

https://dspace.org/

Philosophy of education: Becoming less Western, more African?

Enslin, Penny; Horsthemke, Kai

2016

http://hdl.handle.net/10539/20643

Enslin, P., & Horsthemke, K. (2016). Philosophy of education: Becoming less Western, more African? Journal of Philosophy of Education, 50(2), 177-190. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12199

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Journal of Philosophy of Education
The Journal of Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain
pesgb

Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2016

Philosophy of Education: Becoming Less Western, More African?

PENNY ENSLIN AND KAI HORSTHEMKE

Posing the question 'How diverse is philosophy of education in the West?' this paper responds to two recent defences of African philosophy of education which endorse its communitarianism and oppose individualism in Western philosophy of education. After outlining Thaddeus Metz's argument that Western philosophy of education should become more African by being more communitarian, and Yusef Waghid's defence of communitarianism in African philosophy of education, we develop a qualified defence of aspects of individualism in education. Our reservations about some aspects of communitarianism lead us to argue for a role for some forms of individualism in African as well as Western education. Finally, reflecting on what is at stake in this kind of comparative philosophy of education, we argue that an over-emphasis on cultural differences can distract philosophers of education from the attention they should pay to the common dangers posed across continents by the influence of global capitalism on education.

1. THE VIEW FROM THE WEST

The fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) is an apt moment to take stock of the state of philosophy of education in Great Britain and in the wider world—both the West and globally. On the evidence of its Journal and its conference papers, the discipline as practiced in this Society enjoys greater diversity than it did in its early years in the heyday of analytic philosophy of education. Its members are now much more likely to be attuned to Continental philosophy, and so it is more broadly Western than it was 50 years ago. But what of its relationship with other, different 'philosophies' or approaches to philosophy of education not historically located in Britain, or the West (sometimes referred to as the 'North')? That relationship is, inevitably, complex and controversial—not least because philosophy of education will, like all intellectual endeavours, be implicated in the colonial and neo-colonial relationships that mark Western intellectuals' engagement with the global South.

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.
Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

In this paper our focus will be on philosophy of education in Africa, though some of the issues we will discuss would apply too to other parts of the world where philosophy of education is also a historical product of pre-colonial traditions, colonial imposition of Western models of schooling—itself an instrument of subjugation and government of the natives by Britain and other colonial powers—and latterly a combination of post-colonial resistance and neo-colonial policy borrowing. The very fact of post-colonial disparities in funding of schooling, higher education and research perpetuates deep inequities affecting the conditions under which Western and many African scholars are able to pursue the sort of debate we discuss here. To some extent these factors may account for the reduced representation of philosophical work on education that stems from outside the West, understood largely as Europe and North America, in spite of the greater pluralism that philosophy of education demonstrates now than it did when the PESGB was founded.

African philosophy of education, however, is well represented in the work of Thaddeus Metz and Yusef Waghid. While we do not assume common cause across the board in the work of these proponents of African philosophy of education, we select their treatment of an apparent central difference between Western and African philosophy of education as giving expression to a widely held view. In exploring this stance we set out to take stock of where an on-going debate has reached, ultimately posing the question of what is really at stake and what way forward there might be across key differences in clarifying a way ahead for a globally aware philosophy of education.

In recent work (Metz, 2015; Waghid, 2014) both Metz and Waghid describe and defend African philosophy of education.[1] Stated in summary form for the moment, Metz's critique of Western philosophy of education argues that 'the Western is individualist and the African is communitarian' and 'the West should become less Western' (Metz, 2015, pp. 1–2) by being less individualistic and more communitarian. Waghid's project is to argue for an African philosophy of education guided by communitarian, reasonable and culture-dependent action. In responding to both we focus in particular on the contrast they draw between Western individualism and African communitarianism. We begin (sections 2 and 3) with an account of the positions they take in favour of African communitarianism and against Western individualism. Our reconsideration of individualism (section 4) highlights critical opposition in Western philosophy of education to the forms of individualism rightly opposed by Metz and Waghid, as well as pointing out both a communitarian presence in Western philosophy of education and its generally critical opposition to many aspects of schooling as practiced in the West. Reservations about some aspects of African communtarianism lead us (section 5) to argue for a necessary role for some elements of the individualist tradition. Finally, asking what is at stake in this kind of comparative philosophy of education (section 6), we argue that an over-emphasis on cultural differences across continents distracts philosophers of education from the shared dangers of the influence of global capitalism on schooling.

