

Racism and the Marginality of African Philosophy in South Africa

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Abstract

The following article begins with a brief discussion on the continuity of white supremacy in South Africa, despite wide attempts by the institutions of opinion (public discourse, journalism and academe) to represent the present time as non-racial or post-racial. After a discussion of the contemporary context the focus turns specifically to the relevance of race and racism to philosophy and the implications this has for African philosophy in particular. The article then briefly examines the history of Western education and the practice of philosophy in South Africa from the point of view of African philosophy and its marginality in South Africa.

Keywords: White supremacy; African philosophy; liberation; decolonisation; racism; non-racialism

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Introduction

It is common in South Africa in the years following the “negotiated”¹ settlement of the early nineties—and especially since the adoption of the new constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (hereinafter “the constitution”²)—to describe the country as “liberated” and “post-apartheid.” Accompanying these widespread descriptions is the common belief, although it has in the very recent past begun to fade, that the age of white supremacy has formally come to an end. Supporting this misguided assumption is the fact that the constitution, which also pronounces itself the supreme law of South Africa in its founding provisions, also proclaims South Africa as a democratic state founded on the values of “non-racialism and non-sexism” amongst others. Whereas previous periods of South African history are widely described as “pre-colonial,” “colonial” and “apartheid,” the period following 1996 is described as “post-apartheid” or “constitutional,” the assumption being that the constitution is the over-arching paradigm which provides the standard in contemporary South Africa for the idea of justice.

Although it is not our purpose here to extensively and in detail critique the constitution, it is necessary to discuss some general aspects of it which support the claim made above. In spite of the fact that South Africa has had several constitutions before the present one, none of them have ever enjoyed the status of supreme law until the 1996 constitution. Put more directly, it was not until the indigenous people, conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation, were finally able to have a say in the political and legal order of South Africa, that parliament was subjected to a constitution in order to limit its exercise of popular power. This same “supreme” constitution accords the lowest status—in terms of force—to the law and legal philosophy of the indigenous people. In South African jurisprudence, their law, which is called “customary law” suffers a status lower than that of their colonial conquerors, the so-called Roman-Dutch and English laws (Dladla, N. 2017, 40).

In terms of the judicial hierarchy of South Africa, decisions made in terms of “customary law” may be overturned by appeal to even the lowest of the Roman-Dutch law courts. As a

1 See for example Mogobe Ramose’s *Reconciliation and Reconciliation* (2012) for a critique of the representation of the “talks” in which the transition to the “new” South Africa was carried on as negotiation.

2 Our use of the lower-case “c” in writing about the constitution is a deliberate philosophical convention following for example Ramose (1999). It is a convention consistently upheld in spirit of essay, a spirit which questions the legitimacy and justice of the constitution and its supremacy in South African law from the viewpoint of the indigenous people conquered in in the unjust wars of colonisation.

matter of fact, “customary law” is accorded an even lesser status than the law of other nations (Dladla, N. 2017, 40).

In addition to the Eurocentricism of South African jurisprudence under the constitution, the spirit of its contents stands in violation of well-established principles of justice even within Western law and philosophy. The principle expressed in Latin as *jus ex injuria non oritur* (a legal right or entitlement cannot arise from an unlawful act or omission)³ or its relative *commodum ex injuria sua nemo habere debet* (a wrongdoer should not be enabled by law to take any advantage from his actions)⁴ are just two examples (Dladla, N. 2017, 40). The constitution violates these principles precisely through its fundamentalisation of the right to property. If one considers that under colonialism and apartheid and after it, the European conqueror and his posterity acquired property by disseizin of the indigenous people. The question arises: “Who exactly had property to protect in 1994?” In other words: “Precisely whose property was being protected by the constitution?” The answer to this question makes the claim of the constitution—to be founded on the value of non-racialism—rather dubious (Dladla, N. 2017, 40).

This article contends that the constitution is racist; it is precisely white supremacist for the reasons set out above.⁵ It is because of South Africa’s ongoing status as a white supremacist polity that we understand the study of racism to be not only a philosophically justifiable one, but an ethically necessary one. The practice of philosophy in South Africa could hardly avoid the charge of complicity in the ongoing problem while continuing to ignore this centrally important problem.

The Study of Race/ism and Philosophy in South Africa

Racism must be of concern to all philosophers in all areas of philosophy. Racism is not just a topic for ethics and political philosophy. The existence of systemic racism—its consequences for the structures of the societies in which philosophy is done as well as for how philosophy has been done and by whom—has deep implications for

3 Duhaime’s Legal Dictionary, 2015.

4 Duhaime’s Legal Dictionary, 2015.

5 See Dladla, N. 2017, “Towards an African Critical Philosophy of Race: Ubuntu as a Philo-praxis of Liberation.”

epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and philosophical methodology.
(Babbitt and Campbell 2007, 2)

Race and racism have until the last 20 years or so typically received little academic attention in academic (Western) philosophy departments,⁶ particularly in South Africa. In the past 20 years or so a rise in the prominence of what is commonly called the “critical philosophy of race” has to some extent succeeded in making the point that race/ism is a philosophically relevant subject⁷ and has implications for philosophy in at least two main ways which are interrelated. The first implication is that (Western) philosophy has itself been complicit and continues to be either explicitly or tacitly involved in the construction of the theoretical edifice of race/ism and race/ist thinking.⁸ There are now countless texts which specifically examine the racism of the “great Western tradition” (see Eze 1997; Serequeberhan 2007), with often surprising revelations about the bodies of work of thinkers like Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Montesquieu and Voltaire (see Gordon 2000, 2008; Mills 1997, 1998 Serequeberhan 1994, 2007). There are as many texts dealing with enquiries about the philosophical implications of these expositions for the meaning of their work. The second implication is that even in those places where Western philosophy has not itself been directly responsible, it nevertheless is competent and able to assist us in the resolution of theoretical and practical problems caused by racism. Where philosophy is unable to do that, it can at least assist us in gaining a better understanding about the origins of these problems, their inner nature and workings.

