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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

1. Quest: Continuity and innovation

Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/ Revue Africaine de Philosophie was founded in 1987 at the Department of Philosophy, University of Zambia, by Roni M. Khul Bwalya and Pieter Boele van Hensbroek. The journal soon established itself as a major context for philosophical and general intellectual exchange in Africa, and became the scene of several major debates. After Bwalya's untimely death and Boele van Hensbroek's return to the Netherlands, the latter kept the journal alive and made it grow, largely owing to the generous support from a network of African colleagues serving as contributors, members of the editorial board, and referees. Volume XV (2001) was the last to appear under the responsibility of Boele van Hensbroek, and, as he announced there, the responsibility of Editor was then passed on to Wim van Binsbergen. This former University of Zambia lecturer now combines the chair of Intercultural Philosophy at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam with an appointment as Senior Researcher at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands. With contributions on the *Black Athena* debate, the philosophy of interculturality, and *ubuntu* philosophy in Southern Africa, the new Editor presented his credentials to the *Quest* readership in earlier issues.

It is a sign of confidence, and a reason to rejoice, that all members of the earlier Editorial Board agreed to continue to serve the journal as members of the new Advisory Editorial Board, while for the day-to-day running of the journal an enthusiastic new Editorial Team was formed, consisting of Sanya Osha (Ibadan, Nigeria) and Kirsten Seifikaar (Rotterdam, the Netherlands), besides Wim van Binsbergen.

Inevitably, the editorial transition caused a slight delay in the appearance of *Quest*. This will be redressed in the course of the year 2004, at the beginning of which the present volume XVI is published, while volume XVII is lined up for publication within a few months. While volume XVI happens to be entirely anglophone, volume XVII will return to the usual *Quest* bilingual format, and comprise contributions in French as well as in English.

In order to enhance the world-wide availability of *Quest*, and facilitate the contacts with the readership for such matters as taking out subscriptions and ordering back copies, and also more in general to keep up with the

times, the first task of the new Editor has been to arrange for *Quest* to go online, in a fully bi-lingual (English and French) format. As a visit to *Quest*'s Internet domain (<http://www.quest-journal.net>) will bear out, this task has now largely been completed successfully, although the French sections still need to be upgraded to native-speaker level. Henceforth, emphasis will be on online publishing of the journal. As a result of initial experiments with passwords and paid subscriptions for the online version, we found that free world-wide availability of *Quest* online would best serve Africa's needs of intellectual circulation, and would also reduce the journal's burden of financial administration.

However, we do realize that Internet is not yet a viable and affordable option throughout Africa, where even the PDF format that is standard for online publications may cause difficulties (Adobe Acrobat – the software for reading PDF – not being available on most cybercafé computers). While provisions are made for unformatted .txt files, and .html Internet files, to be available in addition to the PDF format in the online version, *Quest* will continue to be available also in a printed form, for those (including individual contributors, and libraries) preferring a permanent record, and for those without Internet access or Internet skills. Inevitably, readers will have to pay for the printed version of the present, and subsequent, volumes of *Quest*, as well as for the postage. Subscriptions to the printed version of *Quest* are available on an annual basis; for details see the cover of the present volume, or the *Quest* website (<http://www.quest-journal.net>). Subscribers to earlier volumes of *Quest* who wish to renew their subscription or who have queries about the delivery of issues they have already paid for, will also find electronic forms for these specific purposes on the *Quest* website; alternatively, they may contact the *Quest* editorship by e-mail (editor@quest-journal.net), or by ordinary letter, to be addressed to:

Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/ Revue Africaine de Philosophie,
c/o African Studies Centre,
P.O. Box 9555,
2300 RB Leiden,
the Netherlands.

As this postal address indicates, another recent development for *Quest* is that the journal has been most fortunate to secure, temporarily, the hospitality of the famous African Studies Centre in the Netherlands, one of the few remaining institutes in the world dedicated to the full-time research and documentation of Africa. This move will make for continuity and consolidation until such time when the journal's extensive mental and social

base in Africa can be firmly and securely complemented with an actual institutional base in that continent.

With the present volume, which combines issues i and ii of Volume XVI (2002), *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/ Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, is firmly on its feet again, ready to take the precious heritage of its first fifteen years to further fruition. At this point, I wish to thank a number of people. In the first place all those who, in previous years, have favoured *Quest* with their time, efforts, and contributions. In particular I wish to honour my long-standing friend and colleague Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, an honorary African if ever there was one, and the great, modest, efficient, precise and passionate force behind *Quest* as an impressive intellectual achievement. Further I wish to extend thanks to all those who have helped realize the transition to the new *Quest*, as members of the Editorial Team and the Advisory Editorial Board (Paulin Hountondji, as one of the latter's members, is going out of his way to add his immense prestige and thinking power to the launching of *Quest* in its present, new format); as referees, editors and contributors to the present volume – and as funding agencies behind these contributors; as webmaster; and as members of the Leiden African Studies Centre, whose enthusiasm for *Quest* has meant a lot in this transitional period.

