

Editor's Note

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The articles in this issue focus on three main areas of philosophical inquiry, namely, political philosophy, ethics and philosophy of religion.

Barry Hallen examines diverse theories regarding the nature and achievement of personhood in a communitarian context in the writings of contemporary African philosophers, and argues that communitarianism seems to provide a better framework for explaining how a human being becomes a person than classical liberal theory as enunciated by recent political philosophers such as John Rawls.

On their part, Ronald Olufemi Badru and Tayo Raymond Egunlusi propose that the methodology of African metaphysical epistemology be adopted to complement the empiricist-positivist colonial methodology of legal reasoning. They argue that African metaphysical epistemology has the advantageous result of helping in the search for truth concerning offences performed through the manipulation of metaphysical realities or other forms of covert wrongdoing, thereby promoting the delivery of effective legal justice, and thus contributing significantly to the development of a balanced and reliable justice system in contemporary African societies.

Workineh Kelbessa argues that although climate change is fundamentally an ethical issue, African policymakers have not paid sufficient attention to ethical principles when addressing it. For him, the major ethical principles embodied in different African traditions can assist African and non-African countries to address the challenges occasioned by climate change. He also advances the view that technological societies whose current emissions most exceed their fair share of emissions ought to give attention to the demands of justice by playing their respective roles in averting the most extreme effects of climate change.

H.M. Majeed disagrees with scholars such as Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti who hold that reincarnation is alien to African thought. According to him, an adequate understanding of the Ghanaian Akan culture points to the presence of reincarnation in Akan, and for that matter African, thought. However, contends Majeed, reincarnation in the African context, unlike in the Asian one, is not dependent on moral

considerations. He further interrogates how moral responsibility, an idea which is ordinarily regarded as reasonable in the presence of free will, is in the case of the Akan held alongside predestination. He also points out what he considers to be serious philosophical difficulties which this Akan conception of moral responsibility generates in respect of the 'reincarnated' person.

Olusegun Noah Olawoyin offers an interpretation of John Hick's philosophy of religious pluralism in the context of traditional Yoruba religion, with a view to providing a theoretical basis for peaceful coexistence among different religions in Nigeria. He equates Hick's concept of the Transcendent or Ultimate Reality with the Yoruba concept of the Supreme Being or *Olodumare*. He also equates Yoruba divinities with Hick's *personae* and *impersonae* of the Real: like the *personae* and *impersonae* of Hickean Ultimate Reality, the divinities are manifestations of *Olodumare*. For Olawoyin, this interpretative method can be used to account for differences in the conceptions of the Supreme Being among competing religions in Nigeria, especially Islam and Christianity, in their conceptions of God.

Reginald M.J. Oduor replies to Karori Mbugua's article titled "The Problem of Hell Revisited: Towards a Gentler Theology of Hell". According to him, the philosophical questions that Mbugua raises deserve a more incisive treatment than Mbugua accorded them. Oduor further argues that as with all other matters touching on objective reality, the answer to the question as to whether or not eternal damnation exists cannot be determined by our opinions - its existence or non-existence is an objective fact. Consequently, philosophers cannot revise the fact to their liking; what they can do is to accept or reject the doctrine of eternal damnation altogether on rational grounds, but with no assurance that the objective fact is on their chosen side.

This issue is the final one under my stewardship as the founding Editor-in-Chief of the New Series of *Thought and Practice*. The journal was founded by the late Prof. H. Odera Oruka and his colleagues in 1974, but took a break between 1982 and 2009, probably partly due to the high cost of printing and circulation of hard copies. With the advent of online publishing, the opportunity arose to revive it at minimal cost and with a global readership, and the Premier Issue of the New Series was published in June 2009. Over the past seven years, *Thought and Practice* has endeavoured to stay

true to its vision - “A forum for incisive philosophic reflection on intellectual, social and political issues within the African context”. Furthermore, it has striven to fulfil its mission - “... a bi-annual, peer reviewed, Open Access online journal which serves scholars with broad interests in the humanities and social sciences by disseminating original articles with a philosophical outlook, with emphasis on intellectual, social and political issues that are of special relevance to contemporary Africa.”

