

Philosophy, culture and values: African philosophy and the ideal of development

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The questions about the relationship between culture, development and philosophy have been particularly central to the debates on African philosophical tradition. The main issues have been, on the one hand, whether philosophical inquiry is and must be methodologically universal and on the other hand, what is the basis for granting a particular philosophical tradition to be defined with cultural attributes; is it the cultural origin of the patterns of thought, the ethnic background of the philosophers themselves, or is the substance, the topics and subjects of philosophical reflection (see for instance Bodunrin 1984, Eze 1997, Masolo 1994).

In this presentation I want to argue that the debate on the cultural attachment vs. cultural detachment in philosophical inquiry concerning the identity and role of African philosophy has taken a path that is leading into false polarizations between universalism and cultural relativism and dichotomies between African and Western philosophy. By this claim I refer to the tendency to interpret cultural attachment as relativism and the claim for cultural detachments as a sign of universal reason. Instead the issues of universality and/or relativity of human reason and ethical reflection should rather be looked at from the point of view of validity of logic and soundness of argumentation. This means that we can accept the universal (or maybe more modestly, the general) applicability of the method of philosophical inquiry of critical and self-critical questioning and analysis, but admit its fallibility in relation to our particular cultural presuppositions. Rather than looking for 'global and/or local philosophies', we should look for global and local philosophical reflection – and instead of debating on the universality or cultural confinement of our theoretical frameworks, we should pay more attention to the universal nature of the mistakes made by human reason. Studying the errors of reasoning and common fallacies reflects well our cultural presumptions and makes us aware of our cultural embeddedness and local beliefs and social biases.

Thus, cultural reflections – whether in Africa or in the West or anywhere else – as such do not have to try to provide alternatives to the methods or frameworks of philosophy. They are of better use when they can point out and correct fallacies in our reasoning and critical – and self-critical – social reflections in order to better understand our cultures and each other.

The promise and jeopardy of philosophy for development

African philosophy and/or philosophy in Africa has unfairly had to prove its place in the history of philosophy particularly because the imperialistic history of Western philosophy (of history). Thus, in order to discuss the role of philosophy in African development, we need not to focus on African philosophy only, but also in the Western philosophy. In fact, it is less useful to start with a defence of the strength of critical and systematic thinking in

African cultural heritage. Instead, it might be much more obliging to bring out the faults of logic in the Western philosophical tradition, which claims superiority in the achievements of objective reason and logic. If we begin by pointing out how cultural influence fails the universal reason in the West, maybe we get more respect to culturally open philosophising, such as the philosophy in Africa, by Africans and for Africa. This is especially important for enhancement of cross- and trans-cultural dialogue and global wisdom.

The problem with the Western philosophical tradition tends to be blind to its own cultural biases and thus, remains arrogant enough to present claim that demean the other cultures and their local wisdom. Excellent examples can be found throughout the Western philosophical history from the Ancient Greek until today. In the context of the marginalization of African philosophy and in general all development issues, particularly the Enlightenment's philosophical tradition, which rhetorically preached for universality of individual rights, equality in human dignity, remained uncritical of its own logical inconsistencies based on culturally bound prejudices, thus, directly undermining the very possibility of its own descriptive as well as normative universalism. Some of the greatest philosophical minds of the Western tradition – during the so called age of reason – from Locke to Kant and from Hume to Hegel – all presented, in the name of universal reason, social and political views that are strikingly communally biased and culturally bound in their racist as well as chauvinist presumptions. These culturally partial views undermined the very existence of the African philosophical tradition and often also the very humanity of the African people.¹

Just to give few examples from the history of the Western philosophy: John Locke's promotion of tolerance and individuals' natural rights for life, liberty and property conveniently excluded non-whites from the scale of full humanity and denied them equal rights. Hume who warned us about the dangers in deducing 'ought' from 'is', saw no problems in classifying 'the black people/negro race' as naturally less civilized than the white European one. And if this was not enough, he used this fabricated, supposedly empirical generalization, as factual evidence to draw a normative conclusion that the exploitation of Africans is justified. Immanuel Kant, for his part, who demanded, with his categorical imperative, that all human beings – as moral agents with moral duties – should be treated as ends in themselves and never as means – claimed also that the Negro race, was inferior to the white race, and thus, not evidently deserving full human dignity (Eze 1997, 6-10). The same, of course, applied to their views on women – as the irrational, overly emotional gender incapable of autonomous agency.

