

# DECOLONISATION OF THE AFRICAN MIND AND INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE

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## KEY CONCEPTS

African philosophy; decolonisation; philosophy-in-place; humanising pedagogy; humanisation

## ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the question of what the goal of African philosophy ought to be. It will argue that African philosophy ought to be instrumental in the project of decolonising the African mind. In order to argue for this conclusion, there will be an investigation with regards to what it might mean to decolonise one's mind, and, more precisely, what the relationship is between the decolonisation of the mind and the decolonisation of the intellectual landscape. The intellectual landscape refers to universities and other institutions of knowledge production. The claim is that the decolonisation of the intellectual landscape will result in the decolonisation of the mind. It will be argued that African philosophy has the ability to develop concepts with their roots in Africa, and that this is African philosophy's main project if taken from a perspective of understanding of African philosophy as "philosophy-in-place". The development of concepts rooted in Africa has the prospect of working towards the decolonisation of the African intellectual landscape and so eventually the African mind. As a philosophy which aims for health, African philosophy therefore has a responsibility to focus on such a development of concepts rooted in Africa.



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In the Akan culture of western Africa there is the symbol of the *sankofa*, a bird reaching back to retrieve the past to use in the way forward – this is the sort of progress that is demanded by decolonisation. (Ritskes 2012)

## INTRODUCTION

This paper will argue that the development of concepts with their roots in Africa has the prospect of working towards the decolonisation of the African mind and intellectual landscape. The paper interrogates the concept of decolonisation of the mind, and provides an argument for why such a project is necessary in post-colonial Africa. As decolonisation of the mind is an important project for post-colonial Africa, I believe that teaching philosophy in Africa, as well as African philosophy, ought to have some focus on such projects. The final part of the paper sketches an example of the kind of project in African philosophy which can focus on decolonising the mind.

## THE COLONISED SUBJECT: “RACE” AND THE COLONISED MIND

Decolonisation is the change that colonised countries go through when they become politically independent from their former colonisers. However, decolonisation is not merely a matter of political independence. Structures of government and other institutions, the way in which a country is economically organised, as well as the way in which former colonial subjects were encouraged to think, are often still determined by the former colonial powers in post-colonial countries, as a result of the economic and cultural power the former colonisers wield. To claim that the colonial project stops having an impact on the newly decolonised country and its citizens, is to misunderstand how deeply the colonial project affected these countries and their citizens. In order to overcome the legacy of colonialism, it is necessary to also decolonise the intellectual landscape of the country in question, and, ultimately, decolonise the mind of the formerly colonised.

In order to understand what might be involved in the decolonisation of the mind, Franz Fanon’s work proves useful. Fanon writes that “the juxtaposition of the black and white ‘races’ has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex” (2008: xvi). His book, *Black skin, white masks* “is meant to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation” (Fanon 2008: 14). In other words, Fanon believes that it is necessary for the black person to overcome the psychological effects of colonialism.

Fanon makes it clear that he only means his analysis to be specific to his particular time and place, and also that he does not intend for the analysis to be applicable to

every black “man”<sup>1</sup> in these conditions. It is, however, true, he claims, that one can identify some broad trends along the lines of the diagnosis he makes. My proposition is that these inferiority and superiority complexes can have significant explanatory value in contemporary South Africa (especially when combined with discourse on “whiteness”<sup>2</sup>). If it is the case that there are racial inferiority and superiority pathologies still at work in South Africa, what does “the product of a psychological-economic structure” (Fanon 2008: 18) mean for racial identity, and the impact it has on our (both black and white) psyches? Is there a case to be made for the need to decolonise the minds of South African citizens in order to overcome the negative effects of colonisation and apartheid? This paper argues that there is this need, and that one of the ways in which minds can be decolonised is through a decolonisation of the South African intellectual landscape. The paper will revisit this point later.

As a psychiatrist and philosopher, Fanon’s focus is on the black person’s phenomenological experience and creation of identity, which he argues to be subject to an inferiority complex, which can in turn be ascribed to a two-stage process. The first stage is economic and material inferiority, the result of colonial subjugation and exploitation. The second, Fanon (2008) argues, comes about when this economic inferiority is internalised, and becomes a psychological pathology. A parallel white superiority complex is formed through similar stages, namely economic and material *superiority* which is internalised and becomes a complex of entitlement and belief in one’s superior worth. These complexes reach deeply within individual and collective psyches and political identities (Fanon 2008). Another way in which this can be understood, is that the colonial and apartheid context affected how people learnt to think about themselves and others, and that this way of thinking is not necessarily eliminated through political change alone.