I look back with a great sense of fulfilment at the seven volumes, each with two issues, published under my watch from 2009 to 2015. My sense of fulfilment is augmented by the fact that being a person with total visual disability, I do my work using a screen-reader (a talking computer programme). I therefore hope that colleagues will be much more receptive to the possibility of working with persons with disabilities whose motto is “We want opportunity, *not* pity!”

I wish to express my deep gratitude to my colleagues on the Editorial Board, namely, Drs. Francis E.A. Owakah and Oriare Nyarwath as well as Prof. Samson O. Gunga for their support over the last seven years. I wish to further thank Dr. Oriare Nyarwath for accompanying me to the Regional Workshop on Online Publishing at the Kenya School of Monetary Studies (4th to 6th November, 2009), organised by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and African Journals Online (AJOL), where I acquired invaluable knowledge and skills with which I have executed my mandate.

I am also grateful to Profs. Kwasi Wiredu, D.A. Masolo , Bruce Janz, Aloo Osotsi Mojola and F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, and, post-humously, Prof. Joseph M. Nyasani for their service as members of the journals’ Advisory Board.

Words fail me with which to thank our peer reviewers for their valuable input that has ensured that *thought and Practice* maintains the high standards of scholarship for which it is known.

The Editorial Board, Advisory Board and peer reviewers have all served this journal free of charge, thereby making it possible for all the articles to be published free of any processing fees. If more of us adopted this attitude of service without expecting

financial gain, our need for the so-called “donors” would be drastically reduced and our scholarly independence would thereby be greatly enhanced.

Moreover, I am deeply indebted to African Journals Online (AJOL) for hosting *Thought and Practice* free of charge for the past seven years. Their work in promoting open access publishing is an invaluable contribution to the growth of African scholarship in particular and of academic endeavour more generally.

I wish to share with readers three observations that I have made in the course of my editorial work over the past seven years, and that might be of use in enhancing the quality of scholarship in Africa and beyond.

First, there is the very important issue of academic excellence. While a number of authors exhibit outstanding diligence in preparing their articles for submission and in revising them in accordance with the reviewers' suggestions, others submit articles that are poorly conceptualised, inadequately referenced and that have not been proofread, and put in minimum effort to revise them in accordance with the reviewers' suggestions. The fact is that each and every piece that is published in the name of scholarship influences the quality of scholarship not only in the present generation but also in countless future ones. Consequently, while there is no perfect article, it behoves us all to put out articles that meet the highest possible academic standards. This being so, any journal that remains true to its mandate will decline to publish articles that do not meet the threshold of sound scholarship.

Second, there is the question of “should” versus “ought”. In their discourses on the theory of values (“axiology”), authors often confuse the ambiguous term “should” with the decisively normative term “ought”. Thus one often sees statements such as “We *should* act in such a manner as to promote social harmony”, whereas what is intended is “ought”.

Third, a number of African authors urgently need to undertake incisive reflection on the format of their names. Part of the problem is that the concept of “family name” or “surname” is alien to African cultures, having been imposed on them by Western colonialism with relics of its feudal past. The custom of alphabetising names in data

bases and bibliographies with the main name before the first name or names has aggravated the situation, as many authors now think the same format is appropriate in all contexts. Thus one often finds the format of “Oduor Reginald M.J.” instead of “Reginald M.J. Oduor” in non-data base contexts, and this causes considerable difficulty to editors and readers alike. Whether or not we wish to adopt the custom of surnames, it is important that we avoid confusing data base format with the format of every day usage.

Over the past seven years, *Thought and Practice* has sought to contribute to the endeavour to move African philosophy away from the unwarranted sense of obligation to justify its existence and authenticity towards the much more fruitful task of grappling with pertinent theoretical and practical issues that are of concern to contemporary Africa. I am confident that it will continue to contribute to African post-colonial reconstruction and to philosophical discourse at the global level. You can always access the latest uploaded issue of the journal at <http://ajol.info/index.php/tp> , and earlier issues by clicking the “Archives” link on the page - and all free of charge.

I am pleased to introduce to you Dr. Oriare Nyarwath, who takes up the office of Editor-in-Chief on an acting capacity until the Editorial Board gives further direction. With his experience in teaching philosophy at several universities and his seven-year service on the Editorial Board of *Thought and Practice*, the journal can forge ahead with great confidence.

Reginald M.J. Oduor, Ph.D.

Outgoing Editor-in-Chief

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