



The phenomenon of philosophy in Afrikaans: On Pieter Duvenage's *Afrikaanse filosofie: Perspektiewe en dialoë*

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Abstract

The year 2016 saw the publication of *Afrikaanse filosofie: Perspektiewe en dialoë* ("Afrikaanse" Philosophy: Perspectives and Dialogues) (Bloemfontein: SUN Press, ISBN: 9781920382780) by Pieter Duvenage, an attempt to trace the development over the last 100 years (apparently) of philosophy practised in the Afrikaans language. Duvenage is not the first to map the history of this philosophy, but he is the first to do so through engaging in dialogue with the philosophers in question (and not simply through writing about them) and through focusing specifically on its development at a number of mainly Afrikaans universities. I elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of Duvenage's book and end by exploring the sense in which "Afrikaanse" philosophy qualifies as "African" philosophy (an issue Duvenage neglects), thus becoming, not a target of decolonization and Africanization, but a vehicle thereof.

Key words

Pieter Duvenage; Afrikaanse philosophy; Afrikaner; Afrikaans; African philosophy; African

1. Introduction

The year 2016 saw the publication of *Afrikaanse filosofie: Perspektiewe en Dialoë* ("Afrikaanse" Philosophy: Perspectives and Dialogues; Bloemfontein: SUN Press. ISBN: 9781920382780) by Pieter Duvenage, an attempt to trace the development, mainly at "Afrikaans" universities, over roughly the last 100 years, of what he calls "Afrikaanse" philosophy ("Afrikaans" being a language predominantly spoken in Southern Africa). As a formalised, higher educational discipline, Afrikaanse philosophy,

writes Duvenage (2016a:2–14), originated as a mixed response of Afrikaanse academics to the 19th century British idealism that significantly influenced the then colonial masters of Southern Africa, Britain's efforts to institutionalize philosophy here. In so far as this idealism motivated or fed into British imperialism, it did not sit well with Afrikaans philosophers, generally speaking. However, British idealism also involved other themes, viz. ethics, politics, art, religion, and the historical conditions of knowledge. These themes appealed to Afrikaanse philosophers and ultimately led to an emphasis on the continental (as opposed to the British analytic) philosophical traditions at Afrikaanse universities. Moreover, the first Afrikaans speaking philosophers who were given institutional positions chose to study not at Oxford and Cambridge, but in continental Europe. This, one would think, went against the sentiment and wishes of their colonial master and as such constituted nothing short of a revolt, argues Duvenage. To be sure, some Afrikaans-speaking philosophers, viz. those (the vast minority) who chose to pursue the analytic philosophical tradition, as such continued to cherish their British connections, though their tradition of choice was nevertheless still highly critical of the British idealism that preceded it. Besides continental philosophy and analytic philosophy, Duvenage also identifies two other traditions in Afrikaanse philosophy: the Christian Reformational tradition (a continental tradition with major Christian overtones) and, since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, African philosophy.

In what follows, both Duvenage's book and the philosophy it discusses, will be scrutinized. I hope to show that, though the book qualifies as an important and interesting contribution to literature on Afrikaanse philosophy, it suffers from weaknesses, that may derail this contribution. I also hope to illustrate, in response to one of these weaknesses that Afrikaanse philosophy all but qualifies as African philosophy, thus becoming, not a target of decolonization and Africanization, but a vehicle thereof.

2. Precursors

Duvenage's book is not the first attempt to map the history of Afrikaanse philosophy. He also refers to other attempts, such as an article by Andrew

Murray entitled, “Die Afrikaner se wysgerige denke” (The Afrikaner’s philosophical thought), published in 1947, and one by Marthinus Versfeld, “Die Tweede Suid-Afrikaanse kongres vir die bevordering van die filosofie” (The second South African congress for the advancement of philosophy) published in 1953, as well as a book, *Afrikaner Political Thought* (1983), by two of his mentors, André du Toit and Hermann Giliomee, and one by another of Du Toit’s students, Andrew Nash, *The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa* (2009) (Rossouw 2016:5). Like Duvenage, all these authors emphasize context, i.e. the historical, socio-political environment that produced a particular philosophy, but also the historical, socio-political impact that philosophies have. That is, they all assume that philosophies are “lewensbepalend” (life determining), to borrow a term from Versfeld (Duvenage 2016a:12). Murray’s discussion of the way in which theological, educational and political debates during the 19th and early 20th century contributed to an indigenous philosophical attitude amongst members of the Afrikaans-speaking community (Duvenage 2016a:7–11), neatly illustrates and substantiates this assumption.