## COLONISATION OF THE MIND: INTERNALISING THE COLONISER’S VALUES

Referring to the work of Fanon, Freire, and Memmi, Pyke writes that “[s]everal anti-colonial writers concerned with the psychological effects of colonialism on the oppressed in North Africa and South America described a ‘colonised mentality’ marked by a sense of inferiority and a desire to be more like the colonisers” (Pyke 2010: 551). In other words, the values of the coloniser or oppressor, which judge the colonised to be inferior and backward, are internalised by the colonised, and thus

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- 1 This is the term Fanon (2008) utilises, in keeping with his time. Fanon’s analysis is notoriously sexist in places. While recognising this, I do not believe that this needs to undermine some excellent points he does raise, and I intend to focus on these.
  - 2 A term used in whiteness studies, which is meant to refer to white people’s assumptions of their position being “normal” and their views “right”, the way they do and view things as just being “the way things are”.

she suffers a loss of self-esteem and starts to hate herself and what she represents in the worldview of the oppressor. As Fanon (2008) reports, the fact of his blackness made that people would react to him in specific ways which made his “race” (and the acknowledgement of what blackness is perceived to mean under the white gaze) impossible to escape. The fact that people around him reacted to him in accordance with specific racial stereotypes meant that he could either accept these ascribed features (and internalise them), or he had to react against them, and continuously set out to prove that he did not have these features. Either way, the manner in which others reacted to his blackness was something that he necessarily had to respond to and take into account in his life. Indeed, what his life would be was largely determined by how he chose to respond to the racist “white gaze”.<sup>3</sup>

In the South African context, the founder of the Black Consciousness movement, Steve Biko, followed in Fanon’s intellectual footsteps claiming that colonialism (of which apartheid was an extension) left many blacks in South Africa with an inferiority complex, which in some ways made a psychological cripple of the postcolonial subject (Biko 2004). In order to deal with the possible social and psychological repercussions of “race” classifications under apartheid, he argues it is imperative *not* to ignore the deep repercussions these classifications have had on South African society as a whole.

Fanon’s diagnosis is highly relevant for the South Africa of today, for the reason that “race” is still an important category for identity in contemporary South Africa. Most “South Africans tend to think of themselves in racial terms first before they think of other aspects of their identity” (Fischer 2007: 11). So, as a result of its colonial and apartheid history, and the role that “race” played in this history, “race” is still an important sociological category in South Africa today. This is as a result of the erroneous beliefs that earlier generations had about racial determinism of moral and intellectual characteristics, and the consequences of these beliefs on how people were treated (and unfortunately, this exists amongst some of the current generation). The history of oppression, the denial of opportunities and poverty, all rationalised by this outdated belief in biological racial difference and hierarchy, have shaped the opportunities, self-esteem and group identities of “race-groups” to this day, which affect the likelihood of individuals in these groups to be able to lead a flourishing life. The continued difference in life expectations according to “race” in South Africa can be interpreted as one indicator which could be used to measure whether someone is able to live a flourishing life. Not having the capacity to live a flourishing life is a prime example of how prejudice against a group in the past has caused particular circumstances (in this case, not being able to lead flourishing lives), which in turn perpetuates the prejudice.

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3 Fanon’s (2008) *Black skin, white masks*. See especially his chapter “The lived experience of the black”.

Being able to lead a flourishing life is affected by economic position, as one's economic situation determines one's quality of nutrition, medical care and education. People find themselves in their current social positions as a result of the circumstances in which they were raised. Some very basic examples of this include the impact of the quality of nutrition on the development of young children, as well as the proven importance of mental stimulation at an early age, and how that affects people's chances later in life. If parents are unable to provide the kind of environment in which these factors are adequately attended to as a result of their impoverished state, mostly due to their identities constructed as "non-white" under apartheid, this gives a straightforward explanation of how the "race" classifications of apartheid still impact on young people today. In other words, the structural racial inequalities in South Africa seem to persist, and as a result an average black person will have far less chance for a flourishing life than the average white person. But the fact that fewer black people lead a flourishing life, perpetuates some people's prejudices against black people. They seem to ignore the structural causes of their failure to lead flourishing lives, and blame their failure on the individuals themselves, such as blaming their failure on laziness or choosing to fall in with criminal elements.

