

**WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED THE SYSTEM OF
CONVERSATIONAL THINKING (SCT)? A REPLY TO
CRITICS**

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Abstract

This essay is an attempt to address some concerns raised in rejoinders to my theory. I summarise the main concerns in the question, “What is this thing called the System of Conversational Thinking?” Three respectable colleagues, Chad Harris, Bruce Janz and Bernard Matolino have articulated some critical questions, which they hope that in addressing them, I would come to improve the System of Conversational Thinking considerably. In this essay, I would reply to their criticisms, but more specifically, I would clarify my position, counter some of their objections and deepen my thought in some places. My method would chiefly consist of exposition, argumentation and conversation.

Keywords: System of Conversational Thinking, African Philosophy, Creative Struggle, Logic, Criticism, Conversation, Meaning, Context.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, Chad Harris, Bruce Janz, and Bernard Matolino have raised pertinent issues in their various rejoinders; needless to say that their criticisms have forced me back to the drawing board. It seems that for every bullet I repel, they have more in their guns. But those who cannot take criticisms should never pontificate, so I heartily welcome their criticisms and salute them with the greatest respect philosophers who honour their debts to the profession as they do deserve. I have in mind some criticisms they and other colleagues raised at the international round table on Conversational Philosophy hosted by the Centre for Leadership Ethics in Africa (CLEA), The University of Fort Hare, on April 9, 2021. I had profited from those criticisms then and improved on sundry parts of the theory, as can be seen in the recent publication titled “On the System of Conversational Thinking: An Overview”. I thank them immensely for forcing me to strengthen and deepen the System of Conversational Thinking. By the way, I thank Aribiah Attoe and two colleagues at the Centre for Leadership Ethics in Africa, Chris Allsobrook and Motsamai Molefe, for organising that round table.

The witty Nigerian philosopher, Peter Bodunrin (1985) has said that the best respect that can be paid to a thinker is for colleagues to criticise his thoughts. This is especially so when the thinker is still alive and active to respond. Both the organisers of that event and colleagues who honoured me with their criticisms, like the troika I set out to respond to in this essay, have done my theory the most service as far as the profession is concerned. One sure path to advance a theory is to criticise it from all flanks as this enables the proponents, as Paulin Hountondji would say, “to clarify certain ambiguities, refine some notions, and occasionally, deepen the analysis” (1996, viii).

In this Reply to Critics, I will clarify perceived ambiguities, refine some notions, counter some objections, and deepen my thoughts on the System of Conversational Thinking. I thank Aribiah Attoe once again in his capacity as the editor of [Arımarıka: Journal of Conversational Thinking], for giving me the opportunity to respond to the critical essays by the three colleagues. This essay will be divided into three sections. In the first, I respond to Chad Harris.

In the second and third, I respond to Bruce Janz and Bernard Matolino, respectively.

Chad Harris: Taking on the Conversation: Unresolved Tensions in Conversationalism as a System

Chad Harris has raised four pungent objections in his critical essay. I will here address them one after the other. In the first, he observes that my critical remarks against ‘bordering’, can undermine the conversational method. As he put it:

The first area of dissonance pertains to the discussion of ‘border thinking’ in SCT. We are given a very clear definition to work with: “I employ the concept of bordering to characterise the modernist practice of erecting an imaginary wall of difference in which the inside is construed as the zone of existence, and the outside is construed as nothingness” (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 10). It is also clear, based on everything written and said about it, that border thinking is something to be avoided or even eliminated....Conversationalism is meant to be a system that allows us to do philosophical work without recourse to those borders, or at least is a system that presents alternatives to those borders.

At the same time, however, we are told that one of the benefits of Conversationalism is that it is an effective method for meaning-making or meaning-formation (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 6). In other words, Conversationalism is a way of creating meaning out of meaninglessness. Conversationalism is supposed to be a tool that allows us, through the dialectic of conversation, to manifest meaning out of the nothingness of meaninglessness. This means, of course, that a distinction between the meaningful and the meaningless is a necessary presupposition for Conversationalism to get off the ground. Without this foundational distinction, which in essence is a conceptual border, Conversationalism ostensibly lacks a major part of its *raison d’etre* (HARRIS 2021).

Harris proposes two potential strategies for wriggling the SCT out of this border problem. The first has to do with accepting the necessity of the evil of the first border between meaning and metaphysics of absence. Here, we can imagine the necessity of this distinction and allow it to fall away after meaning has been created from meaninglessness. But Harris was quick to observe the futility of this strategy. First, this strategy entails a kind of distinction between borders that are philosophically useful (the ones we tolerated to create meaning) and those that are not (the ones we allowed to fall away). Second, Harris contends that there is no clear path to constructing a justification for this distinction and further states that even if we manage to pull out a surprise in this regard, we would have only created another (new) border, possibly between two meaningful distinctions.

The second proposal Harris puts forward is more optimistic than the first. He suggests that we can think of border distinctions as a continuum where there is no clear line between two seemingly opposed variables, at least at an abstract level. In this way, we would be able to use the idea of ‘degree’ to negotiate distinctions wherever they may appear. However, Harris observes that this strategy may weaken the conversational method that relies on the idea of clear distinction for meaning-making enterprises. He challenges the conversationalists to address the latter obstacle.

Whilst I see the insight in the two proposals above, I am hesitant to commit to any one of them. Both leaves one with serious obstacles to surmount. Why embrace obstacles when you can avoid them? Instead of plotting to deny subsequent borders or glossing over the distinctions, I would do something different. Something already contained in various ideas expressed so as to sustain the internal coherence of the SCT.