However, although Duvenage’s attempt to map Afrikaanse philosophy is not the first, his remains the first book-length attempt to describe this philosophy (Painter 2016). He is also the first to do so through engaging in dialogue with the philosophers in question and not simply through writing about them, though this does not apply to the first two philosophers whose work he discusses, viz. Tobie Muller and C. K. Oberholzer, since they already passed on when Duvenage commenced his research 20 years ago. Duvenage is also the first to map the history of Afrikaanse philosophy through focussing specifically on its development at a number of mainly Afrikaans universities (Rossouw 2016:5).

3. Afrikaanse philosophy in a nutshell

Duvenage (2016a:15f; cf. also 2016b), whose genealogical, critical-hermeneutical analysis of Afrikaanse philosophy is (as such) self-consciously interpretive, gained the following historical and systemic or thematic insights from his engagement with Afrikaanse philosophers: First, the philosophical predilections, noted above, of Afrikaanse philosophers during the inception of Afrikaanse philosophy, not only persisted but

flourished. Though it still entails analytic philosophy, contemporary Afrikaanse philosophy overwhelmingly draws on the continental tradition, including phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism, Reformational philosophy and the more classical Christian tradition. And, as was the case during the early years of Afrikaanse philosophy, this preference is still being sustained by an affinity or openness amongst Afrikaanse philosophers for religious, historical, ethical and aesthetical issues. Second, Afrikaanse philosophers work within the field of tension between modernity and tradition, the global and the local, the West (from where they borrow their concepts) and (South) Africa (where they apply these concepts). Third, within these fields of tension Afrikaanse philosophers grapple with issues around the relationship between the particular and the universal (also politically speaking), between religious belief and modern science, and between thought and language. Fourth, Afrikaanse philosophers engage the issue of trauma, whether the trauma of the Anglo-Boer War or, more recently, apartheid. Their reflections on apartheid involve the issue of guilt with regard to the contributions of Afrikaanse philosophers to this policy, while they also address issues around the political implications of philosophical thought in general. Fifth, Afrikaanse philosophers engaged and engage in social criticism, but also reflect on the practice of such criticism in an establishment where speakers of the Afrikaans language constitute a definite minority. And, finally, the survival of Afrikaanse philosophy is uncertain given the fact that the use of the Afrikaans language at universities diminished drastically over the last couple of years.

4. (More) strengths of *Afrikaanse filosofie*

We live in a digital world, a world in which things can be instantly produced, reproduced or deleted – a world, therefore, where people seem to have lost a sense of origin and development, a sense of history. We also live in a world where the universal often simply overrules the particular, where it is being taken for granted that the globally accessible should overrule what can only be appreciated locally. In this world Duvenage's historical overview of a particular current in philosophy comes as a breath of fresh air (Rossouw 2016:3–5). Moreover, his book contains an interesting variety of issues and ironies, such as the following around the figure of

Tobie Muller, the (according to Duvenage 2016a:18–23) first Afrikaanse philosopher. Besides being a philosopher, Muller was also a campaigner for the Afrikaans language in Stellenbosch around the year 1907, while – in so far as philosophical allegiances go – being a, wait for it, pragmatist! We have become accustomed, rightly or wrongly, to not associate campaigning for the use of minority languages at institutions of learning with pragmatism. However, pragmatism (apparently) motivated Muller to agitate for the use of Afrikaans and against the use of simplified Dutch, as well as, interestingly enough, English. One can only speculate what his stance would have been today in this regard.

