

**KANT IN AFRICA AND AFRICA IN KANT:
CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICAN CULTURE AND THOUGHT
THEMATIC ISSUE OF ESTUDOS KANTIANOS (UNESP,
BRASIL), 2022**

Scientific and Editorial Coordination:

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INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant devotes his thought to the diversity and unity of humanity both in the natural and cultural domains, especially through the foundation or, at least, renovation, of two complementary disciplines: Geography and Anthropology. Thinking of Africa based on Kantian philosophy is an exercise that exposes essential tensions, inherent in questioning the meaning of universality and particularity, as well as its relations. From the angle of the critical power of human intelligence, one can find Kantian resonances in the ideas of freedom and liberation that animate all contemporary African cultural expressions, with an anti- and post-colonial outlook, from politics to the arts, through religion, law, economy and education. However, simultaneously, the *Aufklärung* that Kant announces and lives, is located in European history, in the mutation of Modernity whose passion for the Universal remains deeply anchored in the concrete body of 18th-century Europe divided between Feudalism and Liberalism, but always inclined towards physical and spiritual possession of the world, aimed at the expansion of its Faith and its Empire, identifying the apex of the supposedly progressive history of humanity with its *Logos* and its civilizing *Ethos*. Therefore, Kant's German-Christian Eurocentrism is a constitutive position that challenges the self-critical power of all Critical Reason. Moreover, if Kant rejects and disapproves of colonial violence as a war of aggression that destroys the conditions of perpetual peace, offending Cosmopolitan Justice, he remains nevertheless permeable to Eurocentric stereotypes that represent the character of black otherness and its cultural creations, oscillating between a hierarchical and an egalitarian view of humanity's ethnic-racial differences.

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2021.v9n2.p9>

By publishing this thematic issue, we intend to stimulate the reevaluation and reinterpretation of Kantian thought, taking African culture and history as the guiding thread of our common research, and thereby practicing an 'African mode' of critical intelligence, in order to destabilize and broaden the Copernican Revolution of the critical subject with the concrete inscription of African otherness in the plural subjectivity of humanity. We invite the submission of philosophical original articles that may establish interdisciplinary relationships with all scientific areas that exhibit the vital interests of theoretical and practical reason, with special emphasis on epistemology, ethics, politics, aesthetics, theology and anthropology. Thus, we aim to enrich the mutual understanding between the cultures of Africa and Europe, so disturbed by consecutive centuries of multidimensional, physical and symbolic violence. Through critical hermeneutics and conceptual innovation, we will be able to reimagine and experience other ways of feeling and other categories of intelligence, as well as to envision other goals and purposes, more capable of dynamizing freedom in the composition of the Common Good.

The mutual exchange is based on the concept of the equivalence of cultures and is determined by the idea of productive exchange and mutual stimulation, but also by correction. This is explored with the term interculturality, which is always to be understood as a method, because it is associated with a certain procedure.¹ Intercultural philosophy seeks to clarify the concept of interculturality based on the character of philosophy itself. Kapumba Akena identifies the "dialogical nature of philosophy"² as its central characteristic, which is both the condition for interculturality and for interdisciplinarity.³ The interactions result in "fruitful friction and constructive similarities".⁴ In the domain of philosophy, Intercultural Philosophy is not only to be perceived as a discipline among others, but as a fundamentally different concept of philosophy that seeks to overcome Eurocentrism within philosophy, based on the notion that Western philosophy must always be understood as the product of intercultural exchange, intercultural interaction, and the integration of views from other cultures, such as Egypt and India – a blind spot in the historiography of philosophy. The claim that it originated in Greece cannot be upheld: Philosophy has different places of origin in the world. Intercultural philosophy "[...] is an open project based on a 'philosophy of exploration', which promises us humans a new being without any exclusive normative content"⁵. Philosophical thought, according to the idea of intercultural philosophy, can therefore have a very different character. This is also about accepting other ways of philosophizing. The concept of philosophy itself must be radically questioned and redefined in this context. Because of these difficulties, there is also a tendency to avoid a definition of the specifically philosophical, e.g. Fornet-Betancourt prefers to speak of 'intercultural thinking'⁶ with regard to intercultural philosophy. Like other thinkers, he adopts a broad concept of philosophy, which more or less refers to every form of rational thinking aimed at explaining the world. In addition, Fornet-Betancourt makes a broader claim and believes it can "help improve the quality of life in the world".⁷ He speaks of intercultural philosophy as a "committed philosophy"⁸ and of "philosophy's historical commitment".⁹ It clearly transcends the framework of a comparative philosophy.¹⁰ Dhouib says:

The concept of interculturality goes beyond the factual pluralism of cultures by recognizing and reconstructing the binding aspects between human beings in order to preserve the unity of humanity. Building on this, transculturality seeks to think of the universality of norms as a common aspiration and to strive for corresponding action.¹¹

The goal is a humane coexistence of people from different cultures which are in a constant process of transformation. Here, interculturality and transculturality are conceived in conjunction; transcultural processes build on intercultural processes.¹²

It is the attempt to go beyond the exchange, the coexistence and the mutual criticism of cultures and to hold on to binding principles in the pursuit of what is in common, which can consist among other things in a new humanism, a new conception of morality, a revised ethical universalism, e.g. in the form of human rights, the question of political orientation and structure, as can be seen in the debate on democracy, and a common goal, e.g. as modified cosmopolitanism – mostly conceived in combination of different aspects.

The essays in this special issue on *Kant in Africa and Africa in Kant* of the journal *Estudos Kantianos* offer very different approaches to the thematic focus of the publication. The article entitled “On the Kantian Influence in African Thought and the Notion of Trans-colonialization” of Joseph C. A. Agbakoba is an interesting contribution to the exploration of the diverse and competing views of African thinkers on the meaning and developmental efficacy of cultural, cognitive or epistemic colonialization / de-colonialization / trans-colonialization. Such discussion illustrates the richness and diversity of theoretical and practical philosophy in contemporary Africa in an intercultural philosophical perspective. The author provides us not only with a detailed summary of the conflict of various interpretations and ideological positions, but also with an original perspective, as denoted in the presentation of ‘trans-colonialization’, linking the concept to his earlier writings on hybridity and heterosis. Agbakoba alludes to the Kantian understanding of rationality and knowledge as well as to Kant’s vision of teleological history and socio-political development.

Mogobe Ramose’s article “Ubu-ntu ethics in dialogue with Kant’s deontic ethics” considers Kant’s philosophy qualified for a productive intercultural discourse with Ubuntu ethics. “Kant’s second thoughts on race”¹³ is Ramose’s gateway to the dialogue between the ethics of ubu-ntu and Kant’s deontic ethics. The thesis defended in the dialogue is that Kant’s quasi-absolute prohibition on revolution to bring about a new state order transforms into an endorsement of an ethical revolution in pursuit of truth, justice and peace in both the national and the international spheres. Ramose recognises – under the rubric – ‘Kant: from an intellectual to an ethical revolutionary’ that Kant went through a metanoia that qualified him as a dialogue partner of the ethics of ubu-ntu. He then proceeds to explain the philosophy of ubu-ntu so that the reader can identify Kant’s partner in dialogue. Since the dialogue partners originate from different, and perhaps even competing cultural contexts, the subchapter “Dealing with Difference” discusses the conditions for engagement in dialogue. The final section, ‘ubu-ntu ethics in dialogue with the deontic ethics of Kant’, with its fictional dialogue, is the culmination of all previous sub-chapters.

Marita Rainsborough’s article “Kwame Gyekye’s Critical Dialogue with Kant’s Ethics and its Political Consequences” explores the Kantian legacy of Kwame Gyekye’s philosophy. She argues, that Kant’s theorems play an important role in his philosophy as a form of cultural borrowing in an intercultural dialogue that places Kant’s theorems of human autonomy, freedom and dignity in an African communitarian framework and transforms them decisively in a process of appropriation, offering a moral and political vision not only for Africa but for the world. Gyekye’s theory of a moderate communitarianism, which recognizes the importance

of individual rights, is based on Kant. According to Gyekye, individual rights ought to be exercised based on responsibility for the community. He associates the primacy of society over individual law with the danger of tyranny in the political sphere. Through visions, ideas, ideals, and practices that exceed established communal frameworks, individuals make a decisive contribution to social changes and innovations. This allows for societal advancements at the different levels of communal life. The autonomous character of the individual is also basis for Gyekye's political concept of a 'meta-national'¹⁴ society and 'nation-building'.¹⁵