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

2. THE WEST AS INDIVIDUALIST, THE AFRICAN AS COMMUNITARIAN

Metz appears to be advancing both an empirical argument, the conclusion of which constitutes the first premise of his overall argument, and a more normative argument, the conclusion of which constitutes the second premise of his overall argument, before he arrives at a normative conclusion.

The Empirical Argument

- Western philosophies of education are individualist.
- Sub-Saharan African philosophies of education are communitarian.
- Therefore, there is a noticeable contrast between philosophies of education typical in the West and in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Normative Argument

- There are attractive facets of sub-Saharan African communitarianism.
- On reflection, these facets outweigh the attractive facets of Western individualism.
- Therefore, communitarian rather than individualist facets should inform education.

The Overall Argument

- There is a noticeable contrast between philosophies of education typical in the West and in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Given their overriding attractiveness, communitarian rather than individualist facets should inform education.
- Therefore, education in the West and in societies influenced by the West should become less Western, in order to accommodate these facets.

Let us accept Metz's empirical conclusion, though we find its claims rather stark. Our doubts grow, as we will show, in considering his normative argument, and we disagree with his overall conclusion. While in the paper we discuss here much of his attention is focused on characterising the Western, we note that Metz here contrasts its thinly relational educational practices and philosophy of education to the rich sense of sociality characteristic of African society. On his account, drawing on some pre-colonial practices, African educational ends emphasise learning the community's customs, the acquisition of moral personhood, work-based learning as preparation for work that supports the community and its development, and dialogue. We accept the attribution, for the moment, of communitarianism to African philosophies of education, but not the associated claim of an absence of communitarian elements from Western philosophy of education. But we will argue that Metz's treatment of individualism as a recurrent tendency, a blind spot in Western philosophy of education, is too inclined to emphasise some particular brands of individualism and to ignore those that are both compatible with its communitarian strands and embedded in

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

debates about the aims, or what Metz calls the final ends, of education in Western philosophy of education.

Metz's description of individualism in Western educational thought and practice asserts that Euro-American theory is inclined to value qualities that are internal to persons, i.e. their rationality, autonomy, desires, pleasures and self-esteem—education that is focused on an individual person seeking self-realisation and who is located at a distance from other persons. In philosophy of education in the West and educational practice in the United Kingdom, in Europe and in North America, the ends of education refer to internal properties,

> such as her autonomy, rationality, intellectual virtues, self-development, self-esteem, pleasure, desires and work-related abilities. It is extraordinarily common to find Western normative theorists maintaining that the ultimate aim of education should be to enable the young to judge their traditions, to think critically, to freely pursue a conception of the good, to realise themselves and so on. Individual agency has become the name of the game (Metz, 2015, p. 4).

Metz claims that the individualistic ends of education in the West have characteristically been pursued in school buildings dedicated to this purpose by professional teachers who impart propositional knowledge that is inclined to be established by argumentation, through a curriculum that is both set and tending to focus on written texts. Assessment through testing aims to certify individuals for a market in which they can compete for jobs. As we will show in section 4 below, this characterisation does not match our reading of Western philosophy of education and its relationship to schooling practices in the West.

3. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: ON BEING HUMAN

In his new book, Waghid (2014) undertakes to defend 'an African philosophy of education guided by communitarian, reasonable and culture-dependent action' (p. 1), by drawing 'on a communitarian understanding of the notion of *ubuntu* (African humanness and interdependence)' (p. 2). He takes *ubuntu* to offer a medium not only for the enactment of African philosophy of education but also for its contribution 'towards achieving democratic justice on the African continent' (p. 2). The main argument of the book is that 'an African philosophy of education as a practice has three constitutive aspects: first, to be reasonable in one's articulations; second, to demonstrate moral maturity; and third, to be attuned to deliberation' (p. 5), i.e. to 'consensual' and 'deliberative dialogue' (pp. 9, 13).

