"Philosophy for Children" in Africa: developing a framework

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Building on Ndofirepi's plea for an approach to teaching philosophy to high-school learners in Africa that is a hybrid of western and African thought, I argue that a critical touchstone is needed if the traditional wisdom is to be sifted, and that this can be found in the idea of the questioning and responsible subject. Traditional proverbs and myths, whether African or not, reveal a growing sense of responsibility but philosophy, I argue, can contribute the principle of non-contradiction and the foundational norm of responsibility. The principle and the norm can be found to be at the heart of the modern scientific enterprise and can in principle ground a dialogue between African traditional and modern European value-systems.

Introduction

This paper builds on Ndofirepi's (2011) well-researched and balanced argument for a hybrid approach to teaching critical thinking to high-school learners in Africa. The framework he suggests for teaching philosophy at schools is an African traditional one, using proverbs and myths. These, he argues, need to be complemented by a sifting process if the learners are to be provoked into critical thinking. He agrees with Makinde that "the philosophical task is to receive the messages of the past and to carefully adjudicate what is worthy of passing on to the present generation" (in Ndofirepi, 2011:252). He does not suggest that the traditional proverbs can be simply left as they are: rather, he says, they "are vehicles to drive a point home". His point is simply that the learners will derive the most benefit from the philosophical teaching if this is seen to be somehow cognate with the traditional wisdom, rather than left outside of this teaching. He agrees with Gyekye that "philosophical concepts…can be found embedded in African proverbs, …customs and traditions of the people" (in Ndofirepi, 2011:251), and with Bodunrin that there is no reason why proverbs, myths of gods and angels and social practices could not be proper subjects of philosophical inquiry. But the critical engagement with these comes precisely from the "community of inquiry" that is the classroom situation. The learner must transform "primarily unreflective systems of beliefs …into more reasoned, objective and justified thoughts" (Ndofirepi, 2011:250).

This is well put and, I think, a good starting-point but, speaking as a professional philosophy teacher in Africa, more needs to be said. In particular what is needed are criteria for doing the sifting, if the learner is not to be left, which is not at all Ndofirepi's wish, with a bifurcated mind, or else an easy relativism. I want to give examples of traditional pre-philosophical thinking which illustrate the problem, and then point to Socrates' introduction at the heart of the beginnings of European philosophy, of the principle of non-contradiction. Ndofirepi says "Philosophy for Children in Africa should draw its content and methodology from African beliefs and philosophies of life" (2011:249); I agree here in terms of content, but

disagree as regards methodology. The confrontation of traditional thinking with a more critical one was the beginning of philosophical method strictly speaking, as this has been handed down from the Ancient Greeks. This is a heritage to which all learners are entitled.

A framework for appropriating traditions

Traditional thinking uses common sense. If a pre-philosophical questioner asks, Why do we bury the dead? the answer, quite adequate for the time, is: That is what we do. It is common sense. It is the confrontation with other cultures with other ways of doing things, that spurs the development of criteria for a more sophisticated answer. In some cultures, the ancient Greeks discovered, the custom is to burn the dead; and in yet another, the pious act is to eat the one who has died! "Common sense" is common only as long as the culture is relatively isolated from other cultures. A more sophisticated answer will be in terms of some or other theory explaining why something is the case. In Book One of *The Republic* Plato gives the example of the understanding of justice. What is justice? The common sense answer is easy: Justice is giving back what you owe. So far so good. But what about the case when you have borrowed an axe from your neighbour, and this very man is now chasing his wife in anger: is it just now to give back what you owe? Tricky cases such as this (it can't be the *good* thing to do to give back what you owe in this case) indicate the need for a theory explaining what justice is, a more adequate definition, and Plato does this in an extended fashion.

Examples such as the above provokes Socrates to invoke the criterion of non-contradiction. Justice is giving back what you owe; but in this case, it is *not* the just thing to give back what you owe. That seems to be contradiction. A (justice) is B (giving back); but also A is not-B. In his dialogue with his interlocutor Callicles Socrates gets him to agree that it is better "that the majority of mankind should disagree with and oppose me, rather than that I, who am but one man, should … contradict myself" (*Gorgias*, 482). It is the principle on which he will advance his ideas: get your opponent to see that what they are claiming is self-contradictory. If I want to claim, It is raining, and I also want to claim, It is not raining, I am in effect claiming nothing. I need to revise or rephrase my claim.

