of experience consist of impressions and ideas. The former (impressions) are much stronger than the latter (ideas), but they do not lead us to the objective world. They are not valid in demonstrating the objective reality of the external world but only valid in generating a persuasion of objectivity; they are only psychological exercises.

Ideas arise from impressions by means of imagination and phantasy. Phantasy is the internal sense-perception of objects previously perceived by the external senses. Phantasy fashions both ideas and connects them with their relatives, then there arises well-ordered and complex representations. Experience, therefore, does not consist of simple and disparate ideas. The original impressions constitute a 'bundle of impressions' which are collected and associated to ideas by means of a natural law that governs the exercise. These ideas are then connected in a clearer way to other relationships by way of the laws of similitude, causality and proximity. These associations are firmly retained in our memories. Thus impressions have their associated ideas to which they communicate. For example, the sighting of a watch in a desert brings forth the idea of its maker, similarly, the sighting of a single flat brings forth the idea of others etc.

Association, by habit and custom, therefore, is the explanation of our ideas, especially those fundamental cosmological and metaphysical ideas like space, time, substance, causality and the ego. These ideas are not due to impressions since there exist no organs for their perception. Such metaphysical ideas as space and time are mere relations or modes of impressions that enjoy no objective existence. According to Hume, space is the co-existence of impressions while time is the succession

of impressions. They do not confer any objective and empirical justification. Space and time are nothing just as the idea of substance which arises from constant association of impressions.

The most illustrative example in his philosophy is his treatment of causality. According to him, causality is derived from our associative habit; it is not a product of impressions. Impressions only give us a constant succession of facts, not their causal dependence. The causal nexus cannot even be affirmed 'a priori', for in the idea of cause, the idea of effect is not contained. The idea of casual connection arises solely from the frequent and repeated connection of representations. Thus when we see one event frequently followed by another, we tend to expect that this shall always be so in the future. The associative nexus (empirical observation) and the metaphysical nexus (non-empirical inference) passes arbitrarily but only through a psychological habit. Causality in the phenomena cannot be affirmed with certainty for it is a mere psychological idea and not a real relation as we would tend to think.

To further illustrate this point, I always apply the example of home-taping. I usually record my music 'arbitrarily'. Consequently, various artistes succeed one another in my cassettes. After listening to these cassettes a number of time, I often expect that one song is followed by another in the respect they do in my cassettes. The shock is always registered when the source of music is the radio or somebody else's cassette. This normally illustrates to me in reality what Hume meant by the 'associative nexus' and the possibility of error. The 'Humean Crisis' was thus a subtle and energetic profession of what pure empiricism ultimately lead to. It entailed the argument that we cannot know with certainty the realms of representations. But it also

dealt a blow at the scientific method of induction. Hence Bertrand Russell could observe that

> "The growth of unreason in the nineteenth century and what passed of the twentieth is a natural sequel to Hume's destruction of empiricism"[10]

The empirical method of science is based on the observation of particular objects and the inference therefrom to universal facts. Hume's philosophy greatly undermined this method andas Russell says once again;

> "It is (therefore) important to discover whether there is any answer to Hume within the framework of a philosophy that is wholly or mainly empirical"[11]

Kant's contribution to empirical science was to attempt to 'salvage' science and metaphysics from the skepticism of Hume. Instead of a skeptic conclusion, Kant introduced his subjectivist epistemology.

In his Prolegomena to any Future metaphysics and A critique of Pure Reason Kant argued that man as a cognitive being plays a significant role in knowledge. He agreed with Hume that pure empiricism, since it reduces all cognition to experience, only ends up in skepticism. But this skepticism can be escaped if we recognise the minds' own organising nature. He used the Humean example of causality. Causality, he conceded, is an 'a priori' concept in the sense that it is not derived from experience. But it is applied to experience and it governs it. The human mind, according to Kant, has "a priori" concepts and principles grounded within it. These concepts

Kant understood 'a priori' elements to mean "anything in the human mind which must be pre supposed as a condition of experience and objects". He was thus concerned with the non-empirical elements of human knowledge. While agreeing with Hume that we cannot derive necessity and strict universality from experience, he asserted that we can reach certainty only if we recognise the human minds' legislative role. For the human mind is the "legislator of nature".

The cause-effect proposition is impure in the sense that the concept of cause is derived from experience. But the proposition is nonetheless 'a priori' even if it is not an example of pure 'a priori' knowledge. It is a necessary and strictly universal judgement. The dependence of any event or happening or change on a cause is known with certainty. But it is known 'a priori'. Hence it is a synthetic 'a priori' knowledge. Synthetic because the idea of cause is not contained in the idea of effect and 'a priori' because it is marked by necessity and strict universality. Causality is thus "an objective order effected by the activity of the organising mind and the structuring mind of experience according to 'a priori forms'".

In Kant's epistemology, therefore the knowing subject is primary in as far as the world of cognition goes. The mind does not conform to the object. Rather, the object conforms to the mind. The human intellect cannot impose its laws on reality as it is "in se". The intellect can only impose its 'a priori' forms on reality and only if reality becomes a phenomenon of cognition. A thing "in se" (i.e. in itself) does not depend on the mind and can therefore not be known. What we perceive are just things as they appear to us.

This placement of the human mind at the centre of the cognitive world is what has been referred to as the Kantian "Copernican Revolution". The Kantian Copernican Revolution implies that we cannot know things except in as far as they are subjected to certain 'a priori' conditions of knowledge. The human mind is not passive in the acquisition of knowledge. The active mind imposes on the ultimate material of experience its own forms of cognition. These forms are determined by the structure of human sensitivity and understanding and things cannot be known save through the medium of these forms. Science thus only makes progress in as far as it recognises that the phenomena must be made to conform to its methods.

While attempting to bypass Kant's solution to the Humean Crisis, Karl Popper has claimed credit for the solution of Hume's problems. In the first chapter of his Objective Knowledge (1972), Popper starts off with a bold statement:

> "I think I have solved a major philosophical problem; the problem of induction" [12]

The problem of induction, as we have observed, was introduced by Hume's destruction of empiricism'. Popper's claim to its solution underlies his 'principle of demarcation' between science and non-science. In his own words;

> "..... after I had solved the problem of induction, I discovered an interesting connection between the two problems.[13]

The traditional problem of induction, in Popper's view, involved the question 'What is the justification for the belief that the future shall be largely like the past? i.e. what is the justification for inductive inferences which form the hallmark of the scientific method?
The method of basing general statements on accumulated observations of specific instances is, indeed, the hallmark of science. The application of this method, according to Popper, is what demarcates science from what is not science.

Hume had placed the scientific method in dilemma by destroying its very foundation. Popper instead resorted to the principle of falsifiability. Scientific theories are, by the principle of falsifiability tested by systematic attempts at their refutation; 'If a single black swan has been observed, then it no longer remains the case that all swines are white' if not, then such a truth must only be held 'ad hoc' pending its possible refutation. If it is irrefutable, then it is non-scientific.

According to Popper, all science and all philosophy are enlightened common sense'. Our starting point is common sense and 'our great instrument of progress' is criticism. Men act rationally and not through habit and custom as Hume had maintained. In a passage in which he claims solution to Hume's problem, he says;

> "The solution of the paradox is that not only do we reason rationally and therefore contrary to the principle of induction, established as invalid by Hume, but that we also act rationally".[14]

Our understanding of the Humean problem is, however, contrary to Popper's. Given what he says, it is not easy to infer that Hume held that men act irrationally. All that he attemped to demonstrate, and quite successfully, is that customs and habit plays a significant role in inferences without suggesting that these were irrational Kant had thus read Hume correctly when he underscored the cognitive role of the subject. But Popper undermines just this with his 'epistemology without a knowing subject' as we shall see.

The scientific method, according to Popper, proceeds through a schema he formulated thus; P1 - TT - EE - P2, whereby, P1 represents "Problem 1"; TT represents "Tentative Theory" posited to solve P1; then EE represents "Error Elimination" which are tests on TT. The 'Unintended consequence' of the whole process is P2 which has to go through the same process. Hence men act upon 'best available theories' and not customs and habit. (It might appear here that Popper is talking about the scientific man rather than the man on the street, and this might imply that they (him and Hume) are talking at cross-purposes).

According to Popper, no scientist should fear tests on his theories. The inability to falsify any theory is for the continued value of that theory, he says;

> "In so far as a scientific statement speaks about reality, it must be falsifiable, and in so far as it is not falsifiable, it does not speak about reality" [15]

According to Popper, the citation above is what constitutes the difference between science and non-science.

For Popper, human knowledge progresses in an evolutionary manner. Attempted solution of problems gives forth new problems which are in turn significant for the evolution of knowledge. Objective knowledge exists 'without a knowing subject' This lies in what Popper calls 'the third world'. The third world is to him an autonomous world of objective existence of theoretical systems, problems and problem solutions, critical arguments and the content of journals, books and libraries.

To recapitulate, we have attempted to demonstrate here that Hume introduced the problem of induction and thus questioned the very basis of scientific knowledge. Consequently, he destroyed empiricism and introduced skepticism in its stead. He asserted that between 'matters of fact' and 'relation of ideas' there is an unbridgeable gap. He held that;

> ".... there can be no demonstrative arguments to prove, that those instances of which we have had no experience resemble those of which we have had experience"[16]

We also saw how Kant came to rescue science and metaphysics from the skeptic philosophy of Hume. We saw that he introduced a strong case for subjectivism in both areas of epistemology. Popper has dismissed Kant's solution thus;

> "When Kant said that our intellect imposes its laws upon nature, he was right--- except that he did not notice how often our intellect fails in the attempt; the regularities we try to impose are psychologically a priori, but there is not the slightest reason to assume that they are a priori valid as Kant thought"[17]

While noting Poppers contributions to fallibility as a scientific doctrine. The above passage reveals his apparent contradictions. Having claimed the solution of Hume's problem by pointing out that men act on 'best alternatives he is in the above passage conceding to Hume. Yet the validity of 'a priori' judgements according to Kant lay in their necessity and strict universality. The latter is quite close to what Popper himself has called "reasons and tests" and to which he substitutes for Hume's "customs and habits".

In answer to Hume's criticism of pure empiricism Popper contributed significantly to our problem i.e. the problem of fallibility of scientific knowledge. Popper asserted that scientific theories are only 'conjectures'. This was in opposition to the Neo-positivists stand. The Neo-positivists had prescribed verification as the cardinal principle of science. Our argument still remain that Wiredu's philosophy falls within such an epistemological tradition. Wiredu's respect for the scientific method shall be clear in a later chapter. Here it suffices to point out that his conception of truth as a point of view underscores the now established argument on the significant role of the knowing subject in epistemology. Such an argument i.e. of the role of the knowing subject is helped by the motto of the present sub-section which is attributed to Karl Popper who is, interestingly, the advocate of an 'epistemology' without a knowing subject.

And it is also this 'role of the subject' that Wiredu takes to construct his own epistemology in which the opinion of the knower is equated to truth.

2.3. FALLIBILITY AND PRAGMATISM

> "Upon the first, and in one sense, this sole rule of reason, that in order to learn, you must desire to learn, and in so desiring not to be satisfied with what you already incline to think, there follows one corollary which itself deserves to be inscribed upon every wall of the city of philosophy. Do not Block The Way of Inquiry"
>
> - Charles Sanders Peirce -

Being a concept that calls for provisional holding of our truths, fallibility has won support among pragmatist philosophers.

Pragmatism was the most influential philosophy in America during the first half of this century. It represented a critical rejection of much of traditional academic philosophy and an increased concern for the establishment of what pragmatists viewed as 'positive aims' in philosophy. Today, pragmatism is commonly defined as a philosophy which holds the view that a 'theory is true if it works' or as a 'theory which defines truth as a useful belief'. Indeed the word Pragmatism is a derivation from the Greek 'Pragma' meaning 'act' or 'deed' and conveys the notion that a true belief is one upon which the mind can act.

But this has become only a loose definition which fails to convey the fact that pragmatism was developed into a method for solving and evaluating problems and into a theory about what kinds of knowledge we are capable of acquiring. The concepts closely attached to pragmatism are; 'Cash Value' as developed by William James [18] and 'Instrumentalism' as developed by John Dewey.[19] 'Cash Value', according to James, investigates what functions statements have and what difference they make when they are true or false. Thus the cash value of our ideas are to be found in the use to which these ideas can be put. While theories are viewed and judged as instruments of problem solving. If our problems are solved, then the posited theory is judged as true. If they are not solved, then the theory is false. Ideas, thus, "become 'true' in so far as they work, and 'false' in so far as they don't".