In conjunction with this, the historical legacy and classification of the population according to "race" classifications in South Africa have resulted in a strong identification of individuals with their ascribed "race" groups. As a result, it is difficult to imagine that "race" would not still play a central role in the current South African political landscape. Racial identity is still central to how most people think of themselves, even if there are some in the country who claim to not think of themselves in this way.

One explanation of how a (strictly speaking) non-existing biological category can have this kind of central impact on people's identity, centres on how the perception of these different "races" as having different qualities can have very real effects. For example, empirical studies have shown that applying positive or negative labels to children affect their performance in the classroom; each label acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson 1992). These effects are known as the Pygmalion and Golem effects respectively, according to which teachers' positive or negative expectations of children affect their performance. In the same way, expectations and the ascription of stereotypical features of a "race" group to individuals, and treating them as if they already instantiate these features, could affect their behaviour to align with expectations.

"Race" then, in this sociological sense, denotes *more* than mere morphological features (or even average economic disparities) but rather points towards certain *meanings* attached to these features in the society's symbolic order.<sup>4</sup> Even when

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4 See Stevens, Franchi, & Swart (Eds). 2006. *A "race" against time: Psychology and challenges to deracialisation in South Africa*, for a collection of papers on the importance "race" still plays in identity construction in post-apartheid South Africa.

people are inclined to dismiss “race”-talk, I would argue that people who are taking this stance are simply unaware of the deep racial construction of their identity. For example, in terms of white identity, Vice (2010: 324) writes:

It is by now standard...to think of whiteness as consisting in the occupation of ‘a social location of structural privilege in the right kind of racialized society,’ as well as the occupation of the epistemic position of seeing the world ‘whitely.’ ‘Whiteness,’ Paul Taylor writes, ‘tends to involve a commitment to the centrality of white people and their perspectives’: ‘The way they [whites] see the world just is the way the world is, and the way they get around in the world just is the right way to get around.’ The political, social and economic advantages that accrue to being white are then ‘normalized, and rendered unremarkable.’

White privilege can then be understood “as unconscious psychical and somatic habits, constituted by ‘mental and physical patterns of engagement with the world that operate without conscious attention or reflection’; our very identities are constituted by these patterns of behavior” (Vice 2010: 325). Thus, white identity is constructed in specific ways, and it is exactly this construction which allows many whites to be able to look beyond “race”, as the position of whites is one of the norm, “normalised” in the Foucauldian sense.

As already mentioned, in the same way as the white superiority complex is constructed, black identity can be seen to be constructed in specific ways. In particular, in terms of the symbolic order, it seems that with regards to some aspects, Fanon’s (2008) diagnosis of an inherited inferiority complex in black Antilleans could still be relevant in the African context today. For example, the symbolic order in which white is seen as good and pure, while black is seen as the opposite, namely evil and tainted, is one which still permeates the global discourse. That there are still these stereotypes, and that it is embedded deep within many of our collective psyches, is something which becomes apparent in the famous social psychology experiment known as the Clark doll experiment in which young African-American children were asked to pick a doll, choosing between a black and a white doll. The vast majority of children picked the white doll, justifying their choice through claims that the black doll was “bad”, “naughty” etc. First performed in the late 1930s, the experiment was reproduced in 2006, with very similar results. In South Africa, a similar study was conducted, and the results were that despite “recent efforts to bridge racial distinctions and promote unity, South African children still show sensitivity to ‘race’ ” (Shutts, Kinzler, Katz, Tredoux, & Spelke 2011: 1289). More importantly, children’s responses to the experiment showed remarkable similarities to the ones in the Clark doll experiments conducted in other parts of the world, in that white children show a high own-“race” preference, which is not present in black or mixed-“race” children (Shutts et al 2011: 1288).

To make a diagnosis of the presence of a possible inferiority complex (and accompanying white superiority complex, which can be interpreted as the sense of entitlement that accompanies “whiteness” as discussed above) does not, of course,

mean that all black people in South Africa have an inferiority complex (or that all whites have a superiority complex). It does, however, mean that the global symbolic order still exists in our society, and that black people who do not suffer from this psychological inferiority complex (and whites who do not suffer the superiority complex) are in the minority, and have overcome the obstacles to a healthy self-esteem with difficulty, and against many odds.<sup>5</sup>

## AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND DECOLONISATION

Since “race” is still important in our “place”, as a result of the symbolic hierarchy evident in our societies, inferiority and superiority complexes could therefore still be evident, and philosophy, I will argue in this section, can do much to heal these pathologies in our societies. Tabensky (2008) captures what I believe to be a central feature of African philosophy in the following:

