


Conceptual Analysis and African Philosophy

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Abstract: The history of the methodology of African philosophy can be divided into two periods: the nascent stage that's characterized by a rigor-demand, and the contemporary stage that's characterized by a relevance-demand. In this, paper, I argue for one way to strike the appropriate balance between relevance and rigor in African philosophy. Specifically, I argue that the unconscious rejection of conceptual analysis as a philosophical method by contemporary African philosophers played a major role in how African philosophy came to be characterized by a relevance-demand. Consequently, I submit that even though being only or excessively relevance-oriented is not bad, African philosophy would become rich enough to compete with other regional philosophies—Western, Chinese, and so on—if it re-installs conceptual analysis as part of its methodology.

1. Introduction

Contemporary African philosophy is said to constitute a *sui generis* tradition on its own. The thought is that, from its inception, African philosophy has been contrasted with Western philosophy, and often with negative outcomes, such that if African philosophy is to become an independent and autochthonous discipline, it must not be characterized by or associated with any tradition that is Western philosophical. In this guise, the analytic tradition,¹ primarily, is sometimes said to be inimical to the Africinity of African philosophy (Oladipo, 2000; but see Eze, 2001; Hallen, 2006; van Nierkek, 2015). In its stead, a largely relevance-oriented tradition has been unconsciously installed as the appropriate tradition for African philosophy.

I will use 'analytic tradition', 'analytic philosophy', and 'Western philosophy' interchangeably throughout. In doing so, I do not mean to eschew the fact that analytic philosophy is a type of Western philosophy alongside continental philosophy (see, e.g., Humphries, 1999); my focus is just on analytic philosophy.

One reason for this is the enormous socio-cultural challenges that still beset African societies, the resolution of which contemporary African professional philosophers have taken to be their *raison d'être*. Of course, this is legitimate: philosophy should not just pursue knowledge for its own sake; the gained knowledge must also be relevant to the lives and challenges of the people. Nevertheless, it is important that the gained knowledge be given a socio-cultural context that is contrastable with other contexts. Paulin Hountondji² (1976) warned African philosophers against any attitude that strays from this path. Barry Hallen presents his point best:

In doing so, Hountondji had cautioned his colleagues about ending up with what he termed 'ethnophilosophy'. Even in systematic form, if their analyses of African beliefs and practices did not go beyond the recounting of those culturally specific beliefs and practices, they would not be fulfilling the mission of the philosopher as someone who seeks ideas and truths that transcend culture. (2018, 39)

We can say then that it is disadvantageous to relativize *all* aspects of African philosophy to the African context. The African philosopher should 'try to acquaint himself with the different cultures of the world, not to be encyclopedic or eclectic, but with the aim of trying to see how far issues and concepts of universal relevance can be disentangled from the contingencies of culture' (Wiredu, 1980, 31). In short, the right balance should be sought. But how?

Many years ago, Thomas Kuhn (1962) told us that the progress of a scientific discipline is partly a function of how rich the competing theories that constitute it are. This suggests that African philosophy would be richer if the competing theories that constitute it do not approach African beliefs and practices from a relevance perspective only. Thus, even though being only or excessively relevance-oriented is not bad, African philosophy would become rich enough to compete with other regional philosophies—Western, Chinese, and so on—if it incorporates other philosophical

² Hountondji is a Beninese French philosopher and he is considered an important figure in the development of the African tradition of philosophy.

traditions, e.g., the analytic tradition. And being competitive in this way is a desirable trait for any philosophical tradition.

This is Wiredu's point when he says, 'If [the African philosopher] is aware that it is by some manner of historical accident that his education has come to be concerned with a certain set of foreign philosophies, he will understand at once that he ought to adopt a highly critical approach to his studies, and, as a corollary, a comparative method' (1980, 30–31).³ The problem, however, is that most contemporary African philosophers do not employ this critical and comparative methodology that Wiredu talks about:

But who else is doing philosophy in the African context along the lines of Wiredu? Who explicitly embraces Wiredu's way of doing philosophy and incorporates it into his or her own approach to African philosophy? Wiredu has published a number of essays detailing the methodology he believes can produce important consequences for philosophy in the African context. I don't think he wrote all of those essays for his own edification! He was and is trying to enlist the interest of others. Not just to read his work, but also to become critically engaged with his approach to African philosophy. (Hallen, 2018, 45)

Thus, it is clear that there was a methodological jump in the history of African philosophy, i.e., the critical and comparative methodology, which was prioritized in its nascent stages, has been pushed to the margins in the transition to contemporary African philosophy. This paper aims to explain this methodological jump and weigh its prospect for African philosophy.

