DISPOSITION, LOGIC AND METHOD IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: AN INQUIRY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Jonathan O CHIMAKONAM, csp
Department of Philosophy
University of Pretoria
Email: Jonathan.okeke@up.ac.za
ORCID No: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8913-1434

Abstract

I argue in this essay that a) the disposition of a researcher could influence their method, b) and disposition as a psychological category could present a steep challenge in qualitative research, especially where logic and ethics are not given serious consideration in the formulation and deployment of a method. As a tool that drives research, a method is supposed to provide the parameters for objectivity and accurate examination of reality. This can inspire confidence that the outcome of a given research would be credible. But what are the chances that some of our cherished qualitative methods could lean more towards subjectivism than objectivism? I will examine the basic components of qualitative methods to determine, whether or not, a psychological underbelly exists, which, when not addressed, poses a steep challenge to the credibility of the research outcome. I will use the conversational method, a formulation in African philosophy, to demonstrate how to formulate and deploy a method to avoid the challenge of personal disposition.

Keywords: Method, Disposition, African philosophy, Psychology, Conversational Method, Qualitative research

Introduction

How do we determine our choice of method for any research? Is it a decision about which method objectively does the job better or the one that does it better according to our preference? This is not a trivial concern, although it is largely ignored in the literature. Most scholars who engage in meta-discourses are content to describe the factors that should inform our choice of method for various research projects (see FLEMING & ZEGWAARD 2018; THATTAMPARAMBIL 2020). Few are interested in considering how much influence our mindset or mental character has in such decisions. Decisions concerning our research topics, purpose, questions, environment, participants, data gathering and analysis may be seriously influenced by our 'inherent qualities of mind and character'—our disposition. Unbeknownst to us, these can compel us to bend a chosen method to our whims or deploy a specific method as a tool that can readily yield our preferred outcome over others that may yield more credible results. How do we determine that a research outcome is credible and not simply a researcher's preferred outcome? What are the chances that a researcher's preferred outcome can also be credible?

The above questions signal a problem that exists in research at a fundamental level. This problem proceeds from a researcher's psychological disposition to his research project. Research or inquiries do not conduct themselves. Researchers who are epistemic agents carry out research. These researchers have inherent qualities of mind and character occasioned by their existential circumstances that can influence their research activities. The extent to which a researcher is able to ameliorate such influences determines whether he is a friend or foe of the truth. Here, we assume that the pursuit of truth is the goal of all sciences (FREGE 1956). When used as a metaphor for a research outcome, truth must be objective, at least within specific contexts. But both truthful and false propositions are meaningful. So, perhaps, meaning (besides the truth) is equally a task of all the sciences, or it is not. Perhaps, meaning is the joy or privilege of the inquirer alone, i.e., that sort of thing we often describe as the subjective view. This type of outcome is shaped and pelted by the mindset and predilection of the inquirer. Innocent Asouzu (2007) describes it as subjective truth and contrasts it with objective truth.

However, the above view begs the question of whether truth can be subjective or both objective and subjective. Asouzu argues that subjective truth can be a product of reason based on the availability of data. The danger in this is that it is easy for reason to be corrupted at the subjective level. One can argue, albeit cautiously, that mindset or disposition is a product of the marriage of reason and passion. This is because when we claim to possess a certain mindset or attribute a given mindset to others, there are always traces of both emotion and reason. For the preceding, it would seem futile to dismiss the power and the relevance of psychological disposition in research. It would also seem that while fidelity to objective conditions may lead to the truth, subjective disposition may lead to meaning. This implies that the subjective view is meaning rather than truth. If we accept this argument, it follows that individual researchers make their separate meanings from available data. In this way, it may be argued that though researchers may be pursuing the same truth, but what the available data and even the research outcome mean may vary from person to person, depending on their disposition.

If a research can yield true or false outcomes, and the preceding are both meaningful, then we must also draw a line between meaningful and meaningless outcomes. Which one is more dangerous and should be avoided: false or meaningless outcome? This question commits us to distinguish between truth and meaning, which will be the concern of the first section of this essay. In the second section, I will discuss method and disposition in qualitative research. And in the third section, I will discuss the possibility of overcoming the challenge of personal disposition using the conversational method as a framework.

