



African Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Fractured Epistemologies

Introductory

We are pleased to present to the readers of *Synthesis philosophica* this Special Issue, with the theme “African Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Fractured Epistemologies”, featuring a discourse in the philosophy of multiculturalism. Philosophy as a rational activity had at some point in the history of discourse been seen as exclusively Western, guided by a certain logic of thought and order of reality, while discrediting any other ‘forms of life’, ‘conceptual schemes’, ‘language games’ or ‘paradigms’ that do not align with the said logic of thought or order of reality. This perhaps explains the position of some very reputed Western philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel in the claim that “philosophy is not to be found in the whole Orient”.¹ Such canons of representation effectively ruled out of court as non-philosophical any non-Western thought system, called for the adoption of Western mode of thinking to modify non-Western patterns of thought or an outright abandonment of indigenous philosophies (epistemologies, ethics, ontologies, logic and the like), and thereby eventually fracturing the systems of knowledge production and knowledge transfer in non-Western cultures. And so, as Bryan W. Van Norden asks, “how else can we explain the fact that the rich philosophical traditions of China, India and Africa and the indigenous peoples of the Americas are completely ignored by almost all philosophy departments in both Europe and the English speaking world”?² It is a phenomenon he then describes as “narrow-minded, unimaginative and even xenophobic”.³

Non-Western thought systems had accepted these conceptualisations as ‘the’ theory of reality, knowledge, truth, morality, etc., and employed the same in cognition and relationships. Today, this ‘veil’ of Western logic, perception and ontology has fallen, and the inadequacies and unreliability of Western linear logic, when employed in non-Western conditions, have been uncovered. The very platform upon which the unconcealment of the inadequacies of Western thought rests is the birthing of and continuous thriving of African philosophy, not only as a professional discipline or mere orality of ethnic-narrative but more importantly as a pragmatic instrument for engaging a challenge of development in Africa. By way of extension, the essential task of African philosophy as an emergent and continually unfolding discipline in African and non-

¹ Bryan W. Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*, Columbia University Press, New York 2017, p. 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

African spaces is the reconstruction (“healing”) of the fractured indigenous African epistemologies. Behind this important task is the conviction among scholars of African philosophy, for good reasons, that the modes of knowing and knowledge production in various indigenous African thought systems have been violated, misrepresented and dislocated. This front-burner-task in African philosophy, which has been ruptured, calls for, among other things, identifying, and reconstructing fractured epistemologies in African spaces. The task has, among others, the following two objectives: (i) revealing the substance or content of existing ethnophilosophy or indigenous thought systems of African cultures; and (ii) an analytical-critical activity subjecting the thought systems to the rigour of relevance to human experience. These objectives must be tackled to adequately do African philosophy.

Thus, the discourse in this Special Issue attempts to examine, among others, the questions: What constitute(s) the fractures in indigenous knowledge systems for African peoples? What is the relevance of understanding oral tradition and epistemic communalism to the fractured indigenous African thoughts? How has the tradition of tacit knowledge in indigenous African cultures been betrayed by the Western positivist tradition? What really is White supremacy and what responsibility does the West have in undoing the fracturing of non-Western philosophies? What is the African experience of the West and what has become the heritage of this experience? How have specific aspects of African philosophical thoughts such as the feminist moral epistemology of care, developmental philosophy, healthcare delivery systems, the witchcraft phenomenon, personhood, essence, and cultural practices been fractured, and how can such fracturings be healed? What is the question of method in African epistemology? The papers in this journal issue take up these questions and provide rigorous and interesting analysis.

To be sure, this journal issue in no way assumes to provide an exhaustive discussion of the issues involved in attempts to heal the fractures generated by Western encounters. Yet it does provide very interesting insights that would ignite further discussions. We hope that readers of this issue will find the volume useful in understanding and navigating the terrain of contemporary African philosophy. We wish to thank the editorial body of the journal of the Croatian Philosophical Society for the opportunity provided to present these perspectives. We also appreciate the efforts of the contributors in developing their essays and making corrections where necessary.

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