In her work with Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka Gail Presbey (2002) investigated sage philosophy, questioning wise persons about life and death issues. Why is there death? she asked a sage. To make room for the new generation, came the wise answer.… Um, but what about sparsely populated regions, such as deserts, where there is no shortage of space? Such questions are an irritant to the sage. The point is not to work out all the details! Traditional wisdom is given in proverbs. There are many interesting African proverbs. But proverbs contradict one another: Too many cooks spoil the broth; but: Many hands make light work. Look before you leap; but: he who hesitates is lost.

We could do something similar with African proverbs, and in a very interesting study Christian Gade (2010) has shown convincingly that what is now taken for granted (e.g. Metz, 2007:332), viz. the situating of one African proverb, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, (roughly, a person is a person through other persons) as at the heart of the African traditional worldview, is not something that occurred at least in South Africa before 1990, and in fact, he argues, such identification is largely due to one specific book, that of Augustine Shutte's *Philosophy for Africa* (1993), although it rose to prominence in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the influence of Desmond Tutu. "To my knowledge, *Philosophy for Africa* is the first book in English which explores the identity belief embedded in the proverb "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (Gabe, 2010:72). He also notes that there are more than twice as many Google

search results (in July 2010, namely 742) for this book over its main rivals for contemporary Ubuntu philosophical literature in South Africa, namely Ramose's (1999) *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* and Bhengu's (1998) *Ubuntu: the Essence of Democracy*. "To me, the fact that a large number of texts refer to Augustine Shutte's *Philosophy for Africa* makes it plausible that this book might be an important part of the reason for why *ubuntu* has become linked with the proverb "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*"." (Gade, 2010:73)

Other proverbs could very well have said something perhaps contrary. When elephants fight, the grass gets crushed underfoot. Could this well-known proverb not illuminate the heart of African culture, seen as one in which the Big Man prevails and harmony is achieved through him, except when there is more than one Big Man. Indeed studies of corruption in contemporary African states sometimes have recourse to this idea as explanatory (for example Sikku Hellsten, 2006; cf also my article on African traditional ethics, Giddy, 2002). Of course in English there is also the saying that "no man is an island; everyone is part of the main", which would indicate something quite different to the idea expressed in the common moral advice, "Stand on your own two feet", which seems to promote a strident individualism. Finally it is evident that the term *ubuntu* or *umuntu* might, when identifying different members of *homo sapiens*, be contrasted to *umlungu* (meaning a white person) — not at all something that could act as a universal moral idea! And *ubuntu* is also sometimes interpreted to refer to an ethics where a person's worth is whatever the community deems it to be. For example, Gade shows, some take *ubuntu* to adhere only to those who have been initiated into the community, for example through circumcision and cliterodectomy. (This would also mean ancestors lose this status when they are forgotten (Menkiti quoted in Ramose 1999:91)).

In all these cases there are choices to be made as to what proverb really expresses the kernel of the traditional wisdom, and what exactly it means. Furthermore it is to be expected that any principle of such sifting is bound to be controversial. Shutte's 1993 book is a case in point. He claimed that some philosophical frameworks are more suitable for this kind of dialogue than others; in particular Analytic philosophy was found wanting. For this he was immediately taken to task. A colleague hastened to attack it as "a very bad book on an extremely important topic", failing to meet "universally recognized standards of argumentational rigour" (Holiday, 1994; see my response, Giddy, 1995). Later it was criticized for assuming a white South African could presume to speak authoritatively on African traditional thinking: the preposition "for" in the title seemed to indicate a paternalism on the part of the author; why, moreover, should African thinking only be "authenticated" by reference to a "western" philosophical framework (More, 1996). Ndaba (1999) on the contrary was in broad agreement with Shutte.

Such controversies are extremely illuminating and point to a further role for African traditional thought that Ndofirepi also alludes to, namely, that it may offer itself as a contribution to global thinking. The controversy also suggests the way forward for the framing of philosophy education for teachers in Africa. For what Shutte, Ndaba, and many others are alluding to is the loss of a sense of the subject and agent in the dominant contemporary style of philosophy, in particular in the English-speaking world. The skeptical approach does not allow the questions we are asking to get off the ground. We are aiming at a critical appropriation of the tradition or traditions, i.e. at a more nuanced and less contradictory set of ideas. But in the dominant philosophical approach there is no sure starting point for this kind of task. For objectivity, it might be claimed, is reached through the sciences — and traditional understandings of the human condition, and of values, are thought of as having only subjective

status. The connection between traditional views of life and philosophical thinking, is broken. Eloquent support for this critical interpretation of the dominant trend in contemporary philosophy can be found in the novelist Marilynne Robinson's recent Terry Lectures at Yale, published as "Absence of Mind" (2010).