In South Africa, even other disciplines such as political science, sociology, history and psychology fare quite badly with regard to taking up the question of race/ism as a matter for serious scientific enquiry; but a convincing argument can be made that the situation in philosophy is even worse. Writing in the American context about a similar situation, Charles Mills (1998) has suggested that part of the reason for this is “the self-sustaining dynamic of

6 Here Western philosophy describes the tradition of philosophy practised. That is as opposed to African, Latin American, Islamic or Eastern philosophies for example. The term “Western” also describes the general tradition of the universities and the geography referring either to universities in Europe or in its former colonies, especially with large and dominant white populations in places such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa. It must be added also that although this claim possibly applies to continental Europe and some of its former colonies as well, our study is restricted to the Anglo-Saxon practice and its main philosophical tradition, analytic philosophy (see Mills 1998).

7 See (Gordon, 2000, 2008; Mills 1997, 1998, 2008) also the recent journal published out of Pennsylvania State University called *Critical Philosophy of Race* (Bernasconi 2017)

8 See Serequeberhan (1994); Eze (1997); Ramose (1999).

the ‘whiteness’ of philosophy, not the uncontroversial whiteness of most of its practitioners but what could be called, more contestably, the conceptual or theoretical whiteness⁹ of the discipline” (Mills 1998, 2).

He suggests that this theoretical “whiteness” has by itself been enough to discourage black post-graduate students considering a career in the academy, which in turn causes “certain traits to go either wholly or very weakly challenged” so as to maintain the “consistently monochromatic character of the discipline” (Mills 1998, 2). Problematic as this may be in the United States of America, which Mills is writing from and about, surely the problem is even more serious in South Africa where Africans are both the indigenous people and make up the majority of the population.

Racism has received very little attention in South African philosophy, as can be seen in the worlds of teaching and in publishing.¹⁰ Despite South Africa’s worldwide fame as a “once” *Racial Polity* (Mills 1997), surprisingly little work has been done or rather seen the light in South African philosophy, specifically examining the philosophical significance of racism.

Much of this is the result of a general under-representation of historical victims of racism from academic philosophy in South Africa, as well as the continued commitment to ignorance (itself arguably a consequence of racism), of African philosophy as can be seen by the overall commitment to continue along the colonial lines of mimesis of either continental or analytic philosophy in South African universities’ departments of philosophy.¹¹

9 In our discussion we opt for Eurocentrism rather than whiteness, Africanity rather than blackness and African philosophy rather than black philosophy. Serequeberhan defines Eurocentrism as a “pervasive bias located in modernity’s self-consciousness of itself. It is grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief or idea (*Idee*) that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life.” The essay appears in “Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings”, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press 2002, edited by P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux, 64–78. Our choice of this option will be explained below.

10 See More (1996; 2004). In recent history (2014) the University of Pretoria introduced its first course with a component on racism, after the Louise Mabile affair (to be discussed below); the course was, however, discontinued in 2015. The University of Cape Town’s course of ethics for second year students in 2010 included Kwame Appiah’s problematic analytic treatment of race “racisms” and has since January 2014 introduced a course called “Philosophy of Race,” which we will discuss in a subsequent section dealing with the character of Anglo-Saxon philosophy education in South Africa.

11 It is the case that where race has been treated in South African philosophy, this has happened largely within English-speaking universities. In the case of Afrikaans universities, the University of Pretoria in 2014 introduced into its curriculum a new course on “Race and the Enlightenment” in the second semester, which was, however, discontinued in 2015.

In the next section we examine racism in South African universities, both from the perspective of African philosophy and its exclusion from philosophy in South Africa.

Racism, the Eurocentric University and the Marginality of African Philosophy in South Africa

To deny the existence of African philosophy for the sake of maintaining existing standards in education is to undermine the very nature of education and science. It is at the same time to make the questionable claim that the curriculum is free from ideological tension. (Ramosé 2002)

A Brief History of Western Education in South Africa

The school and university as they currently¹² exist in South Africa were founded by the European settler. Initially it was to serve his immediate personal interest, fulfilling his wish to remain intimately connected to “the metropolis” or “source” (of civilisation and culture). Thus the curriculum and approach to teaching were as consistent with the trends in the original home of the settler as possible. The initial objective was to ensure that the graduate of the university in the colony received an education comparable in character and quality to that of her counterpart at home.¹³ Phillips, in writing about the universities in the Cape Colony, suggests that their founding administrators were “keen to inculcate the cultural dominance of English into the new colony” (Phillips 2003, 123) and towards that end drew on various models of British universities.

The mimesis of the universities in the metropole could be seen, according to Phillips (2003), in teaching and examining procedures as well as curricula; even “the very architecture of the seating in lecture rooms” was borrowed from Glasgow and Aberdeen (Phillips 2003, 126). As

¹² The use of “currently” is to emphasise the point that we do not take it for granted that education was invented by the coloniser; instead, as Mugomba and Nyaggah (1980, 1) suggest, following from an observation which had been expressed by Nyerere (1967) especially: “Indigenous African Education was relevant and closely linked to the spiritual and material aspects of life before colonisation ... there was little separation of learning and productive labour nor any consequent division between physical and intellectual labour. This educational process reflected the realities of African society and produced people with an education which equipped them to meet the material, spiritual and social needs of the society.” So then, even if the systematic education which existed prior to the arrival of the conqueror could not be called “school” in Southern Africa, it is nevertheless in a significant number of aspects comparable.

¹³ McKerron (1934, 15) in his *History of Education in South Africa (1652–1932)* writes: “The early settlers at the Cape were proud of their mother country, then at the zenith of her glory, and desired to transplant the old life as little changed as possible.”

such, the university had an unnatural existence of being deliberately ignorant of the space and experience within the place which it existed.

Much later on, the indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation were admitted into schools and universities. With the disseizin of the land and its resources, which had previously provided subsistence for the African, she was immediately thrust into a state of severe poverty and by the appeal of her senses to the logic of survival she had also been left without a choice but to enter the world of employment (Ramosé 2002, 4). In the world of employment, it was apparent that those with the benefit of “Western education” enjoyed better pay and more bearable work, so the older people were forced to recognise the “benefits” of the education system that the missionaries and state had over time introduced to Africans.

From the viewpoint of the coloniser, who increasingly recognised the value of and encouraged the education of Africans, it was to serve the dual function of providing the job market with more skilled labour and in turn generate a new population of consumers¹⁴ of the products of Europe and those produced in the local factories.