A second of the variety of interesting issues Duvenage's book contains, has to do with strategies and suspicions amongst Afrikaanse philosophers. For example, the late Paul Cilliers was of the opinion that Duvenage and his like-minded colleagues were deliberately misappropriating Johan Degenaar's well-known pluralistic approach (Degenaar 2000:155–170) in order to establish a neo-Afrikaner nationalism.¹ Another prominent Afrikaanse philosopher, Hennie Lötter, also thought so² (and perhaps still does). However, in his interview with Degenaar, Duvenage seems to lay this accusation to rest by convincing Degenaar that he is not pursuing a nationalistic agenda, but a pluralistic one aimed at becoming a, what Duvenage calls, “post-nationalist Afrikaner” (2016a:105). Being such an Afrikaner would not involve the centralisation of power and the subsequent engulfment of the individual in a monolithic hegemonic group identity. On the contrary, it would involve finding one's identity continually and creatively in the field of tension between individual and group. With this project Degenaar seems to agree. The important question, he reiterates, is not, “How can I, as it were, abdicate as an Afrikaner?” Rather, it is, “How can South Africa (and the world) formulate and live its differences?” (Degenaar in Duvenage 2016a:103–106). Duvenage's book should be of interest even to those of us just vaguely concerned with Afrikaner identity and/or the history of Afrikaanse philosophy. It is, however, not without its weaknesses.

1 Personal communication at the Annual Conference of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA), 17–19 January 2007.

2 Personal communication at the Conference of the Ethics Society of South Africa (ESSA), 13–14 July 2005.

5. Some weaknesses of *Afrikaanse filosofie*

A first weakness pertains to Duvenage's failure to properly define the concept tradition, thereby fuelling the suspicion (alluded to above) that what is being referred to as the Afrikaanse philosophical "tradition", is nothing but a fabrication meant to resurrect Afrikaner nationalism. For Duvenage (2016a:2), apparently, talk of an Afrikaanse philosophical tradition would be premature and he therefore prefers to rather speak of an Afrikaanse philosophical approach or simply of the phenomenon of Afrikaanse philosophy. However, there can be little doubt that he *does* think of Afrikaanse philosophy as a tradition, even if he only and ultimately suggests as much through his friend and confidant of many years, Danie Goosen, with whom he, significantly, concludes his series of interviews, so as to give him the last word, as it were. Goosen speaks freely of a "tradition" of Afrikaanse philosophy, albeit a "fragile" (Goosen in Duvenage 2016a:248) one.

But does the philosophical work traced by Duvenage in fact qualify as a tradition? What needs to be true of an activity to warrant the label "tradition"? This question requires more attention than what can be afforded here. Suffice to say that, in terms of prominent contemporary uses of this concept, an activity qualifies as a tradition *inter alia* if it amounts to a set of practices that portrays continuity over time, sustained by some or other commonality, e.g. an authoritative text or other canon of orthodoxy, around which it crystallises. As such, a tradition comprises the context within which the significance of these practices is understood and the medium that moulds and conveys them across generations. This, however, does not render a tradition static. On the contrary, although a tradition is inherited, it is also critically re-imagined by its inheritors. It is therefore both a given and an innovation. The continuity or commonality at its core should not be deemed ahistoric (Horton and Mendus 1994:11–13; Nash 2009:1, 3; Devine 2013:111, 113).

Thus understood, Duvenage's Afrikaanse philosophy qualifies as a tradition in so far as it constitutes a set of practices, all in the Afrikaans language,³

3 Or so it seems. Whether all the philosophical activities that Duvenage considers for his history of Afrikaanse philosophy were in fact done in the Afrikaans language, is questionable – more about this soon.

evolving over three generations. However, the notion of a tradition as a process of self-critical innovation also involves “self-awareness” (Nash 2009:3), that is, it implies that a set of practices properly qualifies as a tradition only if those who participate in them think of themselves as adherents of the tradition in question. Can this be said of the philosophers that Duvenage lists as exponents of Afrikaanse philosophy? Did they, or if they had the opportunity to do so now, would they conceive of their Afrikaans work as contributing to an Afrikaanse philosophical tradition? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, they can only be addressed properly in view of a sufficiently developed⁴ conception of a tradition. This Duvenage fails to provide, leaving us with fewer reasons not to doubt the authenticity of what is being touted as the Afrikaanse philosophical tradition.

