

# 4 Recentring Africa in the Study of Ancient Philosophy

## The Legacy of Ancient Egyptian Philosophy

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### **Introduction: Tracing the Historical Beginnings of Philosophy<sup>1</sup>**

As Plato (2000), in his *Theaetetus*, 155c–d (trans. by T. Griffith) points out that philosophy begins in wonder – and this is how the story of philosophy’s origins is usually told. As such, it becomes easy to see the relationship, right from the time of the pre-Socratics, between myth and critical thinking.<sup>2</sup> Perplexity<sup>3</sup> births the quest for truth, and a puzzled mind follows unprejudiced paths leading away from the trap of ignorance. As Aristotle (Metaph. 982b, 11–19, transl. by A. E. Taylor) says,

That philosophy is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize . . . And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders).

For the purposes of our discussion, therefore, philosophy can be defined as the use of the *human reason* to interrogate the categories of being, and the perplexities of human experience, in order to find *meaning* to life, offer *direction* and provide viable *goals* for human activities. From these, it is easy to identify the formal and material objects of philosophy as human rationality, and the production of value, respectively (Anakwue, 2017). The philosopher applies the basic tools of human reasoning on the basic raw material of philosophy, which Okere calls *philosopheme*, to create value for their own (the philosopher’s) personal and social life (Osuagwu, 2005).

Philosophy is generally applied to non-philosophy, which represents areas of experience outside of philosophy itself. Culture represents an aspect of this non-philosophy, serving as fodder for the development of philosophical thought. Culture is, according to Otite and Ogionwo (1979, 44), “the way of life of a people and the acquisition over time of knowledge of one’s proximate world, either subjectively or objectively, intrinsically or extrinsically”. Culture becomes the background, basis, preoccupation and inspiration of the mission of the philosopher (Osuagwu, 2005). Okere’s concept of a *philosophy of non-philosophy*, consequently, comes to greater light, for “philosophy has an essential and positive relation to non-philosophy”

(Deleuze, 1990, 139–140) and it is through creative engagement with the latter that philosophy emerges and thrives (Osuagwu, 2005, 49). This is critical to understanding how philosophy emerges from Africa’s rich cultural history. But it is from this basis that Eurocentric scholars had decidedly denied that Africa had any history or culture.

In Hegel’s damning pronouncement, Africa was of “no historical part of the world”, with “no movement or development to exhibit” (Hegel, 1956, 92): Africa was not to be credited with rationality, culture or philosophy. As Nkemjika Chimée (2018) argues, the periodisation of African history is markedly influenced by European timelines and periodisation scales, especially of colonial scholarship that held Africa as bereft of culture. This is reflective of the verdict on Africa, of the Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, who had declared to an audience on the BBC in 1965, “Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But, at present, there is none: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness . . . and darkness is not a subject for history”. The striking pretentiousness of this declaration is easily evident in the fact that just a year prior, in 1964, the UNESCO had published its General History of Africa.

Contrary to these spurious assertions, Africa is – of course – home to a rich embodiment of cultures, and a remarkable cultural history – and it also has a huge and often unacknowledged role in the history of philosophy. This is so, in spite of the general unwritten preservation and transmission of African cultures, and the verdict on its authenticity because of a dearth of written records. African cultures celebrate a depth of appreciation of the human experience, and the use of proverbs, dance, folklore, etc. in expressing a profound understanding of reality. Through culture, *epistémê* is harnessed and transformed into *technê*. One of these rich cultural histories in Africa is seen in Egypt. Egypt is home to a rich history and culture that dates back over thousands of years. However, it is the argument of this chapter that what existed in ancient Egypt was not simply *philosopheme*, or the cultural bases upon which philosophising took off, but profound systems of philosophy that many philosophical schools came to absorb. Ancient Egypt was the seat and cradle of deep cultural and philosophical traditions, with its elaborate mystery system. The mystery system represented a religious system and secret order, of which membership was by initiation and a pledge to secrecy. Its members were introduced to deep philosophical training, from which the Greeks adopted much of their philosophical tempers. As the ancient Greek rhetorician Isocrates attests to, in his *Busiris 11–22*, “Egyptians are the healthiest and most long of life among men; and then for the soul, they introduced philosophy’s training, a pursuit which has the power, not only to establish laws, but also to investigate the nature of the universe”.

