Philosophy, Openness, and the imperative of continuous self-renewal

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Abstract
Philosophy premises itself on the ideals of openness and continuous self-renewal. And yet, the story of philosophy has been an endless struggle against the violence of systematic exclusion and erasure. This article deploys the principle of openness as an analytic category to reflect on the broader question of epistemic decolonisation and the imperative this imposes on the practice of philosophy. There are important ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions to the principle of openness with a bearing on the enterprise and how to conceptualise its future. Whether at the global level or within a specific individual tradition, the principle of openness is about the reconfiguration of philosophy itself and restoring its richness and diversity. For the African philosopher, this entails assuming responsibility for the ongoing task of articulating 'what philosophy is and what it can be' within the context of Africa's own history, its problematics, and priority questions.
Keywords: decolonisation, openness, dialogue, intercultural philosophy, dimensions of African philosophy.

Introduction

The need to expand contributions to philosophy beyond the dominance of any single tradition is a reality, which even the most ethnocentric philosophers should now find increasingly difficult to suppress. The circle of philosophical engagement has continued to grow and with it, the ineluctable exposure to the views of others who see the world differently. Consequently, one could be led to infer that the temptation to proscribe and to prescribe what counts as philosophy without taking the emerging reality of world philosophies into context is now behind us. It could also be assumed that as the lovers of wisdom, philosophers would naturally "follow the beloved wherever it takes [them], regardless of the geographical locality in which wisdom is found" (ROSENLEE 2020, 136). While this should ideally be the case, the reality on the ground reveals otherwise. Part of the reason is that:

> We live today in the aftermath of a long period of colonialism. One effect of colonialism has been to reinforce prejudices regarding the intellectual or cultural superiority of certain nations over others; another has been to impoverish and to disempower those who have been both colonized and disparaged. (EDELGLASS and GARFIELD 2011, 4)

Addressing the consequences of this history is something that has preoccupied most of the so-called philosophies of the periphery. The growing presence of different traditions of philosophy in the world even as they remain locked in the battle against systematic exclusion is a development that is set to reshape the global philosophical landscape going forward. This article, which is written from the perspectives of African philosophy, focuses attention on two issues in relation to contemporary philosophising, namely: openness towards other traditions of philosophy within the growing reality of world philosophies and openness to the different dimensions of philosophy within the African tradition of philosophy itself. There is no doubt that if we are to strive to be true to both philosophy and humanity, dialogue within and across the different traditions of philosophy remains one sure way by which we can restore to philosophy its richness and diversity including the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that speak to our different experiences as humanity. In what follows therefore, I shall analyse the implications of the principle of openness not just in the encounter between different traditions of philosophy, but also, and more importantly, what it means to the practice within the enterprise of African philosophy itself as an increasingly growing tradition. I submit that there are, at the bottom, ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions to the principle of openness, which have a bearing on philosophy and its practice in this world. The ontological dimension is for me primary. For it is only when our parity as human beings and "the inalienable right to reason" (Ramose 1999, iv) for all is asserted that the possibility that we can all contribute to knowledge as our patrimony and thus exchange ideas in the spirit of respectful engagement and collaboration which is the very essence of intercultural philosophy can be realised. Thus, embedded in the ensuing reflections on the principle of openness and its implications for philosophy are critical issues that continue to inspire arguments for the decolonisation of philosophy and knowledge in general. The demand for openness is as much epistemological as it is about our relations as human beings. It is about the recognition that our being human precedes everything, including philosophy. For those of us in African philosophy, the principle of openness as a corollary of the decolonial imperative implies that there has to be a commitment to transform philosophy by contributing "not just new concepts, theses, narratives, descriptions, and arguments, but also new conceptions of the philosophical endeavour itself" (DAVIS 2017, 124). The article submits that adopting the principle of openness towards the different traditions of philosophy and also within African philosophy itself has a significant impact on the enterprise. It is important to examine the implications at those two critical levels.

