

Patrick Giddy

Can African traditional culture offer something of value to global approaches in teaching philosophy and religion?

First submission: 30 January 2013

Acceptance: 27 November 2013

What characterises the dominant global culture is a kind of autism, the loss of a well-articulated sense of self, a reluctance to spell out its core values and aims. A good education system, on the contrary, helps the learner articulate his/her sense of self in more adequate ways and so become a more self-aware and self-directing learner. In the context of African traditional culture, this will mean engaging with the pre-philosophical expressions of self-understanding, which will have to be considered in the context of modernity. The differentiation of consciousness that is at the heart of our ability to do this, however, is only articulated within a philosophical framework that has not lost the foundational notion of the presence to self of the questioning subject. In what follows I develop this contention for general philosophy, for ethics, for the philosophy of religion, and for how philosophy is presented in an African cultural context. This article is an attempt to show the underlying unity of these topics and thus make my point more effective.

*Dr P Giddy, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, Howard College Campus,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban 4041; E-mail: giddyj@ukzn.ac.za*



Acta Academica
2013 45(4): 154-172
ISSN 0587-2405
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<<http://www.ufs.ac.za/ActaAcademica>>

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African traditional culture has something of value to offer global society, in particular in its dominant form. This is nothing new, but I wish to summarise a project of promoting this ‘something of value’ in the way philosophy and religion are taught in Africa. The ‘something’ is the notion and value of being a human person, and of becoming more of a person through the community of others. In this article, I shall not argue for this specific understanding of African traditional thought.¹ Rather my aim is to work out its implications for how a culture, where this is so, can contribute to teaching philosophy and religion. On the other hand, a kind of autism, the loss of a well-articulated sense of self, and a reluctance to spell out its core values and aims characterise the dominant global culture. A good education system, on the contrary, helps the learner articulate his/her sense of self in more adequate ways and thus become a more self-aware and self-directing learner. As far as South Africa is concerned, the project seeks to make a contribution to the transformation of higher education as envisaged in the Ministerial Report on transformation in higher education, which explicitly mentions the Thad Metz’s *ubuntu* research project at the University of the Witwatersrand, which addresses the dimension of “epistemological transformation”, to do with “a priori assumptions and a world-view” (Zulu 2008: 91).

With this in mind, I have been researching the framework in which philosophy is approached in the dominant model in the English-speaking academia. My inquiry has a wide-ranging target: general introductory philosophy, ethics, the philosophy of religion, and the African context. This article aims to show the underlying unity linking these topics and, in so doing, to strengthen my overall case.² I

1 According to Gade (2010: 72-3), this linking of the African traditional notion of what it is to be human (*ubuntu*) with the idea of our intrinsic and normative intersubjectivity, expressed in the proverb “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, can plausibly be traced back to Augustine Shutte’s *Philosophy for Africa* (1993). The notion was popularised through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, in particular, through the influence of Bishop Desmond Tutu. The metaphysical underpinnings associated with Shutte’s and others’ understanding of African philosophy and ethics are notoriously controversial, a controversy not discussed in this article. See the debate over Tempels’ notion of “force vitale” by Matolino (2011) and Giddy (2012).

2 In what follows, I refer to the various studies I have published on the different topics covered in this article: this summary, which adds a new element to those

begin by identifying (very roughly, of course) in each case a dominant approach in the field and offer a critique of this approach, based on the need for growth in the student's self-knowledge. In the discussion of the African context, I point to the unhelpful trend of allowing this a space alongside the given set of topics in the field, whereas the student needs to be guided in order to unify these. The unifying thread behind these pieces of research – each topic, by the nature of things, only sketched in this unifying article – might not, however, be immediately evident. I wish to highlight this in the present article.