Lourenço Flaviano Kambalu argues in his essay "O contributo da filosofia Kantiana na tutela dos valores Africanos Banto face aos desafios do relativismo hodierno" that humans today have become more sensitive to the shift towards good practices and demand their rights in terms of human value and dignity. Moreover, the concept of value is very often distorted in a way that leads to homogenisation, homogeneous behaviour and unifying culturalisation. From this point of view, philosophical thoughts of Immanuel Kant are of great importance, as they contain sufficient grounds for the critical consciousness that opposes homogenising behaviour and axiological relativism. For this reason, Kambalu has chosen to look at African folk values on the basis of Kantian philosophical theory.

Michael George Kizito's essay "Kant's deontology as a critique of Africa's ideological ambiguity" demonstrates that the communal characteristic of African Societies has frequently been juxtaposed with the individualistic tenets of Western polities. However, the evolution of African societies into liberal democracies with the obligation to promote and protect constitutionalism and individual liberties calls for a philosophical niche to bridge between communality and individuality. This paper argues that Africa's moral and political philosophy is in an urgent need of a Kantian Copernican revolution to ameliorate the conflictual interface between sociality and individualism. The paper argues that the revolution will help to harmonise the dilemmatic relationship between communitarianism and individualism. The paper also claims that the Kantian categorical imperatives are necessary for eliminating the ambiguous deontological/teleological situatedness of African ideological philosophies.

Leonel Ribeiro dos Santos argues in his essay "Do Colonialismo ao Cosmopolitismo: Kant e o esquecido legado da Proto-Modernidade 'From Colonialism to Cosmopolitanism: Kant and the forgotten Legacy of Early Modernity'" that a relationship between Kant and the Late-Renaissance or Proto-Modern Iberian thinkers (here grouped under the name of "Iberian School of Peace") cannot be documented by a direct knowledge or even an indirect influence. However, some of the thinking of these Iberian philosophers and theologues passed, through the teaching and works of Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez, to some modern philosophers, such as Grotius and Pufendorf, and, through theses, also to Christian Wolff, Emmerich Vattel, and Immanuel Kant. Thus, Ribeiro dos Santos aim is to identify some topics that embody Kant's idea of *ius cosmopolitanicum* and try to recognize its essential correspondence with some ideas advanced by those Iberian thinkers. The thesis he proposes is that, with his idea of *ius cosmopolitanicum*, Kant recovers and develops within a new juridical architecture, the essential of what, in those thinkers, was understood to be the inalienable natural rights of men,

of peoples, of mankind, which should inspire all juridical-political order, be it in the sphere of each State, or in the sphere of international relations between Peoples and States.

Martin Odei Ajei and Katrin A. Flikschuh, in their text titled “Kantian ethics and African philosophy: receptivity and disputations”, offer an in-depth analysis of the critical interpretation of Kantian ethics by several key figures of African philosophy, namely Danquah, Nkrumah and Wiredu. The core issue at stake concerns the way in which Kant neglects the moral function of emotions and the tension between sympathy and universalizability.

Lukas Sosoe's article, « Kant et l'Afrique : deux rendez-vous manqués ? Une approche psychologique développementale », provides a critical assessment of the ways in which Kant and Africa have failed to establish a balanced relationship. On the one hand, just as Kant's anthropology oscillates between a hierarchical and an egalitarian standpoint regarding the diversity of “human races”, so too Kant's cosmopolitanism hesitates between a Eurocentric model of republicanism, to be developed worldwide by European States, and a universal community of egalitarian peoples and states treating each other reciprocally as ends-in-themselves. On the other hand, Kantian scholarship in Africa is divided between extreme opposite poles, that is, between the partial selection of Kant's universal humanism, and the postcolonial rejection of all European cultural constructions.

In the contributions to this special issue, the inspiring power of African philosophy and intercultural philosophy is brought into focus. Beyond the critique of Kant, the importance of Kantian philosophy as a dialogue partner for African philosophy is demonstrated, in addition to the viability of the concept of intercultural philosophy. This dialogue is only just beginning and we look forward to its continuation.

