Philosophy as Translation and the Understanding of Other Cultures, sub theme: Crossing philosophical divides

PHILOSOPHICAL DIVIDES ARE DOTTED LINES

drs. Renate Schepen, April 2016

A child that has never visited another man’s farm, regards his father’s as the biggest
Yoruba proverb

We live in a fast-globalising world where we have continuous interaction with different cultures. How could our education change to reflect this cultural diversity in societies, accommodate cultural differences and facilitate understanding between cultures? What would be the benefits if education changed accordingly? How does philosophy contribute to create these divides and in which way could the discipline transform to cross them and become intercultural? In this paper I will argue that the origin of the cultural divides and absence of understanding between cultural traditions stem from the Enlightenment and that dialogue could be a methodology to bridge such differences.

As we open to philosophical traditions from other cultures, we need to open to different bodies of knowledge and different ways of educating. I elaborate on the different aspects of this concept. To cross philosophical divides in education requires a change in the discipline of philosophy itself: rather than trying to divide the disciplines into categories with clear-cut borders, differences can be represented by dotted lines. Not only would this be closer to the actual postmodern situation where we can no longer place things in categorisable, clear-cut and separate boxes as Enlightenment dictates, but such an endeavor would also open space for inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary education. Currently students are taught that clear-cut categorisation is possible, and education is mostly focused on Western thought. It’s not only Western classrooms that use this Eurocentric approach, but worldwide the colonization has left its traces. African, South American and Eastern universities often are still teaching a Western-oriented curriculum. This also means that much of the available knowledge that could help us to deal with global challenges remains unused. And isn’t it precisely education that should prepare us for the future or at least for its unpredictability? Trying to understand and master plural viewpoints is more democratic than applying the mainstream western perspective and offers a broader range of possible options to deal with an unpredictable future. Crossing philosophical divides would make our education system more attuned to the current situation and challenges and those of the future, in a fast-globalising and interactive world. In this paper I focus on higher classes of secondary education, higher and academic education.

One of the main sources for this paper is the book ‘Interculturele filosofie, een studieboek’ (Intercultural philosophy, a study book) by Prof. em. Heinz Kimmerle (1930-2016). He states that philosophy can no longer be limited to European-Western thinking and its history. In all disciplines; economy, politics, science, technology, art and culture, sports and tourism, there is continuous global exchange. If philosophy does not become intercultural it will be a pure academic discipline without any social importance.¹ This paper is dedicated to him. He died unexpectedly last January, while we were planning to work on this paper together in a dialogical way as we have done with other publications. I miss him as a dear friend and mentor. In spite of the uncountable publications and translations he wrote, for him the spoken word was the most important. Mostly though, it is his wise humaneness that will continue to be an inspiration for me. We shared a passion in giving voice to the voices that are not listened to, in academic discourse and in society at large. I will continue this work, with my own voice, which is inseparably connected to the voices of the people that taught me.

¹ H. Kimmerle (2015), Interculturele filosofie, een studieboek, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant, p. 7
1 INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Let me start by situating myself. I’m in my early forties and could be considered a Western middle class white woman. Both my parents are educated and I studied at university level. One of the best friends of my father when he was studying at the Technical University in Delft was Irm, an architect from Aruba, whom we later visited with our family when I was 6. My younger sister had a Turkish high school friend Aysha and my mother had a friend with Pakistani roots. I had been living and working in different European countries (UK, France, Spain), but besides our family friends, I had hardly had any non-Western influence during my upbringing from kindergarten up till university. I pursued my academic career at a later age, after first obtaining a BA in International Business. At the age of 26 I started studying Philosophy at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam and two years later I would go to the Universidad de la Republica in Montevideo, Uruguay. Strange as it may sound, I only found out towards the end of my academic study that I had not been studying Philosophy like I had always thought, but I had studied Western Philosophy, even at the University in Montevideo. This I realised because of my interest in Eastern philosophies, for which I had to go to the Sociology Faculty, and because of my interest in African Philosophy, which I studied at the University of Legon in Ghana. The subject of African Philosophy was not available at any of the Dutch universities anymore, since Prof. Heinz Kimmerle who had a Chair in Intercultural Philosophy had retired from the Erasmus University and was not replaced, like many other professors working in the field of intercultural philosophy. While in academic curricula non-western cultures were neglected, through my stays and encounters with people in Asia, Africa and South-America I realized the richness and wisdom of these specific cultures. What if our education would reflect this richness in cultures?