Multiple voices in dialogue

> Philosophers are always prepared to acknowledge, at least in principle, that inquiry is advanced by remaining open to the insights provided by others. But this is a principle to which it is easy to pay lip service while ignoring its more demanding implications. (BONTEKOE 2017, 964)

This observation requires closer attention not simply for what it says, but more importantly, for what it implies about the practice and where this has remained problematic and where it needs to change. As Bontekoe elaborates,

> For to *actually* learn from someone else, it is not enough merely to acknowledge that presumably we *could* learn from someone else, if only we had the time to listen properly. An effort has to be made, in other words, if the principle is to be genuinely acknowledged rather than merely mouthed. (2017, 964)

There can be a number of reasons to explain why philosophers are finding it difficult to put into practice the demand, which is arguably the defining principle of what they pride themselves in - dialogue and openness if we agree to retain Socratic interlocution as the paragon of philosophy. To put this into perspective, the following two realities are salutary. First, and this is crucial, central to the principle of openness is an implicit rejection of rigid impositions on the rest by the dominant tradition. The principle of openness is in accord with the view that philosophical inquiry is an ongoing affair, and so are the methods of pursuing it. Its priority questions are not fixed once and for all. Second, and equally important, there is in existence "a self-perpetuating oligarchy" (Mandt 1986, 266) within the kingdom of philosophy, which needs to be overturned by some sort of democratic reform in the way philosophy is practiced. The paradox reveals itself once these two positions are juxtaposed. The question is how philosophy can become true to itself as the champion of open inquiry in the context of a powerful oligarchy that presides over the enterprise with inflexible orthodoxy. This oligarchy, which has its historical home in the dominant tradition of Western philosophy, has also given birth to an array of apologists and acolytes ready to enforce the same in the so-called periphery. But of course, we should draw consolation from the fact that the future is an arena of open possibilities, and so "no living philosophy worthy of the name [should allow] itself to be limited by what philosophy has been in the past" (BERNASCONI 2000, 1). The process of continual self-renewal within philosophy must continue and reflect the emerging realities, new ideas and perspectives. In examining what the principle of openness implies for philosophy at both the global and the local level, I will take this submission on philosophy as a living enterprise as my point of departure.

The story of civilisation, and indeed that of philosophy, is a troubled one and is what it is today because truth was contrived, deformed, and deployed for imperialistic ambitions and arrogantly proclaimed as the preserve of a particular worldview and segment of humanity. For far too long, truth has remained immured to a particular worldview, civilisation, and form of existence (MUNGWINI 2019a, 92). There can be little argument that it is in the centuries of suppressed truth that most of the problems we confront today as humanity lie. Because of this history, the philosophical enterprise has fallen victim to a particular mode of thinking that has tried to impose and to maintain hierarchy between different traditions of philosophy as a fact of nature. To reverse this historical travesty and thus institute some kind of democratic reform on the philosophical field, steps need to be taken to foster genuine openness in the

manner the enterprise is practised. It suffices to state at this point that part of the reason why the oligarchy exists, prompting the need for democratic reform in the way philosophy is practiced, stems precisely from this colonial history. In order to recapture the spirit of philosophy as open inquiry, dialogue among the different philosophies extant in this world must be fostered. Although the old temptation to focus exclusively on one's own tradition of philosophy may still be strong, time has come to move beyond this and other artificial boundaries that continue to work against genuine cross-fertilisation of ideas among the different traditions of philosophy. It is true that philosophical debate, as Bernasconi (2003, 578) points out, "has often been conducted by refusing to share the title 'philosophy' with one's intellectual opponents." However, and this is important, "the relative flexibility of the conception of philosophy does not have to be used only as a way of narrowing what counts as philosophy. It can equally well serve to expand its boundaries" (2003, 578). Progressive attempts at expanding the boundaries of philosophy beyond what has been prescribed or projected by the dominant but exclusionary narrative in philosophy are ongoing. These should help move the world closer to a new age in which all world philosophies can be celebrated. In his book [World Philosophies], Smart (1999, 1) encapsulates this vision not only in the overall title of his book but also in the wording of his introductory chapter which reads, "The history of the world and our philosophical inheritance." As he rightfully points out, "the plural world of intellectual diversity is always liable to hit back at rigid orthodoxies (and how much the more so in a situation like the present, with its cross-cultural meetings)" (1999, 9). Such encounters should open up philosophy and help put an end to the imposition of methodological fetters which have constrained the enterprise for centuries. Sadly, the unfettered growth and self-expression among the so-called philosophies of the periphery remain constrained due to a the restrictive conceptualisation of the enterprise. And yet, as Outlaw (1992, 73) makes clear,