This paper will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I argue that conceptual analysis is this critical and comparative methodology. In Section 3, I attempt a rough historical survey of how contemporary African philosophers came to unconsciously reject conceptual analysis, and how such rejection led to the notion that African philosophy is a relevance philosophy. In Section 4, I argue for the re-installation of conceptual analysis as part of the methodology for African philosophy. In Section 5, I conclude with how to

³ Peter Bodunrin (1981) thinks analytic philosophy should be the benchmark for any other regional philosophy. I think his approach takes things too far. See fn. 7.

achieve a progressive balance between relevance and rigor in the methodology of African philosophy.

I should say upfront that I do not mean African philosophers have not been engaging in conceptual analysis all along. Far from it, and I will continue to reemphasize this point as I progress. A chain of African philosophers that connects to Wiredu utilizes conceptual analysis: Hallen & Sodipo (1997) on the Yoruba conception of knowledge and Ramose (1999) on Ubuntu are a familiar few in this category. My focus is that most contemporary African philosophers do not utilize conceptual analysis and that it is important to show why they should.

2. The Methodology of Philosophy

If analytic philosophy is to be characterized by a distinctive methodology, many analytic philosophers will suggest ‘conceptual analysis’ as such a distinctive methodology. In recent times, however, arguments have been put forward as to why this should not be done, but I think there is a sense in which conceptual analysis, despite these recent rebuttals, is a necessary aspect of not just analytic philosophy but also of any philosophizing, even in non-Western traditions.

Conceptual analysis has a long history, perhaps dating to the Socratic period. Though it is difficult to characterize what constitutes it, there is a consensus in many quarters that stating the necessary and sufficient conditions for being the relevant concept suffices (but see Schaffer, 2015). Little wonder, Gettier’s (1963) argument that ‘justified true belief’, though necessary, is not sufficient for knowledge is widely successful—it exemplifies what conceptual analysis entails. For a considerable period, conceptual analysis, so construed, exhausts how philosophers do what they do. Problems arose in the early twentieth century when Rudolf Carnap argued that scientific concepts also need to be defined a priori and that it is philosophy’s job to furnish these definitions. Willard Quine, Hilary Putnam, and Saul Kripke convinced many philosophers that this will not work, at least until conceptual analysis ceases to be wholly a

priori. Together, they made it clear that analyticity is not synonymous with apriority.

This challenge resurfaces, albeit indirectly, in the criticisms of contemporary defenses of conceptual analysis, e.g., Jackson (1998). Laurence and Margolis (2003) argue that even Jackson's contemporary defense fails to dispel the ghosts of Quine, Putnam, and Kripke. One reason they give is that philosophical intuitions take up the whole space in conceptual analysis, such that empirical investigations seem to have no place at all. It is worth pointing out that accounts of conceptual analysis that include empirical investigations have since been given (e.g., Sytsma, 2010), but let us continue with Laurence and Margolis' criticism. What they do not say is that conceptual analysis does not play any role in philosophizing whatsoever. Rather, one reoccurring theme in their work is that Jackson's contemporary defense does not establish the claim that conceptual analysis exhausts philosophical methodology. If so, then in itemizing how philosophers do what they do, there is conceptual analysis and other methods. A similar theme is noticeable in Williamson's (2007) insightful appraisal of conceptual analysis, according to which philosophers study more than just words and concepts, contrary to defenses of conceptual analysis. Philosophers engage in conceptual analysis and other things.

My point is that there is the likelihood that a philosopher's position often involves elucidation of the *nuances* of a concept or a disagreement born from a misunderstanding/misuse of those nuances. Take 'nuances' here to involve the metaphysics of the concept (i.e., what the concept picks out in reality, how it picks out what it picks out, and the relationship between the concept and other concepts), the epistemology of the concept (i.e., the meaning of the concept, how the concept is being used, how the concept should be used), the ethics of the concept (i.e., the socio-cultural implications when the concept is used), and so on. I do not mean, however, that this disjunction—a philosopher's position involves an elucidation on the nuances of a concept *or* a disagreement born from a misunderstanding/misuse of those nuances—always exhausts every

philosopher's position, only that it is likely so most of the time. This likelihood is why most philosophers, either directly or indirectly, often undertake a conceptual clarification at one point in their works, whatever else they want to achieve. Or they had already, either implicitly or explicitly, accepted and used a conceptual clarification given by another philosopher. If so, then we can say that necessarily some aspects of philosophizing involve conceptual analysis. Philosophers may engage in other things, but they surely engage in conceptual analysis.