I argue that this is important for at least three reasons. First, we live in a plural society. If people feel that their worldview is denied or even rejected, they themselves might feel rejected or inferior. Therefore classrooms should be ‘spaces of recognition’. Secondly, a class should be a reflection of society and prepare students for a society in which they will have to deal with their own restrictions and different, sometimes conflicting, worldviews. Therefore classrooms should be ‘spaces of difference’. Thirdly, many of the challenges we face today have a global scale and we should learn to collaborate and use the wisdom of the world to deal with these challenges. Therefore classrooms should be ‘spaces of collaboration’.

1.1 Spaces of recognition

For me as a Dutch person it was already strange to experience that studying ‘philosophy’ naturally meant, studying Western philosophy. No reference to other cultures was made or any reflections on the Eurocentric and gendered nature of the curriculum. I could not image how people from a non-Western background participating in the Dutch education system would feel when they would find out that they and their culture are mainly non-existing in the canon of philosophy, while at the same time, globalisation and international careers are accepted as normal in sports and business, migration flows are rising and more refugees participate in our educational system.

The dominance of Western science is a worldwide phenomenon. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues that we can only flourish to the extent that we are recognized and that persons can be damaged by mirroring back a demeaning picture of themselves. He asks what picture we give people of themselves when our educational system gives the impression that all creativity and worth is inhered in males of European provenance. Where this could lead to is sadly illustrated by the

---

3 idem, p.25
4 idem, p.65
recent suicide crisis that the First Nations community in Attawapiskat, Northern-Canada is faced
with. Chief Bruce Shisheesh states as the main reason the impact of the country’s residential school
system, where for decades, more than 150,000 Aboriginals were carted off in an attempt to forcibly
assimilate them into Canadian society, neglecting their indigenous culture. The last of these schools
closed in 1996.\(^5\)

This might not only say something about what is taught to the youth, but also about the questions
we pose and consider relevant. While policy makers started questioning how the economic situation
in the community could be improved, chiefs and spiritual leaders from the First Nations People were
questioning how the denial of their culture and spirituality plays a role in the suicide crisis. Neglected
questions are related to minority groups as well as to gender. Harding, who is a professor in the
Social Sciences and Comparative Education Division suggests that so-called women’s issues and the
questions they pose cannot simply be added to disciplinary knowledge as they often challenge the
basic assumptions of the discipline.\(^6\) We should not only strive for pluralist viewpoints within the
discipline, but also critically look at the basic assumptions that form a discipline.

If recognition for one’s specific culture and religion is not given, people might feel they don’t belong,
which could have violent repercussions, like the example of the First Nations community in Canada
shows. At the same time students should not be reduced to their cultural and religious identities. In
Identity and Violence Amartya Sen is arguing for recognition of multiple identities and ‘a world
beyond religious affiliations’.\(^7\)

1.2 Spaces of encounter and difference
In our global environment and in the cities we live in, we share our space with many different
cultures. Undeniably we have to relate to each other and try to understand each other. This might
not be an easy task, but even though it is not easy, it is a necessary task for being able to live
together. This means not only to be educated about other cultures, but also about the accompanying
attitude in which we can open ourselves to ‘the other’. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray describes
this as an attitude ‘in which the otherness of the other is recognized as being irreducible to one’s
own’ and ‘as soon as this is recognized the world itself becomes irreducible to a single world’.\(^8\) It’s
exactly this acceptation that ‘I’m not the whole, which signifies the possibility of glimpsing a wider
world, a greater completeness’.\(^9\)

But often ‘the other’ or ‘other philosophical traditions’ and values are seen as a threat to ‘our
Western culture and democratic values’ and these values as being a Western concept.

