

Unraveling the Metaphysical, Epistemological, and Ethical elements of Oromo Proverbs.

Abstract

Long ago the external world (most prominent among which is the west) had excommunicated African mind from the realm/ treasure of reasoned knowledge. According to Hegel, Hume, Kant, and others, for any thought (about human life, about knowledge and truth, good and bad, right and wrong, mind and matter; about human nature and the universe we inhabit) to count as reasoned knowledge it must be subject to writing. African philosophers like Hountondji, Appiah, Bondurin, etc. have also expounded that individualist element, the main or only yardstick of reasoned knowledge, as they have put it, is missing in the traditional genre of thought. A piece of these characterizations are unfair as they have indisputably tried to discredit the thoughtful knowledge built in oral tradition.

The central point in this article, therefore, is unraveling the practical reasoned knowledge exhibited in the traditional genre of thought. The aspiration is partly alluded to the task of being informative about the place of Oromo society and, by extension, traditional African in the realm of global knowledge.

This is done by closely examining the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical elements embedded in some proverbs of the Oromo.

Key Words: Oral tradition, Oromo proverbs, Oromo conception of knowledge, Oromo conception of truth and ethics

1. Introduction: Oral Tradition in the Eyes of the West

When we pay a glance back to the different acts of the past, they appear, at first, to be things of the past, and outside our real existence. But in reality we are what we are through history. For instance, in the history of thought, what has passed away is only one side, and what we have at present as a permanent possession is essentially bound up with our place in history. The self-conscious Knowledge we Africans possess did not arise suddenly, nor did it grow only from the soil of the present. We must regard it as previously present, as an inheritance, and as the result of labor—the labor of past generations. It is true that those who preceded us in history were not familiar with writing. However, the accumulated skill and invention, customs and arrangements of social and political lives of the present society are the results of their thought, care, ingenuity, plans, and achievements. So we need to owe our reverence to a tradition that has been preserved and transmitted to us from the produce of antiquity.

39 Nonetheless, long ago, the external world, especially the west, had excommunicated Africans
40 from the realm of reasoned knowledge. In the west the very concept of African thinking has
41 no acceptance. In the Westerners eyes, the west is the home of knowledge and civilization
42 where as Africa is the home of wild trees, wild animals, and wild culture, and wild people.
43 On the other hand, there are others who argue that traditional Africans have a collective
44 thought which cannot be reconstructed by themselves in a critical, reflective and scientific
45 manner. There are also African thinkers, for instance, Bodunrin and Hountondji, who claimed
46 that literacy ought to be a recommended requirement for rational discourse. These thinkers
47 concluded that the thoughts of traditional African societies who were not accustomed to
48 writing are not self-evident knowledge. This characterization of oral tradition as basically
49 inferior to writing and the wisdom of sages as authoritative views rather than individual
50 positions subject to criticism and review, as revealed by Joseph Omogrebe in Oluwle and as I
51 agree with, weakens the validity of oral tradition (1999, 8).

52 Thus, it is this view point of western and non-western scholars that present traditional African
53 society as one devoid of and alien to rational thoughts that motivated me to pursue this work.
54 The central point in this paper, therefore, is refuting the prejudice and stereotypic conception
55 of western and non-western scholars on traditional African mind. It is intended, to counter the
56 view that says “To have a rational thought it is mandatory that the thought be available to
57 future generation in writing”.

58 To this end, closer examination is made on the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical
59 elements embedded in some proverbs of the Oromo. The examination is based on a careful
60 analysis of the epistemic evidence as found in Oromo proverbs. The analysis contains critical
61 remarks, clarifications and definition of epistemic terms. It is true, however, that this work
62 does not give us a definitive and comprehensive treatment of the rational thought that inhere
63 in Oromo proverbs.

64 **2. The Place of Oral Tradition in the development of Rational Thought**

65 Oral tradition or oral culture is a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or
66 print. As clearly stated by Ong, a purely oral tradition (primary orality) differs from
67 ‘secondary orality’ of present-day-high-technology culture, in which a new orality is
68 sustained by telephone, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence
69 and functioning on print and writing (1982, 11).

70 In all the wonderful worlds that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives (Ong,
71 1982). Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of
72 sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings. Speech is inseparable from

73 our consciousness and it has fascinated human beings, elicited serious reflection about itself
74 since the very early stages of consciousness, long before the coming into existence of writing.
75 As Ong has put it, proverbs from all over the world are rich with observations about this
76 overwhelmingly human phenomenon of speech in its native oral form, about its powers, its
77 beauties, its dangers. The same fascination with oral speech continuous unabated for
78 centuries after writing came into existence.

