How to be a Universalist about Methods in African Philosophy

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Abstract

Kwasi Wiredu argues for the metaphilosophical view, namely that an African orientation in philosophy can *only* be had through themes and issues of universal significance that are domesticated in African thought and culture. However, in this paper, I challenge this claim. I argue that it grossly overlooks ways in which African philosophy already inherits methods of universal significance, which are applied to African problems and discourse. African philosophy so conceived is quite indistinguishable from African mathematics or physics.

Keywords: Kwasi Wiredu, Metaphilosophy, Meta-African philosophy, African philosophy, Universalism, Particularism, Philosophical methods.

I. Introduction

Roughly, metaphilosophy is concerned with the identity and methodology of philosophy. It asks what the nature, method, and goal of philosophical inquiry is and whether our method is suited to the attainment of our goals. This last question naturally imports a certain sort of normativity to metaphilosophical reflections since not all methods would naturally lead us to our goal-attainment or for that matter a better attainment of those goals. In this way, metaphilosophy is concerned not only with the questions of the identity, goals, and methods of philosophy but with the question of good philosophy. In the context of African philosophy, Kwasi Wiredu links reflections on these questions to the post-colonial African quest for self-definition (Wiredu 2002, p. 56). And he argues that on the issue of the identity or orientation of African philosophy; that identity or orientation can *only* be had through themes and issues of universal significance that are domesticated in African thought and culture (Wiredu, 1980, 1997, 1998, 2002). On this view, the African thinker *qua* philosopher tries to acquaint himself with those themes and issues "but with the aim of trying to see how far issues and themes or

concepts of universal relevance can be disentangled from the contingencies of culture" (Wiredu 1980, p.31).

However, in this paper I argue that while Wiredu's decolonisation project, which lends credence to this metaphilosophical view constitutes an excellent way of doing African philosophy, the metaphilosophical view itself is inadequate. This is so because it overlooks ways in which African philosophy already inherits methods of universal significance which are applied to African problems and discourse. If this is so, then the actual situation of African philosophy supports a more robust alternative metaphilosophy: African orientation in philosophy can be had through concepts *and* methods of universal significance, which can be applied to African discourse.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the second section, I discuss the growing scepticism about the place and value of metaphilosophy in the African philosophical discipline. It is said that meta-African philosophy does not contribute to the fund of knowledge in the discipline and that it reflects a crisis of self-confidence. I examine these criticisms and show them to be ill-founded. This clears the way to taking metaphilosophy seriously, in particular, the metaphilosophical reflection of Wiredu as substantive contribution to African philosophical discourse. In the third section, I take up the metaphilosophical position of Wiredu in contemporary African philosophy and show some of its presuppositions. I argue that in fact, Wiredu is flatly wrong; there are methods of universal significance in philosophy, which makes African philosophy akin to the departments of physics, mathematics, and chemistry in Africa. And these methods meet the criterion of universality as Wiredu conceives it. In the fourth section, I present and discuss these methods. And in the fifth section, I take up several objections to the position defended in the paper.

II. Contemporary Scepticism about Meta-African Philosophy

There is both a growing and a discernible scepticism about metaphilosophical concerns in African philosophy. Some contemporary African philosophers think that metaphilosophical questions are not legitimate goals of African philosophical inquiry. Those in this frame of mind argue that meta-African philosophy is negative philosophy. It makes no substantive contribution to philosophy. Godwin Sogolo for example takes this position in evaluating the approach of some Western-trained African philosophers in doing African philosophy. He notes that "talking about the nature of African philosophy itself, what constitutes an African philosophy and whether or not such a philosophy exists" was how these African philosophers sought to apply their training to the discipline. But ultimately, he says, they saw how futile reflections on those questions were. The philosophers in question here are Kwasi Wiredu, Odera Oruka, Paulin Hountondji, Peter Bodunrin and a host of others (Sogolo, 1990, p. 48). Call this the no-success objection to meta-African philosophy. Another objection comes from those who think that metaphilosophical questions reflect and exacerbate a crisis of self-confidence about African philosophy itself. For example, Simon Makwinja in discussing a recent work that is very dismissive of metaphilosophical concerns in African philosophy says that the work does not do as it says: rather than focus on substantive philosophical issues from human experience, it focusses on metaphilosophical issues. And he says, "in my view, this is an indication that African philosophy is not yet done with the problem of finding itself a place within philosophy (Makwinja, 2018, p. 102). Call this the identity objection against meta-African philosophical discourse.