A second weakness of *Afrikaanse filosofie* has to do with the deficiency of its scope (cf. also Rossouw 2016:5–6). Duvenage’s discussion of Afrikaanse philosophy only focuses on the work of a few white, male professors. As such it excludes the work of other important Afrikaanse academics, like Marthinus Versfeld (to name only one), and of prominent Afrikaanse literary figures who worked independently of universities, like Breyten Breytenbach. It notably also excludes important Afrikaans women, like Antjie Krog, and leading Afrikaanse philosophers of colour, like Adam Small or Neville Alexander. Duvenage acknowledges this deficiency, adding: (a) that the inquiring prose of many Afrikaanse literary figures does indeed contain “philosophical elements” (Duvenage 2016a:4 n5) even though they work or worked independently of universities. Examples include, besides the work of Breytenbach, the work of Eugene Marais, Gustav Preller, C.M. van den Heever, and N.P. van Wyk Louw. And (b) Duvenage acknowledges that he chose to dialogue with eight professors specifically, viz. Piet Dreyer, Bert Meyer, Johan Degenaar, André Du Toit, Danie Strauss, Bert Olivier, Johan Snyman and Danie Goosen, not only because they significantly influenced the advent of Afrikaanse philosophy, but also because they significantly influenced him. His discussion of Afrikaanse philosophy is therefore admittedly subjective and idiosyncratic (Duvenage 2016a:ii).

4 Duvenage’s discussion, admittedly, does suggest a certain understanding of the concept tradition. Nevertheless, his deliberations would have benefitted from a more pertinent analysis of this concept.

A third weakness of Duvenage's analysis relates closely to the first. It pertains to his vague and hence misleading use of the label "Afrikaanse" philosophy. Initially one gets the impression that with "Afrikaanse" philosophy he simply means any philosophy done in the Afrikaans language, the "mother-tongue" (Rossouw 2016:4) of Afrikaans-speaking philosophers. However, one soon notes that the philosophical work of his Afrikaans-speaking interviewees (i.e. the publications with reference to which he conducts his interviews on "Afrikaanse" philosophy) also include a number of English texts. This suggests that, for Duvenage, "Afrikaanse" philosophy also (or really) refers to any philosophical work, whether in Afrikaans or not, done by native speakers of the Afrikaans language; philosophy, that is, as practised (whether in Afrikaans or not) in the "Afrikaanstalige wêreld" (Afrikaans-speaking world) (cf. Duvenage 2015:3). Like his neglect to properly define "tradition" (see above), Duvenage's neglect to properly define the adjective "Afrikaanse" again feeds the suspicion that talk of "Afrikaanse" philosophy merely serves an ideological (in the pejorative sense) function.

A fourth weakness in Duvenage's analysis of the phenomenon of Afrikaanse philosophy also has to do with a deficiency in its scope, but in a slightly different sense. Duvenage rightly points out that, since 1994, African philosophy started to gain the interest of a number of Afrikaanse philosophers, which led to a few studies in this regard. As such, he concludes, African philosophy constitutes a fourth tradition (that is besides the continental, the Reformational, and analytic traditions) in Afrikaanse philosophy (Duvenage 2016a:ii, 15). This reference to African philosophy resonates with Duvenage's general confirmation of the existence and role thereof. Early in his discussion of the advent of Afrikaanse philosophy, he, for example, emphasises the fact that, on his arrival in Table Bay in 1652, the Dutch colonialist, Jan van Riebeeck, found that different indigenous groups of people already participated in certain oral traditions of wisdom (Duvenage 2016a:3). Yet, in spite of his confirmation of the existence and role of specifically African philosophy as a current in Afrikaanse philosophy, Duvenage neglects to explore the converse, that is, he neglects to explore the notion, not of African philosophy as a tradition or current in Afrikaanse philosophy, but of Afrikaanse philosophy as a tradition or current in African philosophy. At the very least he owes us an explanation as to why a proper discussion of Afrikaanse philosophy does not also

have to include a consideration of this specific take on it, viz. Afrikaanse philosophy as a variety of African philosophy.

6. Afrikaanse philosophy as African philosophy

I intend to address this deficiency in so far as I intend to unpack the sense in which it could indeed, to my mind, be said meaningfully that Afrikaanse philosophy is a variety of African philosophy. Such an exercise has to involve a comparison between African philosophy and Afrikaanse philosophy, which in turn requires clarity with regard to the meaning of these concepts, the concepts Afrikaanse philosophy, and African philosophy. My intention here is not to give an exhaustive account of how these concepts are used, or of the debates around the proper use of these concepts. Nor is it to stipulate how they should be used. Instead, I will focus on ways in which these concepts are often used – my aim being to illustrate that much of what is being said about African philosophy also applies to Afrikaanse philosophy, so much so that it would at least be reasonable to think of the latter as a variety of the former.