Peirce was really the originator of the term Pragmatism. Indeed it is also to him that we attribute the first application of the term fallibilism. In his essay entitled "The Scientific Attitude and Fallibilism",[20] Peirce argued that "it is not knowing, but the love of learning that characterises the Scientific man". This was a blow aimed at claim to absolute certainty and the tendency to Scientism. Scientism is the tendency to hold as absolute and immutable Scientific knowledge. He had this to say with regard to scientific certainty;

> "..... on the whole, then, we cannot in any way reach perfect certitude nor exactitude. We never can be absolutely sure of anything nor can we with any probability ascertain the exact value of any measure or general ratio" [21]

Thus man can be said to be 'condemned to be fallible' just as Jean Paul Sartre had claimed he is 'condemned to be free'. In Peirce's philosophy, it is among scientists that this fact is most significant. But Peirce was equally cautious not to be misunderstood to be postulating some sort of a radical skepticism. He drew a demarcation between 'matters of fact' and 'the subjective role of the individual'. Hence his fallibilism did not entail that men cannot attain absolute certainty concerning questions of fact. Rather, he held that;

> "It is a matter of fact to say that there are four eyes in the room. But to say that if there are two persons and each has two eyes there will be four eyes is not a statement of fact but a statement about the system of numbers which is our own creation."[22]

In this, Peirce was implicity alluding to the 'Humean Crisis', Hume, as we had observed had highlighted the significant role inferences, customs and habit play in scientific knowledge and, consequently, introduced a dose of skepticism in science. Peirce, however, while conceding to the 'Humean Crisis', viewed fallibility rather than skepticism as a necessary introduction in a discussion of a method he viewed as based on inquiry since he defined truth as; "the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed upon by all who investigate".[23]

His pragmatism lay in his concern for ascertaining the meaning of intellectual concepts and the meaning of complex words and abstract concepts. He came to hold that all concepts must have some conceivable consequences or practical bearings. Similarly, our language has to correspond with external reality; To say, for instance, that a body is heavy should be the same as to say that in the absence of opposing

forces, it will fall. His respect for the scientific method incorporated the concept of fallibility. In his thought, "true ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify". Bu this should not be construed to entail absolutism. For these methods are our own creations. Their results are only "true ideas" as opposed to absolute truths. Truth and reality were, according to Peirce, two distinct entities.

For while truth is:

> "that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief"[24]

reality on the other hand is:

> "a mode of being by virtue of which the real thing is as it is, irrespectively of what any mind or any definite collection of minds may represent it to be" [25]

Therefore, truth is expressible as knowledge of a reality which maintains an independent tenure. Absolute certainty of reality is unattainable. When searching for truth, we merely presuppose that the reality in question is intelligible and capable of being known and not an inaccessible 'thing-in-itself'. Truth, according to Peirce, are representations of the reality and representations should be in conformity with the intended reality, lest they remain abstract theories

In Dewey's philosophy, pragmatism represented the cognitive beings' relationship with the external environment. And as we mentioned in the previous chapter, philosophy has to be 'Reconstructed' to light upon this fact. Recurrent philosophical problems are thus viewed as recurrent problems of men and not of philosophy 'per se'. Man as a living organism is in perpetual activity of problem identification and their attempted-solutions. Dewey writes:

> "Men have been thinking for ages, they have observed inferred and reasoned in all sorts of ways and to all kinds of results.[26]

It is this state of perpetual problem-identification that gives rise to Dewey's emphatic treatment of inquiry. Inquiry, in his view, is necessitated by conditions in which doubt terminates in the establishment of conditions whereby doubt is no longer necessary.

Dewey's own brand of pragmatism he called 'Instrumentalism'. Instrumentalism represents an epistemological methodology with inquiry occupying a central position. Therefore, the knowing subject is often mandatory to the acquisition of knowledge. In this, Dewey stood opposed to the 'classical theory of empiricism' notably that of British Empiricism right from William of Occam down to Bertrand Russell. The latter is the theory Karl Popper characterised as 'The Bucket Theory of Knowledge' and which Dewey dismissed thus;

> ".....thinking or knowledge-getting is far from being the arm-chair thing"[27] the classical empiricists had thought it to be

According to Dewey, there can never be an absolute knowledge since there is "no accomplished knowledge but only knowledge coming to be"[28]. This is why he substituted 'Warranted Assertibility' for knowledge (truth). Since knowledge is therefore a process of inquiry the result of which bears the 'Warrant' for its 'Assertion'. Such a warrant thus necessitate a tentative holding of all knowledge since superior sort of 'Warrant' may be found in the course of inquiry.

There has always been a general misconception persisting which characterises a certain interpretation of pragmatism. This is the uncritical interpretation of pragmatism which looks at this complex philosophical theory and epistemological methodology merely a theory which defines truth as consisting in useful belief. The perpetuation of this misconception might be blamed on the pragmatists themselves, though it still remains a testimony of academic prejudice which bring about rash judgement upon philosophical theories.

The claim that pragmatism leads to a moral society, akin to the earlier arguments ofMachiavelli i.e. that the end justifies the means, is one that treats pragmatism as a moral theory rather than an epistemological methodology that it was meant to be. Dewey had always been at pains to flay this misconception which basically arose from a misinterpretation of James article "The Will To Believe" in which his critics interpreted James to imply that the belief in God, for instance, is only useful if it leads to some personal satisfaction.

Perhaps it would be sound to let Dewey speak for the pragmatists at length in two passages which should deal the final blow to this misconception and which shall throughout guide our understanding of pragmatism;

> "..... when truth is defined as utility, it is often thought to mean utility for some purely personal and some profit upon which a particular individual has set heart. So repulsive is a conception of truth which makes it a mere tool of private ambition and aggrandizement that the wonder is that critics have attributed such a notion to sane men"29

and again;

> "It is easier to start a legend than to prevent its continued circulation. No misconception of the instrumental logic has been more persistent than the belief that it makes knowledge merely a means to a practical end, or the satisfaction of practical needs------ practical being taking to signify some quite definite utilities of a material or bread and butter type" 30

The relationship between pragmatism and fallibilism should by now be clear. Of the pragmatist philosophers treated in detail above, John Dewey shares a closer affinity to Wiredu's. As a matter of fact, Wiredu has explicity admitted his support of Dewey's instrumentalism.

Dewey's placing of the cognitive being to a significant interactive relationship with the external environment comes to share a great deal with Wiredu's insistence on truth as synonymous with point of view. Such assertions lead both philosophers to an anti-dogmatic conception of truth. Similarly they both embrace a mild form of empiricism borne out of their ultimate respect for the scientific method.

2.4. FALLIBILITY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

"For philosophy never stops; Its very existence
lies in the to and fro of free discussion without
which there's no philosophy"

- *Paulin Hountondji*-

Philosophy has come to be understood as a discipline characterised by a debate among the participants. According to Paulin Hountondji, in African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, (1983), the philosophical method of investigation comes from its traditional method of 'a dialogue among equals'. Similarly, Wiredu in his article "How not to Compare African Traditonal Thought With Western Thought"[31], views philosophy as a dynamic discipline reacting to cultural, geographical, political and technological transformations.

The philosophical method of inquiry is generally speculative. Consequently, it is by its methodological nature, anti-dogmatic. In this respect it suggests fallibility. Philosophy is not based on consensus i.e. it is not a sort of a democracy in which the belief of the majority prevails over that of the minority[32].

Philosophical exercise is, therefore, basically an individual concern. Hence it is commonly viewed quite appropriate when two or more philosophers disagree on matters of philosophical interest. Little wonder that fallibility wins overwhelming support among contemporary philosophers.

Within the African philosophical context, the problem of fallibility implicitly underlay the interesting debate among African philosophers, on one hand, and those who have now come to be referred to as ethno-philosophers. The major argument in this debate lay in the fact that the 'professional philosophers' saw in ethno-philosophical Literature a misconception of African philosophy.

Much has been said and written on this debate. Briefly, the professional philosophers argued, quite justifiably, that ethno-philosophy represents African philosophy which consist only in the static records of the traditional African customs and traditions . Consequently, in the African context, philosophy came to represent the 'static past' supposed to have been lived by our ancestors and handed down via ethno-graphical records of a study of the traditional societies' folk-tales, proverbs and religious beliefs.

At the centre of the rebuttal were Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji and Odera Oruka, to mention only the most widely discussed in the Anglophone circles. Underlying their rejection of ethno-philosophy was a desire for the adoption of universally accredited tools for going about philosophising. Such tools as reason, logic and inquiry, had been ignored by the ethno-philosophers. Yet these are the traditional hall-mark of philosophy as an academic discipline. Wiredu's rejection of the ethno-philosophical way of going about philosophy is based on his idea that ethno-philosophy treats philosophy in Africa independently of the immediate environment. Ethno-philosophy therefore posits a milieu which no longer influences, in any substantial manner, the day to day lives of the majority of the African people.

His position represents the modern argument that all philosophies must be formulated in cognisance with the environmental factors prevailing at the time in question. Therefore a contemporary philosophical activity in Africa must take into account the technological, economical, social, cultural and intellectual transformations that take place in the contemporary world. It must also attempt a critical analysis of contemporary world-views within the context of universal human experience. The doctrine of fallibility in Wiredu's thought is thus consistent to his general approach to philosophy. This is evidenced by his arguments for the rejection of ethno-philosophy in which as we have mentioned above, he rejects a representation of philosophy as a body of traditional thought processes of the African. Philosophy, in his view, evolves with the evolution of Society. Such evolution implies the evolution of truth[33].

13. Ibid, p.1

14. Ibid, p.95

15. Popper, K.R., The Logic of Scientific Discovery, Hutchinson, London (1959), p. 314.

16. Hume, D., A Treatise of Human Nature, London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., Vol.I, p.95.

17. Popper, K.R., Objective Knowledge, op. cit. p.24.

18. James, W., "What Pragmatism means" in The Writings of William James, McDermott, J.J., (Ed.), Random House, New York, (1967), pp.376-390.

19. Dewey, J., Essays in Experimental Logic, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1986.

20. In Buchler, J., Philosophical Writings of Peirce, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1955.

21. Ibid., p.58

22. Ibid., p.59

23. Ibid., p.38

24. Ibid., p. 56

25. Ibid., p. 56

26. Dewey, J., Reconstruction in Philosophy, New American Library New York, (1957), p.115

27. Dewey, J., Essays in Experimental Logic, op. cit., p.13

28. Ibid., p.12

29. Dewey, J., Reconstruction in Philosophy, op. cit., p.129

30. Dewey, J., Essays in Experimental Logic, op. cit., p.330

31. In Wiredu, K., Philosophy and an African Culture, op. cit. pp.37-50.

32. This argument may be found in Oseghare, A.S., "The Relevance of Sagacious Reasoning in African Philosophy". Phd Thesis, University of Nairobi 1985.

33. Wiredu, K., op. cit., p.29

FALLIBILITY IN 'WIREDIAN PERSPECTIVES

3.1. WIREDU'S 'PHILOSOPHICAL PARADOXES

(a) Truth As Opinion

The thesis 'Truth is synonymous with opinion' is one that seems to deny not only what Wiredu himself calls 'the fact of common experience', but also our common understanding of truth and of opinion. Truth in our common understanding is often depicted as absolute and unchangeable, while opinion is depicted as subjective and changeable.

Wiredu recognises his thesis as his own 'philosophical paradox' when he says "..... the denial of some philosophical theories may also imply the denial of certain common conceptions, when that happens, we speak of a philosophical paradox."[1] Our understanding of opinion normally implies a subjective judgement/proposition arrived at under conditions of scanty/incomplete evidence. It is characterised by uncertainty and fear of error.

As opposed to opinion truth is usually taken to express the value of a proposition in its relation to the reality it describes. It is often offered as an 'established fact' arising out of rational scrutiny and corresponding experience. While opinion is taken to mean a subjective proposition offered as a tentative answer to a problem, it (opinion) is thus offered in a take it or leave it manner of speaking. Truth is thus considered as opposed

to opinion. Whereas opinion can evolve into a truth, the reverse cannot happen, otherwise the truth is falsified suggesting that it was never a truth in the first place. By asserting the very opposite of this common sense view of truth, Wiredu's thesis challenges the very foundation of the semantic understanding of the two concepts.

What, then, does his paradox imply?

According to his understanding of truth in relation to opinion, Wiredu takes truth as nothing but a strong case of an opinion. For him the possibility of opinion becoming truth is only apparent. For he says:

> "an established fact is simply an opinion felt to be secure from some individual point of view or set of points of view"[2]

According to Wiredu, we must distinguish between two conceptions of opinion. One of these is the type usually characterised by uncertainty. The second conception is what Wiredu calls 'considered opinion'. This arises out of 'observation, logic and imagination'.[3] The latter is the opinion which is synonymous with truth in his philosophy. To characterise such opinion as trivial and uncertain means nothing more than to dissociate oneself from the opinion of another and to present a 'counter-opinion. The formulation of opinion is governed by an internal organ that safeguards the formulation of rational opinions. Men, therefore do not formulate opinions anyhow. On the contrary, opinions, so formulated, follow the trends of scientific thinking common to all thinking beings.

The element of point of view is therefore significant to the understanding and appreciation of Wiredu's conception of truth as opinion. According to Wiredu, 'point of view' is indispensable for all truth-claims. Truth, therefore, can only come via a point of view, since truth propositions entail a truth-claimant, and a truth-claimant can only express a truth from a point of view, Wiredu says:

> "Point of view is a correlate assertion of truth-claim. There is no assertion or truth-claim without an assertor or a truth-claimant just as there is no question without an asker. By point of of view, I understand exactly the truth-claimant correlative to a truth-claim"[4]

Hence, according to Wiredu, truth is opinion in the sense that it necessarily arises from the point of view of the claimant. The denial of this proposition is synonymous with the claim that truth is beyond the reach of the claimant. But such a claim is unthinkal since it entails an assertion of the unknowability of truth.

