

Postgraduate Conference on African Philosophy

Philosophy Department | University of Cape Town | August 19th, 2016
HUMA Seminar Room, Neville Alexander Building, Level 4, Upper Campus

PROGRAMME



0800-0815

Registration

0915-0945

Archie Mafeje and the question of African Philosophy:
A liberatory discourse
Thabang Dladla | Independent Scholar

1015-1045

Tea Break

1115-1145

Recognition Theory as an Alternative Approach
to Human Rights: An African Perspective
Sabelo Ndwandwe | Masters Student | UFH

1200-1230

A Neglected Traditional Past versus a Contemporary Tide
in Africa's Socio-political Narrative
John Sanni | Doctoral Student | SU

1300-1400

Lunch

1430-1500

African Philosophy in Africanising Education
Malcolm Garbutt | Doctoral Student | SU

1530-1545

Tea Break

1615-1645

The Stone that the Builder Refused
Christopher Jones | Doctoral Student | London

0815-0915

KEYNOTE "African Philosophy": What's in a name?
Dr Tony Oyowe | Lecturer | UWC

0945-1015

Personhood and Feminism in African Philosophy
Dimpho Takane | Honours Student | UJ

1045-1115

Can We Transcend or Go Beyond the Concept of Race?
Ovett Moore | Graduate Student | UKZN

1145-1200

Quick Break

1230-1300

Western Medicine, Traditional Medicine, and Ubuntu Bioethics
Tony Shabangu | Masters Student | UJ

1400-1430

Rethinking Indigenous Ideas as a Philosophical Source
Josias Tembo | Graduate Student | UP

1500-1530

What Does It Take to Count as African?
Tendai Mbanje | Independent Scholar

1545-1615

A Defence of Menkiti's Communitarian Conception of Personhood
Nompumelelo Manzini | Graduate Student | WITS

1645-1745

KEYNOTE African Cosmogonies as a Foundation of
Ancient Egyptian Philosophy
Dr Olusegun Morakinyo | Postdoctoral Fellow | SU

LIST OF ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTES

Tony Oyowe, Lecturer, UWC

“African philosophy” What’s in a name?

The paper will briefly chart the significant historical phases in contemporary African philosophy’s quest for self-definition, i.e., its attempt to make sense of its claim to be both African and philosophy. Specifically, it examines the phase involving its attempt to articulate a unique identity characterized by its opposition to what it perceived as a universalist, by which was understood a Western, idea of rationality—here, it will call attention to the now well-known distinction between that idea of rationality and emotivism; the phase of self-definition characterized by the contestations regarding the proper relationship between philosophy and culture—here, it will aim to distinguish between ethnophilosophy and a philosophy of culture; and lastly, the phase marked by its attempt to specify clearly the identity of its practitioners, or otherwise, its “legitimate citizens”—again, it pays attention to some distinction, this time between *African*, Africanist and *non-African*, Africanist practitioners of African philosophy. Throughout, the paper will attempt to answer the question of whether this quest for self-definition amounts ultimately to what has been regarded in some quarters as the “tribalization” of philosophy. Along the way, it distinguishes two ways African philosophy can be parochial in its aims and recommend one as a benign form of “parochialism.”

Olusegun Morakinyo, Post-doctoral Fellow, Stellenbosch University

African cosmogonies as a foundation of ancient Egyptian philosophy

This is a three parts paper that advance the debate of the historical and conceptual connections of ancient Egyptian thoughts and contemporary African philosophy. The first part engages the ‘Stolen legacy’ and the ‘Black Athena’ thesis and the geo-cultural politics of knowledge production debates it generated and its implications for the decolonization of philosophy. The second part focuses on a detailed interrogation of the arguments for the conceptual connection of ancient Egyptian and African cosmogonies as articulated by Cheikh Anta Diop and its implications for reconceptualising the history and content of African philosophy. The last part focus on a selected reading of ancient Egyptian texts as examples of its relevance to contemporary themes in African philosophy and the question of leadership ethics in Africa.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. Thabang Dladla

Archie Mafeje and the question of African Philosophy: A liberatory discourse

Philosophy and the social sciences, at least in modern times, are largely a product of the west, Europe and the Americas (the new world). This is to say that the west has a monopoly over these disciplines. This may be largely attributed to the colonial conquest of many territories by European powers and the resultant subjugation of the people concerned, people conquered in the unjust wars of colonization. Africa and the Africans are by and large victim of such atrocities by the west. Hence the question of an 'African philosophy' arises, or gets momentum, in the (post) colonial, or at independence. This is because the impulse to philosophise is inextricably linked to the impulse to gain freedom among the bonded. This paper attempts to show how the present subject 'Archie Mafeje' dealt with the question of whether there exists an African philosophy or not. In responding to the question it will also be shown what philosophy is and the practice of it in the African context. This is to be understood as a broader philosophy of liberation which liberates philosophy from euro-American contours and consequently liberates the colonized and oppressed, the African in particular, with its engagement with the neo-colonial condition and remedies for the (dis)order thereof.