The other purpose of education, supposedly altruistic and humanitarian, was to civilise (humanise) the “as yet sub-human African” by introducing her to the culture, language, religion, values and knowledge of her supposedly superior conqueror. The assimilation of such values, either by gentle persuasion or subtle coercion, was deemed to be the possibility condition for the ascent to the level of “human being” on the part of the indigenous conquered peoples.

In all of this “education” of the conquered, her identity, language, historical contribution, culture and perspective were, of course, absent. As long ago as 1917 educationist Charles Loram is quoted trying to explain the high drop-out and failure rates of the children of indigenous conquered people in the formal education system of South Africa, writing:

¹⁴ McKerron (1934, 176) for example, writes: “South Africa is not likely to find a large market for most of her manufactured goods in Europe, Asia or America, where her most influential competitors are already well established. Her most obvious market is among the millions of non-Europeans in Africa itself, but the purchasing power of these people will remain low if they remain in an uncivilised state.”

We have forced the Native child through a course of study which he can dimly conceive. We have taught him subjects foreign to his experience, and in a language which he cannot understand. At first, he comes to school eager to receive the education which he thinks has made the white man his master. For years [social pressure] causes him to continue ... and when he wants to know the why and wherefore of things, he sees no meaning in his school work. He finds no satisfaction in doing the tasks given to him ... no wonder he becomes listless in his school work, fails to satisfy those in authority, and either leaves school or remains there unwillingly. (cited in McKerron 1934, 174)

Even after 1994, almost 80 years after the abovementioned study was written—a year which supposedly marked a fundamental transition in the politics and practices of South Africa from substantive injustice to hollow formal justice; from oppressive and tyrannous to democratic and fair—it would appear that very little had in fact changed in the identity of the university in general, save for its admission policy which now allows for the admission of Africans to all South African universities. The identity and project of the university, however, remain unchanged. It continues to be—as Ali Mazrui so aptly observed—“a transmission belt” of Western educational paradigm (Mazrui 1978).

Much of the curriculum in South African universities is still obdurately chauvinistic and not even, as might arguably be the case with other parts of the world, a locally-derived cultural chauvinism but the most classical and unapologetic Eurocentrism.¹⁵ It has a bias against and condescension towards “non-European” thought and even more especially against the African thought and experience. The scholars, theories, methods and experiences favoured and represented are usually exclusively Western.

In the case of African philosophy, for example, after previewing a typical South African curriculum and teaching programme one could be forgiven for assuming that African philosophy did not exist. In the review of many academic programmes in the country it would be reasonable to assume that there were no world-renowned African scholars, while such scholars have indeed existed long before the birth of 1994 South Africa. The historical

¹⁵ Following Serequeberhan (2002, 64) we define Eurocentrism as “a pervasive bias located in modernity’s self-consciousness of itself. It is grounded at its core in the metaphysical belief or idea (*Idee*) that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life.”

continuity of such scholarship is present in South Africa, often expressing views different from the dominant Euro-American and Eurocentric poles.

The reality in fact is that there is an abundance of such scholarship from all over the continent (see Ki-Zerbo 1981, Mudimbe 1988, Oyéwúmi 1997); the African diaspora and this country (South Africa) specifically. Moreover, some of this work has specifically problematised Eurocentrism, its unjustifiability and the dangers of its dominance in Africa. This is a critique and call which, although it is strangely enough ignored in South Africa, has ironically been heard in many parts of the West, with several European philosophy departments prescribing such works.

There are, of course, some exceptions in South Africa, but in most cases where Africa is considered at all, it is usually Ghettoised under the auspices of African studies or indigenous knowledge systems. Although the contemporary meaning of Ghetto is “a part of the city, especially slum area, occupied by a minority group”¹⁶ its original meaning referred to “the quarter of the city, chiefly in Italy where Jews [the oppressed and dehumanised population in that context] were restricted.”¹⁷ Ghettoising then comes to denote both the forcible placement in an inferior and precarious location subtracting from equal “citizenship” as well as an ethnic quarantine where those Ghettoised are identified for particular ethnic or racial reasons.

What one finds in practice then, in the university, are African history, African politics and African literature, within this Ghetto where the history, politics, and literature departments in the same university continue to exist undisturbed in their unbending Eurocentrism and racism. In this way “that African stuff”¹⁸ has no way of affecting the mainstream (read Eurocentric) and dominant curriculum. The effect of the pre-fix Africa before philosophy, history or any discipline is the same as that of scare quotes, diminution or a question mark. What happens is then that African philosophy and philosophers, African history and historians may be found in the African Studies departments, where *real* (read Western) philosophers and historians may be found in the philosophy and history departments. Africa, as a place of some “Other,” may justify the existence of African Studies in Europe or the Americas, where “European” or “American” is silently prefixed against all other unspecified

16 *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Soanes and Stevenson 2009, 598).

17 *The Shorter English Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Little and Onions 1984, 848).

18 This fate has been suffered in comparable ways by some institutes, centres and departments of “Post- and De-colonial Studies, Black Studies, Ethnic Studies and Gender Studies.”

disciplines or studies. The existence of African Studies in Africa suggests precisely that all else, that is all those disciplines which are not specifically pre-fixed with “African”, are not African. The reason for the foregoing is the persistence of doubt concerning the reality or quality of African knowledge and the importance and value of the experience from which it arises. It is a doubt which has its philosophical foundation in the racist doubt concerning the humanity of Africans themselves. In the academe it is largely the reason for which we continue merely to have universities in Africa, rather than African universities in Africa.

In light of this general history and character of the South African university, let us now turn our attention to philosophy specifically.

A Brief History of Philosophy in South Africa

I call colonial philosophy that which was exported to Latin America, Africa and Asia beginning with the sixteenth century (the universities of Mexico and Lima were founded in 1552 with the same academic ranking as those of Alcalá and Salamanca) and especially the spirit of pure imitation or repetition in the periphery of the philosophy prevailing in the imperialist [centre]. (Dussel 2002, 11)

Although generalisations are of course dangerous, colonialism and colonisation basically mean organisation, arrangement. The two words derive from the Latin word *colĕre*, meaning to cultivate or design. Indeed, the historical colonial experience does not and obviously cannot reflect the peaceful connotations of these words. But it can be admitted that colonists (those settling in a region) as well as colonialists (those exploiting a territory by dominating a local majority) have tended to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs. (Mudimbe 1988, 1)

Some general characteristics

The purpose of our discussion under this section is not so much to provide an exhaustive history of philosophy in South Africa, but rather a brief overview of the history of institutional philosophy. Our purpose also—rather than a systematic study of trends and specific contributors—is to show the basic colonial, Eurocentric and racist structuring of philosophy departments and their practices since their beginnings.