79 Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great
80 deal and possess and practice great wisdom. In this connection, Ong (1982, 14) argued that
81 “oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and
82 human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the
83 psyche.” Apart from this, in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word proceeds
84 from the human interiors and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors,
85 as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into closely-nit groups. Skillful usage of
86 expressions in more sophisticated orally patterned thought is discernable.

87 Thus, it is possible to construct a credible history out of the oral tradition which is a viable
88 source and a history in its own right. In Africa most of the reasoned knowledge has been
89 handed down from generation to generation in a way which is mainly oral. Alexis Kagame’s
90 formulation of a philosophy of being from the Bantu language of Rwanda, the case of Dogon
91 Sage, Ogotemali, the Oromo proverbs and others are instances of an explicit rational thought
92 in oral tradition. These examples provide an evidence for the critical, reflective and
93 inquisitive mind of traditional African society.

94 **3. The Oromo Conception of Knowledge**

95 For the Oromo society knowledge and truth are the key elements in living a meaningful and
96 satisfying life. They understood knowledge and the ability to know as the principal categories
97 that differentiate human beings from animals. They define human beings as ‘the being that
98 knows things’. In other words, it is only men and women who have the intellectual faculty for
99 the acquisition of knowledge and full understanding of reality through the medium of ideas.

100 Taking this essential nature of human being as for granted one way to say a person is ‘stupid’
101 is to say that ‘he/she is an animal’ (*Inni/isheen horii dha*). The Oromo believe that mind or
102 intellect plays an inspiring role to think in a logical manner and acquire knowledge. They
103 describe a person that is not intelligent as ‘his/her mind does not think’ (*sammuun isaa/ishee*
104 *hin yaadu*), or simply ‘he/she does not think’ (*inni/isheen hin yaadu/yaaddu*).

105 Thus, for the Oromo society, knowing and understanding things, especially life in terms of its
106 fundamental meanings is a prerequisite for one to be human epistemologically.

107 **3.1. The method of knowing.**

108 There are different questions that need to be addressed in the inquiry to know. The most
109 important ones are:

- 110 a) How do we get knowledge?
- 111 b) What do we mean by knowledge or what is known?
- 112 c) From where do we acquire knowledge?
- 113 d) How is knowledge validated?

114 For the Oromo society, human beings have the tendency or are endowed with the capacity to
115 know. They believe that she/he can know and does know. This being the case we need to
116 emphasize on the question of ‘How do we know?’ The epistemology of the Oromo society is,
117 therefore, concerned with the manner of knowing. To answer the question that asks ‘how do
118 we know? A careful analysis of some of the Oromo synonyms for ‘to know’ is decisive. Two
119 of the most important verbs for ‘to know’ are ‘*beekuu*’ and ‘*baruu*’.

120 **To know as “*beekuu*”**

121 *Beekuu* is the commonest Oromo word for ‘to know’. It takes an object of meaning ‘oneself’
122 or *waa* meaning ‘a thing’. The expression *uf beekuu* and *waa beekuu*, therefore, imply the
123 certainty about oneself or of something known respectively and so rules out any room for
124 skepticism. The verb *beekuu* can also be treated as ‘to observe’, ‘to take a look at’, ‘to note’,
125 ‘to look’, and these meanings of the verb appear in such proverbs as:

- 126 i. *Haadha ilaalii hintala fuudhi* (Mammaaksa Oromo, 1991) look at or observe the
127 mother marry the daughter.
- 128 ii. *Abbaan of hin argu dhagaan of hin darbu-* A person cannot see himself as a stone
129 cannot throw itself (Sumner, 1995).
- 130 iii. *Kan cabetu akkatti caba dhidhiiban beeka-* he who was once broken knows how to
131 mend what is broken (Ibid).

132

133 The two verbs *ilaaluu* and *arguu* are closely related and call for the use of sense perception.
134 *Beekuu*, then the consequence of *ilaaluu* or *arguu* which in turn means to gain knowledge by
135 observation or seeing, by use of sense organs. The third proverb stands for knowledge we
136 gain after having experienced something. Observation or experience, then, is the means by
137 which we come to know. To put it differently, the result of such an observation or experience
138 then is knowledge (*beekumsa*).

