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Critical Synthetic Realism and the Future of African Philosophy after Postmodernism and Decoloniality: Reconstructing Universality, Epistemic Justice, and Intercultural Reason

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Abstract

The contemporary reconstruction of African philosophy confronts an unresolved problem: how can the historical and political situatedness of knowledge be acknowledged without converting the geography of its production into a criterion of truth? This article critically interprets Januarius Asongu's Critical Synthetic Realism (CSR), locating it within debates over ethnophilosophy, conceptual decolonization, coloniality, hermeneutics, scientific realism, and intercultural rationality. It argues that the most defensible contribution of CSR is a distinction among mind-independent reality, the truth of propositions concerning reality, and historically situated practices of knowing. That distinction enables a critique of Eurocentric universalism without requiring the abandonment of cross-cultural standards of justification. Yet the article also identifies difficulties that any mature CSR must confront: the ontology of socially constituted objects, the underdetermination of rival interpretations, the normative grounds of epistemic justice, and the institutional conditions under which ostensibly universal inquiry is conducted. The proposed response is a fallibilist, socially reflexive realism in which universality functions as a revisable aspiration of inquiry rather than the property of any civilization. By developing objections from African philosophy, feminist standpoint epistemology, pragmatism, and critical social theory, the article clarifies both the promise and limits of a post-decolonial realism. It concludes that the future of African philosophy depends neither on intellectual separatism nor on assimilation to inherited metropolitan canons, but on equitable participation in the shared, unfinished work of philosophical criticism.

Keywords: African Philosophy, Critical Synthetic Realism, Januarius Asongu, Leonard Ekene, Decoloniality, Ontological Realism, Epistemic Justice, Universality, Intercultural Philosophy

1. Introduction: The Unfinished Question of Universality

African philosophy has long confronted a predicament that is at once intellectual and political. Its practitioners have been required to answer questions about the existence and legitimacy of their discipline that European philosophical traditions were rarely compelled to address in comparable terms. The familiar debates over ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, cultural authenticity, and conceptual decolonization were consequently never merely disputes over terminology. They concerned the distribution of philosophical authority: who may formulate general claims about the human condition, whose categories become the accepted language of inquiry, and which forms of reasoning are treated as properly philosophical. The decolonial turn sharpened these questions by showing how colonial institutions, classifications, and educational practices helped establish the apparent neutrality of particular European intellectual traditions [1-3]. Yet the success of this criticism generates a further problem. Once the institutional history of claims to universality has been disclosed, on what grounds can philosophy still distinguish a warranted universal claim from an illegitimate universalization of provincial experience?

The original essay by locates Januarius Asongu's Critical Synthetic Realism at precisely this intersection [4]. Its central contention is that the situatedness of human knowledge must not be confused

with the ontological dependence of reality upon the knower's location. This distinction is compelling, but it should not be treated as the discovery of a logical mistake universally committed by postcolonial or decolonial scholars. Many such thinkers expressly reject the idea that epistemic plurality entails a plurality of mutually sealed realities. Their criticism is frequently directed instead at the institutional power by which one historically produced vocabulary acquires the status of the universal. The philosophical task, then, is more demanding than refuting a crude relativism. It is to show how realism can absorb the strongest genealogical criticisms of its own history and still furnish standards by which rival claims may be assessed [5-7].

This article develops that task through an argument rather than a celebration of CSR. It first reconstructs the intellectual history that makes the question intelligible, then distinguishes several senses of universality and of the social construction of knowledge. It examines Asongu's reality–truth–knowledge triad in conversation with critical realism and hermeneutics, identifies a defensible version of what Ekene calls the geographical fallacy, and considers the objection that social facts may depend constitutively upon human recognition. The discussion subsequently turns to epistemic injustice, conceptual translation, and the institutions through which philosophical authority is distributed. The final sections consider whether CSR offers a distinctive research programme or merely a new vocabulary for familiar realist commitments. The answer advanced here is conditional: CSR becomes philosophically productive to the extent that it turns ontological realism into a discipline of reciprocal criticism rather than a new declaration of privileged access to truth.

2. African Philosophy from Recognition to Reconstruction

The question of African philosophy's status was decisively shaped by the colonial encounter and its intellectual aftermath. Early European descriptions of African cultures often represented communal beliefs as evidence of a collective mentality rather than as contributions to a critical tradition. Placide Tempels's account of Bantu philosophy complicated the assumption that African societies lacked metaphysical reflection, yet its presentation also helped generate the controversy over whether philosophy could be identified with an allegedly shared worldview. Insisted that philosophy is constituted through argument, disagreement, textual practices, and the possibility of correction; a collective ethnographic description could not substitute for the reflective activity of individual thinkers [1]. This criticism was emancipatory because it rejected the implication that Africans should be represented chiefly as bearers of tradition while Europeans appeared as authors of arguments. It also established a demanding criterion: African philosophy must be able to criticize its own inherited categories as readily as those imposed from elsewhere.

