

Wageningen University

Excellent Education Prize 2020

African Philosophy winner in the category “specialized courses”

Many thanks to the jury for this decision, and the students for their amazing evaluations. This award is an immense recognition for the field of African philosophy, as a relatively new, emerging, and fascinating field at WUR, from which we – in the West and in particular at WUR - can learn so much. What is maybe obvious, is still crucial to mention: I grew up with a Western educational and cultural background. This means that I can only teach about African philosophy, based on what I learn from philosophers on the African continent. Students learn about *their* works, they read *their* texts, and listen to *their* spoken words in videos. So first and foremost, I wish to thank the African philosophers, whose work I use in the course: Mogobe Ramose from South Africa (on Ubuntu, justice and truth), Henry Odera Orika from Kenya (on Sage philosophy, oral traditions, and Parental Earth Ethics), Workineh Kelbessa from Ethiopia (on indigenous environmental ethics), Kwame Gyekye from Ghana (on technology and culture), Sophie Oluwole (1935-2018) from Nigeria, Pius Mosima from Cameroon, Wilfred Lajul from Uganda, and Olatunji Oyeshile from Nigeria. The appreciation for this course also goes to them, and I will pass it on.



Mogobe Ramose



Henry Odera Orika
1944 - 1995



Kwame Gyekye
1939 - 2019



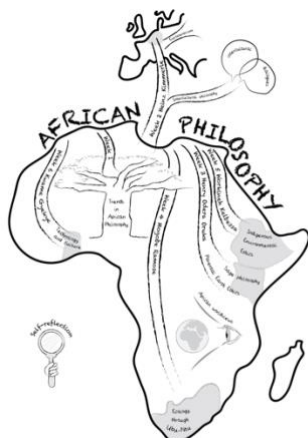
Workineh Kelbessa



Heinz Kimmerle
1930 - 2016

African philosophy demands that we critically reflect on our Western way of reasoning and looking at the world. As such, it emphasizes the urgency for each of us - and particularly for teachers and students with a Western cultural and educational background - to make our position explicit. Therefore, the course starts with the work of intercultural philosopher Heinz Kimmerle, who had a special chair ‘Foundations for Intercultural philosophy’ at Erasmus University Rotterdam from 1990 to 1995. He addressed Eurocentrism in philosophy, and he brought African and Western philosophies into dialogues.

The course gives an introduction to African philosophies and addresses a diversity of topics that are relevant for WUR. We do this by making a philosophical journey through Africa, as visualized on this roadmap. In each lecture, I literally draw the illustrations on the blackboard while teaching. At the end of a lecture, the students receive an A4 hand-out with a visualization of the lecture. We gradually fill in the complete road map.



In addition to the lectures, we jointly explore and reflect on our own Eurocentric ideas and views through a variety of interactive facilitation exercises, like creative destruction. In doing so, I hope to open up students’ minds to other ways of reasoning and looking at the world, to truly listen to other perspectives, and to engage in respectful dialogues. When it actually happens, it’s just beautiful. As one student wrote: “Amazing, just that. This course is one little secret course that every university has that can influence your thinking to such an extent that you will see the world a bit differently afterwards.”

Many thanks to the students: I am deeply impressed by their level of self-reflectivity and it was so much fun to make this philosophical journey together! At the final lecture, they spontaneously proposed to take a group picture. Whereas at the start they hardly knew each other as they came from 4 different Bsc and 9 Msc programs.

Having said that, this journey would not have been possible without the support from Cees Leeuwis, Ewout Frankema and Marcel Verweij who recognized that 'we need a course on African philosophy at WUR' and who were willing to invest in it. Many thanks! In addition, I want to thank Leon Pijnenburg who ensured the philosophical quality of the course.

To conclude, several students said that African philosophy education seems to fill a gap in WUR education as it provides African perspectives by African intellectuals themselves. As one student wrote: *"I would particularly like to stress how important I think this course is for all WUR students whose academic endeavours go beyond the boundaries of Western Europe. I've experienced this course as a good means to critically address the Western secular 'science-based' world view in relation to other world views, such as the various African ones that exist today. It is all the more important that we do this as students of Wageningen University, where we conduct our research under the motto 'for quality of life', because the rendition of this phrase can have very different outcomes in other cultural contexts."*

I truly hope that this award will be a step towards giving African philosophy a more structural place at WUR.

Birgit Boogaard, 9th of June 2020.

