

A CRITICAL REACTION TO LAINE RANDJÄRV'S HISTORICITY OF EPISTOLARITY FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Cyril-Mary P. Olatunji¹ and Mojalefa L. J. Koenane²

¹*University of South Africa and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko*

²*University of South Africa*

Abstract. This article is partly an original research in that it had initially intended to describe what intellectuality means and involves. However, it is mainly a reaction to Laine Randjärv's article titled 'Across the Borders: Unfolding the Personality of Creative Intellectuals Through their Correspondence – the Epistolary Heritage of Tuudur Vettik' in which Randjärv describes intellectuality as border crossing in a simplistic manner that seems to challenge logical experiences and supports the 'official doctrine' of the Cartesian dichotomist dualism. This paper argues to the conclusion and in support of the position of Randjärv's article that intellectuality is border crossing but goes further to question whether border crossing is ever logically possible in such a simplistic form of mental transposition without the self-portrait making implied by the cosmic harmony of Ubuntu. That is, though intellectuality implies overcoming geographical, theoretical and cultural boundaries, restrictions and prejudices. The process however is never simplistic because, following the principles of Ubuntu, the thinker is how he thinks. Therefore, the theoretical position of a scholar is a reflection of the person of the scholar who theorises. Consequently, this paper argues for a qualified acceptance of Laine Randjärv's position.

Keywords: epistemology of history, epistolary, border-crossing, self-portraiting, causal-determinism

<https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2017.1.05>

1. Introduction

In that paper, titled "Across the Borders: Unfolding the Personality of Creative Intellectuals through their Correspondence – the Epistolary Heritage of Tuudur Vettik" and published in volume 16 number 2 of *Trames: A Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* in 2012, Laine Randjärv (2012:97–123) tries to provide a scholarly analysis of the correspondence (1959–1975) between two outstanding Estonian cultural figures, namely the conductors Roland Laasmäe and

Tuudur Vettik, and the correspondence (1955–1967) of Tuudur Vettik with his wife Lonni Vettik-Paigaline. She offers a critical analysis of the contents of the private written conversations between the three related people and argues for the viability of such correspondences as sensible and reliable sources of history, which hitherto had remained untapped. The choice of Laine Randjärv's paper is motivated by the fact that it is one of the most viable articulations of the emerging discussion surrounding the employment of private letters as sources of history in a manner in which it could be appreciated by scholars of history and social sciences even in developed nations in recent time.

Be that as it may, the focus of my article is not to object to the nature and contents of the original correspondences, but to offer a qualified acceptance of the view advocated by Randjärv's theoretical position that personal and private correspondences can provide a reliable and formidable source of history. This paper employs a seemingly comparative and consequentialist phenomenological approach to accentuate the conditions under which the border crossing phenomenon is logically possible, which as it were, is unobtrusive in Randjärv's analysis regarding the correspondences. The paper also argues that her understanding of intellectual border crossing is a simplistic and naive application of the Cartesian dualism. Since Randjärv's paper rather than Randjärv herself is specifically the focus of this review, the paper, in this article is sometimes referred to as EHTV representing the last four words of its title.

2. Summary of Randjärv

According to EHTV, and borrowing from the position of Kendrick Hissani (2007:195), even though like all other literary activities that derive their meanings from how they are situated within cultural beliefs, values, and practices, personal letters have been historically widespread owing to the fact that it is one of the earliest forms of writing as a way of communication in human history (Hissani, 2007:195 as used in Randjärv, 2012:97–123). Nevertheless, letters have previously not been considered as intellectually significant and reliable sources of history. EHTV therefore canvasses the position that private correspondence as a common literary genre denotes texts that bridge numerous seen and unseen geographical, ideological or social borders throughout the human history and therefore are equally viable sources of history. The paper argues grimly, citing Barton and Hall, that the literary significance of letter-writing can be seen in that it has been widespread historically, being one of the earliest forms of writing, which pays to the topic of letters, as well as to the role of the writer in this process (Barton and Hall, 2000:1–7, as used in Randjärv, 2012:97–123). Following this line of argument, EHTV believes that better attention and prime of place should in modern time be given to personal letters as sources of history, more so because at the time of their composition they were not meant for the public eye, and therefore tell the truth about life, describe the inner realm of the writer and open up a window to his personal experiences and innermost reflections, capturing the writers' frame of

mind, their concealed motifs and goals. As a result, private correspondences are of inestimable value to the epistemology of history, especially regarding complicated historical times like that of Estonia under the Soviet occupation.