The border problem Harris identified is an interesting observation that persuades us to clarify our position better. Of course, Harris is right in his observation that meaning-making from metaphysics of absence presupposes a conceptual border. We are pushed here to distinguish the two senses of border that characterise our theory. The first is the ‘divisive’ type that leads to unequal binaries, and the second is the ‘differentiating’ type that leads to equal binaries. In the latter, variables so separated can complement, whereas, in the former, they inevitably contradict. It is the divisive

type of border that SCT is opposed to and not the differentiating type. So, perhaps, I ought to have spelt this out from the outset, and I thank Harris for challenging me to this task. The idea of border, as Harris observes, is not as simple as it seems. It has ramifications from the geographic to the intellectual. In each of these, the divisive type draws a lopsided line between the ingroup and the out-group, the self and the other, the have and the have-nought, the superior and the inferior, etc. But then also, we can, as Harris has compelled us to think, find the differentiating type. While the divisive type is based on a bivalent, truth-gap logic, the differentiating type is based on a trivalent, truth-glut logic. This latter type does not draw a contradictory and divisive line that is prohibitive of complementation and meaning-making like the former. It merely draws attention to 'difference' as a category of existence and the seat of identity. Difference, in this regard, does not translate to inferiority but to variety. Opposed variables like being and transcendental-is, meaning and meaninglessness, etc., can complement. Meaning-making is a cross-border venture in which seemingly opposed variables complement. Meaning is a complementary outcome of a creative struggle. In essence, what is enforced here by Harris' criticism is a distinction between positive and negative ideas of border. Here, bordering will strictly be applied to the negative connotation of border. So, what is entailed is that not all ideas of border are repudiated in the SCT. I had admitted this much when I stated:

On the other hand, decolonialists bid to displace the ego-politics of knowledge with geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge. The latter two are programmes that endorse territorialisation and embodiment of knowledge. They claim that in this way, coloniality of power, knowledge and being could be dismantled. I look at this as democratisation of border. It does not bring border to an end. Every border that emerges from the strangle- hold of the norm is a potential norm, which can in various ways seek the re-normalisation of other borders. It does appear that the anti-border

programmes, from postmodernism to decoloniality are inadequate (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 9-10).

I will now clarify the above further. The anti-border programmes such as postmodernism and decoloniality are inadequate because while postmodernism represents a critique of border from within thus leaving ample room for ‘internal bias’, decoloniality as widely, but erroneously construed, represents a critique of the colonial border using the bivalent logic of the same coloniality. For this, I recommend ‘conversational decoloniality’ as an approach that employs a trivalent truth-glut type of logic (CHIMAKONAM 2021, Invited Lecture). Also, by the notion of ‘democratisation of border’, I mean an approach to border thinking that endorses a positive idea of border not as a divisive mark between the norm and the normalised, but as a mark of difference as variety. The geo-politics, which recognises territorial and cultural borders, and the body-politics, which recognises variety in terms of gender, race, intersectionality, etc., are examples of a positive conception of border. Thus, the process of meaning-making in the SCT that negotiates the intellectual borders between meaningfulness and meaninglessness recognises the equality of the binary opposites. The type of border involved is bridgeable! And it is in bridging that border through creative struggle that meaning-making becomes possible.

In his second objection, Harris questions the lowly place of language in the SCT and wonders if it is not a strong claim that words cannot be communicated. He observes that the SCT interprets meaning “as a phenomenon that is removed from the ambit of the participants in a conversation, as well as from the medium of communication those participants use to understand each other”. If seen in this way, he asks, “who understands these meanings? Where are these meanings meant to be located, and who are they meanings for? On the SCT account, meaning emerges as some sort of third-party (fourth-party?) phenomenon, understood neither by nwa-nsa nor nwa-nju, and not contained in the signifier.” For Harris, then “If meaning has not been analysed out of existence, then SCT has the further task of coming up with an account of the location of meaning... All I am arguing is that if SCT wants a complete and

comprehensive account of meaning, then what is sorely lacking is an account of where meanings are supposed to inhere” (HARRIS 2021)

My response to this objection is this, as far as the SCT is concerned, meaning inheres or can be located in the ‘Context of Enunciation’. Meaning is not located in the signifier (words, objects), the significist (epistemic agent) or the signified (ideas). Sense, reference and denotation are categories that describe the signifier and the signified, but not meaning. The analytic philosophers are mistaken in supposing that meaning inheres in language. Meaning is a product of a process known as creative struggle that occurs from context to context. Moreover, as I explained, there are several folds of these contexts; context of contexts or contexts within context (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 11). Meaning must be produced as a separate epistemic activity than communication. Communication is part of the process leading up to the making of meaning. Understanding is another, but the actual meaning-making occurs in the context of conversation. Communication, understanding and conversation are all relational processes. In communication, the significists transmit the signified through the medium of the signifier. There is an external relationship amongst the three. In understanding, the significists, using their receiving senses and their mind/brain, enter an internal relationship with the signified to reach some interpretation of what they are like generally. And in conversation, there is an external relationship between the significists who exchange the signifier and the signified. Then, there is an internal relationship each must hold as described in understanding before they begin to create meaning as what things are specifically. For nwa-nsa, they must create meaning by association and creative struggle, and transmit it as ideas using the signifier. And for nwa-nju, they must receive the signifier, and by association and creative struggle attempt to re-create meaning. All this goes on in each of the significist’s ‘Context of Enunciation’. This is a context in which each of the significists carries out their own process of creative struggle, either to create or re-create meaning. This context is not static; it changes all the time, and so do the facts that characterise them. Each context is made up of specific facts. Thus, when contexts change, the facts about them change too.

This brings me to the third objection raised by Harris. He queries the SCT’s contention that there are no “Stable Facts”. For

him, “[T]his yields an account of meaning that is not underpinned by reference or denotation in the traditional sense. I say this worsens matters because we have now excluded another potential locale for meaning: the external world. At least with accounts of reference or denotation that have recourse to facts about the external world, we have some basic insurance against complete failure in meaning”. He goes on to suggest that the SCT’s idea that re-creating the meaning a significantist associates with their chosen signifier, which requires the other significantist to appeal to the worldview and mindview of the first significantist deals with the existential facts about the significantist that transmits the ideas. Harris then asks whether the facts of the worldview and mindview are not less stable than the objective world out there. Why would the conversationalist place more faith in mindviews, for example, than the objective world of the tree out there? Does that not make “communication an extremely onerous and complex task”?

I begin my response by asking, are there stable facts or are facts generally unstable? To determine which is the case, we must have to locate the context of the facts. Facts in a specific context tend to appear stable, but in a different context, they quickly reveal their mercurial character. Hence, context upsets fact. Sense, reference and denotation as epistemic categories are always constrained by context. Whatever sense that is intended by a speaker or writer; whatever a speaker’s language refers to; and whatever a writer’s language denotes, are determined by specific contexts in which those languages are used. Harris’ evokes a powerful analogy about two persons on a hot, sunny day who observe an object (stable fact) from a distance and thought it was a tree. But upon approaching the tree for shelter, they observe that it was not actually a tree but “a green tarp propped up by some metal poles”. Harris explains that the two contexts of distant and closer observation points may have supported the SCT’s claim that context upsets facts, but the reality of the object itself proves that there are stable facts since it “allowed the speakers to convey meaning successfully. Absent such stable fact, it is not clear how such successful communication could occur”.