Implicit in such a conception of truth as opinion is a denial of a shades of absolutistic and dogmatic propositions. Truth becomes fallible since it arises from the point of view of a fallible claimant. It can never be an absolute and independent entity sinc this entails its unknowability which is absurd. And in Wiredu's argument when disagreements arise as to whence lies the truth, involved parties present conflicting opinions on the issue in question. The bone of contention is thus, not to arrive at an

absolute consensus on what is true, but to evaluate the judgement of individuals over the issue in question.[5]

Now,a problem has always arisen as to the place of such truths we generally consider as 'Independent'. One example Wiredu gives is that of Alfred Tarski's conception of truth.[6]

In his article, 'Semantic Conception of Truth', Tarski says that such a statement as 'Snow is White' is true if and only if, 'snow is white'. Tarski's is a postulation of a 'Correspondence Theory of Truth'. In Wiredu's understanding, such a conception of truth cannot be said to lead to an absolute or independent truth since it also arises from a point of view. It is unthinkable should we remove the element of point of view.

He says:

> "a truth-value assignment being nothing other than a truth-claim, must be from some point of view. Hence the logical depiction of a statement or assertion, such as 'snow is white' is not complete without a formal indication of point of view"[7]

This 'formal indication' he formulates thus; Ptv (1), where 'v' represents the notion of associated point of view and (1) its numerical identity, 't' represents the truth-value attached to the proposition 'P'.

Thus, as a matter of illustration, to say '-P' is the same as to say '-Ptv(2) indicating that the contradiction arises from a

second, and a different point of view. And to get back to the example of Tarski's conception of truth, the statement cannot stand independently of point of view and it, therefore, only reveals a tautology. If this point is not yet clear, then it ought to become clearer when we turn to Wiredu's second paradox;

'To be is to be known'.

(b) To Be Is To Be Known

This paradox bears a close affinity to Bishop George Berkeley's own paradox; esse est percipi (To be is to be perceived).

In Wiredu's own formulation he says "For anything whatever, To be is to be apprehended".[8] This is in an attempt to prove his thesis. Wiredu introduces the problem of the meaning of 'Existence' which is a correlate of 'To be'. The question posed is; Can objects enjoy some objective existence independent of the knower? Can we assert the existence of an unknown object? Wiredu gives an answer to these questions in the negative.

For him, the existence of an object, whatsoever, is synonymous with its being known. We cannot assert the knowledge of a non-existent object, neither can we assert the existence of an unknown object. For, as he says:

> ".....to assert the existence of an object and to claim knowledge of it in a certain minimal sense is one and the same thing"[9]

Therefore 'To be is to be known' and 'Possibly to be is possibly to be known'. The latter can only be a hypothesis. Wiredu does not deny the argument that there are objects that we do not know. For knowledge according to him is open ended and as he says in support of the assertion "there are things we do not know of but there are no specific things we do not know".[10] Therefore to claim there are specific things we do not know is to claim knowledge of the unknown, which is also absurd.

Can we assert with justification that there was unheard sound in the desert? According to Wiredu, such a problem might only be solved by introducing the word 'may' in the assertion, yet this does not imply that existence is logically dependent on knowledge. All it is saying is that there are other things existing in the universe that we do not have knowledge of and so we cannot logically claim with any degree of certainty both our knowledge of them and their independent existence.

In this light, a problem introduced by Bertrand Russell in his An inquiry Into Meaning and Truth, (1966), though in a discussion of the Law of Excluded Middle, is relevant to Wiredu's conception as presented above. According to Russell, such a statement as "It snowed on Manhattan island on the 1st of January in the year 1 A.D."[11] can neither be said to be true nor false yet it must be either. According to our understanding of Wiredu, such a statement as that formulated by Russell above, can only remain a conjecture. We can therefore re-formulate it thus; 'It might have snowed on Manhattan Island on the 1st of January in the year 1 A.D.'

Wiredu has also begged to depart from what he calls "the idealism of Berkeley and Kant and also all brands of phenomenalism, old and new"[12]. In his position, "it is the existence of an object, not the object itself that consists in being known"[13]. Existence according to him, is a 'mere relation' and not the object itself. Existence is an attribute of an object which can only be asserted in the absence of that object.

Therefore he claims that his thesis is a purely epistemological one as opposed to Berkeley's, which he characterises as ontological since it entails the view that the objects of perception are our sensations. Berkeley's theory, according to Wiredu, reduced objects to sensations thus taking from them any objective existence. Similarly, Kant's epistemology denied knowledge of the 'ultimate constitution' of objects. Kant then resorted to a phenomenalist theory of knowledge asserting that the 'noumenon' could not be known. Berkeley and Kant's ontological epistemology, in Wiredu's view, failed to solve the problem of the ultimate constitution of objects. When objects are regarded as exclusively sensible, contradiction arises since it follows that they lack objective existence and are a mere 'species of sensation'. According to Wiredu, this makes talk of objects same as talk of their ultimate constitution, whereas, in his understanding, we should only assert the existence of objects and not attempt to know the ultimate constitution. Since an attempt to know the ultimate constitution of objects is tantamount to a claim to knowledge of the unknown. His thesis re-inforces his contention on the role of point of view. It underscores the role the knower plays in interacting with the objects of knowledge. The denial of 'ultimate constitution' of the object internalises the knowledge-getting process and thus

supports the first paradox; truth as opinion. In order to strengthen his paradox, Wiredu brings in the following possible objection to his thesis:

> "It may be asked; 'Is it not conceivable that all cognitive beings could perish And would not the world of material objects exist?"

and in the same page, provides an answer thus;

> "This question is raised, and can only be raised, while we are still around, and it is raised from our point of view"[14]

This is similar to Popper's argument for his "third world theory. Popper, as we shall see, recognises objective knowledge to exist only in the "World of Material objects". But it is the thesis Wiredu rejects here when he claims that such a "third World" is merely a conjectural one. The "third world", if our understanding is correct is a world of laboratory research and not a real one. It is a world that can only be conceived of from a point of view. It is "possibly to be known".

3.2. OPINION AS OBJECTIVE TRUTH

Up to this level of interpretation, Wiredu's thesis appears to be subjective. But he has persistently argued that his conception of truth as opinion is marked by objectivity.

Subjectivity is yet another conception Wiredu conceives of quite differently from the everyday philosophical understanding. Subjectivism, in the common rendering of the term, denotes the notion that all individuals perceive of objects of knowledge differently. It has been said of subjects that they vary in their judgement of situations whether cultural or epistemological. It has also been said that 'One man's food is anothers' poison' suggesting a difference in individual taste. Allowance is thus accorded varied ideas, judgements, tastes, values, etc. The moral and the cultural milieu are also normally viewed to constitute the cradle of subjective difference. Aesthetics, for instance, has since been accepted as the field in which varied opinions mingle freely. Opinion is judged as a subjective concept to which all individuals are entitled. This has tempted many critics and interpreters of Wiredu's conception of truth to see him advocating a subjective conception of truth.

But Wiredu has begged to differ substantially from such interpretations. According to him, when his conception of truth is characterised as subjectivist, the implication is that truth, therefore, depends on some psychological peculiarities of individuals. Hence critics tend to imply that according to him, anybody can assert any absurd proposition and win respect for it since everybody is entitled to his/her opinion. Other critics have also interpreted his conception of truth to exist in external environment affecting individual and social 'points of view' as we shall see in a discussion of his anti-relativism.

Wiredu claims departure from the former interpretations since his conception of truth as opinion is grounded on what he calls "rationally considered opinion" arising out of the Scientific methods of "investigation, imagination and observation"[15]. Truth is, therefore, personal but objective. As he says:

> "Whether a belief is rationally supportable or not is an objective issue, that is, an issue whose determination does not depend on the psychological peculiarities of any given person"[16]

The belief that what is personal is subjective is merely a traditional and uncritical understanding of subjectivism. The novelty Wiredu's conception carries is that "something can be both personal and rational; and what is rational is 'Ipso facto' objective"[17]. The tendency is to divorce the knower from objective truth and yet, according to Wiredu, objectivity arises from a synthesis of the knower and the external object i.e. the problem in hand. Closely related to this objection of a subjective interpretation of his thesis is Wiredu's anti-relativist position. Relativism is akin to subjectivism since it expresses the view that truth lacks objectivity and absoluteness, and that 'all truth is a matter of personal opinion' which varies from person to person, context to context, etc.

According to Wiredu, his insistence on the element of 'point of view' is what has led to an interpretation of relativism in his epistemology. He concedes that it is his remarks elsewhere that lead to such a misinterpretation.

He says:

> "The remark that 'there are as many truths as there are points of view' was an attempt to put oneself into everybody's epistemoligical shoes for a moment"[18]

There can never be as many truths as points of view since points of view are frequently regulated by the canons of rational thinking. Men do not deliberately think irrationaly so as to preserve the individuality of their points of view.

A relativist interpretation might also arise out of misunderstanding of 'point of view' as existing in the external perceptive environment. But 'point of view', in Wiredu's conception, is an internal phenomenon which is subject, not to external factors but internal factor. In this case, what he calls 'rational self-control' and 'inter-personal criteria' of truth. Therefore to conceive of point of view as external to the subject is to conceive truth as dependent on this external factor and thus to interpret relativism. And as Wiredu says:

> "Truth.....cannot be said to depend on a point of view that gives the impression of relativism; a truth is a point of view"[19]

Thus two or more individuals might hold corresponding opinions on one issue though they might come from different environments. This is owed to the rational 'Self-control' and 'Inter-personal criteria' of truth which might lead them to hold a similar and objective opinion.

What he calls 'canons of rational thinking' lead Wiredu to hold a theory of truth akin to the Deweyian "Warranted Assertibility". According to Dewey, knowledge arises out of 'tests, corroboration and verification'. Their workability and origination from inquiry warrants their assertion. But Dewey's pragmatist theory of truth endorses relativism. Dewey's theory of knowledge is solely dependent on the living organism's interaction with the external environment hence practicality becomes a significant criterion of truth.

Wiredu admits a position similar to that of Dewey when he says:

> "..... the truth enterprise starts with problems, not with beliefs on hangers, and what we seek to do is not to make selections but to solve problems. We should not take the notion of searching for truth so literally. Searching for truth means trying to solve problems"[20]

But his conception of truth as opinion leads him to differ with Dewey's conception. The element of point of view, as we have seen is cardinal to his conception of truth. Hence he differs with Dewey's in the sense that;

> "Being warranted is not definitionally the same as being rationally warranted"[21]

According to him, Dewey's assertions are rationally warranted yet there are certain assertions that are warranted but their inspirations are derived, not from reason, but from equally significant areas. Wiredu argues that some assertions, particularly those relating to social and individual beliefs might not be rational but cannot be said to be unwarranted. Thus, in Wiredu's own words, their difference with Dewey consists in the fact that;

> "For Dewey, the relation between truth and rationally warranted assertibiliy is one of analytic identity. For me, it is a synthetic relation, since not all points of view are rational"[22]

In our understanding of this supposed difference, Dewey's 'Warranted Assertions' are, or should be identical everywhere. But for Wiredu, this identity cannot be achieved since individuals might reason differently to the same conclusion and since there is no 'Litmus test' for assertions due to what Wiredu calls the 'Substantive nature of belief'.

It is significant to highlight Wiredu's distinction between what he calls the 'Formal significance of truth' and the Substantive nature of belief'. In his view, the former is the kind of truth philosophers like Tarski are concerned with, but the latter, often under-emphasised, concerns the functions of truth in human life. He says:

> "By a substantive exposition of a concept, I mean an account that is not principally concerned with disclosing its conceptual relations but with its very possibility and with its functions in human life"[23]

It is therefore, not enough to merely define truth as "warranted Assertibility", we go further and pursue such questions as;

> "What are its canons? What is the fundamental basis of those canons and what role do they play in the interactions and transactions of human beings with their environment and with their own kind"[24]

Truth is therefore not merely a formal and an academic concern, it is also value-laden. This is the point that has led some interpreters to read a pragmatist treatment of truth in Wiredu. The argument that truth leads to some practical results corresponding to the values held as dear by various communities is already introduced in Dr. Masolo's article "Kwasi Wiredu: Truth and The Question of African philosophy". (op. cit.)

But in bringing this sub-topic to a close, we recapitulate the contention that Wiredu's understanding of both subjectivity and objectivity departs from the common conceptions of the terms. In his conception, subjectivism denotes peculiarities of persons and not subjectivity of judgements. As he puts it;

> "....something is subjective only if it is connected in an unlawlike manner with the peculiarities of a person"[25]

3.3. A MONISTIC CONCEPTION OF TRUTH

We consider as a 'Monistic conception of truth contrary to the 'Dualistic' conception. By a 'Dualistic conception of truth, we understand that conception which bifurcates truth into 'Independent truths' and 'Subjective truths'. Independent truths are supposed to be objective and are conceived of as existing irrespective of what the knowing subject might think or not think of them. 'Subjective truths' on the other hand, are conceived of as arising from individual subjects' opinions in the everyday understanding of the word. The Dualistic conception of truth is, therefore, the philosophical view that draws a sharp distinction between subjective and objective truth. While the monistic conception is that which lacks such a distinction.

A formulation of the dualistic conception of truth consists in most of the traditional conceptions of truth, e.g. Plato's epistemological distinction between opinion (doxa) and knowledge (episteme). Similarly, objectivistic theories of truth suggest the dualistic conception. A more recent formulation of this conception can be found in Odera-Oruka's article 'For The Sake of Truth' (op. cit.) written as an objection to Wiredu's conception of Truth as opinion.