‘There is, for example, nothing exclusively “Western” about valuing liberty or defending public
reasoning. And yet their being labeled as “Western” can produce a negative attitude toward
them in other societies.’\(^10\)

Instead of studying other philosophies and being open to how ‘they’ can enrich ‘our’ culture, they are
kept outside of the main curricula. If classrooms would be plural spaces, people from different

\(^5\) L. Mathieu-Léger and A. Kassam, ‘First Nations community grappling with suicide crisis: ‘we’re crying for
help”, in: The Guardian, 16 April 2016
\(^6\) S. Harding (2015), Objectivity and Diversity: another logic of scientific research, University of Chicago Press,
p.29
\(^8\) L. Irigaray (2008), Sharing the World, London/New York: Continuum, p. X
\(^9\) Idem, p. 17
backgrounds could meet and learn from each other’s culture without placing one culture or philosophy higher than the other. This difference should be valued and reflected in the curricula by including philosophies from different cultures.

1.3 Spaces of collaboration

Large- (even planetary-) scale problems facing future societies cannot be resolved only through deliberation with dialogue partners who share histories and cultures similar to ours, or through interpreting philosophical texts from our own history. The potentiality of philosophies of all the cultures is needed.11 Taylor states that we all miss out as students if other cultures are not included in our curriculum. His opinion is rooted in the idea that all human cultures that have animated societies for an extensive period have something important to offer and contribute’.12

I would like to illustrate the importance of philosophies of other cultures by the concept of ‘Binary Complementarity’ as elaborated in Socrates and Orunmila, Two Patron Saints of Classic Philosophy, by the Nigerian philosopher Sophie Oluwole. She opposes this concept to that of ‘Binary Opposition’, a separation of idea and matter, which became the most influential form in the Western philosophical tradition since Socrates. This has led to an ‘either / or’- thinking. Whereas the concept of ‘Binary Complementarity’, where idea and matter are inseparable, is accompanied by ‘and / and’- thinking in the inclusive sense. Pythagoras (572-500) held this same theory and suggested that precisely the combination of two opposites create harmony in nature and in social life.13 But it’s the viewpoint of Socrates that has shaped Western philosophy, while Orunmila’s (and Pythagoras’) approach form a main stream of thought in African philosophy and can also be found in the philosophy of Ubuntu14. As a result, Western and African philosophy developed in different directions and therefore have different views on democracy, on our relationship with the earth and nature and our relationship as people together. In the concept of ‘Binary Complementarity’ and Ubuntu the other is seen as a necessary condition for my own existence as a human being, reflected in the idea of ‘universal brotherhood’. Oluwole does not mean to suggest that African philosophy is superior to Western philosophy. She sees the development of the idea of ‘Binary Complementarity’ as a specific contribution of African philosophy to world philosophy and sees a combination of Western and African philosophy as an important step for the development of a non-culturally biased world intellectual culture that promotes sustainable development. For challenges we are facing today, e.g. those related to climate, refugees and care, the African concept of Binary Complementarity offers a different perspective, which might be more suitable for sustainable welfare. A realisation of how humans are related to each other and to the earth, would lead to different ways of acting. The same counts for the realisation that man and woman, I and we, and body and mind are not opposed to each other, let alone related in a hierarchical way.

I will give an illustration of how the use of this example of ‘Binary Complementarity’ could be translated to academic education. A lecture could start explaining this concept, to research done in this field and to how this is related to different concepts in Western philosophy. This could be followed by inviting students to take part in a dialogue on related questions, like ‘what could the concept of ‘Binary Complementarity’ mean for our social system?’ E.g. in a guest lecture on African philosophy I asked groups of students from a diversity of backgrounds to work together on above question. A Belgian-Nigerian student shared his experience from Nigerian family gatherings in which

11 H. Kimmerle (2015), Interculturele filosofie, een studieboek, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant, p. 114
12 idem, p. 66
13 S. Oluwole (2014), Socrates and Orunmila, two patron saints of classic philosophy, Lagos: Ark Publishers p.132
14 M. Ramose (1999), African Philosophy through Ubuntu, Harare: Mond Book
they talk till they agree. If one person has a problem, this is seen as a problem of the group. The students discussed how this different worldview of people being mutually connected could be incorporated in problem solving processes in Belgian communities. The method of dialogue was used with the students to relate what is taught to their own experience and reflect on this together.

