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Introduction

Afrikology, as an epistemology of knowledge generation and application that has roots in African Cosmology, emerges at a time of extreme complexity in global economic and social relations, the physical environment and human history. Indeed, there is a great deal of uncertainty and acrimony in the way we understand the world, as well as the way human beings understand each other in different environments and cultural contexts. This is manifested in the manner in which mainstream knowledge is being produced, articulated, managed and applied to meet today’s challenges. While it is true that in prehistory, knowledge production and application was equally a ‘complicated’ affair, today it has become not only complicated, but also complex and increasingly unmanageable in many cases. Indeed, mainstream institutions, including academia, acknowledge that the production of knowledge and its application in the so-called ‘knowledge society’ is a complex and uncertain process due to its fragmentation and incompatibility, even within the same academic disciplines. In some cases, it has become too ‘dense’ and undecipherable; in others, it has become problematic to code and decode or manage in new ways that can bring greater good to humanity as a whole in their environments and cultural contexts.

The philosopher Charles Taylor [1985B] has observed that the ongoing crisis of epistemology, which is based on the ‘civilisation of work’ (as understood in the Western world), has failed to recognise the historical specificity of the civilisation’s inter-subjective meanings and, as a result, it has led to the present malaise and predicaments in society. In his words:

The strains of contemporary society, the breakdown of civility, the rise of deep alienation, which is translated into even more destructive action, tend to shake the basic categories of our social sciences. … Mainstream science hasn’t the categories to explain this breakdown. [p. 48]

The situation in which humanity thus finds itself is one where its mainstream ‘scientific’ knowledge is unable to explain its crisis. This explains why humanity is alienated from itself and from nature, and this imposes an obligation on individuals and communities, as well as
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Institutions of higher learning and research, to redefine a new path for humanity. Such a path needs to be based on new knowledge that can be applied to its contemporary needs and which can overcome the shortcomings of the old fragmented and dualistic epistemologies of knowledge inherited from the Enlightenment. In this new complexity, the task of African scholars is to explore, trace and investigate the role ancient African knowledge systems contributed in laying the ground for the institutions of knowledge creation and their application to human needs throughout history. In this way, we shall then be able to retrace how these systems were received in other societies and applied to their needs with modification in a system of interrelationships, and how this changed. By exploring both the ancient ‘classical’ systems that are not restricted to the Greco-Christian traditions and by extending this to include their origins in the Cradle of Humankind located in Africa, we shall come to some understanding of the problem and how it came about. This can help us to overcome the current malaise by creating a new ‘synthesis’ in which the original African contribution makes a further contribution based on new understandings, called ‘Afrikology’ in this monograph.

The objective of this exercise is, therefore, to elaborate how Afrikology as an all-inclusive epistemology based on the cosmologies emanating from the Cradle of Humankind, can play a role in rejuvenating the Universal Knowledge, which our ancestors first put in place in their growing spread around the world. The role of African scholars is to retrace this humanistic tradition that has roots in the African continent in order to rid our world of those hierarchies and never-connecting dualities of phenomena that Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, introduced. They had a one-sided understanding of knowledge, which they received by way of education from the Cradle of Humankind in Egypt, where they were students and researchers. It is this one-sided and inorganic dualisation and fragmentation of knowledge that has increasingly led to the creation of a fragmented consciousness that imperils our very existence as a global civilised human society.

In calling for a new civilisation, Basil Davidson has, for this reason, pointed out how Britain today lives in ‘a jumble of ethical precepts bereft of their significance’. He observes that the people in Britain exist in this wasteland that is ‘littered with the debris of broken convictions [Davidson 1969: 65]’. In this confusion, the good of the individual is placed in opposition to the good of the society and the community, with the latter going ‘increasingly to the wall’. Davidson points out that, faced with this
fragmentation, ‘we are confronted with an ever more urgent need to find a new morality: a new means of humanising man in society, a new civilisation, or else shake ourselves finally to pieces’ [Davidson 1969: 67]. In a foreward to his book entitled *The African Genius*, Davidson quotes the 19th century poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold as having said ‘Civilisation is the humanising of man in society’. This is indeed what our ancestors of pre-history did and it is what this contribution seeks to do: to retrace the basis on which we can collectively rehumanise ourselves in a world of increasing uncertainty and fragmentation in order to create a better society than the one we live in today.