Let this volume be an invitation to all African colleagues, and to all Africanist¹ colleagues in general, to support *Quest* with your contributions and subscriptions, and to serve the journal as referee. Only with your full participation can *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy/Revue Africaine de Philosophie* be, and remain, an impressive testimony of the intellectual and moral force of Africa.

2. About the present volume

With the present volume, *Quest* continues to address political and moral issues in contemporary Africa, a philosophical concern which has been a red

¹ Internationally, the term “Africanist” (once mainly referring to a branch of linguistics) is used to denote the academic study of (sub-Saharan) Africa in general, as pursued by Africans as well as people from other continents. It is in this disciplinary sense that the term is used here and in the Postscript to this volume. In this sense all authors addressing African (including South African) issues in the present collection, are Africanists. However, in the recent, South African context, deservedly dominated by the African National Congress (ANC) which brought the country to democratic majority rule, the term is often employed to designate opposition parties with a predominantly Black constituency and a political agenda focussing on the African continent, such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).

thread throughout previous volumes of this journal. Once more (cf. *Quest* XV, 2001) these issues are investigated with special reference to South Africa, by contributors who are mainly specialists on the Southern African subcontinent and who therefore had little reason to provide the kind of local background that to the rest of our readership would have been helpful. Therefore, risking to state the obvious, let us give some of that background here.²

In the first half of the twentieth century CE, the Union of South Africa (1910-1961, succeeded by the Republic of South Africa) combined

- a. racism (with such expressions as spatial segregation, blatant economic exploitation, and gross constitutional inequality) as a general feature of the European colonial hegemonic presence in Africa, with
- b. by far the most developed industrial and urban infrastructure in Africa.

In subsequent decades, most African countries were decolonized at least in formal constitutional terms, and in the process they transformed their caste-like racism into more fluid class inequalities that only partially coincide still with somatic differences. In South Africa, however, settler entrenchment led to the capture (1948) of the South African state by the Afrikaner, White, Afrikaans (a creolized form of Dutch) speaking ethnic minority. The enactment of the notorious system of *apartheid* (1950) brought the formalization of racism to a scale scarcely preceded in world history – while the South African economy continued to grow and to absorb increasing portions of the Black, so-called Coloured, Indian and Chinese population segments into its working class and middle class. The increasingly general, heroic liberation struggle led by the African National Congress (ANC), and supported by intercontinental pressure, brought the installation of democratic majority rule in 1994. Liberated from its decades of international and intercontinental isolation and boycott, South Africa's return to constitutional respectability resulted in one of the most significant processes affecting the African continent as a whole in the twentieth century: South Africa's massive resources of infrastructure, education, know-how, constitutional and judicial procedures, science and technology, could finally be added to those of the African continent as a whole – but the same was true for South Africa's traumatic experience of state oppression and of the

² For the same reason (of not making our readers captive to the self-evidences of our authors), technical rhetorical vocabulary, and local or regional biographical, historical, political and otherwise descriptive details, have been occasionally clarified in footnotes marked “(Eds.)”.

annihilation of historic identity during and before the *apartheid* era, which paralleled, albeit (by and large) in intensified form, the historic experiences of African populations throughout the continent in the first half of the twentieth century. From 1990 onwards, representatives of South African economic enterprise, academic expertise and statesmanship have travelled all over the African continent in order to finally establish contact, to make their resources available, to learn what it is to be African on a continental scale (and what it is to be cosmopolitan on a global scale), and to expand into markets and spheres of social and intellectual exchange previously closed to them for so long.

In this process, the idea of the African Renaissance, first formulated in the late 1940s by the Senegalese physicist and cultural philosopher Cheikh Anta Diop,³ was revived and adopted, as an expression of faith in Africa's future in the first place, but also as another articulation of South Africans' views of their country's new, exalted mission vis-à-vis Africa as a whole, and even world-wide. However, it was generally and deeply realized that, before South Africa could convincingly play such a leading role, before even it could hope to function as a viable nation domestically, the nation-wide recent trauma of *apartheid* had to be faced, and South African society had to be reconstructed, not only along lines of constitutional equality and socio-political empowerment, but also through confession, forgiveness, and mutual re-acceptance between the constituent somatic and ethnic sections of the population. Towards this internal process of reconstruction, Southern African academic thinkers elaborated the concept of *ubuntu*. In the Nguni languages (Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa, Swati) covering part of the Southern African subcontinent, *ubuntu* literally means "human-ness, humanity". The concept came to be philosophically worked into a strategy of thought enabling one to recognize the humanity in the Other: in village situations defined by time-honoured tradition where the concept originated; in general; and even in modern contexts where the vicissitudes of social organization and historic experience had led to the construction of that Other as an enemy. With regard to the latter kind of situations, *ubuntu* was argued to prompt restoring that Other's humanity by extending to him, once more, the very humanity that had been denied, desecrated or squandered by himself in the first place, in the context of *apartheid*. The overall claim, on the part of the academic authors or interpreters of *ubuntu* philosophy, is that this

³ Cf. Diop 1948. For an extensive bibliography of the African Renaissance concept, cf. Boele van Hensbroek 2001, i.e. *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, XV (also at: <http://www.quest-journal.net>).

concept taps very ancient, very constant, and still viable resources of (Southern) African culture and social organization. While deemed an essential tool for the reconstruction of South Africa today, the concept of *ubuntu* is also suggested to be one of Africa's great gifts to the world at large, comparable to (perhaps even inseparable from) the global African heritage in the fields of music, dance, the plastic arts, religion, etc.