The discipline of African philosophy originates in tragedy, out of pain, confusion and rage stemming from colonial destruction; destruction that is responsible for what Fanon calls the ‘negro neurosis’ caused by what Biko would describe as the unbearable fusion of colonised and coloniser...[T]he birth of African philosophy as an academic discipline is largely responsible for its character and, crucially, for its distinctive creative possibilities. (Tabensky 2008: 285)

Tabensky thus argues that African philosophy has a distinctive aim, namely the “quest for health” (2008: 291) which he sees as intimately related to the quest for authenticity. I believe that African philosophy, as a result of this aim, results in empowering Africans through articulating philosophical positions which take the context and cultural particularities of African places into account. This empowerment in turn leads to a reclamation of the intellectual space denied to Africa during the racist project of colonialism.

According to Tabensky (2008), what is usually referred to as Western philosophy has as its primary aim the search for truth. African philosophy also aims at truth, but puts the search for truth to work in its main project of the restoration of health.<sup>6</sup> So, projects in African philosophy have as their aim the restoration of health lost by the colonial heritage of violent oppression and exploitation, through exploring

5 A relevant parallel can be drawn with women’s views of themselves in terms of the “feminine beauty ideal” which is ever present in the media and society as a whole. Women are expected to live up to this ever changing ideal, and though there are a few women who are able to form their self-esteem without reference to this ideal, most women will be unable to escape at least some impact of this ideal and how they fail to live up to it on a psychological level. See Callaghan (1994), *Ideals of feminine beauty: Philosophical, social, and cultural dimensions*, for a collection of papers on the feminine beauty ideal and its relationship to patriarchy.

6 This is an insight that can also be gleaned from critical theory, as well as philosophy born of struggle. However, due to space constraints, I will not investigate these links further in this paper.



truths articulated within the context of Africa. As philosophers, we are meant to deal with the postcolonial context, and in this way philosophy ought to cast new light on old issues rife on this continent, problems which arise and are the effects of the continent having had a rupture with its past when the colonial project so violently, yet indifferently, carved the continent up into pieces of the pie meant for European consumption.

African philosophy also has, I believe, another central and related feature. As Janz (2004: 111) argues:

...the core of philosophy, [is] its ability to bring... life to the surface and reflect on it, creating new territory, extending the range of life by creating new concepts. Concepts do not so much point to the past (or, not only to the past), but also to the future, as they open the possibility of new forms of expression and new self-understandings. And, they also point to the present, to the place on which we stand and the life that matters.

African philosophy, according to Janz, thus draws and creates concepts from the place of “Africa”. As a result, I believe it can be instrumental in the decolonisation of the African mind. This is possible through providing an alternative framework for knowledge, which “de-centres” the assumed (Western) centres of knowledge. Concepts need to be created through an engagement with the African past and present, however these concepts will not be “old” concepts in the sense that they are “discovered” in Africa’s past. Instead, they will be new concepts that have their roots in an African past and present. Thus, arguing that African philosophy ought to focus on African concepts is not advocating a return to a romanticised pre-colonial past and a [re-]”discovering” of old concepts. These pre-colonial concepts cannot be relevant unchanged in the world today as a result of the drastic rupture between the pre- and post-colonial states of being. Thus, I am not advocating an ethno-philosophy,<sup>7</sup> even though the relevant concepts would be identified by ethno-philosophy. If what we ought to be aiming for was ethno-philosophy, then concepts would not be *rooted* in the past, but would instead *remain* in the past as static and unchanging. This would reinforce a belief in African culture as static and unchanging, which comes with a host of problematic implications. Rather, in engaging with concepts rooted in Africa, we ought to take them as a starting point for reflection. This would mean that concepts such as *ubuntu* should be engaged; not as a static concept from Africa’s past but rather as a dynamic concept with its roots in the past. Concepts should be developed and acknowledged as having meaning which is fluid and changing in order to take into account present and future situations and contexts.

