

# Struggles for Self-liberation in African Philosophy

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## Abstract

Since its inception as an academic discipline, African philosophy has positioned itself at the centre of the struggle for justice and self-determination, and by that jettisoning—and rightly so—the otherwise sterile pursuit of the abstract. There is an inherent emancipatory urge that is, therefore, historical and that has conferred to African philosophy its identity as a uniquely context-oriented tradition. Even as it seeks to satisfy the quest for knowledge, African philosophy proceeds on the realisation that philosophy cannot hide behind the abstract quest for knowledge at the expense of its practical and ethical commitments. This paper analyses these key issues within the ongoing struggle for liberation in African philosophy. At the same time, attention is also drawn to a problem that potentially threatens this realisation. Unless we choose to ignore history, we should never forget that philosophy, as a practice, has a history of lending itself easily to exclusionary and repressive tendencies—even as the expectation is that it should be the paragon of intellectual freedom. To recognise this fact is an important step in the struggle for intellectual liberation in African philosophy.

**Keywords:** self-liberation; self-determination; injustice; intellectual freedom; struggles in African philosophy

## Introduction

... we feel that philosophy can be, and on more than one historic occasion has had to be, the messenger of the dawn, the beginning of historic change through a radical awareness of existence projected toward the future. (Bondy 1986, 242)

This statement of conviction captures what is undoubtedly shared by a number of philosophers from the so-called periphery, including in Africa. It brings to the fore the belief in the inherent potential of philosophy as the light that can shine on and guide the struggle in Africa. This conviction is by no means unfounded, given that philosophy played a significant role in the politics of imperialism, and so it is only natural to believe



Phronimon

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon>

Volume 21 | 2020 | #7509 | 12 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/7509>

ISSN 2413-3086 (Online)

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that its potential can equally be harnessed in the struggle against injustice.<sup>1</sup> Ganeri (2016, 168) is correct that “philosophy has been widely hailed, in many historical epochs and many geographical locations, [as] a medicine for the human spirit.” It can indeed serve as a cure, when one of the diseases is that of mental colonisation; a particular form of servitude both existential and intellectual that colonialism sought to install as the defining marker of what it means to be African. The struggle for intellectual liberation is a critical component of the contemporary practice of philosophy in Africa; a struggle that is also in no way unique to philosophy, for it expresses itself in different forms and at many levels across the academy. Credit must go to Africa’s own philosopher kings<sup>2</sup> who, from the very onset, positioned African philosophy as not just another meta-philosophical endeavour but as a venture conditioned by explicit commitments to the pursuit of African liberation. In this way, philosophy could occupy the role of messenger pronouncing on the need for imminent change in the lives of its peoples. This it would be able to achieve through a systematic exposition of the social, political, economic, and intellectual conditions on the continent.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first two speak to the emancipatory quest and the demands history places on African philosophy as a practice, including what it means to philosophise in an unjust place. This is an opportunity to look at philosophy from within and to analyse the meaning and significance of this emancipatory urge to the practice. In the third and final section, effort is directed at potential fetters that threaten the struggle towards intellectual self-liberation; that is, the threat of intellectual slave holders. Even as we trace the struggle credentials of African philosophy, we should never forget that philosophy as a practice has a history of lending itself easily to exclusionary and repressive tendencies, even as the expectation is that it should be the paragon of intellectual freedom. It is in dealing with this malady that the struggle for intellectual liberation in African philosophy can be successfully realised.

## Emancipatory Quest

A short return to history would reveal that most revolutions are driven by the conviction that the life we are living is not what it should be and to live a true life, change is

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- 1 To bring this point home, it is crucial to remind ourselves of the belief Nkrumah had in the revolutionary potential of philosophy when he asserted, “social revolution must therefore have, standing firmly behind it, an intellectual revolution, a revolution in which our thinking and philosophy are directed towards the redemption of our society” (Nkrumah 1964, 78). In this way, Nkrumah shared similar insights on the role of philosophy in society to those expressed above.
  - 2 This is a term used by Wiredu (1996, 145) to refer to “the first wave of rulers in post-independence Africa ... who had led successful anti-colonial struggles which were as much cultural as they were political. [Among these leaders are] Nkrumah of Ghana, Senghor of Senegal, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Nyerere of Tanzania, and Kaunda of Zambia [who put forward] blueprints of politics and development based on general conceptions of community, polity, and the general good ... some like Nkrumah and Senghor had technical training in philosophy. But others, such as Kaunda, had only their enlightened intuitions to rely on. ... Nevertheless, in every case it was historical circumstance that made them philosopher-kings.”