2 DIALOGUE AS METHOD FOR CROSSING DIVIDES

In the first chapter I have argued why crossing philosophical divides between philosophies of different cultures is important in education. It will lead to an educational environment in which students feel they are included and belong to the community, it contributes to a more democratic attitude in which differences are valued and it enriches our understanding and our ability to deal with complex questions. To counteract a movement of polarisation, separating ‘them’ and ‘us’, which is used by populist political parties, awareness is required that we are all related. The same counts for teachers and students and students among each other. They will need to collaborate and investigate together how to deal with certain questions. This requires the classroom to be a place where an attitude of respect, accepting others and being open for dialogue is encouraged, a space where not only voices of other philosophical traditions are heard, but also where is revealed what has been denied in the periphery of one’s own thinking.15

The method of dialogue is one of the main methods to cross these philosophical divides. Javier Rodriguez, a student of both Krishnamurti’s teachings and of David Bohm’s dialogical approach, argues that

‘our thinking is generally a conditioned system whose unexamined foundations and conditioned identifications can lead to dangerous states of sustained incoherence. If we do not question the premises on which our scientific disciplines are based, we might get caught up in our own paradoxical thinking. Dialogue is exactly where the fluent movement between inner and outer can take place. It undermines the separation between individual and society as they are seen as complementary aspects of a single process’.16

2.1 Dialogue as a method for intercultural philosophy

In Filosofie van het verstaan (Philosophy of Understanding) Heinz Kimmerle explains that the process of intercultural philosophical understanding starts with listening. If one wants to understand the philosophy of another culture, listening is even more important. The methodology of listening that one must apply, means that one is not only precise and observant, but also needs to listen repeatedly to what they - in his case his African colleagues - say or write. What one thinks to have understood must be placed carefully and provisionally within one’s own horizon of understanding. In this way the confrontation with ideas of philosophers from another culture enriches one’s own thinking. New dimensions are added, both with regards to the content as with regards to the method of philosophizing. Besides, one could become aware of opinions of others also being present in one’s own thinking at a more unconscious level and in one’s own history as forgotten or repressed aspects. In this way, understanding the other leads to a better and deeper understanding of oneself.17

Kimmerle distinguishes three phases in the process of intercultural understanding. Intercultural philosophical understanding starts with becoming aware of judgments about philosophies of other

---

16 J. Rodriguez (2007), Knowledge and dialogue in education, in: Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools, nr. 11 p.4
17 H. Kimmerle and R. Schepen (2014), Filosofie van het verstaan, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant p.31 and 32
cultures. These often appear to be negative pre-judices. As argued before the Eurocentricm of the European-Western philosophy since Enlightenment leads to the thought that ‘real’ philosophy is Western Philosophy. As a preparatory step it is required to critically look at these kind of pre-judices. Furthermore to learn philosophies of other cultures it is needed to open up to them and enter in dialogue. I agree with Kimmerle that philosophies of all cultures should be treated as equal. With this I refer to equality on the philosophical level, it does not mean that ideas from another philosophical system should be uncritically adopted. The Western philosophical tradition is also characterised by continuously reflecting and criticising previous philosophies, within its own tradition. In the first stage of intercultural philosophy it is required to articulate pre-judices by explicating what is known already about another culture that one would like to dialogue with. In the second stage texts and documents from that culture and about the culture whose philosophy one wants to understand need to be studied and one needs to stay for longer periods in the other culture and have dialogues with local philosophers. The dialogues involve that what is ‘other’ is continuously related to one’s ‘own’. The dialogues can also take place and continue in one’s own environment as long as one is able to invite foreign colleagues.\textsuperscript{18} Even though our culture is hybrid in itself and one can learn from other cultures, by simply being open for this aspect, I do agree with Kimmerle that the experience of being immersed in another culture is indispensable. Multi-sensory exchange and experience forms an important part of the dialogue as well as understanding the context in which ideas were developed. One cannot understand philosophies of another culture only by studying theory. Dialogue is a necessary component. The third stage is ‘returning to one’s own, which is not a closing movement, but a provisionally balance of what has been achieved in the movement of dialogue in the second stage. This leads to a different perspective on familiar subjects of one’s own history.\textsuperscript{19}

It does not mean that intercultural philosophy can only be included in the curriculum if students have the chance to go abroad and meet dialogue partners of the respective cultures themselves, but it does mean that teachers and professors teaching intercultural philosophy have participated in intercultural dialogues themselves and/or do have a background in the respective culture. Crossing philosophical divides in education also requires to critically look at who is teaching the students and how we enable for diversity among teachers and professors. This does not only imply in cultural background, but also in gender diversity.\textsuperscript{20} As the dialogue takes place between teachers, between students and between teachers and students a diversity of cultures among the students is an additional advantage.