The idea of African philosophising (e.g. about education) as a communitarian practice is widely shared (see Wiredu, 2004). Yet, Waghid wishes to reject an unfeasibly exclusive reading of African philosophy, Africanisation and African indigenous knowledge. 'What needs to be foregrounded is knowledge that harmonises the universal (say, what comes from Europe) and the particular (traditional thoughts and practices . . .)' (Waghid, 2014, p. 3). He is similarly careful to avoid any simplistic

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

contraposition of communitarianism and individualism, community and individual:

> African philosophy of education as a communitarian practice does not dismiss the individual per se. In other words, the favouring of community should not necessarily be understood as being at the expense of the individual. Rather, it invokes an understanding of education that considers an individual's aspirations and actions as constitutive, as an extension of the community, and not in conflict with the latter (p. 5).

Setting out to avoid any dualistic opposition between the individual and the community and insisting that African philosophy of education is not 'about renouncing the individual in favour of community' (p. 5), Waghid draws on the work of Michael Sandel (1982), Michael Walzer (1983) and Charles Taylor (e.g. 1991) as communitarian philosophers to develop his account of individualism, suggesting some complementarity between Western and African communitarianism. His critique focuses on 'the abstract, atomistic and individualist aspirations of people associated with parochial liberalist thought' (p. 22), by contrast with the emphasis on the social, relational, communal human self preferred by communitarians. In this vein, Waghid describes African philosophy of education as 'most favourably positioned to be attentive to communal human aspirations that allow space for the enactment of human freedom, autonomy and the cultivation of shared, common goods' (p. 22).

Waghid contrasts this African conception of the interactive, enriching, enduring and intrinsic relationship between the individual and the community (p. 45) with the atomic individual, sometimes associated with a narcissistic self as the darker side of individualism. By flattening and narrowing lives, this type of individualism leaves the self the poorer for being unconnected, less concerned with others. This disengaged self seeks self fulfilment and is 'primarily concerned with the right of individuals to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value for themselves' (Waghid, 2014, p. 47, citing Taylor, 1991, p. 14). Waghid illustrates this concern by reference to teachers who make their own interests their priority, imposing them on their students (Waghid, 2014, p. 48), as well as prioritising individual autonomy ahead of collectivism (p. 47).

To his criticisms of atomistic and narcissistic individualism Waghid adds a third category of individualism (drawing on Kymlicka, 1989): possessive individualism, which 'suggests that what people (individuals) want in life is to maximise their share of social resources and material goods, rather than promote the good of others or their own spiritual well-being' (Waghid, 2014, p. 47). For atomists, an individual's capacity for meaningful choice is self-sufficient outside of society and culture.

To the alleged atomistic, narcissistic and possessive individualism of the West, Waghid contrasts three constitutive aspects of African philosophy of education as a practice: reasonableness, moral maturity and deliberation. Each is given a communitarian interpretation, in association with his defence

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

of the notion of *ubuntu*, as African interdependence and humaneness, a humanistic concept that emphasises harmony, cooperation, care and respect (p. 2).

Waghid's approach to 'reasonableness', defining 'rational justifications' in terms of 'what people offer as reasons for their beliefs, practices and institutions' (p. 4), endorses Kwame Gyekye's view that 'African philosophical discourse is embedded in two interrelated processes: rational discourse and the application of a minimalist logic in ordinary conversations without being conversant with its formal rules' (Gyekye, 1997, p. 29; Waghid, 2014, p. 7; see also Waghid, 2014, p. 25ff.):

> An African philosophy of education is not concerned mainly with validity of the belief or story, but with the procedure according to which the story is narrated—with lucidity and argumentation that will present reasons for one's views. While these reasons might not always appeal to the understanding of those who listen, or listeners might contest the logic of the narrations, the existence and proliferation of these beliefs must be understood within the context of a particular life-world (Waghid, 2014, p. 7).

Like the other constitutive aspects of African philosophy of education, rationality receives a communitarian interpretation and is described as a critical response to problems in African society. For Gyekye, 'rationality is a culture-dependent concept' (Gyekye, 1997; Waghid, 2014, p. 7), so that rationality as understood in Western culture may not be applicable in Africa.[2]

Explaining the notion of moral maturity by drawing on Kwasi Wiredu's ideas (2004), Waghid refers to 'an educated person' as someone

> who has attained moral maturity and refinement . . . . Such a person has acquired the virtues of honesty, faithfulness and duty to, and empathy for the well-being of others *in her community*. This implies that an educated person has developed a sense of responsibility *towards her kin and community* (2014, p. 8; emphasis added).

