An African Path to a Global Future

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Introduction

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In this book, we have put together a collection of papers which applies African philosophical solutions to problems in areas of ethics, health, education, economics and criminal justice, both in Africa as well as the rest of the world.

Part One consists of papers which apply Western philosophical ideas and frameworks to African issues such as health and political participation. This is in line with the usual ways in which the world has approached African problems for some time. The papers in this section are examples of how philosophical ideas from the West can continue to be useful when applied to local African contexts and issues in order to solve African problems.

While this methodology of applying Western philosophical ideas and frameworks to Africa can be argued to have some merit, there has recently been a call to decolonize the ways we think about Africa, in applying ideas with their roots in Africa to African problems, instead of utilizing Western ideas in order to do so. Therefore, the second and third parts of the book consist of papers which focus on African philosophical ideas, and how they can be applied to both African and global problems.

Africa has long been seen as a problem in our global discourse. Parts Two and Three seek to invert the usual way of looking at Africa as a problem, or as having problems that need to be solved with Western intervention and ideas. Instead, they ask how we might apply some of the wisdom, ideas and philosophies of Africa in order to solve Africa’s own, as well as global problems. Different conceptual frameworks rooted in the African context are therefore applied in order to try and find solutions for African, as well as global problems.

Part I. Western Philosophical Ideas Applied to African Problems. As mentioned above, Part One of this book contains papers which apply philosophical ideas and frameworks to the African context in a bid to solve particular problems.

“Oil and Environment in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Nexus between the Conflict and Prospects of a Sustainable Solution”
by J.P. Afam Ifedi focuses on the environmental as well as human health and development challenges which have stemmed from oil production in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Ifedi argues that the Nigerian government has provided support and protection to oil companies, and that the government’s attempts to minimize harmful effects on local populations and the environment have not provided lasting solutions to the problem faced by the area. This, Ifedi claims, has had the result that there has been continuous violence perpetrated against the government and the oil industries in the area. This has consequently led to numerous social, economic and developmental challenges. Ifedi posits a solution to the problem based on environmental justice, which in turn ought to provide social, economic and political justice.

Grace Umezurike applies John Locke’s social contract theory to the Nigerian context in order to show how the application of this theory might improve popular political participation. Umezurike argues that political participation in Nigeria is limited to the few, and that there needs to be an attempt to improve popular political participation. She claims that improved political participation would have positive effects on the polity. Locke’s social contract theory, she claims, has a framework of openness to popular political participation and the common good. This theoretical framework, when applied to the Nigerian context, is therefore postulated to be a way to change the nature of political participation in Nigeria.

**Part II. African Philosophical Ideas to Solve African problems.**

In Part Two, we have a collection of papers which use ideas and frameworks with their roots in the African context, and then these ideas are applied to particular current issues pertinent to the African continent.

M. Zakaria Asmal in his paper, “Deconstruction and Reconstraction: Theory, Praxis and Decoloniality in Steve Biko’s Conception of Religion,” analyzes Steve Biko’s understanding of religion and its potential to play a role in the liberation of black South Africans. The paper seeks to address two central questions. First it seeks to address whether Christianity, despite not being indigenous to Africa, represents an authentic part of South African black people under colonialism and apartheid. The author argues that Biko saw Christianity as
significant and authentic for many black South Africans, despite the religion not being indigenous. Second, as it is argued that Christianity can have an authentic place within the lived reality of blackness, Asmal addresses how it is possible to employ Christianity in the liberation of black South Africans. In answering this question, this paper highlights the links between Biko’s practical and contextual theory and the work of two Africana philosophers, Du Bois and Fanon, thereby transporting his idea of religion into the broader African global diaspora, anti-colonial discourse and Africana existential philosophy.