There are two issues here. The first is about the possibility that context can upset facts. Harris is willing to grant this, so as to set up the more serious issue about the existence of stable facts. But I

think that both issues are equally challenging and important. So, I will address them both using his analogy. The above analogy about some folk who observed a tree-like object from a distance (context 1) only to realise that it was not a tree when they moved closer (context 2), is fascinating. These are two different contexts that yielded two different meanings. Our contention in the SCT is not with the *idea* of stable facts, that *idea* exists. Our contention is with the stable facts themselves and not the idea of stable facts. It does not matter whether we think that stable facts are actually stable, because contexts will always upset them. Harris claims that the mere reason that they allowed our observers to convey meaning successfully and that without the stability of the fact of the object itself, those speakers would not have been able to communicate at all on the subject, is proof that stable facts exist. But the only thing Harris's argument in the above succeeded in doing is that the existence of such an object is necessary but not sufficient proof that there are stable facts. For example, consider the following:

P1: Any object with a specific meaning is a stable fact.

P2: X is a stable fact.

C1: Therefore, X is an object with a specific meaning. (MT)

P3: Any object without a specific meaning is not a stable fact.

P4: Y is an object without a specific meaning.

C2: Therefore, Y is not a stable fact. (MP)

Corollary: $Y, X; Y \neq X$

The existence of the object out there is necessary but not sufficient proof that the fact of that object is stable. This is because a stable fact is not just an object in the world; it is one with a specific meaning. And as our tree analogy above indicates, the object does not have a stable meaning. What there are, are objects of meaning, not objects with specific meanings. In context 1, it was a tree, but in context 2, it changed to a green tarp propped up with metal poles. Who knows what else it can change to from other vantage points? And how can we legitimately claim that such a mercurial object allowed our observers to convey meaning successfully. How could this be the case when they were not even sure of the actual meaning

of the object itself? At best, we can argue that it allowed them to engage in a creative struggle, but it failed to yield meaning.

A critic would say that, given our example, that the observers, upon switching to context 2 and realising that the meaning produced in context 1 was faulty, have sufficient ground to dismiss/deny the context 1 meaning and affirm the context 2 meaning. But that would be too simplistic. Human beings as meaning-makers are endowed with dignity. To dismiss anyone's meaning accumulation from one's vantage point or on the basis of the credibility of another's meaning-formation can amount to epistemic/intellectual subjugation. No relative/subjective view has the moral basis to dismiss another. This certainly has ramifications for ethics as it does with epistemology and ontology. It does not matter what you think about their meaning formation; it will always be your own marginal point of view which you cannot impose on others. What matters is what they think about their meaning-formation, and if those from context 1 think that the object in the distance is a tree, it is a tree for them, irrespective of what you think the object is from your context 2 or 3. The object is a construct of iron poles and green plastic shade to you because of your context. So, it is a tree to them because of their context. Just as you would not buy into the imposition of their meaning to you, you should not impose yours on them. The important thing is not what facts are, but what we think they are, and our context is what determines what we think about objects; that is why mindviews are so crucial to meaning-making. Words and proper names refer and denote specific facts from specific contexts. If those specific contexts were to change, those facts would change too. So, contexts will always upset facts. Facts, therefore, are unstable.

Yes, a person's worldview and mindview are facts about that person accumulated over time. I agree with Harris, but they are facts shaped by that person's 'context of enunciation', which is why we respect those and give them inflated rather than deflated epistemic credibility.¹ Epistemic Credibility here refers to the degree of the

¹ This is not to be confused with Miranda Fricker's notions of credibility excess and credibility deficit, which refer to undue credit and lack of sufficient credit, respectively paid to one's testimony chiefly for their social advantages (See FRICKER 2007, 17-18).

believability of meaning engendered by the context in which such meaning was produced. It can be described as ‘inflated’ because it may not stand in another context. It can be described as ‘deflated’ when considered from a context other than the one in which it was enunciated. For example, an observer in context 1 judging from their vantage point, would most likely give a deflated epistemic credibility to the testimony of the observer in context 2, and vice versa. This might be viewed almost as a scandal because it is the observer in context 1 who seems to hold a testimony with deflated epistemic credibility, but they do not know that. Even the testimony of the observer in context 2 is not more reliable. They share the same level of optimism in the credibility of their testimony, as the observer in context 1. Let us assume that there is an observer in context 3 having the same distance to the object as the observer in context 2, except that the observer in context 3 is jaundiced. The observer in context 3 will most likely challenge the credibility of the testimony of one in context 2 by claiming that the tarp is yellow and not green. Let us imagine further that there is an observer in context 4 with the exact same distance to the object as observers in contexts 2 and 3, except that observer 4 is blind. The observer in context 4 upon hearing the flapping of the tarp, may challenge the testimonies of observers in contexts 2 and 3 by claiming that the object was a giant flag. Here, it does not matter who is actually correct or incorrect, wrong or right, legal or illegal, facts are always constrained by context, and so is meaning that is produced from such contexts. The facts of anyone’s existence in each intervening context of life are inseparable from the being of that person. To deny those is to violate the dignity of such an individual. No one, from their unique vantage points, should ever have the right to judge another individual when the latter has not made an incursion into the former’s or others’ context of existence.

Finally, Harris in his fourth objection challenges the logical basis of the SCT, and specifically the principle of Context-dependence of Value (CdV). Using my Ezumezu propositional logic variant, he subjects my favourite analogy to critical scrutiny. He argues that when the principles of conversationalism are properly applied, that the need for contextual analysis, the statement “you need to drink water to stay alive”, which the SCT insists on, will naturally fall away. Using the conversational mechanism of nwa-nsa and nwa-nju, Harris deduces that when nwa-nsa says, “you need

water to survive”, nwa-nju would naturally ask, “what do you mean?” since there can be different meanings associated with the statement. Nwa-nsa would then be compelled through the technique of Approximate Linguistic Transference of Idea (ALTI) to reply by saying “All humans die if they go without drinking water for more than three days”. Harris claims that “this sentence is true regardless of context. It is a true statement said in connection with the man in the desert as well as for his counterpart in the river”. However, what Harris did not realise is that the sentence is true only in a context... ‘more than three days’. To make this clear, let us adjust the context of the statement “All humans die if they go without drinking water for more than one day”. Here, the context changes to “more than one day”, and obviously, the same sentence with a different context becomes false. What the above shows is that no communication escapes the shadow of a context and every epistemic agent is entrapped in a given context of enunciation. Thus, from the preceding, I am hesitant to grant Harris’ suggestion that ideas could convey true meanings outside of contextual determinations. Our idealisation of how things should or should have been can never be a good substitute to how they actually are.

