Research Methodology in Philosophy within an Interdisciplinary and Commercialised African Context
Guarding against Undue Influence from the Social Sciences

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Abstract

This paper argues that despite pressures to conform to the research methodology of the social sciences, African philosophers must diligently work for the preservation of the distinct character of philosophy as a discipline. To do this, they will have to move away from the debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy, and focus their efforts on the quest for a criterion by which to distinguish philosophical works from non-philosophical ones, regardless of where the works hail from. They will also have to be busy engaging in other aspects of philosophical reflection, so that their discipline may grow in an all-rounded manner, and so that the research methodology of philosophy may be manifest to scholars from other disciplines. Only then will philosophy make its unique contribution to interdisciplinary research in Africa and beyond.

1. Introduction

In our day, the social sciences enjoy great prestige in academia and in society at large. This is understandable, as many thinkers, impressed by the great accomplishments of

the natural sciences, endeavour to attain corresponding achievements in studies of human individuals and societies. The tremendous influence of the social sciences is evident in the fact that it has become almost customary for scholars and social activists to demand "facts and figures" whenever a claim is made about an economic, social or political issue. While this approach encourages a considerable amount of objectivity in the endeavour to understand the causes and nature of such problems, it has also resulted in the unwarranted assumption that all disciplines must employ the empirical methodology of the natural and social sciences. Thus traditional distinctions between the humanities and the social sciences are in danger of being blurred, as the humanities such as philosophy, fine art and literature are put under pressure to employ the methodology of the social sciences.

I was first struck by the dominance of the social sciences when, over twenty years ago, I sat in an academic staff seminar in which post-graduate students of philosophy presenting research proposals were taken to task for not having stated their hypotheses, and for not including questionnaires - requirements which presuppose that the students would be engaged in empirical research. The students were taken to task for these "omissions" despite the fact that they had clearly indicated that their proposed studies would be undertaken through library research. Recently, I have even heard senior African practitioners of philosophy and others of religion asserting that there is no real distinction between philosophy and religious studies! The backdrop to this claim is that in several universities, for reasons of financial prudence, the two disciplines are housed in one department. Yet the fact is that if a department housing both philosophy and religious studies were to re-package its course units with a view to merging the content of the two disciplines, the resulting units would be reminiscent of the sterility of the mule - they would be neither philosophy nor religious studies units. This becomes clearer when we consider that while philosophy is characterised by *reflection*, the study of religion entails either an empirical investigation of specific religions ("religious studies"), or a systematic exposition of the teachings contained in a specific "holy book" such as the Bible or the Qur'an ("theology").

This paper argues that despite pressures to conform to the research methodology of the social sciences, African philosophers must diligently work for the preservation of the distinct character of philosophy as a discipline. To do this, they will have to move

away from the debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy, and focus their efforts on the quest for a criterion by which to distinguish philosophical works from non-philosophical ones, regardless of where the works hail from. They will also have to be busy engaging in other aspects of philosophical reflection, so that their discipline may grow in an all-rounded manner, and so that the research methodology of philosophy may be manifest to scholars from other disciplines. Only then will philosophy make its unique contribution to interdisciplinary research in Africa and beyond. The paper proceeds from the realisation that "on the one hand, subjects can basically stipulate methods, and on the other, a certain subject can only reveal itself in an appropriate method" (Peng and Cheng 2006, 450).

From the outset, it is important to bear in mind that there is no consensus on the understanding of the meaning of "research". Even a limited survey of the usage of the term is enough to show that it is applied to activities as varied as the study of form and content of literature, the authentication of historical documents, the derivation of mathematical formulas, the development of technical models and prototypes, the collection and analysis of data in experiments and surveys, and the formulation of laws and theories, and much else (Nagi and Corwin 1972, 1). Nevertheless, it is difficult to gainsay the fact that *research* has something to do with the acquisition or creation of new knowledge through a specific strategy for *investigation*. It is this strategy that we refer to as *methodology*. According to Spirkin (1983), a methodology is a system of principles and general ways of organising and structuring theoretical and practical activity, and also the theory of this system. According to the most common classification, there are philosophical, general scientific, and special scientific methods (Spirkin 1983).

It is also crucial to note that philosophy is one of the humanities, that is, the liberal arts such as fine art and literature. As such, a discussion of its present challenge must include some mention of the predicament of the humanities in general. What Bloom (1968, 357) noted is still largely true today, that "While both social science and humanities are more or less willingly awed by natural science, they have a mutual contempt for one another, the former looking down on the latter as unscientific, the latter regarding the former as philistine. They do not cooperate. And most important, they occupy much of the same ground. Many of the classic books now part of the

humanities talk about the same things as do social scientists but use different methods and draw different conclusions; and each of the social sciences in one way or another attempts to explain the activities of the various kinds of artists in ways that are contrary to the way they are treated in the humanities. The difference comes down to the fact that social science really wants to be predictive, meaning that man is predictable, while the humanities say that he is not."

The paper is divided into three main sections. *First*, I argue that the debate on the nature of African philosophy is ultimately a controversy between universalism and particularism, and that subscribing to universalism is the only way to secure the contribution of African philosophy in the global marketplace of ideas. *Second*, I examine the distinct research methodologies of philosophy and of the social sciences, with a view to illustrating the need for the two fields of study to respect each other's approaches in order to promote genuine interdisciplinary work. *Third*, I interrogate the idea of "interdisciplinarity" in the commercialised academic milieu of contemporary Africa, with special reference to its potential benefits and latent dangers. The paper concludes that while genuine interdisciplinary research might yield useful insights for all involved, scholars of philosophy must guard against a counterfeit interdisciplinary venture which results in philosophy's loss of identity, and with it the loss of its unique contribution to the growth of human knowledge.

2. Universalism: The Only Hope for African Philosophy

The question of the nature of African philosophy has occupied African and Africanist scholars for more than half a century now. Scholars categorise trends in contemporary African philosophy in varying ways. For example, Imbo (1997) adopts a tripartite scheme, distinguishing among the universalists (Wiredu, Hountondji, Bodunrin, Odera-Oruka), the ethnophilosophers (Tempels, Senghor, Mbiti, Kagame) and those who take a hermeneutical approach (Towa, Okolo, Serequeberhan). Vest (2009) speaks of Ethnophilosophy, Excavationist, Professional, Cultural, and Sage philosophy.