Finally, Friedrich Hegel's 'Absolute Reason' did not even recognize the existence of African cultural history. He saw the end of the realization of the Spirit as Absolute Reason in Enlightenment's Europe, and left no place for intellectual development in Africa or elsewhere in the world - in fact, these were places without reason and thus, without history. No hope for civilization and no capacity for rational thought. Thus, for Hegel slavery actually benefited Africans because it provided them with some type of

¹ In the bigger historical picture they boosted the unwarranted illusion of superiority by the Westerners and enforced the idea of cultural inferiority in the African minds. Eze 1997, Masolo 1994, Oruka 1990.

moral education. In his philosophy of History and more prominently in his 'Philosophy Of Right', the logic of reason that unfolds the spirit is in capitalism, imperialism and colonialism – the expansion of these is needed to universalise the European ideals, that is, civilization of the rest of the world (Eze 1997, 6-10). The of history was not, as claimed unfolding in front of the Absolute reason, but failing with flaws of Hegel's own reasoning.

From the point of view of philosophical reflection and logic, these views from the Western, supposedly universalistic philosophy, present radically, culturally situated assumptions. They are also loaded with the most elementary formal and informal fallacies of reasoning, the errors of reasoning that philosophy lecturers in argumentation warn their first year students about. We can see the polarization or even more illustratively black and white thinking between rational-irrational/emotional, modern-traditional, civilized-primitive, we can point out the contradictions with the arguments for universalism which dismiss the particular, we can note how naïve pragmatism and rationalisations are used to justify imperialism and capitalism and to accept the practice of colonization and slave trade, and there are clearly false generalizations concerning the issues of humanity, gender and race.

The lesson to be learnt here is that even philosophers of great intellectual capacity and rigor are as apt to culturally bound prejudices as any other people. They also quite shamelessly discriminate against all those, they feel are intellectually minors (in this case mostly the people of wrong colour or wrong sex/gender). The difference to the prejudices of philosophers and those of non-philosophers is, that philosophers can skilfully argue to support their cultural biases and use rhetorical means to persuade others to accept their ideas. Thus, they have great influence in the intellectual and social development of their cultures as well as cultures of 'the others'.² I, however, would like to use the above examples from the Western history of philosophy to point out the universal weaknesses in human reason, because if philosophy is about the search for wisdom, many philosophers evidently have fallen off from that track. However, if we still believe in the power of human reason, we should more openly admit that no matter what our cultural background and philosophical tradition is, we are all vulnerable to the errors of thought often related to cultural biases. Thus, in philosophy as wisdom, we can use the universal rules of logic to recognize these inconsistencies and our cultural sensitivity and situatedness to point out their origins as well as their intended or unintended social consequences.

From the point of view of African philosophy this type of a bridge between universal reason and cultural connection is particularly relevant, since African philosophers have often been marginalized as cultural relativists due to their open interest to their own culture's heritage, to their strong cultural identity as well as to their focus on culturally

² Even more ironic about Hegel's comprehensive philosophy of history is the fact that he himself it appears to have been influenced by the ancient Eastern philosophical tradition – the tradition that Hegel himself set out to be collective rather than individual reason and thus, outside the historical development of the absolute reason.

rather specific issues.³ Nevertheless, judging from above examples, the universalism in the Western thought is clearly a mere illusion, and the philosophy in the West has never not succeeded in liberating itself from its cultural and historical burdens.

Cultural philosophy and a return to tradition and authentic personality

Recognizing the cultural context of philosophical reflection is important in order to avoid such fallacies. If we try to bring out our cultural predispositions, we can actually look for more objective reasoning in the end. However, emphasis on the influence of culture can sometimes also go so far that it ends up supporting these very claims that separate culture and philosophy from each other. Many African philosophers, in their attempts to challenge the plausibility of Western universalism, have taken radically different, or rather the opposite approach toward the relationship between culture and philosophy – in fact they are seen so intertwined that sometimes no room is left for independently critical reflection. In defence of the existence of African philosophy, many earlier African philosophers such as Mbiti, for instance, focused on the role of cultural embeddedness of African thought as well as on the cultural identity of Africans as a particular group of people with particular and distinguished cultural characteristics, that they forget the real role of philosophy. The same danger lurks in the works of other distinguished intellectuals in the tradition of African philosophy. Aime Cesaire, for instance, created the idea of the black pride and created the negritude movement, Leopold Sedar Senghor's Marxist critique noted that Africans had been 'alienated' from their authentic identities by the European view which prejudices Africans and makes them adapt in to false consciousness about the inferiority of their culture and their place in the world. Kwame Nkrumah as well as Julius Nyerere promoted the idea of authentic African personality and preached for the traditional African values as a cure for the colonial and post-colonial fragmentation of African societies.