2. Dimpho Takane (UJ Philosophy)

Personhood and Feminism in African Philosophy

Feminism has a long and varied history in Western thinking, but its place in African philosophy has been largely neglected in the literature. There are exceptions to this, (e.g., Jennifer Wilkinson 1998, Osire Glacier 2014, Oyeronke Oyewumi 2003). These texts, however, generally consider the roles that African women have played in African history. They have not been exclusively focused on African conceptions of personhood and how these conceptions have impacted on feminist thinking in the African philosophy. This paper shows that the misunderstandings of the different African conceptions of personhood have led us to assume that human beings are what communities make of them. This is related to the more general problem of whether the notion of a human being is a fixed one or whether human beings create, and sustain their own boundaries. In order to demonstrate that personhood is not a fixed notion, in a similar fashion to Kwame Gyekye (1998), I take issue with views like that of Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, that assert that in the African view, in contrast with the Western one, 1) it is the community that defines the person as a person, not some

isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory; 2) personhood is something acquired, 3) and personhood is something at which individuals could fail. Contrary to Menkiti, I argue that African conceptions of the person can - and do - accommodate the view that human beings have the ability to evolve with time as well as choose who they want to be. Furthermore, I use the distinction between African women and women from Western countries to explain that being a woman is not a fixed notion, since if it was, women would be the same throughout the world.

3. Overt Moore (UKZN)

Should African philosophers engage with 'Western' ways of doing philosophy?

The arrival of the colonizers in Africa provided a platform for the interchange of modernity and tradition in which ideas and reasoning were exchanged. Out of this contentious union has come debates about African philosophy: specifically, whether or not African philosophers should engage with so-called 'Western' ways of doing philosophy.

In order to answer the question posed in the title, I will briefly explain what reasoning and philosophy is all about. I argue that to engage in philosophy is principally a matter of employing one's mental and rational capacities to address, articulate and resolve the ultimate question in life about existence, God, human nature and so on. All human beings as rational animals are endowed with these capacities and all societies are confronted by these ultimate questions. Thus reasoning does not belong to any particular group: it is a part of nature. While handed-down beliefs are bound to exist, whether reserved in writing or orally-transmitted, these should be seen as the fruits of individuals' attempts to grapple with the ultimate questions in life rather than the only, or even the correct way, to deal with such questions. As such, the isolation of African philosophy from Western philosophy is neither necessary nor fruitful and African philosophers are not – and should not be - restricted to one way of doing philosophy.

4. Sabelo Ndwandwe (UFH)

Recognition Theory as an Alternative approach to Human Rights: An African Perspective

The search for an articulation of human rights in a manner that will appeal to authentic aspects of African traditions has led different African scholars into trying to articulate an Afro-communitarian theory of human nature which might plausibly be said to underwrite international human rights, but without sacrificing any of the core principles of African

communitarianism. This paradigm has proved to be controversial and has sparked internal conflict within African moral and political philosophy. In this paper I critically challenge the tendency in this debate to consider personhood – that is, on ontological distinctions between African and Western conceptions of personhood as a core foundation for human rights. The article seeks to develop an alternative account - recognition theory of human rights, grounded in African ethical customs, which underwrites human rights in such a way so as to avoid problems African theories typically encounter, those who appeal to ontologies of personhood as grounds for human rights. The paper suggest that reflecting to traditional African political thinking and good governance given in Gyekye's account about the Akan political thinking as a point of departure can help better to reconcile traditional customs with democratic rights in Africa. Thus, it submits that a recognition theory of rights avoid problems of cultural essentialism embedded in the tension between Afro-communitarianism and Western conceptions of personhood.

5. John Sanni (Stellenbosch)

A Neglected Traditional Past Versus a Contemporary Tide in African's Socio-political Narrative

In a continent where there is a growing obligation on the young and old alike to catch up on the ever changing current of technological, economic, and socio-political world views, intellectuals are often faced with a conundrum which sometimes results in a conflicting divide along traditionalist camp and contemporary camp. This divide cuts along the lines of ideologies that consider traditional or contemporary values as the only path to engaging with the atmospheric currents in Africa. As such, a rancour emerges between intellectuals on what approach adequately responds to the situation.