“The ‘Libertarian Paradigm’ of Severino Elias Ngoenha” by Anke Graness explores the concept of the ‘libertarian paradigm’ in the philosophy of this Portuguese-speaking Mozambican philosopher. It is the intention of this paper to take a first step towards greater inclusion of philosophers and philosophy from Portuguese-speaking Africa in African philosophical debate. The paper gives a short introduction to this African philosopher’s work, and starts to explore the potential and limits of his concept of the ‘libertarian paradigm’, especially focusing on the understanding of responsibility within this paradigm. Graness argues that Ngoenha’s concept of the ‘libertarian paradigm’ differs fundamentally from the Euro-American understanding of libertarianism present in the literature. Ngoenha’s libertarian paradigm is characterized by a continued lack of freedom of the African experience of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. He argues that, as freedom is absent from the African experience, African thought is characterized by an anxious quest for freedom. The core of his libertarian paradigm is a particular conception of responsibility.

“Rediscovering individual-based values in ubuntu virtue ethics: transforming corporate entities in postcolonial Africa” by Grivas Muchineripi Kayange argues for the need to rediscover individual based virtues in the postcolonial African context. As opposed to philosophical literature on what can be called ubuntu virtue ethics which emphasizes communitarian virtues, Kayange argues that ubuntu virtue ethics also includes some individual-based virtues. He claims that the neglect of individual values, which has been the result of over-emphasizing communitarian virtues, while effective in the battle against colonialism has resulted in grave problems in the post-colonial African context. In arguing that we ought to restore the importance of individ-
ual-based virtues alongside communitarian virtues in the African context, he claims that various types of African organizations can be transformed.

Part III. African Philosophical Ideas to Solve Global Problems.
In the final part of the book concepts, ideas and theoretical frameworks with their roots in Africa are applied to problems from around the globe.

In this section, T.D. Harper-Shipman applies the philosophy of Wangari Maathai to the World Bank’s Contemporary Development Model (CDF). Harper-Shipman argues that the World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework is too limited, despite the inclusion of some poverty-reduction goals. She argues that the problem lies with the fact that the CDF is still rooted in neoliberal epistemologies, and that this has the result of limiting its ability to identify and address historical and systematic barriers to development. In contrast to the CDF’s neoliberal framework, Harper-Shipman argues that Maathai’s ideas are able to contextualize development in important ways which results in the sustainable economic, environmental and political progress.

“Afro-communitarianism, Humanization and the Nature of Reconciliation” by Rianna Oelofsen argues that an Afro-communitarian understanding of personhood has important implications for how we understand reconciliation and its cognate concepts. If we understand personhood in a communitarian way, this affects the way in which we conceptualize responsibility, justice, forgiveness and humanization. Once the effects of understanding reconciliation from an Afro-communitarian perspective have been explained, Oelofsen offers some tentative reasons why such a conception of reconciliation and its cognate concepts is desirable.

Laura Roost in her paper reconceptualizes the ways in which we ought to understand transitional justice, with reference to philosophical insights gleaned from the care ethics of Joan Tronto, and the African populism of Claude Ake, Mueni wa Muiu, and Godfrey Mwakikagile. These theoretical approaches require the prioritization of local voices with regards to transitional justice. Roost also includes data collected from interviews in Rwanda and at the International
Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, and argues that these highlight the importance of responsiveness to the local context and people. This stresses the importance of theoretical frameworks which emphasizes local participation and ownership of transitional justice mechanisms.

In the final paper of the book entitled “Evolution in Ethics: Interrogating the Notion of Vengeance in Criminal Justice through the Lens of Ancient Egyptian Legal Codes,” Charles Verharen provides an outline of a research program which is aimed at reforming the criminal justice system in the United States. The research program is based on Ancient Egyptian ethics, which prohibits vengeance. This prohibition of vengeance stands in stark contrast to the Ancient Mesopotamian understanding of justice, which is encapsulated in the principle of ‘an eye for an eye’. Such retribution is prohibited according to the Egyptian principle of ‘maat’ (translated as harmony, order, and justice), which advocates the re-establishment of harmony after individual wrongdoings have disturbed their communities. Crime is understood as a disease which requires healing, as opposed to an action which requires punishment. Verharen then refers to recent research in the neurosciences which he argues may confirm the ancient Egyptian understanding of crime as a disease, as opposed to an act of free will. From this, Verharen therefore argues for the reformation of the criminal justice system in the United States, based on ideas and frameworks based in African ethics.