1. An example: religion in a secular age

As a first example, I refer to teaching religion in the context of a secular culture and to the need for a normative self-understanding of our human nature. In this instance and for the sake of teaching philosophy to students who have some contact with a traditional African cultural background, my aim is to obviate, leaving the student with a bifurcated mind. That would be the case if the religious section in the former instance or the traditional section of beliefs in the latter instance, were, at the end of the course of study, left untouched by any critical questions. There would likely be a similar uncritical belief (not held with any really informed conviction) in “scientism” (the notion that only the products of the sciences produce truths, strictly speaking), in the one case, and “western individualism”, in the other. In dealing with the philosophy of religion, we must emphasise the need to speak of religion in terms that are intelligible in our own secular and scientific culture.³

In general, my approach is based on the notion that the dominant global culture is, to some degree, “autistic”, in the words of Robinson (2010), lacking in a sense of self, or reluctant to articulate the substance of its ideas about persons and values.⁴ Robinson's intuition will be verified in each area discussed below.

Let us take, typically, someone who takes his/her religious tradition seriously. S/he is trying to grapple with how to understand the notion of a god who is both eternal, timeless, and ‘in touch’

studies, should stand on its own merits.

3 See Taylor 2007, Shutte 1993b, Akyol 2011, Johnston 2009.

4 This is also a key or framing idea in Shutte 1993a, in particular Chapter 4.

with our own time-constrained lives, of relevance for ourselves. The researcher in question, who shall remain anonymous, believes in Scripture; however, we could equally consider other persuasions such as the edicts of the Pope, for example. The researcher notes that God appears to be acting in the world. She adds that “God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, his response to Abraham’s plea for his nephew Lot, and the dividing of the waters so Israel could escape the Egyptian army are three Old Testament examples among many”.

A second example could be found in someone who takes African traditional wisdom seriously. A few years ago, I visited a special section at the Botanical Gardens in Durban on indigenous plants and their uses in traditional societies. It is explained that certain plants can cure various ailments. One plant is applied when the person wishes to thwart his/her opponent in court.

In both instances, the appreciation of the religious-traditional approach has not been integrated with the framework of a secular and scientific culture. The need for such integration is nothing new; however, it has become more pronounced. In general, this is the task of the university embedded in a plural culture. For dialogue within the university framework has objective (though not static) standards of scholarship, of argumentation, its inheritance from its origins. I am referring to the distinction between common-sense ways of talking and arguing, and theoretical ways that originally developed philosophy as a discipline among the Ancient Greek thinkers. The latter experienced problems, because common-sense notions of justice and so on could not withstand Socrates’ scrutiny: theories of justice were needed to sort out the manifest contradictions which Socrates was happy to point out (Plato, *The Republic*, Book 1). Such a distinction has become commonplace. The following statements are true: “The sun rose this morning” and “The earth’s rotation placed us again into contact with the rays of the sun”. It makes no sense to ask now: how is the true statement about the dawn compatible with the possibly true or purported statement about the earth’s rotation. For the latter assumes that we are adopting a different framework, not a common sense one, but a theoretical one. It assumes a distinction between two kinds of discourse. However, in both our examples, the writer purports to be asking philosophical or theoretical questions, without taking note of the distinction inherent in such questions

between different kinds of writing and of truth. We can refer to the pre-philosophical approach as that of “compact consciousness”, in other words, undifferentiated (Lonergan 1972: 302-5). The radical dependence of the universe on a non-finite power can be defended (as Aristotle did) through philosophical reasoning; not so the event of the dividing of the waters, thus allowing Israel a passage to Egypt. The efficacy of a plant in healing makes perfect sense; not so its efficacy in helping to obtain a favourable judgement in court. However, we can make sense of both by means of the appropriate framing, thus contributing to our understanding of ourselves and the universe. We can make sense of the “rising of the sun” and the “six-day creation story”. In line with this, biblical scholars distinguish different kinds of writing and hence truth in the narrative, myth, legend, history, poetry, parable, and so on.

My contention, in this instance, is that the differentiation of consciousness, which is at the heart of our ability to think through these traditions in the context of modernity, is only articulated within a philosophical framework that has not lost the foundational notion of the presence to self of the questioning subject. In African traditional thought, this idea comes to the fore in how persons, by virtue of their nature, are perceived as ancestors, and fellow human beings, parents and grandparents and others who influence their lives to the good.