139 As Dewey (1958, 165) puts it, the process of acquiring knowledge from
140 experience/observation has two phases: the active and the passive. The active phase of

141 experience consists of trying or experimenting with something and the passive phase is
 142 undergoing the consequence of what has been done. Experience, therefore, is valued for
 143 connecting the two phases-trying and undergoing phases. As Dewey (1958, 165) further
 144 states, “when an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change
 145 made by the action is reflected back in a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with
 146 significance”. The action that we perform has a meaning and this meaning is the knowledge
 147 which arises from the mental ability of the doer to connect what is meant by the first phase of
 148 experience in terms of its second phase-the result or effect. The ability of an individual in
 149 deducing the correct lesson from experience is highly valued in the Oromo society. This can
 150 be understood from the following proverbs:

151 -One who does not understand an inference will never understand the thing as it.

152 -Unless one travels one does not know about expatriation.

153 -A girl counsels her mother about child birth (*Hintalli haadha ciniinsuu gorsiti*). This
 154 proverb is uttered with the message that a new comer-the one who has no experience
 155 in a certain area and consequently had no knowledge –should not give an advice to a
 156 person who has more experience in the matter.

157 -It is only a fool who falls down twice on the same mound.

158 As one can understand from these proverbs observation and inference are methods of
 159 producing knowledge, and experience is the raw material for the production of knowledge. It
 160 is also worth noting that Oromo proverbs deal with the transmission of knowledge to others
 161 in addition to its possession. This transmission to others or communication is treated from the
 162 angles of a wise man (the utter) and that of the ‘receiver’ of the wisdom.

163 **To know as “*baruu*”**

164 The verb *baruu* has the meaning ‘to know’, ‘to recognize’, ‘to note’. It is used in such
 165 expressions: *Ani isa bareera* which means ‘I have known him’. This may refer to knowing
 166 someone after making oneself known formally to him by giving one’s name, or knowing the
 167 behavior or character of somebody after having observed his action. The object “*isa*” also
 168 stands for things and the expressions *Ani isa bareera* is equivalent to ‘I have known it’.

169 Generally speaking, one can validly conclude that observation or experience, inference and
 170 communication are the methods by which the Oromo knows him/herself, his/her environment
 171 (both social and natural environment) and reality as a whole. Observation and inference
 172 involve two steps: observing of external phenomenon by the senses and receiving the
 173 necessary sense-data from it- the experiencing phase of knowing; then comes the process of
 174 organizing and interpreting the sense-data into ideas which come to be referred to as

175 knowledge (*beekumsa*). Accordingly, knowledge is the end product of psycho-intellectual
 176 processes which begin in sensation. Sensation, therefore, produces reflection and valid
 177 inference and is the begging of empirical knowledge which then can be reduced to sensory
 178 experience. In this process of knowing mind or intellect plays a significant role. It synthesizes
 179 our sense data and thus understanding is made possible. Knowledge is essentially a product
 180 of understanding. It is an active process; mere experience can never give us knowledge. The
 181 proverb ‘*yaada malee iiji hin argu*’ (without mind eye cannot see) which has the message
 182 that without the tendency to understand or without mind mere looking at or seeing of
 183 anything cannot give us real knowledge reveals this point.

184 The method discussed above is an active method of knowing. There is also a partially passive
 185 or an acted upon knowing. I call it partially passive because in this way of knowing too the
 186 role of mind is not underestimated. For instance, in the expression *Dhukkubni na qabate*
 187 (illness has seized me/I am sick) the subject knows something not by what he does but by
 188 what happens to him. In this sense, he came to know what happened to him after his sense
 189 organs inform his mind and based on such stimuli he makes decision.

190 In the indigenous Oromo society, therefore, knowing is the result of two different types of
 191 experiences: active and passive and the tendency to make appropriate inferences.
 192 Accordingly, mere observation cannot give us an authentic knowledge. Clear attention and
 193 deep reflection (*xiinxaluu*) on what we experience are necessary. The proverb *Hadurreen*
 194 *keessi bineensa* (deep down a cat is a wild animal) reveals this truth. To clearly understand
 195 what a cat is, we need to undergo a rigorous reflection. We should not restrict our judgment
 196 to the external and mere appearance of objects.

197 **3.2. The Oromo attitude towards knowledge**

198 The Oromo society has different attitudes towards knowledge-*beekumsa* and *baruu*. The first
 199 attitude towards knowledge is that there is a limit to what anyone can know but there is no
 200 limit to what can be known. Since knowledge is limitless any person who claims to know
 201 everything knows nothing or very small. ‘Know all know nothing’ (*kan hunduma nan beeka*
 202 *jedhu homaa hin beeku*). It is because of this attitude towards knowledge that, in the Gadaa
 203 system,* the *Hayyuu Raagaa*-an advisory group is elected to advise *Abbaa Gadaa*, the one
 204 with the greatest authority in the Gadaa system. Because it is believed that a wise and sound
 205 judgment comes from different heads.