Truth and Meaning

Conceptualising Truth: Everybody talks about truth, but no one seems to know what truth is. What is it like, and where can we find it? Several centuries ago, at an infamous trial, Pilate asked Jesus, "what is truth?," but even the great teacher of Nazareth could not answer the question. To this day, philosophers of varied ages and persuasions have attempted to answer the question without clear success. Perhaps, we can approach the concept of truth differently. Instead of a 'what' question, how about 'where' and 'how'questions'? Rather than a search for the ontology of truth, how about its geography and sociology? Instead of what truth is made of, why not where ought it to be located and how it functions? Well, this line of questioning may seem to ignore the substance of truth itself in preference for its contextual location and sociological function. If we cannot find answers to the nature of truth, how can we hope to locate it in a context or describe its function? In conversational thinking, we can discuss the contextual and sociological traits of truth and meaning through the perspective of three basic epistemological principles: epistemic relationality, epistemic contextuality and epistemic complementarity (CHIMAKONAM & CHIMAKONAM 2023). The first describes the sociology of truth as relational. The second presents truths as epistemic contexts and stipulates that the relationships between truths occur in a context. And the third prescribes that the highest epistemic goal is the complementarity of seemingly opposing truths.

Let us imagine for a moment that truth is not an extended property to which anyone can point and say, here is truth or here is what it looks like, take it or leave it. How, then, can we locate it in a place? I would like to think of truth as a 'relational value' determined by certain 'conditions' of specific 'contexts' in which 'relationships' occur. Perhaps, I should define what I mean by relationship. One of the core features of African philosophy is the notion of relationality (the property of relationship or communion between realities). From this metaphysical notion, we formulate the principle of epistemic relationality, which states that "truths necessarily interrelate irrespective of their unique contexts, all things considered, because no truth is in isolation from others" (CHIMAKONAM & CHIMAKONAM 2023, 335).[1] By relationship, I mean a creative struggle[2] between entities, some of which could be binary opposites geared towards meaning-making. It is creative because it is progressive and strives to open new vistas. It is a struggle because the process is critical and seeks to bring binaries together not merely to breach contradiction but to negotiate through it and arrive at complementarity.

But relationships occur in contexts. Contextuality, then, is the second metaphysical feature of discourses in African philosophy from which the principle of epistemic contextuality is formulated. The principle states that "truths are unique epistemic contexts and the relationships between them occur within specific contexts because context upsets truths" (CHIMAKONAM & CHIMAKONAM 2023, 335). Truth, whatever it is, has certain conditions. These conditions are fulfilled clearer in contexts but expressed in languages. When

[1] My reflection on the concept of truth here is going to be shaped by the conversational orientation in African philosophy.
[2] Creative struggle is a critical and creative interaction that is at once rigorous and progressive (See CHIMAKONAM 2021, 7).

these conditions are fulfilled in any context, we say a certain proposition/claim is true. But that we codify truth in a language does not imply that truth is a property of a proposition or that it is embedded in a language. I contend that truth has less to do with the language we employ in expressing it and more with the condition of things in specific contexts. If actions in specific contexts do not align with what is reported, then the proposition has no truth.[3] So, besides being a 'relational value' that is created out of relationships between variables, truth is also a 'conditional value' that depends on the fulfilment of certain conditions in specific contexts.

But as an abstract phenomenon, truth is context-sensitive. What is true in one context may be false in another. A proposition that fulfils a given condition of truth in one context may fail entirely in another. This must appear to spell some doom for the idea of the universality of truth. But what is universal can be construed to be objectively the case in all similar contexts anywhere in the universe (see CESAIRE 1956). To find out, we must ascertain what the conditions of truth are. I can readily identify four. They are empirical, normative, cognitive and ontological.

The Empirical Condition of Truth: An example of the empirical condition of truth can be teased out of the proposition, 'we need to drink water to stay alive'. Ordinarily, almost anyone would say that the proposition is true. But is it? If we create a context for the proposition such as 'one who is drowning in the River Niger', would it still be true that such a person needs to drink water to stay alive as they drown in the River Niger? Certainly not. But let us say we create another context where one is dehydrating in the scorching heat of the Sahara Desert, would the proposition be true? Of course, it would be true that such a person needs to drink water to stay alive. What lesson can we learn from the above? It is the thesis[4] that what is true is true not because the proposition corresponds to reality but because of the context in which such a proposition is asserted. Here, the correspondence theory is exposed as inadequate since the proposition

[3] This is the thesis of the correspondence theory of truth.

[4] This is called the 'logical thesis' from which the principle of Context-dependence of Value (CdV) is formulated (See CHIMAKONAM 2019, 119). CdV states that "…credible value judgements are the ones based on contexts…" (CHIMAKONAM 2021, 19)

itself and the proposition about the said reality are not the last arbiter but the context in which each is asserted.

This same context-sensitive criticism applies to the remaining theories of truth. The semantic theory articulated by Alfred Tarski (1944), uses object and metalanguage to locate truth in the semantic structure of a proposition. According to Tarski, in his famous example:

"“Snow is white” is true if, and only if, snow is white" (1944, 343).