> When we view philosophical practices historically, sociologically, and comparatively, we are led inescapably to conclude that "philosophical practice is inherently pluralistic," and "[a]ll philosophical ideals are local" to communities of thinkers [citing Mandt 1989, 100]. We mislead ourselves if we require that there be something more than "family resemblances" common to all the instances we recognize as instances of "philosophy," where the common feature is more or less systematic *reflection* on various aspects, in various areas, of experience to the end of facilitating ordered, meaningful existence. There are no transcendental rules *a priori* that are the essential, thus defining, feature of "philosophy."

Philosophers themselves "are situated human beings, and thereby inheritors of (amongst other things) a specific historical, economic, and cultural context" (PLANT 2017, 9). The reality of the philosophical practice itself is that it is marked by history and place. It is perhaps the point that Janz (2009, 2) reinforces when he argues that "philosophy must attend to the conditions in which its questions arise, and that this attention does not diminish philosophy's traditional

(although never completely fulfilled) striving for universals." If this is part of what philosophy should be then it becomes apparent that to gain a better understanding of the world, philosophers must engage the thinking of others beyond the horizon provided by their own culture. The subheading to this section – multiple voices in dialogue – not only attests to what I have just described, but it leads us on a path that affirms interculturalism in philosophy as an inevitable reality and the future of philosophy. As described by Mall (2014, 68), intercultural philosophy "refers to a philosophical orientation or a proto-philosophical stance, which allows and encourages the spirit of philosophy to be realized in different cultural contexts." It describes what he terms "a new orientation in and of philosophy" premised on the position that "no single philosophy can be the philosophy for all of humankind" (2014, 68). As both a philosophical attitude and approach, interculturalism is, therefore, antithetical to any claims to absolutism including parochial universalism.

Interculturalism in philosophy is an attempt to encourage dialogue between the different traditions of philosophy and to facilitate as a direct consequence the cross-fertilisation of ideas and broadening of the philosophical perspective beyond a single tradition. Philosophising implies being in continual dialogue with oneself and with others. It is an ongoing conversation in which no individual can claim to have offered the final word on what could be said and thought on any specific topic. Highlighting the significance of conversations and what he has termed the conversational method in philosophy, Chimakonam (2015, 467) invokes the idea of philosophical space to drive home the point that "the fruits of conversations in different places are not to remain enclosed or enveloped within their places of origin alone", but instead, they should enter the philosophical space, meaning "an intercultural forum in which various philosophical traditions converge to converse among themselves." It is this metaphorical meeting of minds in a philosophical space which renders interculturalism not only indispensable but perhaps one sure way to engage in the collaborative enterprise of expanding the edifice of philosophical knowledge.

Going back to the point by Bontekoe (2017) above, it seems clear that among the more demanding implications of the principle that philosophical inquiry is advanced by remaining open to the insights provided by others is the question of how to render interculturalism integral to the practice of philosophy. It is about changing philosophy or more appropriately, it is about the renewal of philosophy and this is in the face of strong resistance from those who cling to the hegemonic dominance of a single conceptualisation of philosophy. Why is the question of transforming philosophy such an issue? One may ask. The answer as Appiah (1992, 88) points out, lies in the fact that '"philosophy' is the highest-status label of Western humanism. The claim to philosophy is the claim to what is most important, most difficult, most fundamental in the Western tradition." The right to the label "philosophy" and everything it instantiates is thus what is at stake in any attempt to transform philosophy, and it is that right to "philosophy" which for the oligarchy and its acolytes warrants safeguarding. Whoever attempts to transform philosophy is threatening this privileged right to the label supposedly bestowed by the history of civilisation- a contrived history, as we now know. The demand for openness touches on this privilege through its call to change both the