Interestingly, both objections are themselves metaphilosophy in disguise. They reflect views about the nature of philosophical progress (the no-success objection) and views about worthwhile questions and goals in African philosophy (the identity objection). In other words, the sceptics are fine with smuggling metaphilosophy into African philosophical debate but not

with a self-conscious and deliberate metaphilosophy that reflects on these questions themselves. This is like asking philosophers to lead the unexamined life, something which is clearly beneath the intellectual dignity of the philosophical enterprise.

The position of the sceptics is worse than that since their implicit metaphilosophy is deeply problematic. For example, the no-success objection betrays a very narrow conception of what amounts to genuine progress in philosophy. Genuine progress on this thinking is some bold philosophical claims or theories, say in African ethics, in epistemology or in political philosophy. But genuine progress is not always measured by the criterion of bold hypothesis in any domain, cognitive or practical. For example, if an athlete in the game of basketball wins an NBA title; it is clear that this athlete has made genuine progress in his or her career. But the athlete also makes progress perhaps of a more fundamental kind if he or she discovers the set of conditions under which his or her superior performances in the game of basketball are replicable. In the case of this latter progress, the athlete may be unable to show anything substantive about his or her progress. And yet, the ability to make good throws and to win championship titles ultimately depends on knowing the conditions conducive to replicable superior performances on the court. I believe this performance analogy holds a quite general lesson. The answers that metaphilosophy provides do not amount to visible progress in the field of African philosophy. And yet they constitute substantive contributions, nonetheless.

Consider next the position of the sceptic with reference to the identity objection to meta-African philosophy. It is surely a mistaken view that to ask metaphilosophical question is to ask about the existence of African philosophy. It seems to me that the worry arises from the way in which the birth of African philosophy as a discipline was conceived. African philosophy as a *discipline* clearly began with questions about whether African philosophy exists and if so in what manner. Indeed, one of the first known conferences in African philosophy held in Düsseldorf, Germany in 1978 was just about these questions. And some of the speakers in that

conference included Peter Bodunrin who presented on "Which kind of philosophy for Africa," Odera Oruka who presented on "Four trends in African philosophy," and Paulin Hountondji who presented on "What can philosophy do?" Since then, to ask metaphilosophical questions is often conceived in some African philosophical circles as asking those very same questions. But clearly and surely, the scope of metaphilosophy is wider than the confines of those initial questions.[1]

III. Wiredu's Universalist Challenge in African Philosophy

Here is one attractive self-image that African philosophy can instantiate, one which makes African philosophy continuous with African Physics and African Mathematics. Wiredu formulates it as follows:

> A department of physics or engineering in an African university is unlikely to be asked to teach African physics or African engineering. What they may legitimately be asked to do is to apply the disciplines to African conditions. African physicists and engineers can be expected to accept with no loss of self-respect that the future in these disciplines for Africans does not lie in trying to create distinctively African sciences, but in seeking to master and advance a body of knowledge and techniques which has already been developed, and particularly in seeking to apply tried methods to the solution of relevant problems in Africa. The sensible African will, in other words, try to develop a particular orientation not in the disciplines themselves but in their application (Wiredu 1980, p.26).

Let us read the attempt to make the department of philosophy analogous to the department of physics as the universal option on the question of methods in African philosophy. The word "universal" here needs to be read delicately. In contemporary African philosophy, the word has been applied to various subject matters, for example, to culture and to

[1] As a reviewer for this journal rightly pointed out, those initial questions still remain valid.

philosophy. With reference to culture, Wiredu for example argues that there are cultural universals such as the laws of human thought that make communication possible. This is opposed to cultural particulars, for example, some aspects of religion such as the dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural (Wiredu, 1996). However, this is not the way I am applying the word "universal" here. With reference to the nature of philosophy, the word "universal" has been applied unrestrictedly to those African philosophers who think that the notion "African philosophy" and "British philosophy" should be indistinguishable with reference to the kind of substance of thinking the word "philosophy" should apply. Hountondji for example, argues forcefully that African philosophy is "a theoretical discipline and nothing else, a discipline which, like any other, can develop only in the form of literature" (Hountondji 1983, p. 67, see also Bodunrin 1982). Further, the word "universal" has been applied to the moderate position of Wiredu on the nature of philosophy itself. For he thinks philosophy can be universal; and this sense of universal is merely aspirational—it indicates what philosophy can possibly be (Wiredu 1980).[2] Again, I am not using the word "universal" either in the unrestricted sense or in the moderate sense when applied to the nature of philosophy.