206 The next attitude to knowledge is figuratively expressed by proverb which says: *Handaaqqoo*
 207 *yaada malee nyaatan gaafa qalbiin ilaalan baallee irraa argan* (a chicken eaten inattentively
 208 will have feathers if you concentrate on it). This proverb carries the message that unless you

209 pay attention to the chicken you eat, you will have the impression it has no feathers. But if
 210 you concentrate on what you eat, you will see that it has feathers. By the same token, if you
 211 do not correctly reflect on or come back on what you did, it will seem it was correct. Your
 212 concentration on your past deeds or on what you thought you know reveals your defects and
 213 measures the extent of your knowledge. Accordingly, experience and a deliberate effort of
 214 the subject play a significant role in the process of knowing. However, this does not rule out
 215 the prior existence of knowledge in some instances. The expression *Kan beekumsa qabu*
 216 *waaqa dha* (it is god who is knowledgeable) or *Beekumsa kan namaa kennu waaqayyo dha*
 217 (it is God who gives men knowledge) affirms knowledge as a priori. Thus, the possibility of
 218 both a priori (transcendental) and posteriori (empirical) knowledge is acknowledged by the
 219 Oromo society.

220 Knowledge is also conceived as light and the source of freedom. This attitude towards
 221 knowledge can be seen from the proverb: *Beekumsi guca dukkana keessaati* (knowledge is a
 222 light in the dark). From this proverb, we can understand the linkage between absence of
 223 knowledge (ignorance) and darkness. A man who is ignorant has no light to anything. He
 224 gropes about in the dark. The expression *Namni seenaa isaa hin beekne akka bishaan*
 225 *gabatee irraa isa gara gabateen jallatetti jallatuuti* (A man who does not know his history is
 226 like a water on a container which flows in any direction following the direction the container
 227 inclines) also reveals the enlightening nature of knowledge. Accordingly, knowledge
 228 (*beekumsa*) is a light, a moral enlightenment that makes the individual free from ignorance
 229 and indifference.

230 Thus, from what we have seen so far, it can be rightly concluded that for the Oromo society
 231 the possession of knowledge and the ability to know or the capacity to understand fully are
 232 the critical properties that makes men human beings. Knowledge for them is both a priori and
 233 a posteriori (i.e., gained by experiencing the empirical world and the intellectual assimilation
 234 of it through the medium of ideas). Knowledge has the power to enlighten and free the
 235 subject.

236 **4. The Oromo Conception of Truth**

237 The subsequent discussion about the Oromo conception of truth is a logical follow-up of the
 238 study of knowledge that has been made so far. Though it is limited in scope, the discussion
 239 addresses the reasons for truth or falsity of our knowledge and the indigenous Oromo concept
 240 of truth and their attitude towards truth.

241 There are different terms for truth. *Dhugaa*, *Haqa*, *Sirrii* and *Afaan-tokko*, however, are the
 242 most common ones.

243 **Truth as “*Dhugaa*”**

244 *Dhugaa* as truth stands for a correct statement. The correctness of this statement presupposes
 245 the tendency to describe accurately the state of affairs as it is. A statement is *dhugaa* or true if
 246 it describes an object or event as it really is. These statements can be reports of/by eyewitness
 247 of events. The proverb: *Inni bira oole hootteetti jennaan inni mana oole hin hoone jedhe*
 248 (while the shepherd says the calf has fed the stranger says it has not) is uttered with the
 249 intention that the report of an eye witness can be trusted to be true than mere speech of the
 250 one who is ignorant of a given state of affair. Because such reports have the tendency to give
 251 an accurate accounts of events. Thus, there is a high degree of reliability and accuracy in such
 252 truth-statements given by an eye witness. However, the possibility of error in the reports of
 253 an eyewitness cannot be ruled out. Hence, the attempt to base *dhugaa* (truth) on eyewitness is
 254 for its high degree of accuracy and not with the view it is an exact copy of reality.
 255 Accordingly, truth is a high degree of correspondence between true-statement and the
 256 objective state of affairs and its validity is based on its high degree of accuracy and
 257 reliability.