In this sense of being a necessary constitutive aspect of philosophizing, let us say that conceptual analysis is the primary philosophical method: however else a philosopher goes about philosophizing, some form of conceptual analysis is required. There is a strong reason to accept conceptual analysis, in this restricted sense, as the primary philosophical method. Whatever method besides conceptual analysis that can and/or have been vested upon philosophy seems to only be contingent constitutive aspects of philosophizing. Consider Williamson's candidate—counterfactual evaluation. Does every instance of philosophizing involve it? Clearly, no. Arguably, up until Williamson's argument, it is highly unlikely that philosophers realized that they are, either directly or indirectly, doing some form of counterfactual evaluation when they defend a certain stance. It certainly did not occur to me that in thinking through the details of this paper, I did so by evaluating what could have been the case in hypothetical situations, such that the truth of my arguments is a function of that evaluation. Even now that it had occurred to me that I might have done so, I find it difficult to see how I am in fact doing so. Yet, there is a sense in which my arguments are philosophical. In short, many positions would still be philosophical if we reject counterfactual evaluation as a philosophical method outright.

But, as we have seen, we cannot reject conceptual analysis as a philosophical method outright. For instance, glaring instances of conceptual analysis dot the whole of this paper. In addition, there is a sense in which Williamson's whole argument can be said to be an analysis of the concept 'philosophical method' (see, e.g., Russell, 2010). Thus, while other

philosophical methods besides conceptual analysis can be done without, conceptual analysis cannot. If so, then there is no fatal harm in associating analytic philosophy with conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis captures how most analytic philosophers do what they do.

To be clear, I do not mean that other philosophical methods besides conceptual analysis are subordinate or reducible to conceptual analysis. Jackson (1998) seems to hold both positions. Rather, I mean that conceptual analysis and other philosophical methods share the stage equally but in a different manner: the former, necessarily, the latter, contingently. We can and we often do have both of them as the methods of philosophical works, but it is unlikely that we have only the latter; whereas we can and we often do have only the former. Put it this way: we know a priori that philosophers engage in some form of conceptual analysis, but we do not know a priori whatever else they engage in.

What follows from this is that conceptual analysis would involve some form of rigor, i.e., teasing out the necessary and sufficient conditions for being the relevant concept would involve some technicalities. By rigor and technicalities, I do not mean what mathematicians/logicians do, and this is because rigorous logical proof has long been shown to not be a true test of philosophical truth (Creighton, 1922). Philosophical analyses may occasionally employ them for clarity purposes, but they are not characterized by them. Excellent philosophical works abound that lack even an iota of logical rigor. So also, excellent philosophical works that are rigorous precisely because they employ formal logical notations abound. Simply, conceptual analysis need not be rigorous in the fashion of mathematical or logical rigor. But if we mean by rigor, methodological rigor achieved by reliance on a critical method and a standard data collection (Gulati, 2007), with the goal of developing universal laws and principles that describe the nature and inner workings of things, then philosophizing via conceptual analysis affords rigor, even if not mathematically or logically so. Thus, to be clear, I will mean by 'rigor' a methodology that is critical, comparative, and has a standardized approach to data collection.

Take Gettier's argument again. Though his clarity is subserved by logical principles, he nonetheless spared his readers formal logical notations. He simply deployed a critical and comparative methodology that evinces a detailed examination of the elements of what constitutes knowledge. Similarly, his data collection strategy, even though non-statistical, was standard. It may be difficult to characterize what constitutes 'standard' here, but a good starting place is the universality of the work, i.e., its applicability to any culture within the Western world.⁴ The standardization of his argument clearly transcends any one Western culture, precisely because its universality is such that, in any culture anywhere in the Western world, knowledge is not just justified true belief. This might explain why the work is generally accepted as a good example of the descriptive content of conceptual analysis—namely, stating the necessary and sufficient conditions for being the relevant concepts. Note that nothing blocks empirical investigations from featuring here. In fact, there have been empirical studies of Gettier's argument (see, e.g., Borges et al., 2017).

What follows from this, then, is that once (a set of) works begin from a perspective of applying only to a specific group of people such that relevance becomes valuable at the expense of rigor, then there has been a misconception of the primary philosophical method. This is the case with most works in contemporary African philosophy, and, as we have seen (Section 1), that was not the case in the days of Wiredu, Hountondji, and other earlier African academic philosophers—I said then that they envisaged a critical and comparative methodology for African philosophy, and we have just seen that conceptual analysis encapsulates such a methodology. If so, then the question that arises is why was there a methodological jump from rigor to relevance in the development of the African tradition of philosophy?