Any standard textbook in philosophy will reveal the problem. Thomas Nagel's popular *What Does It All Mean?* (1987) is a good example. The list of topics presented by Nagel as standard are these: how do we know anything? other minds; the mind-body problem; the meaning of words; free will; right and wrong; justice; death; the meaning of life. The basic underlying philosophical question, it would seem, is whether or not there are good reasons for holding onto the idea of the mind, i.e. something non-material, in particular, with the rise of neurophysiology, contrasted with the brain. I seem to have access to my own mind (and hence am assured of its reality) but what about other minds? The scientific point of view seems to doubt the existence of anything non-material — every event has a cause so how can free will exist? And what status can be given to moral values, to right and wrong? They are not objects of scientific inquiry so perhaps they are simply agreed upon rules for behaviour. But then how would we *criticize* any given set of such rules?

Basically the problem is the loss of the sense of the presence to self of the subject. "Scientism" names the view that only objects investigated by the sciences merit the attribution of being really real. But — to anticipate here a more developed argument below — all scientific inquiry presupposes and must assume such presence to self, which allows one to set up standards for judging whether any hypothesis or theory one holds might be possibly true. It can't be itself an object of scientific investigation. It is only because one knows, is aware of the fact that, one holds such a theory or hypothesis that one can ask whether or not it corresponds to how things *actually are*, and to test it.

The irony is, the prestige of the method of the sciences disallows the idea of any such non-scientific object of the real world. This self-contradictory and self-destructive standpoint has given rise to the postmodern skepticism about knowledge. This conclusion about the upshot of modernity is worth studying. Nevertheless such skepticism is, given our aim, unhelpful. In African traditional thought we are offered ideas about the normative status of being a person, *ubuntu*, and about the grounds of this capacity to be a person, a person's *seriti* or *isithunzi* (literally, shadow, but by extension, influence or power). If the approach we have termed "scientism" means these are excluded from exploration, then there will be a gap between the framework of the traditional-religious person, and that of the science-influenced person, even when these two frameworks exist in the same person. The traditional-religious is then not going to develop or find its insights expressible in terms more appropriate to our secular culture. In contrast in what follows I will assume a broadly *non-skeptical* position and ask of those issues raised in the myths and proverbs the conditions of possibility for affirming the human capacity to reach some deeper objectivity and also to act responsibly, that is to say, on the basis of our judgment as to the real worth of alternative courses of action.

I now turn to my proposal. For these purposes I draw freely on some of my recently published papers for a different audience, namely university colleagues (Giddy, 2009, 2010), as well as an earlier ones which develop some of these ideas in relation to traditional African thought (Giddy, 2002, 2006). It must be noted that I am keeping my eye on the ball, which is the normative end of developing in the learner a deeper sense of what it means to be a responsible participant in the contemporary society, such as it is. In other words, I am not approaching the topic of philosophy from some neutral point of view common to all prac-

titioners of academic philosophy. The point is not to re-affirm the existence of "African Philosophy" on the list of philosophical topics, in the manner of Thad Metz's annotated bibliography (2011), which interestingly enough omits the 1993 Shutte book.

Philosophy through myths

The way into a philosophy which is not alienating and allows for dialogue between modern scientific and traditional religious worldviews, is through *the questioning subject*. All pre-scientific cultures raised questions about the meaning of life, about death, about life and morality. We can see this expressed in myths. Examples abound. To illustrate I give the example of an Ancient Near-eastern myth, the Mesopotamian story of Gilgamesh (Pritchard, 1958:74, slightly simplified). Gilgamesh has been on a successful quest for the source of eternal life — a tree. He is returning with a branch of the tree.

This plant is a plant apart
Whereby a man may regain his life's breath.
I will take it to ramparted Uruk,
I myself shall eat it
And thus return to the state of my youth.

After twenty miles they prepared for the night.
Gilgamesh saw a well whose water was cool.
He went down into it to bathe in the water.
A serpent sniffed the fragrance of the plant;
It came up from the water and carried off the plant.

Gilgamesh sits down and weeps
His tears running down over his face.

