



SOAS
University of London

DECOLONISING PHILOSOPHY

A Handbook

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§i. The Project Team

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§ii. The Motivation Behind the Project

In 2023/24, SOAS University of London launched the third year of its Co-Creator Internships Project (CCIP) scheme for undergraduates enrolled in the School. The purpose of these internships is to grow collaborative communities of practice, and to support developments in learning, teaching, and assessment. Appreciating the value of this attractive institutional opportunity, four members of the academic staff teaching on SOAS’s BA World Philosophies programme decided to submit a formal expression of interest (EoI) to the CCIP scheme. The submitted EoI comprised an overview of a project focused on co-creating the UK’s first ever Decolonising Philosophy Curriculum Toolkit with four undergraduate students across the humanities and social sciences. The hope was that the toolkit would radically enhance ways in which philosophy is taught and learned at advanced secondary and tertiary education levels in the UK. Consulting members of SOAS’s Access Participation & Student Success Team, the four academic philosophers included an ‘impact’-cum-academic citizenship component in the EoI that focused on how the creation and dissemination of this toolkit may proactively contribute to secondary school and university teachers’ continual professional development (CPD).¹ The submitted formal expression of interest was successful—and the work that resulted is the co-created labour by the four student interns and the four academic staff.

The Project’s output, as presented here, is in a handbook form rather than a short and concise guide to decolonising philosophy curricula. As the team’s work developed, we collectively realised that, beyond providing a practical manual (the toolkit), it was necessary to provide the theoretical underpinnings of what we have understood the work of decolonising philosophy to be. After all, doing needs to be accompanied by thinking. As such, in this document, you will find an overview of the historical, institutional, and political context in which we work and what moved staff towards developing the UK’s only ‘World Philosophies’ undergraduate degree programme; §1 an extended argument for why decolonising the philosophy curriculum is required; §2 a detailed guide to implementing critical pedagogy in one’s practice; §3 an extended argument for decolonising assessment and formative activities in philosophy programmes; and §4 an example of how an epistemology module can be transformed to reflect decolonising principles as well as to provide students with a much richer account of the value and place of epistemological practices. Throughout the handbook, we have provided a list of references and additional sources to assist teachers and students in engaging with the recommendations we make.

The Project team is of the view that the toolkit and its accompanying handbook can and will play a vital role in empowering philosophy teaching staff at both secondary and tertiary education levels to challenge the pedagogical *status quo* as well as greatly empowering students to think of themselves right from their late-stage teenage years as active stakeholders in curriculum design, assessment design, and knowledge production in the discipline of philosophy. In this way, students can increasingly start to think and feel that they can and do play direct, material roles in helping shape national education provision at

¹ In February 2023, Dr Elvis Imafidon delivered a presentation on *Ubuntu* moral philosophy to around 40 visiting secondary school students. The feedback from the students was entirely positive. For example, one student commented that “I had learnt about African philosophy and would use what I have learnt and go to my philosophy teacher and challenge why we don’t learn it about school”. Another student commented that the session “broadened my understanding about philosophy as a whole”. And another student said that learning about African philosophy “was eye-opening and a new discovery”. In the wake of these encouraging remarks, Elvis started to explore the idea of whether SOAS might have the capacity to run a CPD session (or two) on Inclusive Philosophy for philosophy teachers in Sixth Form colleges and philosophy lecturers in the HE sector. The CPD provision Elvis envisioned would be an asynchronous training module designed by colleagues teaching on the BA World Philosophies programme. The module’s basic architecture would be similar to the asynchronous training academics and professional service colleagues normally do for, say, a 3-hour health & safety training exercise. Teachers and lecturers would be invited to enrol on the Inclusive Philosophy training course, successfully complete it, and then receive a certificate. Awareness of Elvis’s idea of CPD provision positively impacted on the toolkit and led to an approach that would allow for the toolkit to be of significant use to philosophy teachers and lecturers by embedding more inclusive pedagogical approaches.

advanced secondary level and at university level. Focusing for the moment on the A-level Philosophy curriculum² reveals the sheer scale of the problem that critical pedagogy is having to confront at advanced secondary level.

Here, students aged 16-18 learn about four thematic philosophical strands: ‘epistemology’; ‘moral philosophy’; ‘metaphysics of God’; and ‘metaphysics of mind’. The epistemology strand is entirely eurocentric, and features one work by a woman in the ten set texts. The moral philosophy strand is also entirely eurocentric, and no work by a person of colour is featured in the set text list.³ The metaphysics of God strand is dominated by eurocentric themes and debates with one exception, a brief mention of the *Kalām* argument as a cosmological proof for the existence of God. However, all the authors of the set texts in the strand are Western European, and a white woman is the sole author of one set text (out of sixteen). The metaphysics of mind strand is also eurocentric through-and-through. No work by any person of colour is featured, and only two set texts (out of thirteen) are authored by women.

Developing critical agency to foster pedagogic transformation of curriculum and assessment provision has a major additional benefit: the consequent production of a *lifeworld*⁴—a background set of norms which underpin a given political community’s ability to (re)produce society, personality, and culture—that normalises transformative and decolonial work. Such type of intellectual *praxis* is in the service of collaboratively helping bring about progressive change in existing social orders and improving the health of democratic polities.⁵ We contend that no serious education institution in the UK (or indeed any political state that has an extensive history of dominating other peoples and territories) can afford to ignore or downplay the extent to which a plurality of racialised voices, cultures, and epistemic standpoints either have been (and continue to be) unrecognised to the point of being invisible, or have been (and continue to be) relegated to the margins, or have been (and continue to be) recognised in problematic ways indicative of an effete liberal cosmopolitan disposition that is largely appropriative. By unmasking the various forms of epistemic violence inflicted by the logic and practices of coloniality and empire, the more likely steps towards meaningful reconciliation can properly occur.

Crucially, the decolonial turn is not a binary enterprise. It is consistently co-opted by a binary mindset – especially by those threatened by what they think the decolonial turn is saying – e.g. a critical discourse of white normativity/whiteness is heard and disseminated as “all white people are evil racists”; or ‘studying African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Indigenous philosophies’ means ‘excluding western thought and erasing Plato and Kant from the curriculum’.⁶ The agonistic nature of decolonial discursive spaces resists such simplistic closures. But, sadly, decolonial discursive spaces, because of their agonistic nature, are always vulnerable to being captured in dangerously simplistic manners.

The Project team recognises that in the febrile global political environment since 2016—an environment typified by increasingly reactionary ‘war on woke’ discourse—there may well be significant hostility to our Project. However, in the spirit of rigorous, critical inquiry—a necessary feature of not only academic freedom but also well-functioning political and epistemic communities—we encourage those who, for a variety of reasons, may be inclined to view a decolonial approach to the teaching and learning of philosophy with hostility to re-consider such an inclination. For, the Project, which is constructively polemical, is not a clear-and-present danger to those academic philosophers in post who practise traditional pedagogy; the Project is not interested in producing cultures of alterity exemplified by ‘us vs. them’ discourse; the Project is not distorting UK and western history; the Project is not invested in making privileged agents either feel shame or guilt for their comparative relations of

² <https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/philosophy/a-level/philosophy-7172/specification-at-a-glance>.

³ The only women featured in the set text list are three white women.

⁴ Viz. Habermas (1987).

⁵ See Gordon (2023) for a dedicated discussion of philosophy and decolonisation.

⁶ An example of a type of concomitant vicious epistemic practice we find deeply worrying—at both a symbolic and material level—may be found in the increasingly normalised publication of and widely circulated articles like [this](#) over the past seven years.

privilege; and the Project in no way at all vindicates the ‘Great Replacement Theory’.⁷ Instead, the Project is orientated around the following objectives:

- To face up honestly to and shed light on the ways in which Anglo-European racism, imperialism, and colonialism have adversely affected the organisation, learning content, classroom environment, formative learning activities, and summative assessment diet of philosophy curricula in the UK (and in the Anglo-European context more broadly). No one can reasonably deny that one of the multiple legacies of western imperial domination—especially the European colonisation of Africa, South Asia, South East Asia, North America, Central America, and South America⁸—has been (i) a racialised account of what counts as authoritative knowledge; (ii) a racialised account of whose knowledge matters; and (iii) a racialised account of what takes pride of place in what education institutions teach and how education institutions teach and assess that learning content.
- To offer constructive and implementable suggestions for expanding and transforming existing philosophy curricula at secondary and tertiary education levels, so that teachers and learners have richer, more in-depth, inclusive, and uplifting pedagogical experiences. This progressive discourse, as we will detail in subsequent sections, focuses on salient themes from critical pedagogy.⁹
- To provide teachers and learners with effective ways of, what we call, *redirecting the flow of epistemic power* away from the Anglo-European world that is ideologically positioned at the ‘centre’¹⁰ to a horizontal, comparative, and dialogical model in which no geolocation occupies a privileged position. In this way, thinking in terms of *world philosophies* is the sublation of philosophy itself, to the point that philosophy *as the love of wisdom* logically requires practising deep thinking and reflection in a global, critical, and comparative manner. On this specific point, it would be helpful to take note of two key features of Confucian and Taoist thought and four examples of world philosophical thinking:
 - i. Among the core concepts of Confucian philosophy, ‘*Ren*’ (仁)—‘benevolence’—appears almost a hundred times. Among these occurrences, these key phrases leap off the page:

夫仁者

己欲达而达人

仁亲也从人从二¹¹

⁷ The Great Replacement Theory is US-rooted conspiracy theory that since 2016 has increasingly made its way into mainstream Anglo-European right-wing discourse after originally being peddled by those on the margins of the US far-right. The Great Replacement Theory views white communities at heightened risk of being overrun and erased by people of colour.

⁸ As Edward Said notes (Said 1978: 41), from 1815 to 1914 Western European direct colonial dominion expanded from ≈35% of the planet’s surface to ≈85% of it. The Italian colonial empire (1869-1947), even though it did not practise colonisation to the same scale as the British, Dutch, Belgians, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, should not be ignored here. Italian Somaliland was occupied in 1941 and then administered by the British until 1st April 1950. In accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 289, the territory would become a Trust Territory on that day. The Trust Territory of Somaliland was administered by Italy from 1st April 1950 until the Somalis achieved independence in 1960.

⁹ Viz. Freire (1970) and hooks (1994).

¹⁰ Cf. Santos (2014) and Dawson (2019).

¹¹ ‘Now the man of ‘*Ren*’ virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others’. ‘Wishing to be enlarged himself, he also seeks to enlarge others’. ‘‘*Ren*’ is a kindred spirit and is subordinate to others and is subordinate to the two’.

These key phrases have profoundly elaborated on the connotation of ‘benevolence’. They emphasise that ‘benevolence’ is embodied in interactions between people and is an important criterion for dealing with interpersonal relationships. Indeed, for Confucianism, the very core of ‘benevolence’ lies in promoting harmonious coexistence in human society. Therefore, cultivating good character and enriching relations of mutual respect are indispensable for a well-functioning society. In the context of redirecting the flow of epistemic power, Confucian benevolence provides a framework for inclusive discourse and collaborative knowledge production.

- ii. In the *Tao Te Ching*, expressions such as 天地之所以能长且久者, 以其不自生也, 故能长生,¹² and 保此道者, 不欲盈 夫唯不盈, 故能蔽而新成¹³ encourage individuals to harmonise with nature’s rhythms and adapt to them rather than imposing rigid structures or hierarchies. Taoist thought suggests that true wisdom lies not in the pursuit of dominance or centrality but in alignment with interconnectedness.
- iii. There is a striking similarity between features of Martin Heidegger’s metaphysics and the Taoist concept of 无 (*wu*—‘nothingness’). Heidegger enthusiastically praised the Taoist thought of Zhuangzi, and he not only studied the *Tao Te Ching* and Zhuangzi in-depth,¹⁴ but also related the Taoist concepts of ‘nothingness’ and ‘emptiness’ to the state of openness of *Dasein* on several occasions. Zhuangzi’s philosophy also recognised that ‘nothingness’ and ‘emptiness’ did not merely have a negative meaning. Specifically, Heidegger refers to Chapter 11 of the *Tao Te Ching*, which details Taoist ‘nothingness’ and ‘emptiness’, arguing that the ‘emptiness’ reveals a metaphysical difference between the ontic and the ontological.¹⁵
- iv. Martin Buber, in his articulation of the ‘I/thou’ relationship, also engaged in comparative *praxis* between Chinese philosophy and Jewish philosophy. For Buber, according to both Hasidic Judaism and Zhuangzi’s Taoism, the quest for inner transcendence and the sacred in the mundane is realised not through abstract theories or rituals but through concrete, vivid role models in everyday life. Buber also sees the Taoist sage as a creative force for change and refinement within constraints. He argues that believers in Judaism and Taoism are indispensable co-creators of the world. Furthermore, he points out rather that the Taoist attitude of 无为 (*wuwei*—‘non action’) distinguishes it from disenchanting modernity, as *wuwei* aims to liberate agents from the slavery of violence and machinery. Buber, in this way, sees *wuwei* as a non-coercive way of responding to the Western European impulse to conquer nature, and reminds us to re-examine our humanity.¹⁶
- v. Nishida Kitarō (西田 幾多郎) and other members of the Kyoto School—specifically, the fourth-generation figures of Hase Shōtō (長谷正當) and Ōhashi Ryōsuke (大橋良介), whose initial training was in French and German philosophy respectively and who fuse Nishida’s

¹² ‘The heavens and the earth endure because they do not operate naturally for their survival so that they can endure’.

¹³ ‘The person who maintains the “Tao” will not become complacent. It is because he is never complacent that he can renew himself’.

¹⁴ In 1946, Heidegger co-translated the *Tao Te Ching* with Paul Shih-yi Hsiao.

¹⁵ See Hsiao (1990), May (2005), and Davis (2013) for further on Heidegger and Taoism. See Nelson (2019) for further on Chinese philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and early 20th-century German philosophy.

¹⁶ See Buber (1942, 1951), Herman (1993), Eber (1994), and Muller (2002) for further on this specific comparative philosophical point.

conceptual framework with not only that of Nishitani Keiji's (西谷 啓治)¹⁷ but also a range of European philosophic discursive formations—display philosophical practice that is intimately dialogical between western philosophy and Zen Buddhism.¹⁸ The Kyoto School's inherently comparative and multicultural approach to philosophical practice strongly contrasts not only with Imperial Japan's ethnonationalism from the start of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 until the collapse of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperty Share in 1945, where *nihonjinron* discourse (日本人論 ['Japaneseness']) was common-place.¹⁹ It also fiercely opposed western ethnocentrism. As Nishida writes, “[u]p to now Westerners thought that their culture was superior to all others, and that human culture advances toward their own form. Other peoples, such as Easterners, are said to be behind and if they advance, they too will acquire the same form. There are even some Japanese who think like this”.²⁰ For the Kyoto School, comparative and multicultural philosophical practice reveals humanity's commonality and irreducible diversity.

- vi. Starting a dialogue between the Bantu-speaking *Ubuntu* moral traditions²¹ and Knud Eiler Løgstrup's moral philosophy in *The Ethical Demand* (1956) is particularly conceptually rich. For, while Løgstrup explicitly labelled his own account of moral normativity as an 'ontological ethics', there is every reason to suppose such a label can be appropriately used to describe the moral traditions of *Ubuntu*. This is because *Ubuntu* morality and Løgstrup's articulation of the ethical demand are concrete moral phenomenological positions, in that they are respectively rooted in describing and expounding human agents' socialisation into normatively integrated social spheres constituted by networks of responsibility relations. In other words, since both ways of making sense of moral normativity locate the fundamental source of moral normativity in the nodes of responsibility relations that nourish interpersonal and communal life, such moral phenomenological insights are evocative of ontological ethics. Because they are instances of ontological ethics, *Ubuntu* and Løgstrup avoid either propping up or being imbricated with the two totems of western 'legislative ethics': deontology with its proclivities for maxims and empty formalism; and consequentialism with all its callous, impersonal, and algorithmic approach to moral life. In avoiding either propping up or being imbricated with western 'legislative ethics', *Ubuntu* and Løgstrup do not suffer from *discursive mediocrity*. For, making sense of moral life through the types of phenomenologically parched conceptual frameworks and vocabularies of either deontology or consequentialism restricts uptake of moral normativity and the experience of moral encounters to a shallow level. By contrast, making sense of moral life through the conceptual frameworks and moral phenomenological vocabularies of ontological ethics better enables moral agents to become deep thinkers. To put this critical point in the form of an analogy,

¹⁷ Nishitani is perhaps Nishida's most important student.

¹⁸ Nishida also conducted an in-depth comparative study of Chinese thought and western metaphysics. See Nishida 1987-1989: 6.

¹⁹ Viz. Thinkers such as Okakura Kakuzō (岡倉 覚三) [Okakura Tenshin (岡倉 天心)] and Anesaki Masaharu (姉崎 正治) [Anesaki Chōfū (姉崎 嘲風)].

²⁰ Nishida 1987-1989: 14; 404-5.

²¹ Viz. “In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes this existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group ... The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am”” (Mbiti 1969: 108-9). Viz. “[*Ubuntu*] speaks of the very essence of being human ... It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life ... It is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather, ‘I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.’ ... Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* - the greatest good ... To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you inexorably dehumanises me. It gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them” (Tutu 1999: 31).

much in the same way Simone Weil and Raimond Gaita have respectively argued that the bourgeois liberal is forced to recognise that there is “an essential ‘mediocrity’ to the notion of rights”²² when confronted by and confronting radical evil, there is an essential ‘mediocrity’ to thinking in the discursive formations of deontology and consequentialism when making sense of interpersonal moral life and its affective dynamics.

The Project team also recognises that

- a) To directly challenge and overcome racist and colonial structures within the UK HE sector can be psychologically draining and exhausting for students and for staff. The efforts are made more intense and more taxing when one is a racially minoritised²³ person who experiences either explicitly hostile racism or racial microaggressions from within the academy.²⁴
- b) The neoliberalisation of the UK HE sector since 2010 often sees staff bearing particularly heavy workloads which demand efficiency and hyper-productivity in a time-short working environment that is marked by (a) hyper-competitiveness; (b) hyper-individualism to the point of narcissism; (c) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that have punitive inflections; and (d) endemic employment precarity. This professional ecosystem and the wider neoliberal lifeworld context in the UK place significant barriers for producing the type of radical innovation and collaboration that transformative pedagogy invariably requires. Indeed, over the past fourteen years, UK universities have increasingly come across as labyrinthine institutions wedded to corporate language. They are also emblematic of logistical complexity. Moreover, despite claims to challenging the *status quo* by promoting inclusivity, as most clearly evidenced by strategic digital and print marketing, UK universities are often spaces where little critical pedagogy à la Paolo Freire and bell hooks takes place (especially in philosophy programmes).

In light of this context, we should recognise that UK universities are sites of white normativity/whiteness,²⁵ classism, sexism, and ableism. The result of fusing neoliberal economic policy with a national history of imperialism, colonialism, and contempt for a range of minoritised social groups is that those undergraduate students as well as postgraduate students from comparatively marginalised social backgrounds—such as racialised, gendered, socioeconomic, and sexual orientation groups—often struggle to *think and feel at home* in higher education places and spaces. Many of these students often tell their personal tutors/academic advisors and wellbeing counsellors that they feel overwhelmed, that they feel like impostors, and that they feel alienated. As one of the SOAS international students we interviewed for the Project told us,

From my personal experience, due to the prevalence of colonial discourse in schools, students belonging to racially/ethnically/socio-economically minoritised groups may even try to change themselves to fit in with the so-called ‘dominant’ social group. However, such efforts often

²² Stern 2019: 293.

²³ We use the term ‘minoritised’ rather than ‘minority’, because we want to reflect the way in which such marking reflects the active way in which individuals and communities are represented as other from a dominant cultural perspective.

²⁴ Viz. Arday (2018).

²⁵ Whiteness may be helpfully understood as referring to “the enactment of power and privilege through ... white institutions” (Flores 2002: 189). Cf. “whiteness as a structuring property of modern social systems” (Owen 2007: 204). See Du Bois (2007), Flores and Moon (2000), Baldwin (1955), Morrison (1970, 1992, 1993), hooks (1992), Frankenberg (1993), Mills (1997), Roediger (1998), and Alcoff (2015). In April 1997, UC Berkeley hosted the first academic conference in the United States on whiteness.

struggle to achieve the desired results, making those minoritised people feel even more frustrated and ostracised.

When feelings of powerlessness and internalised othering are coupled with (a) the relentlessness of disciplinary and aggressive social media gazes; (b) a labour market operationally designed to create fiercer and fiercer competition; (c) structural sexism, misogyny, racism, classism, and transphobia; (d) gutted and entropic public services under a dangerous form of neoliberal capitalism; (e) entrenched and virulent forms of environmental degradation; and (f) the undermining of democratic institutions and social capital by right-wing populism, it is tragically inevitable that student mental health, especially the mental health of minoritised students, is alarmingly low.²⁶ There is no good reason to believe that first-hand testimonial reports from students and those testimonial reports by academic staff and mental health professionals about student wellbeing are misguided, exaggerated, expressive of Gen Z's so-called 'lack of resilience', or indeed illustrative of any other kind of epistemic and moral failing. The pain of experiencing cultural invisibilisation and wilfully ignorant responses to minoritised discourses cuts deep; the symbolic and material injuries are intense.

- c) A decolonial curriculum actively encourages staff and students to be collectively 'epistemically disobedient', to use Walter D. Mignolo's expression.²⁷ Indeed, epistemic disobedience may best be thought of as the logical motor of the key Latin American-rooted concept of *decoloniality*. The decolonial effort to redirect the flow of epistemic power to a horizontal, comparative, and dialogical knowledge production and exchange model in which no geolocation occupies a privileged position at the centre is a cathartic and—importantly—enjoyable activity.
- d) In current times of hyper-marketisation in HE, of a crude anti-debate culture, of book-banning, of racist murders, of virulent hostility to women's right to reproductive freedom, of climate crisis, of far-right populism, of transphobia, of shootings on university campuses, and of religious hate crimes, it is worth remembering that a significant part of what it is *to be a philosopher now* should mean not losing the sense of *having something vital to fight over*. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o put it especially powerfully:

But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism ... is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, dependency and a collective death-wish.²⁸

²⁶ See, for example, in the UK context, 'Student Mental Health in England: Statistics, Policy, and Guidance' and 'The Declining State of Student Mental Health in Universities and What Can Be Done'. In the US context, see 'Student Mental Health is in Crisis: Campuses are Rethinking Their Approach', 'Overwhelmed: The Real Campus Mental-Health Crisis and New Models for Well-Being', and Abelson et al. (2022).

²⁷ Viz. Mignolo (2009, 2011a).

²⁸ Thiong'o 1987: 3.