To begin with the notion of Afrikaanse philosophy: For the purposes of this exercise, I take Afrikaanse philosophy simply to mean philosophy done or practised in the Afrikaans language. In short, Afrikaanse philosophy is Afrikaanstalige philosophy. This includes philosophical work translated into Afrikaans.

As for the meaning of the concept African philosophy matters are less straight forward. What makes African philosophy “African”? What needs to be true of a philosophy in order for it to qualify as “African”? What are the relevant considerations or criteria for assessing whether a philosophy is “African”? One would do well not to simply translate these questions into the question as to whether there can *be* an “African” philosophy, since – as Mogobe Ramose (2002a:4, 7) shows – put in this way, one’s inquiry into the nature of “African” philosophy can easily be understood (and for my purposes misunderstood) as an inquiry into whether Africans *can* philosophise. The capability of Africans to philosophise is not the issue here; the meaning content of the expression, “African philosophy”, is.

The literature that addresses this issue is vast. However, even a cursory glance at the tables of contents or introductions of prominent African philosophy anthologies⁵ shows that the Africanness of a philosophy is often assessed in terms of, or in response to the following four questions: (1)“By whom is it being practised?”, (2)“Where?”, (3)“How?”, and (4)“About what?”.

(1) African philosophy is often defined as philosophy done by Africans, where Africans refer to black people (or at least to, if you will, people of colour) who have, as such, been residing in Africa over a substantial period, or who come from Africa (Allais 2018:204; Ogbonnaya 2018:115). While those who define African philosophy thus may not regard this trait as a necessary trait of African philosophy qua African philosophy, they often regard it as sufficient. In other words, if it applies to a philosophy, then, for them, the philosophy in question qualifies as African, period. In terms of this understanding of the label African philosophy, the practitioners (whether actual or potential) of Afrikaanse philosophy all but qualify outright as African philosophers and their work as African philosophy. After all, Afrikaans is the first language of about 1,5% of black South Africans, that is about 602 000 people (Titus 2016:189). Moreover, the majority of speakers of the Afrikaans language are so-called coloured people (about 3.2 million) (Le Cordeur 2016:xv), many of whom are descendants of black Africans and/or the Khoisan people, who, as a people, have been residing in Africa since the late Stone Age (Boezak 2016:112; Du Plessis 2017). Furthermore, many of the remaining native speakers of the Afrikaans language, the majority of which are white, have been in Africa for at least three generations. This, one suspects, would contribute to their Africanness, though it may not fully qualify them as such in the eyes of those who also emphasise pigmentation in this regard.

5 The number of these anthologies steadily grew in recent years. However, in keeping with the spirit and focus of Duvenage's investigation, viz. the development of philosophical traditions *at South African universities*, I am predominantly focusing on two: The anthology (in two editions) (Coetzee and Roux 1998; 2002) to which the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Africa gave birth (the first “South African” anthology of its kind) and the anthology (Etieyibo 2018a) that emanated from a conference at the University of the Witwatersrand (the most recent “South African” anthology of African philosophy).

(2) Which brings us to region as a consideration when it comes to the assessment of the peculiarly Africanness of African philosophy, that is, it brings us to the question as to where the philosophy in question is being practised. For many users of the expression “African philosophy”, the fact that a philosophy was or is being practised in Africa would contribute to its Africanness (Allais 2018:208; Ogbonnaya 2018:116). In other words, for them it would help to make it African, so to speak, though it may not be regarded as a sufficient, nor necessary condition for its Africanness. On this score, the work of actual or potential Afrikaanse philosophers qualify as African, given the fact that the language in which it expresses itself was and is very much being spoken in Africa: predominantly in South Africa and Namibia, but also in Botswana and Zimbabwe (Afrikaans n.d.; Carstens and Raidt 2017:108).