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NOTES

¹ Cf. Elberfeld, Rolf: „Forschungsperspektive ‚Interkulturalität‘: Transformationen der Wissensordnungen in Europa“. In: Konersmann, Ralf; Krois, John Michael; Westerkamp, Dirk (Eds.): *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie*, 2/1, 2008, p. 35.

² Kapumba Akenda, Jean-Chrysostome: „Die Kultivierung transversaler und transkultureller Tugenden als Voraussetzung für Interkulturalität“. In: Dhouib, Sarhan; Jürgens, Andreas (Eds.): *Wege in der Philosophie: Geschichte – Wissen – Recht – Transkulturalität*. Weilerswist (Velbrück Wissenschaft), 2011, p. 388.

³ Kapumba Akenda 2011: 388.

⁴ Dhouib, Sarhan: „Zur Transkulturalität der Menschenrechte“. In: Dhouib, Sarhan; Jürgens, Andreas (Eds.): *Wege in der Philosophie: Geschichte – Wissen – Recht – Transkulturalität*. Weilerswist (Velbrück Wissenschaft), 2011, p. 291.

⁵ Dhouib 2011: 278-279. Dhouib here refers to Meskini, Fethi: „Entschuldigung, Verzeihen und Rechtfertigung oder Monotheistische Politiken“. In: Poulain, Jacques; Sandkühler, Hans Jörg; Triki, Fathi (Eds.): *Gerechtigkeit, Recht und Rechtfertigung in transkultureller Perspektive*. Frankfurt am Main et al. (Lang), 2010, pp. 18-19.

⁶ Cf. Fernet-Betancourt, Raúl: „Intercultural Philosophy from a Latin American Perspective“. In: Note, Nicole; Fernet-Betancourt, Raúl; Estermann, Josef; Aerts, Diederik (Eds.): *Worldviews and Cultures. Philosophical Reflections from an Intercultural Perspective*. Berlin (Springer), 2009, p. 155.

⁷ Fernet-Betancourt 2009: 160.

⁸ Fernet-Betancourt 2009: 159. Further, he speaks of the “paradigms of liberation and interculturality” (Ibid.) and of the need to counter the hegemonic model of civilization. (Cf. Fernet-Betancourt 2009: 159-160)

⁹ Fernet-Betancourt 2009: 160.

¹⁰ In particular, the dialogical form of philosophizing, the openness of the concept of philosophy, and the notion of equal rights for different forms of philosophizing distinguish intercultural philosophy from comparative philosophy.

¹¹ Dhouib 2011: 292. In this context he also quotes Fathi Triki: “Transculturality again [includes] the critical aspect of all cultures in order to determine, in a transversal and transcendent way, what could be universal and thus forms a critical corpus and constantly reaffirmed common values that should apply to humanity”. In: Triki, Fathi: „Pluralisme culturel et transculturalité“. In: Kühnhardt, Ludger; Takayama, Mamoru (Eds.): *Menschenrechte, Kulturen und Gewalt. Ansätze einer interkulturellen Ethik*, 2011a, p. 336. According to Triki, cultures are connected by a transversal movement that includes ontological and historical ties. On this basis, he calls for a rewriting of history that includes a ‘transcultural theory of modernity’ that incorporates the Arab philosophy of the 12th and 19th centuries. Cf. Triki, Fathi: „Die Transkulturalität der Philosophie: Die Philosophie des Mittelmeerraums“. In: Dhouib, Sarhan; Jürgens, Andreas (Eds.): *Wege in der Philosophie: Geschichte – Wissen – Recht – Transkulturalität*. Weilerswist (Velbrück Wissenschaft), 2011b, pp. 358-369.

¹² Cf. Dhouib 2011: 293.

¹³ This is a reference to Pauline Kleingeld's, Kant's second thoughts on race, *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 229 October 2007. p. 573-592

¹⁴ Cf. Gyekye Gyekye, Kwame: *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York, Oxford (Oxford University Press), 1997, pp. 88, 89, 95, 96, 101, 103, 287.

¹⁵ Cf. Gyekye 1997: 82.