§iii. SOAS, The BA World Philosophies Programme, and ‘Street Philosophy’

In May 1914, the Oriental Studies Committee²⁹ held a public meeting at The Mansion House to secure funding from those British financial organisations and institutions that had significant economic interests and investments in Asia. There, Lord Curzon—the Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905 and the committee’s *de facto* chairman—argued in favour of the proposed institutionalisation of the School of Oriental Studies (which then became the School of Oriental and African Studies--SOAS):

In my view the creation of a school like this in London is part of the necessary furniture of Empire. Those of us who, in one way or another, have spent a number of years in the East, who regard that as the happiest portion of our lives, and who think that the work that we did there, be it great or small, was the highest responsibility that can be placed upon the shoulders of Englishmen, feel that there is a gap in our national equipment which ought emphatically to be filled, and that those in the City of London who, by financial support or by any other form of active and practical assistance, take their part in filling that gap, will be rendering a patriotic duty to the Empire and promoting the cause and goodwill among mankind.³⁰

Curzon’s pedagogical construal of empire is also consistent with his 1909 evangelical description of colonial imperium:

I sometimes like to picture to myself this great Imperial fabric as a huge structure like some Tennysonian “Palace of Art”, of which the foundations are in this country, where they have been laid and must be maintained by British hands, but of which the Colonies are the pillars, and high above all floats the vastness of an Asiatic dome.³¹

SOAS—which was formally established two years after Lord Curzon’s proclamation at The Mansion House—was, therefore, envisioned as a political and cultural project for entrenching British imperial power in Africa, Asia, and the Near and Middle East.³² From this strategic perspective, SOAS would

²⁹ In late 1909, following a debate in the House of Lords over the report of the Reay Committee—a Treasury-appointed group to consider the institutionalisation of a school of oriental studies—Lord Morley at the India Office organised a new committee—the Oriental Studies Committee—, one that was tasked with finally creating such a school. The chairman was Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General in Egypt. To quote Ian Brown, “[t]he Oriental Studies Committee ... was formally appointed by the Secretary of State for India in March 1910. It had three principal tasks: to find a building; to propose a governing structure for the school; and to secure the substantial funds required to run the school ...” (Brown 2016: 17-18).

³⁰ Curzon 1915: 191-92—quoted in Said 1978: 214.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5—quoted in Said 1978: 213.

³² When founded in 1916, the School’s official name was ‘the School of Oriental Studies’. The first Director of the School, Edward D. Ross, took office on 1st November 1916. The School was opened on 23rd February 1917 amidst long-running hostility from Oxford and Cambridge. During the 1930s, the School became one of the world’s leading institutions for the academic study of African languages. This was principally due to funding received from the Rockefeller Foundation—in 1932, the School received from the Foundation £3,000 a year for three years to research and teach African linguistics and phonetics. The School’s official name changed in 1935, when ‘African’ was added to the title. Given SOAS’s original location in Finsbury Circus, deep in the City of London commercial territory, the School was embedded in the symbolic and material power structures of the British imperial infrastructure. SOAS, in this way, was established to train officials for service in the British imperial administration—specifically, by offering those state officials courses in African and Asian languages that also appealed to Christian missionary societies who fancied themselves ‘emissaries of light’ and in the business of ‘civilising’ populations across vast areas of the British Empire’s territorial expanse. During the Second World War, SOAS academics helped train translators to use their language skills for espionage purposes. As Brown puts it, “tales of SOAS and British intelligence occupy a central position in the institution’s folklore” (Brown 2016: 199). The UK Government also relied on SOAS’s particular expertise, to cultivate alliances with colonial subjects to support the Allies against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Following the conclusion of the war, SOAS re-located. It moved from the commercial heart to the literati centre of the capital—the Bloomsbury area. In 1947, the UK Government invested significant financial capital in expanding the provision of African and Asian language-learning, on the grounds that proficiency in African and/or Asian languages were invaluable skills to benefit the UK in the post-war geopolitical order. The first published history of SOAS was written by Sir Cyril Philips (Director from 1957-1976), *The School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, 1917–*

also help counter Germany and Russia as well as the rival European colonial powers, who shared the same rapacious attitude towards Africa and Asia:³³

[I]n the field of commerce we expect our clerks in the ... great commercial cities of the East, and notably the Far East, to compete with the active and ever increasing rivalry of other European Powers, and especially the Germans, with practically no equipment [competence in the local language] except that which they can acquire when they have reached the country ... [Without the preliminary training that the School of Oriental Studies would provide] you will see the plums picked from the cake, and the spoils of commercial enterprise taken away from you, as they are largely being taken away, particularly in the Far East at this moment, by your active and indefatigable rivals, most of all by the German people.³⁴

From the perspective of today, the origins of SOAS are hardly auspicious. However, in the space of just over a hundred years, SOAS appears to have undergone a metamorphosis: from tool of soft colonial-imperial power to one of the UK's leading higher education institutions (HEI) that not only has a rich history of anti-racist activity,³⁵ but also a history of institutional endeavours that have been at the forefront of confronting and challenging the colonial and imperial legacies of modern Britain.³⁶

To focus on five examples of anti-racist activism and scholarship at SOAS:

1. Paul Robeson enrolled at the School in 1934, to study phonetics and Swahili. His work at SOAS coincided with the publication of his proto-Négritude essay 'I Want To Be African'.
2. In 1966, Walter Rodney, one of the most influential Pan-Africanists, was awarded a PhD in African History. His doctoral dissertation was then transformed into a monograph—*A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545–1800* (1970). Like his most well-known work—*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972)—it received rave reviews in many academic circles.
3. Malcolm Caldwell, who was originally appointed as a research fellow in 1959 and then made a permanent lecturer in 1972, published the anti-colonialism treatise, *The Wealth of Some Nations* (1977), a work which, in effect, is Rodney's vision and critique (1972) deployed in the context of South-East Asia.³⁷
4. In May 2018, the Decolonising SOAS Working Group published a general Learning and Teaching [toolkit](#) for Programme and Module Convenors. The Working Group was

1967: *An Introduction* (1967). See Brown (2016) for SOAS's imbrication with imperialism and colonialism. Cf. Burton (1998), Hall (2002), Arnold and Shackle (2003), and Gilroy (2014).

³³ By 1914, the Humboldt Universität, the Saint Petersburg State University, and the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (the 1873 fusion of the 1795 École Spéciale des Langues Orientales with the 1669 École des Jeunes de Langues) were already established centres for 'oriental studies', a fact that was not lost on Curzon.

³⁴ Quoted in Brown 2016: 24.

³⁵ See also [Academics, Agents and Activists: A History of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 1916-2016—Special Collections, SOAS Library](#).

³⁶ Cf. "[T]he School was established principally to train the colonial administrators who ran the British Empire in the languages of Asia and Africa. It was established, that is, with an explicitly imperial purpose. Yet the School would come to transcend that function to become a world centre of scholarship and learning, in many important ways challenging its imperial origins" (Brown 2016: 1).

In this way, it is perhaps not all that surprising that SOAS may be viewed as "the most politicised of British universities", to quote an academic interviewed by the journalist Kenan Malik in [his article published by *The Observer*](#) on 19th February 2017.

³⁷ As Brown records, "[i]n early 1967, he was removed from the list of speakers used by the School's extramural division, following a report that a talk he had given in Broadstairs had been devoted largely to 'a quite emotional attack on western colonialism in South East Asia'" (Brown 2016: 195-96). Caldwell's searing critique of colonialism and imperialism was enthusiastically endorsed in the School's New Left student union publications—e.g. *Thornhaugh Street Gazette* (4th May 1977) 'SOAS Past Present Future: Some Thoughts on an Ideological State Apparatus'. Four issues of the *Thornhaugh Street Gazette* are held in the SOAS Library. However, for all of Caldwell's putative progressiveness in terms of chairing the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and his anti-imperialist critiques of US foreign policy, he was a fervent supporter of the murderous Khmer Rouge regime and refused to acknowledge that genocidal acts were committed by Pol Pot's government.

established in 2016 in response to the student-run *Decolonising Our Minds Society*, which expressed significant support for the Decolonising the Curriculum movement.

5. In 2021, the Ebony Initiative was launched at SOAS. In the words of its Director—Dr Althea-Maria Rivas—the institutional endeavour “recognises the importance of the intellectual contribution that is made by racialised students, in the UK academy and globally. The programme aims to nurture Black scholars by focusing on community-building, mentoring and other forms of support. The Ebony Initiative seeks to address the broken pipeline of Black students progressing to PGT [postgraduate taught], PhDs and academic positions in UK HE. At the PGR [postgraduate research] level, the programme takes a multi-pronged approach providing academic skills-building sessions, community-building spaces, career mentoring and funding support and guidance. At the UG level the programme focuses on building research skills, introducing students to research degrees, peer-2-peer mentoring and a faculty-guided summer junior research placement. The programme is being run by faculty members who have extensive experience working with BAME [Black, Asian, and minority ethnic] students and equality initiatives in the UK HE sector and draws up Black academics within and beyond SOAS”.³⁸

Of course, despite the School’s reputation for radical scholarship and activism that counters western myth-making about civilisation and Anglo-European cultural hegemony, the School nonetheless operates as a UK HEI and is thus inevitably imbricated in the complex web of structural racism and intersecting systemic injustices that are not only present in the UK HE sector,³⁹ but in all dimensions of UK political society as well. Focusing on the former, there is extensive evidence across degree programmes in the humanities, social sciences, empirical sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics of key failings in the UK HE sector:

- There are racialised award gaps (specifically, good honours degree outcome differentials between white and racially minoritised groups)⁴⁰

³⁸ <https://ebonyinitiative.com/about/>

³⁹ See [Understanding Structural Racism in UK Higher Education: An Introduction](#).

⁴⁰ Advance HE’s ‘[Ethnicity Awarding Gaps in UK Higher Education in 2019/20](#)’ notes that the 2019/20 UK HE sector racialised award gap was -9.9%. The largest gaps were between Black and white students (-18.6%). The UK HE sector racialised award gap that academic year was principally driven by racialised differences between graduates awarded a First-Class degree (-10.2%). Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, the award gap fell by 3.4%, compared to an average fall of 0.3% between 2003/04 and 2017/18.

In 2003/04, the racialised award gap was -17.2%. In 2015/16, the racialised award gap was largest in England: -15.6%. However, that academic year’s UK HE sector racialised award gap in Scotland and Wales was -8.6% and -8.5% respectively. In 2018/19, the UK HE sector racialised award gap fell to -13.3%. The 2019/20 UK HE sector racialised award gaps were larger in non-STEM subjects (-11.1%) than STEM subjects (-8.2%). The gap in historical, philosophical and religious studies was -3.5%. The most recent data—2020/21—shows that the UK HE sector racialised awarding gap is -8.8%. The largest gaps are between Black and white students (-18.4%).

In 2018/19, the racialised award gap at SOAS was -7.0%. In 2019/20, the racialised award gap at SOAS was -8.0%. In 2020/21—the ‘Covid-19’ year in which no detriment policies and a range of alternative assessments were rolled out in the HE sector—the racialised award gap at SOAS fell to -3%. In 2021/22, the racialised award gap at SOAS increased to -12%. In 2022/23, the racialised award gap at SOAS remained at -12%.

In 2018/19, the racialised award gap at SOAS’s School of History, Religions, and Philosophies (HRP) was -13.0%. In 2019/20, the HRP racialised award gap fell to -1.0%. In 2020/21, HRP’s racialised award gap increased to -11.0%. In 2021/22, the HRP racialised award gap increased to -13.0%. In 2022/23, the HRP racialised award gap at SOAS fell to -7.0%.

The causes of racialised award gaps, according to the most authoritative education literature on the subject, are

- restrictive curricula and traditional pedagogies
- discriminatory assessment practices
- deficient institutional culture (e.g. colour-blindness)

- Racially minoritised students and staff frequently experience racialisation in ways that create concrete senses of racial exclusion and othering⁴¹
- There are many reports of curriculum content as either improperly representing or failing to represent at all peoples not racialised as white⁴²
- There are many reports of having scholarly knowledge presented on a thematic issue as principally produced by and identified with the work of people racialised as white⁴³
- Racially minoritised students often experience that traditional pedagogies reproduce forms of racialised privilege and entitlement⁴⁴
- There is a racialised ‘broken pipeline’ between undergraduate and postgraduate research study⁴⁵
- Racially minoritised academic staff—especially Black academics—are leaving the HE sector for the private sector at an increasing rate⁴⁶
- There are racialised inequities at senior academic position levels (e.g. Professorships) between white staff and racially minoritised staff⁴⁷
- Labour produced by cleaning staff and security staff is often racialised⁴⁸

Around 8 years ago, after reading Arvind-Pal Mandair’s *Religion and the Spectre of the West* (2009), a work which argues for the clear coeval status of different philosophical traditions, Dr Sian Hawthorne began to put together an undergraduate programme at SOAS—BA World Philosophies—to proactively address the structurally racist nature of academic philosophy in UK HE. The intellectual grounds for BA World Philosophies were strong and, conveniently, institutionally-salient, given SOAS’s preoccupation with its imperial and colonial past. Enabling a serious engagement with cultural traditions not engaged with the priorities of Anglo-European philosophic thought was the right place to begin to dismantle the narrowness of academic philosophy as a formal discipline in the UK.⁴⁹ For, it was and is hardly the case that only dead white men have been responsible for doing all the philosophic thinking in the world. Furthermore, even when men, such as John Locke, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and G.W.F. Hegel, made major contributions to philosophical scholarship, the results were rarely completely edifying: enthusiastic justifications of slavery, mythopoetic arguments favouring the ever-expansion of European sovereignty, and cases of prideful, egregious racism, to a name a few. For the most part, then, Anglo-European academic philosophy has served to shore up and even generate oppressive social structures, failing to properly contextualise the history of its own canonical figures, as though their racism was merely incidental to their thought.

To better inform the practice and teaching of BA World Philosophies since 2017/18, three strands have been identified by the SOAS philosophers as a necessary structure for decolonising the discipline of philosophy. These staff have a range of expertise in the multiple philosophical traditions of Africa,

- structural racism as exemplified in part by institutional unreadiness.

See UUK and NUS (2019, 2022) and Singh (2011) for further on the subject.

⁴¹ See Arday and Mirza (2018), Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury (2018), and Shilliam (2015).

⁴² See *Why is My Curriculum White?*.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See ‘[The Broken Pipeline—Barriers to Black PhD Students Accessing Research Council Funding](#)’.

⁴⁶ See ‘[Growing Numbers of Black Academics Quitting for Private Sector](#)’, which reports that the number of Black academics quitting UK universities for the private sector has nearly tripled in the past three academics years: 70 black academics left UK HE in the 21/22; whereas in 19/20, 25 left UK HE.

⁴⁷ See [Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2020/21](#)—Of the 21,135 professors with known racial background, 11% were from racially minoritised backgrounds. Of the 2,425 professors from racially minoritised backgrounds, 1,580 were Asian (65%).

⁴⁸ See Rollock (2019), Gabriel and Tate (2017), Alexander and Arday (2015), and Bhopal (2014).

⁴⁹ Cf. van Norden (2017) for a polemical response to mainstream academic philosophy in the US.

Asia, and the Middle East that is complemented by training in and conversing with the Anglo-American and continental European philosophical traditions:⁵⁰

1. decolonial modelling and the reimagining of philosophy as a global discipline⁵¹
2. dialogic and critical-comparative analyses between global intellectual traditions
3. specialism in specific non-western philosophical traditions

Indeed, SOAS philosophers have been asking ‘*Could Anglo-European academic philosophy change? Can philosophy be thought differently? Is there a philosophy that is not philosophy as western thinkers know it or come to know it?*’ Asking these questions offers the possibility for philosophy that invites the novel, the unindebted, the imaginative and thus the sustainable. These questions matter because they bear on what philosophy is, where it is located, and how thinking itself can really be a means to progressively transform the world.⁵²

If one is not persuaded already by the impetus of overcoming colonial and racist legacies, then consider a simpler, more direct reason to think in terms of intercultural, global and comparative philosophical *praxis*: good ideas have come from, continue to come from, and will continue to come from all corners of the globe. Smart and sensitive agents are not consigned just to one geographical region. In the contemporary era of inter-regional conflict and unprecedented cultural exchange *via* social media, agents need to develop inter-cultural competency—the ability to value and communicate different modes of understanding in the ever-increasing marketplace of ideas. Developing this human and social capital, in turn, requires intellectually engaging with a wide range of culturally-specific ways of having the world in view and being capable of conversing in more than one intellectual language or system of philosophic thought. Once one *thinks* in the specific, ‘local’ terms of, for example, various Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous frameworks and grasps the particular cultural contexts in which these frameworks operate, then one can start to *properly* compare traditions and develop global sensibilities. Since SOAS is uniquely positioned with its expertise in the study of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, so much so that SOAS also has the largest concentration of specialist faculty concerned with the study of these areas at any university in the world, students on the BA World Philosophies programme have ample opportunity to encounter philosophical traditions in their original linguistic contexts.

In this way, a degree in World Philosophies enables graduates to have an additional advantage to those students trained solely in the Anglo-American or continental European philosophical traditions. World Philosophies graduates are more able to *listen* attentively to and understand others’ viewpoints with empathy and deep cultural insight. With such a range of analytical, research, and communication skills in hand, World Philosophies graduates have greater capacity to become effective mediators in

⁵⁰ There is reason to suppose that there is tension between the three principles, not least with the critical-comparative hermeneutic method where there is a requirement to find *some* common ground or principles which then must be translated into a global idiom. The question, then, is ‘whose idiom? What is translatable, and more importantly, what is not and why is it not?’ Furthermore, in foregrounding intellectual traditions and philosophical systems that are non-European, there is a risk of privileging elite discourses that have their *own* oppressive histories. As such, there may be a contradiction between the decolonial intent to centre ideologically-subjugated knowledges, and those very traditions themselves which, while subalternised *with respect to western philosophy*, are nonetheless themselves hegemonic in their own contexts.

⁵¹ In light of this, SOAS will launch the MA Global Philosophy programme in 2025/26. This is the first Master’s programme of its kind in the UK HE sector.

⁵² There may well be, though, an even more substantive question that does not get asked enough in academic philosophy: *Who counts as the philosopher?* It is well-known that philosophic thinking in the Western European tradition is often construed as necessarily disembodied, in order to disguise the specifically embodied nature of the philosopher. Such habits are a sleight of hand but one which has often proven intractable, signalled by the formal separation of epistemology and ontology as separate subfields. We will return to this subject in §1.

complex and demanding environments and situations.⁵³ In the words of one current 2nd Year SOAS PPE student studying World Philosophies modules:

In my opinion, one of the major benefits of the World Philosophies programme is that it has greatly enhanced my understanding and acceptance of different, co-existing ‘horizons’. I have been able to examine and critique my old cognitive frameworks with new ‘horizons’ and in dialogue with various philosophical traditions, I have gradually developed a more inclusive and open attitude. This experience cannot be achieved by relying solely on eurocentric philosophy courses. In the context of different ‘horizons’, my thinking has become increasingly multidimensional.

Connected to the BA World Philosophies programme is the ‘[Street Philosophy Workshops](#)’ initiative developed by Dr Elvis Imafidon that plays a central role in the activities of the [Centre for Global and Comparative Philosophies](#) at SOAS. The street has always been a vibrant, intensely rich and productive space, site and locus for social life, cohesion, action, concept-making, resistance, assimilation, and creativity. Street life, street music, street art, street theatre, street food and other street related concepts have for long been fertile resources for social and humanistic studies such as in urban sociology, hospitality and tourism, development studies, literature, and art studies. But an often ignored and underexplored street-related concept is *street philosophy*, which consists of philosophical ideas emerging from, and collectively achieved in, the street about such matters as the understanding of existence, knowledge, morality, beauty, selfhood, and resistance.

But what (dis)connections may exist between street philosophy and academic philosophy? In what ways are they loci of philosophical activities such as conversations, reflections, critique, formulation of concepts and ideas about being, knowing, acting, or simply existing? What intersections, if any, are there between street philosophy and academic philosophy? How might the street become a fertile ground for academic philosophy about a place? To be sure, these connections are at best very blurred if, as philosophers, one puts on our star-gazing lenses in the ivory tower and maintain the radical binary between (1) academic philosophy as produced by the individuated self and (2) the collectively-achieved philosophies emerging from traditions, cultures, communities, and the street.

The first event of the ‘Street Philosophy Workshops’⁵⁴—*Sapa, Humour, Resilience and the Existentiality of Suffering*—was held in 2022 at the University of Ibadan—aimed to counter academic philosophy’s longstanding tendency to deny the importance of our lively communities and lived experiences for *good philosophizing*, by actively engaging with the rich and thick philosophical concepts and ideas emerging from streets in communities and cultures around the globe about knowledge, aesthetics, existence, individuality, communality, and power. Doing so required going beyond and overcoming deeply rooted binaries in traditional academic philosophy (e.g., ivory tower vs. the street, individual vs. collective authorship, and written vs. oral philosophy).

In moving to *think* in terms of world philosophies and ‘street philosophy’, we recognise that we may have a fight on our hands: much academic philosophy in the UK, US, Australasia, and continental Europe masks its structural antagonism to everything that is not white, bourgeois, male, heteronormative, and able-bodied. Indeed, the institutional gatekeepers of Anglo-European academic philosophy will not take kindly to precisely this critical point, which is bound up with what Thiong’o has termed ‘colonial alienation’—the alienation which is “reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where

⁵³ However, it is important to note that the institutional approval of the BA World Philosophies programme was predominantly determined more by market demands than by debunking coloniality *irrespective* of market demands. To be recognised by consumers as a ‘legitimate’ undergraduate philosophy degree, SOAS philosophers had to ensure that students would encounter thematic studies in the vocabulary of Anglo-European philosophy’s subfields: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, logic, philosophy of language and mind, etc. To try to frame teaching these areas *via* the resources of, say, African philosophies, which do not organise philosophical thinking in these terms, then, would be deemed illegitimate (even though framing things in the vocabulary of Anglo-European philosophy’s subfields is distortive).

⁵⁴ Each academic year, a workshop is organised that is focused on a specific philosophical concept or idea that has become popular and important in the way people understand their existence in the streets of specific places and cultures.

bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe”.⁵⁵ Nor will they warmly welcome the redirection of the flow of epistemic power away from the Anglo-European world that is ideologically positioned at the centre to a horizontal, comparative, and dialogical model in which no geolocation occupies a privileged position at the centre.

At the core of the matter may well be the subconscious struggle to let go or share power with other schools of thought. Sharing the power of thought and giving equal weighting to various different philosophical traditions may lead to loss of influence and control and even sometimes part of one’s identity. Asking people who have historically wielded power over others to share power with people over whom they had and continue to have power is not natural for many.⁵⁶ However, if this power struggle is to be overcome, then sharing power with others leads to a greater sense of ownership, stronger bonds and cooperation, and improved productivity. The resistance to power-sharing stems from the fear among those who have historically held power that by sharing power with marginalised groups, they themselves will become marginalised, creating a reversal in the power dynamic. However, this will not be the case since the purpose of this decolonial toolkit is to embrace marginalised thought certainly to challenge the hegemony of western philosophy (which as such does not tend to preface itself), but also to enable rich and transformative conversations between intellectual systems.