Wiredu's contribution gave this demand a linguistic and conceptual form. In Philosophy and an African Culture and Cultural Universals and Particulars, he argued that conceptual decolonization requires the scrutiny of categories inherited through colonial languages, educational systems, and philosophical training [8]. The significance of the project does not rest upon the assumption that African languages preserve uncorrupted truths. Languages can disclose neglected conceptual distinctions, but they also contain assumptions open to criticism. The use of an Akan or other African conceptual vocabulary may therefore unsettle an apparently necessary philosophical opposition without establishing that the locally available alternative is correct merely by virtue of its origin. This is a powerful antecedent for CSR. Both projects reject the identification of European intellectual history with universal reason while retaining the aspiration to assess competing claims by reasons that extend beyond cultural affiliation.

Shifted attention from the recovery of an authentic African intellectual essence to the apparatus through which Africa was produced as an object of colonial knowledge [2]. The archive of travel writing, anthropology, missionary scholarship, and administrative classification did not simply record a preexisting reality without interpretation; it organized objects, subjects, and permissible explanations through historically unequal relations of power. This insight requires more than a correction of particular false statements. It demands reflection upon the concepts that determine what appears worth investigating and who is authorized to investigate it. A realism adequate to Mudimbe's critique must therefore acknowledge that the objects of human inquiry are not encountered independently of classificatory practices, even when those practices do not create the entire world to which they refer. To affirm mind-independent reality without attending to the institutional mediation of inquiry would be to answer the least difficult version of the postcolonial challenge.

The transition from recognition to reconstruction is visible in later discussions of coloniality and the global distribution of intellectual labor. Connected coloniality to enduring structures of racial classification, labor, authority, and knowledge, while challenged the conceit that modernity's epistemological standards were detached from the colonial conditions of their consolidation [6,9].

Similarly places epistemic freedom at the center of African intellectual emancipation [7]. These approaches differ in emphasis, and it would be misleading to describe them as a single doctrine of relativism. Their common force lies in the contention that the authority of knowledge cannot be evaluated without investigating the histories and institutions that govern its production. CSR must respond not by denying this contention but by asking how such investigations themselves can be truthful, accountable, and open to criticism.

3. Postmodern Critique, Decoloniality, and the Question of Truth

The philosophical genealogy of the contemporary dispute extends beyond African studies. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics rejects the fiction of understanding conducted from a standpoint wholly outside history. Interpretation proceeds through inherited horizons and prejudgments, some of which enable inquiry while others require critical revision [10]. Foucault's genealogical investigations, meanwhile, illuminate the historical organization

of discourse and the relations of power that make certain forms of knowledge authoritative [11]. Neither position can be adequately summarized as the assertion that physical reality is invented by language. Their importance lies instead in exposing the conditions under which particular descriptions acquire plausibility and institutional force. A philosophical realism that ignores those conditions may preserve the vocabulary of objectivity while failing to explain how objectivity is actually pursued.

Rorty's criticism of representational epistemology complicates matters further. In Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, he contests the image of knowledge as the accurate mirroring of a world through a privileged vocabulary [12]. A realist may reject the conclusion that correspondence should be abandoned, yet the criticism identifies a genuine difficulty: the mere assertion that propositions correspond to reality does not explain how disputants identify successful correspondence without relying upon other historically situated beliefs and practices. If CSR invokes reality as the court of final appeal, it must also provide a plausible account of the procedures by which fallible human beings bring their claims before that court. Otherwise, reality risks becoming a philosophical honorific attached to judgments already favored by the theorist.

Decolonial accounts of pluriversality should likewise be read with greater care than polemical contrasts between realism and relativism sometimes permit. The affirmation of multiple worlds may refer to the coexistence of different social arrangements, ontological commitments, practices of meaning, or ways of organizing life; it need not imply that the same physical proposition is simultaneously true and false in identical circumstances. In some contexts, the language of multiple worlds marks a refusal to allow a single dominant institution to define the relevant objects of collective life. A critical realist can recognize that such institutions partly constitute social realities while resisting the stronger claim that all existence depends upon local recognition. The dispute concerns which realities are dependent on human practices, in what sense they are dependent, and how those dependencies can be investigated. Precision on these points is more fruitful than attributing undifferentiated anti-realism to decolonial thought.

The strongest realist response to genealogy is not to deny the genealogy but to insist that a causal explanation of a belief's emergence is not equivalent to an assessment of its truth. Colonial interests may help explain why a proposition became authoritative; they do not, by that fact alone, establish its falsity. Conversely, the political usefulness of a countercolonial proposition does not guarantee its accuracy. Both judgments require engagement with evidence and argument. This symmetry is ethically demanding because it denies the critic the privilege of replacing the authority of one origin with the authority of another. It also permits genealogy to perform its indispensable work: exposing hidden interests, exclusions, and conceptual constraints that may undermine the credibility of purportedly neutral claims.