Specifically, EHTV rightly makes a number of observations and suggestions of theoretical significance to the use and study of private letters in the study of history. It observes:

1. That letters usually follow a set form: date, address, introduction, closing lines and signature.
2. That letters are era-sensitive; such that certain conventions have dictated the contents of letters throughout history.
3. That regardless of the usual contents of private letters which in many cases are routine family business, expressing friendship or love or giving instructions, taking a scientific study of them would nevertheless produce fascinatingly new trails that unwind historicity from a credibly fresh angle.
4. That scientifically scrutinizing an uncensored correspondence such as personal letter would necessarily reveal not only reliable information about the confidential and private world of its writer, but also objective facts of historical significance about the code of patterns from the past.
5. That as a source of history, private correspondence allows drawing an integral picture of the author's frame of mind, world outlook and cultural aspirations, helping to analyse the mentality, slang and customs of the person and the era and the daily life and the mentality or the concealed social nuances of an era.

While these observations and suggestions are theoretically enticing, there are a number of theoretical assumptions underlying the smooth surface of the paper. First, these include the assumption that “/ where does the quotation end? by merely sharing experience and views on the interpretation of choral music, the letters of communication between Tuudur Vettik and the duo of Roland Laasmäe, and Vettik's wife Lonni Vettik-Paigaline have matured and perpetuated the professionalism and world outlook of both correspondents that conducting a choir is not merely about directing the musical spectacle of a choir, communicating one's own principles and world outlook to a large number of people most of all. Secondly, it assumes that through the instrumentality of letter communication, even the fierce battle of the Soviet regime against what it describes as ‘bourgeois nationalism’ which was targeted primarily at uprooting continuity Estonian nationalism in a certain sense, has remained unsuccessful and largely unachieved. Thirdly, the assumption is also implied in the paper that the relationship between the writer and the letter written is that of a subject and an object. In other words, a writer can successfully detach himself or herself from the letter written. This latter supposition seems to be given some credence by the fact in the view of EHTV that some correspondence could be social or political while others are personal, intimate and sincere. Again, the paper supposes that the perpetuation of the music culture in the history of Estonia beyond the Soviet's suppression is not a function of the extent of the severity of the suppression. Rather, the paper presumes that it

is a product of the resilience of Estonians to stand the vicissitude through various mechanisms and instrumentalities such as the letter communications between individuals. The strength of the resilience is evidenced in persistence even though the main actor was in the prison custody where Siberian forced-labour camp formed a major part. Among these four main identified assumptions and under-currents of the article, the latter three fall most suitably within the scope of this review and therefore are offered some further and closer look.

While the paper advocates a scientific study of uncensored personal correspondences as sources of history, it creates the impression that other writings such as political writings, purely academic writings or censored correspondence are incapable of revealing much about the writers as would the uncensored personal letters, or even that they are less credible sources of information about their authors or the societies in which they lived and wrote. That is, EHTV creates the impression that personal correspondences are better and more honest sources of history than other alternatives because they reveal deeply concealed facts and these facts are necessary reflections of the social environment of the writer. In addition, it denotes the view that the writers of such personal letters are causally determined by their social milieu in which they wrote.

According to Randjärv, the correspondences (about 67 in number) she examined were written at a period when Estonian archives were subordinated to the notorious governmental system because of the mass deportations, and hence the survivors of Stalinist mass repressions knew that it was very dangerous to express your thoughts in private letters, as there was no such thing as the confidentiality of correspondence. In addition it was common practice that letters were opened and read by the monitoring authorities and sometimes letters never reached the addressee. If these were true of the time, it is difficult to imagine why EHTV is unable to envisage that Vettik's writings could also have been influenced by those overriding stringent political conditions. The paper represents a belief that the language and contents of such correspondences, since they were written without any premonition of future subjection to public consumption is a necessarily honest and true reflector of daily societal situation and social reality, and she considers the correspondence between Vettik and Roland Laasmäe, and the ones between Vettik and his wife Lonni Vettik-Paigaline to be one of those.

She adds that sending letters is usually associated with the description of personal emotions to a pen friend, hence having low generalization value in terms of history. She nevertheless employs some seemingly curious contextualisation to exempt the letters under consideration from this logical universalization and generalisation. Randjärv believes that the letters are untainted expressions of the true state of affairs and their contents have not been influenced or affected by human contexts and emotions. She holds this position regarding the correspondences between the two great figures of the Estonian choral movement: Laasmäe and Vettik and in spite of the fact that emotional colouration often determine the content, spirit and nature of such correspondence between lovers and people with close acquaintance and ideologies. Consequently, she believes that a careful

reading and studying of the letters has, piece by piece and accurately, added to the general knowledge of the era and the prevalent processes, thereby providing accurate valuable historic information.