approach and conceptualisation of philosophy in this world. Openness to insights and ideas from other traditions gestures towards a redefinition of the boundaries of philosophy, which has a significant bearing on the outlook of this 'status symbol.' It is therefore apparent that interculturalism threatens a complete overhaul of the status quo if we consider those important ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions alluded to in the introduction. Not only does it promise a redefinition of relations between the centre and the so-called periphery, but it also implies many other changes at the level of individual practitioners as well as institutions in terms of the way philosophy is practiced. For the defenders of orthodoxy, this is not just an adulteration, it is a mark of the 'end' of philosophy. And in a world that has seen the resurgence of right-wing politics and ideologies, one cannot be oblivious to the challenge intercultural poses to the defenders of supremacy even within philosophy, given how politics and knowledge production are intertwined. Anything that seeks to put an end to the privilege can thus be easily regarded as a threat. Openness to other traditions of philosophy, would entail not just changes to the nature of the curriculum itself, that is, the composition of what is to be studied, how it is to be studied, but also composition of those who are to teach philosophy and thus lay claim to the practice and revered symbol of Western humanism.

Adopting interculturalism has therefore very serious implications on philosophy as it stands now because it heralds the beginning of the end of the centuries-old hegemony within the enterprise. This hegemonic relationship that has defined the field of philosophy has impacted other domains of existence. Throughout history, philosophy has served as the grounding logic for all kinds of iniquities. What this means, therefore, is that interculturalism does not only threaten philosophical orthodoxy, but it also undermines other forces outside philosophy whose actions have for years found their justification in philosophy. This shift in arrangements in the republic of letters (philosophy) will impact those privileges which came with the usurpation of the universal right to reason. The success of intercultural philosophy, in the sense described by Mall (2014) above, would perhaps constitute the most decisive assault on the logic that has sustained different forms of exclusion and marginalisation in this world. The point I wish to make is that by adopting interculturalism, the practice of philosophy brings with it a new reality of multiple centres of knowledge, dialogue, and symmetry, which has eluded the enterprise for centuries. With intercultural philosophising comes parity of recognition and with it, the celebration of philosophy as multiple voices in dialogue. There is a place for every culture and its ideas in this multiverse of humanity and indeed, a place on the table for every philosophy in this "multiversum of cultures" (KIMMERLE 1995, 143).

The value of intercultural philosophy can also be revealed even for its doubters if they can respond to the timeless question posed by Bernasconi (1997, 183) (directed at such Western thinkers) which reads: "What would it mean to do [Western] philosophy in the light of African [Asian, Latin American] philosophy?" I have no doubt, and here I agree with Bernasconi, that if thinkers in the dominant tradition were to engage this question honestly and in the true spirit of philosophy, they would not fail to become more open to other traditions of philosophy, rendering intercultural philosophising indispensable to the enterprise. "Philosophy" Bernasconi (2003, 574) argues, "is a vehicle not just for learning

about, but also for learning from, other cultures", and it is also dialectically, "an encounter that can be transforming" (2003, 574). Having considered the implications of the principle of openness at the level of encounters between different traditions of philosophy, I now turn attention to the internalities of Africa in the sense of reflecting on the implications of this principle on African philosophy itself as a growing tradition.