4. The Geographical Fallacy Reconsidered

Characterizes a central target of CSR as the geographical fallacy: the inference from the spatial and historical location of knowing to the spatial and historical constitution of truth [4]. Properly formulated, the objection is valid against any argument that moves directly from the proposition that a theory emerged in Europe to the conclusion that its subject matter is European, or from the proposition that a moral concept has an African genealogy to the conclusion that its truth is confined to Africa. A theory of gravity is not true only where it was formulated, and the historical location of a mathematical discovery is not itself a property of the mathematical relation discovered. The circumstances of inquiry and the truth conditions of its conclusions are analytically distinct. This distinction, however, establishes a negative point about invalid inference; it does not by itself prove a comprehensive metaphysical realism.

The difficulty becomes clearer when different categories of object are distinguished. The orbit of a planet is not constituted by the legal or cultural recognition of astronomers, although descriptions of that orbit depend upon historically developed theories and instruments. A national border, by contrast, has material consequences but exists partly through treaties, law, administrative practices, and collective recognition. The price of a commodity and the status of citizenship likewise depend upon human institutions. A theory that insists all realities are independent of social practices would be unable to describe these objects adequately. CSR should therefore distinguish mind-independent natural structures from socially constituted but causally efficacious realities. The geographical fallacy remains a fallacy only when the kind of dependence at issue has been specified.

This qualification has consequences for moral and political claims. Human dignity may be defended as more than a contingent preference, yet the institutional recognition of dignity and the legal practices that protect it are historically constructed. A declaration of rights can be true or defensible in important senses without its institutional efficacy existing independently of political action. Similarly, a claim that colonial classifications distorted African realities may involve judgments about material conditions, social institutions, interpretive practices, and moral principles at once. No single appeal to the independence of reality resolves all four dimensions. A mature CSR must ask what kind of object each proposition concerns, what would count as evidence for it, and which aspects of its subject matter are shaped by human agency.

The geographical fallacy should consequently be reconstructed as a warning against genetic reduction: the mistake of treating a claim's provenance as sufficient to establish its truth or falsity. Such a warning applies equally to colonial universalism and romantic forms of epistemic nationalism. A proposition does not become philosophically sound because it originates within a marginalized tradition; nor does it become unsound because it was first articulated in a dominant one. Yet provenance can remain epistemically relevant when it reveals systematic exclusion, conflicts of interest, unreliable testimony, or suppressed alternatives. The correct

conclusion is neither that origin determines truth nor that origin is irrelevant to justification. It is that the significance of origin must be argued rather than presumed.

5. Critical Synthetic Realism and the Reality–Truth–Knowledge Triad

Asongu's philosophical vocabulary, as reconstructed by distinguishes reality, truth, and knowledge [4]. Reality designates what exists or obtains; truth concerns the correctness of propositions about what exists or obtains; knowledge concerns the fallible human achievement of understanding and justifying such propositions. The distinction is valuable because it prevents a shift from the historical variability of knowledge to the conclusion that the objects known must vary in precisely the same way. It also provides a conceptual basis for progress: later inquiry may correct earlier accounts without creating the realities to which both accounts refer. This is the central realist intuition around which CSR can organize a post-decolonial philosophy of inquiry.

The triad nevertheless requires technical refinement. Truth is ordinarily predicated of propositions, judgments, or other truth-bearers, whereas reality encompasses entities, processes, states of affairs, and relations. Knowledge is not simply a third substance mediating between two others; it is an epistemic relation involving subjects, propositions, evidence, and practices of justification. A careful account should therefore resist presenting the triad as three ontologically parallel domains. Its philosophical utility lies in marking distinctions among what is the case, what is said about what is the case, and how a claim is responsibly accepted. Without this clarification, the language of a mediating truth may create more metaphysical questions than it resolves.

Bhaskar's critical realism supplies a powerful point of comparison. His distinction between the intransitive objects of inquiry and the transitive products of scientific activity shows how theories can be socially produced without their referents being socially produced in the same sense [13]. Yet Bhaskar's argument does more than repeat common-sense realism. It investigates the conditions under which experimental activity and causal explanation are possible, thereby distinguishing the real mechanisms that generate events from the experiences and observations through which they become known. CSR can learn from this methodological ambition. It should not rest its case solely on intuitive examples of gravity or planetary motion, but develop arguments appropriate to moral, social, historical, and metaphysical domains where the relation between knowledge and reality is more complex.

The concept of synthesis in CSR should also be understood rigorously. Synthesis is not a compromise between every opposing position, nor the assertion that all traditions possess fragments of an identical doctrine. Some propositions are incompatible, and philosophical progress may require rejecting one rather than combining both. Critical synthesis instead involves the disciplined identification of insights that survive criticism and can be integrated without contradiction. Hermeneutics contributes an account of historical mediation; decolonial theory contributes an analysis of epistemic power; realism preserves the independence of truth from institutional authorization; and African conceptual criticism enlarges the resources through which claims can be articulated. These contributions are not automatically harmonious. Their tensions are precisely what a serious synthesis must examine.