The weaknesses identified notwithstanding, Randjärv's paper remains one of the novel efforts to introduce ground-breaking innovation into the epistemology and philosophy of history. Most of all, it is a revitalisation of the relevance of traditional informal correspondence through letter writing which has for a while been neglected as a result of modern information and communication technologies and social media innovations such as email, twitter, and facebook to mention just a few. Also, the paper has to its credit, an unrivalled intellectual and theoretical rigour to search the archive for the historical facts and records to bring out the historical documents it has used. That notwithstanding, EHTV is indirectly an acceptance of the following theoretical views that will receive further attention in the remaining part of this paper.

3. Causation and history

First, EHTV admits that letters to loved ones are usually flooded with emotions; it nevertheless thinks that those written by nationalist scholars are generally different and are accurate and sincere picturing of the true state of affairs, because they are supposedly from honest minds and products of 'moments of truth'. Given the nature of humans, it is true that people generally do not intend to deceive people with whom they share some intimate social and/or genetic consanguinity. At the same time it is true that people who are close to us are those to whom we want to open up and express our emotions and feelings in challenging conditions. In some cases, people want to emotionally demonstrate or show the enormity of a problem to attract the sympathy and promptness of action from such possible rescuer. With such messianic expectations and possibilities in mind, people sometimes tend to lay undue emphasis on certain aspects in their reports while downplaying another. Even when they make conscious and concerted efforts to be as less emotional as possible, it is hardly ever possible to transcend their humanness and the weaknesses of their own view to provide reports that are completely pristine and untainted by some overwhelming human weaknesses and biases that betide others. If letters are generally beclouded by emotions, sentiments and outbursts as the paper has admitted, there is no reason to think as Laine Randjärv's paper does, that this did not happen in the letters bearing the correspondences between Vettik and the selected set of people regardless of class and situation. What may differ in actual fact is the kind of emotion, interest and passion expressed.

Their emotions nevertheless, their correspondences can still serve as reliable sources of history because they are expressions of the state of mind of their writers who feel that the most appropriate things to say are those contained in their letters. It must be understood that people, either devastated by emotion or not, generally write what they think is the appropriate thing to write at every point in time. Both

the person who for instance lies that rain was falling every day in Johannesburg during the last winter, and the one who following the weather reports, declares that there was not a single drop of rain during the last winter in Johannesburg could be perceived as opposing and different only in the sense that one may have lied and the other one has followed the acceptable method of verification to arrive at truth. Readers, for example, who are not familiar or personally acquainted with the geographical facts of Johannesburg at the period mentioned, may not easily identify which of the two is correct or honest.

Unfortunately, a considerable number and weight of testimony may actually favour the false report than the true one as it may occur even in legal situations in court. Nevertheless, it is and will remain the truth that both assertions are true reflections of the state of mind of the writers, and they represent what their writers think should be the most appropriate thing to say or write. It therefore, for most part have only very little to do with any objective reality outside of their writers. Rather, they tell us more about how their writers feel and what they think should be shared in their private or public correspondences.

An advantage of perceiving historical facts originating from personal archives of individuals is that they at least afford us the opportunity to see different and even contrary views on the same historical issue. Even a thousand testimonies against or in support of any historical fact will not, on their own account, necessarily make them the true state of affairs. Testimonies (as part of human evidences) are generally one of the weakest attestations. They have been generally accepted because they seem to be the readily available access to past events. Historians and philosophers of history should therefore begin to think of how to overcome the barriers that makes knowledge of past events and contexts depend heavily on human testimonies, which in themselves at best either only represent the perceptions of their human sources or what their human sources feel should be said at a particular moment.

By studying private correspondences of great Estonian nationalist scholars or those of other places anywhere in the world we will not necessarily always get reliable information about the history of the social contexts such as Estonia or Zimbabwe in which they lived. Their correspondences are not necessary reflections of social contexts of the places or conditions under which they lived. People (and especially scholars) are, consciously or otherwise, in the habit of carefully selecting statements and views they intend to present. Regardless of whether they are under the freest or most stringent conditions, they are still free to say what they think is the most appropriate thing to say at any point in time. One person may in fact think that the best thing to do is to lie or to say the very opposite of truth. Another person may also think that the most appropriate thing to say or write is to mix up both the truth and the false information. The most important thing is that the person has freely chosen to say or write what he/she thinks is the most appropriate thing to say or write. Both of them are true reflections of what the agent in question thinks is the most appropriate thing to say or write. In other words, a human agent may think so strongly that the most appropriate thing to say

or write about an issue is to falsity. The write lies will nevertheless be a true reflection of what the agent feels is the most appropriate thing to put down in record even when he or she has no premonition that such a record will ever be made public.