On the different orientations in African philosophy

To recapture the point made in the introduction, we will now analyse what the commitment to openness means for African philosophy itself as a tradition. African philosophy has witnessed remarkable growth in the past five or so decades. Writing a few years before the end of the last millennium, Bernasconi (1997, 183) testified, "Today it is impossible to deny that there are a number of different schools of African philosophy and that, in some of them, not only the standards set by Europe, but also 'Europe' itself, are now very clearly in question." Yes, even those who continue to ignore African philosophy do not do so, because African philosophy is invisible (there is now a lot of high-quality literature readily available), but because they do not want to see it. Today, African philosophy is characterised by the growing number of intellectual discourses, communities and sub-communities. The discipline boasts of numerous scholarly and discursive elaborations which bring to the fore "the historical, political, and cultural complexities- and contradictions" (EZE 1997, 2) which define it as a practice. This complexity and dynamism demand openness in the sense of a cross-fertilisation of insights among its practitioners who, out of historical necessity, must straddle the different areas and facets of the field. The colonial relationship which binds Africa to the West in a special way has also carved the continent into linguistic regions that, for reasons much to do with this history, also call for the cultivation of serious inter-philosophical dialogue within the continent itself (MUNGWINI 2019a, 75). If decolonisation of philosophy is in part a critical-corrective endeavour and an act of self-recovery, then for the African philosopher there has to be a commitment to understanding ourselves better. There has to be renewed intellectual effort to prize open the centuries-old traditions for their varied riches, strengthen the foundations of our philosophy and inspire new thinking that opens other vistas for the enterprise.

In his essay "African philosophy in our time", Wiredu (2004, xix) makes it very clear that substantive issues of philosophy are boundless and straddle all areas of philosophy; they have preoccupied the African mind at all times, "in communal conceptions and individualized cogitations." The need for a judicious exposition of conceptual frameworks that inform philosophical ideas and thinking in Africa is beyond dispute. With recourse to the now well-known example of Mbiti's catastrophically misconceived conception of time, Wiredu (2004, 11) demonstrates how even "the study of African traditional philosophy is apt to precipitate issues of the most direct contemporary pertinence." For example, this controversy, on time, has precipitated culturally specific studies and in-depth research, which has heightened not only philosophical scrutiny but also stimulated crucial inquiries into other key cultural ideas and concepts. Such internal

examinations have become even more urgent given that today, as Wiredu (1996, 138) correctly observes, "it is not uncommon to find highly educated Africans proudly holding forth on, for instance, the glories of African traditional religion in an internalized conceptual idiom of a metropolitan origin which distorts indigenous thought structures out of all recognition." Faced with this predicament, African philosophers have no other option except to sharpen their tools of scrutiny in order, in the words of Okot p'Bitek, "to reflect, reject, [and] recreate" (IMBO 2004, 372) in a manner that reveals what is true of African thought and what isn't. But, to be able to do that, African scholars cannot afford to hover above the concrete cultures for whatever reason, even if it is that dreaded fear of ethnophilosophical contamination- a position that deserves no new elaboration (see MUNGWINI 2019b). Substantive issues for contemporary philosophy in Africa are not limited to the best contributions on contemporary themes, but they also draw into the deeper reaches of our cultures and languages. Since much of what belongs to that era has been distorted, it remains the duty of the contemporary African philosopher "first, to bring out the true character of African traditional philosophy by means of conceptual clarification and reconstruction and, second, to try to find out what is living or fit to be resurrected in the tradition" (WIREDU 2004, 11). Only in this way can we re-establish the epistemic thread between our mutilated past and its present and respond to the call for decolonising knowledge by setting ourselves on a path to intellectual independence.

Theorising the principle of openness and dialogue within the practice of African philosophy has to be understood in the context of the existence of what Wiredu (2004) described as the different dimensions of African philosophy. The question of openness and dialogue becomes important given the multiplicity and plurality that characterises what goes under the rubric African philosophy. In a much simplified but helpful schema for the purposes of analysis, Wiredu (2004) categorized the field of African philosophy into three dimensions, that is, the traditional dimension, the historical dimension and the contemporary dimension. Starting with the last, the contemporary dimension should ideally cover all the philosophical works produced today, but it will be more appropriate to identify this with what has been termed postcolonial African philosophy. But of course, even the name postcolonial African philosophy is, as Eze (1997) points out, problematic. It creates a false impression that we are now clear of the colonial even as the reality of coloniality remains with us, and explains why decolonial theorising is still an imperative in African scholarship. This dimension focuses mainly on the problems and concerns of contemporary Africa as the name suggests. Then there is the second dimension – the historical dimension. This involves a serious and careful study of the history of African philosophy from antiquity on, in order to explore the many intellectual movements and schools that emerged across Africa "before and well into the medieval period of the Christian era" (MASOLO 2004, 50). It is a dimension of study which in the words of Osuagwu (1999, 19) seeks to put behind us, once and for all, "the great controversy surrounding the scientificity and historicity of Black African philosophy." This dimension of African philosophy, focussing as it does on history, provides a record of the African intellectual heritage, which is of immense value to Africa given the history of denigration that the continent has suffered at