The strong emphasis on the cultural distinctiveness of African development has not, therefore, been merely a positive alternative. It also has its failing logic. While it enhanced African cultural identities and returned cultural pride, it simultaneously – unintentionally – gave support to the earlier Western philosophical arguments that there is a 'natural' difference between the people in Africa and in Europe. The emphasis on emotion that promotes communal solidarity and traditional egalitarianism in African mind, made the local philosophies to appear as examples of collective thought (folk philosophies) rather than as evidence of independent and reflecting reasoning. Cultural embeddedness in relation to philosophical reflection in this context can be taken too far. It was not only recognized but it was romanticized and in the end it was turned into normative ideal, that set standards of how all the African people should be, feel and live their lives – how they should return to the pre-colonial value tradition. Thus, interestingly there was normative universalism inherent also in the cultural particularism. Despite the vast differences between ethnic and cultural backgrounds across the continent and even trans-continently, the was the quest for the true and uniting African identity. From the

³ Rather than claiming to universalise its views, it criticises the illusion of universalism in the Western thought

Western point of view this was a sign of radical cultural relativism, not philosophy as such.⁴

The next move in the development of African philosophy, philosophers of African origin took a new turn with the post-structuralism and post-colonial social criticism. This turned shows critical self-reflection that recognizes the problems of cultural particularism in the trends of African philosophy including the negritude movement, nationalist-ideological political philosophy and sage-philosophy. The post-colonial African philosophy recognizes clearly that it is the method of critical analysis and self-critical evaluation and re-evaluation that makes philosophy to be philosophy – and that this applied anywhere in the world, in anytime of history and in any phase of social and intellectual development. Post-colonial philosophy tries not only to save cultural traditions without being yet again marginalized and set aside in the world's development, but to use it as a starting point for self-reflection. Franz Fanon talked about the cultural impoverishment of the Africans by the European ideals and Amilcar Cabral endorsed the role of African popular culture in indigenous development. All these above and many other well-known African philosophers have emphasized how the Eurocentrism in world politics and philosophy has contributed to the devaluation of African national culture, and how African intellectual, social and political traditions can only gain its cultural pride if it pays more emphasis on the African pre-colonial values and worldviews. Along with the lines of Edward Said, the various post-colonial African philosophers note that the Western system of knowledge still filters any information about cultures through the Western consciousness, thus, making it political knowledge rather than 'pure' knowledge. This knowledge, for its part, can be used to – as premises – to justify the civilizing non-Western cultures and no attention is paid to the naturalistic fallacy that such reasoning may entail. (Cecaire 1956, Eze 1997, Fanon 1967, Masolo 1994, Mbiti 1969, Nyerere 1967, 1968, Nkrumah 1965, 1970, Senghor 1962).

Neo-universalism in the name of development

Post-colonial and post-development critique takes yet a critical look also at the interaction between intellectual and politico-economic development. It presents a powerful social criticism, following Foucault's analysis of knowledge-power relations, when it notes that the trends of globalization are merely signs of the continuation of the Western imperialist tendencies. Things have not developed in the sense of wisdom in the West, ever since the Enlightenment (see Ahluwalia 2001, Eze 1997, Laomba 1998).

Post-colonial African philosophy points out that while the contemporary Western philosophical tradition has learnt to doubt the possibilities of universal philosophical frameworks, and even if the Western philosophical tradition itself has fragmented into various philosophical approaches - such as phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism

⁴ Others went even further like Cheik Anta Diop, who claims that the roots of Western philosophy are in Africa since there are clear African influences in the early Greek philosophy: Asante 2000, Cheik Anta Diop 1974, Olela 1994. This of course merely would prove that the structure and errors of reasoning are truly the same everywhere while their cultural context varies depending on various social and historical factors.

and post-structuralism, post-modernism – under the surface the Western political ideologies have maintained universalistic elements which directly promote the Western ideals of the right kind of development and civilization. While they may no longer be explicated in political philosophy, in contemporary political thought as well as in practical policy-making they are evident. It also brings together the post-development critique notes, historically after the end of the Second World War, and the breakdown of the European colonial powers, gave the United States an opportunity to spread worldwide dimensions to the mission of Western civilization and to continue the imperialist, neo-colonizing project in the ideological name of ‘development’ that was to be desired by all nations despite their cultural and historical backgrounds and natural resources. This is also the time the concept of ‘the Third World’ was created. The superior-inferior power relationship was no longer between the former colonizers and colonies, but now it is between the affluent and the poor. And this material impoverishment was and still often is directly related to cultural poverty. The ‘other’ was re-created in international political and economic order. And as Fanon and Cabral has noted, cultural inferiority is created when local customs are undermined and that this suffocation and devaluation of cultural identity maintains and reproduces colonial control.