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⁵⁵ Thiong’o 1987: 17.

⁵⁶ Oppong (2023) details this substantially.

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§1 Framing the Decolonising Philosophy Curriculum Discourse

§§a Introduction

‘Decolonising the Philosophy Curriculum’ is part of the global and predominantly student-led movement, *Decolonising the Curriculum* (DtC). DtC refers to a range of critical pedagogical initiatives that focus on identifying, acknowledging, challenging, and overcoming the ways in which racism, imperialism, and colonialism have jointly impacted upon (and continue to impact on) knowledge production and learning in general. To put it another way, DtC attempts to dismantle colonial institutional structures that confer epistemic centrality upon specific groups of people, their countries of origin, or their linguistic backgrounds.⁵⁷ Since DtC is widely recognised across the HE sector as vital for developing and maintaining inclusive teaching and learning environments, DtC is indispensable for sustaining healthy, robust, and engaging knowledge production contexts. Ultimately, though, the aim of transformative and critical pedagogy goes beyond the realm of philosophy and academia: the positive impact that decolonial frameworks have on the well-being of racially and ethnically minoritised students and staff cannot be understated. Equally important is how it fosters much broader socio-cultural understanding. The social justice endeavour holds the potential to instigate transformative shifts within educational institutions and reshape students’ perspectives on life.

In a relatively recent book, Julian Baggini (2018) posits that the salience of philosophical frameworks across different cultures reflects the intrinsic connection between philosophical thought and societal norms. Thus, to mine the discursive depths of diverse philosophies offers insights into the underlying workings of different societies and cultures. For instance, engaging with Chinese philosophy is indispensable for comprehending the dynamics of contemporary China, an increasingly significant geopolitical and economic power. This is not least because Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism continue to wield considerable influence in China today.⁵⁸ Properly making sense of these philosophical traditions sheds light on various aspects of Chinese society, from the practices of corporations seeking guidance from Buddhist monks to the ideological underpinnings of governmental policies. To focus on Confucianism specifically for the moment, Confucianism historically embraced authoritarian and dogmatic tenets. However, contemporary Chinese intellectuals advocate for a departure from these principles to foster a more democratic nation. Consequently, developing an informed perspective on such delicate socio-political issues is imperative for grasping China’s past, its present, and its future trajectory.

Considering the significance of China as merely one example underscores the broader relevance of substantively engaging with diverse philosophies from around the world. Such knowledge not only enriches knowledge of other cultures but also holds pragmatic benefits for one’s ‘home’ state interests. In this way, were one to neglect robust philosophical teaching and learning about the likes of Confucius risks leaving future diplomats, policymakers, and the wider citizenry comparatively more ill-equipped to navigate ever increasingly complex and complicated global dynamics. Therefore, embracing diverse philosophical perspectives is indispensable for fostering intercultural understanding and facilitating informed decision-making on a global scale.

⁵⁷ Viz. Oppong (2023).

⁵⁸ See Van Norden (2017) for further on this.

§§b What is *Philosophy*?

To frame our toolkit comprehensively and intellectually, it makes good sense to first scrutinise what academic philosophy is and question its roots.⁵⁹ As is well-known, ‘philosophy’ is etymologically derived from ‘*philosophia*’, which means ‘love of wisdom’ in ancient Greek. In its more broad and non-technical sense, ‘philosophy’ encompasses a worldview or outlook on life or core stances held by individuals or communities. In its more technical sense, ‘philosophy’ may even denote a “systematic or rigorous exercise of rationality”.⁶⁰

Excluding African and Asian philosophies from the annals of philosophical history is a relatively recent phenomenon. Indeed, perhaps ironically, cultural parochialities—such as westerncentrism—are a distinctively *modern* practice. In ‘pre-modern’ times, communication between, for instance, Greek, Persian, and Indian philosophic communities was commonplace and mutually nourishing. Trade routes—from Byzantium/Istanbul across the Asian continent—therefore, did not just exchange goods. Those routes were also sites of intercultural exchange and intellectual cooperation, so much so that the modern contention of hermetically sealed traditions developing in parallel may be deemed a myth. Pre- and early modern histories of philosophy did not uphold the exclusionary narrative, not least because figures such as Zoroaster and ancient Chinese peoples were regarded as among the earliest philosophers. For that matter, the pre-modern Islamic world is a *locus classicus* of multiple conceptions of philosophy and of its historical genealogy. Most considered philosophy Greek in origin, while some spoke of multiple, non-Greek traditions of philosophy.⁶¹ The latter were in most, if not all, cases often ideologically, sometimes racially, motivated. For instance, narratives around an ancient Persian tradition of philosophy, art, and like were constructed to assert ethnic superiority and to counter the wave of Arabisation that came with the spread of Islam. The question of how ‘philosophy’ was understood historically, and the prestige that it was accorded in different settings to the extent that it is in some contexts seen (certainly by most contemporary philosophers) as the highest form of human thinking, is admittedly complicated. However, at the same time, it is important to recognise that while there was certainly much cultural exchange at some points, there were also long periods in which there was hardly any intellectual exchange across neighbouring cultures. The channels of intellectual exchange were particularly complex. In most cases, court patronage played a much more important role in importing texts and ideas than trade routes.

It was only in from principally the 1780s that historians of philosophy began to assert a specifically Greek origin for philosophy, thereby marginalising African and Asian contributions.⁶² With the advent of western colonialism, there emerged a tendency to segregate religion from philosophy, with western scholars arguing that African and Asian cultures possessed religion but lacked philosophy. This exclusionary approach was driven by notions of cultural and racial superiority and the dismissal of non-western traditions as primitive and incapable of philosophical thought.⁶³ Additionally, the apparent hyper-individualism and secularity of western modernity overlooks the communal foundations of knowledge in African and Asian cultures. The notion that adherence to a religious tradition renders

⁵⁹ As Richard King observes, “Western accounts of the history of philosophy can be broadly characterised in terms of two main “strands”. The first offers a pluralistic account of the origins of philosophy and is represented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by writers such as Friedrich Ast, Christian Wolff, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Paul Deussen. The second strand represented by German scholars such as J.J. Brucker, Dietrich Tiedemann, G.W.F. Hegel, and the English historian of philosophy, Thomas Stanley came to the fore in the late eighteenth century and, following Diogenes Laertius, attempted to locate the origins of philosophy in ancient Greece” (King 2000: 25).

⁶⁰ King 2000: 2.

⁶¹ See Nasr (1976), Shayegan (1996), Fakhry (2004), and Daiber (2007) for further on this issue. In a way, this would be a reversal of the narrative as discussed in Europe where the homing in on Greece as the ‘origin’ was deployed in a colonial mindset.

⁶² See Park (2014) for further on this issue.

⁶³ Cf. Park (2014).

something less philosophical than adherence to a secular worldview is misleading, and—if anything—reflects eurocentric biases.⁶⁴

Another important question for framing purposes pertains to the characterisation of African and Asian intellectual traditions as ‘philosophy’, which risks constituting a form of intellectual imperialism by implicitly (and uncritically) accepting western categorisations.⁶⁵ For instance, the claimed (yet disputed) religious underpinnings of Indian philosophy prompt the question as to whether the western philosophical traditions would deem Indian philosophy *philosophy*.⁶⁶ Moreover, the designation of Indian philosophy as inherently *Indian* raises concerns, as the term ‘philosophy’ universally evokes western connotations inasmuch as the discipline tends not to preface itself with any regional or cultural designator. In this way, Indian philosophical discourse is confined to its ‘Indianness’ and its immediate cultural specificity. By doing so, Indian philosophy’s broader significance is comparatively marginalised. Indeed, the geographical demarcation between western and Asian thought perpetuates vulnerabilities within Indian thought and culture, rendering them susceptible to manipulation, domination, and distortion by western interests.⁶⁷ European colonialism, extending beyond philosophical realms, substantially contributes to the (Western European) fabrication of the myth of cultural universalism. By confronting these power dynamics, the Anglo-European ‘canon’ may start to unravel through proper recognition of the diverse and rich philosophical traditions that exist in the African and Asian continents.

However, while reframing African and Asian thought outside the western category of philosophy may seem like a step towards decolonisation, it also risks essentialising and ‘orientalising’ these traditions.⁶⁸ To practice decolonial philosophic education requires sensitivity and reflexivity, avoiding the imposition of western frameworks onto African and Asian philosophies while also acknowledging the interconnectedness and hybridity of global intellectual traditions. Overall, there is no such unanimity about what philosophy is among those people who have described themselves as philosophers. Despite divergent viewpoints among those identifying as philosophers, it is evident that conceptions of philosophy exhibit considerable diversity both in contemporary discourse and throughout history.⁶⁹ Even if we do not shift away from referring to ‘ethnic thoughts’ as *philosophy*, critical inquiry prompts a reevaluation of language and conceptual frameworks used to engage with knowledge across diverse cultural contexts. Such introspection, therefore, brings matters of inclusion to the fore.

§§c On Inclusion

One of the most instinctive ways to foster diversity within academic philosophy involves simply incorporating the voices, thoughts, and perspectives of individuals who have experienced colonisation. This activity can serve as a foundational step in the process of decolonisation and aid in ensuring the comprehensive representation of marginalised philosophical perspectives. By integrating diverse philosophers and traditions of thought into academic curricula, a greater number of racially and ethnically minoritised learners are more likely to feel encouraged to pursue philosophy in HE, as they perceive concrete experiential relevance in the content they study. Furthermore, this inclusive approach enhances the uptake of all philosophy students, as engagement with diverse philosophical traditions facilitates a deeper comprehension of societal dynamics and global perspectives. Addressing the lack of diversity in academic philosophy also necessitates proactive measures, such as diverse hiring practices. As of 2020, racially and ethnically minoritised students (problematically lumped together as ‘BAME’)

⁶⁴ This point is expanded at length in King (1999) and in parts of King (2000).

⁶⁵ Cf. Van Norden (2017).

⁶⁶ See Krishna (1966) and King (1999) for further on this.

⁶⁷ See King (1999, 2000) for further on this.

⁶⁸ Viz. Said (1978).

⁶⁹ Viz. King (2000).

represent only 8.6% of philosophy postgraduate students in the UK.⁷⁰ Such a glaring statistic highlights the predominantly white composition of not only the academic staff-base,⁷¹ but the curriculum itself as well. To quote Myisha Cherry and Eric Switzgebel from their 2016 op-ed article in the *LA Times*:

[White students] see faces like their own in front of the classroom and hear voices like their own coming from professors' mouths. In the philosophy classroom, they see almost exclusively white men as examples of great philosophers. They think "that's me" and they step into it.⁷²

This kind of homogeneity discourages racially and ethnically minoritised students from pursuing philosophy, as they perceive a lack of representation and relevance to their own experiences. By employing specialist educators from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, institutions can create more inclusive learning environments, fostering greater confidence and engagement among minoritised students.

Additionally, the inclusion of racially and ethnically diverse staff broadens the range of perspectives within academic institutions, thereby potentially initiating the decolonisation process and promoting multicultural spaces. After all, one cannot help but recognise that institutions comprise individuals who shape and implement their structures, policies, and procedures. Hence, a vital aspect of decolonial pedagogy involves opening institutions to individuals who have been historically marginalised or excluded from multiracial and multi-ethnic spaces. This approach, focusing on *people not places*, acknowledges the role of individuals in driving institutional change and promoting diversity.⁷³

However, notwithstanding the evident advantages and importance of creating greater apparent diversity within academic staff and curricula, several complexities may arise from adopting a simplistic 'add and stir' approach to philosophy.⁷⁴ A significant challenge to DtC comes from the liberal discourse and policy of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (as opposed to the more radical discourse and policy of diversity, equity, and inclusion [DEI]). This is because the longstanding liberal practices of diversification and inclusion in Anglo-European and American-Australasian polities typically fail to recognise the power relations that still 'bolt on', for example, minoritised vocabularies and standpoints are simply additive to a range of Anglo-European and American-Australasian curricula. Without such recognition, minoritised vocabularies and standpoints are regularly construed as *alternative*, or even *non-canonical* perspectives.

Inviting marginalised individuals into educational discourse constitutes oversight of longstanding systemic exclusion.⁷⁵ Persisting unequal power dynamics among various groups render assertions of inclusion insufficient, as those assertions fail to acknowledge deeply entrenched systemic inequities. Instead, engaging in challenging conversations that explicitly address colonisation and its enduring impacts on marginalised communities is better for fostering genuine dialogue on equal footing.⁷⁶ If these unequal power relations remain unchallenged, there is a risk of perpetuated dominance by privileged groups, inhibiting authentic exchange and understanding. Dominant traditions may overshadow less privileged ones, suppressing alternative viewpoints and limiting diversity of thought.⁷⁷

When one tradition holds more institutional power or cultural prestige, there may be a tendency for its perspectives to dominate or overshadow those of less privileged traditions. This suppression and marginalisation of ideologically-rendered 'alternative' viewpoints limits the diversity of ideas and

⁷⁰ Viz. Pozniak (2020).

⁷¹ As Charles W. Mills quipped in 2018, "philosophy is so white that if you go to an APA [American Philosophical Association] meeting, you need to put on dark glasses; otherwise, you'll get snow-blindness".

⁷² Cherry and Schwitzgebel (2016).

⁷³ Cf. Oppong (2023).

⁷⁴ Sager (2018) coins this an expression.

⁷⁵ Viz. McArthur (2021).

⁷⁶ Viz. McArthur (2021).

⁷⁷ Viz. McArthur (2021).

perspectives available for consideration. Moreover, unequal power dynamics can reinforce existing inequities and perpetuate systems of oppression. If one tradition's philosophical perspectives are consistently dismissed or devalued due to their marginalised status, it can further entrench the marginalisation of the communities associated with those perspectives. This not only undermines the principles of fairness and inclusion but also perpetuates the historical injustices that have contributed to the marginalisation of African, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous philosophical traditions. The decolonial process needs to be simultaneously institutional *and* disciplinary transformation: it cannot be achieved by simply adding or replacing one set of thinkers to or with others. The goal of decolonising philosophy curricula in no way diminishes many important and powerful contributions from western philosophy. Rather, its function is to elevate other philosophical traditions and schools of thought to equal standing.⁷⁸

Additionally, while increasing racial and ethnic diversity among staff is important, it does not automatically guarantee diverse perspectives, if the educational processes and even hiring processes are characterised by dominant whiteness. For, under whiteness, racially and ethnically minoritised people have been educated under colonial systems that suppress exploration of their heritage, where such experiences necessitate their own decolonisation process. Hence, 'box-ticking' diversity does not ensure diversity of thought.

Another potential issue that may arise in efforts to engage with more diverse philosophy stems from feelings of guilt or even self-interest on the part of racially and ethnically privileged agents. Rather than enacting meaningful change by either relinquishing privilege or deploying privilege to upend structures of privilege, racially and ethnically privileged agents may view diversity and inclusion as a means of not only 'helping' minoritised folk, but also enhancing their own learning for self-indulgent purposes. Indeed, longstanding liberal practices of diversification and inclusion in the Anglo-European and American-Australasian polities often involve tokenistic decolonisation—e.g. superficial use/mention of Global Southern scholars, Global Southern scholarship or Global Southern ideas.⁷⁹ Tokenistic decolonisation is not only shallow, performative virtue signalling that pays lip service to critical voices, it is also opportunistic and directly reproduces coloniality⁸⁰ by either essentialising or appropriating multiple and different knowledge-systems of the Global South as there for the enhancement of one's own career/standing.⁸¹ Moreover, the liberal expression "giving *x* a seat at the table" is often wedded to a centralised domain of power dubbing a 'marginal' perspective worthy of admission. 'Giving *x* a seat at the table' patronises especially those from the Global South by treating them as being dependent on Global Northerners' assistance to realise something meaningful and substantive. 'Giving *x* a seat at the table' reproduces the very hierarchies need dismantling.⁸²

When confronted with the harsh realities of colonisation and the marginalisation of voices and opinions, racially and ethnically privileged agents may treat stories or perspectives from the colonised as 'exotic', detached from their own comparatively more privileged experiences. This orientalising approach may reflect more of a morbid curiosity rather than a genuine desire to understand the lived experiences of others. The liberal and orientalising approach may also involve 'cherry picking', wherein agents selectively extract appealing aspects of other cultures without fully comprehending or empathising with the struggles and contexts associated with those cultures. Such intellectual interest may

⁷⁸ See McArthur (2021).

⁷⁹ UK HE may well be said to prefer the *appearance* of decolonising the curriculum rather than the *reality* of what decolonising the curriculum would mean: radical ground-clearing and beginning again. See Rollock (2018).

⁸⁰ If one wanted to make sense of *onipa* (the word for 'person' in Akan) in terms of comparing Akan communitarian approaches with Chicago School notions of symbolic interactionism, the worry would not be that such intellectual activity makes no sense to Akan theorists—it would make sense—but that the comparative work requires a highly considered epistemic sensibility to ensure the cross-cultural philosophical endeavour does not accidentally reproduce coloniality. Viz. Wiredu (1984).

⁸¹ Central to coloniality, for bell hooks (1992), is the hegemonic fantasy to dominate and benefit from the Other, rather than any sincere validation of the Other's own language, practices, lifeworld, and concepts.

⁸² Cf. Ahmed (2012).

take on a “symbolic and rarefied form”⁸³ that fails to acknowledge the actual hardships experienced by many ethnic minoritised people. A critical revaluation, therefore, is needed to shift the focus back onto the western tradition, recognising that whiteness could also be perceived as exotic or rare in other parts of the world. This perspective would serve to de-normalise western dominance within western societies themselves, as traditional western philosophy is often elevated above Indigenous cultures in colonised regions due to the effects of colonisation.

§§d The ‘Coloniality of Power’

Significantly, decolonising the curriculum is a constant and even never-ending process, to the point that the idea of thinking of decolonising subjects like philosophy, law, history, literature, mathematics, art, and music reaches a *fait accompli* involves a category error. Decolonising the curriculum is a constant and even never-ending process, mainly because of the ways it responds to the ‘coloniality of power’⁸⁴ and coloniality’s operational life. The coloniality of power—central to and deep-rooted in the ways the Western European-led parts of the Global North⁸⁵ and its array of modern institutional structures and practices construe legitimacy—is always desperate to fiercely combat any and all challenges to its way of making sense of knowledge and of knowledge production. At this point, it would be helpful to return to the earlier observation that thinking in the European tradition is necessarily disembodied in order to disguise the specifically embodied nature of the philosopher, a sleight of hand which has proven intractable.

Santiago Castro-Gómez has argued that western thought rests on a potent myth: the ‘hubris of the zero point’.⁸⁶ Zero point epistemology’s central contention is that an inquirer (the subject of knowledge) stands in a purely observational and neutral relation to the world (the object of knowledge). In the pursuit of Truth and Objectivity, an inquirer engages in dispassionate intellectual topography and cartography:⁸⁷ they map out complete conceptual terrains and develop increasingly more sophisticated systems of analytical categories to most effectively “carve nature at its joints”.⁸⁸ Dispassionate intellectual topography and cartography enables an inquirer to see how *absolutely everything hangs together*. Isaiah Berlin provides a helpful account of such a picture:

In [such a] ... cosmology the world of men (and, in some versions, the entire universe) is a single, all-inclusive hierarchy; so that to explain why each object in it is as, and where, and when it is, and does what it does, is *eo ipso* to say what its goal is, how far it successfully fulfils it, and what are the relations of co-ordination and subordination between the goals of the various goal-pursuing entities in the harmonious pyramid which they collectively form. If this is a true picture of reality, then historical explanation, like every other form of explanation, must consist, above all, in the attribution of individuals, groups, nations, species, each to its own proper place in the universal pattern. To know the “cosmic” place of a thing or a person is to say what it is and what it does, and at the same time why it should be and do as it is and does. Hence to be and to have value, to exist and to have a function (and to fulfil it more or less successfully) are one and the same. The pattern, and it alone, brings into being and causes to pass away and confers purpose, that is to say, value and

⁸³ McArthur 2021: 1684.

⁸⁴ Viz. Quijano (1999/2007, 2000a, 2000b).

⁸⁵ ‘Global North’ comprises so-called ‘economically developed’ countries like the USA, the UK, Canada, many Western and Central European states, Russia, Israel, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. ‘Global South’ replaces the more supremacist expression ‘Third World’ used in previous decades, and typically refers to so-called ‘economically developing’ countries, many of which experienced and still experience the harmful effects of colonisation and exploitation by Global Northern states. The expressions ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’, though, are still not ideal, as they risk recycling over-simplifying categorisations that are precisely emblematic of coloniality and its various practices.

⁸⁶ See Castro-Gómez (2007).

⁸⁷ We have capitalised these expressions in a manner that follows Richard Rorty’s polemic against academic philosophy, to make it clear that we are referring to, what Hilary Putnam has called, the *metaphysical realist* conception of truth and objectivity, which in turn derives from a hyper-representationalist metaphilosophical conviction that philosophic inquiry quests after “absoluteness” (Putnam 1992: 131).

⁸⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus*: 265e.

meaning, on all there is. To understand is to perceive patterns ... The more inevitable an event or an action or a character can be exhibited as being, the better it has been understood, the profounder the researcher's insight, the nearer we are to the one ultimate truth.⁸⁹

The zero point's hubris consists in two activities: the first is its effort to hide (or at minimum downplay) the myriad ways in which the subject of knowledge is enmeshed with the object of knowledge; the second is its ability to maintain the image of a value-neutral and detached inquirer "who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate".⁹⁰ Zero point epistemology is, therefore, strategic in terms of, to use an expression from Jürgen Habermas (1971), its *knowledge-constitutive interests*. This is because the epistemology of the zero point has *technical* interests in achieving and maintaining global epistemic and socio-cultural power through its efforts in intellectual topography and cartography. More specifically, the type of strategic knowledge-constitutive interest guiding activities such as 'mapping out *complete* conceptual terrains' and 'developing increasingly more sophisticated systems of analytical categories to most effectively carve nature at its joints' is one indicative of *coloniality*.⁹¹ While coloniality is, of course, related to colonialism, coloniality has subtle-but-substantive differences from colonialism and it is to this issue that we would now like to turn.

The concept of colonialism usually refers to Western European nation-states as early from 1492—but principally from the 18th century—exerting political, economic, cultural, and military domination over the land, labour, and lives of multiple Indigenous and First Nation populations. However, coloniality is neither reducible to nor synonymous with colonialism.²⁴ This is for two reasons.