(3) And so we arrive at a third question often asked of a philosophy to determine its Africanness, viz. how is it being practised? It is often thought that what might contribute to the peculiarly Africanness of a philosophy has to do with the way in which it is being practised, that is, with the “how” of the philosophy in question. More specifically, it is thought by many, often called ethno-philosophers, that the non-discursive nature of a philosophy helps to qualify it as African, since, for them, African philosophy is by definition not being practised or communicated logically, but emotionally. As such, understanding African philosophy is closer to a sensory or aesthetic experience than to a cognitive exercise. “[H]ere,” says Odera Oruka, “idiosyncracies of the traditional or communal African customs, poems, taboos, religions, songs, dances etc. easily come up as undeniable candidates for what is required” (2002:121). As such, African philosophy strikes an interesting cord with (actual or potential) philosophical works in Kaaps, a variety of Afrikaans. According to at least one prominent speaker of this variety, the dramatist Amy Jephta, Kaaps could also be understood by simply listening to the way it sounds and by feeling it in your body, so to speak. Kaaps, says Jephta, is “... a dialect of the ear ... and of the flesh ... instead of a cognitive language” (cited by Prins 2017:18, translated freely). It is fair to say that this un-logical nature/modality of Kaaps and, by extension, of Kaapse philosophy, would – at least for proponents of ethno-philosophy – help to make it African. The ethno-philosophical understanding of African philosophy is, however, highly controversial –

as is commonly known (Kaphagawani 1998:91; Oruka 2002:121). Be that as it may, for many users of the expression “African philosophy”, there is also another sense in which the “how” of a philosophy may contribute to its Africanness, viz. if the philosophy in question is being practised in an indigenous African language (Masolo 2018:58–59). On this score, Afrikaanse philosophy does not fare badly either, to say the least. Although the language in which it expresses itself primarily developed from 17th-century Dutch, it also substantially borrowed, lexically and syntactically, from indigenous Khoisan and Bantu languages (Carstens and Raidt 2017:24–27, 466–467, 471; Boezak 2016:112–128; Van Oort 2016:552–569; Van Rensburg 2018).

(4) Which, finally, brings us to the fourth question often asked of a philosophy to determine its “Africanness”, viz. about what is the philosophy in question? For many users of the concept African philosophy, the fact that a philosophy is about “problems pertinent to Africa” (Allais 2018:209; Etieyibo 2018b:3–8) would contribute to its Africanness – though they may not regard it as a sufficient, nor necessary condition for a philosophy to qualify as African. Here, again, Afrikaanse philosophy all but qualifies outright as African philosophy, given the fact that much of it addresses problems pertinent to Africa. This certainly applies to all the philosophers that Duvenage dialogues with, to name but a few examples (cf. Rossouw 2016:6,12).

In summary then: The responses often given to our four questions, when asked with regard to philosophy that identifies, or are identified, as African,⁶ significantly overlap with the responses often given to the same questions, when asked with regard to Afrikaanse philosophy, so much so that it would be reasonable to count the latter as a variety of the former.

However, so an objection here might go, is Afrikaanse philosophy, especially the philosophy of the Afrikaners⁷ with whom Duvenage engages in

6 These popular responses resonate in varying degrees with the trends in African philosophy (originally) delineated by Oruka (2002:120–24; cf. also Kaphagawani 1998:86–98).

7 “Afrikaner” here simply means white, Afrikaans-speaking person. This is a popular, though not comprehensive, definition of the term (Giliomee 2018:3).

dialogue, with their involvement in the oppressive policy of apartheid⁸ and their phenomenological-continental/Western ideas, not exactly the kind of philosophy that we need to rid ourselves of if we were to decolonise and Africanise our thinking? Duvenage (2016a:16) acknowledges that, in 1948 and two decades thereafter, the majority of Afrikaanse (read Afrikaner) philosophers were very close to the National Party regime and its oppressive policies. But, he adds rightly, they were not all equally close to this regime and there were also the exceptions, among whom notably Johan Degenaar and André du Toit, who were highly critical of the Apartheid regime. It also remains an open question as to whether Afrikaner philosophers were driven to apartheid policies by their philosophies, or whether it was simply a case of pragmatic considerations and/or opportunism on their side.