In the above responses, I have been persuaded to shift some grounds and I have deepened the analysis I offered earlier, especially on the issue of border. I have also been compelled to address ambiguities and clarify my positions on the notions of context, facts, and the location of meaning. I have no doubt whatsoever that the SCT has come up clearer than before and I have Harris to thank for it. In the next section, I will respond to Bruce Janz.

Bruce Janz: Conversational Thinking, Logic, and the Making of Meaning

As Bruce Janz rightly stated, the earliest conversation we had on our ideas dates back to six years ago (CHIMAKONAM 2015a; JANZ 2016). Before then, about a decade ago, when I was working on the project of systematising the approach to philosophy that developed in the eastern part of Nigeria in the last few years of the last century, I came across some of Janz’s work (2004; 2009). I was fascinated at

the semblance of his style and that of his compatriot Jennifer Lisa Vest (2009) to those I would later call the conversationalists (CHIMAKONAM 2014; 2015b). A few years later, I published a rejoinder where I challenged Janz's conception of space. I did not have much problem with his conception of place. But his conception of space was different from the conversationalist understanding of the idea and I wondered why he was not a conversationalist through and through (2015a). He replied (2016) reviewing my conception and the implications it might have in the practice of African philosophy. He raised some questions about my conception of conversation. I have addressed those in the intervening years (2017; 2018; 2021). But in replying to his latest queries, I will further clarify my responses to some of his earlier questions.

In his latest instalment, Janz raises a number of critical questions concerning the use of concepts such as logic, meaning and conversation in the SCT. He also raises "the question of whether conversationalism is meant to advance the way to philosophize in Africa and beyond, or a way to do so, and if it is the second, how it can coexist with other approaches". Also, he raises the question of "how this approach is African (or, indeed, whether it needs to be seen as such)". I will address these concerns immediately.

On the concept of logic, Janz does not think that there is a need for a new system of logic for the conversational method. He thinks that Ezumezu logic is embedded in the conversational method – that Ezumezu is continuous with the method itself. As he put it Ezumezu "...is not just a structural logic, but a method and the basis for a philosophical approach". In another paragraph, he states, that "[T]he goal of Ezumezu logic is to ground conversationalism" (JANZ 2021). This assumption that Ezumezu is a custom-made logic for the conversational method and is, perhaps, what the conversational method is about is the genesis of Janz's misunderstanding of the conversational method. This misunderstanding calls for clarification. In some cases, a thinker must take responsibility for any part of his thought that is misunderstood and make effort to clarify his notions.

To clarify these notions, a brief explanation of the trajectory of my thought is necessary. As I stated above, the original project was to systematise an approach to philosophy that emerged in the writings of members of the Calabar School in eastern Nigeria. An

approach, I was later to christen conversational method. But seeing that the bivalent logic and other variants of multivalent logics available could not ground this new approach, a second project – a logic one – became necessary since every method must be grounded on a specific logic. This second project yielded the Ezumezu logic as a trivalent, truth-glut logic. Because the conversational method was largely inspired by the African thought system in which relational (the principle that variables necessarily interrelate), contextual (the principle that each relation of variables occurs in a context), and complementary (the principle that seemingly opposed variables can complement rather than just contradict) inferences were core aspects; the logic that can ground such a method necessarily has to accommodate and, if possible, axiomatize these types of inferences. Ezumezu was then developed to do these. So, one can say that Ezumezu grounds the conversational method, but it would be erroneous to say that its “goal” “is to ground conversationalism.” Ezumezu is a tool for reasoning, and even though the need for a logic that can ground the conversational method was what inspired its development, it can be used to ground different new methods in philosophy or other disciplines. Does the conversational method need a logic base? Yes, it does. Every method needs a logic base. There can be no method without a logic. Logic deals with the laws of reasoning. In logical reasoning, realities are brought into various types of relationships sanctioned by the laws of a given logic. Thus, I explained that both logic and ontology lie at the foundation of any system (CHIMAKONAM 2021). Method lies on top of this foundation. It deals with various ways or approaches for applying the laws of the specific logic that is at the foundation of that system. So, there can be multiple methods in a system but only a specific logic. This is because logic agglutinates the principles that enable us to make ideas intelligible. Completing a system is doctrine that lies on top of methods. This refers to the organisation of ideas into theories using any of the methods one finds suitable.

But Janz has other issues with our concept of logic. He seems to think that our method can do without the burden of Ezumezu logic since most (even if not all) of what Ezumezu claims to do can also be done by existing systems of propositional logic. Instead of another propositional logic, he suggests “[E]rotetic logic, that is, the logic of questions”. He asks, “[S]o, is there a place for non-

propositionality within Ezumezu, or must the starting point always be propositions?” To substantiate, he cites my favourite ϕ hakaristic statement “you need to drink water to stay alive”, and contends that it has “...some vague or indefinite terms” (JANZ 2021), suggesting that a more appropriate starting point should have been the sort of questions to which the statement is an answer to – erotetic logic or the logic of questions.

Again, this is a mistake! Ezumezu maps three types of inferences, which are, to the best of my knowledge, not mapped in any other type of logic. These, as already mentioned, include the relational, contextual and complementary inferences. It also maps two types of propositions, that is, arumaristic and ϕ hakaristic propositions. “[An] arumaristic proposition... expresses one thought but which has different values in two different contexts... [and] an ϕ hakaristic proposition...expresses two different thoughts that can both be asserted simultaneously in a complementary mode” (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 21). These are all in addition to the future contingent propositions that Aristotle identified, but which defied his bivalent logic. So, is Ezumezu logic important beyond grounding the conversational method? Yes, it is.

So how does Ezumezu map ϕ hakaristic propositions such as “you need to drink water to stay alive”, which Janz, coming from the propositional lens of bivalent logic, thought was a misnomer? It expresses one thought but which has different values in two different contexts. First, in the middle of the Sahara Desert and dehydrating, the statement has the value true, but in the middle of River Niger and drowning, its value is false. This further entails that ϕ hakaristic propositions are both true and false. This is termed value-complementarity.