It is, nonetheless, the case that the pedagogy and study of ancient philosophy has obdurately ignored the salient philosophical contributions of ancient Egypt in its own right, as well as the essential role of ancient Egyptian philosophy and culture in the emergence and sustenance of Greek philosophy. In lieu of this, Greek philosophy is credited with a “compulsive originality” (Copleston, 1962, 11) that denies the philosophical merit of the influence that individual ancient Greek philosophers drew from the mystery school of ancient Egypt. As Copleston goes one

to assert, quoting Burnet (11), “we [classicists] are far more likely to underrate the originality of the Greeks than to exaggerate it” (Copleston, 1962). These points show the early biases that philosophers like Copleston had towards the appreciation of Egyptian philosophy.

And so, with this denial of non-Greek philosophical influence, and ancient Egypt, the study of ancient philosophy has been restricted to early Greek philosophy, with a focus on the pre-Socratics, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and the various ancient schools of philosophy whose texts are in Greek or Latin, such as the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Neoplatonists. More recently, this study has broadened to an interrogation of philosophical currents in the Byzantine and Muslim worlds<sup>4</sup> but has no place for early Egyptian philosophy and, by extension, African philosophy in its pedagogical schema, as well as in its disciplinary orientations. As such, texts on the history of philosophy and the history of ancient philosophy are silent about the place of ancient Egypt in the development of the philosophic current. In fact, only Copleston (1962) and Russell (1946) seem to mention the place of ancient Egypt in the scheme of things – albeit they derogate its place – in their histories of philosophy. In more recent times, Grayling (2019) makes mention of the place of Egypt, but chooses to exclude it geographically as an African nation. He further disputes the appellation of “African philosophy” to the thoughts and positions of some contemporary Africans, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, who had undertaken study of philosophy in Western countries. He avers that their positions and ideas can rather be qualified as political thought rather than philosophy. He discredits the possibility that there was any form of systematic written philosophy in Africa and passes a verdict of no confidence on the little pieces of historic scholarship by 17th-century Ethiopian philosopher Zara Yacob.

Copleston (1962, 27) sums up this bias against Egyptian thought and Africa:

We have represented early Greek philosophic thought as the ultimate product of the ancient Ionian civilization; but it must be remembered that Ionia forms, as it were, the meeting-place of West and East, so that the question may be raised whether or not Greek philosophy was due to Oriental influences, whether, for instance, it was borrowed from Babylon or Egypt. This view has been maintained, but has had to be abandoned. The Greek philosophers and writers know nothing of it – even Herodotus, who was so eager to run his pet theory as to the Egyptian origins of Greek religion and civilization – and the Oriental-origin theory is due mainly to Alexandrian writers, from who it was taken over by Christian apologists. The Egyptians of Hellenistic times, for instance, interpreted their myths according to the ideas of Greek philosophy, and then asserted that their myths were the origin of Greek philosophy. But this is simply an instance of allegorizing on the part of the Alexandrians: it has no more objective value than the Jewish notion that Plato drew his wisdom from the Old Testament. There would, of course, be difficulties in explaining *how* Egyptian thought could be transmitted to the Greeks (traders are not the sort of people we would expect to convey philosophic notions), but, as has been remarked by Burnet, it is practically waste of time to inquire

whether the philosophical ideas of this or that Eastern people could be communicated to the Greeks or not, unless we have first ascertained that the people in question really possessed a philosophy. That the Egyptians had a philosophy to communicate has never been shown, and it is out of the question to suppose that Greek philosophy came from India or from China.