Here, the first part (on the left) ‘snow is white’ is the object language and the second part (on the right), ‘snow is white’, which uses the predicate (in the middle), ‘is true’ is the metalanguage. We use metalanguage to talk about the object language. But semantic theory is language structure-dependent, and this can easily be exposed using the parallel analogy below:
‘Obi is belt’ ‘is true’ if, and only if, ‘Obi is belt’.

In the object language, Obi (in the context of Japanese) is a word that translates to ‘belt’ in English. However, in the metalanguage, Obi is an Igbo word that translates to ‘chief’s court’. In the latter, we find a clear instance where Obi does not satisfy the sentential function of (the condition) ‘x is belt’ when uttered in Igbo (a different context). In the example above, what the metalanguage says about the object language is simply not true materially. In short, the metalanguage does not say anything meaningful about the object language.[5] By Tarski’s own standards (1944), the analogous statement above may be formally correct but is materially inadequate.

For the coherence theory, a proposition is true if it coheres with other propositions accepted to be true. For example, if a stranger

[5] Also, ‘snow is white’ is true if, and only if, Schnee ist Weiss. Here, the object language (English) translates to the metalanguage (German). But consider the following: ‘mụ na ya so’ if, and only if, I am with him. The object language is *untranslatable* to the metalanguage. This is because ‘ya’ in Igbo could translate to ‘him’, ‘her’ or even ‘it’, depending on specific context. Thus, until specific contexts are cited, the object language does not satisfy the sentential function represented by the metalanguage. This insight was suggested by one of the reviewers of this paper as another instance that challenges the veracity of the semantic theory.

who is smoking marijuana in Fela's Shrine claims that there is a Chinese village in Calabar, we assess the truth value of this proposition by considering other propositions widely accepted to be true. For example,

1) The indigenes of Calabar are Efiks not Chinese
2) The Chinese are indigenes of Asia and not Africa
3) Fela's Shrine in Lagos is famous for being a safe haven for marijuana smokers
4) Marijuana is a hard drug that is known for altering the state of mind of smokers
5) Strangers are generally not reliable witnesses
6) Since the proposition does not cohere with 1 to 5 accepted to be true, we have grounds to dismiss it as false.

One of the problems with the coherence theory is that it is not based on facts of the objective world but on claims. Also, surprises happen all the time and all that is needed to create some doubt about 6 is one statement that coheres with the stranger's claim out of a list of infinite ones. For example,

7) If someone claims that a small Chinese business community resides somewhere in Calabar, and the statement is widely accepted as true.

Again, we see that the coherence theory fails the context-sensitivity analysis. It is not enough to determine true propositions based on other propositions they cohere with; the context of each must be taken into account. If we ask the specific context in which the stranger made the claim, we will likely arrive at 7 rather than 6. But the coherence theory does not avail the resources of context-sensitivity.

Another theory of truth is called pragmatic. It states that a proposition is true if it is useful to believe. However, we can have a proposition that is useful to someone to believe but not the other. For example, it may be useful for the Igbo of Nigeria to believe that an independent state of Biafra will solve Nigeria's problems, but not for the Hausa or the Yoruba. There are other theories, such as the deflationary theories, which we cannot exhaust here due to space. But they all have one weakness or the other. The one weakness they all have in common is a lack of sensitivity to context.

The Normative Condition of Truth: We may extend the above reasoning to analyse the normative condition as well. Given the proposition, 'it is a duty to repay our debt', one notices a pull to declare this proposition true. But on what conditions? It is easy to appeal to one general ethical principle or the other, but none of such principles can offer anything specific. Let us imagine two specific contexts about Osama Bin Laden. In the first, imagine that Bin Laden gave America a large cache of bombs to keep for him during the anti-Soviet War, only to demand to have them returned during his Jihad against America, would America be duty-bound to return the bombs? Second, how about a scenario where Bin Laden demanded to have the bombs back during the same anti-Soviet War? We can see that the normative condition might be fulfilled in context 2 but not in context 1. Here, we see that even the ethics of duty submits to the contextuality principle. This will also apply to consequentialism and virtue ethics. Context always upsets facts.

The Cognitive and Ontological Conditions of Truth

The same principle of contextuality applies to the third and fourth conditions. For the cognitive condition, consider the proposition, 'we should be proud of what we know'. When the contexts are about knowing how to commit murder and knowing how to develop a life-saving vaccine, it becomes clear the one we should be proud of, all things considered. And for the ontological condition, let us consider the proposition, 'Ariel is a woman'. Ariel is a unisex name. The only way to know the truth of the proposition is to get down to the specific contexts. It is when the specific individual under reference is identified that the truth of the proposition can be determined. We can see then that context upsets facts, and truth can be a relational value determined by a set of conditions that shift from context to context.