But Janz seems not to understand this strange type of proposition. So, he argues that when considered from the perspective of a general biological necessity, that the statement would be true irrespective of any circumstances because humans naturally need water to stay alive. But even this bivalent consideration, can be addressed. For example, when the statement is considered as a general biological necessity, (without contextual determinations), it appears to be true, but in reality, it is actually both true and false. For example, contrary to Janz’s conclusion above, humans do not actually need to drink water to stay alive. One who drinks milk will

stay alive even if they do not drink water. The example of babies is a case in point. Janz may claim that there is water in milk, but milk is not water, and drinking it is not exactly what one can describe as drinking water. So, the statement is both true and false. One is able to pin down a specific value once context is provided.

The importance of contextualisation cannot be over-emphasised. Everyday human behaviours and expressions, (as social animals) have practical dimensions, which require contextualization. We do not, for example, say to a group of friends that includes people of diverse genders, medical conditions, religious beliefs and age brackets, ‘you are going to have sex’, and expect everyone in the group to go on and have this experience. Whilst those who are biologically matured to experience sex, who are not biologically too old or religiously prohibited and who do not have any prohibitive medical conditions, will go on to have the experience of sex at some point; there may be others in the group who do not satisfy the above conditions, and who, as a result, would not have the experience of sex. So, while the statement ‘you are going to have sex’ appears to fulfil the general biological necessity that humans have sex, it is true for some and false for some others, and it is the immediate circumstances of each person that dictate that. What is entailed in the above is that while we can get away with the assumption of general biological or artificial necessity, a proper contextual evaluation would reveal how logically incorrect this approach is.

Janz, just like in his rejoinder of 2016, once again prioritises the importance of questions. As much as I agree with him on the critical role of questions in a philosophical inquiry, I believe he stresses this point to some risk. He even suggests here that unearthing what the specifically correct question is to that specifically precise answer ‘you need to drink water to stay alive’ might help us understand that as a generally biological necessity, humans need to drink water to stay alive. The challenge here is that the fact “that there could be several correct and complete but incommensurable answers to the question” as Janz also observes is precisely the reason the statement “you need to drink water to stay alive”, cannot have a single truth value irrespective of how general it might be. I define propositions like the one in our example as ‘*ḡhakaristic propositions*’, that is, those propositions that express more than one thought, which can both be asserted simultaneously.

While I see the insight in Janz's proposal for a 'logic of questions', and grant that it would enable us to broaden our intellectual vision, but I see no reason why we should begin to downplay the logic of propositions. Perhaps, we would understand the preceding point better when we observe that even our questions and answers need to be framed in a propositional format. What we should downplay is the assumption that meaning inheres in propositions. The proposition that appears to begin with the presumably hanging answer, "you need to drink water to stay alive", should not be construed to have skipped questioning as a crucial point of philosophy. No, that would be a hasty conclusion! As a matter of fact, the tradition in analytic philosophy in which questions precede answers is just one alternative approach to philosophical inquiry. I have discussed this in an earlier formulation of conversational philosophy (CHIMAKONAM 2014), and it was demonstrated in a co-authored essay recently (EGBAI and CHIMAKONAM 2019a). In those two works, we used the idea of interrogatory theory to propose a line of philosophical inquiry in which the questions can be framed in the negative. For example, by the interrogatory approach, instead of asking 'what does one need to drink to stay alive?', one can ask, 'what does one NOT need to drink to stay alive'? I do not need to drink coke or sparkling wine or orange juice or milk to stay alive, but I definitely need to drink water to stay alive. Even though the negative questioning has enabled us to eliminate a bunch of things until we are left with water, it would still be hasty to say that we have found the correct answer to that specific question. This is because, on the reverse side, I would stay alive if I drank milk without drinking water. A critic may say that this is only possible because water is contained in milk, but one who drank milk has not really drunk water; neither is milk the same as water. Again, critics may take us back and argue that the negative questioning approach or the interrogatory technique of the SCT started with questions unlike the Ezumazu statement under consideration. But what is negative questioning? The concept entails more than reversing questions; it includes assuming questions. The statement, 'you need to drink water to stay alive may not have reversed the question 'what does one need to drink to stay alive', but it assumes it, that is why Janz was able to ask it. However, the importance of the logic of questions proposed by Janz hinges on where analytic philosophy

places premium. Whilst I do not contend the crucial importance of questions in philosophical inquiry, (a high stool is given to nwa-njū, the questioner in the SCT), answers deserve an equally important place, if not more. This is because questions can easily be assumed as they precede answers. When an answer is stated, most of the possible questions that precede it can easily be assumed, but this is not the same for answers. Answers take more time to arrive at. So, the interrogatory technique of the SCT gives us a different approach, one that requires us to also go backwards rather than the analytic approach in which we are bent on going forwards. I believe that the negative questioning of the SCT fulfils, in its own way, Janz's logic of questions, but the latter does not replace the logic of propositions.

On Janz's questions concerning the concepts of meaning and conversation, a few queries are raised for me. He asks "whether in fact meanings are first internal and impossible to know, and/or whether they align with others"?. Further, he asks, "Is it not possible that we are both creating meaning and discovering existing meaning, the meaning we share as part of our cognitive development that makes it possible for us to have community at all as a primordial form of being human?" "And, if the communal or the shared is a fundamental part of being human (as I think much of African philosophy correctly points out), then the existence of meaning must be something more than simply its production using the tools and methods described". "I noted that there have been plenty of exchanges that we might call conversations within African philosophy, but that these are clearly not what he is advocating. Even if conversationalism's sense of conversation is more specific and more dependent on particular kinds of exchange, though, there should still be a way of accounting for how these things would actually happen, how we would know that they are happening, how we would be able to recognize counterfeits, and how we could see these as situations of mutual learning rather than as just an opportunity to compare positions on things and potentially convert someone else to one's own position" (JANZ 2021).

I respond by first clarifying that by conversation, we do not simply mean exchange or a particular kind of exchange that observes the ritual of the literary meaning of that word. Those who have it at the back of their minds what conversation portends or its dictionary meaning often misunderstand our theory. A conscious or an

unconscious insistence on approaching the SCT from the common-sensical idea of conversation naturally leads to a misinterpretation. Conversation is a meaning-making process that involves some form of exchanges or relationship known as ‘creative struggle’. It entails a relationship that is collective or communal, but which does not consume the interrelating variables. Approximate Linguistic Transference of Idea (ALTI) represents a shared meaning, but the differential that makes ALTI an approximation, represents private epistemic spaces.