The cold war launched the new development ideals because the US as well as the Socialist block were battling over the support for their opposing ideologies from the rest of the world, that is, the new third world. The rising influence of the Soviet Union – the first country that had industrialized outside capitalism – forced the US to come up with a vision that would engage the loyalty of the decolonising countries in order to sustain his struggle against communism. Shifting the focus from political ideologies to ‘Development’ – would be a safer way to keep the control in the hands of the Western powers. ‘Development’ was turned into an ideal that was used as a political instrumental tool and means of rhetorical manipulation of international relations – a means of commercial exchange of loyalties and a condition for political friendship. And politically speaking, the leaders were left without many choices – either to accept development and the liberal ideology with human rights promotion and market economy, or be left undeveloped – uncivilized. The post-development critique here reveals how the Foucauldian power-knowledge relations maintain to influence in international relations.

The contemporary, Western enforced, idea of development is normative and universalistic by its nature – and in political sense then also imperialistic. It calls every nation to follow up the Western ideal of modernization, market economy and liberal democracy. When the US president Harry S. Truman for the first time in his inauguration speech, on January 20, 1949 declared the Southern hemisphere and in general the poor countries as ‘underdeveloped’ areas, at that instance two billion people that before did not see anything abnormal or inferior in their ways of life become sub-category of humanity, the ‘underdeveloped’. The being of those ‘less developed’ does not refer merely to the lack of material resources (or to poverty and disease), but also to cultural impoverishment. Those less developed are less developed in all the walks of life: they have wrong political ideals, primitive values, inefficient economic systems and irrational cultural practices (Esteva 1995).

Post-colonial criticism recognizes that while the language of development and progress is now more politically correct than during the Enlightenment times, the practice remains based on the in-built assumptions that those 'underdeveloped' or less developed lack something essential from 'the standards of full humanity', set by the Western intellectual tradition. Today's developmental views go still hand in hand with Hegel's philosophy of history, and fall into the naturalistic fallacy by deducing ought from is. The actual emphasis in development in the West is used to set standards for the universal ideal of development, that all those 'less developed' should aim for. After all, who in their right mind and with full powers of reason would want to remain underdeveloped or less developed.

This post-structuralist approach can be used to explain why African philosophy has to continuously defend its role in global and local development. After all, African philosophy revived its social influence with its various nationalist-ideological trends and applied Marxist political ideas transformed into African egalitarian communalist value systems creating uniquely African political theoretical frameworks (Nkrumah 1965, 1970, Nyerere 1967, 1968, Senghor 1962). However, the global fall of communism and the decay of the local political socialist experiments made African intellectualism lose its sharp edge and the politics to lose their developmental direction. Their cultural struggle was once again lost. And because there was no return to pre-colonial egalitarian tradition, the Western developmental ideals were left to be the only clear alternative. Thus, also the philosophical reflection to focused more on the African understanding, possible origin, and re-conceptualization of such ideas as 'human rights', 'democracy', 'human dignity' and other widely entitled as 'the Western values'.

Philosophy, however, is not the only academic discipline that is clearly Westernized up to a degree that it has almost unnoticed become normative. I'm not referring to the method of these sciences as such, but rather to their content and to their subjects of study as well as to the standards they use to make empirical studies and comparative evaluations. Political scientists are evaluating local political development against the realization of the Western standards of constitutionalism, the legal protection of human rights, the signing of international covenants and the programmes of good governance. Their analysis is technical and quantitative, not critical and qualitative. They appear to have accepted that African political theory has died with the fall of African socialism. Sociology studies the transition of African societies against the values of modernization. Local cultural traditions are studied in relations to the ideal of development, that is, what obstacles they might create to the national development in the Western sense. Even the term 'tribal' can be banned as politically incorrect in a University curriculum. Development studies, for their part, evaluate the achievement of the international millennium development goals or economic growth, political improvement in good governance and sustainable development. There is no need for external control of the ideal of development in African universities. As Foucault noted, the knowledge-power relation sets its own universalistic standards – and even self-criticism is observed through the Western filters – not through the local reflection and genuinely cultural self-evaluation. Following the ideas of Michael Foucault and Edward Said, scientific knowledge is for political aims. It maintains existing international and national power relations and sets standards to the