I shall now develop this contention for general philosophy, ethics, the philosophy of religion, and how philosophy is presented in an African cultural context.

2. Teaching philosophy in general

In general philosophy, my approach is to meet the dominant trend in philosophy in the English-speaking world on open ground. For each central framing question put forward in the textbooks, we can counter on its own terms. But my strength comes from a flanking movement against this well-disciplined, but ultimately myopic force in the academia. The myopia is linked to what can be termed its autism, and its result in overlooking the contribution of a long tradition in the understanding of human persons, in particular the notion of self-transcendence (other terms may be used). An alliance can be made in this approach with existential phenomenology and its

critical thematisation of subjectivity in a way that consciously seeks to avoid a dualism of subject and object, mind and thing.⁵ With this in mind, Walsh attempts a thorough reformulation of the modern philosophical tradition from Kant through Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida, speaking of “the shift of perspective that has been under way in modern philosophy against the subject-object model whose dominance has been so great that the countermovement has scarcely been noticed” (Walsh 2008: 4). Therefore, the critique I am putting forward, although a minority view, is not at all simply my own! Among phenomenologists, the position of Jean-Paul Sartre (1969: Part 3) is somewhat of an exception, with no likelihood of transcendence of the kind we have suggested; for Sartre, our identity is necessarily constricted by our relation to the other. However, with due respect to Sartre, we can grow as a whole and through our intersubjective relations.⁶ Strengthened by this key notion about our human capacity, philosophy can help critical self-appropriation (Lonergan 1970). There is no doubt that there is a widespread need for this in our culture, as testified by the growth of self-help sections in bookshops, squeezing out philosophy in a more technical sense, as well as the rise of “coaching” as a lucrative profession. Yet there can be a more systematic and critical way of doing this, that links to the human sciences, and to the dialogue or Socratic mode of discussion that is a bulwark against this area falling into simply ‘preaching’.

The origins of modernity can be partly traced back to the picture of the universe that has entrenched itself in our imagination with the dominance of science. Newton’s mechanistic model is no longer the paradigm in science. We still perceive (in some way) a world in which our intentions, aims, and (subjective) grasp of things determine outcomes. However, science-influenced thinkers consider this unjustified, as folk-psychology, as Smith & Jones (1986) put it in their popular introductory textbook. We do things, in our own minds, for various reasons. But the reality – science is meant to be telling us – is different. Cognitive scientist David Spurrett (2008: 159) claims that “science, and especially physics” has shown us “that the actual universe is alien to our default conception of the world”. Arguably,

5 See Luijpen 2000. Charles Taylor mentions, in this regard, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Haldane (2012: 683) turns to Wilhelm Dilthey.

6 For example, Macmurray 1999, Ver Eecke 1975, Shutte 1993a: page no?.

it is more accurate to hold to a non-purposive “blind” causally determined world of objects interacting in some way determinable by an algorithm.

The key confusion, in this instance, concerns the notion of objectivity. Let us put aside any dubious unproven and perhaps culturally biased picture of ‘man’.⁷ Rather, consider the assumptions about objectivity associated with modern science. It is thought that objectivity is reached when subjective elements are put aside. This echoes the empiricist Hume, in a nutshell: according to him, our beliefs arise in us “through causes and effects by a secret operation, and without being once thought of” (Hume 1969). He can hold to this *prima facie* strange idea - that our ideas arrive in our minds as unconsciously as the billiard ball is conscious of arriving in the pocket - because of a picture of reality as “out there”: remember our inner world is or seems to be an anomaly, in a world uncovered by science. If this is the case, then knowing is simply a form of reacting to this reality – as it no doubt sometimes is. I react spontaneously to swerve in order to avoid the pedestrian. However, this overlooks another kind of knowing, the typically human one of actively asking questions and evaluating alternative answers which we have in mind as possibly plausible. Is there a self, we might ask, capable of agency, as Hume and after him Daniel Dennett (2004: 199) have doubted? Consider the evidence, put forward an explanation of the evidence, reflect on your ideas and come to some judgement: aiming at and reaching perhaps some objectivity. Is this not what we understand by knowing? (Lonergan 1970) It is essential to not put aside but to use subjective elements to the full if we are to reach objectivity, as much objectivity as is possible in this particular question. The capacity for agency, we might conclude, is real; it is not at all an object “out there”, not an object of any science. In the African philosophical tradition, on the other hand, agency is specifically normative: in thinking it through, the ethical dimension is always prior. In other words, being placed in relation to others, we (ideally) adopt a critical sense of our own subjectivity, attitudes, and choices.