Coloniality logically precedes the material and symbolic *praxes* of Western European hegemonic powers by serving as the conceptual motor for motivating and structuring the respective modern projects of colonisation by the Western European crowns that materially and symbolically carved the world at its joints. To quote Mignolo here, "[c]oloniality ... is much more than colonialism: it is a colonial matrix of power through which world order has been created and managed".⁹² Since coloniality is made sense of as a matrix of power relations that shape the predatory practices of Western European colonising projects by "defin[ing] culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production ...",⁹³ coloniality can neither be reducible to nor synonymous with colonialism for a second (and arguably more important) reason.

Coloniality neither dies with the expulsion of colonial administrators from sovereign territory, nor does coloniality wither away upon the birth of those independent nation-states rising from the ashes of colonial empire. Coloniality lingers on in having organised a global capitalist geopolitical and economic order that is definitive of much social, economic, and political life in those independent nation-states and the former colonial powers since the end of the twentieth century.⁹⁴

Decoloniality principally takes its lead from coming to terms with Frantz Fanon's postcolonial conception of the double-bind in which colonised people find themselves with respect to seeking recognition from the coloniser. The structure of recognition in such a context is anything but horizontal and *intersubjective*, because the power relation governing the colonial relationship involves the doling out of a specific resource—'recognition'—from a set of colonial recognisers who control its supply to a set of colonial recognisees who are desperate for its acquisition and fairer distribution. To put this another way, if the process of recognition is the bestowal of developmental capital from a centralised domain of

⁸⁹ Berlin 1955: 13-14.

⁹⁰ Mignolo 2009: 162.

⁹¹ The concept of 'coloniality' was first introduced into academia by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano. It has been further developed by Argentinian critical theorists such as María Lugones and Walter Mignolo.

⁹² Mignolo 2011b: 171

⁹³ Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243.

⁹⁴ Viz. Mignolo (2017).

power at the behest and pleasure of one group for the purpose of legitimating another, then recognition deals in domination, rather than evincing emancipation.

Instead of modelling recognition in terms of a dominant group taking pity on an oppressed group, to the point that the latter are viewed as begging for or in need of a white saviour, decolonial recognition is modelled more on a life-affirming intersubjective encounter between comparatively privileged agents and comparatively oppressed agents: the former sunder privilege by growing, and they learn about themselves in sharing power equally with the latter.⁹⁵

The epistemology of decoloniality aims to, following Aníbal Quijano, ‘delink’ from, as opposed to ‘cope’ with, coloniality and its various conceptual buttresses orientated to totalising systematicity.⁹⁶ Mignolo makes this point well, writing that “[e]pistemic disobedience means to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology.⁹⁷ What exactly delinking (and its concomitant *praxis* of epistemic disobedience) specifically involve is articulated by Quijano, albeit in a programmatic manner:

[i]t is necessary to extricate oneself from all the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people. It is the instrumentalisation of the reasons for power, of colonial power in the first place, which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled the liberating promises of modernity. The alternative, then, is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power.⁹⁸

The ideas of extricating oneself from all the linkages between modernity and coloniality and coming to recognise how coloniality has spoiled the liberating promises of modernity raise a key question now: does the abandonment of zero point epistemology signify the move towards the development of *alternative modernities*, or does it point to the development of *alternatives to modernity*?

Developing alternative modernities is a vast constellation of various conceptual and political endeavours. Such alternative modernities can range from attending to and making explicit non-Western European-led modernities, identifying earlier genealogies of Western European-led modernity, focusing on modernities within colonised territories themselves, to even proposing that Western Europe experienced multiple modernities.⁹⁹ Equally, developing alternative modernities can involve constructing a discourse of Western European-led modernity that rejects the central argument of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and adopts either a more ambivalent, Michel Foucault-rooted notion of modern discursive formations and *praxes*,¹⁰⁰ or a non-Panglossian defence of Western European-led modernity in the way that Habermas (1987) and Axel Honneth (2014) respectively have done. Developing non-Panglossian alternative modernities, particularly, places its stock in radical immanent social critique—as opposed to either Whiggish auto-correcting discourses exemplified by western political liberalism, or *Ideologiekritik*. To quote Maurizio d’Entrèves,

[b]y confronting modernity on its own terms, rather than escaping into a nostalgia for premodern traditions, or enthusiastically embracing a technocratic vision of postmodernity, or invoking an antimodern conception of the ‘other’ of reason, [one] can thereby hope to redeem the unfulfilled promises of modernity.¹⁰¹

This suggests that Western European modernity *becomes* subjecting—as opposed to *geared towards* *subjection from the very outset*. From d’Entrèves’s perspective, the multiple normative deficiencies that are commonly associated with the growth of modernity are viewed as temporary (but nonetheless substantial) distortions of modern institutions normatively structured to realise freedom. As temporary

⁹⁵ Viz. Oppong (2023).

⁹⁶ See Giladi (forthcoming 2025) for further on this.

⁹⁷ Mignolo 2009: 160.

⁹⁸ Quijano 1999/2007: 177.

⁹⁹ See respectively here Barlow (1997), Burton (1998), *Daedalus* (1998, 2000), and Gaonkar (2001).

¹⁰⁰ See Koopman (2013).

¹⁰¹ d’Entrèves 1997: 4.

(but nonetheless substantial) distortions, so the ‘critical modernist’ argument goes, the normative deficiencies of modernity can and will eventually be agonistically overcome within modernity, by realising, as Honneth puts it, a “normative surplus”¹⁰² in contemporary late capitalist societies.

By contrast, the project of developing alternatives to modernity is, in part, a rebuke of any search for alternative modernities, such as critical modernist accounts. As Mignolo writes,

if you argue for “alternative modernity or modernities” or “alternative development,” you are already accepting that there is *a* modernity and *a* development to which nothing but alternatives could exist. You lose the match before starting the game. Arturo Escobar shifted the expression to “alternative to modernities,” ...¹⁰³

Developing alternatives to modernity begins by recognising that since Western European-led modernity is *built on* systematic brutality and stolen lands—it is too far gone for *any* form of immanent critique to have significant-enough concrete effect on detoxifying modern institutions and hegemonic lifeworlds. Developing alternatives to modernity is necessarily an exercise in decoloniality and, ultimately, in the business of *transmodern* and *pluriversal* thinking,¹⁰⁴ which are epistemically disobedient sense-making activities that do not just de-link from the zero point, but also accomplish, what Mignolo and Catherine Walsh have called, ‘epistemic reconstitution’:

Decoloniality’s goal and orientation ... are *epistemic reconstitution*. Epistemic reconstitution cannot be achieved by setting up a “new” school of thought within western cosmology. It requires two simultaneous tasks: to open up to the richness of knowledges and praxis of living that the rhetoric of modernity demonised and reduced to tradition, barbarism, folklore, under-development, denied spirituality in the name of reason, and built knowledges to control sexuality and all kind of barbarians. Second, and necessarily, epistemic reconstitution requires delinking from the bubbles of modern thoughts from the left and from the right.¹⁰⁵

Epistemic reconstitution is constituted by interests in delinking as part of a concerted transformative effort to accomplish what Fanon envisioned in the Conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*, namely a ‘critical humanism’. Western European humanism—logically bound up with the epistemology of the zero point, coloniality, and colonialism—is such that “Europe has denied itself not only humility and modesty but also solicitude and tenderness”.¹⁰⁶ The Global South, therefore, is going to be the principal site for germinating the vocabulary for a new concept and politics of humanity, “something which Europe has been incapable of achieving”.¹⁰⁷ Another issue, therefore, is one of speech and voice: how to hear and learn from the vocabularies of the Global South?

§§e Gayatri Spivak’s Questions

The famous postcolonial question ‘Can the subaltern speak?’¹⁰⁸ is often asked from a particular standpoint—from the standpoint of someone ideologically-rendered privileged and elite. However, there is no ‘natural’ subaltern—voices *become* subaltern because of the way power often operates in given political societies. Crucially, marginalised people often have no difficulty articulating their experiences, since there is a well of interpretive resources in their communities that are not only drawn by them to make cogent sense of their marginalisation, but also to proactively resist it. Crucially, those particular interpretive resources are rarely recognised as part of the overall shared interpretive resources of a wider

¹⁰² Honneth 2014: 164.

¹⁰³ Mignolo 2011b: xxviii-xxix.

¹⁰⁴ Viz. Dussel (1993, 2019).

¹⁰⁵ Mignolo & Walsh 2018: 228-29.

¹⁰⁶ Fanon 2005: 235.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁰⁸ See Spivak (1988)

societal domain. This failure of recognition is largely due to socially dominant groups' negative attitudes towards the authors and producers of those particular interpretive resources. In other words, it is not the case that marginalised groups lack the epistemic and hermeneutic capital to make sense of their own experiences—but rather that socially dominant groups, for a plurality of reasons, are not inclined to deem those resources as epistemically and politically significant. As Nora Berenstain puts it, “[i]t is a failure of circulation rather than a failure of creation, and it is due to the refusal of dominant groups to acknowledge epistemic resources that resist assimilation into dominant epistemic schemes”.¹⁰⁹ So, Spivak's famous question—‘Can the subaltern speak?’—might prompt one to instead ask ‘Can the subaltern be heard?’.¹¹⁰

When Spivak asks her second postcolonial question—‘What might the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern?’—, a helpful answer is for privileged agents to practise *unlearning* as a way of transforming the operation of what might be termed the ‘epistemic economy’. Indeed, there is no *a priori* reason to think that an ‘economy’ is restricted to quantifiable, commodifiable resources falling under the language and interest of price signalling mechanisms and market forces. For, knowledge, sense-making frameworks, beliefs, etc. are (non-commodifiable) resources. Such *epistemic resources* can be used to enhance human and social capital, just as they can also be used to cripple human capabilities and erode trust and solidarity either through internalisation, or *via* non-circulation, or *via* inequitable distribution.

§§f Concluding Thoughts

For a decolonising philosophy curriculum to yield transformative results, each individual must actively embrace challenging coloniality. The responsibility for individual decolonial liberation is ultimately communal; it necessitates collective participation and commitment. Having merely a select few individuals able and willing to transform their individual mindset and educate others is insufficient. Genuine desire for change must be internally motivated, institutional and disciplinary in scope, with a willingness to dwell in discomfort.¹¹¹ In the case of academic philosophy in the Anglo-American and continental European world, the problem we have to come to see is the normative whiteness of academics' training. This critical observation finds support in the work of Dolores Delgado Bernal and Octavio Villalpando, who have written that knowledge production in university spaces is rooted in “... a eurocentric epistemological perspective based on white privilege and ‘American Democratic’ ideals of meritocracy, objectivity and individuality ... [which] presumes that there is only one way of knowing and understanding the world and it is the natural way of interpreting truth, knowledge, and reality”.¹¹² Academic philosophy, as a result, is far from an open discipline. Our Project deems (i) the coloniality of power, and (ii) the exclusion and/or marginalisation of minoritised voices in thematic content and module reading lists to be pedagogically, psychologically, and politically pathological.

Similarly, what Charles W. Mills (2007) has termed as ‘white ignorance’ is central to the coloniality of power and whiteness itself, insofar as white ignorance aims to (i) erase sense-making frameworks and perspectives that challenge ideology of western modernisation discourse; (ii) prevent the unimpeded circulation of sense-making frameworks that do not comply with western vocabularies, etc.; and (iii) maintain practices of epistemic exploitation.¹¹³ The following anecdote from one of the SOAS students interviewed for the toolkit powerfully illustrates what epistemic exploitation looks like and the effect it has on those adversely affected agents:

¹⁰⁹ Berenstain 2016: 585.

¹¹⁰ Spivak makes it clear that as soon as the subaltern are heard, they are, in a way, no longer subaltern. For, they have been absorbed into the hegemonic dynamics of recognisability, which results in their becoming other to themselves by adopting the modes of hearable speech.

¹¹¹ Viz. Mignolo and Walsh (2018).

¹¹² Delgado Bernal & Villalpando 2002: 171.

¹¹³ See Berenstain (2016), Davis (2016), and Giladi (2022) for further on epistemic exploitation.

In school, even when I was too young to fully comprehend issues of race and colonisation, I could feel that I was viewed different[ly] to my peers. Every time the word ‘Asia’ was mentioned, even if it was relating to East Asia or even American Indians, the whole class would turn around and look at me to provide more information, as if I represented every single person of colour. Even within classrooms, the burden of educating people about race would be put on me, as teachers were either too scared of saying something wrong, which made colour a “sensitive” topic to talk about or they simply did not understand or view race as something that needed to be addressed. When having discussions about race, I believe that we need to create a space where race is not considered a sensitive or a taboo topic, and that open discussions need to be had, even if it can be uncomfortable. The fact that the teachers, the ones who are meant to facilitate such discussions, placed this on me while refusing to have such discussions among themselves creates barriers in decolonising the curriculum.

Achieving a balance between supporting decolonisation efforts and allowing marginalised groups to lead their own liberation is perhaps the most challenging of all. To quote Seth Oppong, who eloquently phrases the balance problem:

If the allyship is performative and expressed in actions rather than identity and a perfunctory act, there is a danger of it being misused or abused by some members of the dominant group who wish to exploit the plight of the marginalised group for their own benefit instead. If you help wrongly, you are accused and if you refuse to help, you are equally accused.¹¹⁴

Effective communication and collaboration require reciprocal responsibility from both privileged and marginalised communities. It is vital for marginalised groups to be receptive and understanding of efforts from the privileged, who may not always intend harm or domination. Finding this balance necessitates compassion, understanding, and mutual respect from all parties involved.

Despite the numerous challenges involved in decolonising effectively, success is achievable through careful communication and a willingness to acknowledge our potential and actual biases. The realisation of successful decolonisation in philosophy will be evident when we, as inquirers, observe changes within ourselves, our practices, and our relationships; when we actively challenge deeply ingrained beliefs rather than perceiving change as something affecting only others. This process is crucial for individual understanding and the collective social well-being. Decolonisation not only enhances uptake, but also equips all of us with the tools to address institutional issues and cultivate stronger pedagogical practices. It is not merely about universities making surface-level adjustments: genuine decolonisation entails transformative change in fundamental assumptions and practices regarding how each and every one of us interacts with one another, how we conceptualise knowledge, and how we value students and staff. Decolonisation is a process that involves everyone, transcending individual roles and responsibilities. Decolonisation is for everyone.

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¹¹⁴ Oppong 2023: 76.

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§2 Critical Pedagogy in Practice

§§a Introduction

If decolonisation is to be more than a metaphor within educational institutions,¹¹⁵ it is not enough to restrict transformation to the curriculum. The practice and principles of teaching and learning must also change. As Ana Mendes and Lisa Lau argue, “[d]ecolonising the curriculum is about how we learn and whom and where we learn from, as much as what we learn”.¹¹⁶ In what follows, we examine the ways and means of decolonising the philosophy classroom, so that the content of a module is supported by the form of delivery, pedagogic culture, and classroom ecology. The aim is to provide a guide, underpinned by academic literature, to aid the delivery of decolonised pedagogy, one that centres the student experience as a crucial concern. We begin with a series of vignettes that narrate students’ experiences of classrooms that have been oppressive and disempowering and examine why. We then move to a theorisation of the relationship between pedagogic practice and decolonisation. Finally, we offer a practical guide to changing classroom dynamics such that the teaching and learning experience can embody the principles of decolonisation, tracked in previous sections of the handbook as well, and we offer some useful resources.

§§b Experiences of the Classroom: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly

Decolonising the curriculum extends far past curating a course that reflects the wider world and the diverse knowledge it holds. While this is an essential first step, decolonising the curriculum extends to transforming the classrooms in which we grow and learn. UK society is a reflection of UK history—a history that has been demonstrably harmful to marginalised peoples. Hence, UK society—especially our schools—have not always been kind to marginalised children. Beyond being subjected to narrow syllabi that only find value inside Europe and North America, beyond growing frustrated with the silently pushed rhetoric that only white stories are worth telling, and beyond just what we are taught, lies the unfortunate truth that the classroom has not always been a safe space for those it has a duty to protect.

‘BAME’. A simple acronym that attempts to encapsulate the complex histories and cultures that lie far beyond UK shores. ‘BAME’ appears to be closer to a necessary evil than a sign of substantive progress. For, the category involves the lumping together of racialised adults and children, who, in this way, are subjected to homogenising experiences. ‘BAME’, in other words, produces racial and ethnic monoliths. At this point in the critical conversation, eyes may glaze over, and indignation may widen, especially when white peers or superiors,¹¹⁷ who have “never had to think what it means, in power terms, to be white”,¹¹⁸ allow the treacle in their ears to set. When there is an attempt to burst the bubble, and when anyone dares to introduce such agents to reality, instead of the simple act of listening, panic takes over. There is a rush to correct the person of colour—the arrogant few even begin to lecture them—to gracelessly let the person of colour know that this person, who lives in a racialised body that forces them to contend with the power dynamics of race and racialisation, have got it all wrong.¹¹⁹ After all, from a standard liberal perspective, how could, say, a teacher without malicious intent who has never considered racial privilege ever contribute to racial discrimination? Two of the SOAS students we interviewed for the Project reflected powerfully about their experience of marginalisation here in pedagogical contexts:

¹¹⁵ Viz. Tuck and Wang (2012).

¹¹⁶ Mendes and Lau 2022: 224.

¹¹⁷ Of course, not all white folk do this. However, that we have to make such a qualification reveals just how deep structural racism runs, sadly.

¹¹⁸ Eddo-Lodge 2020: ix.

¹¹⁹ See Eddo-Lodge (2020) for further on this experience.

I feel like they didn't consider the students that didn't look like them.

Having to explain an experience they would never understand felt like talking to a brick wall.

The classroom is not experienced in the same way by everyone in the classroom. Much like the world outside its four walls, there are specific power dynamics at play. Much like the world outside, there is the good, the bad, and the ugly. An ugly truth is that racially and ethnically minoritised children within a classroom will be subject to the bias and ignorance of their white peers and teachers. Ignorance born of the latter's inability, or unwillingness, to confront their imbrication in whiteness. And the brave few that attempt to highlight this bias and seek racial justice are, more often than not, met with the same glazed eyes and indignation—what Robin DiAngelo (2011) has famously named 'white fragility':

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviours, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.¹²⁰

The major barrier to progress here seems to be the effort to lead white students and teachers to the waters of enlightenment. But, perhaps more importantly, is the issue of getting these folk to drink. By this, we mean that when discussing the complexities of racial dynamics in the UK, people of colour have often experienced the frustrating phenomenon of white people correctly grasping that race and racism are important matters, but *only* wanting to acknowledge racism in the form of white hoods and burning crosses. However, the following excerpt from a SOAS student we interviewed for the project reveals a more complicated, subtle, and insidious side to racism—what Kristie Dotson (2011) has termed 'testimonial smothering':

In history lessons when we were being taught a skewed account of colonialism and slavery, I was always scared to give my true opinions and share my family and life experiences in case I offended anyone or made any of the students or teachers feel uncomfortable for being white. The way in which we learnt about Jallianwala Bagh in school and the colonialism in India was all done within a singular one-hour lesson, where the teacher showed pamphlets from the time, portraying how brown women were not as beautiful, or less than white women. Being the only brown woman, I was so embarrassed and upset, but never felt as if I could portray that at the risk of being called sensitive.

While I understand what the teacher was attempting to do, trying to show the racist sentiments that people used to hold and for the students to be shocked, I feel that the way it was done was insensitive and made it feel like the cartoons were funny, rather than something to find horrifying. Teachers also taught as if colonialism is this age-old, ancient event that occurred thousands of years ago, when in reality it is a very recent event, with still very raw scars. We have family friends whose great-grandparents were affected by Jallianwala Bagh, which still affects family trees and lines today, not to mention the intergenerational trauma. My own grandma experienced India under British rule and had to endure the burden of fleeing from Pakistan to India with her five siblings. My parents grew up in Kashmir, an area that was made dangerous and contested by partition. Losing generations of family wealth and creating long-term mental scars and trauma that are passed down through family. This is what colonialism means to people who have been affected by it. However, colonialism was treated as a trivial topic that can be quickly covered as part of a few lessons when it actually has moulded and created people's entire lives.

I recognise that schools make attempts to teach sensitive topics, but with an all-white staff that have no personal experiences, it is difficult to engage students in a meaningful way. Those same staff, through this decolonising philosophy toolkit could be taught how to think about decolonisation in their everyday classroom and view it as an ongoing process, rather than just something that has to be covered in a few lessons.

I do not view myself as a victim to my family history or the way that schools taught colonial history, I just recognise that it was more difficult to navigate certain things in my life that other people would not have to

¹²⁰ DiAngelo 2011: 57.

consider. Instead, I feel incredibly lucky and privileged to be in a position that I can help change attitudes and make the learning environment more conducive to open discussions about race.

When critical race theory and the major implications it has for institutional life enter the conversation, a wall is often quickly erected. When faced with the suggestion that white people have benefitted from the happenstance of being born white, and when required to contend with the privilege granted to them as a birth right, comprehension becomes a herculean task. In the classroom, this can even become more sinister. Children and young people of colour are often forced to articulate an experience they may not have words for yet, to people who do not want to listen—or who do not want to *properly* listen. Racial constructs are centuries' old and immensely pervasive and complex in their everyday manifestations. This section attempts to contend with all these experiences, and most importantly, highlight works that have taken up this same task.

Like Sisyphus burdened by his boulder, it has become the burden of people of colour to articulate the details of a problem with which white people refuse to contend.¹²¹ In this task, language serves as a revolutionary tool. Words and their power have moved mountains, caused chaos, and brought peace *when utilised correctly*. Hence, the specific language and racial terms used to engage dialogic encounters are required to address the issue at hand. Yet, it is racialised language that often precipitates fraught tensions that shadow these discussions. Because of this, the boulder slides back down, and *on repart à zéro*. Adjoa Aiyetoro (2009) contends with this shadow directly when opening her discussion in her piece 'Can We Talk: How Triggers for Unconscious Racism Strengthen the Importance of Dialogue'. Her article argues that the employment of the language of race is so heavily disparaged by white society, as it mars their accepted "myth of a colourblind society".¹²² Any attempt to uncover the racial implications of one person's actions threatens to topple the house of cards and insults the accused—anyone caught showing signs of racial bias is portrayed an 'evil-doer'.¹²³

When discussing the impact of white behaviour on racially minoritised folk, white feelings become the focal point. No self-respecting, reasonable person wants to be labelled a racist. So, instead of grappling with the harm their actions have inflicted, they scramble to absolve themselves of the guilt that begins curdling in their stomach, as the following SOAS interviewee for the Project noted:

I quickly learnt that in bringing up race or reporting the behaviour of another student I was sentencing myself to a great deal of emotional labour. Instead of having an adult who I could freely talk to and ask for help, I felt like I was holding their hands through this conversation.