In an article entitled *Philosophy in South Africa Under and After Apartheid*, Mabogo More (2004) argues that apartheid was merely the name of a juridical specification of a long existent, violent and racist colonialism which properly started in 1652 with the arrival of the Dutch in South Africa.

Apartheid as such then has limited historical significance and is often used in obfuscatory manner to distort the length of time over which liberation has been outstanding and to deflect attention from the conquest of indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation. More (2004) writes “the name ‘apartheid’ emerged—in its legal sense—in 1948 as a means of strengthening and perfecting an already existing system of racial discrimination and domination rooted in attitudes of whites ever since they came into contact with the African.” He concludes in the case of academic philosophy before apartheid that it was fundamentally and ideologically no different from philosophy during apartheid.

There have been two basic traditions of colonialism in South Africa; Dutch and British. The former may be traced back to the arrival of the Dutch in 1652, as well as to subsequent European populations who immigrated into that community over the years. This Dutch population has also, despite its self-declared re-identification as Afrikaner and its language Afrikaans, relied on continental Europe for inspiration of its cultural, religious, intellectual and political life. The latter can roughly be traced back to the 1820s; it was formalised and strengthened after the discovery of diamonds and then gold. The evidence of these two “traditions” may be seen in the systems of law in South African history, which are still dominant today, as well as in language, culture and education. The nature of imitation in higher education which we discussed above has also largely adhered to these traditional types. Philosophy has been no exception in this regard.

A self-evident feature is exclusion; the deliberate and sometimes forcible negative discrimination against indigenous peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation in order to ensure and sustain political, legal, cultural and even religious separation between them and the colonial conqueror. This logic of deadly and destructive exclusion is the enduring *leitmotif* guiding the conqueror in the forging of relations with the conquered.

The Afrikaans-continental tradition

The beginnings of institutionalised philosophy in South Africa were at the theological school in Stellenbosch in the mid-nineteenth century¹⁹ where a number of professors offered tuition in the history of philosophy. Several Afrikaans universities were then formed in the Orange Free State, Pretoria and Potchefstroom. Amongst early notables was Dr W.A. Macfayden who began teaching ethics and political science at the University of Pretoria in 1911 and was appointed as professor of philosophy and political science the following year, where he taught until his death in 1924. Amongst the assortment of courses he introduced during his tenure were essentials of later apartheid thought, such as city planning and eugenics (Duvenhage 2002, 110).

According to Duvenhage, what one sees in a study of the development of institutionalised philosophy at the Afrikaans universities during the twentieth century, for instance at Stellenbosch, is the influence “of a certain blend of continental philosophy and Protestant theology [influenced by the powerful Dutch Reformed Church].” This is evident for example in the work of Kirsten, Degenaar and Rossouw. He suggests that even in Pretoria the trend was the same but says the Pretorians Rautenbach, Oberholzer and Dreyer were more conservative (Duvenhage 2002, 112).

According to More (2004), there developed from the religious and cultural traditions of the Afrikaner people a certain distinct Calvinist and neo-Fichtean tradition, especially at Potchefstroom. Many of the advocates of this philosophy studied in Europe under philosophers such as Schelling, Herder or Fichte and were under the influence of mostly Dutch and German philosophers (More 2004, 151). From the doctrines of divine election and predestination in Calvinism came justification for the social ideology of a chosen people, which justified racial conquest and domination. From Fichte the concept of nature was invoked to justify the maintenance of separation between groups of different languages, as well as his view of the individual sub-ordinate aspect of the “Absolute Spirit” which reveals itself historically in the life of the community. Much of this thinking was to provide a philosophical basis to apartheid under the leadership of the Afrikaner Nationalist party.

¹⁹ Nash, A, (1997), “Wine-Farming, Heresy Trials and the Whole Personality: The Emergence of the Stellenbosch Philosophical Tradition 1916–40.” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2), 55–65. For those interested in a non-exhaustive but illuminating overview of the philosophical traditions in South Africa, see Duvenhage’s (2002) essay: “Is there a South African Philosophical Tradition?” in *Thought and Practice in African Philosophy*, edited by G. Presby, D. Smith, P. A. Abuya and O. Nyawarth. Nairobi: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Once apartheid had commenced (after 1948) most Afrikaans university philosophers explicitly defended it. A variety of approaches were employed towards this end, including Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (cited in More 2004, 153). It was, however, Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology which were put to greatest misuse. Phenomenology for instance was the basis of the apartheid state's philosophy of education, which was evident in the subject *Fundamentele Pedagogie* (Fundamental Pedagogy), the development of which was headed by the Afrikaans University of Potchefstroom for Christian Higher Education (More 2004, 153). A study of the Christian National Education Report for instance will show a combination of phenomenological categories with neo-Fichtean notions.²⁰

The relationship between the academe and the racist state, however, extended beyond mere intellectual support. The historical relationship between racist ideology and practice in the development of universities reveals a tangible and historical agenda. Commenting on the Afrikaner secret society known as Broederbond in 1978, political journalists Hans Strydom and Ivor Wilkins (2012, 14–15) wrote: “The Broederbond has an abiding passion for control of education because of the obvious advantages this holds for any organisation wishing to influence the minds and lives of young people. Consequently, its representation in the top echelons of all the Afrikaans-speaking universities is extremely strong.” In their book on the Broederbond this claim is accompanied by an extensive list of former rectors, chancellors and chairpersons of council who were well known “broeders.”

If the list were extended to the general professoriate and ordinary academics employed at these universities, the number would grow quite exponentially. Amongst those who would come to light are several philosophers who at one point in time taught at some of these universities. Prof. Nico Diederichs was by far the most famous Broederbond philosopher, going on to become the first vice-chancellor of the Rand Afrikaans Universiteit (later the University of Johannesburg) and Finance Minister before becoming State President of South Africa in 1975.