In this article, Odera draws a clear distinction between truth based on an objective and independent criteria and opinion based on the subjects' judgement. He speaks of 'truths of opinion' and 'Independent truths' conceived of as distinct entities. He (Odera) gives an example of his conception of an independent truth as such a proposition as 'The Earth is Round' which is as good as an established fact.

According to Odera, there is, therefore, a distinct difference between a 'Universally well-considered opinion' and an opinion simply advanced and defended from some given view point. According to him, "the former is an independent truth and its expression is a matter of confirmed discovery not a point of view. The latter has all the risks of a fable"[26]. Thus, according to him, contrary to Wiredu's assertions, some truths exist independent of any particular point of view. Therefore a sentence such as 'T is true' should be distinguished from personal commitments such as 'I am committed to the point or belief that T is true'[27].

But Wiredu's position do not concede to these objections. According to his conception, a proposition such as 'The Earth is Round', for instance, cannot be an independent truth since it is a truth-claim. And as we had observed earlier, all truth-claims must only arrive via points of view. The objective criteria, viz. reason, observation and evidence are important canons for

independence of truths. To think of a universal but independent opinion is an opinion i.e. it is a supposition that we make by attempting to stand outside our opinion. But this can only be done from a point of view. Whether considered or rational, such assertions are still opinion by virtue of their being judgements. Being judgements then, to posit them as independent and universal is to claim that they are absolute and immutable. But this is reducible to claiming that our 'rationally considered opinions' are 'universal and immutable'. The derivation from this argument is that the truths which have been frequently corroborated remain independent of further inquiry and to continue their scrutiny only come out of what might be called philosophical megalomania. But such an argument may lead to infallibility. To illustrate his arguments further, let us allow Wiredu himself to give concessions and then add at length:

> "If saying that truth is eternal and absolute means simply that when a proposition is true it is true, then I have no quarrel with it. But I doubt that it is this tautology that so much excites the enthusiasm of the devotees of eternal and absolute truth. I see in these notions a reification of truth; truth is conceived by them as an independent entity. That is naive metaphysics. I see in it furthermore, a certain tendency to claim infallibility. The process is somewhat as follows, Infallibility is first modestly attributed to Absolute Truth, something independent of us mortals. But in due course the devotee comes to see himself as being in possession of the truth about

> some highly important matter. There is then a smooth almost imperceptible tranference of the infallibility of the independent, abstract entity. Truth as concrete inhabitant of this Earth"[28]

The best example of such a progression consists in Plato's Republic. After conceiving of absolute truth as unattainable, Socrates progressively designes his 'Philosopher-King', a mortal who undergoes rigorous training in metaphysics and mathematics, attains the necessary tools for grasping the 'Ultimate good' and comes to live and rule the static state as the personification of this 'Good'. The totalitarian and authoritarian nature of such a state is captured in Popper's "Open Society" Vol.I.

Wiredu's conception of truth thus remains Monistic since a concession to the dualistic conception leads to infallibilty and a denial of his own thesis; 'To be is to be known'. If independent truth' exists then, to say that it is not opinion is the same thing as to say that it is unknown. Yet we know such propositions.

Similarly, to go back to Odera's proposition 'I am committed to the point or belief that T is True' is in Wiredu's view, not a personal commitment but a tautology. This is the same as Tarski's formulation of Truth in his proposition "The statement 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white". This formulation bifurcates truth into a claim (as in the first component) and an objective fact (as in the second). In order to salvage his theory from such a dualistic conception Wiredu resorts to the pragmatist strategy of corroboration. He says:

> "Given the availabilty of a declarative sentence constructed from an antecedent point of view to say that it is true is equivalent to corroborating it".[29]

Thus in the example of Tarski's formulation above, the second component, which is the unquoted 'Snow is white' is a confirmatory sentence. It is just a representation of an assertion, a belief, an opinion etc. which has been corroborated and therefore is objective. But the element of 'point of view' is still indispensable and therefore the dualism conceived remains merely formal.

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It is in this respect that we categorise Wiredu's conception of truth as 'monistic. But this does not suggest that he denies the possibility of an independent and factual existence. What he denies is the assertion of such an existence. For such an assertion is tantamount to an assertion of the unknown. The concession he gives is that an independent truth 'may exist unknown to us and we can only regard such knowledge as a conjecture.

3.4. THE NON-CONTRADICTION OF THE LAW OF NON-CONTRADICTION

The Law of Excluded Middle and the Law of Non-contradiction are closely related and, taken together, are known as 'The Law of Thought'. Wiredu discusses the two as one. The Law of Excluded Middle says that all propositions are either 'True' or 'False' and there can never be a middle path, hence 'Excluded Middle' The Law of Non-contradiction, on the other hand, says that 'Nothing can be and not be at the same time', hence non-contradiction.

Therefore an assertion like 'P' and '-P' is necessarily a contradiction. But Wiredu's thesis have the fallibility of truth as a fundamental law of all conceptions of truth. Consequently what is held as true today may turn out to be false tomorrow, which appears to be a contradiction. While lending credence to the dualistic conception of truth as formulated above. Let us attempt here an examination of this apparent contradiction of the laws by Wiredu's thesis, for our conclusion shall be that it does not contradict these laws as Wiredu himself asserts.

According to Wiredu's thesis, it is possible to assert 'P' at a particular time and assert '-P' at a later time without a contradiction. What amounts to a contradiction is only to assert 'P and '-P' at the same time and from the same point of view. In the former example, there is an evident change of commitment and thus the point of views are not identical.

Truth as a personal commitment to a claim is changeable, according to Wiredu, and it is proper to observe; "I believe that P but P is false and I was mistaken"[30]. But when two different persons believe two contradictory assertions e.g. one that 'P' and the other that '-P', what results is not a contradiction but a disagreement. According to Wiredu, it is not as to truth that people disagree but as to issues. Such disagreements are healthy social conditions and, as he says:

> "Non-contradiction would be a poor law indeed if it sought to forbid people to contradict what they take to be the falsehoods of others"[31]

He adds that Non-contradiction should rather be renamed as Lukaciewitz has done to be called 'Bivalence' i.e. 'Two Values'. The problem lies with the implication of the laws. For to posit a declarative statement is so. to speak, to put the 'cart before the hcrse'. It is to assume that all problems have been solved. Yet in order to solve problems we start, not with a declaration but with an inquiry. The

declaration comes as a result of an inquiry. Yet the two laws tend to declare the solution of uninquired problem. Moreover, the laws tend to carry with them a suggestion of absolutism since they offer a ready solution to all problems. But as Wiredu says:

> "we cannot adequately interpret even so fundamental a logical principle as the law of Non-contradiction without taking cognisance of the role of the idea of point of view".[32]

Therefore the solutions so offered by the laws still carry within them the element of point of view.

Contradictions in social communications are only apparent where there exist a self-contradiction e.g. the assertion of 'P and -P' from one and the same point of view. Interestingly this is not totally absent. Indeed it is always manifested in covert forms. One example of a covert contradiction is the case of two different, but antagonistic faiths. In Africa, for instance, the relationship between traditional religious beliefs and modern christian beliefs is often not smooth. This is particularly with reference to what might be considered a superstition. Significant disputations have arisen, even in courts of law,[33] as to the place of 'spirits' and 'ghosts' in two different faiths. Whenever the issue of 'spirits' and 'ghosts' arise with respect to traditional beliefs, the popular reaction among christians is that these are superstitious beliefs. But the christian faith

also harbours significant beliefs in 'spirits' and ghosts. Whether one should be categorised as 'Evil' and another Holy is a matter of orientation. But the point is that if the belief in 'spirits' is equivalent to superstition in traditional faiths then there is no reason why they should not be superstitious in christian faith. It is something akin to asserting 'P and -P' from the same point of view, for as, Thomas Hobbes has observed:

> "Fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind or imagined from tales publiquely allowed is called Religion, not allowed, superstition"[34]

NOTES

1. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and An African Culture, C.U.P., London (1980), P.112.

2. Ibid., P.115

3. Ibid., P.176

4. Wiredu, K., "Deducibility and Inferability", In Mind, January 1973, (Oxford) P.37.

5. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and An African Culture op Cit. P.204

6. Tarski, A., "The Semantic Conception of Truth" in Feigl and and Sellars' (Eds.) Readings in Philosophical Analysis, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949.

7. Wiredu, K., "Deducibility and Inferability" op. Cit. P.38.

8. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and An African Culture, op. Cit. P.124.

9. Ibid., P.129

10. Ibid., P.130

11. Russell, B., An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1966, P.277.

12. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and An African Culture op. Cit. P.132

13. Ibid., P.132

14. Ibid., P.137-138

15. Ibid., P.176

16. Ibid., P.210

17. Ibid., P.217

18. Ibid., P.218

19. Ibid., P.203

20. Ibid., P.213

21. Ibid., P.202

22. Ibid., P.211

23. Ibid., P.211

24. Ibid., P.212

25. Ibid., P.216

26. Odera-Oruka "For The Sake Of Truth", (Unpublished paper), P.13

27. Ibid., P.24

28. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and An African Culture, op Cit., P.225

29. Ibid., P.201

30. Ibid., P.196

31. Wiredu, K., "Deducibility and Inferability", op. Cit., P.36-37

32. Ibid., P.36

33. See, for instance S.M. Burial Saga, Nation Printers, Nairobi, 1987

34. Hobbes, T., Leviathan, with an Essay by the late W.G., Pogson Smith, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1909, P.44

CHAPTER IV

A CRITIQUE OF WIREDU'S FALLIBILITY

4.1. WHENCE LIES FALLIBILITY

Wiredu's commitment to fallibility in his conception of truth ought to be clear following the previous chapter. We have already observed that his insistence on a 'personal' view of truth originating from a point of view is what constitute the cornerstone of his fallibilism. What remains, therefore, is to apply his fallibilism to man's practical experience.

The application of his epistemology is, in turn, what constitutes Wiredu's moral and political philosophy based upon human understanding, libertarianism and tolerance. As he has himself observed:

> "Recognition that truth necessarily involves a point of view should lead one to reflect that the 'truths' which one happens to espouse are not ineluc table and final, and that opposite point of views celebrating opposite 'truths' are in themselves neither evidence of insincerity nor proof of stupidity"[1]

The recurrence of 'opposite truths' leading to political assassinations, exiles and detentions is, in Wiredu's view, an indirect consequence of various shades of political intolerance based upon the fact that political leaders and political systems have been viewed as absolute.

Political leaders begin to look at themselves as divinely ordained personages, while ideologies are posited and held as absolute dogmas arising out of these 'divinities' and their divine role to interpret and execute what is conceived as divine will on earth.

Similarly, in the religious realm, the 'divine will' gradually becomes interpreted as complex creeds which only those in high religious offices might decode. The consequence is that 'opposite views lead to excommunications, banishments and schisms in churches. In Wiredu's understanding, fanaticism, dogmatism, absolutism and authoritarianism are unnecessary social and political ills that can be blamed directly on our pretence to infallibility.

But such ills are unnecessary and impossible should we recognise that our so-cherished 'truths' are merely our 'fallible opinions'. In his own words:

> "It is difficult to think that men could imprison, and even kill, their fellow men for doctrinal differences with a free conscience if they understood clearly that, in doing so, they were acting simply on their own fallible opinions."[2]

Men, it is true, have held their 'truths' as absolute even when evidence to the contrary are overwhelming. Even the existence and possibility of just this 'evidence' has been bitterly contested in human history since man tends to view such evidence as prejudicial to the preservation of the 'status quo'. Similarly men also lack the motivation to inquire into contrary evidence

inspite of what it might entail. For, as Michael Polanyi has observed:

> "If we believe something to be true, we normally bring in evidence that supports our belief, little need comes to our minds to bring in evidence that the opposite of our belief may be true------ otherwise, we only ignore the latter as irrelevant".[3]

If Polanyi's latter was tobe postulated by somebody in a humbler political or religious position as we, the consequence is often to mobilise all the resources available by virtue of our positions to discredit, detain assassinate or excommunicate the prophet of the opposite belief. In most cases, the dispute is personalised and the 'opponent' is viewed as questioning or undermining our very personalities by doubting the very basis of our institutions. In rationalising our refusal to admit a possibility of error, we explain the 'ill-motives' as aimed at the sabotaging of our institutions.

Such combated views are, with time, endorsed and posited as our own 'brain-children'. The distortion of history is a common experience in human experience and if this is true, then it adds credence to Wiredu's political philosophy.

Political authoritarianism, mostly in the so-called developing world, have been rationalised in the language of the pragmatists. Our political leaders think of themselves as 'practicalists' as opposed to theoreticians. This has led to inherent suspicion of all new theories carrying new possibilities with them. New theories are thus viewed as

empty, and traditional methods, however anachronistic, are firmly and desparately adhered to. The fear of change, mostly occassioned by the obssession to preserve the 'statu quo' logically leads to the 'blocking of the road to inquiry' which, as we had seen before, is the motto on the banner of all pragmatists. The political pragmatism prevailing under such circumstances is thus only left to the Machiavellian a-moral pragmatism and not, in any sense, related to the epistemological pragmatism of the American pragmatist philosophers. Such a case is a manifestation of the anachronism defined by Wiredu as "the failure to perceive anachronistic things for what they are and to discard or modify them as the case may be"[4]. It is an anachronism that afflicts, not only our political, but also our academic institutions, and is a serious symptom of intolerance, fear of experimentations and personalisation of inventions.

