

The exclusion of African philosophy in the global justice debate is an epistemic injustice

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Introduction

According to Gerry Dunne (2020:1) epistemic injustice is a form of injustice where a person is undermined in terms of their capacity as a potential knower. Miranda Fricker (2017:1) denotes two forms of epistemic injustice namely, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's credibility is undermined or devalued because of a prejudicial hearer and hermeneutical injustice occurs when an individual fails to make sense of a social experience as a result of a gap in social understanding (Fricker,2017:1). A question we can now ask ourselves is, what makes these injustices epistemic? Not only do they wrong someone in their capacity as a knower, but they also limit and constrain what is in the interest of a situated knower, in addition, they dilute collective understandings and are often perpetuated at an institutional level(Dunne,2020:1). For example in the field of philosophy and education, the blatant denial and obliviousness of African philosophy as a valid philosophy in the philosophical academic field or the refusal of universities to "decolonise the curriculum", are instances that show epistemic injustices being perpetuated structurally by institutions. My paper will firstly critically discuss the four global justice ideologies. This critical discussion will be argued in the context of epistemic injustice. Secondly, I argue that the exclusion of African philosophy in the global justice debate is an epistemic injustice based on the points raised by Jonathan Chimakonam in "African philosophy and global epistemic injustice" (Chimakonam,2017:125). Firstly, that African philosophy has a place in the global justice debate (Chimakonam,2017:125). Secondly, that African philosophers have produced insightful visions on the subject but have been ignored by their western counterparts (Chimakonam,2017:125). Thirdly, this exclusion and marginalisation of African philosophy in the global justice debate amounts to epistemic injustice and lastly, introduce conversationalism as a 5th Ideology to achieve epistemic justice (Chimakonam,2017:121).

Critical discussion of the four global justice theories

The experience of human life differs dramatically around the world (Rugger,2014:1). According to Rugger (2014:1), there is an obvious significant difference in how people in poorer countries live as opposed to those in wealthy countries. These differences are caused by the economic climate of the country. Access to life's necessities such as healthcare, basic housing, food and education are not attainable by those in poor countries (Rugger,2014:1). Since these poverty crippling conditions arise from the mere accident of birth location, Rugger states (2014:1) that the questions that arise from these state affairs such as who is bound to rectify the situation? Does the duty lie universally in all persons, or just in the affected nations? What is the extent of this duty? The global justice theories attempt to answer. I will critically discuss how the four global justice ideologies function as a vessel that further allows the west to impose their truth on the rest of the world causing a lack of intercultural discourse. Cosmopolitanism is the idea that all human beings are in one community in which they share the same standards of morals and duties of justice

(Rugger,2014:4). Utilitarianism and human rights cosmopolitanism are strands of cosmopolitanism relevant to the global justice debate (Rugger,2014:4). Particularism is the idea that individual rights are paramount in socio-economic decisions (Chimakonam,2017:120). Two versions of the particularism perspective are nationalism and communitarianism (Rugger,2014:2). Under communitarianism, people are connected through their relationship with others and are guided by the same moral values and judgements (Rugger,2014:2). Chimakonam (2017:120) describes nationalism as “the ideology that holds that the interests of specific nation-states are paramount in socio-political and even economic decisions”. Chimakonam (2017:132) detects a number of criticisms against these four ideologies. He is of the opinion (2017:132) that these four ideologies on their own will not be able to go global or even be able to engage with non-western concepts on the basis that communitarians place emphasis on western communities and ignore non-western communities correspondingly cosmopolitanism synthesises and universalises the western particular. On the other hand, Particularism augments the western particular at the expense of the non-western (Chimakonam,2017:132). While nationalism divides the western and non-western (Chimakonam,2017:132). From Chimakonam’s critique of these four ideologies I can draw two annotations, firstly, is that they promote the Eurocentric epistemic vision and furthermore, they disbar cross-cultural discourse which will lead to a failure in the global justice debate. I am of the view that intercultural discourse is vital in the global justice debate. There cannot be an authentic global justice discourse on the paradigm of only the west. The goals of the global justice debate are to universalise valid principles of global justice. The word universal implies that whatever data is going to come out of that debate will affect every single person living in this world thus, it would be just and benefiting to include a variety of persons in this debate who will be able to give answers to the problems of the different conditions that they experience because the questions that the global justice debate tries to answer do not manifest themselves the same all over the world. These questions also need to be understood in the paradigm of the culture of those affected. It is not possible to try and solve global injustices against the backdrop of only one epistemic view. Thus, Intercultural discourse is paramount to the success of the global justice debate and its lack thereof does not espouse a global justice debate rather a western debate on the ideologies they advocate for in the global justice debate. Furthermore, the marginalisation and deliberate exclusion of non-western people to have an opinion on the global justice debate is an epistemic injustice that is discussed below.