ideal that African countries are to strive for. Unfortunately, these standards are self-reproducing, that is, they follow the direction of the actual development of the Western societies rather than any truly universal consensus on the development ideal. Thus, the standards for development always remain ‘too high’ to be fully met by ‘the others’, in this case, by the less developed – who are to remain as such (Foucault 1965, Said 1978). Colonialism of material and social kind will never be conquered, as long ‘development’ provides the cognitive-base in the West for its interventionalism in the name of know-how from the and in Africa for self-pity that is replacing resistance and strive for self-reliance in order to promote national development with cultural pride (Sachs 1995, 1-4, Esteva 1995, 6-7).⁵

This situation has created an urgent intellectual and social challenge for philosophers in Africa (as well as philosophers anywhere else). Their task is to reflect how to bring back cultural diversity in thought, how to originate alternative ideas about development and how to better benefit from the local knowledge and wisdom. Philosophical reflection and genuine cultural self-evaluation - rather than evaluation of ‘self’ as ‘the other’ through the lenses of the dominant culture – is needed in context of the globalization. Whereas the colonial power relations have turned into developmental cooperation, the issues of power and social relations have not radically changed.

Where African philosophical has succeeded the best in relation to the developmental issues in the field of the feminist and gender theory. The third world feminists have succeeded in integrating the post-colonial and post-development critiques and use it to bring out the relations between culture and development as well as the role of local in global knowledge and experience in the issues of justice. The feminists and gender theorists in Africa and elsewhere in non-Western contexts have pointed out long ago that there is no universal ‘gender solidarity’ among all the women: the Western white feminism is elitist and does not take into account the different cultural identities of women of different ethnic backgrounds. It is particularly ignorant of and spiteful to the third world women’s situation, it sees development as Western progress as much as any other developmental ideology. Nevertheless, there is a need to see that differences do not mean separation between women or difference in human values they are after but the context of their realization. The cultural confinement is in the women’s experiences, local roles, and efforts. These differences should be respected and used in unison for the good of everyone, not as separating factors. Development should be seen in social empowerment and strive for justice, and every culture can find its own way to promote development as

⁵ I’ve been here in TZ for four year now and I still strikes me when people, students, my colleagues at the university so doubtlessly barefacedly define themselves, their communities and their countries as developing, or even un(der)developed and how they tend to accept that this is the way things are in these parts of the world, how in these less developed areas of the world ‘nothing’ works, while I myself see the development of culture, social networks, nature, environment all around me, in many senses in much more rich and creative way than I can see it in the Northern hemisphere whether in Europe or in the North American continent where economic development and affluence has led into assimilating consumer society and trade wars and political conflicts, modernization into scientific and technological determinism and ecological crises, and the over-emphasis on individualism to indifferent egoism and incapacity in moral agency. Or statements like nothing works here without the donor assistance/expertise.

justice, instead of using the concept of development to suffocate cultures of ‘the others’ (Eboh 1997, hooks 97, Nzegwu 97, Spellman 97).

Achievements and failures of post-colonial criticism

All in all, post-colonial African philosophy has succeeded in explaining the current situation in relation to diversity and plurality of cultural identities. This gives a chance to do away with the dichotomies between colonizers and colonized, developers and those to be developed. When this understanding is taken into an honest cross-cultural and inter-cultural philosophical dialogue, it can pave the way for more equal international power relations. Revealing the injustices and recognizing the universal fallibility of human reason, can help us to admit our own errors and prejudices. Culturally sensitive but not culturally confined reflection helps us understand the cultural and national identities and differences without having to isolate one culture from another.

The post-colonial philosophy does not reject all the modernity’s values such as equality, freedom, and tolerance *per se*, but rather focus on exemplifying that such values as ‘freedom’ and ‘individual rights’, that were already promoted by modernity’s rationalist universalism, were never ‘seriously’ considered to be delivered to Africa – and to the African (or anywhere else outside the West, for that matter). The post-colonial philosophy has tried to show that similar and other important values, such as solidarity, can be found in the pre-colonial traditions in the original cultures of the indigenous people – and are lacking in the modernity’s individualist discourse. These values are to be traded off with each other, but they should complement each other. Post-colonial criticism points out the rhetoric of liberal individualism was – and still is – used as ‘a Trojan horse’ that smuggles in the Western value system to non-Western traditions in the name of equality and freedom that is never realized in the international relations. These values neither respect other cultures nor guarantee equality for instance between the former colonizers and formerly colonized; affluent and the poor. While there may not be anything intrinsically wrong with these values, they remain one-sided, political tools rather than seriously universal ideals.