²⁰ Quoted in More (2004, 153): “We believe that the teaching and education of the children of white parents should occur on the basis of the *life* and *world-view* of the parents. For Afrikaans-speaking children this means that they must be educated on the basis of the Christian-national life and world view of our nation. In this life and world-view, the Christian and national principles are of basic significance and they aim at the propagation, protestation and development of the Christian and national being and nature of our nation. By the national principle we understand love for everything that is our own with special mention of our country, our language, our history and our culture.”

Before his rise to academic administration and politics, Nico Diederichs had been chair of political philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State; he had studied in both Holland and Germany (Moodie 1975, 154), and made many politically relevant contributions in his academic career. He had, for example, theorised a social metaphysics opposed to human equality in his *Nasionalisme as Lewensbeskouing en sy Verhouding tot Internasionalisme (Nationalism as a Weltanschauung and its Relation to Internationalism)* (Moodie 1975, 154). To quote an example from one of his treatises, he wrote: “Only through his consecration to, his love for and his service to the nation can man come to the versatile development of his existence. Only in the nation as the most total and inclusive human community can man realise himself to the full. The nation is a fulfilment of the individual life” (cited in Moodie 1975, 154).

Elsewhere Diederichs (cited in Moodie 1975, 154) argues: “... and one man is more human than another to the extent that the spiritual powers within him are more expressed and developed ... The only equality which must be accepted is the equality of opportunity for each to bring that which is within him to full expression” (Moodie 1975, 154). More (2004, 153) argues that Diederichs’s Calvinist Nationalism was during apartheid realised in all domains: social, cultural, educational, religious and political.

Diederichs was, however, hardly the only politically minded and active Afrikaner academic; there were many more senior Broederbond members who had senior positions at universities. This fact is not unlikely to have affected philosophy departments amongst others, in terms of the appointment of personnel, the selection of curricula and the epistemological paradigms favoured. Amongst senior Broeders who were Vice Chancellors or Rectors of universities, for example, were: Dr Hilgaard Muller (former Minister of Foreign Affairs) at the University of Pretoria; Prof. Samuel Pauw (Serfontein 1979, 83, 86); Prof. W.L. Mouton at the University of the Orange Free State; Prof. E.J. Marais at the University of Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University); and Prof. Tjaart van der Walt at the University of Potchefstroom. At the University of South Africa as well there was Herman de Vleeschauer, a Kant specialist who was Chair of the Philosophy Department from 1951 through to 1965; a professor who was an escaped convict for Nazi-war crimes committed during the German occupation of Belgium during the Second World War (Delpont and Dladla 2015, 30).

According to Delpont and Dladla (2015, 30), De Vleeschauwer's immigration was preceded by correspondence with none other than Nico Diederichs, who was by that time a member of parliament for the National Party, aimed at convincing the latter of his usefulness for the country. The temptation and necessity to wonder what sort of intellectual legacy these men left at these departments, and the extent to which it survives to date, is curbed by contemporary events and practices at these universities, some of which we will discuss in a later section of this paper.

The Anglo-Saxon tradition

Academic philosophy at English-speaking universities began at the University of the Cape of Good Hope, established in 1873 (Duvenhage 2002; More 2004). From the off-set it was characterised by a focus on the British philosophical tradition, studying empiricism and figures such as Locke, Berkeley and Hume. One of the first philosophers to occupy the chair of philosophy at the South African College (Later the University of Cape Town [UCT]) was R.F.A. Hoernlé.

Hoernlé became one of the major figures in the intellectual formulation of South African liberalism (More 2004, 153). In his inaugural address in 1923 as professor of philosophy at another English university, The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Hoernlé (1945a&b) stressed the significance of liberalism in a multiracial society such as South Africa. A text he authored with the title *South African Native Policy and the Liberal spirit* in 1939 argued for racial separation as opposed to assimilation or parallelism (More 2004, 153). It is noteworthy that apartheid was exactly a tangible juridical realisation of this kind of view. It would appear, as More (2004, 153) observes, then that “both the Anglo-Saxon and continental traditions may have been used to provide justification for racial and cultural discrimination before apartheid in 1948 and during apartheid in the years that followed.”

Later philosophy in the English universities, while continuing to uphold the liberal spirit, became increasingly associated with analytical philosophy (More 2004, 154). The analytic philosophers took what has been described by some as a “neutralist position” (More 2004, 154) who believe that philosophy ought to be pursued for its own sake without involving itself in social and political issues of its day. More (2004) summarises their argument as follows: “... since according to [them] philosophy is a second-order activity concerned

mainly with the logical analysis of concepts, the task of the philosopher is therefore the clarification of the logic of concepts and their meaning. Social and political issues are not accordingly the task of the philosopher qua philosopher but qua active citizen” (More 2004, 154). It must be noted, though, that despite this popular self-conception of analytical philosophy, there certainly are historical exceptions. Certain analytic philosophers have been thoroughly engaged in the social and political worlds—both through their activism and philosophical work; Bertrand Russell is one such example.

The a-political disposition of the English-speaking philosophers must, however, not be over-emphasised at the expense of examining some of the political activities that took place within these departments. In a recent article, historian Teresa Barnes writes about how the English-speaking universities have, as with most individual politicians and activists, been over-celebrated for their “struggle” and “resistance” against apartheid. This is mostly through the slanted discussion of their quest for academic freedom and students they produced who became anti-apartheid activists. She makes the focus of her paper an examination of the extent to which the English-speaking or so-called “Open universities” were complicit in the sustenance and support for apartheid in South Africa. Dealing in particular with the case of UCT’s philosophy department, some interesting details about that university’s departmental history emerge, which contradict the idea that philosophers “Stayed Out of Politics” to use Aronson’s phrase. Professor Andrew Howson Murray, who held the chair of UCT’s department of philosophy and ethics from 1937–1930, was a well-known and widely employed collaborator and agent of the apartheid regime. In the course of his academic work, Murray for instance contributed chapters to volumes published in honour of two conservative South African philosophers: the Belgian ex-Nazi fugitive Herman de Vleeschauwer of Unisa and Stoker of the University of Potchefstroom (Barnes 2015, 21). Barnes writes: “As a philosopher and educator, Murray’s perspective was that the concept of pluralism was the only answer to the challenges of life in a multi-racial society. Although in other settings pluralism can be a reasonable call for democratic decentralisation, in Murray’s hands it was deformed into an apology for apartheid” (Barnes 2015, 22). Barnes draws on a variety of his (Murray’s) writings as well as of his students’ marked copies of examination papers to support her reading that for Murray pluralism became a “euphemistic legitimation for injustice” (Barnes 2015, 23).