Nevertheless, some kind of orthodoxy has developed around the four trends in contemporary African philosophy identified by the late Prof. H. Odera Oruka (1990,

13 ff.)as ethnophilosophy (the collective thought of indigenous African communities), nationalist-ideological philosophy (writings of African statesmen in which they present their thoughts on the socio-political direction the continent ought to take), professional philosophy (undertaken by African scholars trained through a Western-type education system) and philosophic sagacity (the original and critical thoughts of individual African thinkers highly conversant with their indigenous cultures, and who have not gone through the modern school system). It is not our intention to give an exposition of the nature of these four trends, as this has already been ably done by Prof. Oruka and many after him (see for example Masolo 1994; Ochieng' 1997).

Whatever direction the debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy takes in future, it will be fruitful to bear in mind the caution given by Vest (2009) that to be busy with questions about the intellectual capabilities of African thinkers or the possible existence of philosophical resources in African cultures is to respond to perverse questions; and that to engage in academic dialogues implicitly or explicitly guided by a request or a felt need to justify and defend the very possibility of African philosophy or African rationality is to engage in perverse and unnecessary dialogues.

Reflection on the nature of African philosophy over the last five decades has demonstrated that one's conception of African philosophy directly influences what one accepts as an adequate research methodology in the subject. As such, if two scholars with two different conceptions of African philosophy were to evaluate the research methodology of a third scholar with yet another conception, both the first and second scholar would very probably disagree with the third, and also with each other. While this kind of situation may be disturbing to anyone hankering for unanimity or uniformity, philosophy is characterised by debate - which includes controversy about the nature of philosophy itself: "Philosophy, …, has this peculiarity, that reflection upon it is part of itself" (Collingwood 1933, 1). Consequently, the debate on the nature of African philosophy arises because of the word "philosophy" rather than "African" in the phrase.

Ochieng' (1997, 117 ff.) correctly observed that the debate on the nature of African philosophy can be conceptualised as a controversy between particularists and universalists. Particularists insist on the uniqueness of African philosophy, and

vigorously oppose any effort to judge it by parameters developed elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, universalists contend that knowledge cannot be limited by cultural contingencies, but must instead be assessed using objective criteria. It seems to me that African philosophers have two choices: to conceive philosophy as understood in the corridors of universities in other parts of the world, or to abandon it altogether. This is due to the fact that meaningful dialogue can only be carried out where there is a minimum set of criteria by which various participants in the dialogue can judge what they hear from fellow participants. The well known observation that relativism rests on an absolute postulate - that "everything is relative" - is relevant in this regard. Thus adopting universalism is far more preferable to abandoning philosophy altogether, because universalism secures the academic character of African philosophy by inviting philosophers from other parts of the world to interact with it on the basis of intellectual values such as consistency, validity and objectivity. In short, African philosophy must be subjected to criticism alongside other philosophies. In this regard Wiredu has stated:

> To present African philosophy as an untouchable possession of Africans is to invite a touristic approach from its foreign audiences. If the philosophies may not be evaluated as false, they may not be evaluated as true either. In that case they might merely be noticed as cultural curiosities (Wiredu 1998).

While universalism, as espoused in the previous paragraph, is considered neo-colonialist in certain circles, the fact is that the very word *philosophy* is derived, not from the Ndebele, Ngoni, Kikuyu, Luba, Igbo, Akan or any other African language, but from Greek - a European language. As such, to insist on holding on to the word while giving it a totally new meaning is to engage in an evident inconsistency that issues from indecisiveness. Furthermore, one wonders why there has been no agitation for African mathematics, African physics or African chemestry, and yet more than half a century has been spent debating the nature of African philosophy as a distinct field of study. One also wonders why those who agitate for African philosophy as totally distinct from other philosophies still eagerly receive degrees on the subject, yet the conferring of such credentials is itself an import from the West.

Thus while we Africans must assert our cultural identity, we must shake off the illusion that cultures are watertight compartments. As Hountondji famously observed,

"Cultural values are like venerial diseases: they flourish here and there, develop in one place rather than another according to whether the environment is more or less favourable; but this purely historical accident cannot justify any claim to ownership or, for that matter, to immunity" (Hountondji 1983, 177). Consequently, those who teach African philosophy must help their students to appreciate the fact that "a course in African philosophy is first and foremost a course in philosophy, albeit dealing with problems arising out of the African context" (Imbo 1997).

Some of the feverish debate on the nature of African philosophy is due to turf battles, and such battles are common to all disciplines (Szmatka and Lovaglia 1996, 396). Yet there is an urgent need for African philosophers to engage in the quest for a criterion for distinguishing philosophical works from non-philosophical ones, regardless of where the works hail from. Failure to do so because of half a century of preoccupation with debate on the nature of African philosophy has exposed African philosophy, and in effect all philosophy, to undue pressure from other disciplines, and particularly from the social sciences. Consequently, although debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy is part and parcel of philosophical reflection and intellectual decolonisation (Wiredu 1998), African scholars of philosophy must now resolutely re-orientate the bulk of their inquiries to other aspects of philosophy, that is, investigating perplexing questions that arise from considerations of various facets of reality. We urgently need many more treatises on logic, epistemology, axiology and metaphysics, hailing from Africa, taking cognisance of the history of the various branches of philosophy, and enriching the discourses with insights from the unique history and cultures of African peoples.

3. Research Methodology in Philosophy and in the Social Sciences

In view of the current trend towards interdisciplinary studies, it is important to distinguish between the methodology of philosophy and that of the social sciences, as this will clarify the nature and limit of co-operation between the two fields. Take, for example, politics as an area of inquiry: while philosophy studies political philosophy, the social sciences study political science, history of political thought, sociology of politics and political psychology, among others. What, then, is the essential difference in approach between these two fields? The brief answer is that philosophy undertake

sits investigations from a reflective point of view, while the social sciences pursue theirs from an empirical stance. This section examines at some depth the differences in approach between these two fields of study. This will hopefully serve as groundwork for the discussion in the subsequent section, where we shall be examining the potential benefits and dangers of interdisciplinary studies in Africa today, with specific reference to the place of philosophy in such collaborative endeavours.

3.1. The Reflective Character of Philosophical Enquiry

At least since Socrates, philosophy and the humanities devolving from it have considered themselves not only as a quest for theoretical knowledge, but also a pursuit of wisdom - and wisdom entails not only knowing what there is, but most of all knowing how to comport ourselves with respect to it (Kohák 1993, 240). As Berlin (1962, 4) pointed out, the two well known categories of academic investigation are empirical observation (employed by the natural and social sciences) and formal deduction (employed by mathematics). Nevertheless, observed Berlin, besides these two major categories of knowledge, there arise questions which fall outside either group, and these are the ones which can be said to be truly philosophical.