However, as in all our reasoning there are also problems involved. The dilemma with post-colonial criticism is that while it indisputably reveals the impact of ‘Westernism’ in modern political, economic cultural theory and political practice, as a theoretical construction postcolonialism nevertheless remains as an internal criticism of modernity’s discourse, which uses the Western tools to criticize the Western worldview.

Post-colonial philosophy remains deeply indebted to the contemporary continental European philosophical existential analysis and post-structuralist and Foucauldian social criticism. It thus also faces the same problems these approaches face in the Western philosophical tradition. As any other ‘post-modernity theories’ post-colonialism does not *per se* provide an alternative to deal with the third world problems. In a wider sense postcolonial theory must lean heavily to the Western academic and intellectual inclinations and it also appears to function most effectively within the Western intellectual discourses. This connection to Western intellectualism limits its accessibility and makes it most attractive to the African elite that is already living in a ‘globalized’ and

pluralistic, post-modern world – with multiple identities – and personally experienced ‘otherness’ they recognize in their existentialist search for one’s true cultural identity had become a contemporary trend. Inevitably these circumstances are socially and culturally very different from the ones that post-colonial world and particularly earlier colonized countries provide for their people. As Pal Ahluwalia (2001) has pointed out, the problem with post-colonial African philosophy is that it is mostly done and discussed in the universities outside rather than within Africa. African philosophy in African universities tend to focus more on traditional philosophy as well as on African ethno-philosophy, which does not help to build up a future but rather pulls the intellectual development towards the past – that itself was built on the dichotomy of African cultural philosophy and ‘real scientific philosophy’.

All in all, the post-colonialist revelations of the Western re-construction of feeling of ‘the otherness’ hit home the best with the cultural ‘nomads’ who have lived in a different cultural settings and who themselves feel always a bit out of place, whether in the culture of their origin or elsewhere. However, it does not directly touch those who are embedded in their cultural traditions have remained ‘cultural pastorals’ who have not faced crisis in their cultural identities and as part of ‘traditional, communal us’ have never experienced the alienation of being ‘the other’. Thus, the postcolonial and postreflective criticism has not yet been widely picked up by scholars or politicians working merely (or mostly) in the third world countries, that is, by those who are – and have been - living and working mostly merely within their own countries ‘post-coloniality’ (in the post-colonial era of Africa as well as Asia, Latin America, or elsewhere).

Conclusion

As the post-structuralist, post-modern, postcolonial and wider communitarian critiques of universalism and eurocentrism from within the African philosophy have pointed out, all human development, intellectual, physical or material, is always dependent on the social and cultural context it has originated in, and vice versa – all social, political, cultural development reflects some of the intellectual and philosophical trends of the given time and place (Eze 1997, Masolo 1994, Oruka 90).

Philosophy, as an activity of human intelligence and reason has an important role in development of every civilization. On the one hand, philosophical analysis provides theoretical basis for our ideas and ideals, worldviews and value systems. On the other hand, critical and ethical reflection can help us guide the development towards more just societies which respects tolerance, equality and human dignity. Nevertheless, philosophy can also have a darker role in developmental issues if and when it is used merely as a rhetorical tool in order to justify our other ambitions, the interests of the elites and unequal power structures.

Thus, as anywhere else, in African countries and nations philosophical reflection should focus on finding a way for finding local, culturally sensitive basis for development that can benefit from the local knowledge and values without losing the understanding of the bigger picture. Only then, philosophy can then be the most useful in development if it

focuses on the problems and ethical issues that need reconsideration and re-evaluation, it can promote self-reliance that is based on tolerance and cultural cooperation. Otherwise, when not fully self-critical, philosophical argumentation can also be used merely to justify the political and social goals of small elites or political leaders.

The relationship between culture and philosophy is many sided – and the approaches to cultural universalism and relativism can be looked at from various points of view. What is in common for all in philosophy, is our love for ‘wisdom’ and the method of critical reflection that questions what others may see self-evident. What is culturally situated about philosophy are its trends, its topical interests as well as the social and political challenges philosophical reflection faces. However, maybe the biggest challenge for all philosophers in all the cultures through out the time is the universal fallibility of our logic and the imperfection of our reason. Maybe that is what is our common humanity – our mistakes in logic and our unwillingness to admit them.

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