As the societal racial default, white people have never had to truly contend with their race and often do not even view themselves as having a racial identity.¹²⁴ As such, white educators often fail to realise when their white identity impedes their treatment of students of colour. When engaging in conversations of race and racism, specifically conversations of the violence that students of colour so often endure at the hands of their white peers, deep emotional responses tend to arise. While all students struggle emotionally throughout these conversations, familiar with the curdled feeling of white guilt and continually oblivious to the taxing trials of moving through society as a person of colour, white educators are quick to comfort the discomfort of white students and leave students of colour to stew in the unjustness.¹²⁵ Another SOAS interviewee for the Project expressed this tendency well:

Class discussions were ... painful, to say the least. Honestly, I always felt white teachers would give students a pass for certain behaviour or statements if it was a 'mistake' they would've made too.

¹²¹ Viz. Eddo-Lodge (2020).

¹²² Aiyetoro 2009: 1.

¹²³ Viz. Aiyetoro (2009).

¹²⁴ Viz. Benson and Fiarman (2020).

¹²⁵ See Applebaum (2017).

Educators set the standards of a classroom, signalling through words as well as actions what is tolerable and acceptable. Whether aware of the choice, the activity of prioritising the feelings of white students when they are confronted with the impact of their racial oblivion and violence reinforces a hierarchy within the classroom. It tells students of colour that the lifetime of prejudice they endure is incomparable to even one minute of white discomfort. God forbid a white student sheds a tear.

In their work discussing bias in schools, Tracey Benson and Sarah Fiarman (2020) aimed to remove white guilt from the conversation, by using the concept of ‘unconscious racial bias’. Much like ‘BAME’, we find the distinction to be a necessary evil, but by doing so they re-centre what should always be at the core of these conversations—the students, more specifically, the harm inflicted upon students of colour. Children of colour have often already been instilled with the practice of quelling emotional responses to racial injustice, lest they make a situation more dangerous for themselves.¹²⁶ To white readers, we want to emphasise the sheer enormity of white privilege. The ability to emote in response to wrongdoing and outright aggression is a luxury not afforded to all, a lesson so many students of colour learnt before even reaching Key Stage 2. The simple act of extending empathy to students of colour and allowing them the space to feel hurt, or angry, or frustrated is a radical change in and of itself.

The classroom is a complex space—a concentrated reflection of the world at large. And thus, teachers, who are tasked with the duty of fostering the growth and learning of the next generations, are also tasked with not just identifying structural inequities that negatively impact the classroom, but also rectifying them. We live in a racialised world and ignoring this fact within schools is not the revolutionary act some seem to think it is. It is the teacher’s responsibility to know and understand the dynamics at play within their classroom, the good, the bad, and especially the ugly. ‘Colourblindness’ does not ensure equity, it only blinds us to the perpetrations of racial discrimination and prejudice. Ignoring a problem is not solving a problem.

§§c Pedagogy and Decolonisation

Decolonising pedagogy, thus, entails a critical examination of the processes that have created educational inequities, where minoritised groups have had their own knowledge systems, values, and perspectives excluded. Teachers who are racialised as white need to understand what Fatima Pirbhai-Illich et al. (2017) refer to as ‘the structural and macro-colonial effects of eurocentric education system’. They argue for the necessity of educators to develop “a deeper comprehension of the psychological and sociological harm done to the continuing realities of culturally marginalised students [for the reason that] a pedagogical method that does not balance or exclude their knowledges, perspectives, histories and experience will not change the existing structural inequities”.¹²⁷

As the SOAS student interviewee voices so far have revealed, classrooms are spaces of power. Classrooms can be alternately empowering or disempowering, liberating or oppressive, both for the teacher and the students. Because classrooms are microenvironments of power relations, it is important to consider how, within a decolonising ethos, power might be (re)distributed effectively and ethically in order to enhance the learning experience, recognise teaching and learning as important contributors to social justice, and to build a rigorous means of questioning ‘settled truths’. The demands this poses on both student and teacher are not insignificant, requiring participants to adjust their expectations of the classroom, agree and abide by a set of behavioural principles, and be prepared to experience a degree of discomfort. The traditional role of the teacher is, as such, concretely challenged, moving from the ‘sage on the stage’ to that of a co-creator of knowledge whose authority is both questioned and yet necessary to maintain a safe space for all, able to facilitate relationships with and between students, and to manage anxieties, and resistance to changed expectations.

¹²⁶ See Dotson (2011).

¹²⁷ Pirbhai-Illich et al. 2017: ix.

More importantly, the teacher should generate excitement, such that the classroom becomes a space of joy, rather than one of boredom, bounded hierarchies, conventional practice or even fear.¹²⁸ Teaching and learning in a decolonial manner are ways of building connections between individuals but also between the inside and the outside of the classroom walls. Taking such an approach is a gift to the discipline of philosophy, which often struggles to show students why philosophical approaches and preoccupations *matter*. This is more than just simply making philosophy ‘relevant’, an endeavour which runs the risk of playing along with the marketing impulses and metrics of the neoliberal university. Connecting the discipline of philosophy, connecting abstract concepts to the lives we all live, is a means of aiding students to recognise the value that concepts and complex structures offer to the pursuit of justice and freedom. As a SOAS student interviewed for the Project stated,

I took a philosophy of law class that was really engaging and I think that was because of how based in reality and our lived experiences it was. We studied actual movements in recent history, like the BLM movement, and it didn’t seem so distant or far removed from our lives.

A decolonial classroom, therefore, begins with a recognition that the context in which teaching and learning occurs, at least in the West, is a normatively racialised, classed, gendered, and ableist environment. As such, the classroom often distributes power unequally, often to the benefit of those who are most proximate to normative structures of power; and the classroom is harmful to those who are not so proximate. With respect to developing a decolonial pedagogy, it is particularly important to attend to the nature of whiteness, as already noted, and how it has operated, at the very least historically, in the classroom space.

Challenging White Normativity

Ruth Frankenberg defines ‘whiteness’ as multi-faceted in its nature and function:

Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.¹²⁹

These dimensions can be further broken down and made more concrete. Much scholarship on whiteness remarks on the pervasive invisibility of whiteness.¹³⁰ Scholars agree that whiteness operates as an invisible, normative, and totalising system of racialisation. It is operationalised by marking out that which it is not: it requires the visibilisation of something it deems non-normative, which is what is marked as non-white, as “deviation” from the unmarked (white) norm.¹³¹ Whiteness establishes its normativity *via* the presentation of itself as universal, naturalising, and then maintaining a hierarchical, racist social system and a dominant/subordinate worldview.¹³² Richard Dyer recognises that “white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular”.¹³³ Whereas ‘Black’ is specified and particularised, white is not: it “is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularising quality, because it is all colours, it is everything. White is no colour”.¹³⁴ And yet, as Sarah Ahmed writes, “[w]hiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it”.¹³⁵ Classrooms are often places, in a western context, where white normativity

¹²⁸ See hooks 1994: 7, in particular.

¹²⁹ Frankenberg 1993: 1.

¹³⁰ See Keating 2007: 64.

¹³¹ Keating 2007: 66.

¹³² Viz. Du Bois (1920) and Fanon (1986).

¹³³ Dyer 1988: 44.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Ahmed 2007: 157.

operates invisibly and insidiously: who feels at ease to talk, who feels confident, who feels listened to, what language is used, and so on.

It is important here to note the differentiated relationship we (teachers and students) have to whiteness. Every participant in a classroom is racialised (not to say also gendered, sexualised, ethnicised, economically situated, etc.) in different ways which may or may not be visible or apparent, or which may be uncomfortably so. It may be that some are reluctant to endure any further discussion of whiteness because of its normativising quality. And of course, some may wish to resist racialisation talk altogether. It is difficult to accept an identity as ‘non-white’, significantly defined and shaped by racist discourse, without adopting to some extent the terms of oppressive structures and agents. Further, there is the risk of absorption in a ‘white identity politics’,¹³⁶ where we re-centre and keep the focus on white people and where the structures of marginalisation, exclusion, and negation that ground whiteness as normative are once more affirmed. For those who are not white, there is little that anyone would have to teach you about the ways of whiteness that you do not already know; those of us who are white have much to learn and much to unlearn.

It may seem that what we argue here is directed solely at those who are white-identified: in many ways it is. White people must talk critically and persistently about the pathology of whiteness. Doing so is not an occasion, however, either for self-congratulation,¹³⁷ or for guilty paralysis (which, according to the current vernacular, would be white fragility accompanied by white tears). At the same time, it is important that we recognise the contingency and fluidity of the connection between whiteness—as a socio-epistemic structure—and white people, while acknowledging that all of us, however we are racialised, inhabit what Ahmed calls “a sea of whiteness”.¹³⁸ Our habitation will be comfortable or uncomfortable to the degree that we are marked or unmarked in relationship to the structures of whiteness.

For those of us who present as white, and who benefit from it, we must learn to *see* whiteness. We need to develop “a critical pedagogy of whiteness”.¹³⁹ Because race can no longer be relegated to the domain of those who are not white, we need to de-normalise whiteness by exploring its racialised, non-universal characteristics. It is principally the labour and responsibility of white scholars and students, to develop an ethics of accountability that stops putting the onus on those who are constructed as other in relation to whiteness to keep doing all the work,¹⁴⁰ or thread us yet again back into the obscured structures of whiteness so often present in the discipline of philosophy. Confronting white normativity is not, therefore, simply about changing the content of a curriculum; it is also about who has power in a classroom, what assumptions about ability and intelligence are prevalent, who speaks, who does not, who feels comfortable and who does not and how the space and time in the class is organised. Because of its invisibility, its normative dimensions, it is difficult to name what whiteness is in a way; rather, we must attend to what it does, what it enables, how it functions within and beyond the classroom.

First, it operates as a form of power that hides its specific values, epistemology, and other attributes “under the guise of a non-racialised, supposedly colourless, ‘human nature’”.¹⁴¹ It simply *is*. In the western classroom, these dynamics are often present where minoritised students are expected to conform to the dominant cultural and behavioural paradigms of white normativity in order to succeed. It places the violent demand on these students that they become other to themselves rather than encouraging them to make use of their own cultural resources, histories, and experiences as valuable contributions to knowledge making and to the pursuit of justice and freedom.

Second, it operates as an epistemology, a system of knowledge and concepts derived from the normative assumptions of whiteness which are self-confirming, solipsistic while highly dependent on

¹³⁶ Viz. Ahmed (2007).

¹³⁷ What Adrienne Rich (1979) names ‘white solipsism’.

¹³⁸ Ahmed 2017: 146. Cf. Mirza 2014: 5.

¹³⁹ Kincheloe and Steinberg 1998: 14.

¹⁴⁰ See Puwar (2004).

¹⁴¹ Keating 2007: 63.

that which it negates. It assumes that all adequate knowledge has been generated in the western world and there is little need to engage with other systems of thought or ways of living. White epistemology is, in effect, a total social system which totalises through division. Epistemological whiteness ranks differences according to their deviation from the white norm and thus when the curriculum, teachers, and classroom practices are normatively white, the message that is received by students is that intellectual production from other locations is not valuable or necessary. It is this ability to shape the meanings and value of other concepts that are subordinated to it and constructed to shore up white epistemology that marks its ability to universalise itself as authoritative, using tools of gradation and indeed degradation. In the context of the classroom, this means that how knowledge is produced, circulated, and engaged with can, and usually is excessively eurocentric and parochial. Students expect and deserve more of the classroom experience than this impoverished model of education.

Third, whiteness both produces and is constituted by a system of racialised contrasts: non-whiteness becomes hyper-visible because it is constructed as deviant, other, specific, and thus different against the ostensible universality and mute blankness of whiteness.¹⁴² This specificity and difference is what is visible and necessarily disavowed, often violently as having any relationship to whiteness. It is marked against a white background which is unmarked. Ahmed points to the way in which whiteness connects to a form of ontology: if to be human is to be white, then to be not white is to inhabit the negative: it is to be “not”.¹⁴³ Being white is a tautology: it is precisely to *be*. Educators need to recognise the identitarian dynamics of the classroom as regularly dehumanising of minoritised students, often enforced subtly through forms of discipline, non-attentiveness to the speech or ideas of these students, and the dominance of white voices as the example student testimonies above spell out so poignantly.

Fourth, whiteness is a phenomenology: it has material effects and materialises bodies. As Ahmed puts it, whiteness as a phenomenology tells us what it is that bodies “can do”.¹⁴⁴ It is a form of orientation that opens space to those marked white and either closes it to those who are not, or remarks their presence as out of place. Racially minoritised students often remark on the exhaustion and anxiety involved in navigating majority white spaces, because of the sense that is implicitly conveyed that they do not belong there. As we will discuss below, an important role for the teacher in a decolonial classroom is to create a space of ownership and belonging for all students and to work to make the space especially hospitable and habitable for minoritised students.

Fifth, whiteness is contingent on and connected to its history, which consists in the repetition of the structures and concepts that accrue to the positivity (simultaneously a negativity) of what is associated with white. However, to maintain its invisibility and pretence at universalism, this history must be covered up. Thus, when a philosophy syllabus covers only the thought generated by white thinkers, it engages in a coverup, becomes complicit in and actively contributes to a long history of racist exclusions. With all of this in mind, therefore, as a first step in decolonising the classroom, it becomes necessary to confront the whiteness of many classrooms and their embeddedness in what we may name a historically colonial pedagogic superstructure, one which both generates and sustains white normativity as the standard of excellence and adequacy and which has dominated the forms and content of education globally. In what follows, we offer some practical guidelines and examples that are intended to aid the decolonisation of classroom settings. We provide tips on how to establish ground rules for conduct, reimagine the role of the teacher, develop generative and co-creative learning opportunities, manage difficult conversations and organise the classroom time and space.

¹⁴² Viz. hooks (1992).

¹⁴³ Ahmed 2007: 161.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

§§d From Theory to Practice: Decolonising the Classroom

Setting some rules: Classroom etiquette

As a first step in establishing the decolonial ethos of a module, it is necessary to communicate a clear set of guidelines for conduct and to draw attention to the racialised context of the classroom. Developing these guidelines has educational value, ensuring that all students are cognisant of and agree to principles of behaviour that reflect an awareness of the potential of a classroom to be oppressive, silencing spaces for minoritised students. Moreover, developing these guidelines will enable teachers and learners to identify routes to remedying situations that students experience as harmful and to build the confidence of minoritised students to speak freely and participate fully in classroom activities.

The following example is from one of the philosophy modules that is currently taught at SOAS, and which colleagues may wish to adapt for their own purposes. It is designed to map out clearly the pedagogic ethos of the module, to set expectations around conduct, and to provide routes for redress if things go wrong.

Classroom etiquette: An example

Together we have a responsibility for maintaining a civil and conducive learning environment. Treat each other and your tutors with politeness, respect, and kindness. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences in race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and ethnicities. Students from different backgrounds and perspectives should be well-served by and comfortable in this course. Your learning needs shall be addressed both in and out of class. The different perspectives, experiences, skills and backgrounds that you bring to this class are a resource, a source of strength and benefit.

Materials and activities will be presented in a way that shall be respectful of your differences and identities, whether these concern gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, or culture. The classroom should be a safe space for all of you and that means we need to abide by some basic rules.

Given the sensitive and challenging nature of the material discussed in class, it is vital that there be an atmosphere of trust and safety in the classroom. As the module convenor, I will attempt to foster an environment in which each class member is able to speak and hear each other. This does not mean accepting views that are toxic or blind to privilege. We can call these out but when we do it is important we focus on critiquing what is said, rather than the person expressing these views, and that we do so courteously. That said, it is not your responsibility in this class to carry the burden of educating others. All too often those of us in a position of privilege shirk our responsibilities to educate ourselves. We must be alert to the labour, and exhaustion involved when a member from a less privileged category has to repeatedly call attention to problematic or unthinking statements that reflect privilege or reinforce it.

When you speak,

- be mindful of the space you are taking up
- be aware when you interrupt or speak over someone else
- be gentle with each other and listen carefully before speaking

Some of the material in this course may evoke strong emotions: please be respectful of others' emotions and be mindful of your own. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, either by myself or other students, is troubling or causes discomfort or offence.

While the intention may not be to cause discomfort or offence, the impact of what happens throughout the course should not be ignored but rather deserves attention: these moments can be important learning opportunities for everyone who perhaps does not experience the same emotions. If and when this occurs, there are several ways to alleviate some of the discomfort or hurt you may experience:

- Discuss the situation privately with me. I am always open to listening to your experiences. I value your input and want to work with you to find acceptable ways to process and address the issue.
- Discuss the situation with the class. In this case, I would appreciate it if you can let me know beforehand so that I can prepare and support this interaction. It is likely that are other students in the class who have had a similar response to the material. Discussion enhances the ability for us all to have a fuller understanding of the context and impact of course material and class discussions and to seek to change ways of thinking and behaving.
- Notify me of the issue through another source, such as a member of the programme's teaching team, your student representative, or a peer. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing the issue directly with me, I encourage you to seek out another, more comfortable avenue to address the issue.
- You can address the issues anonymously through the course Padlet (the link is available on the virtual learning environment).

Learning Culture

Please remember that you are responsible for your own learning—do not rely on others to do the work for you. This includes attending classes and interactive sessions, turning up to your groups fully prepared and ready to pull your weight.

Names, Alternate Names and Gender Pronouns

Your registration details are provided to me listing your legal name. I will gladly honour any request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Reimagining the role of the teacher

As previously articulated, the philosophy classroom is a racialised and racialising space. In a western context, it is usual for the teacher to be racialised white often due to structural racism that affects employment opportunities for members of racially and ethnically minoritised communities. For this reason, it is important for white educators to reflect on the impact that their racialisation may have in a diverse classroom, and how that racialisation itself can and usually does contribute to one's own blindspots, biases, and intentions, irrespective of whether these are conscious. Teachers must take the time to challenge themselves, familiarise themselves with the literature that has emerged from critical race theory and critical philosophy of race, which exposes the over-determined structures that preserve and enable white privilege.

To re-imagine the role of the teacher, the teacher, as a racialised figure, must first re-examine the space and position they hold within the classroom, and the world as a whole. Understanding the mechanisms of racial inequity, the structures that uphold it, and the role they play in racist systems is

essential in decolonising the classroom. Without this intellectual insight, it is impossible to even find the root of the problem, let alone begin to address it.¹⁴⁵

One way to engage with and challenge one's position as teacher is to ask oneself a set of questions that is designed to re-orient pedagogic practice towards transforming the teaching role. The following checklist provides a useful guide:¹⁴⁶

- How do you view success?
- What are your expectations for your students?
- Think about if and how you actively amplify student voices and build student agency in the classroom. Do students have a voice and do they have a say in their learning?
- Think about the student to teacher speech ratio and the nature of discussions in your classroom. Are you the sole or loudest voice in the classroom?
- Think about how you talk to your students and about your students. Do you use deficit-based language or hold assimilationist beliefs? Challenge these so that diverse views are clearly invited and valued.
- Think about how you resolve issues in the classroom. Are you inquiry-stanced and solutions-oriented?
- Do you engage in power struggles with students?
- How often do you give students referrals and how quickly?

When descending through this series of introspections, to most critically engage with how you have filled the role of the teacher as a racialised figure, it is critical to dissect this series through the lens of how these introspections apply differently to both white and students of colour. E.g. Do your answers differ? Has this difference impacted student learning or behaviour? Try to think particularly from the perspective and standpoint of racially and ethnically minoritised students. Are you someone they trust? How might changing your assumptions and practices help to build trust?

The teacher in a decolonial classroom must learn to learn from the perspectives and knowledge systems of the students and to unlearn their own colonially-mediated assumptions and background knowledge. Unlearning means stopping oneself from always wanting to correct, teach, and enlighten. The impetus to always be the speaker and speak in all situations must be seen for what it is: *a desire for mastery and domination*. Rather, the teacher should be prepared to forgo a singularly authoritative role and be a facilitator of, and participant in good learning. The teacher, alongside the other learners in the classroom is then able to explore issues of social inequity that many students experience with the aim of co-constructing a critical consciousness of how knowledge may operate to divide or create connections, challenge the *status quo*, and deepen the class's collective understanding of the contextual and yet "transient nature of knowledge (curriculum, resources, the purpose of education and social change)".¹⁴⁷

The teacher committed to the decolonial classroom should be prepared to share themselves in an open and generous way with the students, to remove structural barriers, while ensuring that this does not centre the teacher's experiences as solely authoritative. Teachers should nonetheless be open about you're their own complicities, learning processes, mistakes, anxieties, and hopes. This airing of vulnerability helps to build trust and strong, honest pedagogic relationships. Moreover, actively and sensitively inviting students to share their own experiences in relationship to the topics module convenors cover enshrines students' positive self-recognition as vital sources of knowledge. Recognising students' plethora of lived experiences as *knowledge*, irrespective of their status as minoritised, opens up the classroom to important insights about how we process information, why knowledge matters, and

¹⁴⁵ Two particularly accessible works that encapsulate these systems and how to confront them are *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (2020) by Renni Eddo-Lodge and 'Sometimes Leaving Means Staying: Race and White Teachers' Emotional Investments' (2019) by Zeus Leonardo and Blanca Gamez-Djokic.

¹⁴⁶ Viz. <https://www.pbs.org/education/blog/decolonizing-our-classrooms-starts-with-us>.

¹⁴⁷ Pirbhai-Illich et al. 2017: 15.

what we may need to unlearn. We recommend allowing time in class to get to know the people our students are: what are their backgrounds, interests, and concerns? Take time to learn how to correctly pronounce their names.¹⁴⁸ Do not put the onus on students to correct mispronunciations.

As already noted above, white normativity is often the dominant mode within which teachers and students operate, whether unknowingly or consciously. As such, drawing attention to racialised and racialising dynamics can often lead to defensive reactions from white people that need to be confronted and managed, so that minoritised students are not harmed. If one is a white teacher, then there is a need to recognise that one may react defensively or dismissively when challenged about one's own blindspots or problematic assumptions. Being open to criticism is especially advisable. Instinctual defensiveness when being criticised is a very understandable human reaction; but it is the teacher's responsibility to put that initial feeling to the side when a student considerately challenges them. The considerate challenge is not an attempt at disparagement, but a summons for an understanding, sensitive ear. No amount of reading or study will ever equate to lived experience of being a racialised minoritised person in society with a deeply embedded racial hierarchy. Because of this, when a student of colour comes to a teacher with a concern, taking the time to carefully listen, hear, and act on that concern, and then checking with the student that their issue has been adequately addressed can work wonders. Moreover, if and when teachers' ever witness students engaging in racist behaviours, it goes without saying that teachers must intervene and challenge such poor conduct. Crucially, though, the confrontation should avoid shaming students, and should endeavour to point out in concrete terms how racist views or words are harmful. Doing so removes the burden placed on minoritised students to educate both you and their fellow students.