The idealist British philosopher, Bernard Bosanquet, indicated what is implied in a "philosophical theory", as distinguished from theories which make no claim to being philosophical:

> The primary difference is, that a philosophical treatment is the study of something as a whole and for its own sake. In a certain sense it may be compared to the gaze of a child or of an artist. It deals, that is, with the total and unbroken effect of its object. It desires to ascertain what a thing is, what is its full characteristic and being, its achievement in the general act of the world. History, explanation, analysis into cause and conditions, have value for it only in so far as they contribute to the intelligent estimation of the fullest nature and capabilities of the real individual whole which is under investigation (Bosanquet 1923, 1-2).

As Bosanquet alludes above, philosophy refrains from limiting itself to empirical data. Concerning this Maritain wrote:

> Philosophy appeals to the facts, the data of experience. To obtain the necessary materials it uses as instruments the truths provided by the evidence of the senses and the conclusions proved by the sciences. It

> depends on both, as a superior who cannot do his own work depends on the servants he employs. …. He therefore judges by his own light of whatever his servants bring him to supply his needs. For example, one of the most successful students of bees, Francois Huber, who was blind, interpreted by the light of his intellect the facts seen by his servants' eyes (Maritain 1979, 88-89).

Seeing that philosophy is neither a natural nor a formal science, what kind of research methodology does it employ? The simple answer to this question is *reflection*, which literally means "thinking again". When one is engaged in reflection, one is *reconsidering* a belief or a judgment which one may have previously accepted without question, or without serious interrogation. Thus whereas most people simply make judgments about right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice, and truth and falsehood, philosophers seek to understand the meaning and justification of such concepts. This is why it has often been said that the sole business of philosophers is the finding of problems in what most people take for granted (de Crespigny and Minogue 1976, pp.xiv-xv).

In undertaking reflection, philosophy has several techniques at its disposal, some of which are outlined below.[1] While those readers who are professional philosophers might find the outline superfluous, it is necessary to include it here in view of the interdisciplinary nature of this journal. It is also helpful to bear in mind that there is considerable overlapping among the techniques elucidated below, so that they are identified as separate entities mainly for the purpose of enhancing clarity of thought about the methodology of philosophy.

3.1.1. The Descriptive Technique

To describe something is to portray, illustrate or depict it. In strict terms, the descriptive technnique is not part of the philosopher's equipment, but rather that of the social scientist's, who is keen to state the causes, nature and manifestations of social phenomena (see 3.2 below). Nevertheless, as alluded to in Maritain's quotation above, philosophers consult studies by natural and social scientists on whatever

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[1] Some writers, such as Njoroge and Bennaars (1986), refer to the techniques as "methods of philosophical inquiry". However, I take the view that the philosophical method is one, namely, reflection, and that reflection manifests in various ways, each of which is a technique.

phenomenon they wish to undertake reflection upon (Maritain 1979, 88-89). This ensures that they do not conduct their reflections in a vacuum. Those philosophers who choose to study ethnophilosophy and philosophic sagacity also use techniques normally associated with the social sciences, especially interviews. However, their use of such techniques is mainly for the purpose of gathering information on which to undertake philosophical reflection. We now turn to the techniques that are characteristic of philosophical reflection.

3.1.2. The Phenomenological Technique

The term phenomenology refers to the method of enquiry developed by the German philosopher, Edmund G.A. Husserl (1859-1938), following his own teacher, Franz Brentano (1838-1917). Husserl set out to develop the doctrine of phenomenology into a pure, non-empirical science. He presented a programme for the systematic investigation of consciousness and its objects. For him, it is of the essence of objects to be correlative to states of mind: no distinction can be made between what is perceived and the perception of it. Husserl contended that experience is not limited to apprehension through the senses, but includes whatever can be an object of thought (e.g. mathematical entities, moods, desires). For Husserl, the philosopher must begin from a scrupulous inspection of his or her own conscious, and particularly intellectual, processes. In this inspection all assumptions about the wider and external causes and consequences of these internal processes have to be excluded ("bracketed"). Although this sounds like a programme for a psychology of introspection, Husserl insisted that it was an a priori investigation of the essences or meanings common to the thought of different minds (see Husserl 1982; Passmore 1968, 466-503).

The phenomenological technique is closely related to the perspective of the existentialists, who insist that abstract reflection as undertaken by traditional Western philosophy is fruitless, and that real philosophy must begin from the subject rather than the object, focusing on the individual's perception of the world (see Cooper 1999). The phenomenological technique aids the philosopher to appreciate the fact that whatever aspect of reality he or she chooses to reflect on, he or she cannot escape the subjective character of his or her inquiry. This technique also seems to be a bridge between the largely descriptive approach of the natural and social sciences on the one hand (see 3.2 below), and the abstract and reflective approach of philosophy on the

other. Besides, it seems to be a refinement of the descriptive technique, as it encourages an appreciation of the subjective element in any knowledge acquired through experience.

3.1.3. The Speculative Technique

In ordinary usage, to speculate is to wonder, conjecture, guess or to hypothesise. Speculation occurs where a particular kind of knowledge being sought is not available. While the natural and social sciences largely exclude speculation from their methodology, philosophy includes it. This is because as indicated by Berlin, Bosanquet and Maritain above, philosophy endeavours to transcend the empirical method of the natural and social sciences, as well as the formal method of mathematics. The speculative technique of philosophical reflection is most frequently manifested in philosophers' attempts to solve metaphysical problems such as death, suffering and happiness, to which there are no simple answers (Njoroge and Bennaars 1986, 26-27). Other topics that have required the speculative technique of philosophical reflection include reality and appearance, mind and matter, the one and the many, permanence and change, time and eternity, freedom and necessity, and unconscious mental states.

The speculative technique is also employed in reflections on values (axiology). For example, in the quest for a just and workable political arrangement, the political philosopher begins by examining existing models, but then goes beyond them through the technique of speculation - he or she takes the liberty to create and examine models whose workings may not have been hitherto tested in practice. Thus when in The Republic Plato recommended a society wholly organised on the basis of his three levels of intellectual ability, he was drawing from the strict militaristic model of Sparta. However, he did not restrict himself to the Spartan model, since he placed intellectual ability at the centre of his own prescribed model, in sharp contrast to the Spartan model which emphasised physical endowment (see Plato 1945).