⁴ I take it that philosophical universality should be relativized to regions. More on this in Section 4. I do not mean by this that Gettier's argument cannot transcend the Western world, only that such transcendence cannot be decided up front. After all, it has been shown that Western epistemological theories may fail when situated in non-Western contexts (see, e.g., Wiredu, 1985).

3. African Philosophy and Conceptual Analysis

To sufficiently answer this question, we must retrace the journey of African philosophy from inception to contemporary times. Since its inception is well documented in anthologies on African philosophy, I will be brief.

Early anthropologists like Lucien Levy-Bruhl who came to Africa reported that rationality is, in principle, absent in African indigenous cultures. According to them, African cultures were formed without objective standards, and, so, too much emphasis was placed on preserving tradition, such that there were no incentives to develop philosophical thoughts. Reactions to this line of thought birthed what is currently regarded as 'African philosophy.' The reactions were essentially a clarion call for African thinkers to take control of the situation since 'rationality' is a subject matter in philosophy, not anthropology. In so doing, the natural tendency was to show how indigenous African cultures were rational in their thoughts, such that there was the danger of rehearsing African traditional thoughts in a bid to show that they are inherently rational, i.e., African thinkers began to ethnophilosophize, a methodology that was frowned upon by earlier African professional philosophers (Section 1).

Across the globe, Richard Rorty (1980, 1991) was propagating the idea that philosophy, though culturally rooted, is unique to the West, and, so, there is no 'historical or cultural evidence of intellectual activity elsewhere in the world that can be meaningfully compared with the idiosyncratic discipline in Western societies that has inherited the title 'philosophy' (Hallen, 2006, 50). Hallen rejects this view, demonstrating, without ethnophilosophizing, how 'Africa has been part of the philosophical universe all along' (2006, 63).

Hallen's strategy is what he calls 'ordinary language philosophy,' and according to him, it helps to carve out a unique African tradition of philosophy, which he calls 'analytic African philosophy.' The tradition entails analyzing the meaning of everyday discourse to highlight their underlying conceptual relationship. Simply put, Hallen's view is that if there is going to be an analytic African philosophy, conceptual analysis is the fulcrum. He adds that analytic African philosophy has always been practiced by

African philosophers, citing himself and most notably Wiredu as examples. He ends on the note that more contemporary African philosophers should become analytic African philosophers. In short, Hallen and I are aligned in calling for the reinstallation of conceptual analysis as a method for African philosophy.

No doubt, Hallen's and Wiredu's styles are attributable to their largely analytic educational background, which was common in the nascent stage of African philosophy—Hallen was trained in the USA, and Wiredu at the Oxford University in the UK. Other historical figures in African philosophy that were trained in a densely analytic philosophical tradition include but are not limited to John Mbiti, Peter Abraham, Peter Bodunrin, Paulin Hountondji, and Kwame Gyekye. Thus, there is the temptation to take this fact about the educational background of earlier African professional philosophers, which most contemporary African philosophers may seem to lack, as the reason for the methodological jump in the history of African philosophy. This temptation should be resisted, however.

Many, if not all, contemporary African professional philosophers were trained in a densely analytic philosophical tradition as well, albeit within the African continent. In fact, as Etieyibo and Chimakonam (2018) report, in today's world, the philosophy curricula in most African Universities are still largely Western. They write: 'From the data presented, one can observe, and it can be surmised that philosophy programs in parts of Africa are highly westernized. There is but a sprinkling of courses in African philosophy in some of the universities' (2018, 85). Although, as Okeja (2012) argues, the fact that contemporary African professional philosophers were trained in a Western tradition does not justify why the philosophy curricula in most African universities are still largely Western. In his view, 'it is not true that all that these teachers of philosophy have got is only Western philosophy neither does it follow that they must teach Western philosophy since they were educated in that tradition of philosophy' (Okeja, 2012, 671).

While it is unfortunate that some six years after Okeja's admonition the data still reflects largely westernized philosophy curricula in African

universities, what is important for us is that contemporary African professional philosophers also have analytic backgrounds, and so the methodological jump in the history of African philosophy is not explainable by a lack thereof. If anything about their educational background is relevant for explaining the jump, then it would be the contents of this Western education background, i.e., the contents of philosophy curricula in African universities back when contemporary African professional philosophers were still young undergraduates, and how the contents have informed their thought.