Generative learning and co-creation

A decolonial classroom is enabled when teachers create contexts where learners can be authentically self-determining; where pedagogy is interactive, dialogic, and fully relational; where the cultural experiences of all students have validity; where knowledge is actively co-constructed; and where participants are connected through the establishment of a common vision of what constitutes educational excellence. The role as teacher is to enable students to become the agents of their own learning rather than unreflective co-operators with the colonial structures and forms of education that continue to exist.

Co-creation of the curriculum is something that can also take place *in* the classroom. This means, once again, lessening the teachers' control of both *what* is studied and *how* it is studied. Co-creating the curriculum encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and to reflect on how knowledge is constructed, produced, cited, and disseminated.

For example, at the beginning of a course, a module convenor could set up a forum for students to propose topics or approaches within the broader rubric of the module enabling them to identify what they need to learn. It is useful to start each seminar/tutorial with some reflection time, getting students to write down responses to prompts that are designed to elicit reflection on topics, the application of these to their own lived experiences, as well as their affective responses. Cultivate students' intimate knowledge of the nature of the classroom and the content of their education to shape the curriculum to their interests and needs. Linked below is an example of the questions/formatting that could be used within your classrooms to gather this knowledge. It asks for long-form questions that allow students to freely express their experiences of the curriculum and classroom as the module progresses: *Curriculum and Learning Evaluation*.

Decolonial practices are not a one-time implementation of change. They require constant reflection and growth. Infallibility is an impossible (and undesirable) feat, so trying and being open to learning is the most anyone can achieve. Continual evaluation throughout the academic year should be sought, as it will aid in gauging the efficacy of changes made and the work that still needs to be done.

¹⁴⁸ If in doubt, check names at this link and then practise: <https://mynameis.raceequalitymatters.com/>.

Below is another example of a questionnaire and survey formatting that would aid in the continual evaluation of changes within the academic space. While the format is mostly scalar questions with the opportunity for longer written answers, the format is based off SOAS Student Evaluation of Module (SEM) surveys, and may be useful in the regular collection of large quantities of quantitative and qualitative data: *Curriculum and Learning Review Form*.

Managing difficult conversations: How to create safe but also challenging spaces

Educational spaces are intended to aid in the growth and learning of the students. Part of that growth is facilitated by the difficult conversations that critically engage with the challenging topics applicable to their lived experiences. Just like in the world outside the academy, this often results in the emotionally tense discussions that can become divisive. It is the role of the teacher to encourage and mediate these debates, whilst refraining from taking sides—outside of clearly harmful rhetoric.¹⁴⁹ However, difficulty begins to arise, when one has to gauge if or when to intervene. Treading the fine line of encouraging participation while minimising harm is no small feat.

In one instance, a SOAS student interviewed for the toolkit recalled an experience of a conversation that centred around the intersection between race and class in a classroom. A student of colour in the class contributed a view drawn from their own lived experience of racism that ran counter to that of the white teacher. The teacher leading the discussion looked visibly uncomfortable when confronted with the contribution of a racialised perspective, most likely because it exposed the limited scope of their view, tiptoeing around the statement. As the SOAS interviewee went on to say:

I find it interesting that we'll still have this controversial thought that started this conversation, that no one else has addressed yet, that could topple the viewpoint we've been discussing and it kind of just lingers in the air.

While educators should remain facilitators in these conversations as opposed to active participants, the key to productive and safe discussions lies within well-established safe spaces. The topic of race should not be treated as taboo, but rather a necessary and normalised practice.¹⁵⁰ Making discussions of racism routine alleviates the discomfort that minoritised students may feel, as noted by another SOAS student we interviewed:

Seeing the school acknowledge things. You know your question to me about when sensitive topics were brought up? Well, my school never even acknowledged [what was wrong with] things like that. So, why would I then feel comfortable talking to them about my experiences?

Enabling students of colour to witness teachers engaging in these conversations, flagging racialised positions,¹⁵¹ and participating in the pursuit of racial justice creates environments in which minoritised students are able to trust that both their perspective and lived experiences will be positively acknowledged, handled with care, and sincerely valued. We recommend teachers make sure that they are educated in how racialised power dynamics circulate, how to ameliorate these. Perhaps most importantly, if a teacher is white, then they should additionally focus on how to build their role as an ally to minoritised students. *The Guide to Allyship* offers a useful and detailed set of principles and practices in this regard. In summary:

- Take on the struggle [for social justice] as your own struggle.
- Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it.

¹⁴⁹ Viz. Applebaum (2017).

¹⁵⁰ See Benson and Fiarman (2020).

¹⁵¹ Particularly those who are marginalised within white majority contexts.

- Amplify voices of the oppressed before your own.
- Acknowledge that even though you feel pain, the conversation is not about you.
- Stand up, even when you feel scared.
- Own your mistakes and de-centre yourself.
- Understand that your education is up to you and no one else.

Amplifying the voices of students of colour and giving them the space to articulate their experiences of the world is essential in these difficult conversations. Our words and points of views are too often marginalised, and centring them is indispensable for constructing and sustaining decolonial spaces. Crucially, though, as previously discussed, educators should remain vigilant of the emotional labour students of colour may be undertaking in doing so. There is the common eventuality of these students' worldview being epistemically exploited, epistemically appropriated,¹⁵² and treated as a learning tool for their white peers. Whether there are good intentions behind inviting a singular student—or a small minority of them—to speak, teachers can fall into the trap of relying on the emotional labour of marginalised students to articulate a position or experience they themselves have not done the work to understand. Students of colour, under practices of epistemic exploitation and/or appropriation, become a commodifiable and fungible resource within a classroom, to broaden the curricula without any challenge to the structures of white normativity. Creating a safe and challenging space that welcomes and aids in these difficult conversations is a balancing act that requires time, empathy, and grace to achieve. It is not something one can expect to immediately achieve: again, it requires learning to learn and unlearn.

Organising the classroom

Many of us have little control over the physical layout of the classroom or indeed the timetable. Most university classrooms are organised in quite a rigid way such that the teacher stands at the front, surrounded by technology, and the students are sat in rows, often at desks or long tables. Such a set-up does not lend itself well to the creative, dialogic practice of learning and teaching characteristic of decolonial pedagogy. It further reinforces the hierarchical division between teacher and learner and thus tends to lend itself to maintaining the inequitable power relationships that a decolonised classroom seeks to overturn.

Authoritative academic studies show that an optimal classroom environment, particularly for minoritised groups,¹⁵³ is one that enables active learning which has three dimensions: behavioural (students' engagement in class activities), cognitive (students' critical thinking and decision-making during the activities), and social (students interact with other students in a small group).¹⁵⁴ If possible, teachers should arrange the classroom into areas that enable students to interact easily with their peers in small groups where teachers are also able to move freely, to engage with the students, and encourage their conversations with each other.

Questions to ask now:

- Are students facing you at all times?
- Do the seating arrangements and the types of learning activities you plan and have your students engage in enable dialogue or individualism, cooperation or dominance of a few voices?

¹⁵² See Davis (2018).

¹⁵³ See Fredericksen (1998).

¹⁵⁴ Viz. Kuwabara 2023: 94. Cf. Watkins et al. (2007).

- Does the classroom organisation enable students to collaborate and engage in interactive learning structures?
- Are they physically comfortable?
- Are you and they able to move freely around the classroom?

Time management

When considering how to make best use of the time spent in the classroom, it is important to remain flexible. Rather than sticking rigidly to a lesson plan, be open to allowing and enabling conversations to emerge organically, while encouraging the focus to remain, at least broadly, on the topic of the class. This can be achieved in a number of ways, depending on whether the class is a seminar or a lecture. Ideally, the aim of any lesson should be to create learning collectively but in a clearly structured way where the aforementioned three dimensions of active learning are enabled.

1-hour seminar example

- As students enter the classroom, have a box of numbers on cards (1-4) ready and get the students to select one each. This number will then identify their group and identify the sections of the classroom where each group should sit.
- Start the class with a reflective check-in, perhaps asking every student to use one word to describe how they are feeling about the topic/class (5 mins)
- Ask for volunteers to provide a 3- to 5-minute summary of the topic/assigned reading(s)
- Ask the students to gather in their group and identify 2-3 discussion questions that are in turn analytic, critical, and applied. Students should then post these on the whiteboard. Or even better, on the class Padlet (5 mins)
- If necessary, ask each group to explain their choices and why they think these questions are important and relevant to the topic (10 mins)
- Ask the student groups to discuss their questions and arrive at answers that correspond to what you collectively hope to learn from the exercise. Each group should democratically appoint a spokesperson (20 mins)
- Bring the groups back together to present their findings and give them time to respond to each other (10 mins)
- Just before class ends, do another 5-minute reflective check-in to see how students have changed their attitudes towards the topic.
- Synthesise and summarise the discussion and post on the class Padlet or noticeboard, drawing out in particular the applications of their learning.

50-minute lecture example (social philosophy)

- Start by offering a clear statement about the aims of the lecture and the structure
- Ask students to post their questions and comments on the course Padlet as you speak; but also invite students to interrupt you if anything you say is unclear.
- As you speak, check regularly that students are able to follow
- At the 25-minute mark, break for a quick 10-minute comment section where you can read through the Padlet and respond to the comments and questions posted.
- Resume the lecture, adjusting its direction to address student responses.

- End the lecture with a summary of the direct applications of the topic, their relationship to forms of social justice and liberatory potential.

§§e Summary

What we have provided here is by no means an exhaustive guide to decolonised pedagogy. Instead, we have attempted to offer a guide to the important first steps necessary to build towards a liberating, justice-oriented mode of learning that is collectively distributed between students and teachers where the decolonising philosophy curriculum is brought to life and made relevant for our students. In this way, decolonial pedagogy produces better, more rigorous teaching and learning experiences for all concerned.

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§§g Other Resources

Blog posts and articles

- [Decolonising the Classroom: Step 1 \(NCTE\)](#)
- [Decolonising the Classroom: Creating and Sustaining Revolutionary Spaces Inside the Academy](#)
- [Decolonising Teaching: A Cross-Curricular and Collaborative Model for Teaching about Race in the University](#)
- [Educate to Liberate: Build an Anti-Racist Classroom](#)
- [How To Be An Ally](#)
- [Name Pronunciation \(Race Equality Matters\)](#)

YouTube seminars and workshops

Decolonising the Classroom

This two-panel series provides a variety of perspectives and methods, highlighting different approaches and rationales. The panels explore fundamental questions: is decolonial practice an additive process, or are we rethinking fundamental structures? Does decolonial practice change how knowledge is produced, validated and disseminated? And in practical terms, what does decolonising look like in the classroom, including standard survey and historical period classes?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4b0eoEEScc>

Decolonising Classrooms with Indigenous Pedagogy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08il8XKBhCU>

Decolonising the Classroom: A Space of Resistance? Part of the Event Series: 'Diversity, Racism and the Broken Promise of Inclusion in German Higher Education'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pn0-uScJQ9Q>

Three Tips to Decolonise Your Classroom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VncbtNrfv2Y>

The Indian Board of Education: Decolonising the Classroom

Excellent overview on the research that demonstrates the positive outcomes of decolonising pedagogy and the classroom experience

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbfLMfrDV8o>

§3 Decolonising Formative Activities and Summative Assessment

§§a Introduction

Philosophy may be regarded as a metacognitive discipline *de rigueur*: philosophers are not just interested in thinking, but in thinking about thinking itself. However, over the course of our research into philosophy assessment culture in the UK HE sector, we found that that many UK undergraduate philosophy assignments are traditional, homogeneous, and lack pedagogic diversity, to the extent that one of the SOAS international students we interviewed for the project spoke about their experiences in a way that resonates with Gillian Rose’s famous reflective remark that mainstream Anglo-American philosophical education ‘... teaches [students] to be clever, destructive, supercilious and ignorant. It doesn’t teach [students] what’s important. It doesn’t feed the soul’.¹⁵⁵

If I had seen philosophy assignments from those celebrated UK HEIs before enrolling, I might not have chosen philosophy as my major. The essay questions, by and large, seem devoid of inspiration and intellectual challenges, appearing as mere technical, abstract exercises. Many universities still rely on traditional essays and exams for assessments. This perception still challenges my ability to engage with philosophy. I believe I am not alone in feeling this way. Many people are interested in philosophy but lack the courage to pursue it due to the cold and intimidating nature of such assignments. Writing answers to typical essay questions can also be intimidating for non-native English-speaking students, badly affecting their confidence. A western colonial ideology might be responsible for why I feel so ‘put off’ here.¹⁵⁶

For all of philosophy’s inherently critical orientation, the assessment culture in UK undergraduate philosophy programmes is unacceptably conservative. In a way, the ‘Janus’ side to academic philosophy—the ability of the discipline to be life-affirming and emancipatory, while the discipline’s institutionalisation often involves stifling such potential through cultural hegemony and reproducing cultures of conservative pedagogy that are embedded at school-level—is a perfect case-study for examining the university as a site of producing “privilege rarefied knowledge, produced by an intellectual elite, which is disconnected from real-world problems and experiences ... and yet ... has also been the site of new theoretical frameworks that challenge these norms”.¹⁵⁷

There is good reason to contend that western colonial ideology, which is logically bound up with whiteness,¹⁵⁸ also manifests itself in the traditional types of formative activities, and, perhaps more significantly, the traditional types of summative assessment philosophy students tend to encounter at UK universities. After all, as David Boud and Trina Jorre de St Jorre contend, “[a]ssessment is a socially constructed practice, that is interwoven with relations of power ... [and] is largely informed by long-standing disciplinary norms, and what educators have themselves experienced. As such, it is designed and constructed in accordance with the social and cultural backgrounds of academics, whose experience

¹⁵⁵ Rose’s expression first appeared in her radio interview with Andy O’Mahony in 1995 shortly before she tragically died at the age of 48. In that interview, she articulated her frustrations with how philosophy was taught at Oxford University.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. “... the colonial system of education in addition to its apartheid racial demarcation had the structure of a pyramid: a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary twiddle, and an even narrower university apex. Selections from primary into secondary were through an examination, in my time called Kenya African Preliminary Examination, in which one had to pass six subjects ranging from Maths to Nature Study and Kiswahili. All the papers were written in English. Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliantly he had done in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all subjects except English, which he had failed. He was made to fail the entire exam. He went on to become a turn boy in a bus company. I who had only passes but a credit in English got a place at the Alliance High School, one of the most elitist institutions for Africans in colonial Kenya” (Thiong’o 1987: 12).

¹⁵⁷ Forsyth & Evans 2019: 749.

¹⁵⁸ One has good reason to think that cleverness, destructiveness, superciliousness, and ignorance are properties of whiteness.

of higher education may differ considerably from how it is experienced by contemporary students, or those from other sociocultural backgrounds”.¹⁵⁹

Traditional types of formative activities and traditional types of summative assessment briefs, then, may be said to invariably reflect western (particularly Anglo-European) systems of knowledge production. In doing so, this structurally disadvantages students from diverse cultural and learning backgrounds which enshrines inequities and normalises the debilitating phenomenon of *social closure*—¹⁶⁰ the proclivity of privileged groups to hoard access to epistemic and material resources in ways that sustain social hierarchies.

It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that radically revising assessment cultures by overturning ideologies invested in uniformity and conformity—ideologies that, as we previously discussed in §1, are central to reproducing the coloniality of power—is going to play an important role in not just eliminating but keeping racialised awarding gaps (RAG) eliminated.¹⁶¹ Indeed, on this very matter, one may point to the scholarly consensus in education research recognising that inclusive formative activities and inclusive summative assessment design are the principal mechanisms for helping eliminate RAGs: however diverse and devoid of westerncentrism a module’s thematic content and reading lists may well be, these properties *by themselves* neither entail a complete decolonial approach to teaching and learning, nor are they materially effective in eliminating RAGs. For, as Boud and Maddalena Taras have respectively correctly observed, “assessment is the most significant prompt for learning”,¹⁶² and “[assessment] has been shown to be the single most important component that influences student learning and education in general”.¹⁶³ If, to use Jan McArthur’s expression, “assessment is the key driver of how and what students learn”,¹⁶⁴ then, under traditional assessment cultures and diets, there is little or no way to pedagogically counter coloniality, since what is the *base* of testing student knowledge is a traditional essay or exam. And if the base is constituted by traditional and exclusionary mechanisms for assessment, then decolonising teaching and learning is effectively hamstrung.

Beyond the metrics-side of RAG as an Education KPI, if one combines non-traditional, intentionally decolonial approaches to summative assessment and formative activities with marked sensitivity to the learning needs of neurodiverse students, then one may be viewed as engaging in *properly* inclusive assessment *praxis*. After all, what forms a positive feedback loop between decolonial and neurodiverse-sensitive pedagogy is the strong opposition to uniformity and conformity, two mutually reinforcing ideological totems of coloniality and ableism.¹⁶⁵ Focusing now on a helpful example of *properly* inclusive formative activity *praxis*, we would like to turn the conversation to pedagogical discourse around conceptual mind maps (CMM).

§§b CMM

CMM is an activity that is increasingly rooted in pedagogical practice for neurodiverse learners, such as those students on the autism spectrum and/or those recognised with attention deficit hyperactivity

¹⁵⁹ Jorre de St Jorre & Boud 2023: 143-44. Cf. Leathwood (2005) and Shay (2008).

¹⁶⁰ Viz. Harvey et al. (2017).

¹⁶¹ See Boud & Falchikov (2007), Cureton & Gravestock (2019), Cousin & Cureton (2012), Hockings (2010), Leathwood (2005), McArthur (2018), Montenegro & Jankowski (2017), [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #ClosingTheGap \(2019\)](#), and [Closing the Gap: Three Years On \(2022\)](#). Other racialised gaps include racialised average mark gaps and racialised pass rate gaps.

¹⁶² Boud 1995: 36.

¹⁶³ Taras 2008: 289. Cf. Boud & Falchikov 2007: 3; Boud, Cohen, and Sampson 1999: 413; Maclellan 2001: 308.

¹⁶⁴ McArthur 2016: 967.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. “Any approach to assessment for inclusion must seek to disrupt notions of normal and, therefore, requires engagement with critical disability theory” (Jain 2023: 30).

disorder (ADHD).¹⁶⁶ CMM, as articulated by Tony Buzan (its principal exponent since the 1960s), uses the entire range of cortical skills to foster what he names ‘radiant thinking’:

It is in these shimmering and incessant embraces that the infinite patterns, the infinite Maps of the Mind, are created, nurtured and grown. Radiant Thinking reflects your internal structure and processes. The Mind Map is your external mirror of your own Radiant Thinking and allows you to access this vast thinking powerhouse.

Radiant thinking constructively deals with executive dysfunction, namely working memory difficulties, and struggles with note-taking, organisation, and time-management. Executive dysfunction is something that ADHD learners typically experience and find especially challenging.

Unlike traditional essays, which are linear, regimented, and word-heavy, therefore marginalising the learning habits and practices of neurodiverse students, CMM provides visual learning opportunities that enable neurodiverse (and neurotypical) students to creatively represent and follow the contours and pathways of their own individual thought-processes. CMM is, in this way, hostile to a neurotypical-centric regulatory power relation in which students are forced to think in manners that are not emblematic of their own, unique ways of engaging with cognitive content, especially when those learners are principally visual thinkers. Forcing neurodiverse learners to think in neurotypical manners exemplifies a vicious culture of coercive legitimation and is, on this basis, the disciplinary partner of colonial regulatory power relations which insists that thinking in ways that are illustrative of one’s local lifeworld de-legitimises one’s knowledge and standing in the space of reasons.

Constructively aligning the pedagogical business of decolonising module content, reading lists and classroom practice with the pedagogical business of practising inclusive assessment cultures provide more intellectually stimulating, more fulfilling, and more meaningful learning experiences for *all* students while reflecting the particular epistemic and cultural needs of minoritised groups.¹⁶⁷ Such a way of approaching developing and ‘testing’ learners, by extension, is important for not only enabling but also sustaining high levels of student engagement and success. One might even contend that inclusive cultures of *authentic* assessment design and *praxis* without inclusive curricula, then, are empty; inclusive curricula¹⁶⁸ without inclusive cultures of *authentic* assessment design and *praxis*, then, are equally so.

§§c Authentic Assessment

The early practice of authentic assessment (AA) in HE—which is currently being revisited as a concerted response to the contemporary neoliberal emphasis on conflating learning outcomes with work-place readiness and the reductive capitalist notions of employability¹⁶⁹—focuses on students producing summative work that is principally evocative of their personal interests, their lived experiences, and speaks to their lives. In other words, authenticity here properly represents “appropriate, meaningful, significant, and worthwhile forms of human accomplishment”.¹⁷⁰ There are at least two principal ways in which AA operates in current HE contexts.

The first involves construing authentic assessments simply in line with ‘alternative’ assessments—i.e. forms of assessment that are not traditional ones like invigilated in-person exams in grand colonial buildings (or even sport halls) / pen-and-paper tests in sterile seminar rooms / essays. Testing learning outcomes through reflective learning journals,¹⁷¹ or academic blogs, exhibitions,

¹⁶⁶ It is worth comparing conceptual mind mapping with the development of flowscapes and their ‘water logic’ by Edward De Bono (1994).

¹⁶⁷ Viz. Bloxham & Boyd (2007).

¹⁶⁸ I.e. thematic module content and reading lists that centre, as opposed to ‘adding and stirring’ ideologically minoritised voices, vocabularies, and lifeworlds.

¹⁶⁹ See Ashwin (2020).

¹⁷⁰ Newmann & Archbald 1992: 71.

¹⁷¹ See Woodward (1998).

documentaries, or case-studies, interviews, podcasts, multimedia presentations, infographics, or even creative portfolios with poetry elements are examples of ‘alternative’ assessments.

AA in this sense is particularly nourished by *crip theory*,¹⁷² which itself is borne out of critical pedagogical discourse at the intersection between critical disability studies and queer theory. The activity of crippling and producing cripistemologies,¹⁷³ concerns, to quote Travis Chi Wing Lau, “ways of knowing that are shaped by the ways disabled people inhabit a world not made for them”.¹⁷⁴ Crippling and producing cripistemologies, therefore, go beyond the neoliberal idea of ‘reasonable adjustments’. Crippling and producing cripistemologies favour a more radical, transformative dismantling and reconstruction of assessment partly through developing a new model of temporality: *crip time*. This new model of time, with its emphasis on the lived and varied affective dimensions of temporality in neurodiverse and disabled communities, prioritises “not just a need for more time, but an exploded concept of time that is flexibly managed, negotiated, and experienced”.¹⁷⁵ With this in mind, reflective journal-based assessment has been identified by Neera Jain as an assessment type that operates more under crip time.¹⁷⁶

The second way in which AA operates in current HE contexts involves AA modifying what is, other than the exam, the most common form of traditional summative assessment in existing UK academic philosophy programmes: the coursework essay. Often, coursework essays—especially those in undergraduate philosophy programmes—are set solely by the module convenor and straightforwardly ‘imposed’ on students enrolled on the module. For example,

1. Reconstruct and assess Galen Strawson’s ‘Basic Argument’ for the impossibility of moral responsibility.
2. ‘If it is a genuine possibility that a creature *functionally* identical to me could lack any sensation at all when I feel pain, then it is a genuine possibility that a creature *physically* identical to me could lack any sensation at all when I feel pain.’ Discuss.
3. “There is no hard problem of consciousness”. Discuss.
4. Evaluate whether G.E. Moore’s argument for ‘the existence of things outside of us’ is valid, sound, and satisfies Moore’s conditions for a “rigorous proof”.
5. How, according to Kant, should one judge the moral worth of actions performed out of feelings of sympathy? Is Kant’s view plausible?
6. Assess the following claim: ‘Charlotte Witt’s uniessentialism’s reliance on an Aristotelian framework about substance means that her position collapses into kind essentialism’.