More generally, I am using the word "universal" here not as applying to the substance of philosophy or to the nature of culture. I am using the word in a very localised sense as applying to philosophical methods simply. Further, the position I paint here as universal is not the position that Wiredu explicitly holds; for he denies that this option in African metaphilosophy is both possible and fruitful. He argues in particular that African philosophical orientation can only be had in the domestication of the discipline rather than in the domestication of the techniques and methods of the discipline. And the project of conceptual decolonisation explains how Wiredu thinks the former can be done (Wiredu

[2] I thank an anonymous reviewer of this journal for pointing this out to me.

1980, 1997, 1998, 2002). Here, the African thinker *qua* philosopher tries to acquaint himself with concepts and issues of universal significance but with the aim of trying to see how far these can be disentangled from the contingencies of culture (Wiredu 1980, p.31). The issues and concepts here include substance, reality, being, God, property, truth, opinion, belief, knowledge, mind, soul, spirit, person, cause, chance, democracy, justice, to mention but a few. Note that Wiredu views this project as part of the answer to the question of defining African identity in the contemporary world. No wonder then he thinks that African self-definition cannot be approached through "a definition per genus et differentia but rather with a programme for intellectual construction and reconstruction in the service of Africa and ultimately the world" (Wiredu et al., 1992, p., 68).

To be sure, the philosophical project of conceptual decolonisation is a great project. What is being questioned here is the metaphilosophical view that Wiredu infers from it, namely, that an African orientation in philosophy can only be had only in the issues or concepts themselves rather than in the discipline of philosophy itself, namely, through its techniques and methods. He gives two basic reasons for thinking so. One is that: "In physics one can speak of fairly well-established knowledge to be mastered. In philosophy there is no such thing" (Wiredu 1980, p. 27). And the second is that "it is not possible to separate technique in any absolute manner from doctrine as far as philosophy is concerned. How, for example, does one distinguish between Kant's method of transcendental analysis and the content of his critical philosophy?" (Wiredu 1980, p.27). Wiredu adds that, "When one takes account of cultural factors the position becomes even worse. What have British empiricists and Oriental spiritual philosophers in common? The analogy with physics recedes far into the distance" (Wiredu 1980, p.27). Let us call this supposed impossibility about the physics analogy Wiredu's universalist challenge in African philosophy.

Note that Wiredu's universalist challenge is not met by citing the use of the method of ordinary language in African philosophy (Barry Hallen & Sodipo, 1997) or the use of Marxism (Taiwo, 1996). This is because like Kantian transcendental method, these methods are bound up with particular doctrines or even cultural views shaped by peculiar historical experiences.

For example, ordinary language philosophy as a method evolved as a reaction to certain trends in 20th century analytic philosophy that tried to improve the standard of ordinary language as means to solving philosophical problems. The method of ordinary language is thus the view that this project is mistaken; philosophical problems are solved or dissolved by paying attention to how our words are actually used in everyday context (Baz, 2016; B. Hallen, 2007). Barry Hallen argues that in using this method, they were adopting the techniques of J.L. Austin, one of the central figures of the movement. He notes further that by so doing, they took the following working assumption: "The presumption is that if the members of a particular language culture have taken the trouble to articulate, to verbalize differences between, for example, things they may claim to ''know'' as contrasted with things they may only claim to ''believe,'' there is some point to or reason for their having made this distinction" (B. Hallen, 2007, p. 116). Based on this presumption, the goal as Hallen and Sodipo (1997) see it is to formulate a criterion of meaning or the set of application conditions for the term "knows," "believe," etc. However, given how J. L. Austin's analysis is tied to the English language; can that presumption be taken for granted? Would the taken for granted that presumption as the authors did not amount to an unjustified subscription to the colonial heritage? In fact, there is a strong reason to think that that presumption may not be a universal feature of all languages but shaped by certain unique experience of the world, in this case, the Western world. As Golec notes "Austin's aims were not merely to describe how language worked,