Meaning is never discovered; it is never out there for all to see; it does not inhere in objects or propositions; it is made from ideas that inhere in objects and propositions! Meaning is made through creative struggle in its ever-changing and ongoing private, collective and contextual folds. The existence of family units, groups or communities with symbols, beliefs, and norms, may seem like proof that a bunch of meaning about such groups and their ways of life have long been created and now rests in store for common appropriation. In this way, a new member of a group may simply come to discover those meanings that define life in such a group, or a newborn may simply grow to discover such stockpile of communal legacies in their laws, values, totems and symbols. But this is incorrect. It is simply not how the world works, and certainly not what our concept of conversation portends. The SCT sets out the basic building blocks of the concept of conversation and meaning, beginning with the concept of ‘sign’ that can be broken down to signifier (words, symbols, legacies); signified (ideas carried by the signifier), and ultimately significist (the epistemic agents involved). Meaning is not created from nothing; it always and only has to come from something – a bearer of ideas.

Whatever meaning is created from is a signifier. Whether that be a set of norms or laws, or values, or symbols of a group or community, it is a signifier. And when meaning created from it eventually is transmitted, it is transmitted as signified (mere ideas). So, in the minds of individual members of such a community who appropriate such communal legacies are varied ideas. No two members of such a community, not even the two oldest custodians of those legacies, have *exactly* the same meaning of those legacies. They might recite exactly the same mantra, but it is hardly the case that they think about it the same way, or mean the same thing, when

they convey such a mantra to others. Each goes on to make the meanings of those communal legacies daily in what is a form of internal relationship of creative struggle. When they transmit the ideas in the form of an external relationship of creative struggle to two other strangers or new members, what is received once again varies between the recipient and between the custodians and the recipients. Meaning can be created both internally and externally, and they are not impossible to know. When I say, 'I love you', I know what I mean by the expression; if you reply with the same expression, you know what you mean by it. However, what we both mean by the same expression might be similar at best, but never the same. The best that can be expected and which ensures the smooth functioning of such a relationship or community is ALTI. This is why we argued that there is such a thing called degrees of meaning, and the mutualisation of meaning amongst members of a group, despite some discrepancies, is what leads to the formation and sustenance of relationships, groups, communities and even the society, and that is and has always been enough. So, there is a shared meaning, but it does not inhere in any object of meaning-making; it resides in the private spaces of meaning-makers. It is shared to the extent that the privately made and held meaning clusters are mutualised or are to a reasonable degree similar. And there are no clusters of meaning out there. There is no communal bank of already made meanings anywhere. Individual contexts of enunciation are where meanings are made, and they change regularly. When I say 'good morning' to my neighbour, I am not transmitting an existing or already created meaning of goodwill. I am creating a new meaning. If I do this every morning, I am creating a new meaning every morning. If the meaning of my greeting this morning is similar to the one I created yesterday; it is not because they mean the same thing. Rather, it may be because my contexts of enunciation are similar.

SCT does not prescribe how we should make meaning internally in order to make it the correct way. It describes how meanings are made in our private creative struggles, whether knowingly or unknowingly. What it prescribes (in addition to its description) are supplementary guidelines on how we can engage in an external creative struggle in order to help one another mutualise the meanings we make internally. Every purposive human activity is

a meaning-making enterprise. In the internal creative struggle, there is nothing like a counterfeit process of meaning-making. Even the rules we set for external creative struggle are not there to check counterfeit measures but to enable us to mutualise our internally created meanings. Every meaning-making activity proceeds through creative struggle. The meanings we make daily inform our actions. There may be the temptation to say that some people make better meanings than others, but that is all one could say. Unfortunately, even such a conclusion would be that individual's isolated opinion. There is nothing like a better, good, bad, moral or immoral meaning. Meaning is meaning, and it is shaped by an individual's context of enunciation. We can judge actions informed by meanings to be moral or immoral, but we cannot say so of meanings themselves. If an individual responds to someone's behaviour towards him with violence, and another individual responds to the same action with gentility; it is because the meanings that informed these two distinct reactions are different. How often do we wonder why people behave or respond the way they do? It is due to their tension-laden contexts of enunciation charged by creative struggle. Creative struggle which meaning-makers go through every moment of their existence is a delicate process. It is creative because it is a spinning wheel that unfolds meaning, and it is a struggle, because the varied and ever-changing circumstances that characterise our fluid contexts of enunciation impose on us burdens that sometimes, if not most times overwhelm us.

The making of meaning can be private (internal) or communal (external), so Janz's question about the SCT being an individualist theory does not apply. Axiomatically, while the laws of *njikoka* and *nmeƙoka* explain the privately accumulated meanings, *oƚona-etiti* explain the shared meanings. Similarly, while the principle of contextuality endorses the internal creative struggle, those of relationality and complementarity endorse the external creative struggle. SCT is not opposed to the shared spaces of meaning; it contends that they would ever be completely mutualised. People everywhere, including in Africa, are humans, not robots, irrespective of how closely knit their communal ontology might be.

Language and, indeed, all objects convey ideas, except that the SCT does not hold that meaning inheres in language or in objects themselves. They harbour only ideas. Ideas are what things are

generally like, but meanings are what they are specifically like. The notion of language precision, whether natural or artificial is abhorrent to the SCT since language merely conveys the signified and not meaning per se. Setting the rules of how to make meaning as Janz demands, merely amount to establishing the standard of analytic philosophy for another philosophical tradition. If meanings were to inhere in language, or objects, as analytic philosophy holds, then it would be necessary to set the rules of appreciating the meanings. What we can set rules about is how we engage in external creative struggles with one another, and we have laid out quite a number of them (See CHIMAKONAM 2015a; 2018; CHIMAKONAM and NWEKE 2018; EGBAI and CHIMAKONAM 2019b). We cannot do so for our private internal creative struggles. Imagine a rule set out to prevent people from thinking about others as sex objects, how do you put such a rule to effect? Individuals may make their own rules, consciously or unconsciously, which they habitually violate to no one's consternation. For example, how often do people make new year's resolutions only to violate them before the end of the first day of the new year? Whether individuals uphold or violate the rules they set for their internal creative struggles is of little consequence. The factors of their contexts of enunciation will always prevail. Some drunkards suddenly quit for good when they are diagnosed with liver disease. You wonder why they claim they could not quit despite their best efforts in the preceding decade or two in which all manner of people had tried to help them. Our contexts of enunciation always prevail because we are beings in and of contexts!