the hands of its colonial detractors. For within this history, the contemporary would be able to locate itself and thus contribute a tradition of philosophy that is not simply floating in the air but is rooted in the record of intellectual achievements by our forebears. It is common practice, as Gracia (1992, xiv) points out, that "the vast majority of philosophers use the history of philosophy not only for teaching purposes, but also as a point of departure of their own philosophical reflection." Where an historical account in the manner of, for example, Obenga's exposition entitled, "Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy" is available, it becomes possible to trace even the etymology and history of concepts such as justice to African intellectual heritage, rather than the usual practice of going back to Classical Greece which has helped to reinforce the misplaced opinion almost now commonplace that serious thinking about concepts began with the birth of the Greek language (see GORDON 2019, 19). The "serious and careful study of African philosophy from antiquity through the present era" (OBENGA 2004, 49) which must also include what Diagne (2004) describes as the forgotten tradition of precolonial African philosophy in Arabic, will surely reveal to the African student of philosophy that African philosophy is not only limited to the contemporary, but it has a long history with a much wider scope of its own. Philosophy everywhere is implicated in the story that it tells about its history and origin. Contestation over the history of philosophy, including the story of civilisation is what it is today because of the importance of this history to a people's sense of identity including the pride that comes with belonging to a specific culture and place. For this reason, the story of philosophy was reconstituted to feed a particular narrative and to allow Europe to lay claim to the coveted intellectual productivity whose roots, as we all know today, is traceable to other spaces outside Europe.

Having looked at these two dimensions, it is now time to turn attention to what Wiredu (2004) has termed the traditional dimension in African philosophy. As most would agree, this dimension has been the most contentious compared to the other two, so I shall devote a bit more space in my reflections on this dimension. The traditional dimension is

> multifaceted not only because… it has a communal as well as an individualized component, but also because it has multifarious media of expression. Access to it can be gained through "communal proverbs, maxims, tales, myths, lyrics, poetry, art motifs and the like." Art motifs are in some ways approximations to writing. In some ways, indeed, they may have a vividness of message that a piece of writing may not approximate. In terms of profundity, this is even truer of some of the deliverances of African talking drums, which communicate abstract reflections through riddles and paradoxes in the very midst of music and dance. (WIREDU 2004, 22)

It is not necessary to rehearse much of the controversy that has surrounded this dimension serve to state that, to this day, the polemics are such that any attempt to provide a critical appraisal of this heritage "is apt to get on the nerves of some contemporary African scholars" (WIREDU 1996, 150). It, therefore, does not come as a surprise that there are still much within our traditions that remain unexplored. As Hallen (2002, 11) argues, there is

> the virtual mountain of historical texts, still incompletely catalogued, that have been indistrimately labelled African 'oral literature.'...That cultures which were significantly oral in character, or somehow different in other respects, produced forms of literature which are not conventional in present-day Western culture need not mean that they are lacking in philosophical content or substance. In so many respects, it seems, Africa's cultures have not benefited from the kinds of exhaustive and empathetic scholarship that are being lavished upon other parts of the world.

It is apparent that any effort to mine this resource for its riches would require those with in-depth knowledge of the language and culture. One would be forgiven to expect that African philosophers would be drawn to take advantage of their background knowledge of culture to construct philosophies capable of responding to issues of modern existence, but as Hallen bemoans above, this has not always been the case. The topic of traditional philosophy has been afflicted with the ethnophilosophical 'sin' such that most would rather stay away from it. Perhaps, as Bernasconi (1997) correctly diagnosed, African philosophers may be hestitant about any appeal to the prephilosophical because there were attempts to confine Africans to that realm at one time. To avoid a repeat of this history, distance must therefore be created between ourselves and that realm. "However," and here is the point, "once it is recognized that all philosophies draw on prephilosophical experience, the old dream of a scientific philosophy is *ausgeträumt*, it is exhausted" (BERNASCONI 1997, 191). There is no doubt that these oral resources' multifaceted media of expression can manifest the fecundity of philosophical expression in Africa. But that is only possible once the prejudice against these resources as valid sources of philosophy has been overcome.