258 Truth as *dhugaa* can also be understood as something that is powerful and everlasting. As the
 259 proverb *Dhugaan qallattu iyyuu hin cittu* (no matter how much it becomes thinner truth
 260 cannot be destroyed) puts though one can threat truth, no one can destroy it. The one who is
 261 truthful will have a long and satisfying life. He/she does not lose hope for being threatened by
 262 falsehood.

263 **Truth as “*Haqa*”**

264 *Haqa* is an Oromo word for truth and has the meaning ‘real’, ‘genuine’, ‘distinguishable’. In
 265 these expressions, truth stands for a significant statement for it contains the word of life and
 266 precedes another statements and things.

267 This is a pragmatic theory of truth that is based not only on the workability of an idea but also
 268 on its ability to make possible a better human situation and to make life valuable.

269 **Truth as “*Sirrii*”**

270 The Oromo society uses this expression very often in discussions, communications, debates,
 271 etc. Truth as *sirrii* can either mean ‘straight’ or ‘right’ or ‘true’. Falsehood is referred to as
 272 *sirrii miti* which can either mean ‘not straight’ or ‘not right’ or ‘not true’.

273 This concept of truth presupposes the prior existence of normative standards of truth-
 274 statements which are used to measure other truth-statements. This normative truth-statement
 275 is what is generally known by the society and represented by the elders to be true. Such truth
 276 statements are acquired through experience and passes from generation to generation.

277 **Truth as “*Afaan tokko*”**

278 *Afaan tokko* is a phrase that is made up of *Afaan*-meaning ‘mouth’ and *tokko*-meaning ‘one’
 279 and so *Afaan tokko* means ‘one mouth’. Truth as *Afaan tokko* is a statement that is consistent
 280 and without contradiction in the description of a given reality. It can either mean inner
 281 consistency and harmony or the consistency of the statement made by several people about a
 282 given state of affair. However, in the case of external consistency, by collaborating what
 283 others have said, one is confirming and not necessarily ‘speaking’ the truth which is first
 284 established by other. By the same token, the similarity of an opinion cannot be used as a
 285 criterion of truth. Therefore, the *afaan-tokko* conception of truth is a truth that is internally
 286 consistent, i.e., the consistency among the truth statements made by the same person about
 287 one and the same reality at different times.

288 To sum up, one can deduce four clear concepts of truth from the examinations made so far.
 289 The first concept of truth is truth as knowledge-statement of reality that corresponds with
 290 reality of higher degree. It is also conceived as the identity of new knowledge-statement with
 291 other knowledge-statements that have been accepted to be true. Thirdly, truth is conceived as
 292 the internal consistency and harmony of one’s thought about one and the same reality. Lastly,
 293 truth is the knowledge statement that can create new and better life.

294 **5. Ethical significance of proverbs**

295 This section of the paper examines how proverbs can be used to express ethics/morality and
 296 the Oromo conception of morality. As James K. Kikongo (cited in Sumner, et. Al, 2002) puts
 297 it “any people who have evolved a culture would be expected to have a distinguishable
 298 epistemology or conceptual knowledge of the basic components of their culture, including
 299 also their ethics”. Such conceptual knowledge guides the ethical conduct of the society. As
 300 Kikongo further states, “ethics in Africa is a component of traditional culture” (Sumner, et.al,
 301 2002). This view rightly holds true for the Oromo society. Ethics is found explicitly in the
 302 thought and practice of the Oromo people.

303 In the Oromo society, the foundation of ethics can be viewed in two ways. According to the
 304 first view, ethics or morality is founded on the widely practiced traditional religion of the
 305 Oromo. The Oromo situate him/her self with regard to the forces and events which mark
 306 his/her existence, with regard to fellow human beings, and with regard to some supreme
 307 reality that he/she thinks accounts for everything that is. As Workineh Kalbessa (cited in
 308 Presbey, et.al, 2002) puts, *Waaqaa* (God) is the guardian of all things, and nobody is free to
 309 destroy natural things. The Oromo think that doing wrong or harming the creation of *Waaqaa*
 310 is a disharmony with the order of nature and would automatically disorganize the perfect

311 harmony that exists within the created being and between the creator and creatures. Thus, the
 312 religion restricts the freedom of human beings in their dealings with both their natural and
 313 social environments. In their dealings with nature, the concept of *safuu* has a significant
 314 position. In this connection, Workineh emphasized that:

315 *Safuu* is an important concept in the beliefs and practices of the Oromo people. *Safuu*
 316 is a moral concept that serves as the ethical basis that helps individuals to avoid
 317 morally wrong actions. *Safuu* is knowing how to relate natural laws that are given by
 318 *Waaqaa* and to act according to them. *Safuu* can also refer to expression of
 319 astonishment, fear, pain, pity, shame, etc. (ibid).