From the aforesaid text, it is seen that the debate as to the place and contribution of Egyptian thought to Greek philosophy, and the origins of the philosophical enterprise has long existed. Consequently, Copleston attempts a dismissal of the debate on the basis of two counterarguments. Firstly, he makes the point of the *unwrittenness*<sup>5</sup> of ancient Egyptian philosophy, by stating that “Greek philosophers and writers know nothing of it” and that the argument that the Egyptians had “a philosophy to communicate has never been shown”. Secondly, he argues that even if Egypt had anything to communicate, it had *no philosophic value*, as it was mere allegorising, and also, it would be unexpected of “traders” to transmit philosophic thought (this view is highly classist). In this regard, it is easy to identify the distinctions that Kenny (2004) makes between *historical* and *philosophical* reasons for the study of the history of philosophy. In the first respect, the history of philosophy may be seen as an aggregate of opinions of dead philosophers of the past, in a bid to understand their schools of thought and the prevalent intellectual currents of the time or, in the latter point, as a means to illuminate the persisting challenges of our present age. As such, Copleston seems to weigh the worth of influence of ancient Egypt on the growth of philosophy, from these two angles. While arguing that, on philosophical grounds, the Egyptians had no philosophy to communicate, he further maintains that on historical grounds, that even if they had, this would not have been communicated because of his assumption that traders would be incapable of communicating it.

In the course of this chapter, I will show that these views are mistaken, by tracing the historicity of ancient Egyptian thought systems, as well as examining the philosophical value of these cultural systems of ancient Egypt. We will then discuss various independent philosophers in ancient Egypt and the philosophies that they were known for, before advocating a new pedagogical framework for the study of ancient philosophy that takes into due cognizance, the contributions of African philosophy.

### **Ancient Egypt: Cradle of Culture and Civilisation in Africa**

Egypt is located at the northern part of the continent of Africa. Because of the spread of Egypt across the Sinai strip, it is often argued that ancient Egypt was not part of Africa, though the concentration of Kemetic communities around the river Nile, which was situated in the African continent, shows that ancient Egypt was predominantly part of Africa (Amin, 2010).

Many Greeks came into Egypt for the purpose of enlightenment and in search of knowledge. One of such persons was Pythagoras, who, after receiving his training, left for Samos to establish his order. Thales, too, had long and protracted contacts

with Egypt, as well as the other Ionians, Anaximander and Anaximenes. Others of mention are Socrates, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno and Melissus, who were all natives of Ionia (James, 1954). The teaching of the Egyptian mysteries had spread far and wide within all the neighbouring areas of Egypt. These mysteries discussed metaphysical and ethical themes through books and the thoughts of independent thinkers like Ptah-hotep, Duauf, Amenhotep, Amenemope, Amenemhat, Akhenaten and a number of others (Asante, 2000).

This system encapsulated the wise teachings (*sebayit*) of the old sages. I had pointed in an earlier article on how the verb *rekh*, meaning “to know”, is represented by the image of a “mouth”, “placenta” or “papyrus rolled up, tied and sealed”, identified “a wise man” – a philosopher (Anakwue, 2017).

The word *rekh*et implies “knowledge” or “science” in the sense of “philosophy”. *Seba*, meaning “to teach”, implied a methodological process of imparting knowledge, and so, the wise man was said to teach (*seba*) in order to open the door (*seba*) to the mind of the pupil (*seba*) so as to bring light, as from a star (*seba*).<sup>6</sup> The wise man’s quest, therefore, was to lead ultimately to truth (*ma’at*) (Obenga, 2004, 35–40). *Ma’at* occupied a pride of place in the Egyptian mystery system and philosophy, “as it expresses the embodiment of perfect virtue” (Anakwue, 2017).