Thus Wiredu's transition from an epistemological conception of truth as opinion into a moral and political philosophy is made possible by what we saw as his distinction between 'The substantive nature of belief' and 'The formal significance of Truth'. As we observed earlier on, the former is the concern of the moralists and pragmatists while the latter concerns academic epistemologists and logicians. It is this distinction of concerns in Wiredu's conception of truth that D.A. Masolo has taken to interpret the former's defence of the traditional African philosophy.

According to Masolo in his article, "Kwasi Wiredu: Truth and the Question of African Philosophy"[5]. Wiredu's conception of truth as including its 'substantive nature' leads to a defence of truths posited in the contexts of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

In this interpretation, it is not enough to give a statement of corresponding facts as mirroring the truth. We go further to present the 'psycho-epistemological determinations' of the truth-claimants. Hence, to use our own example, a mother whose son dies of malaria is least likely to believe the medical doctors' explanation that the son had been bitten by an anopheles mosquito and this caused the death. She instead goes on to believe that this mosquito was actually sent after her son by some evil person bent on bringing misfortunes on her. The circumstances prevailing being greatly influenced by belief in witchcraft, the mother's explanation may be found to be rational given the 'epistemological determination by circumstances.

This argument seems to be compatible with Wiredu's own. He has pointed out that his relation between truth and 'rationally warranted assertibility' is a synthetic one-------- since not all points of view are rational-------- and this is why his position differs from Dewey's whose 'rationally warranted assertibility is analytic.[6] But he has (elsewhere) departed from an attempt to justify actions and beliefs on non-scientific and unanalytical grounds. In his highly critical essay 'Philosophy and an African Culture' (1976), Wiredu maintains that anachronism, authoritarianism and super-naturalism are the chief complaints that may afflict, and indeed afflicts, a society developing from the traditional to the modern. Supernaturalism, in particular, leads to a superstitious interpretation of morality and thus an irrational and unjustified belief on 'evil spirit' and 'evil persons' held responsible for individual and social misfortune.

According to Wiredu, belief in witchcraft, occassioned by an unscientific and unanalytical approach to the external world is one sort of anachronism that still afflicts the African society. Masolo is, therefore, right when he observes that:

> "..... Wiredu's argument is about the errors quite often made in applying a set of techniques of knowledge or of reasoning developed in the context of a particular life-style to the solutions of problems inherent in another life-style radically different frcm it"[7].

But this should not imply that Wiredu intention is for us to understand that the nature of scientific evidence ought to be relative to time and place. Nor is it the case that we ought to endorse virtually all knowledge, however humble, on the basis of relativism. It is a practical fact that different societies operate along the line of truths occassioned by contextual needs, problems and priorities and that, Wiredu argues to the effect that all 'truths' must conform to contemporary experience. But his respect for a sort of a universally rational truth leads him to prescribe education that involves the disciplines of 'formal and informal logic and..... the methodology of rational thinking' to help fight off the prevalence of irrational, unanalytical and supernatural explanations. In this, Wiredu is much similar to Dewey's 'analytical epistemology' and his synthetic epistemology' suffers dilution. His point here might be that; What is psychical knowledge is not necessarily totally unacceptable while what is analytical in the Deweyian sense is not all that there is in human knowledge. In endorsing his psychical knowledge, he yet emphasises the analytical and scientific method which strives to back all assertions with evidence saying:

> "What is wanted is a certain kind of training that will produce minds eager and able to test claims and theories against observed facts and adjust beliefs to the evidence"[8] (our emphasis).

The end-result of such education is the institutionalisation of that sort of universalism that scientific knowledge strives to create. But it is an effort which does not ignore what we have called the 'Psycho-epistemological determinations' and so 'truth as opinion' thesis is not undermined in any way.

In still holding firm to the 'anti-anyhow formulation of opinions, Wiredu's 'substantive nature of belief' does not have to arise from certain illogical and supernatural explanations. Rather, it arises from the humane considerations to which all moral values ought to be geared. In the same chapter quoted above (Philosophy and an African Culture), Wiredu argues for the African traditional morality which, in his view, is largely aimed at the attainment of some practical welfare of the members of society. This same argument is elaborately advanced in his article 'Religion and Morality in Akan Thought'[9]. The argument (in the latter article) that certain supernatural beings are called upon only to help in the enforcement of moral laws and prescripts whose rationale can be found in the common welfare of society is an elaboration of what Wiredu means by the 'Substantive nature of belief'.

Examples of such supernatural formulation of moral laws and norms offered in the latter article may be found among other African ethnic groups apart from the Akan. Among the Luo of Kenya, for instance, it is still widely held that a mother-in-law cannot spend

a night in her married daughter's house unless she wills a curse to befall her daughter and her offspring. Such a moral law must have originated from the architectural designs of traditional houses (huts) and the strict sense of decency under circumstances when the mode of dressing was anything but scanty. It must have been occassioned by the parties' self-respect and the need for social control. Whether those conditions are still prevalent is a relative case which should not be addressed to 'mystical forces' who were said to have formulated the laws. However these laws are still meticulously observed even among people living in huge mansions containing several rooms reserved for just such visitors. It gives credence to Dewey's observation that:

> "Customs as widespread uniformities of habit tend to perpetuate themselves even when they no longer answer the needs of man in relation with his environment"[10]

Wiredu's strict respect for 'observed facts' and 'evidence' here seems to be incompatible with his view that all truths of opinion demand respect since cultural relativism clearly involves certain irrational observation of laws that do not tally with the actual environmental conditions. These are die-hard laws that prevail owing to what Wiredu himself recognises as a 'synthetic epistemology'.

A critical evaluation of the 'Substantive nature of belief' thus ought to involve the positing of such questions as; of what practical consequences has such a body of belief to those who hold them? Are such a body of beliefs true or false as means or as ends? etc. Thus beliefs are only attributed to supernatural beings for their strict

adherence, but they can yet be subjected to rational scrutiny in order to ascertain their practical good for man's social conduct.
If the result of such scrutiny is found to be positive, we continue holding them as values worth pursuing and which can only be said to be negative from a different point of view brandishing evidence to the contrary. If not, then we strive to discard them. But such a view still carries with it possibilities of disagreement. For what comes of the adamant adherents of these laws who have no respect for analysis but would be categorised among the synthetics in Wiredu's understanding? It has been observed that certain social groups adhere to evidently irrational beliefs irrespective of what circumstances tend to show. Take for instance, a religious group that holds that their members should not go to hospital. This is evidently a 'point of view'. But governments find it increasingly difficult to tolerate such beliefs particularly at times of an epidemic.

4.2. ODERA ORUKA'S OBJECTIONS

Closely related to what we regard as Wiredu's moral and political philosophy is Odera-Oruka's objection to the view that the understanding of truth as opinion leads to tolerance in politics and religion.

In his objection to this position, Odera-Oruka observes that the view that truth is opinion is as extreme as the view that there's an absolute truth and, in practice, is likely to lead to anarchy in politics.

The arbitration of disputes and the formulation of laws and their enforcement is widely recognised as the major task of all political organisations. In Oruka's implied objection, should we hold that truth is the same as opinion, then all truths become subjective and personal thus removing the credibility of all potential impartiality in arbitration. In real experience, this might imply that the death sentence delivered by courts of law no longer warrants our respect since the magistrates merely operate along the lines of their 'fallible opinions'.

The gist of Odera's objection is the possibility of a society devoid of any objective standards of organisation and arbitration. That is, by all definitions, a society of cynics. What be comes of a society without a unanimously recognised authority? According to Odera, only anarchy is the consequence of a society which has undermined all grounds for legitimate authority. It is due to these fears that Odera readily welcomes the recognition of an objective criterion independent of any individual opinion. The recognition of such a criterion is a pragmatic requirement which we ought to adopt as a mere instrument of social utility. The implication of this argument is that the very fact of such utility is the measure of its objective existence.

Odera's argument can, by derivation, be deduced to entail a recognition of a measure of what we might call----- for lack of a better term----- "justified authoritarianism"; i.e. a practical necessity of certain

recognised authority to which we appeal for practical solutions of our day to day problems. If we take Wiredu's ideas as logically consistent and coherent, then little difference can be found between his and Odera's approach to authority as presented here. Wiredu has, in a different context, defined authoritarianism as "the unjustified overriding of an individual will"[12]. Even if we substitute 'opinion' for 'will', the definition clearly concedes the possibility of "justified authoritarianism". But Odera's objection goes further to question the possibility of "justified authoritarianism" should we stretch to its limits Wiredu's conception of truth as opinion.

How, nevertheless, can authoritarianism be justified? Wiredu has condemned authoritarianism as both a moral and epistemological ill. In his understanding, authoritarianism is mainly occassioned by the refusal to tolerate contradictory points of view and the individual's pretence to absolute truth. Rarely does Wiredu refer to 'abstracted' authority as that invested in the institution of the father, the Bible, academic sources etc. All these are authorities which may have pretentions to absolute truth and so constitute authoritarianism in its general and negative sense. The Bible, for instance, is such 'abstracted' authority and believers tend to view it as an 'Independent criterion of the sort Odera is talking about. Similarly, Karl Popper talks of nearly the same thing when he conceives of epistemology existing independently of any knowing subject. But in the Bible, there's an interesting development into the recognition of the fundamental place of the individual conscience (opinion?) and right to choice. The acceptance of Jesus as one's personal saviour is left upon the individual, but this has nothing to do with the 'established' absolutism of the scriptures.

In politics, libertarianism which originates from the recognition of individual freedom ends up in the universal endorsement of democracy as a priceless moral virtue. Democracy implies the incorporation of the choices and interests of all adult citizens. The assumption is that all those who have attained the age of eighteen can hold, (and be held, responsible for) their choices and interests. But society necessarily carries within it conflicting interests, choices, preferences and needs. Hence the practical necessity of an arbiter who ought to decide, in the interest of all, which of these prevail over others. The French political thinker, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote his Social Contract both as a justification and testimony to the reality of a civil authority. Rousseau recognised the hierarchical structure of government but balanced it all with the effection of the 'General Will' of the sovereign which, to him, was vested in the people.

In Wiredu's epistemology, conflicting interests of the political realm can be said to originate from conflicting opinions of the epistemological realm. The latter, he says, can be regulated internally by what he calls 'rational self-control' and externally by 'enlightened' discourse. Such discourse must be cultivated under conditions of rational self enlightenment, respect for evidence and facts and respect for analytical thinking. The former, we might conjecture, can be regulated by rational decision making. But all these may only be achieved through penchant for education and incessant research. It is only then that the citizens can critically evaluate and verify decisions under circumstances marked by tolerance of conflicting opinions

and, indeed, truths. The Courts of Law shall thus operate along overwhelming evidence for, as Polanyi has observed;

> "A jury passing death sentence is only cushioned by the fact that the evidence of guilt is overwhelming"[13]

and not that they are some absolute authority with supernatural grasp of the truth.

4.3. OBJECTIVITY OF MORAL PRESCRIPTS

Apart from being a significant epistemological, political and scientific mood, fallibility qualifies as an equally significant moral concept. But this raises a philosophical problem thus; can fallibility as an essentially moral prescript be justified in an objective and scientific manner? i.e. can a moral value be elevated to the position of a science?

Various moral philosophers have grappled with a similar problem regarding ethical values and their relationship to scientific and factual conditions. Since David Hume introduced the problem of deriving 'ought' from 'is' various philosophers have contributed in this debate. But relevant to our problem here is the emotivistic moral theory of A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson. A.J. Ayer, taking his cue from Logical Positivism denied ethical statements any objective domain and instead placed them in the emotions of men [14]. Both Ayer and Stevenson attributed ethical

statements to personal convictions and repulsions. In their arguments, therefore, fallibility as an essentially moral value ought not to seek scientific justification. At best, it becomes a personal wish which can only be acceptable to a number of people in as far as they share in that wish.

But the two philosophers have not had the last word. John Dewey has noted that there exists a relationship between ethical claims and cognitive aspects of language.[15] In this understanding, since ethical terms and moral principles are presented as guides to practical social conduct, they are objective since they arise from certain life-experiences borne out of man's cognitive interaction with the environment.

Fallibility, following such an argument, can be said to arise from man's deliberation over an epistemological methodology which is also moral in as far as the end-result guides human conduct. In Wiredu's own sense of objectivity (as consisting in rational investigative and imaginative results), fallibility may be said to be objective in this new meaning of the term. In yet another sense that understands objectivity as consisting in empirical and independent results, it may be said to be objective if it reflects the actual and practical conditions of human societies. These conditions can only be found in the daily interaction of man in the social, political and cultural realm.

4.4. A PSYCHO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

We have already alluded to the underlying assumption in Wiredu's epistemology that man as a cognitive being ought to be rational all round. The possible negation of this assumption weakens the thesis that truth is opinion and lays Wiredu defenceless to Odera-Oruka's observation that according to Wiredu's view:

> 'there can be nothing true outside the whims and beliefs of the individual, no matter how wicked and stupid he may be"[16]

Wiredu has defended his thesis against this observation by stating that rational scrutiny is the basis of all opinion in his understanding of the term.[17] Hence all individuals should be understood to possess, within them, a faculty which regulates the formulation of rational opinions. This is the faculty he calls "rational self-control". In this, therefore, a sort of natural scientific method guides man in the formulation of "rationally considered opinion". (This view is very akin to the Kantian a priori forms of knowledge which makes the human mind the legislator of the universe).