The period when African philosophy was becoming an institutionalized and academic discipline—the late twentieth century—unfortunately coincides with when conceptual analysis was facing its first wave of attack at the philosophical world stage, from which we can say it never fully recovers. In Section 2, I explained that during this period the Quine-Putnam-Kripke challenge against conceptual analysis as the primary philosophical method was surfacing in the literature and with far-reaching consequences (see, e.g., Kriegel, 2017). In particular, Quine's challenge, espoused in his famous 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' became a *locus classicus* for undergraduate studies in most African (and arguably, Western) universities, and it still is—at least, it was the center of my second-year undergraduate epistemology course in Nigeria in the early 2000s. One consequence of this Quinean challenge was a belief that conceptual analysis is neither what philosophers do nor how they do what they do. This belief was imbibed by many young African students, such that in the latter part of the late twentieth century, when they were maturing into professional philosophers, the influence of the Quine-Putnam-Kripke challenge against conceptual analysis had taken roots in their thoughts and works.

Arguably, the young African students, now contemporary African professional philosophers, had believed that African philosophy would be retrogressing if it took conceptual analysis, a now highly problematic methodology, as its primary philosophical method. But it was not directly clear what should replace it since whatever else philosophers do and

however else they do it, besides conceptual analysis, as we have seen (Section 2), is manifestly and inherently gerrymandered. What, then, should contemporary African philosophy take as its primary philosophical method? One ready substitute was the resolution of the manifest socio-cultural challenges bedeviling many of Africa's societies.

If contemporary African philosophy is to be distinctively African in its practice and methodology, how best should it demonstrate such distinctiveness other than by being relevant to ameliorating pressing socio-cultural ills? This gives an adequate background to Sogolo's claim that contemporary African philosophy is characterized by 'the pressure to respond to the growing demand for utility which now forms the measure of the worth of academic disciplines in Africa' (1990, 39). In this way, a relevance-oriented methodology gradually began to take center stage in contemporary African philosophy.

I do not mean that views which give alternative explanations for why contemporary African philosophy is relevance-oriented are wrong, only that my view underwrites them. Consider Matolino:

Thus, modern philosophy, in Africa, begins by rejecting a world that it may just as well recognize, but cannot accept on the grounds that it is insufficiently philosophical. Yet, at the same time, it is under pressure to show its philosophical colors by resorting to methodological approaches of a system that philosophers in Africa patently recognize to be both an unfair and a burdensome imposition. (2018, 341)

No doubt, Matolino's view correctly describes the status quo, but only partly I would say. For if I am right, then the reason contemporary African philosophy cannot accept African cultures on the grounds that they are insufficiently philosophical is because it has rejected conceptual analysis as a philosophical method. I will explain how conceptual analysis helps to show that African cultures are not philosophically humdrum in Section 4. For now, it suffices to say that this rejection is partly why Matolino says Western philosophy unfairly and burdensomely pressurizes African philosophy to show philosophical colors, especially if it insists

that the colors be shown by resorting to its own methodology, i.e., conceptual analysis.⁵

Furthermore, rejecting conceptual analysis means that works like those of Wiredu, Hallen, Ramose, and so on, which have conceptual analysis as their methodology, began to fizzle out of fashion, sometimes even frowned at, and those that are largely relevance-oriented began to take center stage. It is thus not uncommon to find statements that prioritize relevance as the distinctive methodology of contemporary African philosophy. Here is Amato: 'It is philosophy's connection to central human concerns that legitimizes any such claims, and in each case, this connection takes the form of a set of modalities, methods, or genres of discourse' (1997, 74). Matolino puts it best, bringing out the methodological jump I have been characterizing:

[W]hat I seek to suggest is that doing philosophy in Africa cannot necessarily be the same as doing philosophy elsewhere, particularly as it is done in the metropolis of Africa's colonized past [...] what I am advocating for is the need for philosophy in Africa to be relevant to the concerns of the people here. (2018, 349)

My claim is that the reason doing philosophy in contemporary Africa cannot necessarily be the same as it was done in Africa's colonized past is the rejection of conceptual analysis as the primary philosophical method.