The temptation to dismiss these oral sources before any serious attempt to understand them, that is, to place them under our microscopic gaze for hidden insights and potential contribution, points more to a deficit in us in terms of lack of training in the appropriate methodology than it does about the value of the corpus. I would be inclined to believe that as African philosophers, we probably hastily abandoned or failed to appreciate the value of fieldwork in African philosophy particularly for a discipline such as ours that was not only young but whose traditions had been deliberately corrupted and distorted out of recognition. How else are we to recover lost meaning and set the conceptual record straight without getting to the ordinary people who live by these ideas? At this point, I think facets of Oruka's sage philosophy in the sense of repositioning the role of fieldwork to contemporary African philosophy must be re-strengthened. We read today about how experimental philosophy is helping to open new avenues in terms of resolving some of the most intractable problems in metaphysics, such as the question of free will and determinism. This appeal to science to address a starkly metaphysical issue should at least convince us that in this quest for answers, even philosophical fieldwork still has a place in philosophy. Traditional African philosophy remains underexplored largely because we have not seriously taken into consideration the procedures and methodologies that can make such philosophical understanding possible.

Perhaps we can draw an important lesson from what Gracia (1992, 27) describes as "methodological preconditions that the very character of the history of philosophy imposes on its students." If you wish to unravel the meaning of a text, Gracia (1992, 27) argues, you must "listen with an open mind and engage in an honest attempt to understand." When we engage the past, we should never forget that at every point in pre-modern Africa, human beings had to face up to the challenges and forces that threatened survival and they prevailed through the power of their ideas, and so, inherent in some of these oral texts is a record of the intelligence that secured the survival of a people. The *Ifa* corpus analysed so thoroughly and insightfully by Sophie Oluwole (2017) in her book [Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy], serves as a very good example. To any philosopher who knows what they are doing, "these [oral] texts are like bacteria, visible only through a microscope. … In order to see them we must conform to certain procedures" (GRACIA 1992, 31). To unravel the hidden meaning in the oral texts, we must at least conform to the methodological parameters that make that study not only possible but the message in the oral text itself 'visible' to the mind. The principles of proper historiography must guide our explorations into oral texts whose meaning would otherwise remain a mystery, always guided with the understanding that such texts are the creation of human beings who wanted to communicate something. Our task as scholars is not to rash to dismiss any texts simply because we cannot discern their meaning. What is perhaps more worrisome is that not many contemporary African philosophers seem to have the necessary patience to exact on these oral sources, serious philosophical scrutiny in the sense of systematic and relentless prodding. Part of the problem is precisely that a perception has been created that our traditions are instances of a relic that ideally deserves to be buried.

To return to the point with which I started, which is the principle of openness, my point is that those who practice African philosophy should not simply see the value of this principle on the global theatre of ideas, but such openness, like charity itself, must also begin at home. The more demanding implication of this is that African philosophers should remain open about the enterprise in the sense of "assuming responsibility for the ongoing task of negotiating, contesting, and articulating what philosophy is and what it can be" within Africa (MONAHAN 2019, 15). This is in keeping with the broader task of decolonising philosophy, which in essence is an attempt to remove those constrains that prevent us from celebrating the gift of wisdom in its varied expressions. Openness to the insights of others should translate into openness to the parameters and methodologies that make access to the range of philosophical resources and concepts available in Africa possible. In other words, the principle of openness must also entail being able to operate outside the prescribed norms of the discipline, which as we all know has been tailor-made for a different historical context. Openness must mean challenging the prescribed norms in order to improve their efficacy within a context where oral literature holds a historical significance to us that others may not share because of our history. To be able to keep alive the spirit of internal criticism and continuous self-renewal, African philosophy, like philosophy in general, must continue to ask itself the question "what is philosophy?", which is the chief meta-philosophical question that