therefore desirable. As a concept describing a historical process, the idea of revolution presupposes the existence of an undesirable condition and the promise of a better future. There is, therefore, contained within the idea of revolution a promised ideal in terms of the desirability of the condition that it hopes to bring about. This sense of revolution, as marking a new beginning, invests the idea with a certain messianic outlook; the promise of salvation. Accordingly, two paths are possible: one, the establishment of something novel; and two, the restoration of a desired lost order. But the two need not be mutually exclusive—for it is possible to retrieve in order to renovate. That way, the sense of identity, and restoration of the epistemic thread connecting the past and the present—so necessary for moving forward—is made possible. It is in this latter understanding that one can make sense of the story of African philosophy as a practice. Although revolutions may fail to bring about the intended change and therefore result in more misery and suffering [deserving of the appellation “failed revolutions”], the point I wish to underscore is that the inherent promise—that of a better future—is fundamental and it is the major driver behind most revolutions. It is this re-humanising ideal in revolutions in the sense of “reclaiming our lives” which also defines African philosophy—conferring on African philosophy its credentials as a philosophy of liberation. It is not a point of dispute that Western philosophy provided the crucial ideological and theoretical scaffolding needed for the projects of imperialism and colonialism in Africa resulting in the political, economic, and intellectual subordination of the continent. For that reason, African philosophy had (out of necessity) to emerge and shape itself both in response to this challenge; and also out of the need to map its own territory and lay down its credentials.

The struggle for intellectual liberation in Africa is central to the broader emancipatory project that drives African philosophy as an enterprise. Philosophy, as the discipline quintessential to the exercise of freedom of thought and reflection, is consubstantial with liberation. Even as it seeks to satisfy the quest for knowledge, African philosophy proceeds from the historical reality where philosophy cannot hide behind the abstract quest for knowledge, at the expense of its practical commitments to truth and justice. Perhaps it should not, therefore, come as a surprise that more and more people in our universities and across society are awakening to the need to ground themselves in African philosophical foundations and, in particular, in the conceptual weapons at its disposal which invariably provide them with more ammunition in dealing with their own discipline-specific issues. Not long ago the intellectual landscape in South Africa witnessed widespread discontent directed at the enduring legacies of colonialism on the epistemic field, which came to be epitomised in the “Rhodes must fall” movement. This decolonising endeavour, and of course grounded on a particular philosophical mode of thought and action, can again trace its roots to the idea planted by Africa’s own philosopher kings who saw in philosophy the seeds of the African revolution. Not only has this intellectual quest preoccupied the minds of practising academic philosophers, but it has also inspired and has been adopted by various activists and scholars who have come to appreciate, and rightly so, that the problem in Africa is fundamentally a philosophical one—it is ontological, epistemological, and ethical in nature. In

philosophical terms, the problems bedeviling the continent have their basis in theories of being (ontology), questions over knowledge (epistemology), and the principles of justice, including what ought to define our relations as human beings (ethics). As I argued elsewhere, the problem of epistemic injustice that we face today is not a product of nature, for which we must seek to gain a better understanding of the objective laws that govern its operations, but a consequence of the arrogance of men who wanted to elevate themselves to the level of gods.<sup>3</sup> It is this problem that the philosophers have sought to examine at the level of ideas and theory with the hope that these ideas could be put into practice through the articulation and pursuit of a social vision. To articulate a social vision capable of addressing the political and economic challenges of the present is the duty of African intellectuals; and it begins at the level of understanding who we are—and that is the basis for liberation and self-determination.

The quest for intellectual liberation and self-determination places a particular imperative on African universities. Universities are expected to lead the way in the construction of autonomous “spaces of theoretical production.” They are to become themselves “self-reliant” centres of knowledge production that enable Africans not only to raise their own questions but also to answer questions raised by their own societies. The first step in this direction, as Hountondji (2009, 9) argues, would probably be to formulate original “problematics, original sets of problems that are grounded in a solid appropriation of international intellectual legacy and deeply rooted in the African experience.” Even as we draw from the reservoir of available global intellectual resources and theories, the aim should be to build a philosophical tradition in Africa not only capable of sustaining itself, but also of providing the theoretical resources for Africa-centred take-off in other domains of knowledge.