but to see the facts of the world in the description; in other words, to see how the facts of the world are shaped and continue to shape the structure of our utterances" (Golec, 2009, p. 74). Put more explicitly, if certain complex relation between the English language and the world of the English speakers underpins Austin's ordinary language philosophy; can that be taken for granted? Clearly not, if we are to escape the charge of an uncritical acceptance of the Western frame of reference.

The same thing can be said of Marxism as a method of inquiry since this is tied strongly to the unique historical and economic conditions and circumstances of the industrial revolution. Indeed, this historical background underlies all the various aspects of Marxism as a method. These include the fact that it is materialist, namely, it pays close attention to the forces and relations of production; it claims that technology and power are fundamental with respect to other social formations, that class struggle and conflict are part of historical change and that we need to give privilege to the perspective of the underclasses at any time in history (Little, 2007, p. 233).

So clearly, these methods do not meet Wiredu's universalist challenge. But that by itself does not impugn their credibility as viable tools for undertaking projects in African philosophy.

In the next section, I show how Wiredu's universalist challenge can be met by reflecting on African philosophy as currently done or how it can be done. In doing so, I will be arguing for the following claim:

HYBRID: African orientation in philosophy can be had in the domestication of the discipline of philosophy itself and its methods.

Note that if something like HYBRID is true; it also vindicates the project of conceptual decolonisation so well championed by Wiredu (including other ways of implementing the programme, perhaps through ethnophilosophy of some sophisticated forms).

IV. A Defence of the Universal Meta-African Philosophical Option

It is helpful to start by rethinking the notion of philosophical methodology at least as Wiredu conceives the idea. His paradigm of philosophical methodology is something like Kant's transcendental method. But that paradigm of philosophical methodology is crudely chosen and imagined. Philosophical methodology is not some very arcane procedures attainable only by some philosophical elites or unique to any philosophical tradition. But if they are like Kant's transcendental method or Marx's method of inquiry, those are extreme examples of some very ordinary human practices. As Williamson notes: "Philosophy, like all science, starts with ways of knowing and thinking all normal humans have, and applies them a bit more carefully, a bit more systematically, a bit more critically, iterating that process over and over again" (Williamson, 2018, p. 6). If this is true, then we can characterise philosophical methodology more generally as ways of thinking, habits of mind, and techniques of procedures that are used both in philosophy and in everyday ordinary human engagements to clinch point of view or claims. On this thinking, philosophical methods can be employed just by anyone, in any culture, without any cultural or philosophical assumption unique to any society or historical experience. If so, the methods that meet these descriptions in philosophy directly serve as just the normal way to meet Wiredu's universalist challenge in African philosophy. In other words, like physics, we can say philosophy has some techniques that can be mastered and brought to bear on African problems. One might even claim that philosophy is in a much better position because these techniques are already practiced in the ordinary ways of thinking in traditional African society. Or so I will argue.

Take the method of common sense for example. This has been an influential method in the practice of philosophy itself. Notably, Thomas Reid in the 18th century thought that in approaching philosophical problems and issues, we should think in such a

way that we are consistent with the "opinion of the vulgar" (Nichols & Gideon, 2016). In this way, common sense lends credence or constrains what an acceptable theory about anything would be. But common sense is not just the opinions people happen to have just about anything. Rather, common sense or what Reid sometimes calls first principles are typically principles whose denial is not only false but absurd; they are necessary for our preservation as humans, given unconditionally by the Author of Nature and are believed once they are understood (Reid, 2011).

Consider how Reid deals with the sceptic about perceptual beliefs. He argues that common sense lends credence to the output of both perceptual capacities and reason. And he says that perceptual beliefs come from the mint of Nature, and bears the image and superscription of nature and its deliverances are accepted with trust and without suspicion (Reid, 1997, pp. 168-169).