In this article, I seek to engage this alleged intellectual divide by proposing a platform where complementarity and dialogue are encouraged whereas dismissive tendencies are minimised. Using Nigeria and South Africa as case studies, I will touch on important elements of their socio-political world views. This will be carried out with the aim of showing how the present and its hopes for the future lack meaning when it trivialises and relegates to insignificance the insights of the past, and how the past is antiquated when its values are considered as absolute that must be followed without rigorous reflections. Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism* will be used to substantiate my arguments.

6. Tony Shabangu (UJ)

Western medicine, Traditional Medicine and Ubuntu Bioethics

Western medicine encompasses the health care practices of doctors and nurses in general hospitals and clinics. Traditional medicine is what one experiences when one consults with a Sangoma or a shaman. In South Africa the Department of Health still views Western medicine as the primary form of health care and Traditional medicine as only secondary. Can a philosophical theory provide us with a basis for viewing these two practices as equally important health care providers? Yes, I argue in this talk: Ubuntu gives us the bioethical resources for deeming Traditional Medicine as an equally worthwhile health care provider as Western Medicine in Sub-Saharan Africa. I draw on a Metzian version of Ubuntu, which prizes harmonious or friendly relationships and the restoration of human dignity. I want to supplant the current standard view, which emphasises being in good health alone, with the more holistic notion of being in a harmonious relationship. Conversely, to be ill is to be in discord with others, individualistic in action, and under the will of evil. A health practitioner should aim to avoid illness, and conduct him- or herself in a way that does not “fail to honour relationships” (Metz 2010). Health is opposed to illness, which is viewed as an evil, a disturbance of the harmony in one’s being (Makinde, 1988). I explain why this Ubuntu position should be preferred to utilitarian and Kantian theoretical frameworks. After highlighting some distinctions between Western Medicine and Traditional Medicine I make reference to the Traditional Healers Organisation to illustrate my novel claim: whereas Kantian and Utilitarian ethics rule out viewing Traditional Medicine and Western Medicine as equals, Ubuntu allows us to rightly honour their equality.

7. Sibusiso Zikalala (Wits University)

An African Conception and Analysis of Personhood

South Africa is in the midst of fighting racism and this is a really hot and touchy subject (perhaps now more than ever). Many are being socially charged with racism and others are pleading innocent. Solutions are being put in place in the name of building an anti-racist and eventually non-racial society. In this essay, I will be exploring different conceptions of racism and the main motivation for it is this; in order for us as individuals and society to effectively deal with racism we surely need to have a healthy hold on what it really is.

The conceptions which will be explored are the following: Racism as an attempt to delegitimize the ability of black people to have powerful reasoning abilities (Franz Fanon), racism as disrespect (Joshua Glasgow), racism as inferiorization or as racial antipathy (Lawrence Blum), racism as a form of bad faith (Louis Gordon), racism as intrinsic

to other fundamental issues such as equality, economic justice and so on and racism as fundamentally oppressive (W.E Du Bois), racism as a form of White supremacy (Charles Mills), and racism as ideology (Tommie Shelby).

The section of the essay will be an explication of racism by Gorge Garcia. His view strikes me as being more plausible than others. Basically, he thinks that racism is a thing of the heart. He thinks that racism lies in non-cognitive places, that is, attitudes, wishes, will and desires of the racist person. Fundamentally it is about hate. Finally, I will cash out the aforementioned conceptions of racism (Fanon, Glasgow, Blum, Gordon and Du Bois) in terms of hate, to show that hate is among the most fundamental constituents of racism.

8. Malcolm Garbutt (UCT)

African Philosophy in Africanising Education

Philosophy is tightly interwoven in education and is fundamental in addressing the persisting call for Africanizing Education. While most authors call for epistemic views of Africanization (Beets & Le Grange, 2005; Botha, 2010; Msila, 2009) a contingent take an ontological stance recognising that causal issues stem from differences in perceptions of reality (Hopper (2000) in Higgs & van Wyk, 2007).

Education in (South) Africa generally follows a Western philosophy and consequently a perception of reality which differs 'profoundly' from the African view (Menkiti, 1984). Central to African thought are concepts of individual and community or society. In African thinking an individual is a human being from birth but only becomes a true 'person' through right actions and good conduct. As a person they are defined by the other persons in their community. Menkiti (1984) depicts this as Society → Person in contrast to the Western view of Person → Society. Thus in the Western sense the individual (whether good or bad) can form their own view of society which they can change (almost) at will. In contrast the African view perceives society as pre-existing the person who is defined by it. Thus objects 'exist' and it is just a matter of the individual obtaining them. For example, in a personal conversation with an educated and outspoken advocate of free education, the issue was raised of where the funds would come from. His reply was 'there is always money'. He is of the opinion that more black people should be educated in order to alleviate poverty through more people having jobs. On the other hand he also admitted that many people with degrees walk the streets of the informal settlements. In his opinion jobs pre-'exist' and the educated person has only to find one. 'Educated' is used here from the higher education perspective in contrast to the African view of an educated person who is trained in the cultural aspects of being a 'person' (cf Wiredu, 2004).