The tradition of African philosophy as I mean to use it here, (as post-colonial philosophy in this place, Africa) takes the insight of particulars possibly giving rise to universals seriously, and seeks to provide a different perspective on various

7 See Oruka (2002). Four trends in current African Philosophy. In *Philosophy from Africa: A text with readings*, Coetzee, P.H, Roux, A.P.J (Eds), pp. 120-124.



philosophical problems. This could empower Africa and Africans through challenging the accepted Western philosophical paradigm, and could illuminate insights which the dominant paradigm systematically ignores. In this way, the African philosopher can contribute to the philosophical tradition through the recognition that the intellectual landscape has been dominated by Western perspectives without recognising them as such.<sup>8</sup> The African philosopher who takes this approach is, however, still essentially interested in universals, particularly if they have invested in the Western analytical tradition. As Wiredu writes, “the African philosopher may be making contributions to general conceptual understanding. In other words the universal may arise out of a concern with the particular” (Wiredu quoted in Bell 2002: 20). The fact is that accepting the dominant Anglo-American view without question, leaves us with a poorer understanding of the world. Different perspectives are important, and can get us closer to the truth.

This is not a novel insight, and one of the most famous proponents of this view is Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of morals* (GM Essay III: 12), who argues that all seemingly objective judgments are actually concealed perspectives. As Nietzsche states “there is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’ be” (GM Essay III: 12). Thus, as we can never have a “view from nowhere”, and since we must always view the world from only one place at a time, we each need the other (person/culture) in order to give meaning to the world, in order to complement our own views (Bergoffen 1996: 54). Knowledge constitutes a form of power, since it implicitly affirms the “objective” truth and validity of the perspective from which it is made; it is informed and formed by our interests (Wartenberg 1990: 131) We “necessarily know an object from the standpoint of certain interests that direct our attention to only certain aspects of the object of knowledge” (Leiter 2002: 20). Through our theorising, we understand things in a particular way, and this means that we cement power within certain paradigms – in other words, social reality is largely constructed by the paradigms we hold as dominant. Knowing and understanding this ought to result in a quest for objective truth (as opposed to “objective truth” which is a particular perspective masquerading as objective truth) which always admits to the possibility that accepted “truths” could be false. This quest for truth requires an engagement with all perspectives for the reason that there is always the possibility that they might shed some light on the truth (which, perhaps, can never be fully realised, but to which we *can* get closer).

The question of what African philosophy is, has unfortunately often become a way of trying to convince the Western world that Africans can engage with them on

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8 This can be directly related to the concept of whiteness, which assumes that the Western, “white”, dominant perspective is “just the way things are”.

an equal intellectual footing.<sup>9</sup> This is best interpreted in the post-colonial context as an effect of the so-called inferiority and superiority complexes, and the difficulty of having to deal with a legacy of colonialism without simply affirming the values which the West has ascribed to the colonised peoples of Africa (as the *Negritude* tradition has been interpreted).<sup>10</sup> Colonised cultures have, in many instances, become thoroughly assimilated to colonising cultures. This has the result that the *specificity* of the socio-historic place from which the colonised's perspective would otherwise have been formed is lost, and with it the opportunity (for anyone) to engage with this perspective. However, as there has not been a complete assimilation of the African peoples into Western cultures (an example might be what has been labelled "African ethics" that is still at play in this place), there is the possibility to engage with a worldview and framework which can enrich the dominant paradigm. It is possible to engage with this perspective in order to perform philosophy in "place" – from *my* place, *my* context and *my* phenomenal world. Attention to particular situations and contexts can, I believe, bring to light universals, a new way of looking at concepts, or aspects of concepts which have thus far not been emphasised, or even recognised.

As this philosophical undertaking is, however, still ultimately *aimed at* universals, this is not a project of ethno-philosophy, which is typically concerned with a project of recovery.<sup>11</sup> African ethno-philosophers record and aim to recover the folk philosophy of specific African cultures. Though this focuses on the particularities within the African context, this does not align with philosophy in place, as philosophy in place utilises the particular as a *starting point* for critical engagement. But how can doing philosophy be healing, and how exactly can it result in a decolonisation of, first the intellectual landscape and then the mind? It is on an example of how African philosophy can be utilised in this way that the paper will focus next.

## AN EXAMPLE OF HOW AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY CAN DECOLONISE MINDS: HUMANISING PEDAGOGY<sup>12</sup>

This paper is concluded by briefly trying to put into practice the aim of "philosophy in place", by interrogating what humanising pedagogy could mean from an African

9 The accounts of African philosophy by Janz and Tabensky do not fall prey to this objection, and this is one of the reasons why I utilise their accounts.

10 The original articulation of this objection was in Sartre (1976), *Black Orpheus*, translated by S.W. Allen, Paris: Présence Africaine. Also see Irele's (2002) "Negritude: Literature and ideology" in *Philosophy from Africa*, edited by P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux, for an analysis of this objection.