*Ma’at* is the feminine of *maa*. It was the light of truth that illuminated the darkness of ignorance. *Ma’at* represented transcendence to the divine, to the sacred and the universal that was beyond the limitations of particularity and individuality. It was the Egyptian denotation for “measure, harmony, canon, justice and truth; shared by the gods and humans alike” (Udažvinys, 2004, 302), so as to maintain cosmic order. *Ma’at* was reflected in the principle of justice, because it was the light of rightness, as against error, and the warmth of unity, against dissension. The *ma’at* represented the highest moral and positive law for the ancient Egyptians. Their lives were governed by the illumination of the principles of right conduct. Every pharaoh, consequently, was not merely politically or morally distinguished; he stood as a true/real (*maa*) king, a divine leader and a spiritual king, using the divine principles of the *ma’at* to govern his empire (Obenga, 2004, 46–48). Philosophically, this is easily linked to Aristotle’s four virtues – prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude – representing the cornerstone of moral philosophy (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book II, Chapter 6).

The concept of existence in the Egyptian mystery system is also worthy of note. The verb “to exist” was designated by the term *wmn* (“unen”), written with the hieroglyph of the desert hare. This pictorial description of speed and agility, in the long-eared hare, characterises “being” as a capacity for movement.

Non-being, therefore, in Egyptian parlance, was static. As I have previously argued, therefore, this notion of “being” offers clarity to the concept of “existence”, with the material sun (*Re*), at the centre, ordering all things (Anakwue, 2017). Life and existence were dependent on the sun god Amun-*Re* (Baker and Baker, 2001). Egyptian kings were seen as the earthly embodiment of the sun god. The dichotomy existing between the concepts of “chaos” and “cosmos” as extremely antithetical concepts is dispelled; for the Egyptian mind has no concept of chaos; in the beginning, *Re* emerges from the primordial waters, by his own energy, to



Figure 4.1 A hieroglyph showing a long-eared desert hare, used to represent the verb “to be”.

Source: “Nice hare” by Karen Green ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flickr\\_-\\_schmuela\\_-\\_nice\\_hare.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flickr_-_schmuela_-_nice_hare.jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0).

initiate the creation of the world (Obenga, 2004, 33–42). The Book of the Dead was a book of intellectual engagement with metaphysical realities, teaching the philosopher how to pass through the trials of initiation (Scott, 2016).

In ancient Egypt, as well, there was a visible respect for ethical values, using the principles of *ma’at* which ensured not merely cosmic order, but likewise, moral order. These principles were outlined in the 42 laws of *ma’at*, which are written as a parallel to the 42 negative confessions. An autobiography of an official by name, Nefer-seshem-re from the Fifth Dynasty, paints an image of this in the *negative confession* of the Papyrus of Ani (Budge, 1967, 121–129):

I have left my city, I have come down from my province,  
Having done what is right (*ma’at*) for its lord, having satisfied him with that  
which he loves,  
I spoke *ma’at* and I did *ma’at*, I spoke well and I reported well . . .  
I rescued the weak from the hand of one stronger than he when I was able;  
I gave bread to the hungry, clothing [to the naked], a landing for the boatless.  
I buried him who had no son,

I made a boat for him who had no boat,  
I respected my father, I pleased my mother,  
I nurtured their children.

*Isfet* translated as “wrongdoing” was the most common opposite value of *ma’at*. Another was *grg*, which meant “lie” as against “truth”. In chapter 126 of the Book of the Dead (transl. by E. A. Wallis Budge), the four apes who sit in the bows of the boat of Re are the ones “who make the right and truth (*ma’at*) of Neb-er-teher to advance . . . who feed upon right and truth (*ma’at*), who are without falsehood (*grg*), and who abominate wickedness (*isfet*); [the deceased asks] Destroy ye the evil (*dwt*) which is in me, do away with mine iniquity (*isfet*)”. By keeping to the divine principles of right and truth, therefore, the Egyptians believed that it was possible to live freely of sin (*isfet*). However, as the mystery system was a preparation for death, in the same way as a guide to living, the deceased were expected to use the coins of a good life here to pay for entry into the other life. Ptah-hotep of Memphis was a renowned ancient Egyptian thinker and moral philosopher. He taught that one need not be conceited about knowledge or learning because art had no limits and the artist never reaches perfection (Scott, 2016). In his oeuvre *The Maxims of Good Discourse*, Ptah-hotep discusses instructions on the moral duties of persons. Ptah-hotep delineates action in line with the principles of *ma’at*. In his instructions, Ptah-hotep points to the *ma’at* as the guiding principle for the universe.