#### Philosophising in an Unjust Place<sup>4</sup>

The question regarding the practice of philosophy and how to leverage on its promise in an environment marked by all kinds of iniquities is one that perhaps most philosophers have had to confront at some point in their career. The issue is not just about doing justice to philosophy, but it is also about whether the practice of philosophy itself is invested with a certain level of moral expectation by virtue of the place within and out of which the activity of philosophising is undertaken. The practice of philosophy in Africa requires that we take a closer look at Africa’s present condition and “reflect on the responsibilities at the level of ideas and thinking which this situation imposes on the contemporary discourse of African philosophy” (Serequeberhan 2015, 3). As if to elaborate on this point, Cloete (2019, 91) makes the following important submission:

In the context of post-colonial Africa, an authentic philosophy of liberation presupposes a historical sense of justice that speaks to the possibility of political and economic

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3 See Mungwini (2019, 70).

4 This subheading is inspired by the subheading in an essay by Oguejiofor (2019, 113).

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freedom. This historical sense of justice has its roots in a sense of moral violation that has been preserved and collectively sustained in the historical memory of the African victims of colonial conquest and European hegemony.

If indeed every place has its own story, then we should perhaps follow this up by returning to the significance of the question proposed by Janz (2009, 7): “What is it to do philosophy in this [African] place?” However varied the kind of responses that philosophers may offer to this question, the need to pay particular attention to “the site on which the fundamental tensions of life and thought are played out” remains critical. In other words, subsumed in the above question is the attention it draws to what has been described as “context-oriented modes of philosophising.” There is, of course, some relationship between the place out of which the activity of philosophical reflection takes place and the product itself. In other words, history or culture imposes certain types of problems on philosophy, which in turn defines the philosophical practice. In this vein, the question of what it means to philosophise in an unjust place becomes important given that, as Serequeberhan (1994, 16) correctly states, “the proper task of philosophy in Africa is that of systematically elaborating a radical discourse of the contemporary African situation.” There is consensus that African philosophy is “the bearer of a mission”<sup>5</sup> and part of that mission is to redeem Africa from a host of iniquities that continue to affect the continent. For that reason, philosophy in Africa cannot afford to be the pursuit of topic-neutral abstractions, with no bearing on the humanity or well-being of the peoples. We can indeed draw inspiration from the observation by Outlaw (1992, 71) that “African philosophers have generally been much more successful in advancing the enterprise of philosophy, theoretically and practically, as a venture conditioned by explicit commitments and linkages to the histories and historical situations and to the interests of African peoples”; and on that basis seek further ways to ensure that this context-oriented tradition of philosophy is intensified, given the ever-growing need for intellectual solutions to our problems. Yes, at the universal level we can say that philosophy addresses what in effect are universal human concerns, but the particularity of each of the ways these problems are experienced across the world cannot be downplayed. And so it follows that behind the activity of philosophising in an African place is an attempt to make sense of the African situation. Of course, the situation in Africa is not monolithic; the narratives are shaped by many factors including the local histories, priorities, and setbacks; as well as ideologies that inform the different thinkers and protagonists on the continent. Nevertheless, in spite of these local variations, the narrative on the continent revolves around a shared history of tribulations—from slavery, colonialism, underdevelopment and all that goes with it, including the spectre of political dictatorships, disease, poverty, and wars that continue to wreak havoc on the continent. It is within this broad narrative of challenges, both historical and otherwise, that our philosophising must take root.

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5 This phrase is from Rettova (2016, 127).

Often times in moral admonitions we are reminded that “the truth shall set you free”; meaning that in stating the truth the burden of guilt will be lifted. Here, truth serves as a means to an end; it serves the goal of personal expiation over and against an overbearing sense of guilt that may even prove fatal. When philosophy considers itself as the quest for truth, it places a particular moral responsibility on its practitioners. As seekers of truth, philosophers do not so much aim for personal expiation but rather through this pursuit they seek to establish the truth and, where possible, liberate the truth from being held hostage and being the prisoner of ideological and political interests. The history of civilisation, and indeed that of philosophy, is a troubled one and it is what it is today because of how 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 been immured to a particular worldview, form of existence and civilisation. There can be little argument that it is in the centuries of suppressed truth that most of the problems we confront today, lie. Philosophy cannot, therefore, dither nor waver when it comes to the pursuit of truth. It is philosophy that should, without excuse, seek “to enthrone, once and for all, the desirable goal of truth” (Soyinka 1999, 12) for the benefit of humanity. But to be able to do so there is a need to liberate philosophy from being an instrument of domination.