It is such a claim (that men posses a faculty which controls the rationality of opinions) that warrants his thesis to constitute a psycho-epistemological rendering of man as a cognitive being. But this position can still be challenged in as far as it constitutes

"too much faith" in man's rational capacity. For it is witnessed in daily experience that everyone possesses a measure of rational capacity to synthesise raw data and identify problems and formulate their solutions. But it is not a similar truth that man is everywhere uniform in their rational capability. Man, to adapt the Biblical saying, cannot live with reason alone, and as Wiredu himself has observed;

> "..... there is a place for intuition and emotion in life. Life is not all logic[18].

Man cannot be rational all the time and, in that sense, his opinion cannot be 'considered opinion' all the time. Wiredu recognises the difficulty involved in this reality and his conception of truth as opinion. His resort to the scientific method of respect for 'observed fact' and 'evidence' and his failure to repudiate completely the place of emotions and intuition in life is, as we have observed, ambigous. As it is his total commitment to the former method leads him to observe that;

> 'A rational man is (in the ideal) one who apportions his belief to the evidence and orders his conduct according to warranted belief[19]".

Yet in everyday experience, there are those who have completely convinced themselves that their beliefs are 'apportioned to evidence' when in actual fact, these are merely their emotions and idiosyncratic commitments.

Admittedly, psycho-epistemological determinations exist to a great degree in man's natural cognition. But this cannot be over-emphasised even after we have admitted that education and exposure shall develop man's rational capacity to a level when we shall quite comfortably recognise all opinions as 'rationally considered'. Man's complex nature shall still lead to the rejection of certain opinions as socially unacceptable. Take, for instance, the controversy surrounding the problem of abortion in the so-called developed countries. These are countries like the United States, Canada and in Europe where literacy rates are comparatively higher as compared to the so-called developing countries. Yet such problems tear populations apart. The majority of the people resort to personal biases and religious authority rather than reason, thus making it impossible for the attainment of rational consensus.

The risk of a dualistic conception thus continues to loom over Wiredu's philosophy. The end result of all these might be an 'acceptable' rationally considered opinions" among the educated elite and their political leaders having agreed to disagree and to play the game according to their own formulated rules, on one hand, and the humble opinions characterised by emotions and intuition aired with the desparation of a drowning horse, on the other. The bifurcation is inevitable and intolerance may easily be the result. In this case, Odera's observation that;

> ".....one of the necessary ways of promoting human toleration and reducing fanaticism and unnecessary authoritarianism is by inventing methods which promote knowledge and education in the world"[20]

must be taken seriously while contending with the fact that failure to attain this ideal may easily lead to an elitist epistemology of the sort of Platonic social classes with 'philosopher-kings' above everybody. But even among the elites; (the consequential 'opinion leaders') it still remains wishful thinking to hope that a situation of a complete consensus rationally regulated can be achieved. This is probably why Odera speaks selectively of 'reducing fanaticism' and 'unnecessary authoritarianism'. The implication being that these are evils we shall have to live with. Thus the reality of the independence of points of view is also the great difficulty in the applicability of Wiredu's epistemology.

NOTES

1. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and an African Culture, Cambridge Press, London, 1980 p.66

2. Ibid., p.122

3. Polanyi, M., Personal Knowledge: Towards a post-critical Philosophy Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1958, p.300.

4. Wiredu, K., op. Cit., p.1

5. Masolo, D.A. 'Kwasi Wiredu: Truth and the Question of African Philosophy' (Unpublished paper, 1988)

6. Wiredu, K., op. Cit., p.211

7. Masolo, D.A. op. Cit., p.4

8. Wiredu, K., op. Cit., pp.15-16

9. In Odera-Oruka and Masolo D.A., (Ed.) Philosophy and Cultures, Bookwise Publishers, Nairobi, 1983, p.6-13

10. Dewey, J., Human Nature and Conduct: An introduction to Social Psychology, Henry Holt & Co., New York 1922, p.58.

11. Odera-Oruka 'Truth and Belief' in Universitas, (Ghana), Vol.5, No.I, Nov. 1975, pp.177-184.

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AN EVALUATION OF FALLIBILITY IN WIREDU'S THOUGHT

5.1. THREE INFLUENCES: DEWEY, BERKELEY AND POLANYI

a) DEWEY

We have already noted the close relationship between pragmatism and fallibilism in the second chapter. We have also underscored the direct influence on contemporary philosophy by the American pragmatist tradition. We do not therefore wish to repeat ourselves in this sub-topic. But we wish to re-introduce the philosophy of John Dewey as one pragmatist philosopher whose epistemology is most harmonious with Wiredu's conception of truth as opinion and one whom Wiredu has explicitly expressed his affinity to.

Dewey's philosophy, as we noted earlier, illustrates best the modern day epistemological approach that places the subject of knowledge at the centre of knowledge getting. Dewey places a significant emphasis on human rationality. He views human rationality as given during man's day to day interaction with his environment. Such emphasis on the subject, a sort of a dualistic 'subject-object' interplay can be traced to traditional subjectivism of Immanuel Kant for instance.

Kant introduced his synthetic 'a priori' which represented the objective nature of knowledge and its subjective component. But Dewey added to Kant's by bringing in biological science in place of the Kantian 'a priori' forms. As he wrote:

> "For many years, I have consistently and rather persistently maintained that the key to a philosophical theory of experience must proceed from initially linking it with the processes and functions of life as the latter are disclosed in biological science."[1]

This is why John E. Smith has characterised Dewey as a 'philosopher of experience'[2]. What has been called Dewey's "Empirical naturalism" stems from his emphasis on experience as a product of the interplay between objective conditions and organic existences. Experiments and inquiry arise out of natural conditions. They are deliberate alterations of the environment by researchers and it is them that lead to the discovery of fresh knowledge. Experience is thus both experimental and natural. According to Dewey, it (experience) is the sum-total of what we recognise as life. In that case, it is common to all thinking organisms.

According to the line of argument above experience develops through five distinctive features, viz. (i) perplexity, confusion and doubt, (ii) a conjectural anticipation (iii) interpretation and definition of the problem (iv) an elaboration of a tentative hypothesis and (v) an overt action that tests the hypothesis. Therefore, thought is cardinal in all organisms. But thought is not ultimate and

absolute. It is only an active ralationship between the organism and the environment. It is instrumental, naturalistic and empirical. It is naturalistic in the sense that it is a natural necessity in all organisms; and instrumental in the sense that it is geared towards problem identification and solution. It is also empirical since it originates from experience and leads back to it. It is thought that constructs and makes all objects of knowledge.

In his Reconstruction in Philosophy (1954) Dewey went on to hold that all disciplines are subjective, in his understanding of the term. According to his argument, judgement is the central thing in all disciplines, including logic. Yet judgement is not logical at all but rather, is personal and psychological. Therefore, notions, theories, systems etc., no matter how elaborate and self-consistent, can never be held to be finalities in Dewey's thought. For they are hypotheses originating from personal or collective thoughts. Dewey's philosophy, as formulated above constitute his fallibilistic approach to knowledge. Taken together with what Anthony Quinton calls Dewey's "anti-spectator theory of knowledge"[3], Dewey's philosophy is quite supportive of Wiredu's own affirmation of the place of "point of view" and the radical conclusion that "truth is opinion".

But there is still a radical difference between Dewey's and Wiredu's epistemology. When Dewey insists that knowledge-getting is an active enterprise, he ends up asserting an epistemology in which reason plays a rather significant role. This is what we saw Wiredu referring to as an "analytic epistemology", and which he complements by what he calls "synthetic epistemology". The admission of a universal existence of thoughts, problems and problem-solutions makes Dewey encompass an epistemology which is both empirical and

psychological. In this, there is a close similarity with Wiredu's own thought as we saw in chapter iV i.e. that Wiredu's epistemology encompasses a psycho-epistemological approach to knowledge. But the question of universal rationality makes the two part ways. When Dewey affirms an "analytic" epistemology, he involves himself in affirming the point that all results of a rational and analytic inquiry should be identical. In other words, that the result of inquiry should lead to a universal, but provisional truth and hence, his "warranted assertibility". But Wiredu says the contrary. He says that the identity of such results is not necessary, since certain judgements might be thought to be irrational, unanalytical and unidentical yet they are instrumental within their own rights. And since they must be useful as tools for problem-solution, they are true but only from the point of view from which they arise.

b) Berkeley

As we mentioned earlier on, Berkeley's influence on Wiredu is one that carries with it the controversies that have clouded the bishop's epistemology.

Berkeley's thesis "Esse Est Percipi" was held among his contemporaries as that of a lunatic. Leibnitz, a remarkable philosopher of the time remarked in reaction to Berkeley, that:

> "I suspect that (the man of Ireland) is one of those people who seek to become famous by their paradox"[4]

Berkeley's paradox was indeed, remarkable. In an often quoted passage, he wrote that

> "The table I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it, and if I were out of my study I should say it existed meaning thereby that if I was in my study, I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it"[5]

His epistemology involved a critique of our usage of language. The question it posed was: What is the meaning of 'existence' save for that we perceive existing things? Hence he concluded in his controversial thesis "to be is to be perceived".

Wiredu, apart from paraphrasing Berkeley's paradox has overtly expressed his support of Berkeley thus:

> ".....attempts to refute Berkeley's contention that to be is to be perceived have always, to my knowledge, displayed "ignoratium elenchi", the fallacy of arguing to the wrong point. After repeatedly offering the final refutation myself of the paradox in undergraduate and postgraduate exercises, I am now of the opinion not only that it is irrefutable, but also that it is in close harmony with common experience.[6]

A critic might answer here by accusing Wiredu himself of "Argumentum ad Ignorantium" - the fallacy of accepting certain propositions on the basis that they cannot be refuted. But let us confine ourselves to the analysis of Berkeley's influence on Wiredu's epistemology.

As we had seen in the introductory chapter, Berkeley's thesis did not confine itself to anti-empiricist epistemology. It incorporated the Bishop's respect for God. The omnipresent God was ever-perceiving and it is only because of this that we can ever claim the objective existence of perceived objects.

Berkeley succeeded in blending subjectivist and empiricist epistemology. For this Wiredu has supported Berkeley. Wiredu claims that for his case "to be is to be apprehended" differs from Berkeley only in so far as for him, "it is the existence of an object not the object itself that consists in being known"[7]. According to Wiredu it is right to hold an epistemological thesis which entails the point that objects consist in being known. But it is wrong to conclude that objects are mere sensations of the perceivers. For such a conclusion errs in the sense that it attempts to claim the understanding of the "ultimate constitution" of objects. It asserts the unknowable while denying the objective existence of unperceived objects.

Such a denial (of the objective existence of unperceived objects) can be demonstrated to be faulty if we look at ourselves as objects of a perceiver. For one to claim that I do not exist because a perceiver does not perceive me is to involve oneself in stating an absurd thesis. Objects enjoy objective existence even if they only arrive to us via sensation. We formulate our language from the data we receive via sensation and this only demonstrates our own limitations and not the non-existence of objects outside our experience.

But Wiredu's rejection of what he calls Berkeley's "ontological thesis" can be traced back to his atheistic philosophy. Wiredu is known to reserve little or no respect for supernatural explanations as those found in the theories for the existence of God. Consider his observations here:

> To assert 'God exists' is to assert that the term 'God' has a reference i.e. refers to an object. One could not even begin to investigate the claim unless one could obtain an adequate conception of the significance of the term 'God' independently of the question of whether it, in fact, has a reference. It follows that, whatever the right conception of God may be, the issue of his existence is logically separate from it"[8].

and elsewhere that:

> 'It is pleasing to me that the Akan moral outlook is thus logically independent of religion, for it means that the ethics of our culture can survive the withering away of the belief in God a belief for which I know no good arguments"9

as the basis for his atheism.

Nevertheless, Berkeley's "epistemological thesis" has been successfully incorporated into his conception of truth asserting that the subject is always primary to knowledge.

c) Polanyi

A rather striking similarity exists between Wiredu's arguments and those of Michael Ploanyi.

In his Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), Polanyi argues a view quite supportive of Wiredu's two theses - "Truth as opinion" and "to be is to be known". In a preface to the above work, Polanyi lays his objectives as the demonstration:

> "that complete objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and in fact a false ideal"[10]

He also goes on to assert the knowing subjects involvement in knowledge. In a passage reminiscent of Wiredu's own, he writes:

> "I have argued that my confident utterance of a hypothesis H cannot be expressed by the impersonal symbol P (H/E). Accordingly my commitment to an empirical inference H based on the evidence E would always have to be asserted in the form /- H/E where the assertion sign (/-) would embody the degree of confidence I place in H on the grounds of E."[11]

> "..... the logical depiction of a statement, or assertion, such as 'Snow is white' is not complete without a formal indication of point of view. According, we write Ptv (i) where v represents the notion of associated point of view and i stands for its numerical identity"[12]

Polanyi's epistemology thus supports the very basis of the controversy that has clouded Wiredu's thesis. In a criticism of Zeno of Elea, and an indirect support of Wiredu's arguments that what is true now from one point of view, may be false later from the same point of view and without a contradiction Polanyi says:

> "Zeno foolishly denied that physical motion was possible because an object had to be at the same place at every moment of time. It is equally foolish to argue, in reverse to Zeno that we are never committed because our commitments are changing"[13]

If we relate this observation to Wiredu's arguments already discussed in relationship to the law of non-contradiction - briefly that, our truths, which are synonymous with our opinions, are varying with time but are objective. And that there exists no contradiction in holding that what is true now may be false in a later time. In Wiredu's own words:

> "Suppose I believe that P at time T1 and at time T2 I find good reasons to jettison it and assert its contradictory. This is a change opinion, it indicates a change in commitment, ordinarily speaking."[14]

Polanyi is clearly in agreement with Wiredu's argument presented above when Polany observes farther that, it is the strength of evidence that commits us to particular beliefs and the latter may easily change should the former change.