Acquiring a sense of empathy, responsibility towards others in the community is a precondition for both personhood and for being an educated person. Moral maturity in African education, as a moral discourse in itself, also embraces sincerity, justice, moral sensitivity, responsibility and courage. These virtues, cultivated by an African philosophy of education, aim to empower communities towards educational development which can address the 'African predicament', ameliorating '. . . poverty, hunger, famine, unemployment, political oppression, civil wars, colonialism (imperialism) and economic exploitation . . . ' (Waghid, 2014, p. 8, citing Oladipo, 1992).

As the third constituent of the social practice of African philosophy of education, Waghid includes deliberation and 'consensual dialogue' (p. 9) as a significant if not essential component of African philosophy of education (see Wiredu, 2004, p. 21). In deliberation thus interpreted, Waghid emphasises listening respectfully to the other, however inarticulately they

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

may express themselves, or how apparently irrelevant or ill-informed their contribution might seem to the listener. In sub-Saharan Africa, consensus is commonly perceived as desirable, and dissensus as undesirable, both on epistemic and political grounds. In traditional African societies, debate characteristically continues until a compromise is attained and all participants agree with the outcome (Metz, 2007, p. 324).

4. INDIVIDUALISM RECONSIDERED

Both Metz and Waghid contrast the preferred communitarian character of African education with individualism, which Metz more explicitly associates with both philosophy of education and educational practice in the West. Their critique of individualism focuses fundamentally on the idea of the atomistic individual, critical and autonomous, detached from others, pursuing her own desires and pleasures—and on educational practices that set out to foster such an individual.

We will return to the topic of Western educational practice shortly, but need first to question this characterisation of Western philosophy of education. Whatever its collective failings might be, Western philosophy of education is at the very least much more varied in its preoccupations and opinions of the aims of education than this description suggests.[3] Taking writings in Britain alone as an example, while autonomy has featured prominently in extensive debates about aims of education, there is no shortage of those who have been sceptical about the idea that it should be viewed as an aim of education, let alone its sole aim. Even Robert Dearden's influential essay 'Autonomy and Education' (1972) tempers his defence of a Kantian notion of autonomy with important qualifications, including that autonomous choices are not made in isolation from others, and that supporting autonomy does not assume unbridled freedom to do whatever one likes. John White's work has defended autonomy interpreted in an enlarged sense, as moral autonomy that includes the good of others (1982). Richard Smith's scepticism about the usefulness of the idea of autonomy (1997) challenges a tendency to think about persons atomistically instead of in groups. But Smith is far from alone in this scepticism—and he expresses it from within Western philosophy of education. As further evidence of the vigorous debate in the West about the aims of education, in his essay 'Education without Aims?' Paul Standish (1999) is both struck by the preoccupation among philosophers of education with autonomy as an aim of education and also prompted to ask whether there must be aims. In doing so Standish is alert to the debasement of educational aims by concerns with 'accountability, quality assurance, objectives, performativity . . . ' (p. 49).

While some philosophers of education writing in the West would endorse a form of autonomy as one of the aims of education (and we note that on Waghid's account autonomy is allowed a role in association with common goods and communal aspirations), they would almost without exception share Standish's concern about the debasement of education by the influence of performativity on schooling, including higher education. In doing so their criticisms of education as practiced in the West and elsewhere have

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

much in common with Metz's concerns about pursuit of the ends of education through institutionalised schooling that aims at certifying persons to compete for jobs in the labour market, relying in doing so on assessment by testing.[4] Yet, although forms of testing of the kind Metz rightly opposes are increasingly corrupting of education globally, we would want to argue that some forms of assessment are less so, especially if formatively offered in ways that are less closely hitched to extrinsic ends like employability and if they are more individualistic, in the sense of being addressed to a person's own educational aspirations and regardless of extrinsic ends attached to them. For this reason alone, there are grounds for defending the supposedly Western idea of education for its own sake. In its worst institutional manifestations, schooling is counter-educational whether in Western or in African and other contexts of the global South. This has been prominently exposed by philosophers and sociologists of education in the West and elsewhere, who are neither apologists for dominant schooling practices nor normally influential enough to see their own ideas enacted in educational provision. If only philosophers of education enjoyed such influence!