11 Examples of ethno-philosophers include Placide Temples, Leopold Senghor, and John Mbiti.

12 Recent events in South Africa such as the "Rhodes must fall" movement at the University of Cape Town, and the "Black students' movement" at Rhodes University reflect and support the argument made so far, namely that the intellectual landscape (here that refers to the university as a space for producing knowledge) is in need of decolonisation.

perspective of personhood.<sup>13</sup> It will be demonstrated how African philosophy can be used as a tool in the decolonisation movement through engaging with questions of what it means to humanise pedagogy in our context. I will briefly relate the “Afro-communitarian” understanding of the person to the concept of humanising pedagogy, and show how this kind of application of a concept rooted in Africa to the issue of pedagogy can provide new insights and fresh perspectives to the issue.

Focusing on an application of an Afro-communitarian understanding of the person to pedagogy, emphasises the knowledge and contributions of Africa to the intellectual landscape, and as such the African mind can start to escape the belief that it is inferior. The claim of this paper has been that we might focus on understanding African philosophy as post-colonial “philosophy-in-place”. The methodology is to start from the individual’s particular place – not only geographically, but also contextually, as “Africa” denotes more than a geographical location, to recognise that this could affect one’s ideas, and so to focus on what the individual’s own specific context can offer for understanding, creating and investigating concepts. Such projects of creating new concepts from this place, Africa, might support and work towards the decolonisation of the intellectual landscape, and so the mind instantiates philosophy as “therapy” in the post-colonial African context. Drawing lessons from African culture could, in itself, work against the inferiority complex and symbolic order through inculcating pride.

The Afro-communitarian view of the person<sup>14</sup> will now be applied to the concept of humanising pedagogy.<sup>15</sup> The Afro-communitarian conceptual framework can be understood as a metaphysical and/or an ethical understanding of personhood. In South Africa, the particular instantiation of this conceptual framework is *ubuntu*.

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13 Please note that this section is only meant to provide a sketch of the kind of project that I am arguing African philosophy ought to engage in, as an in-depth analysis of the project would require an article of its own to do it justice.

14 Note that this claim with regards to the Afro-communitarian personhood does not presuppose that all Western worldviews or philosophical positions are individualistic, but rather it is a claim about most Western worldviews. So, it is a claim about a particular subsection of Western philosophy, namely the ones that presuppose individualism. It is also not the intention to suggest that all African philosophers subscribe to the communal view of personhood applied in this paper, nor am I claiming that the issue of personhood has been solved in African philosophy. As Kaphagawani (2005) argues in his article “African conceptions of a person: A critical survey” there are different ways of understanding personhood in African thought – he mentions the interpretations of force, shadow and communalism. This paper will, however, only focus on the communalism strand in African thought, as it is the contrast between the specifically Afro-communitarian understanding of being a person and the Western individualistic understanding of personhood that I wish to investigate. The theses of force and shadow are not of interest here as they also have an individualistic, and not the communitarian understanding of personhood. It is this communitarian understanding which I find interesting, and which I believe can be useful in applying it to humanising pedagogy.

15 See Del Carmen Salazar (2013), “A humanising pedagogy: Reinventing the principles and practice of education as a journey toward liberation.” *Review of Research in Education* Vol. 37 for a substantial explanation of this term.

*Ubuntu*, a Nguni term often translated as “I am because we are” (Tutu 2007: 3) provides a starting point for some of these conceptual explorations. As the project centrally engages with this term *ubuntu*, which is most often understood as ethno-philosophical, it is necessary to clarify that despite the centrality given to *ubuntu*, this is not engaging in ethno-philosophy. Rather, the project is regarded as one of post-colonial African philosophy, and we should understand the project of philosophy as dealing with and responding to problems inherent in the post-colonial situation in Africa. As the project is one of post-colonial African philosophy, none of the claims about *ubuntu* being put forward are meant to essentialise indigenous Africans or their views.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of the *ubuntu* worldview that is proposed, the fact that it originated within a certain time frame of rural traditional Africa of the past, does not eliminate the possibility that an adapted understanding of this type of subjectivity and ethical schema could exist and flourish in other contexts in our day and age, not only for indigenous Africans, but also in other contexts. The aim is, however, not to utilise the philosophy of *ubuntu* as it might have existed “authentically” (as I do not pretend that I would be able to understand what that would look like), but rather to use it as a philosophical construct, as a catalyst for ideas to relate it to humanising pedagogy and engage with this concept from a different angle, a different perspective. This is in line with utilising ideas as a starting point for critical engagement as in the tradition of philosophy in place. In engaging with humanising pedagogy as the concept would be understood from the worldview of Afro-communitarianism, a conception different from that available in the mainstream literature comes to light.