The exclusion of African philosophy in the global justice debate is an epistemic injustice based on the points raised by Jonathan

Chimakonam African philosophy has a place in the global justice debate

The main ideologies that underpin the framework of African philosophy can be found in Ubuntu and this doctrine, amongst others, can contribute to the debate of global justice. The integral value of human relationships found in Ubuntu is applicable on a global scale (Khomna,2010:161). The values which underpin ubuntu philosophy are solidarity, compassion, generosity, mutuality and commitment to community are universally relevant (Khomba,2010:161). Ubuntu has an impact on a global scale as it has been accepted and acknowledged by Ambassador Elizabeth Frawley Bagley (Secretary of States special representative for global partnership) . According to Bagley (Khomba,2010:162), globalisation has shown the value of interconnectedness and this value should be applied universally, everyone

participates as a team for the common good of the group. Global justice debates are centred on migration, justice and global poverty, these issues are emerging day to day life challenges that can be overcome by community solidarity (Khombo,2010:162). There is a sense of sisterly and brotherly connection in African communities in which co-operation, sharing and care are paramount to the sustainability of the community (Khombo,2010:162). The above description indicates that African societies are underpinned by values that are humanist and social in nature. Thus, not only can Ubuntu be a moral compass guiding the global justice debate it can also provide practical solutions to the issues that the global justice debate is trying to provide answers to.**African philosophers have produced insightful visions on the subject, but have been ignored by their western counterparts**

The global justice debate has been restricted to the western world, namely North America and Europe (Chimakonam,2017:6). The views of other cultures are simply overlooked despite the fact that we share the human experience and can provide different epistemological perspectives (Chimakonam,2017:6). Chimakonam (2017:6) illustrates through the work of Graness insightful work produced by a Kenyan African philosopher, Henry Odera Oruka (1994=1995) citing the concept of global justice before it became a topic in the Euro-American debates which was ignored and sidelined. According to Henry Odera Oruka in 'John Rawls' Ideology: Justice as Egalitarian Fairness' (1981) and 'The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: A Question of the Right to a Human Minimum' (1989), global justice is a concept that can be universally contextualised according to the principles of justice. The blatant obliviousness of the western world toward Oruka's work on the global justice debate is one of great epistemic injustice.

The exclusion and marginalisation of African philosophy in the global justice debate amount to epistemic injustice

The doctrines of African philosophy that espouse values like justice, equity and tolerance deserve a position in the global justice debate. It is evident from my above enquiry that firstly, African philosophy contains within itself doctrines (Ubuntu, afro-communitarianism) that are relevant and could be of great value to the global justice debate. Not only that Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka and Ethiopian philosopher Theodros Kiros have produced works about issues that surround the global justice debate which has been largely ignored (Chimakonam,2017:124). This exclusion is not because there is a defect in African philosophy that incapacitates it from contributing ideologies that are valuable and insightful to the global justice debate, on the contrary, it is a deliberate and systematic marginalisation of African thought by the western counterpart which amounts to epistemic injustice. There seems to be a unilateral pattern the west has followed and continues to follow in imposing their culture and knowledge as a universal truth. This has undoubtedly created a system of marginalisation and exclusion whereby philosophy is wholly Eurocentric (Chimakonam,2017:10). The west cannot be the gatekeepers of philosophy, prescribing their own methods as the paradigm of what is deemed to be worthy as "philosophy". The methods of philosophizing cannot be universally identical and this difference in methodology unjustifiably amounts to exclusion and discrimination. This barefaced lop-sidedness in the global justice debate raises the question of whether or not the global justice debate is even a global one. It is questionable whether an inquiry aimed at generating answers to problems that universally affect everyone will be able to engage in fruitful discourse without even considering ideologies that are culturally relevant to those involved.

Introducing conversationalism as a 5th Ideology

Introducing the fifth ideology implies that the current four ideologies have failed and cannot be modified to be reconciled with epistemic justice and concepts that are non-western (Chimakonam,2017:132). Chimakonam (2017:13) proposes that epistemic justice will only be able to be a reality if there is a horizontal station of philosophical conversations and verticalisation of philosophical questions. By horizontalisation of philosophical questions, Chimakonam (2017:13) espouses philosophical conversations in the global justice debate that is free from marginalisation, exclusions and discriminatory appearances, a platform realised where philosophers from all spectrums of cultures can engage on an equal equilibrium (Chimakonam,2017:132). This horizontalisation of philosophical conversation will function as a force against marginalisation and exclusion of persons (Chimakonam,2017:13). In contrast, verticalisation is the liberation of philosophical questions (Chimakonam,2017:13). This will debar the uniform philosophical questions normally expected from philosophers to ask (Chimakonam,2017:13). Conversationalism as a fifth ideology. through horizontalisation of philosophical conversations and verticalisation of philosophical questions will be able to attain epistemic justice because firstly, it will encourage an equal platform for intercultural discourse thus enabling a genuine global enquiry reflecting authentic global views. Secondly, it will give the marginalised and excluded their voice back by enabling them to exercise their right to think and express their thoughts freely without constrain. Lastly, African philosophers can raise questions that are relevant to their particular condition of life and by doing so will solve the existential problems of the persons affected by that particular condition.

Reference list

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