It is arguable, but one might suggest that ethics professors' most significant work happened outside of the classroom. Murray operated as the state's anti-communist expert in the "Treason Trial" where he was "brought in as a state witness by the pro-Nazi, chief prosecutor Oswald Pirow" (Barnes 2015, 24). Murray's main task as expert witness was to identify the accused's writings as "communist," the defence famously successfully had him unknowingly analyse his own earlier writings which he classified as communist (Barnes 2015, 24). According to Barnes, Murray continued to testify against anti-apartheid activists well into the 1980s. Murray also worked for the Publications Appeal Board (the main South African censorship body) from the 1960s until the 1980s: "Murray was the head of the political committee of the Board, and wrote many opinions that were central in the Board's decisions to ban books and silence authors of critical political materials" (Barnes 2015, 25). He in some instances recommended that authors be investigated by military intelligence. Barnes goes on to show that he was not the only professor at UCT who worked for the apartheid regime, but that there were countless spies and agents at the so-called open universities who did such work.

The English-speaking universities very often lay claim to producing some of the anti-apartheid movement's most important liberals; a tradition whose relationship with analytic philosophy and British nationalism we will examine later in this article. Liberalism has historically been predominantly the political tradition of English-speaking South Africa. It has also been rejected numerously from within the ranks of African politics; at one stage by the ANC Youth League of Anton Lembede, which saw liberals as trustees that were stifling African political development and agency (Maloka 2014, 43). The most famous critique of liberalism and its rejection, however, came some approximate 25 years after Lembede when a group of black students split from the liberal National Union of Students and formed the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). Liberals were criticised as political hypocrites in pursuit of the enjoyment of the moral reputation of rejecting white supremacy, while enjoying it fully. The Black Consciousness (BC) Movement produced a most devastating critique of liberalism. It rejected the paternalism and condescension of the liberals and their long history of speaking for the indigenous conquered people. This is practice which had a long history traceable to the petitionists of the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century and the Native Representative Councils in the twentieth century. Most significant, however, was the realisation by the proponents of BC that the liberals' rejection or opposition of apartheid was not necessarily also an endorsement of historical justice. The Progressive Party (the most

influential liberal political formation since the late 1950s) for instance, was still advocating for a qualified franchise for blacks until 1978. Many self-professed liberals also approved proposed political reforms akin to Hoernlé's 1940s parallelist social theory. One needn't even examine their position regarding historical justice and the restoration of titles to the territory and sovereignty over South Africa. It is worthwhile to note that in 2015 the "Decolonisation of Universities" movement was initiated at the English-speaking universities by students who were echoing the course of the BCM in the 60s and 70s, and complained about silencing, paternalism and Eurocentric cultural chauvinism at the universities, amongst other things.

We conclude this section simply by noting the interesting development that since the end of apartheid, English-speaking white South Africans (philosophers amongst them) have become especially more openly socially and politically active. In the next section we turn our attention to the contemporary situation of philosophy in South Africa.

The Contemporary Practice of Philosophy and the Marginality of African Philosophy

Around September 2013 an incident took place which caused a bit of a disturbance in the philosophy community in South Africa. Louise Mabile, a young lecturer in philosophy at the University of Pretoria, made national news after she wrote a controversial article in the Afrikaans cultural blog PRAAG, run by Afrikaner intellectual and cultural activist Dan Roodt. In her article she wrote, amongst other things, that black South African males rape babies as a "cultural phenomenon" (Aboobaker 2013). In order to support her claim she averred that they (Africans) had not even invented the word rape (and were implicitly unfamiliar with the concept) until their "meeting" with their enlightened relatives from Europe.

Mabile made these claims without recourse to historical-linguistic analysis. It is doubtful from reading the article whether Mabile speaks any Bantu language at all. She made her claims without giving reasons; supposedly the hallmark of the discipline in which she is expert. She resigned from her appointment at the university promptly and the university was quick to distance itself from her and her writings on the blog. Before issuing their final statement on the matter, the university first attempted to justify Mabile's actions by suggesting she was writing in her personal capacity and not on an academic site, though the

eventual statement was an apology and advertisement of her resignation. More interesting was a statement from the Philosophical Society of South Africa which suggested that her writings were against philosophy.²¹

This is interesting when one considers the history of this discipline both in its silence and complicity in the past. One wonders precisely when it is that racism or silence about it²² suddenly became “unphilosophical” in South Africa. Although the response by the philosophical community in South Africa was to distance itself from Mabile and treat her as an offender who went against established ethics, we would do well to consider her a victim of the same system that sought to distance itself from her. Mabile was, after all, a student at a South African university and received all her degrees from Bachelor’s to Doctorate after 1994 at one of South Africa’s “best universities.” What does it tell us then about the universities in this country that a graduate of the highest degree in the discipline that concerns itself with the good life and good reasoning, was able to write such a poorly reasoned explosion of blind hatred?

It is difficult to imagine that Mabile is a recent convert to racism; instead closer to the truth is probably that she has held her views and expressed them throughout her studies, teaching and social life and publicly enough to have the confidence to publish them proudly on the internet in her own name—and not expect serious consequences. The people who populate the institutions that distanced themselves from her during this embarrassing incident, were also likely former teachers, mentors, students and colleagues.

When one considers the history of philosophy in South Africa as well as its character today, what emerges is the likelihood that far from being exceptional, Mabile is in fact the rule. What is exceptional about her is that she was caught out.

21 The statement reads: “The Philosophy Society of Southern Africa distances itself unequivocally from the views attributed to Dr Louise Mabile in her recent article in *Praag*. The PSSA is dismayed at the ignorant and racist views expressed within this piece. Both the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, and the PSSA, condemn her article in the strongest terms. Central to the philosophical engagement is the rigorous exchange of idea; there is no place in such engagement for racism and prejudice.”