The concept of “human” as understood by Afro-communitarianism will be harnessed in order to investigate what exactly we might mean by humanising pedagogy from this perspective. The *ubuntu* worldview, for example, recognises the importance of others, of history, of context and community in the formation of one’s identity, and the inter-dependent relations between individuals and collectives. Recognising inter-dependence and the importance of interpersonal relations for the self, this worldview sees the individual as necessarily socially embedded, and affected by context. Under such an Afro-communitarian account, personhood comprises the creation of the person through her community, and a central aspect of personhood is understood to be being ethical and accepting resulting moral duties and responsibilities. What makes us human, according to Afro-communitarianism, then, is our capacity for self-realisation through meaningful, interpersonal relationships.

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16 See Masolo (2014), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-sage/> “Ethno-philosophy had falsely popularized the view that traditional Africa was a place of philosophical unanimity and that African traditions encouraged unanimity regarding beliefs and values. If this were true it would allow no room for individual thinkers like, say, Socrates or Descartes, with their own independent views on such matters.”

If one sees the “self” that one aims to realise as being diffused throughout one’s community, constituted by others and one’s relations with others (so that the self becomes a communal self which needs to be realised) then self-realisation is cast in terms of a communal self. This communal self need not mean that everyone will be “the same”, as might be suggested or implied by a common identity. An analogy that can capture this understanding is different parts of the body, and that it needs different organs and limbs to function. In the same way, we can say that a communal self needs to have diversity in order to function well, and that the focus needs to be on the health of the individual (and different) organs, as well as a harmonious relationship between the different organs, or that they function together well. The insight proposed here is that the self-realisation in question is not one of the individual, but a *communal* self (the “we” created through shared identity).<sup>17</sup> The good which has fundamental moral worth then, on this communitarian understanding of the self, is the realisation of the community, and the important emphasis on developing moral personhood found throughout the literature on *ubuntu*. The ultimate aim then is not personal fulfilment as an individual, but rather the recognition that personal fulfilment is part of a *communal self*. As the individual and the community are so intricately interrelated in African thought, self-realisation would have to include community realisation or flourishing, or, in other words, an individual cannot flourish in a non-flourishing society, and therefore the ultimate goal ought to be a flourishing (and “self-realised”) society. The aim is, however, still self-realisation, and thus working towards a flourishing self (thus this ethical theory can still be understood as at core a “virtue ethic”) – the difference is that this self is contributing to a communal self. To continue with the analogy of the body, people who work against the community purely for their own benefit, could be analogous to cancerous cells that impede the overall harmonious functioning, and ultimately the survival of the organism as a whole. Though the cancerous cells might seem to be thriving, in the end this growth against the functioning of the organism as a whole undermines the survival of the organism, as well as the cancer cells themselves. To apply the analogy to the individual and community, people who work only for themselves without taking the health of the community into account are undermining their own health and flourishing, whether they recognise this or not. That we cannot flourish unless we live in a flourishing society, is not something that most people with an individualistic bent would find easy to accept.<sup>18</sup> However, without this insight, I believe it is not possible to understand some central claims that friends of *ubuntu*

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17 Lutz’s article seems to have a relevantly similar interpretation of *ubuntu* to the one being argued for here. See Lutz (2009). “African *ubuntu* philosophy and global management.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 84(3): 313-328.

18 This is something that could be argued to be present in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean ethics*, and why he sees politics as the most important discipline, as he understands that without the right context, individuals cannot flourish.

have made with regard to our relations with others. For example, the claim by both Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela that the oppressor and the oppressed are both in need of liberation can best be understood if this notion of communal self-realisation is taken to heart. Ultimately, self-realisation cannot happen without individual and communal commitment to the type of society which allows for and is made up of flourishing human beings.

The Afro-communitarian ethical theory which I employ when talking about humanising pedagogy, will then be *communal self-realisation through the promotion of harmony*. The idea is that it is the collective self (which is the proper object of virtue) which justifies and grounds the importance of harmony.