6. Universality without Intellectual Empire

The distinction between universality and universalization is crucial to the political meaning of CSR. A claim is universal in aspiration when it purports to hold beyond the local circumstances of its formulation; universalization is the historical process by which a claim acquires wide recognition or institutional authority. The two may coincide, but neither entails the other. Colonial education often universalized European categories through political and economic power, while many insights originating outside Europe remained marginalized. To criticize that history is not to deny the possibility of universally valid claims. It is to deny that global circulation, institutional prestige, or military dominance establishes their validity. CSR's strongest formulation therefore relocates universality from the authority of a civilization to the open-ended assessment of claims.

This relocation also changes the obligations of the realist. A philosopher who affirms shared reality cannot reasonably treat interlocutors from different traditions as mere sources of illustrative material. If others are capable of disclosing dimensions of a common world that one's own conceptual formation obscures, their participation becomes epistemically necessary rather than ceremonially inclusive. Intercultural inquiry requires opportunities for reciprocal criticism, translation, disagreement, and revision. The fact that all participants are fallible does not make their judgments equally supported, but it prohibits the assumption that a single tradition is entitled to occupy the position of final arbiter before the argument begins. In this sense, universality is inseparable from the ethics and politics of participation.

Offers an instructive comparison because his response to the opposition between objectivism and relativism resists the assumption that the rejection of indubitable foundations leaves only arbitrary preference [5]. Rational judgment can be historically situated and still answerable to standards that are tested in argument. Similarly treats truthfulness as involving dispositions toward accuracy and sincerity whose value cannot be reduced to the preferences of a particular community [14]. These positions do not settle the metaphysical disputes of African philosophy, but they demonstrate that the search for alternatives to absolutism and relativism is neither conceptually unprecedented nor confined to one intellectual geography. CSR's distinctiveness must therefore be established through its specific account of decolonial power, African conceptual resources, and the institutions of intercultural inquiry.

A further distinction is needed between universal moral aspiration and moral certainty. Opposition to slavery, racial domination, and systematic exclusion may be defended through arguments about agency, vulnerability, reciprocity, and the conditions of human

flourishing. The strength of those arguments does not depend upon the critic's ability to occupy a perspective outside every historical community. Nor does it follow that any single moral vocabulary exhausts their meaning. A fallibilist universalism allows a claim to be presented as binding while acknowledging that its formulation and supporting argument may require refinement. The alternative would be to choose between moral dogmatism and a skepticism that deprives criticism of its normative force. Neither choice is necessary.

7. Epistemic Injustice and the Material Conditions of Philosophical Dialogue

An account of universal inquiry remains incomplete unless it addresses the material conditions of knowledge production. Libraries, universities, scholarly journals, research funding, translation networks, and digital infrastructures distribute opportunities to formulate and defend claims. Their unequal organization influences which problems receive sustained attention and which contributions are treated as authoritative. Rightly situates epistemic freedom within struggles over institutional power, while identifies the danger of intellectual dependency in which African scholars supply data for theories elaborated elsewhere [1,7]. A realism that celebrates shared truth without confronting these asymmetries risks legitimating a formal equality that has little practical effect.

Account of epistemic injustice provides a useful analytic vocabulary [15]. Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice unfairly diminishes a speaker's credibility, while hermeneutical injustice arises when unequal participation in shared interpretive resources disadvantages persons in making sense of their experience. Both phenomena are relevant to colonial and postcolonial contexts, although their historical complexity exceeds any single taxonomy. A philosopher's argument may be disregarded because of the institutional prestige of the university in which it was produced, the language in which it was written, or assumptions about the intellectual capacities of its community. Such exclusion does not merely injure recognition; it deprives collective inquiry of potentially corrective evidence and concepts.

Ssocial account of scientific knowledge adds a complementary insight: criticism improves objectivity only where communities provide genuine avenues for challenge and uptake [16]. Diversity alone is not sufficient. A panel that includes scholars from different regions but systematically discounts some participants has not achieved the epistemic advantages of plurality. CSR should therefore distinguish the presence of multiple voices from the institutional capacity of those voices to affect conclusions. This requires transparent standards of evidence, opportunities to contest interpretive assumptions, responsible translation, and attention to the economic barriers that govern participation. Such requirements turn the rhetoric of intercultural philosophy into a programme of institutional reform.

The implications are especially concrete for African higher education. Scholars require access to archives, sustainable research support, and publishing arrangements that do not make international recognition dependent upon the adoption of narrow thematic expectations. African philosophy should not be rewarded only when it discusses identity, tradition, or colonialism, as though metaphysics, logic, philosophy of science, and political theory belonged elsewhere. At the same time, global participation should not require abandoning African languages or the local questions from which philosophical problems arise. The aim is neither a self-contained African canon nor assimilation into an existing hierarchy, but a genuinely reciprocal intellectual ecology in which claims travel because they can be argued for and criticized.