Thus, the truth may have objective conditions, but their confirmation can better be done in contexts. The closest we can come to the truth that transcends contextual limitations is through the third epistemic principle: epistemic complementarity. This principle states that "'seemingly opposed truths can have a relationship of complementation rather than mere contradiction'" (CHIMAKONAM

& CHIMAKONAM 2023, 335). In other words, to reach a clearer vision of the world, opposing research outcomes need to be seen as complements rather than just contradictories. Consider our original proposition: a) 'you need to drink water to stay alive'. It may sound like an absolute truth from the perspective of biology, to which its opposite, b) 'you do not need to drink water to stay alive', must be false. But if we contextualise the two propositions, as we did earlier, we may be able to find some false versions of the former and true versions of the latter. Take, for example, the propositions 'a dehydrating man in the desert needs to drink water to stay alive' and 'a drowning man in the River Niger needs to drink water to stay alive'. The first is true and the second is false in their unique contexts, but their values will change as soon as they shift context. It seems that one way to make sense of such value fluctuations is to transcend contradiction and aspire towards complementation. The statement 'a drowning man in the River Niger needs to drink water to stay alive' directly falsifies the seemingly universally true statement 'you need to drink water to stay alive'. This reveals not just the power of context in the determination of truth but the significance of complementation. Both the contexts of a and b propositions above can complement besides being opposites. It is their complementation that enables us to make sense of the contexts of the desert and River Niger. We can call this account, *the context theory of truth*.

Conceptualising Meaning

Turning to meaning, the conversationalists define it as a product of internal creative struggle involving the significist (epistemic agent), signifier (words, symbols, and gestures), signified (ideas), receptor sensus (perceiving senses) and the mind (CHIMAKONAM 2021). When an epistemic agent receives ideas through a relevant sense communicated in a language, he processes it in his mind by associating relevant words that recreate the ideas from which he can approximate the meaning in the mind of the agent who transmitted the ideas. The implication is that one can only transmit ideas not meaning. Meaning is what agents make of each idea in their minds. Communication, understanding, and conversation are possible when parties are able to mutualise their meanings. In other words, when agent A communicates x-message to agent B, A has a given meaning in his mind but which he can only communicate as ideas to B. B's epistemic task is to recreate that meaning in his mind through creative struggle. If he succeeds, then both A and B are in a conversation or meaning-making. If he fails, their meaning-making efforts collapse. They could keep trying or break off their conversation.

However, it must be stressed that no matter how successful the conversation between epistemic agents is, the meanings they create from each other's ideas cannot be exact. They can only hope to reach "Approximate Linguistic Transferance of Idea (ALTI)", (the closest possible transfer of ideas encoded in language) (see CHIMAKONAM 2021, 12). If they achieve this, we say that their meanings are mutualised. Though they may vary in some degree within a safe zone of their orbit of meaning, it would just be enough to sustain their conversation. The farther their meanings go from each other, the more likely it is that each may get out of the orbit in opposite poles. If this happens, we say that crisis or distortion in meaning has occurred.

We can also interpret meaning using the three epistemic principles. In the first (epistemic relationality), we argue that meanings necessarily interrelate for conversation to occur. Conversation is a relational process of creative struggle between agents and is geared towards mutualisation and sustenance of the epistemic relationship. But because each relationship occurs in a specific context, the principle of epistemic contextuality describes the uniqueness of each context of relationship, and the fact that no two meanings can be exactly the same. Although epistemic agents may converse on the same subject and mutualise their meanings, those meanings cannot precisely be the same. Overall, the goal should always be to sustain the conversation. One way to achieve this is through the principle of epistemic complementarity. This principle enables agents to complement each other. Their meaning-making activity aims to negotiate contradiction and achieve complementarity. It is in complementing each other that a richer epistemic resource can be created.

From the foregoing, if truth is objective and meaning is subjective, then research aims at both. Method as a tool that drives research has a dual epistemic value. On the one hand, it can yield more objective truth that is accessible to all if it is weaved to consider empirical conditions thoroughly. On the other hand, it can yield more subjective meaning that reflects the preference of individuals if a researcher's disposition influenced its formulation. As it is difficult to have one and not the other, the expectation should be the sort of balance that does not jeopardise any, and this is a moral task. A research outcome and method should reflect, to a reasonable extent, both the researcher's mindset and the study's empirical conditions. The researcher must be able to see himself in the research, otherwise, it would seem that the research has no soul. This is what the research or its outcome means to each individual. But the influence of this subjective experience must be kept to a minimum so as not to impact the empirical conditions of the study. This is yet another fine demonstration of the value of complementation. In the next section, I will probe the challenge of disposition in the articulation of a research method.