Africanizing education requires understanding African Philosophy (Higgs, 2003; Horsthemke & Enslin, 2009; Metz, 2009; Wiredu, 2004). These authors conclude that the challenge is in methods of implementation and what the final end will be. African Philosophical writings are essentially based on two notions - a person is a person through other persons and *Ubuntu* (humanness) (Beets & Le Grange, 2005; Metz, 2009). Metz (2009) uses these philosophical concepts as a basis for an African moral theory approach to public funded higher education. He proposes five final ends – foster development; support culture; rectify injustice; realise equal opportunities; and facilitate cooperation. However a contradiction exists whereby education must be balanced between internationalization and Africanization (Botha, 2010). Internationalization is required for (universal) *knowledge sharing* while Africanization is required for (African) *knowledge retention*.

Sub-Saharan African people face contradictory choices daily. Language for instance is a paradox. English is needed in order to succeed in the world of business in South Africa. But this causes a disconnection from the speaker's traditional language and oral tradition resulting in a fear of losing identity. Language is important for discourse, dialogue, and understanding traditions. Due to oral origins traditions are embedded in language thus losing the language results in the fear of loss of tradition. Effects of loss of tradition have been observed for instance in the enactment of traditional ceremonies and duties without conviction (Wiredu, 1997). Wiredu (1997) calls for Africans to reflect on and analyse their philosophy and to hold onto the good while adding that which is lacking? Paradoxically philosophy is constantly being (re)formed and consequently differs from original oral traditions. Consequently many Africans espouse a traditional philosophy which is incongruent with their actions (Wiredu, 1997)

A middle ground is required to develop a philosophy for both Africa and African education that recognises the best of both philosophies so that no person is left behind unless they choose to be. This approach must view people as persons and allow and even encourage each human to become a person in the African sense.

9. Tendai Mbanje

What does it take for a Philosophical Theory or Argument or a Philosopher to count as African

Does Africa as a continent has continental African Philosophy? Or is there anything called "continental philosophy" in Africa? Africa as it stands is not a homogeneous continent. It is very complex and much divided, that is why colonialism and Christianity were a success on the African continent. The multiplicity and numerous cultures found on the continent make

the continent diverse and difficult to use a blanket statement about Africa. Given this view it is difficult to generalize and talk about “African culture” or African Philosophy. There is no such a thing. In this paper the author will discuss African philosophies, African philosophers and philosophical theories. Africa should be viewed from its diverse perspective. African philosophy or African culture doesn’t exist but African cultures and philosophies do exist. The author therefore argues that when we look at Africa we have to look it with critical eye. Anything generalized about Africa is not accepted. If one looks at north, east, west and southern Africa one learns that they are quite divided; the cultures and religions are different. Even in Southern Africa where cultures are similar (Bantu Culture) there are lots divisions. Therefore there is nothing to be termed African Philosophy but philosophies, culture but cultures.

10. Nompumelelo Zihle Manzini (WITS)

A defence of Menkiti’s Communitarian conception of personhood

Can the view that the normative conception of a person is not anti-queer, gendered and ableist be justified?

When I started thinking about this project, the initial idea was to argue that the communitarian conception of a person is gendered, anti-queer and ableist from the first glance, especially if we accept the premise that it is the community that confers the status of personhood on an individual. Yet, when reading on African personhood I realised the converse of the aforementioned, in that Menkiti’s conception of a person is the most promising social conception of a person for it allows for a timeless moral theory. It is a theory that is not static or placed in a particular time and as a result it allows for fluidity.

Literature on African personhood indicates that there has been much debate had regarding African personhood and some of the conversations had remain unanswered. My aims in this project are not to argue which conceptions of African personhood are better than the other. Rather I want to embrace Menkiti’s conception of personhood and indicate that it allows for a fluid person, moreover it allows for adaptability. The project aims are to indicate that his conception is not stuck in some African Tradition cast in stone. In doing so, this paper is a defence of communitarianism, in arguing that it is fully representative of the African person, I argue that communitarianism should be accepted and not rejected which is contrary to the sentiments made by Matolino in the introductory paragraphs of his book “Personhood in African Philosophy” (2014). The project assess on what grounds these justifications made.