8. The Social Ontology Objection

A serious challenge to CSR concerns realities that are not independent of human practices in the same way as physical objects. Money, legal authority, citizenship, property, and institutional offices depend upon systems of recognition and coordinated behavior. Argues that institutional facts arise through collective intentionality and constitutive rules, while remaining capable of producing consequences that are not reducible to any individual's preferences [17]. The social reality of a debt is not imaginary simply because the institution of debt is humanly constituted. Its causal and normative effects can be profound. An adequate realism must therefore allow that some facts are objective within a socially constituted order even though the order itself depends upon human activity.

This objection matters to African philosophy because colonialism involved both misdescription of preexisting realities and the active production of new social arrangements. Colonial borders, legal categories, racialized administrations, and property regimes were not merely false theories superimposed upon an otherwise unchanged world. They reorganized the world through coercive institutions. A purely representational account of colonial knowledge would consequently miss the constitutive force of law, administration, and economic practice. CSR should incorporate the possibility that power shapes not only beliefs about social reality but also the social realities about which subsequent beliefs are formed. Recognizing this point does not commit the philosopher to the claim that all reality is socially constructed.

A differentiated ontology offers the strongest response. Some objects exist independently of human recognition; others depend upon human practices for their existence; still others combine material structures with institutional classifications. Claims about each class may be true or false, but their truth conditions differ. A historical assertion about a treaty may require archival evidence, while an assertion about the physical consequences of a drought may require climatic and agronomic evidence. Both can be evaluated realistically without assuming that their objects possess the same ontological status. CSR would become more persuasive by treating this plurality of dependence relations as a resource for analysis rather than a threat to the unity of reality.

9. Translation, Conceptual Pluralism, and Rational Disagreement

The possibility of shared truth does not guarantee straightforward translation among philosophical traditions. Concepts acquire significance through networks of language, practice, inference, and historical use. Wiredu's conceptual decolonization shows that philosophical problems can be altered when their apparently necessary terms are reconsidered through African languages [3]. Yet translation is neither impossible nor transparent. A term that appears equivalent across languages may carry different implications concerning agency, personhood, community, or obligation. If CSR treats every disagreement as a contest over one already fixed proposition, it may obscure the prior work required to establish what the disputants are actually claiming.

Gadamer's account of historically effected understanding helps illuminate the problem. Interpreters do not first eliminate their horizons and then encounter an uncontaminated meaning; understanding emerges through an encounter in which both the question and the conceptual resources of the participants may change [10]. A realist can accept this account without treating truth as a mere product of agreement. Dialogue may reveal that one party has misconstrued the other, that an apparently universal category is too narrow, or that a previously unrecognized distinction is indispensable. These are epistemic achievements even before the parties agree on a final answer. The shared world functions as an orientation for inquiry, not as a guarantee that all descriptions are immediately commensurable.

The relevant standard of intercultural rationality should therefore be reciprocal answerability. Participants must be prepared to explain their concepts, consider counterexamples, revise inadequate translations, and distinguish disagreements about evidence from disagreements about the framing of a problem. Such procedures do not eliminate asymmetries of power or settle every metaphysical dispute. They do, however, provide a practical alternative to the assumption that only one philosophical vocabulary can serve as a universal tribunal. CSR's claim to synthesis becomes credible when it demonstrates this kind of patient conceptual work rather than merely announcing that all traditions address a common reality.

10. Originality, Antecedents, and the Burden of Demonstration

The assessment of Asongu's originality requires care. The distinction between an independently existing world and historically variable theories of that world has a substantial philosophical history. Aristotle's discussions of truth, the realist dimensions of medieval thought, Bhaskar's critical realism, and later debates over scientific and moral objectivity all supply relevant antecedents. Similarly, the rejection of a false choice between absolute foundations and unrestricted relativism has been developed in hermeneutics, pragmatism, and post-analytic philosophy [5,10,13]. It would therefore be excessive to identify the basic reality–truth–knowledge distinction as unprecedented. Philosophical originality must be located more precisely in the questions the distinction is made to answer and in the arguments developed through it.

CSR's potential novelty lies in reconstructing realist commitments under the pressure of African conceptual decolonization and contemporary analyses of epistemic domination. It asks whether the critique of Eurocentric universality can be completed without denying the possibility of judgments that transcend the contexts in which they originate. This is a significant question, but its originality depends upon engaging the strongest versions of rival positions. If decolonial theorists are represented as uniformly denying reality, the apparent solution becomes too easy. If African philosophy is described as though it had not already addressed universality through Wiredu, Hountondji, and others, the genealogy becomes misleading. A mature CSR should instead demonstrate what its synthesis explains that those earlier accounts leave unresolved.