3.1.4. The Prescriptive Technique

To prescribe is to recommend or to set down as a rule or guide. We alluded to the prescriptive technique in the previous paragraph, when we pointed out that Plato's speculations on the best form of government resulted in a *recommendation* of the rule

by an intellectual elite. In philosophy, prescription is undertaken in the study of axiology, that is, the theory of values. Included in the study of axiology are aesthetics, ethics, social philosophy and political philosophy.

Philosophical reflection on values becomes necessary when people are no longer certain about what is important, worthwhile or valuable for their lives. Faced, for example, with conflicting moral standards or radically opposed ideologies, people need to think about the whole foundation of morality and of society. At this point philosophical reflection on values is unavoidable, even for the scientist (Njoroge and Bennaars 1986, 17). Some of the contemporary issues requiring the use of the prescriptive technique are such paradoxes as progress and poverty, scarcity in the midst of plenty, and over-production and under- consumption. Using a specific set of principles, the philosopher makes recommendations on how people ought to conduct themselves (ethics), or provides a justification for the existence of human beings in groups (social philosophy), or recommends the system of government which he or she thinks to be best suitable in a specific situation (political philosophy), or proposes what constitutes real beauty (aesthetics).

3.1.5. The Analytical Technique

The single most decisive difference between 20th-century philosophy and earlier epochs is the central role of logic and language in both the methods and the subject matter. This new era actually began in 1879, when Gottlob Frege revolutionized the subject of logic and effectively invented the philosophy of language (Searle 1999, 2070). Consequently, Bertrand Russell's "On denoting" (1905) applied Frege's methods to the special problems of analysing sentences in ordinary language. Thus early in the twentieth century, there arose a philosophical movement which aimed to clarify language and analyze the concepts expressed in it. The movement was given a variety of designations, including "linguistic analysis", "logical empiricism" and "logical positivism". What was common to thinkers in this movement was their insistence that the main function of philosophy is analysis. Nevertheless, they disagreed radically about the nature of analysis, and also on the kind of information analysis gives us about the world. All the same, they were agreed that insofar as philosophical problems can be solved, it is through some sort of clarification of language (see Urmson 1956; Passmore 1968, 201-239, 343-366).

The analytic movement, with its focus on the nature and function of language, has left its mark on contemporary philosophers, who have considered the definition and use of various words in the contexts in which they appear. Philosophy is not contented to operate with old categories; rather, it recognises the need to throw new life into key words (Parmar 2000). In his celebrated essay, "Politics and the English Language", George Orwell (1946) observed that "political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness." Yet the need for clarification is not restricted to political language. There is need to clarify language in any field of knowledge before embarking on an assessment of the veracity of its claims. Through its emphasis on definition, the analytical technique focuses on the clarification of basic terms, thereby removing the kind of ambiguity and vagueness that Orwell lamented about, and facilitating precision in reflection and discussion.

3.1.6. The Rational Technique

The word "rational" evidently comes from the word "reason". To reason is to provide grounds for a claim. The rational technique focuses on assessing the adequacy of the evidence upon which a claim is made. In other words, it is concerned with the logical connection, or lack of it, between the claims made and the grounds upon which those claims rest. Here insights from logic are crucial, since the central problem of logic is the distinction between correct and incorrect reasoning. The logician's methods and techniques have been developed primarily for the purpose of making this distinction clear (Copi and Cohen 2005).

For a collection of ideas to be termed a *system*, it must be internally consistent - its various components must fit into one another to form a coherent whole, thereby being free from contradiction. Thus the rational technique focuses on determining the extent to which people's perspectives adhere to the basic rules of logical inference, such as the rule of identity and the rule of non-contradiction.

3.1.7. The Critical Technique

In its original meaning, the word "critical" implies "judging", having been derived from the Greek verb krinein, literally denoting the act of judging. Indeed, the idea of weighing evidence and arriving at a conclusion, as a judge does in a court of law, is at

the core of the meaning of the term "criticism" as used in philosophy. The critical technique lays great emphasis on independent and original thinking. As Russell (1959, 6) observed, there are two attitudes that might be adopted towards the unknown: one is to accept the pronouncements of people who say they know on the basis of books, mysteries or other sources of inspiration; the other way is to go out and look for oneself, and this latter is the way of science and philosophy.

Using the critical technique, philosophy evaluates things in the light of clear and distinct ideas, seeking to protect people from fanaticism, hypocrisy, intolerance, dogmatism, slogans and ideologies. In short, it aims at liberating people from narrow-mindedness (Njoroge and Bennaars 1986, 23-24). Thus the critical technique focuses on the need to examine a claim from all possible perspectives, with a view to ascertaining its truth and/or applicability, with the highest degree of objectivity possible within the confines of human finitude and subjectivity. In this regard, the philosopher seeks to make a clear distinction between the way things appear to be and the way things are, and also between the way things are and the way they ought to be (Wambari 1992). Insights from epistemology (theory of knowledge) are crucial in this endeavour.

Many philosophers consider the critical technique to be at the core of philosophical reflection. Thus when Wiredu (1980, 62) aserted that the task of philosophy is to examine the intellectual foundations of human life using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human well being, he seems to have been implying that philosophy is a critique of human thought. Peng and Cheng (2006) see both the analytical and rational techniques as being subsumed under the critical technique, as they assert that the critical technique examines language, thinking and reality. For them, the initial task of the critical technique is to delimit language so as to determine whether it is meaningful or not, and if it is meaningful, to explicate its meaning. On the basis of language, the philosopher must conduct a critique of thinking, With the aim of revealing its architectural structures, examining if the foundations are reliable, and whether or not its structure is contradictory. Through the critique of language and thinking, the philosopher must finally turn to the critique of reality (Peng and Cheng 2006, 452-453).

3.2. The Empirical Research Methodology of the Social Sciences

Social sciences are those disciplines that seek to apply the empirical approach of the natural sciences to the study of human groups and of interpersonal relationships in them. We must therefore have a clear understanding of the methodology of the natural sciences if we are to appreciate the approach of the social sciences. The word science is derived from the Latin word scire, denoting "to know". Nevertheless, it is evident that the quest for knowledge is not the exclusive province of the natural and social sciences, since other fields of study such as mathematics and philosophy also seek to acquire knowledge. What is distinctive about the sciences, natural and social, is the methodology they employ in their quest for knowledge.

Natural scientists undertake empirical investigations of specific phenomena in the material world, with a view to arriving at an accurate understanding of their causes, nature and function. They do so either to solve practical problems or simply to satisfy their intellectual curiosity (Okasha 2002, 40). Among the well known natural sciences are biology, physics and chemistry. Perception is a fundamental tenet of the scientific approach (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 1992, 8). Definitions of the scientific method use such concepts as objectivity and acceptability. Objectivity indicates the attempt to observe things as they are, without falsifying observations to accord with some preconceived world view. On its part, acceptability is judged in terms of the degree to which observations and experimentations can be reproduced.