It is noteworthy that some contemporary African professional philosophers opine that issues about the appropriate methodology of African philosophy are redundant. For instance, Makwinja says: 'the focus on different substantive problems necessarily leads to the many ways through which

5 Following claims that analytic philosophy cannot be relevance-oriented (e.g., Soames, 2003, xiv), some contemporary African professional philosophers think that contemporary African philosophy, having become relevance-oriented, can no longer return to the path Wiredu and other earlier African academic philosophers envisaged. At least a couple of them have made this argument, during the Q&A sessions, at conferences where earlier versions of this paper were presented. I think this view is too limited, however. Consider analytic metaphysics, for example. It is arguably the sub-discipline of analytic philosophy with the least practical relevance, but, as I will show in Section 5, it is practically relevant. Both analytic philosophy and analytic African philosophy can be relevance-oriented without jettisoning their analyticity.

such problems can be approached. In that way, methodological problems are being considered concurrently with substantive issues' (2018, 101). That is, the appropriate methodology of African philosophy would be born from resolving the socio-cultural ills confronting many of Africa's societies. I agree: the methodology of a discipline tends to develop concurrently with the substantive contents of the discipline, and if resolving socio-cultural ills is now the *raison d'être* of African philosophy, then surely the methodology of contemporary African philosophy would be born from actually resolving those ills. But this, ultimately, presupposes a significant difference between the substantive content of African philosophy in contemporary times and in its nascent stages, which then implies a methodological jump.⁶

In short, debating the appropriate methodology of African philosophy may be redundant, but debating why there is a methodological jump in its history certainly is not. I have identified the rejection of conceptual analysis as a philosophical method as a major factor in accounting for this jump. However, since conceptual analysis is closely associated with analytic philosophy, contemporary African philosophers fear that its reinstallation would lead to forfeiting the regionality/Africanity of African philosophy, by fostering some sort of neo-hegemony of Western philosophy over African philosophy. This fear, in my view, is unwarranted.

4. African Philosophy and the Analytic Tradition

Partly due to Rorty's influence, philosophy has been said to have a Western history (Section 3). However, it has been argued that this is a mistake (e.g., Eze, 2001; Hallen, 2006; Perkins, 2019). The origin of Western philosophy should, as it has been, be traced to ancient Greece, that of Chinese philosophy to ancient China, and that of African philosophy to ancient Egypt.

⁶ Moreover, I think the current manner in which contemporary African philosophers go about this resolution is detrimental to the future of African philosophy. For one, Africa is notoriously multicultural and this multiculturalism calls into question how the resolution can be effective. More on this in Section 4.

Philosophy has different origins depending on which regional philosophy one has in mind. If so, and since conceptual analysis is closely associated with Western philosophy, then perhaps Matolino is right, and I am unfairly and burdensomely imposing conceptual analysis on contemporary African philosophy by canvassing for its reinstatement. I do not think it is an imposition, let alone an unfair and burdensome one.

If philosophy is inherently regional, then my view also holds for Western philosophy as well, in that it is not just Western philosophy that can contribute to other regional philosophies but also that other regional philosophies can contribute to it. Indeed, they do. For example, Radnitzky (1981) and Mou (2006) draw out how Western and Oriental philosophies, and Western and Chinese philosophies, respectively, are positively related without any losing itself in such unions. Also, Sarkissian (2010) develops an account based on Confucianism that resolves some ethical problems in Western philosophy.⁷ Thus, the fact that a philosophy is regional does not mean it cannot contribute to or learn from other regional philosophies while maintaining its own regionality. The relationship between regional philosophies in terms of which can contribute to the other is symmetric. With this symmetry in the background, what troubles most contemporary African philosophers can be properly stated.

Contemporary African philosophers are not particularly troubled if African philosophy can contribute to Western philosophy—that is a plus for African philosophy, precisely because its regionality/Africanity would be secured—after all, Wiredu’s and other analytic African philosophers’ works achieve just this. What really troubles contemporary African philosophers is Western philosophy’s contribution to African philosophy. It is here that African philosophy risks losing its Africanity. This is what Masolo means when he says, ‘Wiredu overwhelmingly characterized philosophy as a universal endeavor at the expense of Africans’ claim to specificity

⁷ Hence, I disavowed the claim that Western philosophy is the benchmark for other regional philosophies (fn. 3). It may be the most popular, but it still has a great deal to learn from other regional philosophies.

and difference' (2006, 7). I think this fear will not materialize, at least if the union between African philosophy and Western philosophy concerns reinstalling conceptual analysis as one of the methods for doing African philosophy. In fact, to the contrary, the opposite is to be predicted—namely, reinstalling conceptual analysis as a philosophical method for African philosophy would help to foster its Africanity.