\textbf{2.2 Restrictions of Dialogue}

In every form of dialogue, but especially in intercultural dialogue, multi-sensory experiences is essential. Often all participants don’t share the same native language and dialogues take place in different forms in different cultures. The form of the dialogue itself should be open to reflect upon, to transform and to remain inclusive.

Irigaray makes a plea for including silences in the dialogue, as in no dialogue everything can be said. According to her the first word we have to speak is the capacity of being silent.

\textsuperscript{18} idem, p. 35-36
\textsuperscript{19} idem p. 36
\textsuperscript{20} ‘There is a serious gender problem in philosophy in the Netherlands. In the 11 departments of philosophy the numbers of permanent staff members are roughly the following: assistant professors: 110, of which 25 are women; associate professors: 45, of which 5 are women; full professors: 65, of which 7 are women (I have not included part-time professors; this data is based on the websites of the departments)’ in blog by Anthonie Meijers, Gender and Philosophy in The Netherlands, \url{http://www.newappsblog.com/2013/12/gender-and-philosophy-in-the-netherlands-guest-post.html}
'The renunciation of speaking according to a discourse that we know in advance is a word of welcome to the one who comes to us from beyond the horizon that has been opened, but also closed, by our language. It is a welcoming to another world, to another manner of speaking and saying than the one we know.'

In education the awareness of all these different elements and the realisation, that the dialogue is more than words is important. It includes spatio-temporal proximity and sensual perception - the rhythm and sound of the words - and touch.

However, one should not be overly optimistic about direct social and political outcomes as results of the method of dialogue. Dialogue can create a deeper consciousness and understanding about issues that we’re confronted with while living together with different cultures. Sometimes dialogue is seen as a tool to revert to when there is a problem between different groups op population and if it doesn’t lead to solving the issue at hand, the method of dialogue itself is deemed to be ineffective. These dialogues start when there is little trust between participants, which requires much more effort. On the other hand, dialogue also has an effect not easily measured, which is the prevention of these conflicts. By creating a dialogical attitude in our society, people will feel more inclined to look for mutual understanding and accepting of difference. Schools are excellent places for practicing this dialogical attitude.

3 DOTTED LINES AND THE ‘IN BETWEEN’

Opening up space for other philosophical traditions in education requires a different way of educating. Awareness that intercultural philosophy changes the concept of philosophy in itself is needed. Philosopher and quantum physicist David Bohm argues that we often confuse solid and dotted lines and that this fragmentation in our thoughts will lead to even more confusion as solid lines give the impression that things are divided, whereas they are actually connected. I suggest that we need to acknowledge that in the field of education of philosophy many of the divides, are actually also dotted lines. Furthermore, they are even fluid and changing continuously in time and in different contexts. To cross philosophical divides and to make space for philosophies that are outside of the mainstream academic discourse, like philosophies from other cultures and feminist philosophies, inclusion of other forms of knowledge and different ways of learning and educating are required. Space should be created for intuition, oral tradition, the interdisciplinary, creativity and embodied learning. This should be taught to the student as well as being embodied by the teachers.

Exploring the space between different philosophical traditions and disciplines diminishes the chance of certain philosophers and philosophies falling through the cracks, because they don’t fit in any of the current categories.