22 It must be noted that during apartheid the SAJP contained a statement: “The [Philosophical] Society is committed to the achievement of a just and democratic South Africa where there is no discrimination on the grounds of race, gender or creed.” As Aronson (1990) points out, however, the history of the society’s publications and actions suggests it had no problem “staying out of politics.”

Mabille is the double-victim of both a poor education which was in part responsible for her perspective, and a scape-goat paraded as a convenient exception, a gangrened limb amputated to save a diseased body of which she was an ordinary and consistent part before wounding herself by exposure. Her expulsion was a wasted opportunity for thorough reflection which might get to the root cause of the problem that her incident brought to light. It also prevented the philosophical community from moving a step closer to the necessary fundamental change which can liberate philosophy in South Africa. This was, however, no mistake; the body was merely preserving itself. The situation that prevails within the world of institutionalised philosophy today is little different from the process of imitation that has been going on since universities were first established in South Africa, as described in the sections above.

There are those who might suggest that things are beginning to change in the world of philosophy. One of the results of the Louise Mabille affair was that the University of Pretoria (where she was employed) temporarily introduced (in July 2014), a course on race and the Enlightenment. It is worthwhile to note that the University of Cape Town has also in the same period (since July 2014) introduced a course on philosophy and race. This brings us to the important issue of curricula and research agendas.

Developments in Curricula and Research Agendas

When writing about the history of curricula in South Africa, Lehoko (1997) states that they were “traditionally content based” which is to say that “they were organised in terms of prescribed subjects offered at various stages.” The progress of students from one stage to the next depended largely on the extent to which they mastered or memorised the required content, which was almost always tested by written examinations in a formal year-end exam. “Curricula were meant to direct teaching and learning and therefore, tended to be prescriptive and inflexible not often meeting the needs of particular groups of learners” (Lehoko 1997, 154). He goes on to say that this system permeated all sectors in education and led to numerous problems which persist to date. It was in light of this shortcoming that as early as 1995 the transitional government of national unity published a White Paper on Education and Training (March 1995) which aimed to correct the problem, amongst other historical defects of the education system, which were understood to have a negative bearing on the achievement of social justice. The key principles which were set out as necessary in the

creation of new curricula were inter alia legitimacy, relevance, credibility, coherence and integration (Lehoko 1997, 159).

Despite this expressed intention, the situation has barely changed, if our own experience in the South African education system can be used. Having experienced approximately 20 years of primary, secondary and tertiary education, 15 of them after the publication of the abovementioned article—this is something which has yet to change, no less in the teaching of university philosophy.

Although some philosophy departments in both the English-speaking and Afrikaans universities are presently offering, or have at one time or another offered African philosophy courses, epistemic control over these courses is vested in white academics with rather dubious credentials to deliver the courses. The problem of course is not with their being white. It is rather with their somewhat sudden and evidently casual interest in the historical as well as the philosophical variety and depth of the experience of the indigenous African peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation. This does not justify the prevailing white epistemic control over a subject in which they often deliver tutorial content that simply goes against the elementary common sense knowledge possessed by the indigenous African peoples conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation.

The University of Cape Town has, for example, since 2014 hired a British²³ lecturer who also studied in a British philosophy department to teach the subject philosophy of race. The course is filled with an assortment of readings, especially of academic debates in the North American situation, but does not—with the exception of Steve Biko (a speech by Pixely kaSeme and an article by Barney Pityana are also included)—contain any studies of philosophical work produced by contemporary African philosophers dealing specifically with the South African question or African colonial conquest. Through the detachment of the existential, political and economic dimensions of race/ism, it is turned to an analysis of concepts without reference to the history of conquest and dispossession, impoverishment and systemic murder of the indigenous conquered people that goes on to this day.

²³ His Britishness is relevant in light of our earlier discussion of colonial mimesis. South African universities often boast about the European and American training of their personnel. According to this logic, their being “really” European or American is an added virtue of authenticity. As a matter of fact, the UCT philosophy department has not to date ever permanently employed an African member of staff at any teaching rank, but it has boasted about several American and British members of staff.

Added to this criticism is a re-iteration of our discussion above on Ghettoisation. The University of Cape Town curriculum has Ghettoised the problem of race/ism, keeping it far away from its courses on metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy. These courses are taught in the orthodox fashion, unsullied by discussions on the racist dimensions of the thought of the philosophers studied or the complicity of the discipline in the oppression of “non-European” peoples. The course, it goes without saying, is also an elective unlike political philosophy and ethics courses, which are construed as “essential” to any philosophy programme worth the name. In this way, though, the gesture of including philosophy of race appears to be progressive at first. That is to say, it appears to be correcting the historical problem of a decontextualised and quite frankly colonial curriculum. Ultimately the addition of this course in this way really turns out to be a conservative gesture which only serves to prevent any substantial change and challenge of the status quo.

As if to confirm the state of utter ignorance and disinterest in African philosophy, the lecturer and course convener of UCT’s philosophy of race course—together with another academic from the African studies department—hosted a seminar series in 2016 with the offensive title “Philosophy in Africa and Africa in Philosophy”.²⁴ This title is reminiscent of two relevant historical episodes in the history of South African philosophy. The first was the publication of the Thomist from UCT, Augustine Shutte, who in 1993 (Ramose 2002, 380) published a text titled “*Philosophy from Africa*.” It is not certain whether the organisers are aware that a dispute arose relating to precisely the philosophical implication of a Thomist philosopher from their university who in 1993 wrote a book “*Philosophy for Africa*” published by UCT Press. A decade later in the *South African Journal of Philosophy*, an African philosopher examined this text, not paying insufficient attention to its title. He suggested that both the title and content of the book betrayed Shutte’s prejudice, despite his ignorance of Africa, that philosophy and Africa were two distinct and irreconcilable values.