In pursuit of objectivity and acceptability, the natural sciences insist that every research project include the identification of a problem, construction of hypotheses, testing of hypotheses, collection of data, statistical analyses of data, and the writing of a report that clearly and accurately presents the end-product of the preceding activities. As such, the distinctive characteristic of the research methodology of the natural sciences may be termed as *refined observation*, that is, the systematic and meticulous gathering of facts through the use of the senses. Whenever a branch of supposed factual knowledge is rejected by natural scientists, it is on the basis of its methodology. Thus science is not any general or particular body of knowledge; rather, it is distinct because of its methodology (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 1992, 4; Nagi and Corwin 1972, 2-3).

In contrast to the natural sciences, the social sciences are concerned with the origin, development, institutions and ideas involved in human groups (Doorne 2000). The social scientists assume that we human beings "are just as much part of nature as other natural objects, conditions, and phenomena and that, although we possess unique and distinctive characteristics, we can nevertheless be understood and explained by the same methods by which we study nature" (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 1992, 7). Among the social sciences are anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics and political science. The methodology of the social sciences is greatly influenced by the work of August Comte (1798-1857), who gave an impulse to sociology conceived as a science or "social physics". He excluded revealed religion, and replaced it with humanism and ethics, based on history and aimed at the improvement of human conditions (see Comte 1968).

In line with the methodology of the natural sciences, the social sciences emphasise the need for the systematic gathering, analyzing and presenting of empirical data. As such, they emphasise the need to use a research methodology that facilitates precision in the endeavour to describe social phenomena as accurately as possible. As Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992, p.vii) observe, Social science research is a cyclical, self-correcting process consisting of seven major interrelated stages - the research problem, the hypothesis, the research design, measurement, data collection, data analysis, and generalization. Each of these stages is interrelated with theory in that it both affects and is affected by it.

The social sciences attach great importance to empirical techniques such as those of experiment and survey to gather relevant data about the causes and manifestations of various social phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination and crime. From such data, some of them have endeavoured to formulate theories that account for the interactions among various individual members and sub-groups in any society (see Wagley and Harris 1964, p.xiv). Social scientists often distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research, the former involving the gathering of statistical data, the latter entailing a more dynamic and therefore less structured approach to the gathering of information (Spirkin 1983). However, some social scientists insist that

the two approaches to research comprise a continuum rather than a dichotomy (see Newman and Benz 1998).

Furthermore, the method of the social sciences, by virtue of being empirical, is highly descriptive. It endeavours to report things as they can be observed, and limits itself to those recommendations and theories that are directly implied by relevant observations. This approach is indispensable, because it is meaningless to speak of studying society in a vacuum.

Nevertheless, the empirical approach of the social scientist has one main limitation - it does not allow the human mind to explore a problem beyond the data gathered and the theories employed to gather them. In other words, it largely reduces the human intellect to a processor of empirical data. It is a fact that the human mind engages in inductive reasoning of the kind dictated by empirical investigation - relevant information is gathered through the meticulous use of the senses, after which analyses are undertaken and reports written in which certain generalizations are made about the phenomena under investigation. Nevertheless, to assume that all that the human mind can do and ought to do is to analyse empirical data is to have a grossly limited understanding of the human intellectual potential. This is because the human mind can also undertake systematic reflection, as indicated in the previous subsection (3.1).

Following August Comte, many social scientists have held the view that their disciplines have the potential to make great strides comparable to those of the natural sciences. Nevertheless, the limitation of applying the research methodology of the natural sciences to the realm of human society is illustrated by the history of the twentieth-century mutation of empiricism called logical positivism - the range of ideas characteristic of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s. According to logical positivism's famous "verifiability principle", the meaning of a proposition consists in the method of its verification, that is, in whatever observations or experiences show whether or not it is true. Any proposition that is in principle unverifiable by observation is by fact devoid of meaning. Mathematics and logic, which are consistent with all observations, were admitted as meaningful at the cost of being tautological - They simply explicate the meanings of terms, telling us nothing about how things are in the world.

The "verifiability principle" was the basis of logical positivism's attack on metaphysics and axiology. At best, logical positivism claimed, the "pseudo-propositions" of metaphysics, like those of ethics or aesthetics, could only be allowed to function as emotional expressions rather than statements of facts. Consequently, the task of philosophers was essentially that of elucidating meanings or calling attention to the lack of them rather than the presentation of philosophic doctrines (see Ayer 1936; Bawden 1944).

However, critics of logical positivism questioned the status of the verifiability principle itself. They asked: "Is the verifiability principle empirically verifiable or tautological?" The answer was that it was neither. It therefore followed, going by the reasoning of the logical positivists, that the verifiability principle itself was meaningless, so that it failed its own test! The principle turned out to be a metaphysical postulate rather than an assertion about two or more variables in the material world, and yet the logical positivists had rejected metaphysics as meaningless. Furthermore, there were serious problems about how to formulate the verifiability principle in order to exclude metaphysics without also excluding historical propositions, that cannot be conclusively verified by observation, yet they are certainly not meaningless.

Besides, Karl R. Popper (1902-1994) recognised that to discard all metaphysics as meaningless as prescribed by logical positivism would make all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, impossible. He correctly noted that universal statements, such as very general scientific laws, are not empirically verifiable. He also pointed out that it is out of the imaginative conjectures about the world as carried out by metaphysics that science has emerged. For example, astronomy owes an enormous debt to astrology and mythology. Thus for Popper, the point of scientific investigation is not to reject metaphysical doctrines out of hand, but rather to attempt where possible to transform them into theories that can be empirically tested. Popper also insisted that although metaphysical doctrines cannot be tested scientifically, they can nonetheless be criticised, and reasons given for preferring one metaphysical opinion to another (see Popper 1959; 1962).

Such difficulties turned many philosophers of broadly empirical outlook away from logical positivism towards less dogmatic forms of linguistic and conceptual analysis.

Thus while empiricism is the basis of the social sciences, its most basic postulate has been brought into serious question. Of course there are still evident benefits of employing the empirical method in studies of human societies, chief of which is that it ensures that scholars are in touch with things as they really are in the world. Nevertheless, in view of the serious challenges that empiricism faces, it is inadmissible for social scientists to seek to compel scholars of humanities to comply with the empirical approach to research. Instead, they must concede that the humanities have the right to use their own distinctive approaches. It is only then that interdisciplinary co-operation can be undertaken in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This leads us to an examination of the idea and practice of interdisciplinary studies.