The types of individualism opposed by Metz and Waghid in their defence of African education's more communitarian qualities represent a selection of some elements of the individualist tradition. But as a strand in modern Western thought, individualism comprises several tendencies, some at odds with one another (see Lukes, 1973). Some educationally indefensible expressions of individualism should be, and indeed have been, rejected by Western philosophers of education, but there are others which played a historically progressive role in eroding the often tyrannical, patriarchal authority of the monarchy, the church and the nobility. One of these, the notion of respect for persons, of human dignity and the worth of each individual human being as an end in herself, we would endorse as an underpinning for a defensible conception of education, universally, but also as common to most Western conceptions of education. Resting in part on this foundational idea is the widespread support for some form of autonomy as an aim of education, even if alternative terms like 'agency' are preferred and however autonomy might be qualified by insisting on locating the individual in relation to others, both ontologically and also by relating it to defences of moral and citizenship education. For Western philosophers of education learning is social, unavoidably interactive.

By contrast, like the possessive individualism rightly opposed by Waghid, the brand of individualism expressed in what Steven Lukes (1973) calls economic individualism has found little if any support among philosophers of education. Following its early defence by economists like Milton Friedman (1962), it finds its current expression in neo-liberal conceptions of the learner as both an investment and a customer who pursues her preferences by buying an education that will in turn enable her to take her place as a competitive individual working for private profit, thus playing her part in making the national economy more globally competitive than others. We note, however, in passing, that the employability policy imperative in Western schooling, though subject to strong critique by philosophers of education, looks rather like one of the features of African philosophy of

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

education, i.e. preparation for work (see, for example, Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003, pp. 431–433).

Relatedly, political individualism would cast the individual citizen as expressing her preferences by voting periodically, on the assumption that the aggregated preferences of all such choosers is a rational way to select leaders, whose performance would then be assessed by the electorate, who periodically choose like customers whether to retain those they have elected, or to replace them with a new set of rulers. Philosophers of education writing about citizenship education do not favour such a conception of the citizen, and have given much attention to the fostering of citizenship as disposed to the common good.

The citizen as autonomous individual would, for some philosophers of education, engage in a further form of individualism that Metz regards as favoured by the practices and philosophies of education in the West, i.e. in critical thinking. Metz describes this in a form that judges one's traditions in pursuit of self realisation and an own conception of the good. But though most philosophical treatment of critical thinking as an aim of education is not about encouraging people to make this kind of judgement, this particular concern is also evident in another much debated thread in philosophy of education in Britain and the USA that has elicited divergent opinions. William Galston (1995) favours protecting diverse individuals and groups rather than fostering choice. Thus inclusion is given priority over critical reflection, which may undermine ways of life. By contrast, Amy Gutmann (1995) gives individual autonomy precedence over diversity, arguing that future citizens should be taught to evaluate the different political perspectives associated with different ways of life. Yet even this stance hardly matches Metz's depiction of philosophy of education as encouraging young people to *judge* their traditions. We will return to individual autonomy and education for critique again, in our reconsideration of African education as communitarianism.

5. COMMUNITY RECONSIDERED

By avoiding the pitfalls of individualism, African communitarianism is apparently better equipped to be both a philosophical foundation for education and the basis for a consensual approach to addressing the continent's problems. We see several problems with philosophy of education thus delineated, some arising if it is to be opposed to individualism in those forms *accurately* attributable to its interpretation and practice in the West, some from the account of community in Africa described above, and some from apparent assumptions about the causes of human suffering and the kind of political action required to address it. Some elements of communitarian thought may not be conducive to the political or educational goals sought by Waghid and need to be tempered by elements of individualism.