7 We can consider Plato and Aristotle, at the origin of the argument, for some human capacity for transcendence.

We can now spell out the shift in how the basic philosophical questions should be framed. It is convenient to follow the set of questions, or issues, put forward in Nagel's (1979) classic of introductory philosophy in the English-speaking world.⁸ The first question concerns the problem of knowledge, framed as: Can we get from "in here" – our mind – to "out there"? This is only a coherent question if we assume the aim of knowledge to get to what is "out there". If by "out there" is meant simply what is the truth of the matter (rather than simply imagined), then the problem dissolves into the development of reasonable judgements. However, if by "out there" is meant what does not involve the subject, it is a misleading concept of the real. In the process of trying to reach knowledge, the aim is a reasonable judgement of the accuracy or otherwise of our ideas in the light of the data furnishing evidence. The aim is the appropriation of our capacity for a heightened self-presence and cognitional self-transcendence. In other words, the framing question has to do with the fulfillment of our humanity – in our African suggestion, this is captured in the term *ubuntu*. How is this possible? How is it linked to the human sciences? How has our understanding of it changed since the rise of modern science? These are, contrary to Nagel, the more interesting questions.

Nagel asks whether other minds exist. This is an offshoot of the above problem: if we assume, with Descartes, some special exceptional inner knowledge of our own self – what about other selves (as opposed to their obviously real bodies)? If the capacity for self-consciousness develops only through others, the reality of the self is not at all an "out there" reality of an object (let us call that "material reality"). It is affirmed simultaneously as real and as a norm (I can achieve it more and more), unlike the instance when we affirm any material object as real, which is in itself value-neutral. Therefore, the self is affirmed not as alongside other "objects", as are atoms, molecules and any kind of body, but shareable, as we discover in intersubjective causality, the sharing of ideas and the personal influence of one person by another.⁹

8 Other texts could be used, for example Pinchin 2005.

9 See the classic two-volume analysis of this by John Macmurray 1999. The African traditional notion of the person and of intersubjectivity dovetails with such analyses.

Is there an intractable problem of free will? If every event has a cause, then so too must so-called free choices. If an action is caused, it is determined. What is 'intractable', in this instance, is that our entire social set-up, in particular our legal system, seems to assume the capacity for free choice and responsibility, that is to say, precisely not being determined. This 'problem' depends on the framing of the question, and the slogan conceals an ambiguity between an event having a cause and an action having a reason, which is a common distinction. In other words, as is the case with the other central (confused) questions of introductory philosophy, we can question how this issue is framed. In each instance, we can uncover a norm, a norm of being human, lost in the paradigm of the dominant modern approach to philosophy.¹⁰ Indeed, there is a problem of moving from essential human freedom to actual human freedom; this could be framed as a problem of free will, albeit not an 'intractable' one. 'Free will' otherwise understood could, on the other hand, seem to suggest a magical power of choice operating apart from the conditioning factors uncovered by the human sciences, by psychology, sociology and ethology. However, this would miss out on the crucially important inquiry into how our capacity for free self-disposition translates into a real, effective ability. Wittgenstein (1974) famously believed that there was nothing of philosophical interest in this question, in other words only empirical psychological facts: "the will as a phenomenon is of interest only to psychology". This would not furnish any norm for human action, but simply indicate an autism of the kind we have highlighted, and to which we can again point, as a valuable counterbalancing approach, to the African philosophical notion of the person being present to him-/herself by being present to others.