Disposition and Method

The clever Nigerian philosopher Innocent Asouzu states that method can be a disposition. He argues that "[t]he problem of method is the problem of acquisition of truth in a manner that our disposition and outlook is permeated by it. This is ultimately possible through a fundamental disposition of the philosopher to be committed to truth" (ASOUZU 2007, 148). A disposition can be likened to a mindset, a psychological orientation with which an inquirer forays into and organises ideas in the realm of reality that interests him. This mindset could be set at objective truth or subjective meaning. It is a delicate aspect of research, and psychology could be overwhelming.

Also, because methods shape research, the method that a researcher has elected to deploy might be the one that best aligns with their inherent character. It is often said that methods are tools in a researcher's hands that allow him to pursue his task objectively. Maybe, this is correct, but a researcher consciously and preferentially chooses to work with one particular method out of other options. What does that tell us? It could be that the method chosen by a researcher is one that best reflects his mindset, his disposition. One could argue that the choice of a method is by and large informed by the need to get the job done as efficiently as possible. But is efficiency not driven towards a purpose, a goal? Would the process still be regarded as efficient if a research project should stray from its purpose? The answer is clearly no, as so often is the case in experience.

What the above indicates is that it does not matter much what we have convinced ourselves to believe over time about the place of method. If considerable care is not taken in the formulation and deployment of a method, chances are that it could be weaponised to serve an unholy disposition of an immoral researcher. In this way, methods can become intellectual weapons, making it the most deadly of human inventions by far. Empirically, we can single out nuclear and biological weapons as deadly, but if one possesses the raw materials and still does not know 'how' to make an atomic bomb, there is no obvious danger. If it ain't loaded, it ain't lethal!

Alternatively, let us consider slavery, racism, colonialism or even apartheid. These are forms of intellectual weapons mechanised by one race to devalue the other races. Education and social orientations under those programmes contain methods for delivering poisons to the mind. If a man can be turned against himself, to oppose and devalue everything about himself, that becomes the death of the man. If this tactic could be deployed on a large scale across an entire nation or race, call it slavery, colonialism, racism or apartheid, that would be the mother of all crimes, right? Yes, of course, but why is colonialism not regarded as a crime at all? Why are racism, slavery and apartheid not regarded as mother crimes? One possible answer is that their approaches constitute intellectual weapons. Intellectual weapons are usually downplayed or even overlooked mainly because they do not take physical forms. No one disputes or is ignorant of the danger posed by a bomb, gun, or dagger. Intellectual weapons like methods do not take physical forms like bombs, guns and daggers, so it is easy to underrate their power.

Also, those who wield intellectual weapons are usually those who are in a position to flag it. Why stop what gives you power over others and enables you to sustain such power? This is where morality comes in. Without a moral compass, some methods are literally weapons of mass destruction. For example, a moral deployment of a scientific method uses atomic agents to produce helpful technologies and life-saving gadgets, but an immoral deployment would use those to produce bombs. As philosophers, we have a duty to make this distinction. But most of us do not, at least, not as loudly and as clearly as necessary.

The duty of a philosopher to society is sacred in the sense that it constitutes a moral offence for a philosopher to fail in such a duty or to obstruct or disempower a philosopher from performing his duty to society. The philosopher who is silent in the face of evil is no philosopher at all. He is either an impostor or a fool. But the philosopher who aids or defends evil by the tools of his trade is an abomination unto reason. Those who have made it their concern to corrupt, obstruct or disempower the philosopher are the true enemies of humanity.

In our world today, at least since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, capitalist forces have been wedging wars against the conscience of the philosopher. They have consistently chipped away at the moral fibre of society. They have commercialised everything, including morality. It is now perfectly possible to have ethics code without morality. It is also perfectly acceptable to be an ethicist without practising morality. Recently, Keith Burgess-Jackson (2020) demonstrated that a well-known ethicist, Peter Singer does not live by the ethical principles he espouses. Even though, as Burgess-Jackson observes, philosophical values have since shifted such that "…an arguer's hypocrisy (understood as a failure to practice what one preaches) [is now taken to have] no bearing on either the merits of his or her argument or the acceptability of the argument's conclusion" (BURGESS-JACKSON 2020, 397), he considers it apt to challenge this new capitalist vogue. Burgess-Jackson cites many philosophers, including those who have criticised Singer for hypocrisy and labelled him and other philosophers like him who do not practice what they preach as the most dangerous people in the world (See SMILANSKY 1994; TOOLIS 1999; SPECTER 1999; POSNER 2001; OLASKY 2004). His main point is that philosophers owe a moral duty to preach the right values to society, but if they would not live by the same values they prescribe to others, then they are hypocrites of the worst kind. Singer (2007; 2008), who had severally called out America for hypocrisy, is found by Burgess-Jackson to be as bad if not worse than those he labelled hypocrites, especially as it concerns his prescriptions on what people must donate to address poverty. A prescription he does not live by. One can even point to his recent interview published in [The New Yorker], where he openly displayed intellectual racism towards non-Western academics, whom he literally captures as lower in intelligence by suggesting that their works are not at a level he is interested in (SINGER 2021), as another proof of his hypocritical behaviour.