3.1 Origins of Philosophical Divides in Education

In antiquity philosophical thinking benefited from intercultural exchange, but the Enlightenment is characterised by a strong Eurocentric discourse. The Greek and therefore European-Western origin

---

21 L. Irigaray (2008), Sharing the World, London/New York: Continuum, p. 18
22 idem, p. 12
23 H. Kimmerle en R. Schepen (2014), Filosofie van het verstaan, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant, p.131
24 H. Kimmerle (2015), Interculturele filosofie, een studieboek, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant, p. 35
25 D. Bohm (1992), Thought as a System, New York: Routledge, p. 72
of philosophy has roots both in Egyptian science and mysteries and in the hermetic wisdom of the Near East. Philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato travelled to Egypt to learn about its scientific and religious ideas. But during the Enlightenment European culture starts to be seen more and more as the highest stage of historical development of the whole earth. Hegel’s idea of a cohesive philosophical tradition from Thales to his days being purely European cannot stand. However, his line of thinking kept influencing philosophers like Heidegger and Rorty. This is illustrated by Heidegger’s statement that European philosophy is a pleonasm, since Europe is philosophical and philosophy is European. Likewise Rorty states that no other indigenous tradition has developed a similar philosophical system like Western thought.

The influence of the Enlightenment is ever-present in education systems across the world. Students and teachers are often confronted with the underlying assumptions of Enlightenment in existing curricula that mirror what has been denied, ignored, or deleted in Enlightenment for various-reasons of its time. The economic and political colonization of large parts of the world by European countries was one such reason, and crossing cultural and philosophical divides would reveal how certain aspects in European philosophical traditions have also been denied. This awareness could stimulate tolerance and empathy, much needed for the process of crossing divides in students’ everyday lives.

3.2 Crossing philosophical divides through different styles and forms

Feminist philosopher Rossi Braidotti turns philosophy into a creative practice. She characterises feminist nomadic thinking by the fact that content and style cannot be separated. She investigates how new systems of thought can come into being and questions whether creativity might be more suitable than rationality and mythos might be more suitable than logos. The nomadic style she uses is interdisciplinary and crosses the divides that usually separate disciplines from each other. It is a fluid movement in which a continuous effort is made to create relations in a different way. This opens space for discontinuity in our thinking or for inner conflicts, which are seen as signs of development of thinking. ‘Nomadic thinking’ is creation of knowledge by connecting things that seemed to be incoherent at first glance. This form of epistemological nomadism can only take place in-between zones and is characterized by inter-disciplinarity and not sticking to the hierarchical order in which knowledge is traditionally organized.

Professor of Education Ken Robinson argues that in education creativity is as important nowadays as literacy and we should treat it with the same status. He is pointing out how

‘every education system around the world has the same hierarchy of subjects, at the top are mathematics and languages, then the humanities and at the bottom are the arts and often within the arts there is a hierarchy as well, in which art and music are normally given a higher status than drama and dance’.

Even though this hierarchy can be found in most education systems around the world, this does not reflect many non-Western philosophical traditions in which disciplines cannot be as strictly divided

26 H. Kimmerle (2015), Interculturele filosofie, een studieboek, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant, p. 42
27 idem, p. 39-41
29 S. Oluwole (2014), Socrates and Orunmila, two patron saints of classic philosophy, Lagos: Ark Publishers, p. 161
31 idem, p. 56-57
and art, bodily practices and ethics form an integral part of the philosophical tradition. Robinson refers to our educational system as a system, which was developed in the 19th century to prepare a workforce during an age of industrialization. Furthermore, according to him, the education system has been designed in the image of the universities, which means that creativity is not valued. Why not bring creativity beyond primary and secondary education into our academic curriculum as well? The discipline of intercultural philosophy would be very suited for this as many of the non-western philosophies come in different forms.

So do feminist philosophies. A feminist nomadic style is characterized by mixing different styles of speaking and writing and a possibility to mix the theoretical with lyrical or poetical language. In feminist nomadic philosophy thinking is not exclusively theoretical, but is also seen as a way of being and therefore the thinking should not be separated from somebody’s creative power.

In order to cross philosophical divides, besides the use of creativity, the discipline of philosophy could also be transformed to include oral traditions and intuition. The Kenian philosopher Henry Odera Oruka, whose father was a traditional sage, presents Sage philosophy as original oral philosophy rooted in African traditions. The sage philosopher is aware of this knowledge and at the same time able to distance himself from the ideological aspects. In Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy. Obstacles in Philosophical Dialogues Oruka determines intuition as the starting point for any type of philosophical practice. According to Odera Oruka ‘Intuition is a truth of Wisdom and wisdom is, so far, wisdom of the sensible world.’ He considers intuition a cultural universal and the starting point for all philosophy. With this he highlights an element for a general concept of thinking that has been put at the periphery in the history of western philosophy. In this way the tradition of the Sage-philosophers can encourage critical reflection on our own way of thinking. Oruka places oral philosophy within a broader cultural reference including mythologies, practices, beliefs and values of the people, that are expressed in spoken language. Cameroon philosopher Jacob Emmanuel Mabe endorses the Sage-philosophy project by Odera Oruka and the importance of acknowledging African philosophical knowledge. He sees mediation/intuition and initiation as characterizing oral African Philosophy.