3. Teaching ethics

In ethics, I suggest that we should draw on the premodern philosophical tradition, in order to reintroduce the understanding of the human person as able, in some way, to creatively react to the determining influences of biological, psychological and sociological

10 This is particularly well analysed in the now unfortunately neglected school of Dutch and Flemish phenomenology. See Strasser 1965, Kwant 1969, Van Peursen 1956, Bakker 1964.

factors, to transcend. The dominant categories, in terms of which we debate the human person in modern philosophy, are inadequate to this task, as we have argued. This is not to say that we cannot pick out dualist, essentialist and gender-biased aspects of, for example, Aristotle's understanding of human nature (as also in the African traditional concept). Aristotle's approach was unhistorical, whereas we view persons as cultural products. The point, however, is to note the failure of modern philosophy to adequately deal with the resultant problem of ethical relativism, where ethics is considered to be an epiphenomenon of culture, and where no answer can be given to the critical question as to why be moral (if I can get away with not being moral), because remaining unthematized is the orientation by virtue of our human nature towards ever fuller participation in a universe of real values. In this instance, we can detect a resonance with the African cultural notion of real personal growth through fuller embeddedness in the human and transcendent community.

I can identify the lack of a sense of real self-knowledge at the root of the inadequacies of modern ethics. More precisely, I can refer to the separation of reason from emotions, facts from values, the "is" from the "ought", the intellect from the will. This problem already arose in my earlier discussion of 'free will'. Kant's ethics 'solves' this problem by arguing that we must act 'as if' we are free. However, I am pointing to the crucial growth of self-knowledge, of our natural hierarchies of desires, as the matter, the content, of any adequate ethics. This is omitted in an ethics of principles only. It is judged that no transcultural notion of normative human nature can found ethics (no "ought" from an "is"). This means that the issue of motivation is left out of the discussion (Smith 1994). We can only discuss ethics with those who can agree on the basic principles. The foundation of these (for instance, justice, equality) is off the page. Skorupski (2007: 140-1) puts it well: "It is not that people in 'Western' liberal democracies show a lack of moral concern about urgent moral issues such as poverty, oppression, global warming. I am raising a different question. Are we living off certain ideals without really being willing to defend or revise them, or even scrutinize them?" What is missed, in a science-influenced approach to ethical inquiry, is the appropriation of our agency and the virtues constitutive of such appropriation, which is a matter of self-understanding, of our inner life (Cronin 2006).

This involves taking a step of commitment, at least of involvement (Johann 1975). As illustration of the step, we can consider Freud's scientific – 'objective' – description of the kiss, as the meeting of the mucous membranes at the entrance to the digestive tracts, and compare this with a fuller account, with what really matters at the level of intentions, the discernment of the inner life of the agents, whether (this is crucial) her lips are non-responsive (pursed at the mouth) or responsive (slightly open?).

Being unable to thematise our subjectivity and agency, any foundation for ethics seems somewhat arbitrary. A common move is to take as foundation a list of basic individual human rights – which is admittedly culturally founded, and linked to the values of tolerance and equality. But, this ethical approach will be unable to dialogue with particular cultural and religious traditions, and – crucially – to discriminate between their – objectively – more helpful and less helpful aspects. The upshot, well brought out by Johann (1988), would be a politics of domination rather than one of deliberation and consensus. This is of grave concern for our project of contextualising philosophy in Africa. In particular, as pointed out by Zulu (2013), this framework is inadequate to think through an ethic of transformation that does not betray our deepest values.¹¹

4. Teaching the philosophy of religion

As far as the philosophy of religion and theology is concerned, my suggestion is to develop our capacity for creative action. In the absence of a sense of this basic notion, philosophical reflection on religious faith has, in the English-speaking world, turned to conceptual analysis (see, for example, Davies 2004, Murray & Rea 2008). The starting point, in this instance, is our notion of the god (written as "God", capitalised, since in this tradition the god is thought of as personal and hence named) as omnipotent, eternal, all-knowing, compassionate, and omnipresent. Simultaneously, the subject matter of the inquiry is focused almost exclusively on belief, that is to say the intellectual

11 "A rights based culture alone is not a sufficient condition for democratic accountability". What is needed is "recognition of a basic moral value that exists independently of power politics and so cannot be subjected to moral expediency" (Zulu 2013: 41-2).