The forceful use of the method of common sense continues in 20th century analytic philosophy, especially in the work of G. E. Moore. And like Reid, common sense are not opinions, which people happen to have. On the contrary, they are things they know to be true like the claim that the earth existed long before I was born. He acknowledged that we do not know them directly, we know them indirectly by knowing other things, which are evidence for them (Moore, 1925). And like Reid too, they constrain philosophical claims in the sense that they either support or undermine them. They support them if they are consistent with them. They undermine them if they are inconsistent with them.

In contemporary analytic philosophy, we see the method amply used as the method of eliciting intuitive judgements about philosophical concepts (e.g., "knowledge," "moral permissibility," "reference," etc.) in imaginary scenarios that bear close resemblance to everyday scenarios. In this practice, we test philosophical claims or theories of these concepts by seeing whether they accord with what we would say in very ordinary but

hypothetical scenarios about knowledge, moral permissibility or reference. For example, to test whether every case of justified true belief is a case of knowledge as implied by the definition of knowledge as justified true belief (AYER, 1956; Chisholm, 1957), Edmund Gettier in 1963 described two cases of agents whose beliefs are true and justified, but whose beliefs do not amount to knowledge. This then was taken by Gettier (1963) that knowledge cannot be justified true belief as the orthodox view had it. The epistemological community agreed with Gettier's verdict of these cases.

However, contemporary epistemologists are increasingly aware that Gettier counterexamples to the orthodox view of knowledge was not sufficiently original; although it was to the Western audience that read his paper. The practice of relying on intuitive case judgements to constrain claims of knowledge was present in both Eastern and Western traditions of philosophy long before 20th century analytic philosophy (Boyd & Nagel, 2014).

Note that the situation with reference to concepts such as knowledge, reference, and moral permissibility warrants even a bolder claim here. We should expect that every society, including African societies already have common sense notions of the presence and absence of philosophical interesting phenomena like knowledge and moral permissibility in ordinary situations, and we can elicit their judgements and use those judgements to constrain or lend credence to certain philosophical claims about these concepts. This is one way in which philosophy is a study of culture. And culture here is understood as the embodiment of norms, common sense beliefs, intuitions, proverbs and practices.

This is already the situation in African philosophy, in the movement generally known as ethnophilosophy (Kayange, 2014; Mbiti, 1969; Senghor, 1964; Tempels, 1959). In general, I believe that one of the most spectacular achievements of ethnophilosophy is

precisely in drawing our attention to the body of common-sense view of the world as enunciated in our religious, moral, political, and social life. Although often criticised as being insufficiently philosophical and self-critical (Bodunrin, 1981; Hountondji, 1983; Wiredu, 1991), I believe that it all depends on how ethno-philosophy is used. If used as common-sense method, that is, as a way of constraining or lending credence to philosophical claims or views; that clearly should not be objectionable on any ground. Consider how one might do that in the context of African epistemology. Hallen and Sodipo (1997) using the method of ordinary language philosophy showed that testimony in Yoruba (a socio-cultural group in Southwest Nigeria) cannot confer the state of knowledge ("mọ̀") but only the state of mere belief (gbàgbọ́), which roughly translates as hearing and accepting what one hears. One can point out using the ethno-philosophical sources that something is wrong with this theory: it violates many things we know from proverbs about the epistemic value of the words of our elders and tradition. For example, an African proverb says, "the mouth of an elderly man is without teeth, but never without words of wisdom." In general, we accord so much value to the words of elders and this practice would not have survived for generations across many African societies if the words of elders are not *typically* sources of knowledge.

The common sense method is not only viable in African philosophy; in traditional African contexts, it is widely used as a way of clinching some views or claims in conversational contexts. It does this by making the view or claim rests on the highly plausible. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe describes it as an art of everyday conversation; "the palm-oil with which words are eaten" among the Ibos, a south eastern ethnic group in Nigeria (Chinua, 1958, p. 1). But the claim is true of almost all ethnic groups in Africa. Chinua further illustrates the value of this reasoning technique in the conversation between Okonkwo's father, Unoka, who was a notorious debtor and Okoye,

Unoka's neighbour in the village. Okoye had come to claim the cowries Unoka owed him. Pointing at the far wall of his hut, Unoka showed Okoye five groups of perpendicular lines of chalk, with smallest group having ten lines. Each group he said represents a debt he owes someone in the village and each stroke of the line is one hundred cowries. Concluding the conversation, he says: "Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them. I shall pay my big debts first." And he took another pinch of snuff, as if that was paying the big debts first. Okoye rolled his goatskin and departed" (Achebe 1959, p. 2). Indeed, in traditional African society, to be called an elder is a great compliment associated with the ability to deploy proverbs that are clear, concise, and relevant in council meetings in order to clinch one's point of view.