At the initiative and under the editorship of Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, the previous volume of *Quest* (XV, 2001) was devoted to a detailed examination of the concepts of African Renaissance and *ubuntu* as expressions of philosophy in Africa. The present volume, *Truth in Politics: Rhetorical Approaches to Democratic Deliberation in Africa and Beyond* (*Quest* XVI, 2002) is largely built, not around the locally emerged philosophical concepts towards South Africa's current reconstruction (*i.e.*, African Renaissance and *ubuntu*), but around that country's 1995-1998 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as the crucial institutional process through which South Africans have sought to publicly and collectively come to terms with the experiences of *apartheid*, in their quest to build a domestically viable and internationally respectable post-*apartheid* society. In sessions that were held all over the country, thousands of survivors and victims, as well as perpetrators of *apartheid* atrocities, and fighters against *apartheid*, were heard, the victims to tell their tale, the perpetrators to gain amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of their deeds. Unique in its format, scope, and vision, the TRC has already given rise to an enormous primary and secondary literature, a fair selection of which is cited in the present volume.

However, this collection's ambition goes beyond the descriptive details of the TRC, and this makes for both its philosophical relevance, and its comparative relevance for Africa as a whole. The editors and contributors primarily seek to answer the question:

- why could the TRC play such a major role in the reconstruction of post-*apartheid* South Africa, and what precisely were the communicative, political and legal mechanisms and strategies enabling it to play that role?

This leads on to further questions, notably

- what are the ethical/moral, and the epistemological, boundary conditions under which the TRC could play such a role?
- what does it say, in general, and at the most abstract and fundamental

philosophical level, about the nature of the state, democracy, citizenship, reconciliation, memory, politics, and “the political” as an institutional field, that the TRC can be argued to have deployed such mechanisms and strategies as are highlighted under the contributors’ and editors’ scrutiny – particularly in the contributions by Salazar, Cassin, Villa-Vincencio, Doxtader, Lollini, Gitay, Nethersole, Samarbakhsh-Liberge, Rossouw and Garver?

- what is the comparative evidence, from elsewhere in Africa (Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville – discussed in this volume by the philosophers Osha and Kouvouama, respectively) and beyond (including the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher – in the analysis by Calder from the University of Zambia; archives in France today (Cassin); the outgoing Roman Republic under Cicero as one of its two consuls in 64 BCE – as discussed by the Nigerian classicist Ige; and the city state of Athens immediately after its defeat in the Peloponnesian Wars in 403 BCE – by Cassin once more), concerning mechanisms and strategies that are similar to those of the TRC and that can be argued to have been at work, or to have been sorely missing, in these concrete political settings; and what are the philosophical yields of such comparison?

These are momentous questions indeed. To try and answer them, the editors and most of the contributors deploy the time-honoured main-stream Western philosophical tradition of *rhetoric* (in the technical sense of the public, sustained articulation of truths – not in the vulgar sense of the florid articulation of untruths):

The purpose of this volume is to try and acclimatize “rhetoric” to the philosophical scene in South Africa, and more in general in Africa as a whole, and to contribute a scholarly reflection on the emergence of public deliberation in the South African democracy by providing analyses from the standpoint of rhetoric. (Salazar, Foreword)

Not the least of this volume’s qualities derive from the fact that, complementary to rhetorical analysis, other, related forms of the *socio-political production of truths* have entered into the collection’s scope. This includes Hajjar’s painstaking and passionate, yet expertly legal-scientific examination of state torture; this study highlights how the utterly perverted search for usable truths under conditions of torture has yet elicited a human-rights thinking that directly addresses, and profoundly modifies, the philosophical categories of “human”, “person”, and “the state”. Similarly valuable is the examination (highly illuminating both from a conceptual and from an empirical interactional/ communicative point of view) of the forms and modalities of discursive public plurality, as operative in communication

and deliberation in intercultural settings (the contribution by Collier & Hicks).

This rich and excellent collection is an asset to our journal, and we are grateful to Philippe-Joseph Salazar and Sanya Osha to have made the conference proceedings available so that they could be worked into the present special issue. Let the resulting collection now speak for itself.

At the end of this volume, a Postscript will situate this collection within the general line of philosophical discussions that has characterized *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* over the years. This Postscript thus offers, effectively, a manifesto for *Quest* in coming years, as well as a vindication of the present collection's emphasis on Aristotelian rhetoric, and on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in the light of more general philosophical and African issues.

WvB

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