attitude that is one dimension only of religious faith, involving as this does both a commitment of the will and a crucial emotional and existential dimension. It is not difficult to perceive the reason for this thin version of faith: it is the corresponding thin version of objectivity that has accompanied the rise of modern science and scientific method. The only objectivity possible, on this truncated view, is achieved by excluding as far as possible subjective elements, objectivity as knowing what is “out there” and not including any elements (such as “the self”) which cannot be verified in that way. However, in our view, which grounds all knowledge – including scientific knowledge – on self-knowledge, objectivity is not to be contrasted with subjectivity, but is the fruit of authentic subjectivity, of attentiveness to the data, of habitual practice of asking intelligent questions in respect of that data, and of a commitment to not go beyond what is reasonable in judging any suggested interpretation as plausibly true, or unlikely to be true. It is this fuller notion of subjectivity that was developed by Hegel’s phenomenology and prior to him appealed to by Kant and, in both instances, applied to how we frame our understanding of religion (for example, Kant 1960). With exceptions (Pattison 2001, Armstrong 2009), this approach to religion is, to a large extent, in the shadows of contemporary philosophy of religion.

By modelling religious faith on the kind of knowledge (of what is “out there”) characteristic of the sciences, the object of the faith is regarded as competing with scientific knowledge (Ward 2006) and coming a very poor second to the latter. The evidence (in this sense of evidence) for the existence of the god is thin. There are also issues regarding the integrity of our intellect; it is as if we have to suspend disbelief when it comes to supposed divine interventions in the natural, empirically verified, order of things. In addition, there is the issue of evil: if the god is all-powerful and compassionate, evil should not exist, and the conclusion is either that the god is not all-powerful, or that the attribute of compassion is incorrectly applied to the god; in this instance, we should not worship such a being.

On the other hand, if we take as proper object of inquiry the attitude of religious faith at the existential level, at the level of taking up our life as a whole including our attitude to ourselves, in an inevitably personal overarching narrative, then the god is regarded as sourcing this capacity (for self-transcendence) not as rivalling any

intra-universe force. Consequently, as McCabe (2005: 6) points out, the god cannot be conceived of as “interfering” in the world’s natural processes – the idea of “miracles”. The object of inquiry is not at all something “out there”, but that does not imply that it is merely something “in here”, that is to say only mental or imaginative. What establishes the plausibility or otherwise of such an object of faith is the cogency of the argument, in the same way as the plausibility or otherwise of the existence of “the self” is established. There is a long tradition of such arguments, beginning with Aristotle’s cosmological argument for a “prime mover”. In the narrative in which we place ourselves, there is likely to be room for special, decisive moments which are especially revealing of the presence of the god, but this does not imply intervening divine action, rivalling the natural forces.¹² In addition, given, in our conception of religious faith, an affirmation of the integrity of the universe, there is no question of wishing away the negativities that are part of the evolving and developmental nature of the world (Swimme & Berry 1992). There is also scope for seeing ‘evil done’ as an underachievement of our human potential, a privation of the good, and hence calling for an existential response of patient forgiveness, the faith in the god giving a motivation for this attitude. It is the African philosophical approach that can be seen to correspond with this idea: both the notion of our ‘place’ by nature in the universe, and the specific moral value of including the other, can provide a more adequate framing orientation to ethical inquiry than that associated with the dominant philosophical paradigm.

5. The contribution of African traditional thought

It is not difficult to note the importance of all this for the contribution of African traditional thought to introductory philosophy and theology. In any effective teaching, the cultural background of the learner is crucial (Ndofirepi 2011). However, we have to distinguish between content and method. All traditional-religious expressions of notions about our reality as a whole, written up in proverbs and myths, can and should be subject to critical questioning, and the tools for this, including the key principle of non-contradiction, were

12 See Stoeger 2008: 225, explained in Giddy 2011, as well as the critical remarks of Verhoef 2012.

developed by the Ancient Greek thinkers in response to their early form of modernisation. This is philosophical method, properly speaking.