Philosophical method so conceived and used by the African philosopher is not something inscrutable. On the contrary, the philosopher is just reasoning in the normal ways of ordinary people, and in a way in which philosophers down through the ages have normally reasoned. In short, contrary to Wiredu, the universal option in African philosophy as he conceives it is both possible and fruitful.

Take another notable example: the method of argumentation, which is just the giving and accepting of reasons for one's claim. Philosophy is really about arguments. As one philosopher recently puts it; "Philosophy is argumentative to its very core" (Deutsch, 2015, p. 74). Indeed, it is the beauty of philosophy that the authority of a view derives not from the authority of the speaker or author, but the quality of the evidence that is giving in its favour, where evidence is understood on this thinking as reasons that speak strongly in favour of a position. It is also the condition for philosophical progress under some ideal circumstances.[3] For all things being equal, the faith of the philosophical community is undermined when there

[3] In non-ideal circumstances, things are more complicated as Thomas Kuhn so well demonstrated in science (Kuhn, 2012).

are good reasons that speak against a position; and conversely; the confidence that a theory is right is bolstered in the light of good reasons in its favour.

Argumentation lies at the core of African philosophy too. In fact, *it is part* of what Peter Bodunrin and Paulin Hountondji mean when they say African philosophy is only here with us; in the making as it were (Bodunrin 1981). They understood the African philosophical profession as a theoretical discipline; and part of that must be the use of argumentation and not the mere canvassing of the beliefs, proverbs, intuitions, practices and cultural heritage of the African people as proponents of ethnophilosophy often conceive the enterprise. In this way, these philosophers (in their own light at least; since it is a different question whether they are right in so thinking) sought to position African philosophy much like Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon sought to position Greek philosophy. Like their African counterparts, Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon saw the endeavours of Homer and Hesiod as not really intellectually credible and thus philosophical. For Homer and Hesiod were just content with documenting and presenting the religious and cultural worldviews of the average Greek.

Again, like the use of common sense method, argumentation is hardly unique to philosophy. People argue for their views all the time in every society, culture, contexts, and occasions. A salesperson in the supermarket wants to convince you to buy her products; she gives you reason why the product would benefit you or why the product is worth buying intrinsically, perhaps because of its beauty or longevity. In traditional African society, people argue all the time. For example, in council meetings, the chiefs deliberate which course of actions is suitable for some goals, say engaging with a belligerent neighbour. Those chiefs present reasons why their preferred course of action should be acted upon.

In speaking mostly of giving reasons for one's view, the impression might be that this is the only way argumentation works. But that is not right actually. Rather than move from reasons to conclusions (deductive arguments), where the reasons entail the conclusion in some

direct way; one can move from some given evidence or data to some conclusion that if true would best explain the evidence or data (Lipton, 2003). In a nutshell, the latter form of inference is abductive, and the argument is inductive. For example, a patient tells his doctor that he has lost his sense of smell. The doctor infers that the patient has Covid-19. The conclusion of the doctor is not entailed by the evidence. In fact, the evidence is compatible with other conclusions, for example, that the patient is suffering from a new form of malignant flue that is different from Covid-19 but less deadly than it.

Although not usually given this rationale, most argumentative moves in African philosophy proceed in just this way. For example, Mounce (1973) gives the following illustration of why some belief processes of the Azande should be seen as rational. Imagine that you were presented with a sheet of paper and ask to stick a pin into the sheet of paper. You comply. Imagine again that your interlocutor draws an excellent picture of your mother and asks you to repeat your previous action, this time aiming at one of the eyes. Imagine further that you comply yet again but only to discover shortly after that your mother has developed an affliction in one of her eyes and she is about to go totally blind. Mounce concludes by saying, "I wonder how many people would resist feeling, if only momentarily, that there was some connexion between the two events" (Mounce, 1973, p. 353).