Here we have the explanation of death (and by extension all negativities in life) as a result of an external evil force, which is accidentally allowed to exercise its power over humans. A greater sense of the human responsibility for the negative and destructive aspect of death is however given in the Adam myth (Genesis 2-3) in the Hebrew and Christian tradition. In both cases human persons are seen to possess, *problematically*, a capacity for self-determination, for understanding and choice, which can question and perhaps, or perhaps not, overcome any forces negating this. Here are two comparative African myths (from Beier, 1966:56-59).

When Death first entered the world, men sent a messenger to Chuku, asking him whether the dead could not be restored to life and sent back to their old homes. They chose the dog as their messenger.

The toad, however, had overheard the message, and, as he wished to punish mankind, he overtook the dog and reached Chuku first. He said he had been sent by men to say that after death they had no desire at all to return to the world. Chuku said he would respect their wishes, and that is why today, although a man may be born again, he cannot return with the same body and personality.

Some opposing evil force is responsible for the way we experience our lives and projects as problematically limited. But we also have myths highlighting some sense of human responsibility for our predicament.

When Death first entered the world, men sent the chameleon to find out the cause. God told the chameleon to let men know that if they threw baked porridge over a corpse, it would come back to life. But the chameleon was slow in returning and Death was rampant in their midst, and so men sent a second messenger, the lizard.

The lizard reached the abode of God soon after the chameleon. God, angered by the second message, told the lizard that men should dig a hole in the ground and bury their dead in it. On the way back, the lizard overtook the chameleon and delivered his message first, and when the chameleon arrived the dead were already buried.

That is why, owing to the impatience of man, he cannot be born again.

The failure here seems to be less "magical"; at least a moral attitude is invoked: greater patience was required. But the advent of modern science has itself not been without its problematic attitudes to human responsibility, in particular insofar as accompanying science has been a myth (we have called it "scientism") about a fully impersonal universe, determined by factors apart from human moral efforts. This needs interrogation as much as do the traditional, pre-scientific narratives. In the following section I want to suggest that this outlook, unhelpful for our project, is not at all a necessary one.

Science and the norm of responsibility

Modern science in early modern Europe was born not without a struggle. Faced with extra-scientific determinations of truth, from religious and traditional authorities (church and philosophical — Aristotle was the authority), science posited observation as key to knowledge proper. But it was Newton who introduced the key notion of "inertia" as explanatory tool for understanding the physical movement of objects. It is not at all, he argued, that things have a natural tendency by virtue of their nature to move to certain ends (Aristotle), the stone "wanting" to be at rest on the ground: no, the movement of objects is solely due to the impact of other objects on them ("gravity" in this example). But in this Newton can be seen as "murdering" matter, taking the natural life out of them. And hence making the world seem more *alien* to our normal end-governed behaviour, to our human world. We became aliens in a world of matter. Philosophers henceforth were to ask, as foundational question, can how we experience things be at all how they are out there (answer: not really).

The impact of Copernicus on world-consciousness needs to be recalled. To be told that how we observe things, the sun running its diurnal course from the East to the West, is in fact incorrect, this threw our confidence in reaching objectivity into disarray. We couldn't any longer be satisfied with common sense as control over our thought patterns.

Observation was posited as crucial in science, not authority. But objectivity of course is not reached through observation. Or at least through observation alone. Different observers see things from different points of view. From Newton we have the idea of solving this problem, the problem of relativism, so destructive to our project of eliciting the ethical potential of our scientific and secular age.

Imagine a bucket full of water being hung from the ceiling and spun around. You, observer A, are standing next to it. And imagine a little man, observer B, standing on the edge of the bucket. As the bucket begins to spin, the water through inertia stays motionless. But observer B (moving on the edge) *sees it* as moving; we say it is not moving. As the water catches up to the bucket's motion, B, moving with it, now says it is not moving! But *we* say it is now moving. Who is correct, who has the objective truth?

The solution Newton gives is this: look for further evidence. Notice that the surface of the water forms an arc, depressed in the middle of the bucket. What could cause this? Only the friction of the moving bucket against the water causing the water to rise at the rim of the bucket. That means that the water is indeed moving. The hypothesis that it is still, seems not to account for the evidence and should be rejected. Both A and B can see this, and assent to the second hypothesis, that it is indeed moving. No relativism.