However, the bias of modernity has been in the content of what is taken as proper subject matter. The bias has been to think of any expressions of an orienting understanding of the self as lacking in objectivity. The problem is the loss of the sense of the presence to self of the subject. If we think that it is only the objects investigated by the sciences that merit the attribute of being truly real, this “self-presence” must be simply made up, not real. Of course, science as an activity is not possible without it: we can only thereby, in fact, set up standards for getting at the truth of things, by reflecting on how we do come to know things as they really are. This presence-to-self cannot itself be an object of scientific inquiry. Hence, a philosophical outlook which bypasses this idea will also neglect to subject to critical inquiry ways in which such presence-to-self grows and is developed, in interaction with others. We can note that traditional African culture might fill this gap, articulating through some such idea as that of *ubuntu* precisely how it is through our interaction with others and participation in communities that we achieve greater self-knowledge and begin to adopt a more adequate hierarchy of values.

I can point to a corollary of the autism, the lack of a sense of self-knowledge, in the contemporary global culture, namely the understanding of ‘the modern’ as subtracting from the whole set of objects of belief (spirits, gods, miracles, and so on) of a previous age, to reach the natural (material, bodily) residue underneath. On the contrary, I argue, along with Taylor (2007: 151-4), for an understanding of academic standards as deriving from an appropriation of human subjectivity that has its roots in what Jaspers (1953) termed the “axial age” of the major religious traditions (the prophets in the Hebrew religion, the Upanishads and Gautama Buddha in the Indian culture, for example), where outward conformity is criticised in favour of an inner authenticity of faith.

The myth of the real as what is “out there”, a myth accompanying the rise and dominance of the sciences in our global culture, is a permanent obstacle in human understanding, because every individual has to move from the world of immediacy of the infant,

oriented by biological needs, to the world mediated by meaning. With the acquisition of language, we are able to grasp things 'in the mind' without grasping them with the fingers or putting them in the mouth. By invoking their names, we can hold them in mind, and we can consider whether or not what is in the mind corresponds to how things really are; we can exercise our powers of reflective judgement. Of course, the infant 'knows' that the breast is now at last in its grasp. However, there is another kind of knowing: asking questions and suggesting answers, and the confusion between the two, reinforced by the myth of a material universe (atomic or otherwise) accompanying modern science, is clarified by what Lonergan (1972: 238) calls "intellectual conversion".¹³ For the infant's elementary knowing, the real is whatever s/he faces "out there". The 'second objectivity' that is pertinent to adult living is a quality of being reasonable, an actualisation of our intellectual capacities. It is moving to a new level, from sense experience to being intelligent to reflective judgement of the probable accuracy of our ideas. These transitions are growth moments. The existentialist writers, protesting against a loss of the self in modern thought, stress the personal nature of the quest for truth, the 'subjective' way. For Kierkegaard (1968: 181), the highest truth is what he terms "subjectivity". Such intellectual growth – heightening our critical grasp of our set of ideas, in particular through the systematic methods of the natural and social sciences – needs to be structured into a university curriculum. This happens not within any science where the conversion is implicit only, but rather in the humanities.

Finally, we may note the vision of my own university, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, to promote itself as 'the premier university of African scholarship'. If this slogan is to have any meaning, it will have to imply the promotion of the kind of inquiry that matures and develops the student's capacity for self-appropriation, for growth in self-understanding and in responsibility (Giddy 2012). In addition, if what I have argued in the course of this article is plausible, then this will imply the promotion of the humanities at the university, a re-orientation that is against the global stream and might very well cost

13 Along similar lines are the well-known critiques given by Polanyi 1962 and Maxwell 1986.

Giddy/Can African traditional culture offer something of value

the university in terms of prestige and, of course, money.¹⁴ It is not clear at present that the University understands the trade-off involved in the desire to give proper recognition to the African culture, and to students who straddle these cultures.

14 The Development Bank of South Africa report on transformation in higher education notes that “increasingly ... the trend has been to approach higher education investment from the perspective largely of the promotion of economic growth and the preparation of students for the labour market and as productive workers for the economy” (Badat 2010: 43).

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