4. Philosophy, Interdisciplinarity and Market-driven Academics

Research carried out in a particular time and place is greatly influenced by the social context (see Nagi and Corwin 1972). In the contemporary society, programmes designed to cope with problems such as those of ecology, demography, urbanisation, space exploration, and so on point to the need not only to pool the efforts of specialists in various fields, but also to combine scientific data in situations where there is in principle no complete or definite information about the object as a whole (Spirkin 1983). This partly explains the rise of interdisciplinary studies. Furthermore, increasingly complex societies are confronted by ethical dilemmas which require the thinking of scholars from various specialisations to address. In Kenya, for example, the 8-4-4 system of education introduced the "Social Education and Ethics" syllabus in an endeavour to ensure that students were equipped with social and moral skills regardless of their religious persuasion or lack of such persuasion. The programme had an interdisciplinary approach, drawing insights mainly from philosophy, sociology, psychology and history (see Oduor 1990). Thus when the University of Nairobi designed a curriculum to prepare teachers for the Social Education and Ethics syllabus in secondary schools, it relied on scholars in philosophy, religious studies and sociology to execute it.

Other instances of interdisciplinary inquiries are gender studies, environmental studies, disabilities studies and human rights studies, all of which draw their subject matter from the natural and social sciences, as well as from the humanities. For example, environmental studies include ecology as undertaken by biology, cultural studies in the tradition of the social sciences, and environmental ethics as investigated by philosophy.

Nevertheless, interdisciplinarity and its implied antithesis, (intra)disciplinarity, defy absolute definition as intellectual concepts: their meanings are at best provisional and institutionally dependent, so that sometimes "interdisciplinary" merely means "interdepartmental" (Austin 1996, 272). Where "interdisciplinary" refers to substantive colaboration among various specialised fields, it requires the investigators to honor the assumptions, history, methods, and the current multiplicity of each discipline (Berg 1996, 276). Besides, a readiness to admit personal limitations is required from all involved, as it is difficult to work at a comparable level of knowledge and sophistication in more than one field so as to recognize possible intersections and parallels among the disciplines (Berg 1996, 277). Interdisciplinary study works because people from one discipline are not routinely bound by the same assumptions as people from another, so that they can often see through the assumptions that ground other disciplines so thoroughly that the assumptions have become invisible axioms (Torgovnick 1996, 282).

4.1. Social Sciences versus Humanities: The Struggle for Hegemony

In the information age, the natural sciences enjoy an almost unchallenged dominance in academia, because the material benefits of their work in fields such as agriculture, medicine, transport and communication is incontestible. It is also evident that there is a struggle for dominance between the social sciences and the humanities. The recent history of political philosophy lucidly illustrates the way in which the social sciences have sought to push philosophy and other humanities to the periphery of academia. After the 19th century, the methodology of the natural sciences began to be increasingly applied to other academic domains and gradually became dominant in these fields. Consequently, the almost hegemonic view was that the study of political issues must be dependent on facts, not on value judgments, let alone metaphysical

analysis. Thus from the 1850s to the 1970s, the study of politics experienced a transition from what the political historians called "traditionalism" to "behaviorism". As a result, political philosophy fell into a crisis of knowledge legitimacy (Chen *et. Al.* 2006, 507). In fact, in the 1950s, in Britain and America, political philosophy was declared to be dead (de Crespigny and Minogue 1976, p.x).

While political philosophy experienced a revival of credibility through John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), it continues to be vigorously attacked by social scientists. One of its most articulate challenges is Favell (1998), who questions the approach of the renowned Canadian political philosopher, Will Kymlicka, to the issue of minority rights. While Favell acknowledges that Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995) represents an extraordinary attempt to put applied political philosophy to work in the empirical context of contemporary political debates about immigration and ethnic minorities in western societies, he contends that there are methodological and interpretative difficulties of combining normative and empirical goals as Kymlicka does.

Nevertheless, the role of normative reflection such as is carried out in political philosophy remains pertinent, because the special concept of value embedded in the cultural elements of a body politic inform, and even restrict, its specific policies and laws. We therefore not only need to undertake an empirical study of the policies and laws actually implemented in a political community (as is done by social scientists), but also, as is done by political philosophy, engage in an incisive normative inquiry into the value criteria from which these policies and laws are derived (Chen *et. Al.* 2006, 511-512).

To our insistence on the need for philosophical reflection on values, Favell (1998, 275) would reply that a growing body of literature in sociology and political science is also addressing normative questions, and developing theoretical ways of combining normative and empirical work, suggesting that some important contributions to normative theory may indeed come from outside political philosophy in the coming years. Nevertheless, as indicated in the previous section, the research methodology of philosophy is evidently distinct from that of the social sciences. As such, philosophical reflection is likely to yield insights into values that the empirical studies

cannot yield. Besides, it is difficult to see how empirical studies of values can proceed without the researcher subscribing, implicitly or explicitly, to some normative judgments (see Emmet 1966). When, for example, a social scientist is conducting a survey on drug *abuse* in Nairobi, he or she is proceeding on the basis of the value judgment that there are ways in which drugs *ought not* to be used. Why, then, should philosophical reflection not be employed to evaluate the rationale for such judgments?

Searle (1999, 2069) asserts that there is no sharp dividing line between science and philosophy, but philosophical problems tend to have three special features. *First*, they tend to concern large frameworks rather than specific questions within a framework. *Second*, they are questions for which there is no generally accepted method of solution. *Third*, they tend to involve conceptual issues. For these reasons, contends Searle, a philosophical problem such as the nature of life can become a scientific problem if it is put into a shape where it admits of scientific resolution. Searle goes on to assert:

> These features of philosophical questions, that they tend to be framework questions and tend not to lend themselves to systematic empirical research, explains why science is always 'right' and philosophy is always 'wrong'. As soon as we find a systematic way to answer a question, and get an answer that all competent investigators in the field can agree is the correct answer, we stop calling it 'philosophical' and start calling it 'scientific' (Searle 1999, 2070).