Meaning-making or conversation is a process of creative struggle (not a space in which propositions exist as Janz supposes) for creating meaning (not meaningful propositions). In SCT, meaning does not inhere in propositions; it inheres in contexts in which propositions are asserted (CHIMAKONAM 2019). Ezumezu is a logic that grounds the conversational method. It is not concerned with meaning, but truth. It is a tool that explains the relationship of realities. The structure of that relationship, which the conversational method purveys, helps us to explain how we might create meaning out of meaninglessness. By conversation we do not necessarily mean dialogue or encounter or exchange, let alone a specific type of exchange. That would be a simplistic interpretation. Yes, there may

be dialogue, encounter or exchange in conversation, but what is involved is better captured with the notion of relationship. There can be an exchange without a relationship.

I come now to Janz's last three questions "of whether conversationalism is meant to advance the way to philosophize in Africa and beyond, or a way to do so, and if it is the second, how it can coexist with other approaches"?. And of "how this approach is African (or, indeed, whether it needs to be seen as such)"?.

The conversational method is a way, not the way to philosophise. We discuss the method in relation to Africa because it was African culture-inspired not because it is an African method. It is a method that can apply anywhere. Now that I have stated that it is a way and not the way, Janz's follow-up question on how it can co-exist with other methods is probably not the pressing question. The more pertinent question is not how it can co-exist with other approaches, but what would make other approaches relevant, despite the existence of the conversational method and vice versa? And the answer is that there is room for a thousand flowers to bloom, insofar as each represents a new useful addition to the toolbox and an extension of the frontiers of knowledge.

To Janz's last question on how the conversational method is African and whether it needs to be so, my answer is that it is African in origin. It needs to be seen as such. Intellectual history makes it necessary for the cultural origins of ideas to be remarked, and the one's produced in Africa, and from the African cultural worldviews should not be treated any differently. The Africanness of SCT has both logical and ontological foundations. These involve the criteria for distinguishing African from non-African philosophies. I highlight the ontological ones as relationality, contextuality and complementarity already discussed, as principles that are teased out of the common traits in various African worldviews. I also developed a logic that can ground it, mapping inferences and propositional types that often characterise expressions and assumptions in African philosophy. It is one thing to say that propositions of African philosophy are communal, non-bivalent, complementary, relational, contextual, etc., and another to point out the logic that can map them. Without such logic, philosophers from other traditions who test those propositions with the principles of their own logic would find them to be pre-logical and a system of

mystical participation (LEVY-BRUHL 1923), unintelligible and contradictory (EVANS-PRITCHERD 1965), closed predicament (HORTON 1967). Without formulating the logic that can ground African philosophy, we offer people from other philosophical traditions no basis at all for accurately testing the assumptions of our philosophy. They naturally resort to doing so through their own logical *criteriology* and arrive at some of the most bizarre conclusions like the ones by Levy-bruhl and Horton. This has been the case until the development of Ezumezu. Placid Tempels once put it roughly:

So the criteriology of the Bantu rests upon external evidence, upon the authority and dominating life force of the ancestors. It rests at the same time upon the internal evidence of experience of nature and of living phenomena, observed from their point of view. No doubt, anyone can show the error of their reasoning; but it must none the less be admitted that their notions are based on reason, that their criteriology and their wisdom belong to rational knowledge. (TEMPELS 1959, 51)

Also, Evans-Pritchard, in explaining Levy-Bruhl's assertions, says:

He does not mean that primitives are incapable of thinking coherently, but merely that most of their beliefs are incompatible with a critical and scientific view of the universe. They also contain evident contradictions. He is not saying that primitives are unintelligent, but that their beliefs are unintelligible to us. This does not mean that we cannot follow their reasoning. We can, for they reason quite logically; but they start from different premises, and premises which are to us absurd. They are reasonable, but they reason in categories different from ours. They are logical, but the principles of their logic are not ours, not those of Aristotelian logic. (EVANS-PRITCHARD 1965, 81-82)

The above passages by Tempels and Evans-Pritchard, despite their poor choices of words, speak directly to an important point that has eluded many commentators on African systems of thought. For many years, scholars in Africa and elsewhere in the world have discussed the substance of African philosophy, denied or affirmed it,

but the controversy has always been about measuring its assumptions with alien logics or no logic at all. I take the development of the logic that can ground African philosophy to be the singular most important project in the entire history of African philosophy, and the members of the Calabar School who worked on this project (Asouzu, Ijiomah and the present writer), must have the credit for this.

The conversational method was formulated as one approach that demonstrates the viability of the logic. Ezumezu is a model truth-glut trivalent logic. But the conversational method is one of many other possible methods that can be grounded in such a logic. Without *the* logic, it makes little sense to talk about African philosophy as a tradition. Every philosophical tradition necessarily has to be based on a specific logic. There may be strands and variants, but they would be strands and variants of that logic. The attempts by Innocent Asouzu (2004; 2013) and Chris Ijiomah (2006; 2014; 2020) are the other variants of that logic. Whilst still not perfected, Ezumezu represents its finest formulation to date. So, yes, it is the logic of the African philosophical Tradition. Even though Ezumezu deals with truth as all logics should (FREGE 1956), and can ground theories with different themes, its structure is adequate to galvanise a theory about meaning-making, just like the bivalent logic grounds many theories that are not about truth qua truth.

On the whole, I find Janz's criticisms very rich to compel clearer articulation of the SCT, for which I am grateful. It is my hope that this ritual would continue as a veritable way of advancing the idea and ensuring progress in the field of African philosophy. In the next and final section, I reply to Matolino's objections.

Bernard Matolino: A Strange Conversation

Bernard Matolino has developed a reputation as an *animadversionist*. But it is exactly folk like him that the field needs to make theories better and bring about progress in this contemporary era of African philosophy, the sort of progress, which actors of the Great Debate era could only dream of. To mount constructive criticisms as he does is not an easy task. If anything, it is a thankless job. The creators of ideas would continue to rely on the laser-sharp objections of critics to fine-tune their theories. So, critics

are important for any discipline to make reasonable progress. I welcome Matolino's criticisms as intellectual gifts that are invaluable. Like the criticisms of Harris and Janz above, Matolino's would compel me to deepen my thought and clarify others. He has two objections: first, he queries my concept and conceptualisation of 'metaphysics of absence', as the starting point of the SCT, finding it "incontrovertible", "unoriginal" and yet hard to "get" what it is "supposed to mean", all at the same time. Second, he wonders where the originality lies in the method of 'conversational thinking', giving that 'conversation' has always been part of philosophy; prominent in analytic style of philosophy, and features clearly in the philosophy of Emmanuel Eze. I will respond to these two objections together.