Nigerian philosopher Sophie Oluwole shows in her book Philosophy and Oral Tradition that oral tradition can also be rational and critical. She makes a plea to accept oral tradition within the field of academic philosophy and shows how the perceived dichotomy between oral and written texts creates a hierarchy in which written texts are considered superior to oral tradition and non-literate cultures are considered less-developed. In her book she refers to ancient Africans whose thoughts have been transmitted from generation to generation through the medium of oral tradition and whose thoughts were rational and critical.

3.3 Crossing philosophical divides by embodied learning: theory and practice
In a western Binary Oppositional way of thinking, theory and practice are seen as opposed to each

34 H. Haenen (2012), Sage filosofie, Antwerpen/ Apeldoorn: Garant, p.62
35 Idem, p. 61-62
36 J.E. Mabe (2005), Mundliche und schriftliche Formen philosophischen Denkens in Afrika, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang
37 Idem, p.359-385
other. Policy makers often consider theoretical studies to be to far away from practice.\(^{39}\) At the same time academic researches complain that they need to prove the practical use of their studies and/or are forced to back up their studies with empirical research. Looking from the perspective of Binary Complementarity it would be noticed that practice and theory are complementary. They are two paths that continuously influence each other. Even now while being engaged in the reflective intellectual work of writing this paper, it influences my practice directly. Realising that in African culture knowledge is not limited to an academic environment, but could come from nature as well as from an unexpected encounter and conversation, in my practice I become much more open to these sources. An unexpected encounter is no longer seen as a distraction from my goal, but incorporated in my theoretical reflection. I do realise that taking a refreshing walk, meditating or a burst of laughter with fellow students will influence me and therefore also my philosophical reflection. Then, also it is no longer about the amount of books we have read and our ability to reproduce texts, but about the impact on our lives and practice that could be realised by the texts we read, which might be even just one paragraph.

In non-Western philosophical traditions, like the Indian or African philosophies, practice forms an integral part of philosophy. According to Luce Irigaray the lack of personal experience with yoga or other spiritual practices is the reason why Western philosophers who have tried to address Hindu and Buddhist teachings—particularly Schopenhauer—have gone astray.\(^{40}\) But it’s not only Indian and African philosophies which relate theory to practice. The Italian medieval philosopher Bonaventura states how the acquisition of truth is conditioned not only by an inserted capacity, but also by attitude, focus and virtuousness.\(^{41}\) In the long-standing practice of the lectio divina in the Middle Ages reading philosophical texts was combined with a meditative practice in order for the texts to have a transformative effect.\(^{42}\)

Turning inwards through meditation, bodily practices or dialogue is crucial to understand many of the philosophies, which are outside the mainstream Enlightenment philosophical tradition. Crossing the divide between inner and outer world makes one aware that also this is in fact a dotted line, just like Descartes divide between mind and body is. If we really want to cross divides in education the discipline of philosophy needs to transform, not into a new fixed paradigm, but into a discipline open to continuous transformation and reflection on the concept of philosophy itself. This would include non-rational and non-textual elements and highlights that context and bodily experiences influence how we teach and learn. It thereby opens up space to include creativity, intuition and the embodied experiences of students and teachers. Most of this happens in between those dotted lines, wherein different forms of obtaining wisdom are open to the creativity of interaction between people and disciplines, and where bodies can be incorporated in the learning process. In this way classrooms could become spaces of recognition, spaces of difference, encounter and collaboration. Societies could become so as well.

---


\(^{41}\) S.Metselaar (2015), God as First Known, the common Ground of Philosophy and Theology in Bonaventura’s Thought, Amsterdm: Vrije Universiteit, p.230

\(^{42}\) idem, p. 225