Critics of Wiredu's thesis notably Odera Oruka, have observed that truth and opinion have two distinct semantic offices and that this must never be overlooked[15]. While noting that Polanyi does not make an explicit application of the term opinion as a synonym of truth, there is yet a closeness to this in his assertion that knowledge (and, by derviation truth) is personal. We specifically note the similarity between what he chooses to call "passionate contribution" and Wiredu's rendering of point of view when Polanyi says:

> "I have shown that into every act of knowing, there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known and that this co-efficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge"[16]

It is remarkable how two philosophers may agree in theory. But it is not our suggestion that this agreement indicates a direct borrowing or influence. For throughout our study of Wiredu, we did not encounter a reference to any of Planyi's texts. We thus proceed with the assumption that it is quite possible for two philosophers to agree in theory without necessarily reading each other. Nevertheless, concession is given to the fact that the subjects role in knowledge acquisition, as argued by both philosophers, is an increasingly popular epistemological persuation.

It is such a philosophical persuation that has influenced the abolition of capital punishment in some Western countries. The argument that what is now viewed as "overwhelming evidence" may change to be contrary and, that such irreparable judgements as the death sentence becomes unforgivable sin was the basis for the abolition of capital punishment in Great Britain. Perhaps Wiredu is appealing to us in Africa to be cautious and desist from over confidence when judging cases where fundamental human rights such as the right to life are involved. This, however, remains our conjecture and the reader is welcome to her/his own.

5.2. ORIGINALITY OF WIREDU'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Wiredu's propagation and defence of his conception of truth as opinion reveal certain novel epistemological ideas. Some of these novelties have already been mentioned in relationship to his epistemology. Nevertheless, in this sub-topic we wish to [illegible] identify them separately and highlight them for the sake emphasis.

Among these novelties is the argument that opinion is not always trivial contrary is the popular application of the term. In his own peculiar understanding of the term opinion is always "rationally considered" and is the synonym of truth. Opinion, in this sense is always a component of the element of point of view. Yet this element of point of view is invaluable to all propositions be they mathematical, logical, scientific, philosophic and religious

As we earlier observed, Wiredu's application of the term opinion must be understood independently of our daily rendering of the term. Such an understanding is significant since it is what

leads Wiredu to equate opinion with truth. To attempt a simplification of his thesis, Wiredu is asserting that truth is always personal. It is personal because it necessarily entails a claimant. And a claimant can only make his/her truth-claim via a point of view.

But this position does not entail the conclusion that there is no truth. Neither does it conclude that truth is trivial. Rather, it makes it extremely difficult to assert the possibility of an absolute truth since such an assertion arrives via a point of view and is thus reducible to the assertion that One's point of view is absolute. Similarly, it does state that truth is personal without claiming that it is trivial. For what is personal is not necessarily trivial. Ideas, theories, propositions, observations etc are always personal, but since they arise out of reflections, observations, imaginations and meditations, they cannot be trivial unless we say that these are trivial, or unless we maliciously disagree with them. Truth-claims formulated in a trivial and irrational manner are only absurd. Absurd propositions such as 2 + 2 = 0 can therefore not be acceptable on the basis that they are opinions.

Another novelty in Wiredu's epistemology is his treatment of subjectivity. This treatment is closely related to his understanding of truth as opinion. Wiredu denies the common conception that what is personal is necessarily subjective. His thesis tend to suggest that truth being opinion is therefore subjective. But Wiredu argues such a claim meant simply that truth is personal, then there would be no problem. But the tendency

is to infer that since truth is subjective, it is relative and therefore, cannot be objective. This is the conclusion that most adherents of anti-absolutist theory of truth would like to embrace. But Wiredu differs from his potential philophical colleagues. In place of such conclusion, he asserts that truth is always personal but can be objective. Objectivity in his peculiar understanding, lies in the reflectivity, rationality and practicality of truth claims. Truth can thus be both personal and objective. Yet it is always personal.

Wiredu removes the criteria of objectivity from the independent nature of truths. This is understandable if we note that according to his theory, independent truths are impossible since they deny the role of the element of point of view. This view contradicts the correspondence theory of truth, as formulated by Alfred Tarski and Bertrand Russell. The correspondence theory lays objectivity of truth in the "external rality" which all truth propositions are supposed to reflect. But Wiredu claims that such realities can only be opined by us. We can only opine that certain independent existence are there independently of our knowledge of them. But these only remain useful conjectures which we, nonetheless cannot assert with any degree of certainty. At best, they are hypotheses which are useful as "spotlights" shining upon the vast without being independent.

Subsequently, Wiredu dismisses a relativist interpretation of his conception of truth as opinion. In his understanding, relativity in its common conception implies the existence of a multiplicity of truths. The relativist therefore concludes that there are many truths as there are opinions. Such a conclusion implies that no

criteria exist for the arbitration of conflicting truths. But Wiredu claims that the issue at stake in all disputes is always commitment and not truth. This means that the variances asserted always varied commitments and not varied truth. Commitments are admittedly relative but not truth itself. But from an individual point of view, truths are those commitments that bear practical results. They can thus only be untrue from a different point of view.

These are some of the basic epistemological novelties we may identify in Wiredu's arguments. We do not claim that they make foolproof philosophical system. But we concede that they are argued with remarkable degree of plausibility and consistency. Their possible challenges is the subject of our next sub-topic.

5.3. CHALLENGABLE POINTS IN WIREDU'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Despite Wiredu's incessant efforts to substantiate and defend his epistemological conceptions, we do not admit his absolute freedom from inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. In this sub-topic, we wish to highlight challengable points in his epistemology. But we first identify them as:-

1) the claim that the recognition of truth as opinion leads to political and religious tolerance.

2) the claim that the conception of truth as opinion incorporates all point of views.

3) the claim that the distinctions between the functional role of truth and the academic discussion of the same re-inforces his conception of truth as opinion.

4) the claim that "personal truth" can be objective.

5) the claim that knowledge of objects depend on the subject.

1. Odera-Oruka has identified the first point, which forms the justification of Wiredu's thesis on humanitarian grounds, as one of the challengable points of his epistemology. According to Odera, the thesis that truth is synonymous with opinion is as extreme as the one which claims that there is an absolute truth. We are, however, aware of the existence of Wiredu's rejoinder to this objection. We do not wish to take sides here, but we would like to introduce a new line of argument in our own objection to what we consider the basis of Wiredu's political and moral philosophy.

Wiredu's thesis does not affect, in any substantial way, the conception of truth as an abstract entity. All that it seems to succeed in doing is to "humanize" truth. This it does by underscoring the fact that all truth-claims emanate from the claimants stand-point. Truth is so to speak, an inhabitant of this earth. We are the manufacturers of truth and our raw materials are evidence, state of affairs, logical consistencies and problematic conditions. The standard measure of truth is therefore its origin in rational reflection. It is in this sense that it is an opinion since it is a product of certain "raw materials" merged with our own cognitive nature.

Wiredu is indisputably right to assert the foregoing. But, in our view, he does not succeed in convincing an apostle of truth as an abstract entity. It is still thought, following the tradition of Plato, that a certain absolute but abstract entity called the

truth exists. The duty of the knowing being lies in striving after this truth and it is not therefore right to assert that the attainment of this truth is impossible. For the strive after truth must ultimately arrive at a stage when no more pursuit of the truth is necessary. Such pursuit cannot go "ad infinitum" lest we conclude that there is no truth. Wiredu as we had noted earlier on, does not claim that there is no truth. All he says is that truth-claims are our opinions which appears trivial in this context. One example of an 'established truth' is the shape of the earth. Originally men thought the earth was flat and that was socially endorsed truth. The thought that its shape could be otherwise was not contained. Men went on their daily duties assuming that the earth was actually flat. Then revolution in scientific inventions and investigations got men to believe that the earth was round. Today the shape of the earth has been ascertained to be actually oval. And this seems to end the riddle. The fact that the earth is oval in shape is true even if it is an opinion of a collection of reflective points of view. The need to tolerate contradictory points of view clearly does not affect established truths as that which we take above. For another person to assert that "the earth is flat" in this century is not likely to win respect even if it is from an independent point of view. To respect such a point of view on the basis of our wish to promote 'tolerance on earth' is to 'bow so low' in order to promote tolerance on earth.

In addition to the foregoing there is truth as a concept. Truth may be conceived of as an ultimate good which we all strive to achieve but of which none should claim to have found. For the "discovery" of such a concept of an ultimate truth is indeed likely to promote

intolerance for it is likely to be 'evangelised' by those who claim to have discovered it. In this sense, Wiredu is right to caution against it. But this is merely a moral truth a cultural way of life which men can claim to have found. The history of religious strife best illustrates this. Similarly, the history of ideological conflicts illustrates such a danger. But it does not follow that truth should be conceived of as synonymous with opinion before we become tolerant of other peoples ways of life or perception of how people ought to lead their lives. Just as Wiredu says that people disagree on issues. Such religious and ideological conflicts are really conflicts on issues as to how to attain the ultimate truth and good for mankind.

Political and religious leaders often view themselves as the practical custodians of social values, and bodies of the society's knowledge. Intolerance arise when such values and truths are threatened by opposite and contradictory views. Persecution follows on personal lines rather than issues in question. In most cases it is not the issues that are combated but those persons that advocate such 'revolutionary' issues. Cases of intolerance often arise mainly owing to the threat that 'opposite truths' pose to the personalities and status of those in leadership.

Wiredu's view can be and has been, of practical use in academic circles where experimentation is the rule rather than the exception. But it is difficult to perceive of it as toning down fundamental contradictions in society, such as those between theists and atheists or socialists and capitalists, for instance. It would thus be interesting to get Wiredu arguing with a believer on the existence and non-existence of God under circumstances in which it is recognised that truth is opinion. Even if Wiredu's thesis would succeed in

> humbling men when it comes to matters of ascertaining the truth, the nature of contradictions as the impetus of development and of discoveries of new truth remain to propel human societies into greater heights of contradictions.

But the fact that his 'synthetic' epistemology endorses the non-scientific explanations is a pointer to his desparate urge to salvage his thesis. It involves an entangled theory which becomes increasingly difficult to be practical. Wiredu wishes to elude the criticism of lack of arbitration in the case of conflicting points of view by showing that the criteria of all points of view lies in the prevailing psychological circumstances. This, however, makes his thesis "inescapably relativist" in the common application of the term.

Wiredu does not tell us what would be the case if for instance, one believes that the earth is flat when the prevailing scientific view is that it is oval. Let us apply a hypothetical case of certain inhabitants of the earth who are not yet exposed to modern scientific findings and who believe, as men of old, that the earth is flat. The opinion that the earth is flat is thus true from their point of view, and the practical result of their belief is that, they dare not venture far off, lest they "fall off" the edge of the earth. Their point of view cannot be said to be irrational from their perspective since their eyes tend to corroborate their belief. Now should we encounter these people and reveal to them our knowledge of the earth as oval and should they deny, whose point of view prevails? To endorse their point of view is to

endorse a falsity, for our point of view is marked by evidence investigations and reason. And to endorse both points of view is to admit relativism on the basis of a moral need to tolerate other contradictory points of view. Wiredu's point, however, is slightly stronger than this.

According to Wiredu, as we have already said above, scientific knowledge is superior to knowledge acquired in intuition or mere common sense simply because it (scientific knowledge) is based on evidence, investigation and reason. Therefore, if scientific evidence proves wrong a specific belief about reality, that belief remains wrong, whether in the past or in the present. What is wrong today cannot have been correct before, in as far as science is concerned.

However, knowledge acquired by intuition is limited in its application and cannot be subjected to or judged by the consequences which follow from scientific knowledge. The two cannot therefore be mingled or made to apply to the same sphere of operation. In this regard, Wiredu supercedes his own relativism on the basis of his dialectical approach to the understanding of knowledge and its applicability.

Wiredu is an earnest follow of Kant, Hegel and Marx in regard to the dialectical theory of knowledge. For Wiredu, as for Kant, a radical divorce and independence of the subject that knows from the object that is known entails an illusion. Such separation he contends, leads to a denial of the creative activity of the mind and of the epistemological use of concepts to understand the external world. Wiredu therefore rejects the kind of extreme sensationism which denies the validity of abstract concepts. This rejection

of extreme sensationism is epitomized in the two chapters, "to be is to be known and "in praise of utopia".

For Wiredu then, reason is entangled into an intricate relationship with the dealectical external reality. The changes in the external world will therefore urge changes in the epistemological bases of reason - its methods of investigation, basic truths or principles, etc. which define how reason relates to reality in space and time.

3) The introduction of a distinction between the functional role of truth and its academic concern is closely related to the foregoing. It also demands a close analysis since it might be found to reveal certain challengable points.