Focusing on 1., this question requires the student to read Strawson’s 1994 article and suggests students engage with the voluminous responses to Strawson’s argument. However, the question—for all its worth with respect to clearly testing at least one module learning outcome in a module on (analytic) metaphysics—is fairly generic and superficial. Students are not *actively* encouraged to engage in deeper

¹⁷² Viz. McRuer (2006).

¹⁷³ Viz. Johnson and McRuer (2014).

¹⁷⁴ Lau 2021: 3.

¹⁷⁵ Jain 2023: 33.

¹⁷⁶ It is important to recognise that for all of the advantages that come with producing a reflective journal, reflective writing in English can be particularly challenging for those students—especially Global South students—whose first language is not English. Because of this, assessment briefs that have significant reflective journal writing elements to them require careful linguistic and technical support, to prevent a pedagogical inequity from arising.

learning and original reflection, especially if they base their answer on existing published arguments (of which there are many).

In this way, students are almost ‘set up’ for mediocrity and discursive banality,¹⁷⁷ by being more likely to produce a generic and superficial response to the essay question, one which will be very similar to what a large language model like ChatGPT produces competently. Setting students up for mediocrity and discursive banality is further evidenced by two things: first, by the way in which students often report that traditional assessment comes across as “something that was done to them, rather than something in which they could play an active role”;¹⁷⁸ second, as Hannah Forsyth & Jedidah Evans point out, by recognising that “the experience of completing an essay or exam—regardless of its benefit to learning or self-betterment—legitimises, in part, the assessment form. The toil, stress, and even boredom of traditional assessments are familiar ground, and the experience is akin to completing a long race: the student has worked hard, and has made it to the finish”.¹⁷⁹

Thinking in terms of AA in the second operational context means that coursework essays need to be designed in ways that explicitly give students far more sense of *responsibility for their own learning*—in this case particularly, by challenging and encouraging them to have an active stake in the debate about Strawson’s Basic Argument. AA, therefore, enables a radical break from the traditional, bureaucratic, and anxiety-inducing modelling of assessment as “a hurdle [students] have to jump over on the way to getting a qualification”.¹⁸⁰ Rather than have the module convenor pedagogically act in a top-down manner by setting a *generic* question about Strawson’s Basic Argument, the AA version of things here can involve a bottom-up approach in which the module convenor and the enrolled students co-create spaces where students are empowered to create their own essay question. By making it very clear to students that they are ‘masters of their own pedagogical destiny’, and that the role of the module convenor here is consultative,¹⁸¹ an assessment brief for a module, say, on ‘Metaphysics’, can look like this:

Essay (70%) – 2000 words

Think very carefully about wording the title of your own essay question—specifically, think about devising a question that

- i. is authentic and reflective of your intellectual interests concerning the topics covered in ‘Metaphysics’*
- ii. best enables you to communicate your own philosophical voice*
- iii. addresses the module’s learning outcomes*

The AA version may require students to not only contextualise their answer in real-world examples and/or show how the application of theory to real-world problems might solve those problems, which in itself requires students to take significant responsibility for their work. This means their learning becomes properly agentic, since the essay-writing *praxis* now is about “student *becoming*, rather than

¹⁷⁷ Cf. “... a focus on testing risks encouraging superficial approaches to learning” (Villarroel et al. 2018: 841). Cf. Endedijk & Vermunt (2013), and Beyaztas & Senemoglu (2015).

¹⁷⁸ Sambell et al. 1997: 363.

¹⁷⁹ Forsyth & Evans 2019: 758.

¹⁸⁰ Bols 2012: 4.

¹⁸¹ Giving students this critical pedagogic sense also conveniently provides students real motivation to not restrict their intellectual efforts to the reproducible genericity and superficiality of ChatGPT.

merely demonstrating familiarity with a lecturer's selected topics".¹⁸² With this in mind, please find below some examples of co-created with student authentic essay questions from 2023/24 at SOAS:

Focusing on real-life instances with particular emphasis on moral accountability, in what ways—if any—can Judith Shklar's and/or Richard Rorty's discourse about cruelty improve ethical conduct?

How do Judith Shklar's and Richard Rorty's respective definitions of cruelty hold up against the philosophical dilemma posed by self-inflicted harm, which can be considered cruel due to its 'unmaking' quality towards the agent?

In the context of human rights abuses, can either Shklar's or Rorty's approach to cruelty offer a robust framework for addressing distinctly modern forms of socio-political cruelty?

Focusing on case-studies centred on the ethical implications of intergenerational justice, what is the most effective way for prioritising the allocation of resources and responsibilities among nations, communities, and individuals in response to the climate emergency?

Which salient themes in 'The Last Forest' shine particularly rich conceptual light on matters pertaining to climate justice?

Focusing on some contemporary case-studies, would operating under an integrationist approach to climate justice provide a particularly effective response to the climate crisis?

To what extent can conceptual decolonisation be applied outside of the African historical colonisation context, particularly in the framework of the colonial-gender system?

Framing conceptual decolonisation in non-obvious colonial contexts: The case of the decline of dialect and accent in the North of England. Internal colonisation in Britain?

Using real-life examples, is translation not merely practised for the sake of achieving the original meaning of a different language but also a tool for conceptual decolonisation and legal reforms?

Focusing on a Chichewa proverb that you find particularly interesting, would making sense of it using conceptual resources from Gricean maxims 'enhance' or 'dissolve' that Chichewa proverb's meaning?

Does translating tenets of Taoism into English risk doing some type of epistemic violence to Taoist thought and culture?

The non-co-creation of assessment briefs is indicative of an asymmetrical power dynamic, one where staff 'impose' assessment briefs on students. This longstanding traditional pedagogic *praxis* not only fails to motivate students to engage with the pedagogical process proper and even read through feedback, it also produces a learning environment that puts students at risk of obsessing over grades, rather than focusing on, to use John Dewey's famous term, their 'growth'. In the words of another SOAS international student project interviewee:

¹⁸² Forsyth & Evans 2019: 758. Cf. "In an assessment context, students need to recognise that they have a greater role to play than simply being the passive victims of distant assessment regimes. What is at stake here is the difference between students as active participants in their learning experiences and students as merely consumers" (McArthur 2018: 138).

At a philosophy seminar last week, I discussed with classmates their favourite topic of the semester. I asked them, “Do you remember any of the assignments you’ve written this academic year?” I was shocked by their answer—“No; none.” I pressed on, gradually revealing the logic behind what they said: my classmates explained that every time they completed an assignment, they just focused on completing the task and meeting the teacher’s requirements to get a high grade.¹⁸³ They said that once one assignment was submitted, they would quickly turn their attention to the next assignment. They couldn’t recall doing the assignment until the grade came out. This whole phenomenon doesn’t seem difficult to understand, because our assignment diets are cyclical (and at times never-ending!). Whenever we complete an assignment, even if we want to reflect on feedback about it, we often need to move on to the next task almost immediately. I have found that in such higher education contexts, traditional essays and exams can further entrench these experiences. My classmates have also told me that sometimes they would rather give up writing on an essay topic they are particularly interested in and instead choose to cater to the teacher’s particular research interests because they think doing so is more likely to get a higher grade. Such a situation is regrettable.

Because a lot of the philosophy modules I took here were built around authentic assessment, I discovered my real interests and my strengths. I clearly remember what I gained from each philosophy assignment. These include the reflective process that I gained from the challenging topics to being able to implement ideas and discuss them with my professors, from which I learnt about my current shortcomings. This learning process has been a very happy and beneficial experience for me and will help me in my future studies and career.

Authentic assessment briefs have also got me thinking about just what is the purpose and value of assessment. Jan McArthur wrote something that I found really interesting on the subject: “No assessment ... should serve a summative purpose in the form of certification alone. In fact, accreditation should not be an end or goal in itself”.¹⁸⁴ The value of assessment in many educational institutions is often expressed in terms of marks, almost encouraging students to think of assessment in utilitarian ways—e.g. ‘I just need to pass and get grades xyz and then be able to graduate’. Often, as students, we seem to often think that memorising points is more important than drilling down to the concept’s depths because memorising allows us to more readily adapt to exam cultures. I think we should revisit the assessment process and endeavour to make it properly part of learning rather than simply certifying students. We should seek deeper understanding, creative and critical thinking and a lot more real-world application of students’ abilities and skills, rather than simply pursuing high marks. Through a varied and authentic set of assessments, I think students would become genuinely engaged and even enjoy the process of producing and submitting assignments instead of feeling like the whole process is a mechanised assembly line.

The benefits of authentic philosophy, then, would appear to be largely in-line with Forsyth & Evans’s account of the benefits of authentic history:¹⁸⁵

1. *doing*, rather than learning, philosophy
2. *becoming* a philosopher, rather than just working on the ‘canon’
3. *emphasising* student and community knowledge

As Juuso Nieminen contends here, “authentic assessment criteria do not aim to lower academic standards but indeed to raise the bar higher. When assessment is evaluated in terms of the social good it provides ... students are asked to truly connect with the world rather than to produce work only for their teachers”.¹⁸⁶ To quote another SOAS international student interviewee here:

¹⁸³ Cf. “Many other students similarly saw normal assessment as something they did because they had to, not because it was interesting or meaningful in any other sense than it allowed them to accrue marks. To many it was an encumbrance, a necessary evil, and an unfair means of assessment which had everything to do with certification and which was, in their minds, divorced from the learning they felt they had achieved whilst studying the subject being tested” (Sambell et al. 1997: 359).

¹⁸⁴ McArthur 2018: 129-30.

¹⁸⁵ Viz. Forsyth & Evans 2019: 757.

¹⁸⁶ Nieminen 2023: 69.

Introducing diverse formats, such as creative portfolios and podcasts, would really make a lot more students comfortable and confident. Personally, I have discovered that I excel in creative portfolios and presentations—and not really in traditional essays. Different assessment formats better reflect actual abilities. Philosophy is about the complex processes of thinking. And, because of this, it's strange to think assessments are often confined to either essay or exam. Just as one would not dismiss Global South philosophers as inferior due to language differences, we should value different assessment forms that allow all students to demonstrate their philosophical abilities. Ignoring diversity and inclusivity in assessment may overlook talented individuals with valuable philosophical skills.

The point about creative portfolios, such as, for example, an assignment comprising a 2000-word academic blog with a 1000-word reflective commentary on the choice of the blog's topic, cannot be overstated. It is nicely complemented by the following five student testimonials: the first is from an undergraduate's public-facing academic blog serving as their Final Year Independent Project at Manchester Metropolitan University (2021/22), the next three are screenshots of preamble sections in student-authored public-facing academic blogs for 'Gender, Race, and Sexuality' at Manchester Metropolitan University (2022/23); the final testimonial is a response from a postgraduate student who participated in a YouTube clip assessment task (cited in Bourke 2023).

Fig 1

Queer communities tend to 'rebel' against societal norms and form their own subcultures. Thus, to write about queer theory in a traditional dissertation format would be a disservice to what it fundamentally means to be queer. **A blog to a traditional dissertation is what queer culture is to society - an unexpected variation.**

Each essay purposefully swings from theoretical to personal, both in academic style and in content. I refuse to write about an intimate topic with needless academic rigour; work concerning identity needs a heart. For this reason, I am using the blog format rather than presenting a traditional dissertation to you. Whilst *Dyke Writes* is rich with complex queer theory, I believe that wholly intellectualising one's history and community forgoes the emotion, nuance and softness needed to convey lived experiences. *Dyke Writes* is structured as a series of short essays, each providing an accessible subsection of lesbian feminist theory. Each essay can be read and understood as a stand-alone piece. However, they are most effectively understood when read in order and in their entirety to render a more contextualised and nuanced understanding of lesbian feminism.

Fig 2

About

Writing an academic blog is a new experience that was quite enjoyable and an interesting break from the standard academic writing that is required in other modules. Having more freedom surrounding the topics and discussions made within the blog, allowed for a newfound creativity to emerge. The module itself being: Gender, Race and Sexuality was by far one of the most interesting modules that I have been able to study during my time at University.

As I will have mentioned in the blog, being a mixed-race, white and Asian woman, having the opportunity to study more than surface level on feminism and race was truly an eye-opening experience. It has always been of interest to be able to look at more research on feminism and critical race theory as it feels applicable and more personal to me as an individual. To see the struggles that other ethnic women have gone through and to see that inspire them to create movements and develop critical research on topics I would have never otherwise known much about is refreshing.

Fig 3

However, I wanted to make the blog more interesting and so I decided to link both of these two concepts, homophobia and racism, to something I'm passionate about; Football. Football as a culture and an institution is global but it has a strong grip on the English way of life, and it is evident in today's era that homophobia and racism are rife and rampant in the game. Therefore, I decided it would be a good learning process for me to research the philosophical aspects of these two concepts and relate them to how they're weaponised in the modern footballing world.

Fig 4

Using the reading list from Moodle helped to find important pieces of literature to learn more about the philosophy of both homophobia and racism respectively, however whilst researching these sources I was able to find more through Google Scholar and also looking in the University library. As a result I was able to acquire a myriad of academic books and journal articles to both educate me on these subjects and also provide quotes for me to reference in my research resources.

As a result, I also provided a set of learning resources for anyone who is still interested in learning more about the philosophy of homophobia, the philosophy of racism, and how both of those fit into footballing culture. I obtained these books, articles, and essays through multiple ways, one such way was to find them as references themselves in other essays I was reading. I believe the reading list I have compiled for any eager learners more than helped me to write these resources and would further educate anyone else on the same matters. It was a challenge to find certain sources, especially those regarding homophobia in football that were from before the 2010s, however I found that the challenge helped me develop vital resourceful skills.

Fig 5

“Some of my favourite assignments were ones where I was able to be myself, be creative and show my learning in a way that interests me. This is what we expect students to do in primary school so why does it suddenly stop during high school/university and then you're expected to regain creativity in your job/career?”—
Education postgraduate student, 2021/22

However, strangely, despite the extensive and growing literature on AA,¹⁸⁷ it is rare to find talk of AA that focuses on AA's ability to play a substantive role in *decolonising* knowledge and consequently

¹⁸⁷ Following Jan McArthur's very informative literature review (McArthur 2023), AA has been discussed by Maclellan (2001), Rust (2007), and Sambell et al. (2013) in the UK HE context. In the Australian HE context, Ajjawi et al. (2019),

transforming learning environments. Indeed, it seems that currently only McArthur (2016, 2018, 2020, 2023), Forsyth & Evans (2019), and some of the contributors to Ajjawi et al. (2023) have made explicit the conceptual link between cultures of authentic assessment practice with the critical pedagogic commitment to transforming HE for the purposes of social justice.

One especially rich perspective on the matter has been articulated by Lambert et al. (2023), who have put forward the Culturally Inclusive Assessment model—a framework which is principally rooted in Paulo Freire’s development of critical pedagogy in 1970 and Taskeen Adam’s detailed 2020 studies of student reflections on the effect of colonial and apartheid legacies on their pedagogical experiences.¹⁸⁸

§§d The Culturally Inclusive Assessment Model

Dimension ¹⁸⁹	Common Theme
Justice-as-content: decolonising <i>what is taught</i>	Correcting under-representation or misrepresentation in lecture slides/notes and module reading lists
Justice-as-process: decolonising education processes through co-creation or co-design of course curriculum, assessment, and content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ‘Two-way learning’ ▪ Relational processes ▪ Personal positioning and critical consciousness ▪ Student co-creation of decolonised learning materials as an assessment task
Justice-as-pedagogy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ students are encouraged to critically engage, reflect on, and challenge what is being taught ▪ assessments or whole subjects designed to teach the ideas of socio-cultural justice, decolonisation or cultural competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning how to apply socio-cultural justice, diversification and decolonisation to new experiences and contexts ▪ Learning how to avoid orientalisation

The Culturally Inclusive Assessment model provides us with the conceptual resources for mapping out a ‘Theory of Change’ here:

Ashford-Rowe et al. (2014), Herrington (2014), and Herrington & Herrington (1998) have discussed authentic assessment. In the Chilean HE context, AA has been discussed by Villarroel et al. (2018). In the Indonesian HE context, Arlianty (2017) and Sutadji et al. (2021) have made important contributions to AA discourse. AA has also received substantive treatment in Sri Lanka by Karunanayaka & Naidu (2021), in Singapore by Chong et al. (2016), in the Netherlands by Gulikers et al. (2004), in South Africa by Maniram & Maistry (2018), and in Botswana by Oladele (2011).

¹⁸⁸ Adam’s studies also involved multiple discussions with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) designers.

¹⁸⁹ Viz. Adam (2020a, 2020b).

Current Conditions

- Widespread evidence of students reporting that they often struggle to think and feel at home in higher education places and spaces
- Sizeable award gap between white students and racially minoritised students
- Sizeable award gap between white working-class students and economically more privileged groups
- Summative assessment is often designed and constructed in ways that differ considerably from how it is experienced by students, especially those from non-Anglo-European sociocultural backgrounds
- Summative assessment diets often do not adequately support neurodiverse students and are generally experienced as bureaucratic and anxiety-inducing

Suggested Strategies, Actions, and Examples

- Recognise the great extent to which traditional types of summative assessment briefs invariably reflect western (particularly Anglo-European) systems of knowledge production as well as neurotypical ideologies, and how this structurally disadvantages students from diverse cultural and learning backgrounds.
- Encourage crip practices for *all* students, such as keeping a reflective learning diary (or reflective learning log) for each of their modules. In writing a weekly entry of 150-200 words for each module, indicative things that students should consider in their weekly entries may include
 - *How am I linking what I am learning in this module to a) what I already know, and b) I'm learning now?*
 - *What do I think I understand better?*
 - *Did I have a 'light bulb moment'? Did I radically change my thinking about x? If so, why? What caused the transformative change?*
- Encourage students to produce and share a conceptual mind map for each week of study in all of their modules.
- Encourage developing cultures of co-creating summative assessment briefs with students such as essay questions, reflective pieces, or academic blogs, or exhibitions, or documentaries, or case-studies, or interviews, or podcasts, or multimedia presentations, or infographics¹⁹⁰

Impact

- Eliminating student experiences of alienation and a range of award gaps.

¹⁹⁰ However, to ensure pedagogical innovation does not come at the expense of student wellbeing and academic skills, it is important to recognise the following: for some students, especially those who have internalised disciplinary norms from school, innovative assessment can cause them anxiety—it can be overwhelming, particularly in the First Year, to move from very regimented assessment cultures to co-creator cultures, in such a short space of time. Therefore, there is a pedagogical need for module convenors to scaffold authenticity from First Year up and to ensure student projects are academically supported through effective guidance and consultation.

Vision

- An HE environment in which i) students report that they feel that their voices are meaningfully heard and listened to in HE environments, ii) the co-creation of curricula and assessment cultures is normalised, and iii) a range of award gaps are not just eliminated but remain eliminated.

The following rubrics are taken from module assessment patterns that we have adopted at SOAS with excellent results. You should feel free to adapt these as necessary:

Example 1

A reflective writing assignment summative assessment brief (1500 words)

What's a Reflective Piece?

70% of the total mark of the module is allocated to the production of a reflective piece. A reflective piece is an instance of 'authentic assessment and learning'. Authentic assessments, which are rooted in critical and relational pedagogy scholarship, are increasingly popular and are designed to enable students to think and feel that what they're producing for their coursework is more meaningful, more enjoyable, and more illustrative of their personal takes on the subject-matter. Only conservative approaches to teaching and learning produce the difficult-to-shift myth, often internalised by students, that assessments cannot be fun.

Reflection (thinking about thinking and feeling) is an important philosophical practice, a practice where we step back and think carefully about what we are learning, where we are positioned, what makes us more or less comfortable, whether we understand an idea or argument, and what conclusions we can draw in ways that we can apply to our own lives. Your reflection piece should include a summary of the reading with which you are engaging, stating what you believe to be the main arguments. Then, you should comment on your own responses to the texts or topics, providing reasons. I am particularly keen that you think through and present your own relationship to the discipline of philosophy in relation to the material we examine. What does this material reinforce or change about what you understand philosophy to be? Can philosophy be different? If so, what would this require?

Producing a reflective piece has a very broad scope, which—understandably—can be a little confusing and even overwhelming. In light of this, you can and should think and feel that you are very warmly encouraged to explore various ways of producing a reflective piece that enables you, as the individual learners each of you are, to not just achieve the module's learning outcomes, but achieve them to a very high academic standard. To help the process of discovering which type of reflective piece works well, here are some ways to nicely model a reflective piece.

Option 1—'Beefing up' your relevant reflective learning diary entry

Let's say that you want to write your reflective piece on feminist speech act theory. You can then look over your 250-word diary entry for that lecture week, and start to determine which bits you want to expand and substantiate. Displaying clear evidence of consulting and engaging with secondary literature, to complement your engagement with the primary literature, is a very effective way of enhancing your reflections: the more you read, the more you reflect on what you've read, the more you will have things to say about where you stand on a topic, with which 'camp' in the literature you most philosophically identify, and so on.

Option 2—Recorded presentation

Your presentation should not be longer than 15 minutes (which is the equivalent of 1500 words). Start by creating an outline of the presentation, much as you would for an essay. This should include:

1. An introduction where you identify the topic, indicate the problem it is asking you to assess, and then outline how exactly you will approach it
2. An overview of the literature you are examining

3. Main content or points you want to raise; survey of critiques or different positions
4. Conclusion

Option 3—Infographic/Poster

Although content, evidence, and organisation will still be important, you will have to think about these in a new way. Infographics rely less on the written word and more on visual elements to grab attention, convey information, and/or rationally persuade. Therefore, you will need to think about what visual elements and design would best suit your content. Pay attention to what information you include, the language you use, the design elements you use, and the way that you organise the information and visual elements. Strive to make your infographic interesting, readable, and consistent in terms of visuals and text (colours, fonts, sizes, lines, shapes, etc). Be creative and purposeful. You can use a mash-up of graphics from various places that you find and/or created by you. For visual consistency, you will likely want to use the same kind of visuals (as in, photographs, paintings, drawings, or icons, etc.) so that you create a particular theme/style. You could, for instance, represent a core concept with some kind of image or visual map.