What is 'the community', when applied to the vast continent of Africa in the early 21st century? To an extent one can attach the concept to small, local communities in neighbourhoods or villages or to organisations whose members might know each other, even sometimes to imagined communities

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

when particular issues and problems prompt a unified response. To these one can attribute the features of community admired for their sociality, shared identity and solidarity. Such communities are more readily imagined on all continents either on a small and specific scale or in historical contexts prior to modernity, globalisation and the post-colonial condition that characterises almost all societies now, notably Britain and most of the West. There are a few exceptions to this generalisation, like North Korea, perhaps. Yet, even in their mainly bygone more pristine conditions, the rurally rooted communities of occidental pre-modernity were not found objects and neither are those of contemporary Africa. Their composition, internal relationships, structures and hierarchies are the products of power, struggle and negotiation. Some members have the power to influence decisions more than others. Viewed from a minimally sociological perspective all are marked by at least some structured inequalities and their membership and traditions are at least in part a product of the power of those who grant themselves the right to determine them. Communities can be oppressive and exploitative. So, while we support Waghid's account of deliberation with its emphasis on listening to the other, in practice when deliberation appeals to the good of the community it is often likely to favour its dominant members.

Communities are not only inclined to marginalise some of their members from within, as has been the experience of gays in some parts of Africa and the West. If right acts are those that value harmony and respect relationships of identity and solidarity (Metz, 2009, p. 191; see also Metz, 2007, where he lays the groundwork for an African moral theory), what are the implications for those not of the community? If an educated person has acquired a communitarian sense of responsibility toward kin and community, the virtues of 'mutual respect, sincerity, justice and moral sensitivity' rightly prized by Waghid amount to too little if thus confined. Like care, empathy and compassion are biased if limited to only some. After all, we tend to empathise to a greater extent with those close to us: with family members, members of our primary group, close friends, perhaps companion animals, and those whose personal needs and concerns are similar to our own, though this is not invariably or exclusively the case. Moreover, why should the moral maturity and refinement of an 'educated person' be measured in this narrow communitarian sense?[5]

Waghid also leaves unaddressed the reality of many, if not most, traditional societies or communities, where duty and responsibility are characteristically understood, for example, as an obligation to obey or as a duty of unquestioning loyalty. It is unclear whether acting out of such a sense of duty or responsibility will precipitate moral maturation, or the development of moral maturity and refinement.

When extended beyond the community, kith and kin, what kind of engagement, including political action, might an African philosophy of education prepare persons for, given the emphasis that Waghid places on both consensus and deliberation, the latter a concept much debated in Western democratic theory, on which his analysis draws. We have no problem recognising the significance of deliberation and dialogue in (*any*) philosophy of

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

education: our concern arises with the use of 'consensual' and, again, with the narrow communitarianism at work in this qualification of 'dialogue'. It is one thing to recognise the value of consensus in small-scale, fragile societies and communities; it is quite another to see it as a significant if not essential component of African philosophy of education, especially when applied to citizenship education. It is easier to associate this account of community with such examples than with much larger and more diverse groups, like nation states. What is *the community* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Nigeria, large, ethnically diverse and sometimes fractured as they are?

One could ask whether Africa's 'misery' might not in part be more difficult to address because of the preoccupation on the African continent with communalism—which underlies obedience to authority, ancestors and traditional leaders—and arguably also of the 'tyranny of consensus'. Our concern here is that 'palaver democracy',[6] which aims at agreement, is considerably less democratic than a system—educational or political—that encourages dissent and critical interrogation. Similarly, what in practice has the contribution of *ubuntu* been 'towards achieving democratic justice on the African continent' (p. 2)? While communalism and *ubuntu* may well be forces for good at times, an over-emphasis on their worth as distinctive of African ways is made at the expense of a fuller explanatory picture of the causes of misery, which include contemporary corruption, autocratic rule, and the curse of debt traps that tax-evading foreign corporations exploit to shore up undemocratic regimes, sometimes with the connivance of Western governments.

Waghid attributes lapses in African humanism evident in events of human catastrophe in Africa like genocide to 'sporadic surges of atomistic individualism that bring a concern for human welfare into conflict with other despotic and patriarchal imperatives, such as to dominate and exclude people from authentic ways of living—that is, peace, stability and prosperity. However, despite the lapses in living ethically, African cultures are still concerned innately with living worthwhile lives . . . ' (p. 46). We don't necessarily question this latter claim about traditional African culture, but we do doubt the explanatory power of atomistic individualism thus invoked to explain catastrophe on the continent. We know of no credible theorist of social or political action, Western or otherwise, who would subscribe to such an account, whatever role it might have played as an underlying tendency in some expressions of enlightenment thought that are now thoroughly discredited. Moreover, to suggest that individual autonomy ought to have a place in depictions of democratic deliberation and action in Africa does not commit one to advocate pursuit of responsible self-determination depicted as the acts of atomistic, isolated individuals. No plausible theory of political action would attribute explanatory value to 'mere acts of individualised activity' (Waghid, 2014, p. 28) by individual selves acting without others. Conflict and suffering on all continents are very rarely attributable solely to the acts of individuals. That they *are* is an assumption that flies in the face of well-established explanations of conflict, which is structurally caused.