And, on the issue as to whether the phenomenological-continental/Western ideas of these Afrikaner philosophers necessarily qualify their philosophies as colonising, two responses seem relevant. The first comes from the Wits philosopher, Lucy Allais (2018), in a recent thought provoking article, “Problematising Western philosophy as one part of Africanising the curriculum”. “[I]t is not obvious,” says Allais (2018:209),

that there is an easy way of determining what makes Western philosophy Western, given the extent to which it's not homogenous or monolithic, and has been constantly changing and contested, and given the breadth of the topics which have, at various times, been taken as its subject matter ... [T]his raises a problem for the attempt to define a tradition in opposition to so-called Western philosophy, as well as for the idea that Africanising the curriculum would mean excluding or replacing so-called Western philosophy.

In other words, before one may think of Western ideas (including the ideas of the Afrikaner philosophers that Duvenage dialogues with) as colonising,

8 “In 1976 [the year of the Soweto uprising against Afrikaans as an enforced medium of tuition – DJL] Jakes Gerwel, a black professor of Afrikaans at a [so-called – DJL] colored university, cited a statement by the novelist Alan Paton that ‘only a fool or a philologist’ would discuss Afrikaans without thinking immediately of Afrikaner nationalism and its close association with apartheid. He added: ‘Afrikaans has become the defining characteristic [of the state] which the greatest part of the population knows, particularly by its image of arrogance and cruelty’” (Giliomee 2004:42; cf. also 2004:43).

one has to embark on the arduous task of deciding exactly which ideas would qualify as authentically “Western” (cf. also Appiah 2016).

A second and, to my mind, appropriate response to the question as to whether the supposedly phenomenological-continental/Western ideas of the Afrikaner philosophers that Duvenage dialogues with necessarily qualify their philosophies as colonising, comes from Johan Rossouw. In his review of Duvenage’s book, Rossouw (2016:3–4) contends that whether ideas are decolonising or not, should not depend on their origin, but on how they are being used, specifically on whether they are being applied locally (i.e. here in Africa) to promote a free and just dispensation. On this point Degenaar’s work springs to mind again. Degenaar employed the Western, or shall we say, apparently Western ideas of “postmodernism” and “deconstruction” to criticise Apartheid. However, since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, he used these self-same ideas to warn against nation building as a one dimensional, even totalitarian project (Degenaar 2008:275–292; Duvenage 2016a:17). Postmodernity, said Degenaar, celebrates a plurality of conceptions of reality, it discourages closure and affirms complexity. This resonates with an affirmative reading of deconstruction (Louw 1996:67–69). It is easy to see how these ideas led him to a critical stance with regard to oppressive policy of Apartheid and nation building as a one dimensional, totalitarian exercise. Degenaar’s critical, *local* application of these concepts make them decolonising (and not colonising), claims Johan Rossouw (2016:9) rightly, in spite of their “Western” origin.

Afrikaanse philosophy (including and specifically Afrikaner philosophy) is, as Degenaar’s work clearly shows, not inherently or innately colonising or oppressive. On the contrary, for its practitioners in all their colourful variety, Afrikaanse philosophy serves as a much-needed instrument of empowerment. Practitioners of Afrikaanse philosophy do so against the backdrop of a belittling of their language, whether through calling it a “kitchen” language (Thomas 2016:158), as the Dutch used to do since the eighteenth century, or through ignoring it for all intents and purposes at institutions of higher learning (Giliomee 2004:49–51; 2018:226–232). Afrikaanse philosophers also practise Afrikaanse philosophy against the backdrop of a belittling or violation of their humanity, whether as victims of Apartheid or as perpetrators thereof, in case of which the

violation in question constitutes self-inflicted suffering. Like its victims, the perpetrators of Apartheid are also in need of rediscovering their humanity (Kombuis 2016). For these Afrikaanse philosophers, the practise of Afrikaanse philosophy constitutes reparation and restoration in so far as it says to themselves and to the world: “The humanity and dignity of the Afrikaans-speaking philosopher is second to none” (cf. Ramose 2002b:608).⁹

7. Coming clean: My motives

Raising neo-colonial suspicions with regard to the efforts of others to emphasise the value of Afrikaans philosophy in a post-Apartheid dispensation, comes easy. However, fairness demands that the same be done with regard to my own endeavours. Is my effort to establish the Africanness of Afrikaanse philosophy nothing but a thinly veiled attempt to re-establish the hegemonies of Apartheid?