Consider communitarianism, which many in the profession take to be central to African philosophy (but see, e.g., Matolino, 2014), where communitarianism is 'a formal or governmental structure and system in which people live together as a group, in virtue of sharing overriding set of moral, social, and political values or principles' (Ikuenobe, 2006, 2). Given the centrality that is accorded it, communitarian claims are often (but not always) generalized to be about African philosophy *simpliciter*, even though they are almost always proffered from the perspective of one or two African cultures. Matolino and Kwindigwi put it better: 'there is always a lingering danger of reducing African reality to a monolithic view [...] It is hardly an exaggeration to advance the view that being African does not mean the same thing to all Africans—even indigenes of sub-Saharan Africa' (2013, 201). Simply, Africa is manifestly multicultural, and, so, generalizing from one culture to all African cultures is dangerous to the future of African philosophy.

Though acknowledged, this generalization is still widespread.⁸ There seems to be an implicit understanding that communitarian claims when generalized to be African philosophy *simpliciter* should be read as 'African philosophy from a given African culture's perspective.' This implicit understanding notwithstanding, the danger of such generalization remains.

Simply, the generalization would lead to another great debate, one that African philosophy can no longer afford. African philosophy has gone through one great debate—about its nature and existence—and it might

⁸ For instance, the *Journal on African Philosophy* warns authors to refrain from such generalization: <https://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/jap/about/submissions>. See, particularly, Guideline 2, parts a and c.

as well be going through another—about its methodology. Agada (2015) and Makwinja (2018) complain that the existence- and methodology-debates do not help anyone since the best way to show that African philosophy exists is to show what it does, and the best way to show its appropriate methodology is to resolve substantive African philosophical issues. But if this generalization is not moderated, it would inadvertently yield another great debate—about the contents of African philosophy—a ‘content-debate’, so to say. For dissenters would have been provided with enough evidence to the effect that most of the content of contemporary African philosophy is insufficient to legitimize the enterprise. They would say that at best what there is, is a disjointed body of works that do not amount to what we can call *African* philosophy. They would argue à la Hume that since no claim about African philosophy *simpliciter* is based on all African cultures, the notion of ‘African philosophy’ was snuck in through the back door just like the notion of causality. This Humean challenge is the danger, which generalizing from one African culture to African philosophy *simpliciter* poses to the future of African philosophy.

It is already noticeable, albeit relatively unaddressed, that even if we accept African philosophy as a relevance philosophy, its relevance will be relative to the culture from which perspective a given philosophy was written. Given the multiculturalism of Africa, it seems clear that we cannot just turn the wheel and use a solution that works for one African community as a template for all others. But this is what the majority of the relevance-based works in contemporary African philosophy are implying when they generalize from the solutions proffered for one African community to all African communities in their practice of speaking in terms of African philosophy *simpliciter*. I take this to be part of what Makwinja means when he says that the ‘demands of relevance have the potential to directly cripple the development of African philosophy’ (2018, 106). Ultimately, therefore, the current manner contemporary African professional philosophers go about resolving the socio-cultural ills bedeviling African communities is poised to cause more harm than good in the long run. If so, then it is all the more pressing that we engage with (a form of) the methodology-

debate, that of asking why there is a methodological jump in the history of African philosophy. For not doing so would yield a content-debate, one that would bring the existence-debate back to the surface.

As I see it, the way out is either to deny that communitarianism is central to African philosophy, or to embark on a critical and comparative analysis before making any general claim about African philosophy *simpliciter*. The former is not an option, at least for those who take communitarianism to be central to African philosophy. We are left then with the latter, which, upon proper consideration, is just conceptual analysis.

Conceptual analysis, as I have defined it here, is rigor built on a critical and comparative methodology, and supplemented with a standardized approach of data collection. By embarking on a critical and comparative analysis, therefore, contemporary African philosophy would be endorsing conceptual analysis as a philosophical method. But, clearly, its Africanness would not be forfeited by doing so. For one, the solutions it would now proffer to socio-cultural ills would be usable as a template for any African community, since they would have been arrived at from teasing out the necessary and sufficient conditions for being the relevant concepts. (Notice how this would also necessarily acknowledge the multiculturalism of Africa: for that would be part of what it takes to arrive at those necessary and sufficient conditions.) In short, instead of jeopardizing the Africanness of African philosophy, conceptual analysis would be fostering it, precisely by fostering its relevance-orientedness. If so, then Western philosophy can contribute to African philosophy without imposing any sort of intellectual or cultural neo-hegemony. Precisely, the reinstallation of conceptual analysis as part of the methodology for contemporary African philosophy would not foster any such neo-hegemony.