I begin by noting that all those who strive to understand the SCT must first abandon convention about what the word 'conversation' literally implies; what meaning is; what meaningful things are; and where meaning inheres. Matolino, pretty much like Janz earlier, comes to the table of SCT with the conventional literal understanding of the word 'conversation'. On the basis of this error, he finds my own usage "strange", "unusual" and "odd". But there is a distinction between word and concept. My use of 'conversation', and this is an explanation I had made profusely (see CHIMAKONAM 2017, 2018, 2021), is not in keeping with the everyday understanding of the word, but as a pure concept. One would expect critics to meet me on my terrain and engage with me on the very stipulated definition I had given to the concept. This mistake is not limited to Matolino alone, Janz is equally guilty of it, as would many others even after the publication of this clarification.

The preceding has been a problem in the long history of philosophy itself. Philosophers are supposed to question assumptions, yet, too often, we begin from unquestioned assumptions. This was what E. E. Evans-Pritchard observes when he was discussing the barrage of criticisms by many colleagues against Lucien Levy-Bruhl's arguments in the [Primitive Mentality]. As he put it, "I think I may claim to be one the few anthropologists here or in America who spoke up for him, not because I agreed with him, but because I felt that a scholar should be criticized for what he has said, and not for what he is supposed to have said" (EVANS-PRITCHARD 1965, 81). I did not say that my use of 'conversation' is in keeping with its everyday literal import or how an analytic

philosopher or any other philosopher would see it; I did not say that 'okwu' is a "state"; I did not say that "at the beginning or at whatever stage, there is a certain "absence," which has to be filled"; I did not say that "humans are creators from an absence"; I never said that there was "such a proper point of beginning where there was nothing either in language or thought to represent rawness"; I did not even talk about any metaphysical beginnings or stage or point, etc. These were some of the claims, which Matolino incorrectly attributed to me to justify his criticism of my concept of metaphysics of absence and the originality of my method. Matolino began his criticism by assuming the above, and, like many of Levy-Bruhl's critics, criticized me for what I never said. I have no doubt that with these observations, Matolino would realise that he lost me at the point at which he implied his own cherished conventional interpretations of the concepts I employed.

I have clarified our conception of meaning and its location earlier and so will not belabour it further. But one valid general claim that can be made about SCT is that it holds that the goal of life is ultimately meaning-making. Every conscious quest is reducible to the pursuit of meaning. This is an answer to the question: what can all conscious acts be reduced to? The SCT attempts to describe how we make meaning daily from metaphysics of absence, not how the first humans made meaning out of nothing. Here, Matolino questions the suitability of this concept. My response is that it is called metaphysics of absence because it describes realities that have yet to take forms as specific objects of meaning. Metaphysics of absence does not imply nothingness and it is not simply something. It is the world of everything that is absent, and this can be conceptual or empirical. By absence, we do not mean non-existence or nothingness, or spiritual or supernatural imaginings, we mean the 'absent-presence'.

As a theory of meaning-making, the SCT explains that every conscious activity is about meaning-making, which is our special cognate for the concept 'conversation'. Existence is conversation. To exist is to be in constant conversation. Animals and all forms of life are meaning-makers too. We have found ways to explain the meaning-making behaviours of some advanced biological forms of life – like when danda, the gregarious ants, stockpile food in their holes in preparation for the next rainy season, or when viruses

mutate. Everything that has taken a specific form is an object of meaning to meaning-making beings. All objects of meaning are created from the metaphysics of absence. Think of a log of wood as a metaphysics of absence – an embodiment of absent-present realities. In it is buried a chair, a table, a statue, a door, etc. Inside the log, all possible objects of meaning that can be created out of it are meaningless, not in the sense of nothingness, but in the sense of pre-existence or absent-presence or lacking the form to serve as an object of meaning.² Any activity geared towards carving a statue out of the log, is a creative struggle. No two sculptors can carve out precisely the same statue. Their individual skills and overall life circumstances or contexts of enunciation are different and heavily influence their meaning-making exercise.

From the above, the processes of meaning-making are laden with creative possibilities but also fraught with struggles. The closer to the benoke point, which the meaning created by each epistemic agent is to the one created by others, the better. But crossing the benoke point, a point beyond which ensues a crisis in meaning, otherwise known as conversationund, is abhorrent. Conversationund is a sphere of pretence where agents pretend to precisely match the meanings others have in their states of mind. For example, between two significists, one who has created a meaning for a given cultural symbol, transmits the ideas to another. That other person undergoes their own internal creative struggle to re-create the meaning in the mind of the transmitter. At the end of these processes, both claim that the meanings they each created of the cultural symbol are exactly the same. This can only be possible where there is a pretence or outright confusion about the meanings created. As a result, we say that there is a crisis in meaning.

At the other extreme end is tension of incommensurables. This represents a collapse in meaning. Here, epistemic agents fail to mutualise their meanings. Everything in-between the benoke point and the tension of incommensurables is mutually intelligible, but the closer it is to the benoke point, the better. When meanings created by

² An 'object' of meaning is anything that stimulates ideas in any conscious entity. Any entity that is capable of generating own ideas is conscious, and is thus, a 'subject' of meaning. Consciousness is a charged topic, but this narrow definition serves our purpose.

epistemic agents who are in conversation cross the tension of incommensurables, it signifies the collapse of meaning and the meaning-making processes.

For the benefit of doubt, I distinguish ideas from meanings. While I define ideas as ‘what things are like generally’, I define meanings as ‘what things are like specifically’. Ideas are immediately available. Language conveys them as roughly as possible and the senses perceive them as sketchily as possible, but meanings are products of creative struggle in the private mental spaces, distilled from the relationship of language, ideas, the perceiving senses, and the engine of the mind. Is this what philosophy has been saying in its millennia-old history? Does this represent the epistemic standpoint of analytic philosophy? Is this the position held by Emmanuel Eze? Does the methodological process of creative struggle that involves the three components of ‘sign’, the two significists, their capacities and the internal and external creative struggles sound like any of the known methodologies in the world of philosophy? How then is the SCT methodologically unoriginal? Again, the above clarifications of my concepts and deepening of my thought show that Matolino, despite being well-meaning lost the train of my thought the moment he assumed what I never said and criticised my concepts for containing ideas that are different from what is conventional. Essentially, Matolino has criticised the SCT for being original, but even this is not without some benefits. The further explanations I have offered with new examples have made the SCT come out clearer. This is, for me, the most important contribution criticisms make in scholarship, and for that I am grateful.

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