Ramose uses the metaphor of the doctor and patient, where philosophy is for Shutte Western medicine and he himself, the all-knowing doctor, is there to treat the sick and medically ignorant patient, “Africa” (Ramose 2002, 125). Philosophy “proper” in the context of that book is Western philosophy; African philosophy on the other hand is entirely absent from the

24 See Thabang Dladla (2017) for another discussion of this episode.

scope of discussion—out of the sheer commitment to ignorance displayed by the expert doctor. Writing on his experience in contributing to the editorial work of Oxford University Press’s widely influential “Philosophy from Africa,” of which he requested his name to be omitted from the editorial list, Ramose explains: “His argument was that the ‘from’ in the title is not only reminiscent of the ‘for’ in Shutte’s title but it is also a subtle expression of doubt that philosophy ‘proper’ can ever come from Africa. In other words, it is an expression of doubt about the meaning of ‘African philosophy’.”

It is perplexing why more than a decade after this discussion has taken place, Hull and Ntsebenza (the conveners), nevertheless opt for a seminar series bearing this problematic title. When one turns to the proposed topics to be discussed in the series, one realises the name is hardly a coincidence; all the proposed topics are thoroughly ignorant of the work that African philosophers have been engaged in over the past 60 years. Most of the proposed topics share a family resemblance with the title, which conceives of Africa and philosophy as two unrelated species asking if the good doctor can help his patient in one or other regard.

Examples include:

- What distinctive concepts, ideas and arguments are contributed by African traditions of thought and practice to philosophical debates?
- What constructive insights can academic philosophy offer into problems—political, social, epistemological, metaphysical—specific to Africa, including South Africa?
- Do indigenous African traditions of thought provide alternative models of rationality which can challenge presuppositions of philosophical work in the “analytic” tradition?

Even before Hull and Ntsebenza’s offensive seminar series, the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) also held an annual conference at Fort Hare University in East London during the month of May 2014, which was widely attended by members of the predominantly white philosophical community. In a great number of instances what happened was that they simply contextualised their usual staple of research questions and approaches in “Africa” or “the Post-Colonial.”

Numerous papers pretended to perform comparative analyses between Western and African authors, where for instance the entire oeuvre of the Western author was studied as compared

to a single text of the African one. What was exhibited was a surprising lack of conversation with African philosophy and a suspicious opportunism to appear to be “Africanising” while genuinely engaging their prejudices as little as possible (Mbatha 2014). It is hardly surprising from a technical point of view that work presented would be dubious, after all when and where would South African philosophers have suddenly studied African philosophy? It is a famous fact about South Africa that despite almost four centuries of presence in the country, the majority of white South Africans (among them philosophers) speak no African languages. This happens even as they invest heavily in maintaining their European heritage through the attendance of German and Greek schools for example. Most former white universities also maintain departments of modern European languages which continue to enrol considerable numbers of white students every year.

In the world of philosophy too, there has after all never been an attempt by the now would-be African philosophers to run study groups for academics examining the history of discourses in African philosophy. There have been no broad efforts to attend conferences humbly as students of African philosophy first and then being peer-reviewed and eventually publishing in journals of African philosophy throughout the continent. Yet we may expect that as the superficial pressures of government to Africanise the curriculum and publishing increase, the same community which has maintained a multi-century commitment to ignorance will also increasingly enjoy the unjust power of reviewing, examining and writing about a discipline and cultures about which it has invested no time studying and engaging. The effect of combined and immense institutional and discursive power with the age-old commitment to ignorance will be the distortion and disfiguring of African philosophy in South Africa. There will likely also be more and more single courses in African philosophy in otherwise unchanged curricula offered by South African universities. This, as with our discussed case of African studies, will leave the damaging colonial philosophy untouched. It will also have the effect of sustaining the exoticisation, alterity and minority, and the marginality of African philosophy.

The marginality, distortion and diminution of African philosophy and Africans in philosophy in South Africa today are symptoms of outstanding liberation: socially, politically and economically. The “negotiated settlement” that brought into being the not-so-new South Africa, after all upheld the philosophical doubt that the African is not a rational animal by agreeing to purchase back stolen land and resources. What we mean by this is that if the

moral basis for the dispossession of land was that the African's humanity was defective, then surely to purchase the object of dispossession is to concede to the validity of this reasoning. The attainment of liberation will for us require not simply the development and practise of an African philosophy of liberation, but also the liberation of philosophy itself. Philosophy itself needs to be liberated because it is a philosophy of oppression and a philosophy of oppressors which continues to justify the unacceptable conditions that the majority of South Africans live in today. Dussel already observed in 1975²⁵ that:

[T]he colonial philosophers of the periphery gaze at a vision foreign to them, one that is not their own. From the centre they see themselves as nonbeing, nothingness; and they teach their pupils, who are something (although illiterate in the alphabets imposed on them), that really they are nothing, that they are like nothings walking through history. When they have finished their studies they, like their colonial teachers, disappear from the map geopolitically and philosophically, they do not exist. This pathetic ideology given the name of philosophy is the one still taught in the majority of philosophy schools of the periphery by the majority of its professors. (Dussel 2002, 12)

Conclusion

We began by arguing against the validity of the general portrait of present-day South Africa as a non-racial society. We showed instead that South Africa remains a white supremacist polity both *de jure* through a critique of the constitution that underpins post-apartheid South Africa as well as *de facto* through a discussion of higher education.

In our discussion of higher education, we began with a discussion of its history, with a special focus on philosophy, where we discovered both the racist roots of philosophical education and practice and its undisturbed continuity today. This urgent epistemological, ethical and political injustice has recently led to various kinds of student uprisings and can be understood as symptomised in the world of philosophy in South Africa by the continued marginality of African philosophy: the philosophy of the majority of the indigenous people conquered in the unjust wars of colonisation.

²⁵ The reference which follows is drawn from a 2002 English translation of the 1975 text originally written and published in Spanish.

On the basis of our exposition it is clear that the liberation of philosophy in South Africa will be realised only once African philosophy is no longer simply an exotic option on a menu of possibilities, but the very grounding of philosophy itself through which other traditions are engaged. The African philosophy of liberation is on the other hand increasingly coming to light—especially among the youth. This can be seen in a recent rise of movements which have come into being to challenge the prevailing marginality of African philosophy—both in the university, and in society, as well as the polity. Examples of such movements include the Economic Freedom Fighters’ party, the Black First Land First (BLF) movement, the #RhodesMustFall movement at UCT, the #Black Students’ movement at Rhodes University and the nation-wide #FeesMustFall movement with its call for a free decolonised education, now as well as the newly inaugurated Azanian Philosophical Society.

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