This burden of demonstration extends to Asongu's own publications. Presents The Splendor of Truth as an important source for the systematic articulation of CSR, and the present discussion uses that characterization while avoiding unverified claims about the exact contents of particular chapters or pages [4]. The relation between CSR and earlier realist projects should be established through direct textual comparison, including points of agreement and divergence concerning causality, social ontology, truth, and epistemic justification. Such comparison would make the argument stronger, not weaker. A philosophy capable of acknowledging its debts and limits is better positioned to make a distinctive contribution than one whose originality depends upon inflated claims of priority.

11. Objections from Pragmatism, Standpoint Theory, and Decolonial Critique

A pragmatist objection holds that the appeal to reality adds little to the practical work of inquiry. If all available judgments are made through historically situated methods, then what difference does it make to insist upon a world beyond those methods? encourages skepticism toward philosophical pictures that promise a privileged relationship between language and reality [12]. CSR can respond that realism marks an important distinction between success in persuading a community and correctness of a proposition. Communities can agree and be wrong; institutions can stabilize interpretations that later evidence discredits. Yet the response must go beyond restating this intuition. It should explain how inquiry disciplines its beliefs through criticism, observation, interpretation, and practical consequences without claiming an impossible escape from history.

A standpoint objection raises a different concern. The insistence that truth transcends social position can be used to discount the epistemic significance of marginalized experience. However, show why the social location of knowers may reveal systematic omissions within dominant accounts [15,16]. A defensible realism need not deny this advantage. It can distinguish the claim that social location determines truth from the claim that social location affects access to evidence, the framing of questions, and the identification of distortions. Some standpoints may be

epistemically advantageous for particular problems because their occupants encounter phenomena ignored by others. This advantage remains defeasible and subject to criticism; it is not a general guarantee of correctness.

A decolonial objection questions whether a supposedly shared rational space can be established before material inequalities have been addressed. Invitations to universal dialogue may reproduce domination when participants enter with radically unequal institutional resources. This objection is compelling against purely procedural accounts that ignore power. CSR should therefore treat epistemic justice as constitutive of responsible inquiry, not as an optional moral supplement. The demand for universal answerability becomes credible only when scholars can access evidence, contest judgments, and publish arguments without disproportionate barriers. Realism cannot by itself produce those conditions, but it can help explain why their absence is an epistemic loss rather than merely a political inconvenience.

Finally, a metaphysical objection challenges the unity implied by the language of one reality. If human life includes irreducibly diverse kinds of being—physical, biological, social, normative, and symbolic—then a single realist formula may be too abstract to guide inquiry. The appropriate response is not to insist that all domains conform to one model of objectivity. Rather, CSR should develop a stratified account in which different objects require different forms of evidence and explanation. Such pluralism need not abandon realism. It can affirm that claims are answerable to their subject matter while recognizing that the subject matter varies. The result would be a more demanding synthesis than the simple contrast between one reality and many interpretations.

12. A Research Programme for African Philosophy

The practical future of CSR depends upon whether it can generate research questions capable of sustained criticism. One promising programme would compare rival accounts of personhood across African and European traditions, distinguishing claims about social recognition, moral status, metaphysical identity, and legal rights. Such work would test whether CSR's differentiation of reality, truth, and knowledge helps clarify disagreements or merely redescribes them. Another programme would investigate the epistemology of African historical archives, including the interaction of oral testimony, colonial administrative records, archaeology, and local memory. The aim would not be to privilege one form of evidence by origin but to develop explicit standards for assessing their strengths and limitations in particular inquiries.

A second research direction concerns the social organization of philosophical inquiry. Comparative studies could examine the distribution of editorial authority, citation networks, translation resources, and research funding across African and non-African institutions. Such research would bring the decolonial critique of epistemic hierarchy into contact with CSR's claim that the pursuit of truth requires a plurality of correcting perspectives. It would also provide a way of assessing whether the institutional conditions of global philosophy permit the kind of reciprocal criticism that CSR recommends. The outcome could be both philosophical and practical: clearer concepts of epistemic justice and evidence-based recommendations for reforming scholarly collaboration.

A third direction concerns the ontology of social realities. African political and legal history provides rich material for investigating how institutions created under colonial rule persist, transform, or dissolve through subsequent political action. A differentiated realism could examine which features of these institutions are dependent upon collective recognition, which are maintained through material coercion, and which produce consequences independent of the intentions of their participants. Such analysis would allow CSR to confront the strongest social-constructivist insights without relinquishing the possibility of objective historical explanation. It would also demonstrate that ontology is not a retreat from politics but a means of describing political realities with greater precision.

The most important requirement is that CSR itself remain corrigible. Its claims about decoloniality should be tested against the writings of decolonial scholars rather than against convenient summaries. Its account of realism should be compared with established alternatives, and its proposals for intercultural inquiry should be evaluated through actual cases of conceptual disagreement. If the framework proves unable to distinguish between natural and social objects, to identify relevant evidence, or to address institutional inequalities, those failures should motivate revision. A philosophy that defends objective truth while immunizing its own formulations from criticism would reproduce the very confusion between truth and authority that it seeks to overcome.