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

6. (PHILOSOPHY OF) EDUCATION: WESTERN, AFRICAN, GLOBAL

In his penultimate concluding remark Metz says, somewhat cryptically: 'as someone who believes that those in the African tradition often miss out on some kernels of truth in Euro-American viewpoints, particularly with regard to the value of knowledge for its own sake . . . , I am also partial to the idea that those in Africa should become less African' (2015, p. 8). Our argument has suggested that elements of philosophy of education in the West, centrally a qualified notion of critical autonomy, would be of value in African education. In doing so we do not reject the relevance of certain forms of community to the aims of education, and so to educational practice, especially given the growing influence of neo-liberal conceptions of the individual on Western schooling. In fact, philosophy of education in the West is not short of either defenders of community or critics of neo-liberal influences on education policy and practice, in and beyond the West.

But what is at stake, for the practice of philosophy of education, when we make remarks like these? To some extent, we are puzzled by what the ultimate point is of exchanges like the one addressed here, supposedly between Western and African philosophy of education; what resolution might be either desired or possible? In posing these questions we hasten to add that trying to think post-colonially about the state of philosophy of education at the 50th anniversary of the PESGB neither requires nor permits Western triumphalism, just as it inevitably sets limits to a retrieval of pre-colonial African traditions. We have no wish to defend the West—which has so much to answer for given its history of colonialism and its role in enduring neo-colonialism—against the rest in a partisan dispute about which part of the globe might have the best conception of aims of education, whether suited to local conditions or to cross-continental circumstances. We think that neither Metz nor Waghid seeks the latter kind of resolution either.

In comparative philosophy of education of this kind, several tendencies come into play. Metz (2015) makes a strong case for his claim that there is some truth in geographical labels like 'Western' and 'African' and that they plausibly pick out properties like 'individualist' and 'communitarian'; as a rough generalisation we don't necessarily disagree, provided we recognise that these categories are neither ontologically nor analytically stable. As we have argued, much remains to be said about what content such geographical characterisations may be given. In filling out such content, comparison across *space* becomes mixed in turn into comparison across *time*: past African traditions, meanings and educational practices (which may not be all that different from pre-industrial revolution Western traditions and education) are commonly compared with selected elements of contemporary Western *philosophy* of education, which is sometimes collapsed into Western and indeed increasingly global schooling *practices*. Conceptual analysis through examination of the philosophical treatment or the common, everyday use of key educational terms can shade into their reconstruction, sometimes across the regions labelled West and Africa, such reconstruction being advanced in advocating change in public conceptions

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

of social and educational discourses and practices. Anthropological description is not the same as philosophical critique and reconstruction, but they are best recognised as different activities which might inform each other, and not treated as equivalent or interchangeable.

Our final concern about the dangers of doing philosophy of education across continents, between the West and Africa as well as the global South in general, is that attending to the apparent differences between them by overemphasising cultural differences, whether in their educational or social or political traditions (all contestable) distracts attention from the common problems they face at the hands of global capital, which is now so internationalised that it would be a serious conceptual and strategic error to regard it as either a solely Western force or as indistinguishable from what philosophers of education have to say on its appropriation of education to the ends that concern Metz. As a contemporary manifestation of capitalism, neo-liberal forces in education sponsor schooling that is similarly indefensible for all those thus schooled, globally. This is schooling not for its own sake, aimed at well being or flourishing, at promoting individual autonomy, democracy, social justice, community or citizenship, but at individual and national competitiveness, aided by high stakes testing and league tables. It is aimed at preparation for employability in work that is increasingly less secure and for low wages, or for structured under- and unemployment, implicated in turn in growing inequality both within and across countries and continents. Taking a *culturalist* line on the major challenges that face education and so philosophers of education globally, distracts attention from these shared problems. Marx's contribution to global thought, while Western in origin because he lived and wrote there, has understandably inspired resistance to colonialism in Africa and elsewhere. We do well to bear in mind the emphasis in that Western and global tradition of thought on the *material* conditions in which human beings live and educate.