320 According to the concept of *safuu*, everything in the cosmic and social order have their own
 321 place. It is the moral duty of human beings to keep them where they ought to be. It has a wide
 322 scope of applicability; there is *safuu* for every action we perform. The proverb: *safuu hin*
 323 *safarani, eelee* hin waqarani* (*safuu* cannot be measured *eelee* cannot be hammered) reveals
 324 the wider applicability of *safuu*.

325 Apart from this, ethics in the Oromo society is also founded partly on the considerations of
 326 human well being. In this respect what is morally good is what brings about dignity,
 327 prosperity, and contentment. Consider the proverb *sangaa abbaan gaafa cabse bittuun gatii*
 328 *cabsa* (the buyer lowers the price of an ox whose horn is broken by the owner).

329 This proverb has a double message. First, breaking the horn of an ox is contrary to the order
 330 of nature and, hence, it is unethical. Secondly, unless we act ethically, the consequence of our
 331 action will not be as desired. In the proverb given, had the horn of an ox not been broken, it
 332 would have been sold at a higher price. Accordingly, because of his immoral act the owner
 333 has lost prosperity. This second message also reveals that the spiritual consideration of ethics,
 334 i.e., ethics that is based on religion and the concept of *safuu* is a foundation for the humanistic
 335 consideration of ethics, i.e., ethics that is founded on consideration of human well being.

336

337 **Summary and Conclusion:**

338 Westerners and other scholars alike had a negative and inferior nature of Africans and
 339 African mind. The westerners had not only invented the ideas of primitive Africa, but also
 340 what they assumed to be a means for her to have a moral worth. According to this outlook,
 341 the west not only invented African thinking but also thinks on behalf of Africa.
 342 Consequently, grappling, retrospectively, with this down playing attitude is necessitated.
 343 This, as Bekele (2002) sanctitly states, demands scrutinizing indigenous knowledge of
 344 African thinkers to reveal their significance.

345 Hence, examination of some Oromo proverbs for their epistemological, metaphysical and
346 ethical import is called for. The careful examination of the proverbs revealed that knowledge
347 and truth are the key elements in living a meaningful and satisfying life. For the Oromo, one
348 of the principal categories that differentiate human beings from animals is knowledge and the
349 ability to think. The epistemology of the indigenous Oromo society is concerned with manner
350 of knowing. *Beekuu* and *baruu* are the two most important words for ‘to know’. In this
351 manner of knowing, we have two different phases: the active and passive phases.

352 However, the Oromo society has different attitudes towards knowledge. The first attitude
353 towards knowledge says that in spite of the infinity of what can be known there is a limit to
354 what we can know. The second attitude expounds the significance of experience and the
355 deliberate effort of the subject in the process of knowing. Knowledge is also conceived as a
356 light and source of freedom.

357 Truth is the other important concept that has to do with our knowledge. *Dhugaa*, *haqa*, *sirrii*,
358 and *afaan-tokko* are the four common terms for truth that entail clear concepts. These are the
359 concept of truth as knowledge-statement of reality that corresponds with reality of higher
360 degree, the identification of new knowledge-statement that have been accepted to be true, the
361 consistency and harmony of one’s thought, the knowledge-statement that can create new and
362 better situations of life.

363 The proverbs have also a wide ranging significance in explicating the ethics embodied in the
364 culture and life of indigenous Oromo society. They reveal that ethics in Oromo society is
365 founded on two different practices: religious practice and the consideration of human well-
366 being.

367 Hence, from the examinations made so far on the epistemological, metaphysical and ethical
368 significance of some Oromo proverbs one can legitimately conclude that there is a practical
369 reasoned knowledge embedded in the thought of an oral community. Such thoughts, similar
370 to that of literate culture, are the product of an individual person who is critical, reflective and
371 reasonable. It is also correct to say that literacy and the tradition of writing is not a necessary
372 condition for rational thought though its significance in preserving and transmitting ideas and
373 reflections of individuals intact and knowing them by name is not underestimated. The
374 metaphysical, epistemological and ethical concepts discussed above are the product of deep
375 and critical thinking about fundamental issues of life. Hence, traditional (pre-literate)
376 societies have the capacity to think and reflect on the necessary questions in human life. Their
377 works are handed down from generation to generation through channels such as proverbs,
378 wise sayings, socio-political make up, etc.

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