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Editorial: Mapping Recent Issues in African Philosophy

This volume 7, number 1 of *Filosofia Theoretica* is a Special Issue dedicated to the workshop on how to publish in international journals which took place between March 29 and 31, 2017 at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. It features six articles and a book review. The essays bring together scholars in African philosophy working in Nigeria, Malawi, South Africa and Cameroon to critically examine some thematic, historical, and methodical issues in African philosophy. This volume offers fresh critical perspectives on important themes in contemporary African philosophical scholarship: personhood, transhumanism, pneumatologism, communalism, individualism, reincarnation, development, philosophic system building, ‘conceptual decolonisation,’ ‘conceptual liberation,’ conversationalism, francophone African philosophy, among others. The reader can expect a multi-perspective approach to issues in contemporary African philosophy ranging from methodology to applied philosophy.

Beginning with Pius M. Mosima’s “Francophone African Philosophy: History, Trends and Influences,” this article is specifically placed as the opening piece to provide not just the historical trends and influences in Francophone African philosophy, in isolation, but in conversation with some prominent figures and related issues that have shaped the trajectories of Anglophone African philosophy in the turn of the 20th century. Mosima’s historical overview of Francophone African philosophy is a comprehensive discussion of the overlaps and conversations among philosophers in Anglophone and Francophone Africa. He argues that in spite of the linguistic divides between Francophone African philosophy and the philosophical traditions in Anglophone and Lusophone Africa, there have been philosophical communications across the traditions.

Applaudable as this attempt is, it leaves one curious about the non-discussion of Afrophone philosophies. One might wonder what possible roles African philosophical discourses in indigenous African languages have for self-understanding and the search for authentic African philosophy. In future conversation, more papers wait to be written in filling this gap and advancing Mosima’s intimations and contributions to historicising Francophone African philosophy.

The second article is a piece from Ojah Uti Egbai, who uses the conversational approach as an example, in making case for system-building in African philosophy. Egbai is interested in how best to do African philosophy. His claim is that system-building, which involves the ingenious creation of concepts and formulation of theories explaining everything, is imperative in African philosophy. Albeit his independent judgment about the shoddiness of some attempts at system-building in African philosophy, as can be found in C.S. Momoh’s theories of conflictology and many-many-truths, Pantaleon Iroegbu’s theory of Uwa ontology, Innocent Asouzu’s Ibuanyidanda ontology, Thaddeus Metz’s relational theory, and Ada Agada’s Consolationist theory, Egbai thinks that conversational philosophy is aptly an arrowhead for system-building in African philosophy. The author’s choice

of conversational thinking is because of its African methodological novelty, which he calls the ‘arumaristics technique’ of philosophising.

One might be curious to know whether there are epistemic tensions or not in system-building philosophy itself, and perhaps how such antinomies can be addressed, before considering the desideratum of system-building in African philosophy. It might be asked, further, why should the novelty of conversationalism bode well for system building?

Beyond the metaphilosophical inquisition on system-building in African philosophy, the next article in this volume is on the thematic issue of personhood. Though there is expansive literature on personhood in African philosophy, this author’s interest is to redefine the idea of personhood in relation to transhumanism from an African perspective. Drawing insights from Barry Hallen’s metaphysical account of personhood and Thaddeus Metz’s modal relational conception of personhood, the author defends an Afrofuturistic account of personhood. In this interpretation, salient elements of transhumanism are recognised and synergised with the normative, ontological and the communal dimensions of personhood in an African *Weltanschauung*.

While this article is a fresh addition to the various theorising about personhood in African philosophy, its framing of the discourse in the bioethical debate on transhumanism might lead to the search for more accounts, say for instance in postcolonial constructs in African Studies such as Afropolitanism, Afrofeminism, among others. Whether or not the outcome of such philosophical constructions would lead to “chaotic plurality” of personhood in the postcolony, to borrow Achille Mbembe’s (2006) catchphrase, and whether that would be a good thing, are matters of future conversation.

In “African Philosophical Foundation of a Pneumatological Controversy inside the Church of Central African Presbyterian in Malawi,” Grivas Muchineripi Kayange offers a critical discussion of the metaphysical problems involved in the concept and essence of Holy Spirit in the sub-Saharan African church. How best to understand the Holy Spirit is a contentious theological issue of philosophical relevance: as a tripartite and fully divine spirit or as a created angel with privileged status in the pantheon? Beyond the divisions on the nature of the Holy Spirit between the adherents of the New Pentecostal Theology (NPT), and the Reformed Calvinist (Protestant) Theology (RCT), both within the Church of Central African Presbyterian in Malawi (CCAP), Kayange provides an interesting philosophical interpretation of the conflict, rooting it in the broader dichotomy between communitarian ontology and individualistic ontology. While the New Pentecostals, who are better categorised as progressives, find solace in individualistic logic and principles, the Protestants, also the conservatives, share the Christian communist worldview.