In addition, with this reinstallation, African philosophy would end up with the sort of richness of depth that a scientific discipline needs to compete with other scientific disciplines (Kuhn, 1962). After all, one complaint about African philosophy, which might explain why, until recently, it has not been given its due place at the philosophical world stage (see Garfield and Edelglass, 2011), is that its substantive contents are based on

different particular cultures (Eze, 2001; Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013), and so, they are aphilosophical. Hallen puts it best:

There are those in African philosophy today who suggest the contents and contexts of Africa's cultures may not be suited to the existent methodologies of international academic philosophy. They maintain that a new and different approach to doing philosophy is needed if Africa is to be given fair representation. (2018, 49)

My claim is that reinstalling conceptual analysis as a philosophical method has the potential to be this new approach Hallen talks about. One advantage of going down this route is that it would not take the jettisoning of African cultures to achieve a fair representation of African philosophy on the philosophical world stage. African cultures are not philosophically humdrum; what was lacking, which makes them appear so to dissenters, was conceptual analysis. Were it present, it would have supplemented the ongoing practice of culture-based philosophizing that characterizes African philosophy by blocking any Humean challenge along the lines of the one discussed above, and, in so doing, give African cultures rich philosophical contents.

Thus, what we need to transcend the particularity of the many African cultures or tease out their universal features, as Wiredu (1980) advocated and envisaged, is arguably conceptual analysis. Without it, the fact that contemporary African philosophy is (or has become) a relevance-oriented philosophy would no longer matter. For upon proper consideration, we see that such relevance would be lost in the maze of relativism that would become indissociable from African philosophy. I am not canvassing for conceptual analysis to be the sole methodology for African philosophy, it must be said; all I have said is that conceptual analysis should be *part* of that methodology. Relevance need not be jettisoned to accommodate rigor, and, in the same vein, the unconscious decision to jettison rigor to make space for relevance was a mistake.

5. Conclusion: Towards Balancing Rigor and Relevance

Let me round off by moderating one overly optimistic claim I have made—namely, that conceptual analysis will foster the relevance-orientedness of

contemporary African philosophy. Even if I have explained how conceptual analysis would foster this such that my arguments may be plausible, things might not pan out that way in real life. After all, relevance is being prioritized at the expense of rigor precisely for this reason—rigor is good on paper, relevance is what counts in real life, and African philosophy, as we have seen throughout this paper, wants to and should count in real life.

Nonetheless, I think this exaggerated optimism, if at all we can call it that, can be moderated if we consider that some of the best philosophical works are those that strike the appropriate balance between rigor and relevance. I will go to analytic metaphysics to find an example since its theories are arguably very rigorous and supposedly have the least relevance in real life.

Morganti (2015) argues against the claim that metaphysics is empirically unverifiable. His view is that metaphysical theories are *indirectly* empirically testable. For instance, given that quantum physics says that the physical world is such that there can be numerically distinct physical systems with the same physical properties, quantum physics challenges the Leibnizian metaphysical principle that indiscernibles are identical. Consequently, some philosophers, notably David Lewis (1986), reject the aspect of quantum physics that conflict with this Leibnizian principle, and their rejection has gone on to influence the progress of quantum physics, i.e., it has prompted physicists to clarify, by way of supplying evidence, that at the quantum realm, atoms can be indiscernible but not identical. Hence Morganti says: ‘metaphysical conjectures and theories can *turn* into empirically relevant theses—at least in the sense that they *become* indirectly testable, i.e., relevant for the interpretation of science, at specific junctures in the history of science (and philosophy)’ (2015, 62, original italics).

It follows from this that metaphysics has pragmatic relevance not despite but precisely because of conceptual analysis. Lewis not only arrived at his rejection of quantum physics through conceptual analysis, but he was also a champion of the method (see Lewis, 1994). If so, then striking the

right balance between relevance and rigor is one of the hallmarks of good philosophical works. After all, despite the shortcomings of the Leibnizian principle, which quantum physics exposes, the principle is still a remarkable philosophical theory. One reason this is so, I contend, is that the principle (together with the Lewisian metaphysics that upholds it) strikes the right balance between rigor and relevance.

If so, then my position that contemporary African philosophy should seek the right balance between relevance and rigor is not at all overly optimistic or wildly exaggerated. In fact, since striking such a balance is a hallmark of good philosophical work, then contemporary African philosophy works that strike the balance would be all the better for it. After all, Matolino has said that ‘as [contemporary African philosophy] gets born it just might as well retain those schizophrenic attributes consistent with straddling two different worlds. It then becomes a fine balancing act of being faithful to the core tenets of Africinity, without the frivolity of ethnophilosophy, and the demands of a rigorous but foreign philosophy’ (2018, 342). It is all about that fine balancing act for contemporary African philosophy, and conceptual analysis can bring it about.

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