The idea that both A and B can agree on the objective truth of the matter assumes that both A and B have the capacity to weigh the evidence and consider that they might be occupying a position which biases their perception (B, on the edge of the bucket). It is this self-awareness that is crucial and which is left out of the picture in any materialist ("scientistic") view of reality, and also left unthematized in the way philosophy is presented by Nagel.

We can note here also that we are assuming that A and B are acting responsibly. In other words, they not only have the capacity to observe attentively, to hypothesize intelligently, and to make a reasonable judgement about the hypothesis, but they are actually trying to do so. They are making an effort. The outlining of the effort required by our capacity for responsibility, is ethics. And here we have a possibility of dialogue with traditional-religious worldviews. For what they do is precisely this: outline the necessary ways in which such responsibility is developed. For example, we might say that African traditional culture has a lot to say about how our self-understanding and our growing sense of a more adequate hierarchy of values is acquired through participation in the community and interaction with others more mature than ourselves. And that modern global culture very little: the idea of autonomy so well articulated by Kant in the 18th century, downgrades such other-influenced growth as undermining one's autonomy and therefore dignity. Materialist philosophers such as Marx on the other hand think that human behaviour is fully determined by and individual choice undermined by the influence of others. Modern-traditional dialogue is not at all a one-way street — as prophets such as Fritjoff Capra have said for some time.

Philosophy as a dialogue of world-views

In the light of the above we now have a framework for a productive "community of inquiry" after the fashion spoken of by Ndofirepi. But it means joining the existentialist thinkers in appealing against the loss of the sense of the subject and agent in modern European thought. Kierkegaard argues that truth is subjectivity, not meaning that no objectivity is possible, "subjectivism". He means that the full context of human existence is the personal, the ethical and engaged, not the impersonal and scientific, and must be thematized in this context. As examples of "engaged" thinkers one can think of Marx and Sartre. Their very different views are responses to the challenge to express human transcendence without a dualism of the kind that Plato was content with but which is much more problematic in a secular and scientific age. This transcendence, as we have suggested, refers to the capacity to make oneself present to oneself in being able to stand back and evaluate the accuracy of one's beliefs, and also the

relative worth of one's desires or wants or any proposed course of action. Clearly on the model of scientism this is not possible. But science itself — I am summarizing here the counter-argument articulated in many very dense philosophical tomes, in particular Lonergan's *Insight* (1957) — as an activity obviously *presupposes* our human capacity for self-awareness, in other words, to transcend. The only possible conclusion is that reality consists of more than the objects of scientific inquiry strictly speaking. Such objects, for example ourselves in this sense of having the capacity for freedom, themselves demand an explanation. Obviously freedom cannot be brought into being nor developed by any finite causality — which would precisely take away the freedom. Those who baulk at the consequences of this, namely that there exists a *non-finite* causality, would prefer to think of human self-awareness as epiphenomenal — but this does not make sense, contradicting the very act of making a claim about this, which *assumes* self-awareness and freedom as really real.

One can draw attention here to an inevitably contentious issue. For in the notion of responsibility as explained here there are obvious influences of the Hebrew and Christian notion of god, as transcendent of any finite reality, and of "humankind in the image of God", in other words as sharing in this power of transcendence, but in a relation of dependence on the god, the finite transcendence being explained by and sourced by the infinite transcendence. And for a secular intellectual culture this conceptual and historical connection with a particular religious tradition puts this whole approach to philosophy under a cloud of suspicion. For a common perception — although challenged for example by Henry (2010) — is that modern science and modern philosophy arise out of a *conflict* with the religious authorities, in particular of this religion. And this hostile attitude has largely lasted until the present day, at least in a modified form. At the same time the recourse of large sections of the religious population has been to take refuge, in the face of secularization and science, in a fundamentalism of the most anti-philosophical kind. Taking up the battle with the latter the so-called New Atheists (the philosopher Dennett (2006) among them) have unfortunately displayed all the marks of engaging in a battle where, in the words of Matthew Arnold, "ignorant armies clash by night".

I mention these wider issues in introducing philosophy at school level because they are bound at any rate to be raised in the classroom. The particular methods of modern science in understanding the material world can however be seen as developments of our ability to make ourselves present to ourselves, which is the key to understanding human persons in the approach we are suggesting. But knowledge of the subject and agent is not something which can be arrived at neutrally, in a disengaged stance, as if one were investigating the properties of some distant planet never before encountered. Writers today speak of the "narrative" framework of any such understanding, which, in other words, is always a chapter in one's own autobiography. And if this is the framing of basic philosophical, critical, questions which is favoured in the African traditional approach, it can offer a refreshing take on modernity.