It is evident that in Searle's view, philosophy is subordinate to science, as it allegedly investigates issues in a less incisive manner than science does, and hands them over to science once they can be subjected to systematic empirical research. Yet such a view rests on logical positivism's contested metaphysical postulate that only claims that can be verified empirically are meaningful (see 3.2 above). What is more, both the history of science and the philosophy of science have plausibly suggested that science itself is not "cast in stone", but is rather in a process of change (see Sarton 1952; Klee 1997; Rosenberg 2000; Shackelford 2007). Consequently, there is no sufficient justification for regarding science as a "perfect" mode of investigation in contradistinction to philosophy as Searle seems to do.

Moreover, Searle's suggestion that it is only a matter of time before all philosophical questions move into the realm of science is open to serious challenge. How would

philosophical questions such as time and eternity or the holistic understanding of the nature of the human person ever become issues for scientific inquiry? Let us, for purposes of illustration, focus on the attempt at a holistic understanding of the human person: is there any reasonable hope that science will in the foreseeable future discover an explanatory principle that integrates the chemical, physical, social, psychological and historical aspects of the human person? Although such a discovery seems highly unlikely, the human race continues to grope for answers to it, as is evident from proposals put forward by various worldviews. By virtue of its reflective approach to inquiry, philosophy is uniquely placed to evaluate the answers that various worldviews give to pertinent questions concerning the human person, such as the following:

> The crucial questions, …, to ask of a worldview are, how does it explain the fact that human beings think but think haltingly, love but hate too, are creative but also destructive, wise but often foolish, and so forth? What explains our longing for truth or personal fulfillment? Why is pleasure as we know it now rarely enough to satisfy completely? Why do we usually want more - more money, more love, more ecstasy? How do we explain our human refusal to operate in an amoral fashion? (Sire 1988, 216).

Thus despite the over-arching influence of the social sciences, the need to balance experience and reason, truth and value, reality and possibility has led people to tend to philosophy again, because after the denial of religious authorities, it is only philosophy that shoulders the responsibility for the integrity and unity of knowledge, and provides a basis for the justification of the values that give meaning to human existence (Chen *et*. *al*. 2006, 508).

4.2. A Commercialised Academic Milieu

During the last fifteen years or so, the market has come into the African academia, with the question of demand and supply weighing heavily on institutions of higher learning, and specifically on the humanities which are viewed as making no contribution to economic development. Students are now referred to as "clients" and the academic staff as "service providers". Thus what Stunkle said in 1989 of the American society is probably applicable to a number of African countries today, where we have "a public consciousness that views education as a commodity,

students as consumers, and professors as producers and purveyors of useful information and skills" (Stunkle 1989, 325).

In Kenya, for example, the government has been cutting back on financial support to public universities, insisting that they come up with "marketable" academic programmes that enable them to cater for the deficit. With its eye firmly on economic development, the government has also frequently declared that what the country needs is a band of young people trained in the natural sciences, thereby denigrating the social sciences and the humanities. Besides, students frequently ask if they will be "marketable" if they pursue a degree in philosophy (Oruka 1997, 94-101, 229-230). Even more saddening is the fact that African philosophers have often fallen into the temptation to pander to such utilitarian demands. The fact that many agencies that fund research projects have an explicit bias towards the social sciences has further aggravated the situation.

It is evident that philosophy can contribute to economic development. For example, Loehle (1988) avered that ecology could profit from the formal tools of philosophical inquiry, because the complexity of ecological studies leads to ambiguities and interference by the observer's mental framework.

Nevertheless, even where no "direct" benefit of philosophy in the economic and political spheres can be pinpointed, the philosopher must not yield to intimidation. Our problems are not only economic, but also the lack of qualitative thinking to help people get out of their quagmire, a need which philosophy can contribute to meeting (Oruka 1997, 214). Besides, as the philosopher does his or her work in the highly materialistic contemporary society in which the humanities are often viewed as adding little or no value to the GDP and GNP, he or she will do well to remember that the abstractions with which philosophy deals were the progenitors of the work now being done in the natural and social sciences (Ziman 1968; Bloom 1968, 377).

Even more significant is the fact that any scientific enterprise is underpinned by a philosophical orientation (Spirkin 1983). Furthermore, aspects of methodology developed in philosophy are general across all sciences and provide tools for problem solving in particular disciplines (Loehle 1988, 97). Indeed, the work of some

scientists is akin to philosophy, consisting largely of developing concepts and theories, with little or no involvement in empirical research. Thus even among scientists, the gap has sometimes increased between theorists and empiricists (Nagi and Corwin 1972, 16). Moreover, the utility of philosophy in academia should be obvious, when we consider that most disciplines use philosophy to gain deeper insights into their own areas of specialisation. Thus we have phenomenology of religion, philosophy of religion, philosophy of law, philosophy of education, philosophy of science, philosophy of the social sciences, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mathematics, among others.

As departments of philosophy around the world have sought to assert their relevance in the scrumble for students, they have presented various write-ups on the benefits of studying philosophy, many of which are readily available on the Internet. Among the benefits that they cite are that interaction with philosophical works helps a person to develop a better sense of his or her own values and goals, refines his or her abilities to think and communicate, encourages him or her to be more open to experiences in life that are especially challenging, and stimulates him or her to be better prepared to thoughtfully consider various questions that he or she encounters. Furthermore, many philosophy department websites display statistics indicating that philosophy majors score consistently higher than students in all other non-scientific disciplines in Graduate Record Examinations (GREs) and other standardized exams designed to gauge a student's likelihood of success in graduate and professional studies. The statistics indicate that philosophy majors also compete favourably with science majors in such examinations.

However, the danger of philosophers trying to play the game by the rules of the marketplace is that the tangible wares of the applied natural sciences (such as agriculture, medicine and information technology), and the "facts and figures" of the social sciences are likely to be more appealing to potential "customers" than the highly valuable but non-tangible goods of the philosopher. Was it not Plato's Socrates who rejected the entrepreneural outlook of the sophists for the pursuit of insight through disinterested contemplation?

Perhaps philosophy, and other humanities in Africa today, have something to learn from the American experience. According to Allan Bloom's well known but controversial book, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1968), the 1960s were the turning point. An influx of minorities and huge general increases in student enrollment could not be absorbed by the most rigorous disciplines, notably the natural sciences, whose standards were too high and clear. As a result, most of the new people, disadvantaged and poor in skills, were shunted into the social sciences, where standards were less well articulated, and finally to the bottom of the barrel, the humanities, where operational measures of competence were least evident. This led to the drastic deterioration in the academic standards of the social sciences and the humanities. In the rivalry for second place between the social sciences and the humanities, the aura of a scientific approach to issues and the ambience of credibility that interest groups enjoyed if they could site social science research in favour of their causes worked to the advantage of the social sciences (see Bloom 1968, 351-354). Are the "self-sponsored" programmes that mushroomed in African universities over a decade ago having a similar effect?