Indeed, hypocrisy thrives when morality is little regarded in a philosophical practice. Many renowned philosophers easily meet the criterion of hypocrisy. Georg Hegel, David Hume and Immanuel Kant are other incontrovertible examples of philosophers whose personalities contradict their theoretic tenets on rights, laws and ethics. These trio were eminently racist (see HEGEL 1975; HUME 1741-42; POPKIN 1977). Kant (1960) is praised for formulating the ethical theory of Categorical Imperatives, which enjoins treating others as one would wish to be treated and never treating humanity in whomever it manifests as means but always as an end itself. Yet, he profoundly demonstrates hardcore racism against Africans and all those he considers less human to his own race.

My point here is that it is not enough to formulate a fine method of research; the formulator must ensure that it does not violate moral principles. It is also not enough to deploy a fine method in research, one must do so morally and with a balanced disposition because method is everything. It is an intellectual compass. If desired, it can lead to a good destination, but it can also lead to a horrid place. Purveyors of knowledge, especially philosophers, must, above all else, strive to follow the right course in their inquiry. The right course is simply a morally crafted method deployed in a moral way or with a balanced disposition.

As intellectual compasses, methods are weaponised in a capitalist world that sees everything as an item in the market stall. Policies are now almost exclusively driven by cost-benefit analysis. In academia, capitalists now design and run many universities as money-making ventures. Some academics are craftly being coerced to lower the standard to increase student intake and funding and produce barely good enough citizens to service the capitalist machine. Rigorous academic training that pushes students to their limits has since been tossed out of the menu in many universities. Critical, creative and imaginative thinking are now served sparingly and in diluted forms in some institutions. Lowering the standards is done through different strategies like student and teaching evaluations based on pass rates.

On the one hand, if a lecturer upheld the highest standard, as should be the case, students who failed or performed poorly, or even those who had to get out of their liberal comfort zones to work hard enough to earn the grades, might punish him during their evaluation. On the other hand, if he fails many students who perform poorly, the hiring and promotion committee might blame and punish him. If he receives one or two poor ratings from a class of unserious and over-pampered generation and go on to publish a critical article against the system, capitalism will immediately fight back. They could cite the stupid student evaluation to demote or fire him. The professor is now effectively at the mercy of the universities' capitalists. They set his salary, determine his curriculum, supervise, cajole, impoverish, and overload him. He is at once, a teacher, a marker, a supervisor, an administrator, conference convener, a marketer, a conference attender and speaker, a researcher, a parent to the spoilt students, etc., on a meagre salary just enough to keep him afloat and needy. This way, he would have no time to address the issues of society. If he had some time, he would not have the audacity, as capitalism has empowered the capitalists who run the universities to fire at will.

In society, the capitalists have taken over and condition everyone's life. Most academics are paid below their labours' worth, and taxed almost half of it. In South Africa, for example, an academic who pays 35 % tax also pays another 15 % through vat as at 2022, making it half of the meagre income. Most academics are given access to mortgages they could hardly pay up in a lifetime. Because some could not afford a car, they are also given mortgages. On the surface, it looks as if the capitalists had given him a fair deal, but in essence, they have enslaved him. The professor knows that if he lost his job due to any careless opinion piece he wrote, he would lose his home, car, and other property acquired through the unscrupulous credit system overnight. The consequences are severe. His children will be driven from the school; his family will be homeless and hungry. He could lose his wife and his children. He would become nothing! He would not be able to get another job in another university because the capitalists have organised the university system to allow them to work together to punish any academic who strays.

Aware of this grim reality, most academics have been cajoled into total submission to the will of the capitalists. As a result, the philosopher, society's supposed conscience, has gradually gone silent. In South Africa, for example, with its terrible past that continues to influence its present, one hardly sees any philosopher who writes about racism, neo-apartheid, and sundry issues that contribute to the collapsing social values in which capitalism is sufficiently guilty and elaborately profits.