13. Historical Evidence, Memory, and the Politics of Explanation

The historical study of colonialism illustrates why realism and decolonial criticism need not be adversaries. Colonial archives preserve information that cannot be ignored, yet they also reflect the purposes, classifications, and exclusions of the institutions that produced them. An administrative report may accurately record a tax demand while misrepresenting the political legitimacy of the authority imposing it. A missionary description may preserve a linguistic observation while interpreting religious practices through categories that obscure their significance. Responsible historical inquiry therefore requires more than choosing between acceptance and rejection of the archive. It requires source criticism, comparison with alternative testimony, attention to material evidence, and an account of the institutional conditions of documentation. The resulting knowledge is historically mediated, but it can still be better or worse supported by the surviving evidence [2].

The distinction is especially important where historical memory has been shaped by violence. Oral testimony can preserve experiences excluded from official records, while also reflecting the limitations of recollection, transmission, and retrospective interpretation. Colonial documents may appear precise because they employ bureaucratic forms, but that appearance of precision does not confer

neutrality. A critical realist historian can recognize the fallibility of both sources without assigning them equal credibility in every case. The task is to ask which claims each source is positioned to support, which incentives shaped its production, and how disagreements might be adjudicated through additional evidence. This is not the imposition of a culturally foreign standard upon African memory; it is a discipline of accountability appropriate to any inquiry that makes claims about what occurred.

The political stakes of this approach become visible in public debates over restitution, memorialization, and historical responsibility. Claims about the seizure of objects, the organization of labor, or the consequences of colonial policies involve empirical and documentary questions as well as normative judgments. Neither the moral urgency of redress nor the institutional prestige of a museum settles those questions in advance. Indeed, the demand for restitution becomes stronger when it is supported by transparent historical investigation capable of withstanding criticism. CSR can contribute to these debates by refusing both the colonial presumption that metropolitan archives monopolize authority and the contrary assumption that political identification guarantees historical accuracy. The purpose of decolonizing historical knowledge is not to replace one immunity from criticism with another, but to widen the evidence and correct the conditions under which historical claims are assessed.

14. African Languages as Philosophical Laboratories

Language is not merely a vessel into which fully formed philosophical propositions are poured. Grammatical distinctions, semantic fields, and inherited patterns of inference influence the questions that appear natural to speakers. Wiredu's programme of conceptual decolonization remains instructive because it treats African languages as resources for testing the apparent inevitability of categories transmitted through European philosophical education [8]. Yet the metaphor of a philosophical laboratory is preferable to that of a repository of authentic truth. A laboratory is a site of disciplined experiment, where hypotheses can fail and familiar assumptions can be revised. Likewise, linguistic comparison should generate questions and counterexamples rather than serve as an automatic certificate of conceptual superiority.

Consider the general philosophical problem of personhood. Different traditions may place varying emphasis upon biological humanity, moral agency, relational recognition, communal obligation, or the developmental acquisition of social standing. These emphases can illuminate distinctions that a single philosophical vocabulary obscures. Nevertheless, the interpreter must avoid assuming that an entire language community shares one uncontested theory of the person. Meanings are negotiated across generations, regions, institutions, and practical contexts. Philosophical reconstruction therefore requires dialogue with speakers, examination of usage, and awareness of disagreement within the relevant tradition. The result may be a more differentiated account of personhood, but such an account must still confront questions about disability, childhood, gender, exclusion, and the conditions under which moral standing should be recognized.

A CSR-informed approach to translation would preserve two commitments. It would reject the assumption that European-language terminology already exhausts the possible structure of philosophical problems, while also rejecting the inference that every linguistic difference discloses an incommensurable world. Translation can succeed partially, fail locally, or require the invention of new conceptual distinctions. Philosophical dialogue is therefore iterative: initial interpretations are proposed, tested against cases, corrected by interlocutors, and reconsidered in light of rival explanations. This practice makes the situatedness of knowledge a resource for discovery rather than an argument against truth. It also gives concrete content to the claim that African philosophy can contribute to general philosophical questions without ceasing to be historically and linguistically distinctive.

15. Realism, Human Flourishing, and the Limits of Moral Consensus

A theory that affirms universal truth will eventually face the question of moral universality. The challenge is not exhausted by pointing to widespread condemnation of slavery or racial domination. Moral consensus may be historically unstable, and societies can agree upon practices that later generations regard as profoundly unjust. The stronger question concerns whether moral judgments can be defended by reasons that do not depend entirely upon the approval of those who already share them. CSR may answer by appealing to features of human vulnerability, agency, social dependence, and the conditions under which persons can pursue meaningful lives. Yet such appeals require philosophical elaboration. The mere existence of human needs does not yield a complete moral theory, and the meaning of flourishing remains subject to reasonable disagreement.