Let us assume that in spite of the belief in universal causal determinism, the Estonian nationalism was able to escape such deterministic influence. That is, that the case of the Estonian musical giants described by Laine Randjärv is one out of a million (which, at least is theoretically conceivable) and therefore that the cultural and social situation of Estonia were under the Soviet occupation exactly as described in those writings given the fact that it is a recent history and there are countless of testimonies against the contrary. The accuracy and sincerity of the literary giant nationalists notwithstanding, the only condition under which their letters can be of any theoretical significance is that they have not been causally determined by any external forces. For the remaining part of this paper, and using examples from the discipline of philosophy as an example representing the entire domain of academic disciplines and intellectuality, we shall discuss why and how the only condition under which letters can be true reflections of historical realities is if and only if their writers had freedom of expression regardless of how accurate or otherwise anyone may perceive them. That is, their theoretical viability rest on the condition that they were not causally determined and that they were free to write. This part is needed to justify the earlier warning that the theoretical opinion presented by EHTV must be accepted caution.

Second, the paper denotes the view that people, including scholars whose opinions are of intellectual values, could be causally determined by the social and cultural contexts in which they live and operate, because, among other things, letters derive their meanings and significances from how they are situated within the cultural beliefs, values, and practices that produce them (Randjärv 2012:98). To fully understand the logical and theoretical implications of this belief, some background information is necessary.

Before the 21st century various fields of academic endeavours, which hitherto were considered part of the discipline of philosophy had gained their disciplinary independence to an extent that philosophy thereafter appeared empty with no distinct subject to deal with other than mere methods. Scholars, especially those belonging to the analytic tradition in philosophy did not help the matters. Many of them, especially from Wittgenstein onwards, maintained that philosophy had nothing to do with real life outside of analysis of language.

The changing disciplinary focus of philosophy and, the methodological approach of the analytic tradition described above notwithstanding, it is at least reasonable to assume that a philosophical investigation should maintain appreciable standards of clarity and distinction. Since the modern era and especially in Bacon, Descartes and Husserl, this clarity demand of philosophy gradually metamorphosed into debates on objectivity and the objective truth. It is commonplace that mathematics and science oriented philosophers such as Descartes tend to argue that some utopian objectivity is achievable. These philosophers tend not only to see objectivity as a negation of person-dependent knowledge, they also

insist that whatever carried little or no evidential (empirical) weight outside of the person making the assertion could not be objective (Spurrett 2010:156–166).

Descartes, who is often identified as the originator of this dichotomist thinking, and his contemporary exponents of rationalism have till today, not successfully accounted for the gap between the thinking mind and the object of its thought. The root of what today is referred to as dualism is often traced back to Descartes. He believes that reality and most of all, the human world, consists of an un-extended thinking mental entity called the mind and the extended but not thinking physical and mechanically operating entity called the body. This is the position that Gilbert Ryle scornfully regarded as the official doctrine because it was also officially the church's position and the view of most ordinary people following the influence of the dominant religious catechesis of the post-medieval era that the non-physical soul inhabits the physical body as a ghost inhabits a machine until it is liberated and escapes out of the body at death.

Bertrand Russell argues for instance that “subjectivity certainly is no guarantee of truth or even a high degree of credibility” (Russell 1940:444). By implication, Russell's position is that certainty is attainable and that only person-independent ideas can guarantee the truth and is tolerable. Cartwright, like many post-Copernican epistemologists, also argues that a good philosophical explanation must be an objective, person-independent matter (Giddy 1985:219). Kant however, while not denying the possibility of objective knowledge, makes it clear that one of the preconditions for scientific objectivity is that the mind of the scientist is not itself subject to causation (1985:137–231, 2009:107–111, 295–297; see Putnam 1986:105–115). Since an objective truth is understood as person-independent rather than individual subjective, it ultimately means that the attainment of objectivity is based on the ability of the knowing human agent to transcend all intuitions and personal imaginations, personal inclinations, contexts and human capabilities in order to attain it.