So, how would this understanding of personhood and ethics affect the notion of humanising pedagogy? Humanisation in the sense of *ubuntu* is, at core, about having a healthy collective self, and that involves having good relationships with others in the society. Dehumanisation for the Afro-communitarian would centrally involve being removed, isolated and excluded from the collective self. Most importantly from an Afro-communitarian perspective, becoming fully human is dependent on treating others humanely. For the Afro-communitarian, when referring to “dehumanisation”, this includes an erosion of one’s humane responses (dehumanisation of the self), as well as a perception of others as not being worthy of similar respect and value as myself (dehumanisation of others). Thus, when applying this logic to dehumanising pedagogy, for the Afro-communitarian dehumanising pedagogy will dehumanise not only the student, but the teacher as well. How do we humanise our pedagogy? I will argue that humanising pedagogy from an Afro-communitarian perspective needs to focus on the importance of the imagination.<sup>19</sup>

The imagination plays a central role in education within many cultures, with metaphors, proverbs and storytelling being a pivotal part of forming the moral compass of younger members of the community. The young listener is encouraged to imagine different perspectives and put herself in the different characters’ shoes. This ability of imaginative understanding becomes central to humanising the other under the Afro-communitarian model, as it is through such imaginative understanding that the strong sense of community necessary to create the communitarian self, is formed. Rehumanising the other (and in the process the self) is therefore a practice which has the imagination at its core from an Afro-communitarian perspective.

The arts and humanities, especially subjects such as literary studies and philosophy which foster the imagination, will therefore have to play a central role in our education in all fields, and too strong a focus on instrumental and praxis-

19 Due to space constraints, this account is unfortunately a superficial one. The aim is merely to demonstrate what this kind of African philosophical project should look like. For a substantial recent account of how African philosophy can decolonise education, see Higgs’s (2012) article on the subject.



orientated education, which only focuses on a particular subject to the exclusion of all others, ought to be discouraged.

None of this assumes that the material taught at universities ought to be completely Africanised. In fact, as Mbembe (2015: 24) writes:

...the Western archive is singularly complex. It contains within itself the resources of its own refutation. It is neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West. Africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it. *Decolonizing knowledge is therefore not simply about de-Westernization.* [italics added]

Humanising pedagogy will therefore also encourage engagement with Western material, as long as it is with the understanding that Africa, and African students, have a valuable perspective to contribute alongside what is found in the Western canon.

Apart from merely changing what is taught, however, also important is *how* it is taught. The focus on enhancing and fostering the imagination needs to be combined with what Mbembe calls “pedagogies of presence”. For Mbembe (2015: 6), decolonising the university (which is a part of my conception of the “intellectual landscape”) “has to do with creating a set of mental dispositions”. The mental dispositions that need to be fostered are in line with what I have been calling the “decolonisation of the mind”. Academics and students, especially black ones, ought to make their voices and perspectives present in the university, and thus the intellectual landscape, in order to overcome the male Western white bias under which it currently operates. In order to encourage this presence of black academics and students, white academics and students need to self-reflectively engage with their context.

In other words, responses to the context from white academics such as myself working in education, should include working against our superiority complex, attempting to overcome our whitely habits, and listening and engaging with other groups in a reflective manner during the course of teaching and research. Our day-to-day relations with others should be influenced by the understanding that some (to us often invisible) advantages (such as a good self-esteem) are a result of factors that we had no control over. Our response should also include working towards a hybridisation of identity, in which values and concepts from the traditional African concepts are incorporated into our worldview. Learning an African language should be seen as a priority for white academics in this aim for hybridisation of identity.

The aim is to foster a hybrid identity, people with an identity who would feel comfortable in both traditional African as well as Western contexts. As Biko (2004) argued, we need to aim to keep the good aspects of both the cultures of the coloniser and the colonised in this hybrid identity. Humanising pedagogy would include the recognition of knowledge and skills which students can contribute, a necessity for



the creation of a hybrid identity, and this can be especially fruitful in philosophical research in African philosophy.

Humanising pedagogy would therefore, according to the Afro-communitarian view, focus on imaginative understanding of the students we are teaching, and the recognition that unless we treat students as human beings, and attempt to have humane relationships with them, we would be dehumanising not only the students, but also ourselves.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued for the practice of African philosophy as “philosophy in place”. I contend that it is necessary to overcome the inferiority and superiority complexes inherent in postcolonial Africa. The article concludes with a brief sketch of infusing concepts with new meaning from the perspective of philosophy in place, namely humanising pedagogy where the “human” in question is viewed from an African understanding of personhood.

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