The practice of the principles of *Ma’at* was strengthened by the exercise of the virtues. The Egyptian mystery system teaches ten virtues of control of thought, control of action, steadfastness of purpose, identity with a spiritual life or the higher ideals, evidence of a mission in life, evidence of a call to spiritual orders, freedom from resentment when under the experience of persecution and wrong, confidence in the power of the master, confidence in one’s own ability to learn and readiness or preparedness of the Ancient Mysteries of Egypt.

(James, 1954).

Egypt also utilised systematic principles of logic, by developing a logical, inferential methodology of thought and analysis. They made use of logic as a tool of precision in constructing and developing their mathematics and presenting their thoughts (Obenga, 2004, 41). Gardiner (1937) emphasises the characteristics of passivity and logicity that the Egyptian language possessed, with the principle of diminishing progressions used in the hieroglyphs that were written.<sup>7</sup> Having proven the “facticity” and “writ-tenness” of the ancient Egyptian culture and thought systems, it becomes important to interrogate these alongside the disciplinary requirements of philosophy, following Copleston’s verdicts against the influence and philosophical worth of ancient Egypt.

### **Valuing the Egyptian Mystery System as Philosophy**

The discipline and practice of philosophy during the ancient times was not as defined and distinct as it is today. Pythagoras is generally credited with the origin

of the term *philosophia*, meaning “love of wisdom”. Asante (2004) makes the argument that the origins of the composite parts of the word *philosophia* come from Medu Neter, the ancient Kemetic language of Egypt. He alleges that the word *seba*, meaning “the wise”, which appeared on the tomb of Antef I, in 2052 BC, was an etymological root of the Greek suffix *onclu*. Philosophy, consequently, in modern times has separated itself from other disciplines and has achieved a significant structure of formality, with regards to its practice. In spite of this, the study of the history of philosophy tends to utilise the modern prisms of understanding of philosophy, in tracing the origins of philosophical thought and practice. This bias transposes a modern hermeneutic over an ancient historical period. This, in itself, constitutes an anachronistic fallacy. As S.H. Nasr opines, with respect to this:

The perspective within which the origin of modern philosophy is conceived and the choice of which philosophers to include and which to exclude in the account of the history of philosophy all reflect a particular “ideology” and conception of philosophy and are related to modern man’s view of himself.

(Nasr, 1964, 185)

It becomes important, therefore, that in evaluating the philosophical worth of the mystery systems of ancient Egypt, and the independent thinkers of the time, proper attention is paid towards situating the argument within the right historical and hermeneutical contexts. In so doing, we can eliminate disparity in contexts from our consideration of issues. And so, on the first basis, to identify the distinct emergence of philosophy, as a paradigmatic movement from mythical thought systems (*mythos*) to rational thought (*logos*), in Ionia, Greece, is flawed. This is because, firstly, philosophy was not easily distinguishable from religion and cultural myth in the ancient world. In fact, Udažvynys (2004, 300) relevantly submits that historians and teachers of philosophy choose to ignore the true implications of the Greek word *logos* as “speech” (the demiurgic word of *Re*, made as operative wisdom by Thoth, in Egyptian theological lingo), in their bogus interpretation of *logos* as *dianoia* (discursive reasoning). This served as a springboard for the spurious argument of Thales’ novel shift from myth to *logos*. On the contrary, philosophy, as Udažvynys (2004, 308) goes ahead to attest strongly,

is a prolongation, modification, and “modernization” of the ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern sapiential ways of life; *philosophia* cannot be reduced to philosophical discourse; for Aristotle, metaphysics is *prote philosophia*, or *theologike*, but philosophy as *theoria* means dedication to the *bios theoretikos*, the life of contemplation – thus the philosophical life means participation in the divine and the actualization of the divine in the human through personal *askesis* and inner transformation; Plato defines philosophy as a training for death.