Option 4—Blogpost

The purpose of blog writing is to present ideas in an accessible and more informal way than in formal academic essays—they are more like a journalistic ‘think piece’. Blogs are a more informal platform than an academic essay to present an argument that builds on your own perspective. Compared to a formal academic analysis, blog posts give you more freedom to discuss personal experiences and perspectives on the course material before delving into analysis. Just as in a formal academic essay, you need to include citations and analysis of evidence in a blog, but you don’t need to use a very rigid structure—the tone can be more conversational and reflective. With this looser framework, you can be creative with structure. You can emphasise important points in a range of ways: short paragraphs, bullet points, bold text, italics, underlining, and headings. Because blogs are an electronic platform, images, videos, and links are helpful to demonstrate your thinking.

Example 2

A creative portfolio summative assessment brief (1500 words)

40% of the total mark of the module is allocated to the production of a summative group portfolio intended to enable you to demonstrate skills in applying theory to practical issues and lived experiences and in working as a team. This form of assessment is intended to ensure that you are committed not only to your own learning processes but to those of your fellow classmates, an aspect which we encourage as part of the pedagogical culture of the course. You are expected to create at least two pieces of work that apply the theories you have studied in the module to global issues, challenges and debates. It is important that you employ at least two theories each from two hermeneutical traditions or thinkers you have studied. The format in which you do this work is up to you. It can consist of two of the following: a novella, poem, a piece of art, a video, a poster or infographic, a piece of music, a blog or vlog, a collage, a gallery, etc. The only limits on the format are that (1) it must be loadable to Moodle directly or via a weblink, from where the creative portfolio can be accessed; (2) you should provide additional documentation describing your creative process, group work, and listing your sources and bibliography.

The mark allocated to each group will generally be the mark that each individual in that group is given, except in cases where there is clear evidence that some members of the group refused to participate in the group work. It is therefore very important that you work closely and cooperatively together as a team in your group.

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§4 Traditional vs. Decolonial Design of a Core Philosophy Module

§§a Introduction

The beauty of philosophy as a discipline in part lies in the extraordinary capacity of the human mind to dive into discursive depths. Philosophy as an activity might even be said to serve as a *sine qua non* way of exercising humanity, so much so that it is a discipline that has the power to progressively transform the world—as opposed to principally resting content with interpreting it. While the discipline has seen agonistic progress over centuries, there is reason to think bigger leaps are required to take academic philosophy further, mainly because the western institutionalisation of philosophy has failed in making philosophy fulfil its radical potential as a catalyst for progressive social transformation and liberation. As part of this toolkit, we wish to provide a tangible demonstration of what a decolonial module within university philosophy education looks like. Having conducted extensive research into current UK HE philosophy module design, we would like to focus on comparing existing epistemology modules from various universities, highlighting both their similarities with respect to their traditional-cum-colonial make-up and ways in which epistemology modules are capable of decolonisation.

The process of decolonising epistemology is itself an epistemological paradox, as it demands a re-evaluation of the very foundations upon which knowledge of this branch of philosophy is constructed and validated.¹⁹¹ Our aim is not simply to dismantle existing paradigms for teaching and learning epistemology, but principally to construct a more inclusive and equitable epistemic landscape that honours and does justice to different ways of knowing and recognises the interconnectedness of multiple knowledge systems. To start, it is advisable to interrogate what it means for epistemology to be structured in terms of coloniality.

Coloniality did not just shape entire world dynamics, territories, and borders. Perhaps its most important long-lasting effect of coloniality, as identified by Quijano,¹⁹² is that it has nourished relations of domination, geocultural identities, epistemic injustices, and epistemic oppressions. Coloniality imposes ways of “thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living”.¹⁹³ Therefore, what we are trying to achieve through a decolonial approach to an epistemology module is subvert the coloniality mindset that “permeates all aspects of social existence and gives rise to new geocultural identities”.¹⁹⁴

Epistemology has long been dominated by perspectives that are predominantly male, pale, and stale. This intellectual hegemony reflects the great extent to which colonisation and masculinisation are central to academic philosophy’s disciplinary identity. Those western epistemic foundations are the ones whose “values of utilitarianism represented by the likes of [John Stuart] Mill and [Jeremy] Bentham, justified colonialism on the need for “progress””.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, an epistemology module design which is saturated by ‘male, pale and stale’ is a clear red flag. Recognising that the epistemic ecosystems shaping the processes of teaching and learning shapes the way we think means that, we need to take the opportunity—when confronted by colonial-masculine paradigms—to challenge and reshape ways in which agents know and have the world in view.

One philosopher who has painstakingly disclosed how colonisation has impacted knowledge systems is Kwasi Wiredu (2002), who inaugurated a substantive and rich debate about ‘conceptual decolonisation’. For Wiredu, this epistemic practice involves African intellectuals dismantling the colonial influences embedded in knowledge production. Indeed, most universities in the African continent teach philosophy from the western perspective, mainly because of how Western Europe has

¹⁹¹ The process of decolonising epistemology may be similar in a way to Otto Neurath’s famous anti-foundationalist analogy of trying to keep a boat afloat while constantly repairing it.

¹⁹² Viz. Quijano 2000: 537.

¹⁹³ Mignolo & Walsh 2018: 8.

¹⁹⁴ Lugones 2008: 3.

¹⁹⁵ Ramani 2011: 17.

standardised and institutionalised the discipline. Significantly, oral ways of producing knowledge and communicating philosophical ideas, which are so central to a plurality of African philosophies, are—on this basis—regarded as inferior production and dissemination of knowledge. In light of this, by critically examining the colonial nature of epistemology, we can challenge entrenched hierarchies of knowledge and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.

We believe that a decolonial epistemology module is far more than just including Global South philosophers in the reading list. For, resting content with carving some space for Global South thinkers perpetuates the idea that the benchmark of legitimate philosophy is Western Europe-mediated. A decolonial epistemology module should reflect the world's ways of knowing.

§§b Conventional Epistemology Modules in HEIs

In our pursuit of creating a decolonial epistemology module, it was imperative to thoroughly assess the prevailing methods of instruction. Our examination of publicly available information from various university websites, including epistemology module overviews, prescribed readings, and thematic approaches, revealed a tendency to adhere to eurocentric perspectives not only through the themes covered within epistemology but also through the choice of material and readings provided.¹⁹⁶ To illustrate this, we detail the approaches to epistemology taken by i) notable UK HEIs, such as Manchester University, the London School of Economics (LSE), Cambridge University, Southampton University, Newcastle University, Warwick University, Durham University, and ii) some non-UK HEIs such as University of South Africa, Addis Ababa University, Banaras Hindu University, and Harvard University.

When looking at universities in the UK and the US, specifically, a similar pattern emerged in their readings and the addressed themes. Among others, René Descartes, George Berkeley, Gottfried Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and David Hume were listed as the main historical philosophers in students' readings, module summaries, and themes taught. Placing those philosophers as the modern benchmark figures for epistemology takes authority away from underrepresented philosophers, both in the past and present. However, decolonising a module does not mean discrediting Western European philosophical theories or theorists and making them not worthy of studying. To first see whether a module is decolonially designed, one first needs to see its structure—and not just the thematic content.

We do not wish to single out a single institution for criticism. And even if we were disposed to do so, it is logistically impossible to land successful hits in such a context because detailed module designs with week-by-week topics and assigned readings are largely not available online unless one is an employee or an enrolled student at the university in question. However, that being said, we have managed to gather enough information to be able to make out the very likely module design of many of the HEIs. In what immediately follows, we present an example of a 10-week long epistemology module that has traditional-cum-colonial design. Such a module straightforwardly follow traditional Anglo-European history of epistemology, 'canonical' figures, 'canonical' topics, and 'canonical' readings, to the point that epistemology modules that have colonial design are perhaps the most common type of philosophy module in western universities.

§§c Example of a 'Traditional-cum-Colonial' Epistemology Module (First Year)

Week 1: Introduction to Epistemology

Readings:

¹⁹⁶ In UK academia, epistemology modules sometimes go under the name 'Knowledge and Reality', or even (especially tellingly in terms of eurocentrism) 'Rationalism and Empiricism'.

- Cooper, J.M. (ed.) 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett. (Book VII of *The Republic*)
- Selections from Audi, R. 1998. *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. New York: Routledge
- Russell, B. 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate.

Week 2: The Analysis of Knowledge

Readings:

- Feldman, R. 2003. *Epistemology*. London: Pearson.
 - Chapters 1, 2, and 3.
- Gettier, E. 1963. 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?'. *Analysis* 23: 121-123.
- Selections from Nozick, R. 1981. *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Week 3: Empiricist Epistemology

Readings:

- Selections from Hume, D. 1975a. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.)—revised by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Selections from Hume, D. 1975b. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.)—revised by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Selections from Locke, J. 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. P.H. Nidditch (ed.) Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Week 4: Scepticism

Readings:

- Descartes, R. [1641] 2017. *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (First Meditation). 2nd edition. J. Cottingham (trans. and ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dretske, F. 1970. 'Epistemic Operators'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 67: 1007-1023.
- Moore, G.E. 1939. 'Proof of an External World'. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25: 273-300.
- Selections from Annas, J. and Barnes, J. (eds. and trans.) 2000. *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Selections from Wittgenstein, L. 1969. *On Certainty*. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (eds.), G.E.M. Anscombe and D. Paul (trans.) Oxford: Blackwell.

Week 5: Epistemic Justification—Foundationalism and Coherentism

Readings:

- Bonjour, L. 1976. 'The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge'. *Philosophical Studies* 30: 281-312.
- Selections from Bonjour, L. 1985. *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Selections from Plantinga, A. 1993. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Week 6: Epistemic Justification—Evidentialism

Readings:

- Selections from Conee, E. and Feldman, R. 2004. *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, A. 1979. 'What Is Justified Belief?', in G.S. Pappas (ed.) *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Selections from Haack, S. 1993. *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Week 7: Internalism and Externalism

Readings:

- Bonjour, L. 1980. 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5: 53-73.
- Bonjour, L. and Sosa, E. 2003. *Epistemic Justification: Internalism Vs. Externalism, Foundations Vs. Virtues*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Burge, T. 1979. 'Individualism and the Mental'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4: 73-121.
- Goldman, A. 2009. 'Internalism, Externalism, and the Architecture of Justification'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 106: 309-338.
- Selected chapters from Kornblith, H. (ed.) 2001. *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Week 8: Epistemology of Modality

Readings:

- Selections from Coates, J. 1983. *The Semantics of the Modal Auxiliaries*. London: Routledge.
- Selections from Ayer, A. J. [1936] 1990. *Language, Truth and Logic*. London: Penguin,
- Selections from Quine, W.V.O. 2010. *Word and Object*. Harvard, MA: MIT Press.

Week 9: Social Epistemology

Readings:

- Selections from Coady, C.A.J. 1992. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fricker, E. 1987. 'The Epistemology of Testimony'. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 61: 57-83.
- Selections from Fuller, S. 1998. *Social Epistemology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Selections from Goldman, S. 1999. *Knowledge in a Social World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 10: Feminist Epistemology

Readings:

- Selections from Code, L. 1991. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and Construction of Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fricker, M. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Ethics and the Power of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Selections from Harding, S. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Selections from Harding S. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Longino, H.E. 1999. 'Feminist Epistemology', in J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds.) *Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Malden: Blackwell.

The above example of a 'traditional-cum-colonial design' epistemology exemplifies a eurocentric approach to ideas of knowledge and justification. The readings are predominantly focused on canonical western philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, and Hume which offer in-depth retrospections of their own experiences. A lot of the epistemological discourse also involves 'armchair theorising'. Furthermore, the foundationalist and coherentist theories of justification presented reflect a narrow conception of methodology that disregards alternative approaches prevalent in non-western philosophical traditions. Other forms of justification may be more suitable for different cultural and intellectual traditions. Similarly, with regard to thematic debates about truth, the module in its traditional-cum-colonial form overlooks the limitations of the dominant western theories of truth such as the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories. The universalisation of these theories blinds students to theories of truth emerging from global contexts such as truth as an intrinsic feature of cognition in Indian philosophy (*pramanya*) as how this is connected with accuracy (*pramatva*), and truth as the soul of a discourse (*emuata*) as held by the ancient Benin Kingdom of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the absence of African, Asian, Latinx, and a plethora of Indigenous philosophical work on important topics such as feminist and social epistemology highlights the module's cultural hegemony. The module in-principle should offer a comprehensive and critical examination on the theory of knowledge, yet its focus on European accounts alone gives a skewed global impression of epistemology. This module would be more accurately labelled 'Anglo-European Epistemology', as it fails to encompass any other cultural perspectives.

Conversely, in our investigation of philosophy modules at Banaras University, Addis Ababa University and University of South Africa, the way in which they structure their modules was noticeably different. Unlike the majority of western universities, which, by and large, only pedagogically focus on western philosophical traditions, Banaras University, Addis Ababa University, and University of South Africa each make explicit distinctions between i) Anglo-American and European philosophy and ii) their indigenous philosophical traditions. This contrast not only shows the lack of initiative among Anglo-European academic institutions to broaden their philosophical horizons but also serves as an indictment of how Anglo-European philosophical paradigms have come to dominate the discipline worldwide. If the philosophical traditions of Western Europe are not accorded similar attention elsewhere, it prompts the question of why should the Global South prioritise the study of Anglo-American and European philosophy. By contrast, consider now what a 10-week long epistemology module that has a decolonial design can look like:

§§d Example of a Decolonial Epistemology Module (First Year)

Week 1: Introduction to (Decolonial) Epistemology

Readings:

- Alcoff, L.M. 2007. 'Mignolo's Epistemology of Coloniality'. *The New Centennial Review* 7: 79-101.
- Selections from Chimakonam, J.O. & Ogonnaya, L.U. 2021. *African Metaphysics, Epistemology and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy*. Cham: Springer.
- Clammer, J. 2008. 'Decolonising the Mind: Schwimmer, Habermas and the Anthropology of Postcolonialism'. *Anthropologica* 50: 157-168.
- Selections from de Sousa Santos, B. (ed.) 2008. *Another Knowledge is possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. London: Verso.
- Gordon, L.R. 2023. 'What Does It Mean to Colonise and Decolonise Philosophy?' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 93: 117-135.

Week 2: The Nature of Knowledge

Readings:

- Afolabi, O.S. 2020. 'Globalisation, Decoloniality and the Question of Knowledge Production in Africa: A Critical Discourse'. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 1 / *Revue de L'enseignement Supérieur en Afrique* 8: 93-110.
- Cooper, J.M. (ed.) 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett. (*Thaetetus*)
- Datta, D.M. 1932. *The Six Ways of Knowing: A Critical Study of the Vedānta Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Selections from de Sousa Santos, B. and Meneses, M. (eds.) 2019. *Knowledges Born in the Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies of the Global South*. New York: Routledge.
- Selections from Marchetti, G. (ed.) 2022. *The Ethics, Epistemology, and Politics of Richard Rorty*. New York/London: Routledge.

Week 3: Moral Epistemology

Readings:

- Basu, R. 2018. 'Can Beliefs Wrong?' *Philosophical Topics* 46: 1-18.
- Selections from Confucius. 1998. *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and his Successors*, E.B. Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks (trans. and eds.) New York: Columbia University Press.

- Horn, P. and Long, E.T. (eds.) 2008. *Ethics of Belief: Essays in Tribute to D.Z. Phillips*. Cham: Springer.
- Selections from Kar, B. 1978. *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy: An Analytical Study*. New Delhi: Ajanta Publications.

Week 4: Religious Epistemology

Readings:

- Selections from Adeel, M.A. 2019. *Epistemology of the Qur'an: Elements of a Virtue Approach to Knowledge and Understanding*. Cham: Springer.
- Selections from Fuqua, K., Greco, J, and McNabb, T. (eds.) 2023. *The Cambridge Handbook of Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Selections from Gaon, S. 2002. *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. A. Altmann (trans.) Indianapolis. Hackett.
- Selections from McNabb, T.D. 2019. *Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 5: Feminist Epistemology

Readings:

- Selections from Alcoff, L.M. & Potter, E. (eds.) 1993. *Feminist Epistemologies*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Code, L. 2014. 'Ignorance, Injustice and the Politics of Knowledge: Feminist Epistemology Now'. *Australian Feminist Studies* 29: 148-160.
- Dotson, K. 2014. 'Conceptualising Epistemic Oppression'. *Social Epistemology* 28: 115-138.
- Frye, M. 1983. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press. (Specifically, 'On Being White: Thinking Towards a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy')
- Lugones, M. 2008. 'The Coloniality of Gender'. *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* 2, Dossier 2: 1-17.
- Pérez Sedeño, E., Almendros, L.S., García Dauder, D. & Ortega Arjonilla, E. (eds.) 2019. *Knowledges, Practices and Activism from Feminist Epistemologies*. Wilmington: Vernon Press.

Week 6: Posthumanist and Environmental Perspectives on Knowledge

Readings:

- Selections from Ahrens, J. & Halbmayer, E. (eds.) 2023. *Climate Change Epistemologies in Southern Africa: Social and Cultural Dimensions*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Selections from Cozza, M. and Gherardi, S. (eds.) 2023. *The Posthumanist Epistemology of Practice Theory: Re-imagining Method in Organisation Studies and Beyond*. Cham: Springer.
- Selections from Kimmerer, R.W. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.

Week 7: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being

Readings:

- Chao, S. 2021. 'Children of the Palms: Growing Plants and Growing People in a Papuan Plantationocene'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27: 245-264.
- Fre, Z. 2018. *Knowledge Sovereignty among African Cattle Herders*. London: UCL Press. (Specifically, Chapter 2: 'The Case for Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Knowledge Sovereignty')
- Gegeo, D.W. & Watson-Gegeo, K.A. 2001. "'How We Know": Kwara'ae Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology'. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13: 55-88.
- van Meijl, T. 2019. 'Doing Indigenous Epistemology: Internal Debates about Inside Māori Society'. *Current Anthropology* 60: 155-173.

Week 8: Epistemic Injustice

Readings:

- Fricker, E. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Selections from Giladi, P. and McMillan, N. (eds.) 2022. *Epistemic Injustice and the Philosophy of Recognition*. New York: Routledge.
- Maitra I. 2009. 'Silencing Speech'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39: 309-338.
- Selections from Medina J. 2013. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 9: Epistemic Violence

Readings:

- Dotson, K. 2011. 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing'. *Hypatia* 26: 236-257.
- Selections from Isasi-Díaz, A.M. & Mendieta, E. (eds.) 2012. *Decolonising Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kumalo, S.H. 2021. 'Distinguishing between Ontology and 'Decolonisation as Praxis''. *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde* 58: 162-168.
- Selections from Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2018. *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialisation and Decolonisation*. New York: Routledge.
- Selections from Santos, B.D.S. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. New York: Routledge

Week 10: The Epistemology of Science

Readings:

- Selections from Kimmerer, R.W. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.
- Knopf, K. 2015. 'The Turn Toward the Indigenous: Knowledge Systems and Practices in the Academy'. *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 60: 179-200.
- Selections from Nelson, L.H. 1990. *Who Knows: From Quine to a Feminist Empiricism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- van Wyk, J-A. 2002. 'Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Implications for Natural Science and Technology Teaching and Learning'. *South African Journal of Education* 22: 305-312.

§§e References

- Lugones, M. 2008. 'The Coloniality of Gender'. *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* 2, Dossier 2: 1-17.
- Mignolo, W.D. and Walsh, C.E. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Quijano, A. 2000. 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America'. *Nepantla: Views From South*: 533-580.
- Ramani, S. 2011. 'Decolonising Knowledge Systems'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 46: 17-19.
- Wiredu, K. 2002. 'Conceptual Decolonisation as an Imperative in Contemporary African Philosophy: Some Personal Reflections'. *Rue Descartes* 36: 53-64.

General Resources and Inspiring Quotes

Academic blogs

- [Decolonising the Curriculum: The Importance of Teacher Training and Development—*The Runnymede Trust*](#)
- [‘Decolonising the curriculum’: A Conversation—*Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences \(University of Cambridge\)*](#)
- [Decolonising the Curriculum: A Graduate Teaching Assistant’s Perspective—*University of Glasgow*](#)
- [Imperial & Global Forum—*University of Exeter*](#)
- [MsAfropolitan—*Minna Salami*](#)
- [So, You Want to Teach Some Africana Philosophy?—*Blog of the American Philosophical Association*](#)

Journal articles (Open Access)

- [‘Why is My Curriculum White?’](#)
- [‘Critical Theory in a Decolonial Age’](#)
- [‘Manifesto: Networks of Decolonisation in Asia and Africa’](#)
- “Among the responsibilities of the powerful is the requirement to acknowledge—and eschew—the ease with which their epistemic privilege enables them to occupy the centre of an epistemic exchange. The dominant must come to know when and how to use (and relinquish) their epistemic power... [M]arginalised individuals [need to] self-identify in opposition to the demands of the powerful, so that such individuals (we) may determine for themselves (ourselves) their (our) position within an epistemic community. Our goal should be to uproot the existing epistemic landscape”—Emmalon Davis
- “The discourse promoting resistance to racism must not prompt identification with and in terms of categories fundamental to the discourse of oppression. Resistance must break not only with practices of oppression, although its first task is to do that. Resistance must oppose also the language of oppression, including the categories in terms of which the oppressor (or racist) represents the form in which resistance is expressed”—D.T. Goldberg
- “One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the ‘arts’ of civilisation. By lacking such values we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilisation but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not ‘fully human’; some of us were not even considered partially human. Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not

human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism covered here”—Linda Smith

- “There has to be somewhere else, I tell myself ... Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system ... I am searching: somewhere there must be people who are like me in their rebellion and in their hope”—Hélène Cixous
- “The Third World must start over a new history of man which takes account of not only the occasional prodigious theses maintained by Europe but also its crimes, the most heinous of which have been committed at the very heart of man, the pathological dismembering of his functions and the erosion of his unity, and in the context of the community, the fracture, the stratification and the bloody tensions fed by class, and finally, on the immense scale of humanity, the racial hatred, slavery, exploitation and, above all, the bloodless genocide whereby one and a half billion men have been written off ... But if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers”—Frantz Fanon
- “A task of decolonial thinking is the unveiling of epistemic silences of western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued”—Walter D. Mignolo
- “[I]t seems urgent to me that the scientists in Africa, and perhaps more generally in the Third World, question themselves on the meaning of their practices as scientists, its real function in the economy of the entirety of scholarship, its place in the process of production of knowledge on a worldwide basis”—Paulin J. Hountondji
- “An adequate critical theory of whiteness does not place the interests and needs of white people at the centre of its reflections. Rather, ... the telos of an adequate critical theory of whiteness (and this is one of the necessary conditions of its adequacy) must be the disruption of the structures and mechanisms that function to maintain racial oppression”—David Owen