

# Decolonising Philosophy: Re-imagining Knowledge and Reality

## What Does It Mean for Philosophy to Be Colonized?

### Eurocentrism and Racial/Ethnic Origins

Philosophy, as traditionally taught and studied, has been historically shaped by Eurocentric frameworks that assert the discipline's origins and authority primarily within Western, particularly European, intellectual traditions. This framing not only privileges white, male, bourgeois, and heteronormative perspectives but also marginalises the rich and diverse philosophical contributions from African, Indigenous, Asian, and Latin American traditions.

The module Knowledge and Reality, for instance, predominantly features canonical Western philosophers and metaphysical concepts, implicitly presenting these as universal and normative. Such dominance perpetuates a hierarchical epistemology that sidelines non-Western ways of knowing and being.

### Marginalization of Non-Western Perspectives

Non-Western philosophies are often treated as peripheral or supplementary, reinforcing a hierarchical epistemology that positions Western knowledge as superior. This can result in the exclusion of diverse voices and perspectives, limiting the scope of philosophical inquiry.

The module Knowledge and Reality overlooks non-Western perspectives on the nature of reality, such as those found in Buddhist or African philosophical traditions, which offer alternative understandings of concepts like existence and consciousness.

### Historical Context: Colonialism and Epistemic Power

The development of Western philosophy is deeply entangled with colonial histories, where colonial powers imposed their epistemologies globally, systematically devaluing and erasing indigenous and local knowledge systems. This has led to 'colonial alienation', where education reinforces colonial power structures by centering European thought.

The module may inadvertently perpetuate colonial power dynamics by presenting Western philosophical traditions as universally applicable, without acknowledging their historical relationship to colonialism and imperialism.

Decolonising philosophy requires recognising these embedded power structures and their ongoing impact on curriculum and pedagogy.

## Why Decolonise Philosophy?

### Epistemic Justice

Decolonising philosophy is imperative for achieving epistemic justice, which demands that diverse voices and perspectives — especially those historically excluded or discredited — are recognised and valued within knowledge production.

This involves recognising and addressing epistemic injustices, where certain individuals or groups are unfairly discredited or excluded from knowledge production.

In the context of Knowledge and Reality, this means expanding the epistemic horizon to include marginalised perspectives, such as those of women of color or Indigenous thinkers, whose lived experiences can illuminate alternative understandings of knowledge and existence.

### Relevance

Engaging with non-Western philosophies can provide insights and tools to address contemporary global issues. By broadening the scope of philosophical inquiry, decolonisation can enhance the relevance and applicability of philosophy to pressing social, political, and environmental challenges.

Example: Incorporating Indigenous philosophies on environmental ethics into Knowledge and Reality could provide valuable insights for addressing climate change and promoting sustainability.

### Challenging Hegemony

Decolonising also challenges the hegemony of Western thought by promoting a more inclusive, pluralistic philosophical landscape. This involves dismantling the structures of power and privilege that perpetuate Western dominance and creating space for diverse perspectives to flourish.

Encouraging critical engagement with canonical texts allows students to interrogate the assumptions and biases that underpin Western philosophy, thereby promoting a more comprehensive and equitable understanding of philosophy in the module.

## Key Areas for Decolonisation

### Curriculum Content

Implementing decolonisation in practice begins with diversifying reading lists to include works by non-Western philosophers and scholars, thereby broadening the epistemic base of the module. For example, alongside traditional metaphysics texts by Stephen Mumford or Michael Loux, students might engage with postcolonial critiques or Indigenous epistemologies.

Expanding the curriculum beyond the Western canon to meaningfully incorporate African, Asian, Indigenous, and Latin American philosophical traditions. This inclusion not only diversifies the voices represented but also challenges the notion that Western philosophy is the singular foundation of the discipline.

Example: Introducing works by African philosophers such as Paulin Hountondji or engaging with Asian metaphysical traditions alongside classical Western texts in the Knowledge and Reality module.

### Methodology

Critical engagement should be encouraged, prompting students to question the assumptions and biases within all philosophical texts, including canonical Western works. This fosters an environment of reflective inquiry and epistemic humility.

Critically examine and revise traditional philosophical approaches that may be culturally biased or exclusionary. Incorporate alternative methodologies — such as oral traditions, storytelling, or context-sensitive inquiry — as valid forms of philosophical inquiry, ensuring practices in the module that are more accessible and relevant to diverse communities.

### Language and Concepts

Decolonising requires a critical analysis of the ways in which philosophical language and concepts have been shaped by Western cultural and historical contexts. Many foundational concepts — such as 'knowledge', 'reality', and 'self' — are embedded with Eurocentric assumptions that may obscure or invalidate other epistemologies. By interrogating these biases or limitations that may arise as a result, the curriculum can foster a more culturally sensitive philosophical dialogue.

## Guiding Questions for Reflection

- Whose voices and perspectives are privileged in our current curriculum, and whose are marginalized or excluded?
- How can we cultivate a more inclusive and equitable space for philosophical inquiry that respects diverse epistemologies?
- What underlying assumptions shape our understanding of key philosophical concepts and methods?
- In what ways can we foster critical self-reflection among students and educators to challenge entrenched biases and expand epistemic horizons?

## Further Reading and Resources

Anderson, Elizabeth. *Epistemic Justice as a Virtue of Social Institutions*. *Social Epistemology*, 2012.  
Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*. *Stanford Law Review*, 1991.  
Gordon, Lewis R. *Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonisation of Knowledge*.  
Ngigí wa Thiongó. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann, 1986.  
Mumford, Stephen. *Metaphysics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2012.  
Loux, Michael J. *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*. Routledge, 2001.  
Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Intersectionality*, 1989.