Methods can also serve as tools for marginalising those considered outsiders in the knowledge ecology. If someone from the South writes about the epistemic hegemony of the West, reviewers who are sympathetic to the West could write off the essay. They could say, for example, that thorough analysis had not been done, that the writer had been uncharitable in his criticisms; that he was wrong in his interpretation of the literature; that he had not been faithful to his methodology, etc. If a Westerner writes a diatribe against the epistemologies of the South, the same reviewers could approve it. They could say that his analysis was spot on; that he was amply charitable in his criticisms; that his interpretation of the literature was accurate; that he had been true to his methodology, etc. These indicate what could go wrong about a method as disposition. Without a good dose of morality, methods could be deployed as tools for marginalisation, as we have seen with the analytic method above.

Methods could also be formulated without sufficient moral consideration. Most methods in Western scholarship, such as analysis, hermeneutics and phenomenology, are some good examples. The logic that grounds these methods is divisive, and so are the methods themselves. The two-valued logic draws a thick line between the superior and the inferior. It labels the former True and labels the latter False. Thus, the methods are strung up to divide reality into two sides, elevating one and reducing the other. Whenever they are deployed in research, these methods seek to separate the correct from the incorrect, the true from the false, the right from the wrong, the meaningful from the meaningless, etc. At surface value, these dichotomies look credible until we ask, according to whose disposition? The determination of true and false, right and wrong, correct and incorrect, meaningful and meaningless are all based on one person's, one culture's or one group's idiosyncrasies. Methods are moulds; they give concrete shapes to whatever ideas you feed into them. Considered under this lopsided intellectual climate, Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that epistemologies of the South are subjected to the worst kinds of marginalisation using these Western methods (2014, 2018). Clichés such as supernaturalism, superstitions, ethnology, contradictions, etc., are regularly evoked to write off or destroy confidence in those epistemologies. In this way, methods could be weaponised to marginalise or discriminate against the episteme and voices of other peoples or cultures.

Overcoming the Challenge of Disposition: An Example of the Conversational Method

To reduce the chances of methods serving as tools for evil, formulators must not ground their methods on divisive logics. Also, morality has to be considered by those who bid to formulate a method and those who seek to deploy it. When the roles of logic and morality are not properly considered in method formulation and deployment, a weapon of mass destruction could be created or deployed. In reality, there is the objective view and the subjective view. The question of which is superior or inferior continues to be a subject of debate in an intellectual climate that promotes divisive methodologies. However, this question should never have arisen if our methods were based on non-divisive logic and if we had taken morality into account. The objective view has a limited scope, so also is the subjective view, and they both belong to different realms of understanding. It would seem that balance rather than binary opposition is a more appropriate approach. It becomes uncalled for to evoke the dichotomy of superior and inferior in comparing the two. But that is what the two-valued logic with its embedded theses of bivalence and determinism entails.

The thesis of bivalence states that a statement is either true or false while that of determinism states that a statement is either necessary or impossible. These two theses are supported by the laws of non-contradiction and excluded-middle. Formally, both laws can be stated as follows:

Non-contradiction: $\sim(A \wedge \sim A)$
Excluded-middle: $(A \vee \sim A)$

Non-contradiction is reducible to excluded-middle, which makes them equivalent. That nothing can be and not be at the same time is equivalent to either a thing is or it is not. On the one hand, bivalence stems from the latter to bifurcate reality into superior and inferior. On the other hand, determinism ensures that when something is affirmed, its opposite becomes negated, inevitably. There is no middle position.

When this divisive logic grounds methods of research, the lines of bifurcation and lopsidedness become a permanent feature of such methods. Studying reality through the prism of such methods always creates and recreates the center and the periphery. On this account, some logicians from the East and West have faulted bivalence and determinism and attempted to develop a trivalent system (see ŁUKASIEWICZ 1920, 1922, 1930; BIRKHOFF AND VON NEWMANN 1936; BOCHVAR 1939; REICHENBACH 1944; KLEENE 1952; PUTNAM 1957; NICOLESCU 2002; PRIEST 2018). Contributions from Africa have also corroborated those from other places (see HEBGA 1958; MOMOH 2000; ASOUZU 2004, 2013; IJIOMAH 2006, 2014; CHIMAKONAM 2019).

Ezumezu logic is one of the contributions from Africa with universal applicability (ENYIMBA 2022; OFUASIA 2021, 2019, ANI 2019). In it, both bivalence and determinism are transcended for trivalence and complementarism. While the thesis of trivalence states that a statement can be true, false or both true and false, that of complementarism states that a statement can be necessary, impossible or contingent. These two theses rest on the law *Ọnọna-etiti:*

> C (Ax ʍ ~Ax)
> This law deals with ọhakaristic propositions[6] and states that such a proposition is both true and false in the complementary mode of thought.