Wiredu, as we earlier noted, speaks of two distinct understandings of the concept of truth. One is that which he calls "the formal significance of truth" and the other he calls "substantive nature of belief". The latter, he says is his major concern and is the field in which his conception of truth as opinion applies. Wiredu says that it is with respect to what truth claims do to people in practical experience that the thesis that truth is opinion is most significant. This is more of a pragmatist theory of truth

That all beliefs have certain substantial use in the social milieu is a position akin to William James' arguments in his book The Will to Believe. It is a proposition re-inforced by Wiredu's claim that all truth claims have the element of point of view affecting them. And points of view are influenced by the use to which beliefs are put. Thus, the belief that witchcraft exists, dominant among certain societies, is an important and truth-laden belief among members of such societies. They can only be said to be false, if alternative and antithetic beliefs exist, for instance, the scientific explanations of phenomena. But even this can only be expressed from an antithetic point of view. What Wiredu fails to tell us is the necessary judgement when such antithetic point of view exists. Elsewhere, we have noted his great respect for science. The idea that we might respect supernatural explanations from a different point of view is thus inconsistent with his urge to respect science. It is an urge to defend his moral philosophy based on "recognition of truth as opinion" and the promotion of tolerance on earth. But it is an urge which can only be realized at a rather expensive cost.

Otherwise Wiredu's distinction of the concept of truth as seen above, does not speak about truth. In our understanding here it tends to speak more about actions which are admittedly not synonyms of truth. It is rather difficult for a critic to be convinced of the separation between the two understandings of truth. For, even though, a truth-claim is overtly expressed, the justification of actions upon belief belong more to the instinctive faculty of an acting being. Consequently, Wiredu mingles the conception of overt and covert regulations of our actions.

Subsequently as we deduced earlier on, the distinction of the understanding of truth into two does not in any way change the academic discussion of truth as in the correspondence theory. What it succeeds in doing is to, first of all discuss truth as one, then discard one and concentrate on the aspect that concerns conduct but does not concern the first. This is not to suggest that this aspect is trivial. Rather it is to suggest that the development of the first (the formal) is necessarily intertwined with the second (the substantive) and less emphasis of the first is what leads to anachronism in societies.

4) We have already analysed the idea that truth is both personal and objective. We conceded that if reflections, reason and imagination is the criterion of objectivity of truth, then it is alright to hold that truth is both personal and objective.

What, however, happens to subjective truths such as those to do with judgements? Wiredu's treatment of truths as truth-claims is interestingly akin to what we understand as judgements. Men act upon their judgements over what their actions are likely to produce. Truth-claims are thus judgements and subjective in the sense that they are personal. They can only be objective from one and the same point of view. Probably Wiredu is only cautious of the common rendering of subjectivity as inferior to objectivity. We, however, do not find anything wrong with holding that truth-claims are subjective, if this does not suggest variance in judgements and acceptability of all judgements on the basis of such a variance.

5) We noted that the thesis that "to be is to be known" is an adaptation of George Berkeley's paradox "to be is to be perceived".

This is a thesis which, at the outset seems indisputable. But we can yet dispute it thus: We know of the existence of certain objects which we have never acquainted ourselves with. For instance, We know that there exist a species of animals called "Polar bear". Yet I have never seen a Polar bear. But we can be committed to the fact that a Polar bear exists. Similarly we can conjecture that there exist a one and a half year old chinese boy living in a particular province in China and we can get committed to this conjecture. The fact that I am committed to such a conjecture does not make the real existence of "a one and a half year old Chinese boy". It is the existence of the Chinese boy and his consciousness to his existence that confirms my conjecture even if I do not go to China to confirm it.

The problem of the thesis, therefore, is more acute when the object of knowledge is a conscious being. For instance we may again conjecture that at this moment of time a man in another country is thinking of Immanuel Kant. Even if I can not know this with certainty, we know it all the same and the fact of our knowledge of it confirms that a man who is thinking of Immanuel Kant exists. This is more the reason why the thesis that truth is opinion confirms that existence should not depend on knowledge. For if we opine that "God exists" the existence of God depend on opinion whether rational or not.

Knowledge in Wiredu's sense suggests a meditative knowledge. If this is so, then his arguments for the non-existence of God is

faulty. For Wiredu says that to say that "X exists is the same as to say that "X has a reference" and since God has no reference, it is absurd to say that he exists. But the issue seems to be that if we say that "X exists" then it means that "X is opined". God, therefore, exists because it is opined and all disagreements only arise from a different point of view.

This argument leads us to his own argument that there are objects that exist without our knowledge of them but we cannot assert their existence. It appears, however, that if there exist no reason to dismiss the possibility of the existence of such objects, then we know of them without necessarily having to confront them in actual cognitive experience. Wiredu's thesis as it appears to us starts off from mild empiricism but ends up concluding in a radical empiricism.

Nevertheless, even if we were to stick to the thesis of opinion and existence i.e. that "to be is to be opined" there still exists a contradiction thus; Let's say "A" opines an idea. The idea then exists and if it exists for "A" then it should also exist for "B" lest 'it does not exist'.Similarly if "A" knows something that "B" does not know, the logical argument is that "B" must accept the existence of what he does not know because since "A" knows it, it "Ipso facto" exists, since we cannot know the non-existent.

NOTES

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5. Ibid

6. Wiredu, K., Philosophy and an African Culture, Cambridge University Press, London, (1950), p.111

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CONCLUSION

We have endeavoured to show throughout this work, that Wiredu's conception of truth as opinion is the cardinal hallmark of his doctrine of fallibilism. Fallibilism, in his philosophy, is therefore based on his novel idea that all truths are personal. What is personal, according to his argument, is 'ipso facto' fallible - for it has been said that "to err is human". From these arguments, we wish to draw the following conclusions with regard to his epistemological thoughts.

1) Wiredu disregards (and even dismisses) the conception of truth as an abstract idea. Any idea, in epistemology, can never be said to be abstract since the act of abstraction can only be done via a particular point of view. To claim that truth is an abstract idea is, therefore, synonymous with the claim that truth can never be known. Worse still, to claim knowledge of the existence of an abstract idea is synonymous with the assertion of the existence of an unknown idea. But in his conception of truth, truth is an "inhabitant" of personal points of of view and is thus known but only as part of these points of view.

The idea of truth as an abstract idea can thus only be understood as a conjecture. If the purpose of such a conjecture is to lead men into inquiring into those areas of potential knowledge then it is alright. But the risk is always that men come to have pretentions to knowledge of truth

as an absolute entity. The end-result of such pretense is to protect absolute truth, so-conceived, with "tanks and guns". Alternative conjectures are, therefore, quashed and not tolerated.

2) Wiredu denies that the end-result of scientific investigations are "accomplished truths". Instead he says that these are just strong opinions since scientific investigations arrive in the form of truth-claims. ince truth-claims presuppose truth-claimants they necessarily arise from point of views and are thus opinions in his understanding of this term.

In this, there is a remarkable difference from the conclusions of other fallibilists. Whereas Wiredu places emphasis on the personal nature of knowledge, Popper emphasizes on the evolutionary nature of knowledge while Dewy and the other pragmatists emphasize on instrumental nature. It is probably Polanyi whom he shares with his emphasis on the personal nature of knowledge. He seizes the common adage "to err is human" to underscore his own antiabsolutism. He argues that to assert that truth is absolute is merely to assert a belief in the absolute nature of one's personal truth. This, in his view, happens quite unconsciously and is what leads to various shades of political, religious and academic intolerance.

3) Wiredu disregards the formal discussion of truth as represented in the correspondence theory of truth. This theory he feels tends to abstract the concept of truth from the truth-claimant and thus claims the existence of independent conditions for truth. Though he concedes to the logical consistency of the

correspodence theory he nonetheless thinks that is formulation is merely tautologous.

He thus turns his attention to the "Substantive nature of truth". He points at the instrumental role of knowledge as the actual day to day experience fo cognitive beings. He thus evaluates truth and belief in terms of their role in the regulation of social conduct and behaviour. The truth of propositions thus lie in their practical consequences.

4) Wiredu rejects the doctrine that holds that truth is unchanging and static. For such a doctrine would be reducible to the claim that "Our truths are unchanging and static". Similarly such a doctrine promotes idealistic and metaphysical conception of truth which bifurcates truth and opinion. It entails the conclusion that truth is independent of the knowing subject and is thus unknowable.

He does not deny the existence of truth. What he denies is the assertion of the existence of an abstract but knowable truth. In doing this, he denies the Deweyian understanding of truth as "the ideal limit of indefinitely continued inquiry". Since such an understanding of truth tends to conceive of truth as an abstract idea.

5) Wiredu's grounding of truth on the truth-claimant seems to trivialize the philosophical concern with truth. His concern leans more on the layman's conception of truth. But this is not an uncommon phenomenon in philosophy. Edmund Husserl the German phenomenologist was more into this sort of philosophy when he called on his famous slogan "Back to the things

themselves"[1]. Similarly the French existentialist philosophy is akin to such an emphasis on the subject of knowledge.

In asserting that truth arises from a claimant, Wiredu seems to be asserting a truism which strikes one accustomed to technical philosophy as of no concern. But it is in conformity with William James "Classic stages of a theory's career". James had written of pragmatism " I fully expect to see the pragmatist view of truth run through the classic stages of a theory's career. First, you know a theory is attacked as absurd, then it is admitted to be true, but obvious and insignificant, finally it is seen to be so important that its adversaries claim that they themselves discovered it".[2]

Wiredu's conception of truth as opinion has struck many critics as absurd. But a close study of his arguments reveal that it is in harmony with common sense.

6) The doctrine of fallibilism is not an altogether uncommon philosophical concern. Most contemporary epistemologists and philosophers of science have advanced various arguments in support of the thesis that truth cannot be said to be absolute. These arguments can be traced back to the Greek skeptic schools down to the skeptical philosophy of David Hume. But more recently, the great apostles of fallibilism are to be noted Karl Raimund Popper, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Thomas Kunn has also advanced similar theory in his The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Scientific knowledge is currently viewed as provisional truths. But the scientific method is still held as the most appropriate method of

arriving at knowledge of things and as Morton has observed with regard to pragmatists.

> "Nineteenth Century America, so successful in producing scientific thinkers of the first rank, did give to the world three of sciences loudest cheerleaders".[3]

Even though Wiredu do not arrive at the same conclusion as the pragmatists, he incorporates the canons of scientific investigations viz. logic, reason and evidence in the formulation f truth-claims. He thus joins the ranks of "sciences cheerleaders in Morton's sense.

But Wiredu makes interesting concessions to the possibility of objective but non-scientific beliefs. This should be owing to his penchant for tolerance and his commitment to the conception of truth as opinion. Even though he recognises the scientific methods of investigations and formulation of beliefs, he goes a step farther to recognise the non-scientific methods of formulating beliefs and truth-claims. In his arguments, it is not sufficient to search for the truth-value of beliefs and truth claims by scientific methods. It is therefore necessary to go farther and investigate the commitments, the practical consequences and the use-value of beliefs and truth-claims. This involves the incorporation of the rational and irrational facts of beliefs since the former are judgements from "contra-distinct point of views.

7) Wiredu's arguments for his conception of truth as opinion do not contradict the law of non-contradiction. According to Wiredu,

the law of non-contradiction deals with inherent contradictions in propositions. His conception of truth, however, deals with the nature of commitments to various propositions. Commitments admittedly change. It is, therefore, quite acceptable and consistent to assert "P" and later "-P" provided this is at different points of time. Thus one may assert "it will rain" given the prevailing circumstances and later assert "it will not rain" given the changes in the prevailing circumstances. This does not go against the law of non-contradiction. What goes against the law of non-contradiction, is the assertion of "P" and "-P" from the same point of view and at the same point of time.

But when persons disagree as to what is the truth e.g. when person "A" asserts "P" and person "B" asserts "-P" the result is not a contradiction but a disagreement on an issue. This is merely a manifestation of the possibility of a multiplicity of judgements given the personal nature of truth-claims. For instance, if person "A" asserts that "it will rain" and person "B" asserts that "it will not rain". Evidence accruing to either party and the personal experience of each is at variance. Neither party is asserting an absolute truth but the outcome of personal reflection. The eventual falsification or verification of either proposition is a part from the point of time either propositions were expounded. The law of non-contradiction would only concern itself with the assertions such as that "it is raining" and "it is not raining" asserted at the same point of time from two different points of views. The law thus concerns itself with the ultimate truth of propositions which might not necessarily be in immediate

experience. Wiredu's concern, however, is with truth proposition arising from the truth-claimant at any given time of judgement and observation.

In the final conclusion, however, we wish to reiterate our ealier observation that Wiredu understands philosophy as a discipline which must take into cognizance the transformations that has taken place in the contemporary world. An African philosopher should thus make contributions in the attempts to solve pertinent philosophical problems rather than confining himself to what has been conceived of as "peculiarities" of the African. Peculiarities which are then posited as constituting African philosophy. The time-consuming debate on the definition of African philosophy should thus not concern a serious student of philosophy. His concern should shift to the practical contribution of bodies of philosophical literature within the African context. This is the understanding of African philosophy which Paulin Hountondji embraces and defines as "a literature produced by Africans and dealing with philosophical problems"[4]. Wiredu's epistemology treated in the present research work is an example of this new definition of African philosophy. The present researchers wish is that Wiredu's contributions should provide an impetus for more of such philosophical contributions from this continent. But it is also our wish that his work should end the persistent misunderstanding of what African philosophy really is.

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