A fallibilist moral realism should therefore distinguish the objectivity of moral claims from certainty about their correct formulation. A judgment may aspire to universal validity while being defended through historically available arguments that remain open to correction. The experience of persons subjected to domination can disclose injuries that dominant theories fail to recognize, but such experience must enter the argument as evidence and moral testimony rather than as an unquestionable substitute for reasoning. Account of epistemic injustice is relevant here because the exclusion of testimony can prevent a community from understanding harms produced by its own practices [15]. The epistemic value of inclusion is thus inseparable from the ethical value of recognizing persons as responsible participants in public judgment.

The same reasoning applies to the risk of paternalism within ostensibly universal projects. Philosophers who claim to know the objective interests of others may be tempted to disregard the interpretations and choices of those whom their theories concern. CSR must resist that temptation by joining realism to procedural humility. The claim that there are objective goods does not confer unrestricted authority upon any philosopher, state, church, or university to define those goods without contestation. Public justification, attention to consequences, and the possibility of

revising normative categories are indispensable. Understood in this way, moral realism can support criticism of domination without becoming another instrument of domination. Its universality is an obligation to provide reasons and remain answerable, not a license to close debate.

16. Methodological Criteria for a Mature Critical Synthetic Realism

The argument developed here suggests that CSR requires explicit criteria if it is to function as a research programme rather than a philosophical orientation. A first criterion is ontological differentiation: an analysis must identify whether its object is natural, social, normative, textual, or a combination of these. A second is evidential appropriateness: claims should be supported through methods suited to the kinds of objects and relations under investigation. A third is genealogical reflexivity: the investigator should examine how historical power, language, and institutional position shape the questions asked and the evidence considered. A fourth is reciprocal corrigibility: rival interpretations must be exposed to objections under conditions that allow criticism to affect the conclusion. These criteria do not constitute a mechanical test of truth, but they make the framework more exacting and its failures more readily identifiable.

The criteria also reveal why a simple opposition between ontology and epistemology is inadequate. Ontological assumptions influence what investigators count as relevant evidence, while evidential practices may require revision of the assumed ontology. Historical inquiry into colonial legal categories, for example, may show that an object initially treated as a natural social division was produced through administrative classification. The finding is simultaneously epistemic and ontological: it changes both the explanation of the category and the understanding of the kind of thing the category is. A responsible realism must allow such reciprocal correction rather than assigning ontology an unquestionable priority over every act of inquiry. The independence of reality from a particular judgment does not imply the independence of philosophical ontology from criticism.

The most demanding test of CSR will arise where different communities disagree not merely about an answer but about the object of inquiry itself. In such cases, philosophers must reconstruct the rival conceptual frameworks before evaluating their claims. They may discover that some disputes are verbal, others empirical, and still others concern incompatible metaphysical commitments. There is no guarantee that dialogue will produce consensus. Its achievement may instead be a more accurate map of disagreement and a clearer account of what further inquiry would require. Such outcomes are philosophically significant because they replace premature certainty with disciplined understanding. The framework will deserve recognition as a distinctive contribution when it demonstrates these gains in detailed case studies rather than relying principally upon general declarations about universal truth.

17. Conclusion

The future of African philosophy cannot be adequately described as a choice between fidelity to indigenous intellectual traditions and participation in universal reason. That opposition reproduces the assumption that universality belongs to a tradition outside Africa and that African intellectual autonomy requires withdrawal into a separate epistemic world. The most significant achievements of Hountondji, Wiredu, Mudimbe, and decolonial scholarship undermine both assumptions. They establish that philosophical concepts have histories, that intellectual authority is unequally distributed, and that no civilization possesses an entitlement to define the standards of inquiry on behalf of humanity. Yet these achievements do not eliminate the question of whether rival claims can be better or worse accounts of the realities they address.

Interpretation of Asongu's Critical Synthetic Realism identifies a productive way of posing that question [4]. By distinguishing reality, truth, and knowledge, CSR resists the invalid inference from the situatedness of inquiry to the local constitution of every truth. Its promise is greatest when this distinction is joined to a robust account of epistemic power, social ontology, and the conditions of intercultural criticism. It must recognize that some realities are constituted through human practices, that translation may alter the framing of a philosophical problem, and that the aspiration to universality can be compromised by institutions that exclude relevant participants. These qualifications do not defeat realism; they specify the work required for realism to become philosophically and politically responsible.

The decisive contribution of a mature CSR would therefore be neither the proclamation that truth is universal nor the assertion that every tradition contributes an interchangeable fragment of knowledge. It would be the construction of a critical practice in which claims are answerable to their objects, arguments remain vulnerable to correction, and participation in inquiry is not restricted by inherited hierarchies of intellectual prestige. African philosophy has particular reasons to insist upon such a practice because its modern history reveals the consequences of confusing institutional power with philosophical authority. Its future, however, lies not in reversing that confusion but in overcoming it. To philosophize from Africa is to bring historically distinctive resources to questions that no community can settle by geographical entitlement alone. The universal, on this account, is not an empire of concepts already completed; it is the unfinished horizon of a shared and demanding inquiry [18].

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