All this hints at how one might make sense of an African traditional understanding of the human person, and formulate a framework in which this might form part of a dialogue with the dominant global picture. The idea of *ubuntu* is precisely a concept which is both factual (a person grows through others) and normative (it is good to foster those attitudes and carry out those acts which promote the sharing of one's life with others). Various writers could be used to expand on this basic idea, the idea of a transcending power running through all things, from the god through ancestors and living elders to all persons. To live is to grow, and ethics always has to do with growth in power and strength. Other interpretive frameworks are no doubt possible (a personalist one of Polanyi (1962), reiterated by Verfliet (2007); also Maxwell

(1987)). But it would miss the point if one were to stress the ethical idea of *ubuntu* shorn of what Analytic philosopher Farland (2007:356) dismisses as its "cloudy supernatural assumptions".

However the African traditional thinking is expressed and interpreted, what is important is that some framework is developed which enables a dialogue with competing worldviews. In the African tradition we have a concept of human flourishing which specifies much more precisely the attitudes that lead to a good human life together. And it is backed up by a metaphysics which does not see material reality as over and against human (free) reality: freedom is achieved through engagement with the world, in particular (here Sartre would disagree) engagement with others, which is not, pace Sartre, ultimately frustrating. Who is right?

Conclusion

I have introduced philosophy through the lens of common sense traditional wisdom. This draws in *all* traditional cultures and does not prejudge any (and so undercuts the recourse to bringing in African traditional thought as if it were some exotic thinking that bears little relation to the modern world). This has brought to the fore the need for greater precision, in particular in the light of the development of the theoretical standpoint. It has also pointed to the need for the practice of individual judgment in sifting through what is truly of worth in any culture. Secondly, I have introduced the idea of the "shock of science", disturbing the traditional wisdom, the naïve idea that how things seems to us is how they are in themselves. By means of a crucial example I have developed the idea that recourse to relativism is not necessary. We are able to draw on our powers of critical judgment. In the third place I have pointed to a possible critique of the dominant cultural and intellectual global trend to overlook the subject and agent. In the fourth place I have suggested various contending philosophical anthropologies that resonate in the contemporary culture and can usefully play a role in making the student's take on their own culture more sophisticated and differentiated. I have also suggested that a rethink of a knee-jerk attitude to religion will be of great help in speaking to students struggling to come to terms with both traditional and modern cultural elements. African traditional culture is religious; and a reconsideration of the possibility of dialogue with it could very well assist the dominant religions in rethinking their self-understanding, in a way more appropriate to a secular culture made up of a plurality of approaches to life.

I have been asked about the implications of all this for framing the philosophical education of teachers. To some extent it is a question of attitude: an openness to the African traditional thought-world. But the appropriation of these insights, I have argued, can be hampered by an inadequate philosophical framework. My own suggestion, running counter to the way philosophy is presented in the dominant global approach, cannot avoid being controversial. Luckily, in philosophy controversy is embraced, its method is that of a *dialogue*. It is ironical that the thinker who used to represent European philosophy, namely Aristotle, can now be evoked in order precisely to challenge it, and in particular the skepticism that issues in what we have termed "scientism". Aristotle's *normative idea of the human person* has been reworked by contemporary thinkers such as Bernard Lonergan and Alisdair MacIntyre to bring in the greater sense of subjectivity that Descartes stressed so much, as well the cross-cultural context (as I also do in the context of Tempels' account of African philosophy, Giddy, 2011). With this framework traditional mythological accounts, which illuminate the way we can and do question our existence, are not dismissed as "non-scientific" — since science is *itself* one

actualization of our norm of being self-aware questioning subjects and responsible agents. Cultural relativism is also seen as unhelpful: learning is a journey, as Plato's simile of the cave brings out, and contemporary existentialist writers concur. If one asks for actual texts on African traditional thought there are too many to mention and even more so comparative narratives from global religious traditions (e.g. Fasching, 2011). The easiest introduction to the appropriate *philosophical framework* is in my opinion Shutte's 1993 book and its 2001 follow up specifically on the ethics of *ubuntu*. Useful too is Sartre's brilliant but ultimately pessimistic analysis of intersubjectivity (1969, Part Three, especially Chapter Three) which will provoke the learner to come to their own conclusions.

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