Correspondence: Penny Enslin, School of Education, University of Glasgow, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow G3 6NH, United Kingdom.
Email: penny.enslin@glasgow.ac.uk

NOTES

1. Waghid's is an articulation and defence of African philosophy of education from within drawing on elements of Western philosophy, while Metz's is a critique of Western philosophy of education from an African perspective, arguing that the former needs to be more like the latter.
2. Like the question of whether one can really speak of indigenous or African knowledge and its construction within African traditions, further discussion of this account of African rationality is beyond the scope of the present paper.
3. See Hayden, 2012 for an empirical study of the themes, philosophers, theorists and concepts studied by philosophers of education whose work was published in four leading journals published in English between 2000 and 2010. 'Community' is one of the 25 most frequently referenced concepts in the four 'Western' philosophy of education journals, though this may indicate interest rather than allegiance to any particular account of community.
4. We will not here discuss the other individualist features that Metz attributes to Western schooling, such as a set curriculum taught by professional instructors, though we would want to defend them in some form.

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

5. We acknowledge that Waghid seems to oscillate between this narrow sense and a wider, more encompassing understanding of communitarianism. (This is especially noteworthy in his discussion on pp. 21–28, where he pays tribute to the work of Sandel (1982), Walzer (1983) and Taylor (1991), before reiterating his intellectual debt to Gyekye.) Our concern is not with the communitarianisms of Sandel, Walzer and Taylor—but clearly the question arises what would be left of a characteristically *African* philosophy of education in the defence of such a wider use?
6. 'The elders sit under the big trees, and talk until they agree' (Wiredu, 2000, p. 374; Wiredu refers to a quote by Julius Nyerere to substantiate his claim that 'decision by consensus was often the order in African deliberations'; see Waghid, 2014, p. 56).

REFERENCES

Adeyemi, M. and Adeyinka, A. (2003) The Principles and Content of African Traditional Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35.4, pp. 425–440.

Dearden, R. (1972) Autonomy and Education, in R. Dearden, P. Hirst and R. Peters (eds.) *Education and the Development of Reason* (London, Routledge).

Friedman, M. (1962) *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).

Galston, W. (1995) Two Concepts of Liberalism. *Ethics*, 105.3, pp. 516–534.

Gutmann, A. (1995) Civic Education and Social Diversity. *Ethics*, 105.3, pp. 557–579.

Gyekye, K. (1997) *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Hayden, M.J. (2012) What Do Philosophers of Education Do? An Empirical Study of Philosophy of Education Journals. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 31, pp. 1–27.

Kymlicka, W. (1989) Liberal Individualism and Liberal Neutrality. *Ethics*, 99.4, pp. 883–905.

Lukes, S. (1973) *Individualism* (New York, Harper & Row).

Metz, T. (2007) Toward an African Moral Theory. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15.3, pp. 321–341.

Metz, T. (2009) The Final Ends of Higher Education in Light of an African Moral Theory. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43.2, pp. 179–201.

Metz, T. (2015) How the West was One: The Western as Individualist, the African as Communitarian. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47.11, pp. 1175–1184. Available online at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00131857.2014.991502.

Oladipo, O. (1992) *The Idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of the Major Orientations in Contemporary African Philosophy* (Ibadan, Molecular Publishers).

Sandel, M. (1982) *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Smith, R. (1997) The Education of Autonomous Citizens, in D. Bridges (ed.) *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship* (London, Routledge).

Standish, P. (1999) Education without Aims? in R. Marples (ed.) *The Aims of Education* (London, Routledge).

Taylor, C. (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press).

Waghid, Y. (2014) *African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered: On Being Human* (London & New York, Routledge).

Walzer, M. (1983) *Spheres of Justice* (New York, Basic Books).

White, J. (1982) *The Aims of Education Restated* (London, Routledge).

Wiredu, K. (2000) Democracy and Consensus in Traditional African Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity, in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.) *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings* (Oxford, Oxford University Press Southern Africa).

Wiredu, K. (2004) Prolegomena to an African Philosophy of Education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18.3, pp. 17–26.

© 2016 The Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.