The need, alluded to above, of Afrikaanse philosophers to re-discover their humanity, links up closely to a first reason or motive for making a case for the Africanness of Afrikaanse philosophy, viz. it allows Afrikaanse philosophy to be seen and to conceive of itself as a part of the solution and not the problem when it comes to the project of the decolonisation and Africanisation of syllabi at institutions of learning (Etieyibo 2018c). As African philosophy, Afrikaanse philosophy becomes part and parcel of what we, according to this project, need to devote more of these syllabi to and not of what needs to be omitted from them (Allais 2018:209). Yes, again, there is a bitter irony to this notion, in so far as the Afrikaanse philosophy (specifically Afrikaner philosophy) of some served and may still serve colonial/apartheid aims (Mettler 2016:142–143; Vearey 2018). Even so, it takes nothing away from the fact that Afrikaanse (including Afrikaner) philosophy as a phenomenon is not necessarily or inherently oppressive or colonising, as I tried to illustrate through my brief reference to Degenaar’s work (cf. also Degenaar 1987:205–209). This also applies to the Afrikaans language per se. Its use need not involve or constitute

9 I am here paraphrasing Mogobe Ramose’s impassioned plea for the rationality and hence humanity of the black African, thereby suggesting that this plea also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Afrikaanse philosophers.

oppression. On the contrary, speakers of the Afrikaans language across colours and creeds (also) used and use it to *defy* colonialism, Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. “Afrikaans,” says Franklin Sonn rightly, “is not only the language of apartheid; Afrikaans is also the language of the struggle and reconciliation” (2016, translated freely). However, Afrikaans *becomes* oppressive when it is so used, that is, when it is used as a tool by the oppressor. By being the medium through which apartheid laws were imposed, Afrikaans became the symbol and vehicle of violence, racism and repression (Van Heerden 2017:7)

A second motive for wanting to conceive of Afrikaans philosophy as African philosophy has to do with the fact that it constitutes a step towards meeting the challenge of valuing the diversity of African philosophy. Valuing its diversity liberates African philosophy from what Ramose calls “one-sidedness” (cf. Ramose 2002a:6), that is, the one dimensionality Degenaar warns us against (cf. also Masolo 2018:53–69).

Third (or to put the second motive differently), thinking of Afrikaanse philosophy as a variety of African philosophy contributes to the depth and plurality of the latter. Here examples abound, so much so that I would do well to take a leave from Duvenage’s book and only concentrate on the work of some of my Afrikaans-speaking mentors at the Department of Philosophy of Stellenbosch University. For example, in a 2009 publication, “God en die gode van Egipte” (God and the gods of Egypt), Willie Esterhuyse traces the similarities between the Egyptian gods of antiquity and the Judaic-Christain god in a way which resonates well with African philosophical efforts to identify the roots of so-called Western philosophy in Egypt, and thus Africa. It also resonates well with the work of African philosophers, predominantly those to which Oruka (2002:123) refers to as “professional” philosophers, who decry talk of “Africa” as something drastically different from the rest of the world.

Similarly Hennie Rossouw, in his influential book, “Die sin van die lewe” (The meaning of life) (1981), emphasises continual ethical reflection in a way that would strike a chord with those African philosophers who underscore the process character of ubuntu and the need to continually “reinvent” it; ubuntu, in short, as a “living tradition” (Magadla and Chitando 2014:188). “Etiese rus roes” (ethical rest corrodes), as Rossouw (1981:40) puts it.

8. Concluding remarks

Hennie Rossouw is a highly respected philosopher, not only, but certainly amongst Afrikaanse intellectuals. His impressive oeuvre, which includes only a few works in English (the rest are all in Afrikaans) could enrich, but also be enriched by African philosophy in a variety of other ways. For the field simply to ignore it or Afrikaanse philosophy in general uncritically would amount, not to decolonisation, but to what the other Rossouw noted above aptly calls “self-colonisation” (2016:3). This also applies to Afrikaanse meta-philosophical works, like *Afrikaanse filosofie*. In spite of some key weaknesses, Duvenage’s book constitutes a timely contribution to a variety of increasingly important debates.

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