In fact, Broadie and Macdonald (1978) opine that Greek thinkers got the idea of *logos* from the writings of Philo, who in turn, adapted from the Egyptian concept of



*ma'at*. This refers to the mind of God, a subsidiary to God, who is the ultimate principle of life and, likewise, similar to Plato's world of forms in being immaterial. The term *logos*, therefore, is similar to *ma'at*. *Ma'at* was a "god-conceived" principle or power of cosmic order. *Ma'at* like Philo's *logos* was the principle through which God or the representative of the gods governed the cosmos.

As such, there exist strong similarities between the Egyptian mystery system and the notion of ancient Greek philosophy because philosophy, for the ancient Greeks, meant the combination of wisdom and love in some form of moral and intellectual purification to reach the "likeness of God", which was attainable through knowledge (*gnosis*) (Udažvinys, 2004). So when Plato and Aristotle trace the origin of philosophy to wonder, what they really imply is "the contemplation (*theoria*) of the manifested cosmic order, or of the truth and beauty of the divine principles" (Udažvinys, 2004, xvii). Following the formal and material object requirements of philosophy, as outlined at the start of our discussion, philosophy for the ancients entailed the application of reason, through the guidance of the divine principles (*ma'at* or *logos*) to the understanding of nature and the world around us. The ancient Egyptians were able to accomplish these through elaborate systems of thinking in metaphysics, ethics and logic. These fulfilled requirements help us to better identify the origins of philosophy with the marvel of Egyptian thought systems.

As James (1954) points out, the Ionians never made any attempt to claim the origins of philosophy, for they knew who the true authors were. As such, the Greeks persecuted the philosophers of ancient Greece, because these systems of thought were alien to them, and contained strange ideas of which they were unacquainted (James, 1954). This is evident in the martyrdom of Socrates, as is narrated by Plato in the *Phaedo*. It is only later that these philosophical systems are adopted and adapted to herald the Greek genius. As such, the Greeks knew that the Egyptians were philosophers, however, this had become subsequently misrepresented by modern European scholars under the bias of Greek (Eurocentric) superiority. The necessity, therefore, of giving due acknowledgement to ancient Egypt, and Africa, as pioneers of the philosophical enterprise, cannot be understated.

### **Justice Against African Epistemicide**

The idea of an African origin for ancient culture has been suggested before but had been strongly opposed by white classicists who had a rather vested interest in the idea of Greek primacy. Martin Bernal had argued in *Black Athena* (published from 1987 onwards) for this in three volumes that address deeply how Greek philosophy could be rooted in Egyptian philosophical origins. He spars significantly in the culture wars between Eurocentric disregard and Afroasiatic originality, calling into question two of the most-established explanations of the origins of classical philosophy and civilisation – the Aryan model and the ancient model. In the Aryan model, there is the argument that Greek culture emerged due to conquest from the north by Indo-European speakers or Aryans, while the ancient model argues that civilisation came to Greece by Egyptian and Phoenician colonists. Bernal proposes

a different revised ancient model that suggests that classical philosophy instead has had its origins in Afroasiatic cultures.

Mary Lefkowitz (1996), in a scathing rebuttal of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, disregards this entire mission as mere Afrocentrism. In an opening paragraph in her book, *Not Out of Africa*, Lefkowitz, says accusatorily,

In American universities today, not everyone knows what extreme Afrocentrists are doing in their classrooms. Or even if they do know, they choose not to ask questions. For many years, I had been as unwilling to get involved as anyone else. But then, when I learned what was going on in this special line of teaching, my questions about ancient history were not encouraged . . . ordinarily, if someone has a theory that involves a radical departure from what the experts have professed, he or she is expected to defend his or her position by providing evidence in its support. But no one seemed to think it was appropriate to ask for evidence from the instructors who claimed that the Greeks stole their philosophy from Egypt.