It seems highly plausible on this way of conceiving the practice of African philosophy that what makes the inference rational is not the causal connection between the two events, the sticking of the pin and the affliction in the eyes. On the contrary, the affliction in the eyes is an inference that is taken as being licensed by the sticking of the pin, and one accepts the inference or explanation among many competing inferences or explanations because if true it best explains the phenomenon one has just witnessed. That is a better way of conceiving the analogy and the rationality of certain beliefs in magical practices among the Azandes that Mounce is

trying to defend. Besides, causal connection is a highly elusive notion to advert to in defending the beliefs of the Azandes.

In the same vein, one finds many philosophers in the Western tradition using abduction as well. They present bold speculative theories but do not provide reasons that entail them. On the contrary, they argue that the bold speculative theory should be accepted because we can see that the consequences of the theory is true. David Lewis' argument for modal realism, namely, that there are plurality of worlds as real as ours exemplifies this exactly, for he says: "Why belief in plurality of worlds? – Because the hypothesis is serviceable, and that is a reason to think that it is true. The familiar analysis of necessity as truth at all possible worlds was only the beginning. In the last two decades, philosophers have offered a great many more analyses that make reference to possible worlds or to possible individuals that inhabit possible worlds" (Lewis, 1986, p. 3).

So contrary to Wiredu's claim, philosophy does actually have a distinguished heritage of methods of universal significance, which requires no doctrine or culture, and which is not unique to any culture or tradition.[4] In a nutshell, the universal option in African philosophy is both possible and fruitful and reflects how African philosophy is currently being done or can be done. This shows that HYBRID is true.

[4] An anonymous reviewer for this journal pressed me on the question of whether this statement is not in conflict with my earlier formulation of HYBRID, namely, that an African orientation in philosophy can be had in the domestication of the discipline itself and its methods. But as I see it, there is no contradiction here. The first part of HYBRID says philosophy as a discipline has themes of universal significance, which can be domesticated in African thought and culture. The second part says philosophy has methods of universal significance which can be applied to African problems and discourse. I think the worry arises from the word "domestication" in HYBRID. Wiredu (1980) uses it with reference to themes in philosophy and with reference to the methods of philosophy. But so used, I believe the word is not univocal. Roughly, with reference to themes in philosophy, it means making something that is general to have cultural dimensions and flavours. With reference to methods, it means applying something general to cultural problems and issues. The further objection the reviewer raises is that if we can domesticate the discipline of philosophy and its method (a claim Wiredu makes sans the method), why clobber him on the claim that philosophical methods are universal (a claim he can accept)? Actually, Wiredu does not accept the idea that philosophical methods are universal. And I have pointed this out in several parts of the paper.

V. Objections and Replies

There are several objections I would like to address here.[5] The first is that one might worry that Wiredu in his larger philosophical project already accepts my position. And if true, I have engaged in a strawman. The reply to this is that if by larger philosophical project one means *explicit* philosophical claims, the objection rests on a false claim as textual evidence in the previous section (III) shows. The text itself (Wiredu, 1980) is very instructive because it is the seminar work of Wiredu; a work where he broached all the ideas, which he later fully develops. However, if by larger philosophical project one means how Wiredu has actually practiced his philosophy and the view implied in that practice; yes, the objection rests on a true claim. But it does not show that the position I have developed is a strawman. I will illustrate with a historical parallel.

Rene Descartes is well known for his substance dualism in the *Meditations*, roughly the idea that body and mind are two radically different substances, since the former is extended in space, but the latter is not. Descartes also holds that both the mind and body interact, and that this interaction ensures our well-being and preservation and attests to God's goodness and power (Cottingham, 2017). In one of the well-documented philosophical conversation in Western philosophy, Descartes shares his work with princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, who was then on exile with her entire royal family in The Hague. On the 6th of May, 1643, the young princess writes Descartes pointing out that the notion of the soul or the mind interacting with the body is incoherent given that the notion of the soul imparting on the body depends on some platitudes about impact. For example, if A can impact on B, the impact of A on B depends on how much B is pushed, the manner in which B is pushed and the surface-texture and shape of the thing that pushes B, all of which are excluded if A is a non-extended soul as Descartes conceives it. Descartes on the 21st of May, 1643, develops a different conceptual framework in

[5] These objections come from an anonymous reviewer of this journal.

reply to the objection. Basically, he says, that we have several basic notions, which must be strictly applied. The notion of extension is strictly applied to body, the notion of thought strictly applied to mind, and the notion of union is strictly applied to body and mind together. So read, the Princess is mistaken because she is applying the notion of extension to the unity of mind and body. The debate goes back and forth. And the verdict of most historians is that Descartes merely fudged the debate and never really answered the objection of the young Princess (Bohemia & Descartes, 2007).