In South Africa, one of the momentous occasions since its independence is undoubtedly the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As we reflect on the discipline of philosophy in Africa and indeed on the circumstances surrounding its practice, it might be important once again to remind ourselves of the need to ground our practice in history. If philosophers are supposed to take the context within which they engage seriously, then probably we should have drawn significant lessons from some of the ideas in that essay by Vice (2010), “How do I live in this Strange Place?” which of course, for reasons both philosophical and otherwise, elicited so much reaction.<sup>6</sup> In that essay, she raises the fundamental issue of self-reflection and introspection in terms of how to live in a place “saturated by histories of oppression or privilege.” Had that awareness been extrapolated to the teaching and practice of philosophy, much could have been achieved in terms not only of connecting thought to practice but more importantly in terms of “taking ethical questions seriously and framing them as the primary focus of intellectual investigation” (Ramose 2015, 557). In other words, the seekers of truth, that is, the philosophers themselves in South Africa, took too long to see the value of truth and its liberating potential where it mattered most—in their own discipline. This resulted in problems to do mostly with race and lack of transformation that almost paralysed the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa itself, and from which it is yet to fully recover. Of course, questions have been raised concerning the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in terms of its efficacy. There are many who share Soyinka’s position that first, if history is to be taken seriously, its name should have been the “Truth,

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6 A special issue of the *South African Journal of Philosophy* (2011) was even dedicated to an examination of the essay and the position it had proffered.

Reparation, and Reconciliation Commission” and second, that even in its aftermath not much has changed, “the violators [continue] to pursue a privileged existence secure in the spoils of a sordid history” (Soyinka 1999, 24). The point here is not to provide an analysis of its successes and failures, but to draw from its overriding quest to build a better society on the basis of truth. There is a distinct historical relationship between African philosophy and the pursuit of truth. Since its inception, African philosophy has had to fight for truth. First, in terms of demonstrating and on that basis refuting the dominant narrative propagated by the West regarding even the ontological status of the African as a person with reason. Of course, every other falsehood directly or indirectly sought to provide further justification to this ontological doubt. Second, and equally important and connected to the first, African philosophy continues to pursue truth at the epistemic level. In this pursuit of truth, philosophy in Africa cannot afford to divorce itself from history.

There is indeed something seriously wrong if philosophy, under the guise of the pursuit of rigour and academic excellence, begins to insulate itself from the realities that constitute its surroundings and when it reduces itself to a cult understood and appreciated only by those inside. When Solomon (2001, 29) castigates some version of philosophy for its preoccupation with “philosophical games based on a dubious notion of ‘logical possibility’ and the continuing insistence on necessary and sufficient conditions, giving rise inevitably to the counter example contest,” his criticism ought to be taken seriously if we are to keep philosophy grounded in the needs of society. The idea here is that there has to be a point of convergence between the activity that philosophers pride themselves in and the concerns of the society they find themselves in. The real problem is that by preoccupying itself with such philosophical games, philosophy divorces itself from the real world and the real concerns of the people who inhabit the environment in which it takes place, instead creating for itself an ideal world of possibilities and “what ifs.” Given its historical context and its mandate to illuminate the minds of many, African philosophy cannot afford to reduce itself to such games and neither can it derive much benefit from these fanciful but less productive games. Other philosophical traditions which enjoy a long history of productivity, and which do not share the acute problems that Africa faces, may afford that kind of luxury and maybe in future Africa could join in, but at this juncture there is a lot of intellectual work to be done towards changing the plight of its peoples. The diagnosis, elaboration, and the search for lasting solutions to its problems take priority giving African philosophy its role in carrying the emancipatory project forward. It is this dimension of African philosophising which, deriving its impetus and direction from the liberation struggles of yesteryear, is manifesting itself in recent debates concerning the decolonisation of knowledge. It is again this mode of philosophising which the public stands ready to embrace because of its significance to their own lives. Philosophy in Africa cannot be divorced from the politics of the continent and ultimately from the questions of ethics because, fundamentally, every understanding that philosophy seeks, even that of the universe, is ultimately concerned with the betterment of human existence. If it is indeed correct that the historical-political conditions to a larger degree dictate the philosophical

*problématique* in Africa, this fact exposes “the poverty of speculative African philosophy” which, in the words of Yai (1977, 18), “eliminates politics from philosophy” by reducing philosophy to an abstract practice that floats above society. To grasp the nature, meaning, and practice of philosophy in Africa is to understand the reality of injustice, both historical and contemporary, within which it takes place. African philosophy is a philosophy of action; seeking among other things to fight for justice and to restore dignity to the indigenous peoples of the continent.