The eclectic embrace of these ideologies together with the African communitarian ideals within the CCAP is creating some pneumatological and doctrinal tensions, for which the author provides a two-fold African philosophical solution. On the one hand, Kayange proposes an urgent reconstruction of African

identity to concurrently include re-educating church members that both communitarian and subjective values define human essence. On the other hand, he advocates a new pneumatological theology that incorporates and reflects some African traditional experiences and practices.

Whether one can have a clear-cut dichotomization of the underlying philosophies of the Pentecostals and the Protestants without some ideological overlaps is subject to debate, which I invite the reader to peruse further. It is important, also, to alert readers to the kind of principles to be in place in negotiating between the globalisation expediency of inculturation and the faith-based pneumatological ideal in the new theological regime being advocated by Kayange in Malawi?

Ndubuisi Osuagwu and Jonathan O. Chimakonam provide an excellent critical analysis of some of the dominant approaches in African Studies and defend the cogency of language-based approach in authentic knowledge production in African Studies. A compelling aspect of this article is the rigorous critique provided of some of the existing methodological approaches to African Studies: hermeneutics, transliteration, Kwasi Wiredu's 'conceptual decolonisation' and Kwesi Tsri's 'conceptual liberation'. In line with the conversational approach to philosophising defended by Egbai in the second featured article in this volume, Osuagwu and Chimakonam argue that future African Studies can flourish when new and original concepts, springing from traditional languages, are created to interrogate African realities.

As applaudable as this position might appear in being instrumental to the realisation of the concerns about originality, epistemic fidelity and validity of knowledge production in African Studies, another sensible project for further reflections is the extent to which Osuagwu's and Chimakonam's call for 'creative language-based techniques' square at the centre of other primary concerns of African studies - for instance, the pedagogy of disseminating produced knowledge in African Studies and the application of such knowledge to policy formulations for Africa's transformation. Would a different approach be required in engaging these other pertinent domains of African Studies?

The question of development in Africa is taken up by Christian C. Emedolu in the succeeding article. He identifies what he calls 'Thought Predicament' or colonised mentality and the 'unwillingness to act' or *akrasia* as the fundamental bane of underdevelopment in Africa. On this score, the author provides a critical overview of some developmental theories such as the secularist, religious and historicist models, as well as the economic growth, the reductionist, and the science and technology models. His thesis is that Africa will cease to be an 'unpromising' continent, using the phrase of Justus Makokha (2011), when the development of full, independent human intellectual, volitional, and affective faculties are taken seriously by the state and rightly deployed by Africans.

How and when to balance these various faculties and to what ends must they necessarily be directed are matters of contested judgment. Beyond the author's

identification of mental indolence and the unwillingness to act for the right reason at the right time as the twin minions of Africa's underdevelopment, it would be interesting to know how best to practically overcome *akrasia* both at the individual and the state levels.

In the final contribution, this volume features a critical review of a recently published book, [Reincarnation: A Question in the African Philosophy of Mind] (2017), by the Ghanaian philosopher Hasskei M. Majeed. Engaging with some existing theories of the mind in African metaphysical discourse, Majeed maintains that, notwithstanding the cultural and religious proclivities of reincarnation, it is an irrational belief. In his review, Ada Agada explores the weaknesses and strengths of the book, focusing on the topical philosophical issues in the belief and concept of reincarnation in African thought: the nature of mind, personal identity, and the mind-body-problem as well as on the promise the book has for more intracultural and intercultural philosophy in the African space.

To each of the articles in this volume, I invite the reader's critical periscope.

As Peter Bodunrin

(1981) rightly opines, the best compliment to a philosopher is to criticise his or her work. Tsenay Serequeberhan (1991) charges as well that "African philosophers must engage in a theoretical threshing of their philosophical formulations in order to separate the wheat from the chaff in their own discourse." Harkening to Bodunrin's and Serequeberhan's voices, the articles in this volume should stir up some controversies, conversations, and critical confrontations, with the avalanche of concepts and ideas advanced and defended by the contributors. Let the conversation start with welcome responses in future volumes of *Filosofia Theoretica*.

Ademola K. Fayemi Ph.D.
University of Johannesburg
Guest Editor

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