Now to the point I wish to make. In a classic paper, entitled "Understanding Interaction: What Descartes should have told Elizabeth" Daniel Garber argued that given Descartes larger philosophical commitments in his *physics*, the answer he gave to Elizabeth is not the answer he should have given; in fact, the answer he gave, says Garber conflicts with his other views. He should not have told the Princess that she was conflicting our basic notions; he should have said rather that the notion of union of soul and body is the most basic notion we have for understanding anything at all and is the paradigm of all causal explanations. Therefore, rather than trying to use body-body impact to understand mind-body impact; we should move in the other direction (Garber, 1983).

This is the general metaphilosophical lesson I draw from that historical parallel. A philosopher can be mistaken even about his own views or the implications of his own views or in his or her description of his or her views. And it is no strawman to seek to address that. In fact, it is a substantive contribution to the very growth of philosophical knowledge, as the case of Garber so well illustrates.

The second objection is as follows. One might worry that speaking of a universalism of method might mean imposing an over-arching framework of philosophy, which might undermine the essence of philosophy. One might further buttress this by saying that the method of common sense is not neutral as claimed. "The moment we move from the truth of common

sense deliverances to the problem of their meaning (if we assume that common sense delivers truth of perception), we immediately encounters significant philosophical problems, the least of which is definitely not in what language we decide to make the analysis." I readily grant that there is a pernicious form of universalism in which one tries to impose an overarching framework that comes from one tradition of philosophy, presumably from the Western tradition. But this is not the position advanced here. The position advanced here is that X is a universal method if X is not the exclusive preserve of philosophy, and more importantly, not the exclusive preserve of any philosophical tradition but reflective of the ways in which people everywhere normally seek to advance their views. This is a very innocuous universalism since at the very least it does not imply colonial or neo-colonial imposition. The second part of the question can be answered fairly easily. We need to distinguish between X as a method and the output of X. The position defended here is not that the output of X is universal. On the contrary, the position is that X's applicability and validity transcend the preserve of any culture. The output of X is always culture relative. And that is how it ought to be. I would close my reply to this objection by adding a clarification. Perceptual truth or knowledge comes standardly from the exercise of perceptual abilities. It can often result in serious disagreement and interpretative worries. If someone were to assert that perception is a universal ability; that assertion charitably read means that perceptual abilities have universal applicability and validity. But not the output of that ability. For within any given culture, disagreement can be had over the import of shared perceptual object or experience. But that itself does not impugn the claim that perceptual abilities are universal. The same applies to common sense as a method of philosophy.

The third objection goes as follows. Why argue for universalism about methods rather than the more attractive option of seeking for African set of methods that have universal philosophical relevance? One might add that Odera Oruka's sage philosophy shows the

possibility and attractiveness of such a method. Indeed, I clearly do not deny that particularism about method is possible and fruitful. Although it is a different question how far and to what extent Oruka's method is really a cultural particular. Sages and thinkers are in every culture and tradition. For example, Socrates was a sage, and the dialectical style of inquiry and ethnography is hardly the invention of the Kenyan philosopher. In general, I grant that particularism about method is both possible and fruitful. But that is compatible with using methods of universal significance as well. My overall image of African philosophy is a tradition of thinking that employs multi-methodological approaches in advancement of the discourse on African realities.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued in defence of the universal option in African philosophy with respect to the question of methods. I show that contrary to Wiredu's claim that philosophy is unlike physics department in Africa, with methods of universal significance that can be applied to problems anywhere; philosophy is actually like that. I illustrate the claim with some paradigm methods; although there is no suggestion that these are the only methods that attain the relevant universality.

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