The above reads that Ax can be true in a specific context and false in another; but it can be both true and false in the complementary mode. The letter C symbolises value complementation (both and) (see ANI 2019; OFUASIA 2019; 2021; ENYIMBA 2022;). My argument is that this is suitable logic that can ground methods without the consequences of bivalence and determinism. Trivalence wipes off the vertical line that separates two realities by imposing difference, and complementarism wipes off the horizontal line that separates two realities by imposing hierarchy. When methods of research are grounded on this type of truth-glut three-valued logic, all forms of moral challenges that arise from marginality will be overcome.

The conversational method overcomes this challenge because it is grounded on a three-valued logic with inherent characters of

[6] These are "propositions that express one thought with two opposed values that can simultaneously be asserted in the complementary mode". They express the future tense. For example, Jacob Zuma will lift two hundred kilograms of weight at 9am on April 19, 2024 in front of the MK party secretariat in Durban. This statement is both true and false as at today April 18, 2024.

trivalence and complementarism (ATTOE 2022). Despite some criticisms (DIANA-ABASI 2017; OGBONNAYA 2022), other scholars have argued that conversational thinking addresses the problem of mutual exclusivity between seemingly opposed variables (ENYIMBA 2022; MANGENA 2022). Using the above principles and law, the conversational method allows for realities to be studied through a logical paradigm that accommodates a via-media approach. Binary opposition is transcended for binary complementarity. The contingent value eliminates marginality. The categories of periphery and centre equally collapse to give way to a balanced disposition and vision of reality in which every entity serves a missing link of reality (ASOUZU 2011).

The moral issues involved in methods formulated from a bivalent logic can be legion. For example, when a line is drawn between races, it leads to racism. For the sexes, it leads to sexism. Similarly, when such a line is drawn between people of different economic and social statuses, it leads to classism, etc. The two-valued logic is polarising and yields discriminatory methods and disposition that residualise otherness. A three-valued system such as the Ezumezu variant exposes this major flaw. Unlike the Aristotelian two-valued logic that is divisive and lacks adequate moral consideration in its formulation, Ezumezu is a logic that defers to morality. The conversational method and, indeed, any other logic that would be grounded on it cannot be discriminatory. The lopsided structure that two-valued logic produces is overcome in the Ezumezu variant of three-valued logic.

Often, discriminatory mindsets or dispositions are the causes of lopsided vision of reality. The psychological tendency to elevate oneself above someone else or others drives polarising initiatives. When it is canonised in a logic and embedded in methods formulated therefrom, silent weapons of mass destruction, discrimination and segregation could be let loose. Methods are needed everywhere and in everything, from policy to laws and economy to education and social formations. They guide and regulate human activities. They are so crucial to organized society that nothing can be ordered or function without methods. The danger is, however, enormous when marginal structures are embedded in methods. The best possible world that can be expected would not be different from the present one.

Asouzu dissects human psychology to unravel the impulse or disposition to dominate and marginalise others for selfish interests. This is the psychological underbelly that shapes the two-valued logic and the methods that it yields. He prescribes the principles of integration, progressive transformation and truth, ibuanyidanda imperative and authenticity criterion as remedy. In integration, he states that each "being serves a missing link of reality". This means that all existents are important in equal measure. His principle of progressive transformation states that all human "actions are geared towards the joy of being". However, as joy does not always result from all of our actions, we must learn to appreciate and allow our limitations to be "the cause of our joy" (ASOUZU 2011, 44-45). This is because it offers an opportunity for mutual realisation of joy of being when we complement each other. The preceding is the provision of the ibuanyidanda imperative. The truth and authenticity criterion cautions against the psychological disposition to elevate a world-immanent missing link to an absolute instance. In the web of reality, each entity has equal value. It becomes discriminatory and morally repugnant to attempt to elevate one and residualise others as the parameters of two-valued logic and its methods dispose researchers to. This is a challenge that has yet to attract serious attention in the literature.

Conclusion

In the above, I have exposed the problem of skewed personal dispositions in the formulation and deployment of methods, especially in qualitative disciplines like philosophy. I argued that the conversational method grounded on a truth-glut trivalent logic is an example of a method that overcomes the challenge. A critic might claim that the inherent divisive trait in two-valued logic can be justified. He could argue that bivalence, determinism and excluded-middle yield clarity in reasoning and certainty in knowledge. But both claims would fail because clarity has remained a luxury and certainty elusive in our epistemic edifice. Besides, neither clarity nor certainty can compensate for a chunk of reality excluded by the axe of two-valued logic. We do not have infinite points between two seemingly opposed variables. There are always points of intersection, and complementarity could trump contradiction some of the time. As a result, the cost that bivalence imposes is too high for humanity. I have argued that a truth-glut trivalent logic is better-positioned to yield methods that can overcome the challenge of disposition that informs divisive and lopsided ideologies.

Declarations

*The author declares no conflict of interest or ethical issues for this work.

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