4.3. Preserving the Identity of Philosophy

In view of the assault on the veracity and relevance of philosophy, it is not surprising that Peng and Cheng (2006) contend that in our time, the identity of philosophy has already collapsed. For them, it is no longer philosophy that provides stipulations for other subjects, but the other subjects that give direction to philosophy. Peng and Cheng cite examples of the philosophy of language, structuralism and post-structuralism, all of which seem to rely on linguistics for guidance. They conclude that the boundary of philosophy and non-philosophy is quite uncertain: "A text can be philosophical, literary, cultural and even linguistic" (Peng and Cheng 2006, 433). While Peng and Cheng's assertion is an over-statement, it points to what might happen in a few decades if scholars of philosophy do not move swiftly to preserve the identity of their discipline.

The most effective strategy for the preservation of the identity of a discipline is the protection of its *methodology*. This is due to the fact that subject matter often cuts across disciplines. To give a few examples, both the psychologist and the psychiatrist

study mental health, both the chemist and the biologist study chemical reactions, and both the political scientist and political philosopher study politics. As such, it is methodology which distinguishes the disciplines.

Thus scholars of philosophy in Africa today must assert the distinctive methodology of their discipline, and on the basis of this assertion seek ways of co-operating with practitioners of other disciplines. Wwhile genuine interdisciplinary research might yield useful insights for all involved, false interdisciplinarity is a pretext for the unjustified exaltation of some disciplines above others. African scholars of philosophy must therefore guard against a counterfeit interdisciplinary venture which results in philosophy's loss of identity, and with it the loss of its unique contribution to the growth of human knowledge. In the endeavour to stand their ground, they must remind thinkers from other disciplines that at least three knowledge types exist: empirical knowledge originating basically from observing the world, analytic knowledge from rational reflection, and normative knowledge from various theories (Chen *et*. *Al*. 2006, 512): philosophy contributes to the growth of the second and third knowledge types.

What is more, although philosophy is frequently accused of indulging in fruitless abstraction, it is a fact that the essence of any research methodology is abstraction:

> … abstractions are an important aspect of method. They are the super-highways which unite the remotest referents into a meaningful whole. Their very abstractness makes it possible to bring objects, acts, events, situations of the most varied traits into a common picture, since all entities have at least one trait in common: the fact of existence. Being, the most abstract of all abstractions, expresses this common Trait (Bawden 1944, 490).

Early in this paper, I cited the erroneous insistence by some that there is no distinction between philosophy and religious studies. True, interdisciplinary studies should be based on the fact that "The faculty of the mind, the power of thinking, is at its seat one and undivided. Despite a long tradition that recognizes the diversity of the mind's activities and has provided us with polar terms like reason and sensibility, logic and intuition, dialectic and poetry, there exists no telling evidence of an essential division of thought itself" (Shattuck 1988, 143). Nevertheless, this does not imply that there are no distinctions among the disciplines: disciplines are distinguished by subject

matter, and more crucially, by methodology. An adequate appreciation of the indivisibility of the human mind should lead us to respect the various ways in which the mind functions, as indicated by the pairs listed by Shattuck above: those various ways point to the diverse methodologies of the disciplines.

The philosopher in Africa today, as elsewhere in the world, must also remind his or her potential collaborators in the social sciences that "Recourse to 'rules of evidence' fails to account for the extent to which the adjudication of claims is a disciplinary formation. Not only does each discipline construct its own criteria of proof, but what counts as proof is itself contested within, as well as across, disciplines. To understand this contest in historical terms is the crux of interdisciplinarity" (Schoenfield and Traub 1996, 281).

Above all, in contending for the integrity of the methodology of their discipline, philosophers can also point out that even among the social sciences, there is vigorous competition:

> Actually each of the social sciences can, and does, make a claim to be the beginning point in relation to which the others can be understood - economics arguing for the economy or the market, psychology for the individual psyche, sociology for society, anthropology for culture, and political science for the political order (….) The issue is what is the social science atom, and each specialty can argue that the others are properly parts of the whole that it represents. Moreover each can accuse the other of representing an abstraction, or a construct, or a figment of the imagination (Bloom 1968, 359-360).

This being so, the philosopher has no good reason to defer to a cluster of disciplines that are themselves engaged in vigorous debate about their own methodology, suggesting the imperfection of their conceptual foundation.

5. Conclusions

The foregoing discussion leads to at least three conclusions. *First*, as efforts at interdisciplinary work continue, scholars must stay alert to the presuppositions that underlie each institution's demarcation of the disciplines, in order that, when necessary, they may defend the presuppositions or, perhaps, argue for revised, institutionally more appropriate definitions (Austin 1996, 273). As Murray (1996, 280) cautions, the challenge of focused interdisciplinary reciprocity is that such work

may alter the foundational assumptions of the fields under consideration; but even when welcome alterations result in the definition of evolving disciplinary practices, they will not maintain their efficacy without an active dialogue with the historical reevaluation of the disciplines from which they emerge. Furthermore, we would expect interdisciplinary projects to work best when the goals of each discipline are compatible enough to focus research but enough at odds to stimulate new approaches to old problems (Henkel 1996, 279). These considerations underscore the importance of mutual interdisciplinary respect.

Second, it would be evidently presumptuous for African scholars of philosophy to insist that each and every aspect of their subject matter is, and will always be, worth pursuing. Nevertheless, the decision as to which branches and sub-branches of philosophy are worth investigating must continue to rest with philosophers, because it is they who are keenly aware of the history and methodology involved in such inquiries. After all, it was Philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer who came to the considered, albeit controversial, view that metaphysics had outlived its usefulness, if it had any in earlier ages.

Third, since the most vigorous challenge to the methodology of philosophy comes from those who idolise the natural and social sciences, it is appropriate to take note of Maritain's outline of the relationship between philosophy and the special sciences:

> … the nature and needs of philosophy make it incumbent upon the philosopher to keep himself as fully acquainted as he can With the scientific knowledge of his period, provided, however, that he preserves intact the freedom of philosophic truth. For though the philosopher as such need not use the affirmations of the special sciences to establish his own truths, he ought to make use of them, (i) to illustrate aptly his principles, (ii) to confirm his conclusions, (iii) to interpret, throw light upon, and assimilate, the assured results of the sciences so far as questions of philosophy are involved. And finally he should use the affirmations of science (iv) to refute objections and errors which claim support from its results (Maritain 1979, 91).

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