## The Threat of Intellectual Slave Holders

As a way of pointing to some of the fetters that threaten our progress, let me take this opportunity to examine a development that I believe poses a serious threat; one that may scuttle some of the efforts at achieving intellectual liberation in Africa. This may not be a new problem, but it is indeed manifesting itself in the intellectual circles of philosophy and it does pose a challenge to the health and flourishing of a discipline that prides itself as the paragon of intellectual freedom. When Soyinka (1999) writes of what he calls a “new breed of slave-holders” in Africa, referring to the array of dictators who continue to rule post-independence Africa and to hold their own people in bondage denying them humanity, his analysis resonated with what I saw in the field of scholarship—and in our case philosophy. According to Soyinka:

The crimes that the African continent commits against her kind are of a dimension and, unfortunately, of a nature that appears to constantly provoke memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on that continent by others. There are moments when it almost appears as if there is a diabolical continuity (and inevitability?) to it all—that the conduct of latter-day (internal) slaverunners is merely the stubborn precipitate of a yet unexpiated past. (Soyinka 1999, 20 [the parenthesis are original]).

However, perhaps this curse is not only unique to the politics of the continent, but it also extends to other domains including the intellectual field. Subsumed under what Soyinka calls “memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on the continent by others,” I would also include intellectual subordination and suppression of alternative voices. When the tag of “new slave holders” is used on Africa’s brood of rogue politicians and dictators, it seems a fitting label; but when this is extended to those who are supposed to be the liberators of the mind, it does call for serious reflection. The history of philosophy as a practice, the acrimony caused by the pronouncements of some of its lead figures, and the overall exclusionary narrative it has attempted to endorse, are enough grounds to suspect that philosophy can be a practice that lends itself easily to oppressive tendencies, even where the expectation is that it should be the paragon of freedom. Here I am not speaking of the historical issue of the intellectual domination of the North over the South as evinced in the geographical metaphor of the centre and periphery so familiar in the discourse of philosophy. Neither am I talking about that historical conspiracy to equate the provenance of knowledge with a particular geographical place and segment of humanity. Nor am I talking about another new, and of course, fashionable but equally worrisome development where a new breed of theorists have in recent years washed on



our intellectual shores here in the South, with seemingly new theories and ideas that we should all embrace with immediate effect even as forced conscripts. Rather, I am speaking of an evolving situation within the South, and in particular within the contemporary practice of African philosophy itself.

From one perspective, it might sound like an oxymoron to speak of intellectual slave holders within the context of a discipline that has sought to distinguish and thus define itself as inherently liberatory in the sense of philosophy as an embodiment of the free spirit of inquiry and exercise of the faculty of reason par excellence. But contrary to expectation, there is a form of intellectual malady pervading the discipline, an insidious form of mental servitude exerted on the many by a few who are among the elite and working with a cohort of willing enforcers under the guise of defending philosophy and its objectivity—practising it as religiously as it has been bequeathed to us. These slave masters of today—in the context of philosophy—have sought to subordinate and even suppress the thinking of those whose views are different and seen as radical and unsettling to the status quo, if those views happen to go against those who, at this point in our history, enjoy seemingly unparalleled canonical status. I raise this point not so much as a call to identify this new breed of slave masters, but simply as an invitation to reflect on the goings on particularly in the field and practice of African philosophy. When the editorial team of the journal *Filosofia Theoretica* in its wisdom made the decision to include a section in their future issues, titled “African Philosophy Controversies”<sup>7</sup> my guess is that they may have seen how particular thinkers and waves of philosophical expression were being held hostage and refused expression under the guise of guarding philosophical excellence and professionalism. In light of this, one cannot help but wonder: Is it merely accidental or is it a question of cowardice that some of the best essays ever penned by individual thinkers are those that have been published posthumously? In spite of the apparent hesitancy to defend their thoughts, there is genuine reason to believe that those works represent their internal thinking and truths, which they knew would find no outlet or would potentially cause irreparable damage to