philosophy has posed of itself for millennia. In that way, African philosophy (through its various dimensions) can create room for itself to remain vigilant and thus force itself to revisit its own practice in a manner that can answer some of the unanswered questions concerning the nature and place of its own intellectual heritage within the growing reality of world philosophies. The ability to develop an inbuilt mechanism of constant introspection and self-renewal cannot be overemphasised. It is one way by which to pursue the decolonisation of philosophy, in a sense, contributing an understanding of philosophy that refuses "to let the avatars of Eurocentric philosophy" dictate what can and should count as philosophy everywhere (MONAHAN 2019, 10).

The modernist temptation to hive off contemporary philosophy from its roots and thus to foreclose dialogue between the different dimensions by refusing to feed contemporary African philosophy with a healthy diet of concepts and ideas originating from within its own traditions is an aberration. Elsewhere, I have argued that the past has a special synergy with the present; even where that may not be apparent, it lives on in the nooks and crannies of the present, and that will not change because a philosopher today decides to impose a boundary between them (MUNGWINI 2011, 4). Openness within African philosophy should also translate into the rejection of hierarchisation and inklings towards an inbuilt hegemony which militate against the construction of a tradition of philosophy characterised by, in the words of the Wiredu (1996, 114), a "dialectic of diverging schools of thought with the excitement of an inevitable variegation of insight" and productivity. Earlier on, reference was made to the problem of an oligarchy, which now boasts a worldwide reach with its array of apologists and acolytes ready to enforce the same in the so-called periphery. The threat posed by these apologists in Africa cannot be appropriately described as self-serving since the orthodoxy it defends originates from elsewhere and forecloses other expressive genres and orientations in the discipline. For as Plant (2017, 5) makes clear, "to appreciate the diversity of philosophical practice, one does not have to trawl through the annals of history." Anybody who has bothered to check "current journals, publishers' catalogues, and conference proceedings" will testify to the abundance of "discussions of topics that seem eccentric to philosophers of different metaphilosophical persuasions" (2017, 5). Openness within African philosophy should translate into the ability to work with and through the various dimensions of African philosophy even as one prioritises a specific set of questions or problematics within the particular sub-community that one identifies with. The other attendant implication of openness in African philosophy should also address the question of multiple voices in the sense of avoiding as much as possible the situation where philosophy in Africa becomes predominantly a male heterosexual domain. If lessons from history are to retain their significance as the greatest teacher, then there are lessons that the history of Western philosophy has provided to African philosophy. Strongly preferred opinions should not translate into overt hostility, silencing, and ostracisation of other thinkers and those who defend a different or even less popular view of philosophy. There should be no place for intellectual slaveholders. Overall, the much bigger point I am making here is one that goes beyond philosophy but to which philosophy is an important contributor:

it is the question of how to work for the advancement of Africa in a manner that liberates imagination and reverses the consequences of exclusion and marginalisation in the production of knowledge in Africa and about Africa (MUNGWINI 2022). To paraphrase the crucial point made by Plantinga (1984, 256) in his advice to fellow Christian philosophers and extrapolating that to our own situation, the African has a perfect right to the pre-philosophical assumptions he/she brings to the table; the fact that these may not be shared by the dominant tradition in philosophy should not be a problem. Through serious engagement across the different dimensions of African philosophy, our own practice should become a microcosm of the larger global aspiration of multiple voices in dialogue.

Conclusion

In this article, the principle of openness has been deployed as an analytic category to grapple with issues of epistemic injustice within the philosophical terrain and how these can be addressed. Exclusionary practices, including even overt hostility towards different orientations and outlooks on the practice, are vices that haunt philosophy not only at the global level but also within the dimensions of African philosophy itself. Only a sustained endeavour to engage the different dimensions of African philosophy can help to build a distinctive tradition of philosophy-distinct not in terms of its techniques and standards of scholarship but by reason of its own priority questions, its history, and problematics. In this way, African philosophy can respond to the fundamental call for the decolonisation of philosophy and knowledge in general.

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