From this text, it is clear that Lefkowitz indicts the Afrocentrists of blind argumentation and lack of evidence to support outlandish claims. One must note that, in excess of zeal and emotivity, many proponents on both sides of the divide push forward prejudices and insecurities. As such, it is important that, in making one's case for the Africanity of Egypt, exaggeratory or hagiographical approaches should be avoided, as they are unscholarly and misleading. However, the attack of this entire claim, by prevailing Western scholars, majorly aims at ridicule without due consideration of the glaring evidence in its support. As Bernal (2001), in response to Lefkowitz and other Eurocentrists, says, the Afrocentrists are right in two regards: first, that seeing ancient Egypt as an African civilisation is useful to pedagogy and knowledge and, second, that Egypt played quite a central role in the development of ancient Greece. The ancient model, propounded by Bernal, however, that there was an Egyptian or Phoenician colonisation of Greece, remains to be proven true by archaeology and genetic studies. Consequently, many allude to factual and uncritical errors in Bernal's thesis. This, nonetheless, does not detract from the fact that ancient Egypt enjoys a cultural originality that is associated with Africa. Any attempt to ridicule this thesis would be epistemically unjust.

Fricker (2007) highlights two distinct forms of epistemic injustice, namely, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, of which, in our case, the latter form, which concerns our knowledge of the social world and history, is implicated.<sup>8</sup> By separating Egypt from its elaborate historical and cultural context, we become guilty of epistemicide. This is seen clearly in the attempt to reduce the philosophical value of philosophising in ancient Egypt based on modern canons of thought and choosing instead to characterise the historical beginnings of philosophising from the time of Greek civilisation.

Tshaka (2019) echoes this, along with Mudimbe's call for Africa to divest itself of the epistemological order of the West, by arguing relevantly for the Africanisation of curricula within our African citadels of learning, to eschew the injustices in existing knowledge of the history of Africa and the world. To better Africanise

the curricula, African universities and educational institutions should draw on the intellectual traditions, epistemologies and ways of knowing that are indigenous to Africa, rather than relying solely on Western paradigms, theories and methods. This approach involves incorporating African philosophies, languages and literatures into the curriculum, as well as engaging with local communities and learning from their experiences and knowledge systems. By foregrounding African perspectives and ways of knowing, the curricula would become more inclusive, diverse and relevant to the needs and aspirations of African societies.

This Africanisation of curricula would help to overcome the limitations of Western-centric education and enable African students to develop a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage, as well as the global history and diversity of knowledge. This approach would also contribute to the decolonisation of the curriculum, which involves critically examining the historical and social conditions that have shaped existing knowledge systems and identifying the ways in which they have perpetuated inequalities and injustices. This requires acknowledging the contributions of marginalised groups, including women, LGBTQ+ individuals and people of colour, and recognising the value of their perspectives and experiences.

The call for the Africanisation of curricula reflects a broader movement within academia and beyond to challenge the hegemony of Western knowledge and promote more inclusive and diverse forms of education. By engaging with and drawing on the rich and varied intellectual traditions of Africa, educational institutions can help to create a more just, equitable and sustainable future for all (Tshaka, 2019).

### **Recommendations: In Defence of Afrocentrism**

From our discussion, the importance and place of ancient Egypt, and Africa, in the philosophy of the ancients, comes to greater light and focus. Also, the travesty of excluding ancient Egypt from the pedagogy of ancient philosophy becomes even more obvious. This is because modern studies in ancient philosophy, both in universities and in research endeavours, particularly are solely biased towards studies in ancient Greek and Roman philosophies and, in broader contexts, the Byzantine and Muslim worlds (Daniels, 1998). This is particularly true in most departments of philosophy in universities on the African continent. Given that studies within these departments specifically utilise a great deal of the works of these Eurocentric scholars, these assumptions pass inadvertently, and these studies deny ancient Egypt, and Africa, of any philosophical worth of their ancient systems. Also, they invariably present a one-sided and insufficient study of ancient Greek and Roman systems, as these philosophical systems do not exist *in vacuo*, but are better seen and appreciated in the light of the mystery system of ancient Egypt. To avoid these problems, this chapter makes the following recommendations:

1. Recognition of the philosophical worth and influence of ancient Egypt, and Africa, should be infused into the pedagogy and study of ancient philosophy, discussing the *philosophemes* of ancient Egypt and their development into metaphysics, ethics and logic.