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7 I am here referring to an announcement posted on the philosophy platform NAIJAPhil (Tuesday 8 January 2019) by the Conversational School of Philosophy, publishers of *Filosofia Theoretica*, announcing its decision among others to include a section on “African Philosophy Controversies.” It read: “Finally, and this is important to the development of African philosophy as a discipline, we have decided to introduce another section to the journal. Prior to now, the journal had three sections namely; Research Article, Conversational Piece and Book Review. The fourth section we are introducing is called ‘African Philosophy Controversies.’ We believe that controversies help generate new systems and drive progress in a field. But because standard reviews will generally reject controversial articles, controversies only arise in different fields by accident. *Filosofia Theoretica* will henceforth publish controversial pieces in African philosophy under this new section. ... Contributors should first submit a ... proposal for the editorial board to determine whether it qualifies as a controversial issue in the field. Note, all contributions in this section MUST defend/put forward a thesis either on an issue that already exists or on a new one entirely.” What I wish to emphasise is the spirit behind the idea, that is, the very thinking that inspired the decision—to allow space to the ideas of those whose views are likely to suffer the fate of being denied audience by traditional reviews because they probably go against the grain.

their own standing, particularly within the circles and in the eyes of the intellectual establishment that enjoy canonical status. To be intellectually correct, they had to keep their true thoughts to themselves for fear of upsetting the dominant breed of intellectual masters. It is important to ask ourselves that if “to be truthful is to let your speech reflect your thoughts” (Wiredu 1996, 106), in what way and to what extent has this been rendered impossible? I have no doubt that there are many thinkers, young and old, today in African philosophy who are caused to hold back from expressing the truths of their minds in order to remain philosophically correct. However, it should never be forgotten that what ought to distinguish African philosophy and philosophy in general for that matter, is philosophy’s “openness to its own incompleteness” and the pursuit of dialogue not so much as a tool for consensus building, but dialogue as “productive friction.”<sup>8</sup> The discourse of African philosophy and its demarcation is not something already given, nor are its boundaries cast to finality. Its contours must continue to be negotiated and renegotiated as a living philosophy and that includes its methods, articulation, and exposition. African philosophy must be an embodiment of intellectual virtues, including the freedom to imagine and to express; it must truly reflect the different modes of thinking by those who never fathomed that one day they could pronounce on their own reality in their own way.

As I move to conclude this discussion, allow me to draw from the essay by Mandt, “The Inevitability of Pluralism: Philosophical Practice and Philosophical Excellence,” a title that is as informative as it is cause for serious reflection and soul-searching. According to Mandt (1989, 100):

Philosophers have failed to produce authoritative standards for judging philosophical work not because philosophy lacks standards, but rather because philosophical practice is inherently pluralistic. ... The history of philosophy is a history of disagreements, not agreements. ... Philosophy is a craft; the best work is not always a model for imitation, but it is always worthy of appreciative regard as a thing of beauty, and even, in its fashion, of truth.

That the best work is not always a model for imitation, is not only significant with reference to philosophers working within the same discipline although belonging to different sub-communities, but this point assumes added significance when the philosophers in question belong to entirely different traditions and worlds. When I spoke of the new slave holders, it is precisely with respect to the last statement in this quotation that the point I wish to make is made clear. I wish to emphasise how the significance of this distinction and the point it makes are often overlooked and the best piece of work is conflated with what everyone should emulate as the only true direction to go in African philosophy. Such has been the case with particular reference to certain aspects of contemporary African philosophy. There is nothing wrong in learning from others and seeing how best to improve oneself. But there is everything wrong if what is seen

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8 I borrow the expression “productive friction” from Monahan (2019, 86).

as the best example becomes the only way that everyone else must follow, particularly for a subject such as philosophy, given the contestations that define its history as a practice.

## Conclusion

Being a context-oriented practice, African philosophy proceeds from the premise that philosophy cannot hide behind the abstract quest for knowledge at the expense of its practical and ethical commitments. The belief that philosophy in Africa can be preoccupied with “pure” questions and themes that are context independent is untenable. In this struggle for liberation and self-determination, philosophy must come to terms with what it means to philosophise in Africa. In their practice, philosophers in Africa cannot be averse to truth and neither can they ignore questions of historical justice.

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