2. Courses in critical ancient philosophy can be developed to better enable the in-depth study of ancient African philosophy in universities and encourage curricula that critically investigate the various aspects of the ancient Egyptian mystery system, the *ma'at* and the various independent thinkers in ancient Egypt.
3. Greater research into these ancient philosophical systems in ancient Egypt should be funded and supported, to encourage scholarship around these interests and increase our knowledge about them.
4. Encyclopaedias of ancient philosophy should, likewise, reflect the place of ancient Egypt in the development and history of philosophy, or newer volumes of critical ancient philosophy should be developed, to address this pedagogical gap.
5. There should be appreciation and adoption of experiential knowledge from marginalised groups across the continent and beyond, and there should be focus on the development of thought, irrespective of social and cultural biases.

This chapter has investigated the philosophical worth of the mystery systems of ancient Egypt with a bid to establish the importance of ancient African philosophy in the study of ancient philosophy. Our investigations have proven that it is mistaken and limiting to deny the place of ancient Egypt in the development of philosophy and have tried to make recommendations as to a more improved curriculum for the pedagogy and study of ancient philosophy.

This chapter realises that with the renewed interest around Africa and the study of African thought systems, as well as the debate concerning reparations to Africa for the scandal of slave trade, it is important that Africa is re-enthroned as the cradle of philosophy, and the origin of the development of philosophical thinking. This would constitute a significant way of making amends for the Eurocentric biases and tropes that have been hurled at African originality, and the travesties that have stripped Africa of any modicum of rationality, culture and philosophy. Africa truly is the cradle of human civilisation, and, rightly so, the cradle of ancient philosophy. It is, therefore, the hope of this chapter that greater academic interest, scholarship and academic study around ancient Egyptian philosophy and ancient African philosophy emerge stronger and more defined around the world.

## Notes

- 1 And thus, the beginnings of philosophy – according to this story – came from the human being's search for profound answers to some of the recurring perplexities of life. Not content with dogma and traditions, the mind of the philosopher is apparently constantly interrogating the elements of reality, in a determined pursuit of *epistēmē* and the accomplishment of *technē* so as to better master our world and experience.
- 2 Kathryn A. Morgan in her book, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, discusses in detail how myth and philosophy are interrelated and how the relevance of philosophical thought emerged from the mythical stories of the time. Plato, in his *Meno 84c*, distinguishes “puzzlement” as the context of wonder for the philosopher from mere “curiosity”.
- 3 Plato, in his *Meno 84c*, distinguishes “puzzlement” as the context of wonder for the philosopher from mere “curiosity”.

- 4 Vryonis (1971), Arabatzis (2011).
- 5 African cultures were largely preserved and transmitted through oral traditions, art, songs and dance. However, in ancient Egypt, cultural forms were documented in hieroglyphic and hieratic language and symbols. In fact, writing was invented in Egypt and Mesopotamia, circa 4000 BC.
- 6 *Seba* is an old Egyptian symbol that represents the Duat, or realm of the dead. It is depicted as a five-point star, similar to a starfish. It is used to signify learning, gates and doorways, or the stars within a circle, representing afterlife (Rogador, 2021).
- 7 A good example of this is seen in the use of logical extensions of meaning, as is appropriately discussed by Fischer (1937) in his article *Further Evidence for the Logic of Ancient Egyptian: Diminishing Progression*. He demonstrates this using the term “be great” and “be small”, both of which may, on occasion, refer not only to size, but also to age or rank. Thus, *ld* can mean “be great in years” or “be old” and, hence, as a derived noun (presumably a participle), either “elder” or “potentate”. Similarly, *nds* means “be young” and, as a derived noun, “lowly person” and “commoner”.
- 8 See Lance in this book on Fricker.

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