Most idealists and their foundationalist allies, while arguing for the possibility of a perfect and incorrigible knowledge also ultimately advocate person-independent objectivity. In fact, the history of epistemology is almost completely a history of the search for foundations and the search for foundation is itself a search for objectivity. From the modern era and given the influence of empiricism, the search for objectivity has become more of a search for person-independent objectivity. This is true of Thales in the ancient time, Aquinas in the medieval (1943:bk1) era no less than it is true of the rationalists and the empiricists in the modern (Locke 1690:1–4, 105, Bennett 1971:89, 102–112) even aside Descartes. The advocacy of person-independent objectivity and the belief in its possibility is not limited to the modern scholars, even postmodern and contemporary philosophers still accommodate this belief (Psillos 2004:618–657, Richard Rorty 1999:9, 1991:29, Aspers 2000:1–23). It formed the core of Edmund Husserl's anger against psychologism in logic (Husserl 1970, Burrowes 2010:74–82). This conception of a partitioned reality in the history of ideas in post-17th century philosophy has become the root of the object-subject demarcation that has dominated the thinking of scholars as

the acceptable fashion of reasoning till today. The dichotomist outlook has further been enhanced by the analytic tradition, which according to Strauss, is no more than mere identification and distinguishing (Strauss 2009:11, 13, 19 and 24).

In the strange relationship between these objects of two unrelated categories, scholars believe that the mind is the real actor and subject while the physical body, following the suggestion of Isaac Newton that the physical body is perpetually at a state of inertial until an external entity exerts pressure on it, is incapable of self-motivations as a mere object. This has further influenced the dominant belief today that for whatever happens, there must be a cause, and that the cause of an event is always from outside of the event caused. The naivety of this object-subject and cause-effect belief which has originated from the initial search for the objective truth in philosophy has further influenced most aspects of human endeavours including the judiciary, criminal investigation, medical diagnosis and the academic world most of all.

Perhaps the emergence and increase in racism, classism, ethnicity and all sorts of discriminations that characterise the 21st century society, which coincides with the contemporary epistemological crises, could also constitute manifestations of the dichotomist schema. Whether this is true or not, it is at least conceivable that the naive dichotomist epistemology is still the dominant acceptable intellectual fashion in the academic world today. The hub of the foregoing discussion is that scholars began to assume that they are distinct from their own analyses. Suffice it to say that it has beclouded scholars on the one hand, from seeing the relationship between themselves and the analyses that they make, and on the other hand, from realising that the only reason why their theoretical analyses that can be taken as genuinely theirs is that they are not under the influences of causal forces. We shall return to this shortly.

Unfortunately, it is traditionally assumed that epistemic justification involves accessibility. Accessibility implies that an agent s who is justified to believe a proposition p is in a position, at least in principle, to have a firsthand access to p (Wheeler and Pereira 2007:1–17). First-person accessibility is therefore thought necessary for s to demonstrate or evaluate his reason for holding p . In spite of the justifiability requirement of knowledge claims, scholars still lay claim to knowledge while at the same time claiming that they can transcend (be distinguished from) their own analyses.

To help improve the multiplier effects of the dichotomist mentality Husserl condemns the proposal of the physical sciences that the method of conceiving the physical and the non-physical realm as causally based on corporeality as a sort of naive rationalism (Pivcevic 1970:75). What he could not say clearly, however, is that the assumption that knowledge and truth corresponds to some form of objectivity beyond the self is primarily faulty. In the same dimension, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, like most phenomenologists, goes a bit further to help reconcile diametrically opposed partitioned human knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1962:383). According to him “it is through my relation to ‘things’ that I know myself” and “my awareness of constructing an objective truth would never provide me with

anything more than an objective truth for me and my greatest attempt at impartiality would never enable me to prevail over my subjectivity” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:355). In addition, Merleau-Ponty insists that our knowledge is attained only through our bodies’ perception of the world, because our bodies share special proximity and intimacy with the world even at a pre-reflective stage (Merleau-Ponty 1962:279–295). That is, there is a gap between our conscious perception and the field of reality which is only later partitioned into a discreet individual object of perception. Although Merleau-Ponty identifies the proximity that the body shares with the world and as part of that world, the emperio-centric influence on him does not allow him to equally consider the relation, which the mind (if it exists), could share with the body. No doubt, there have been untold prejudices against the possibility that the mind as a spiritual entity exists. The problem, however, is that the belief of Merleau-Ponty that the existence of the extended world is certain or surer is itself a display of naive naturalism. We shall return to this shortly.

In Laine Randj r v’s article, the action of Tuudur Vettik was indirectly referred to as border crossing of a border which could be physical, geographical, ideological, psychological or even social (Vettik 2012:97). Among border scholars, as observed by Hooks (as cite in Ahluwalia 2010:1), the nature, focus and direction of their theoretical outlook is influenced by the nature of their component borders. According to Ahluwalia, the specular intellectual such as Edward Said, W. E. B. Dubois and Zora Neale Hurston are critical of both cultures and utilizes his or her intellectual cultural space as a vantage position from which to define others, their ambivalent status creates some tensions in them (Ahluwalia 2010: 4–5). Such an internalised tension is not limited to specular border intellectuals. The syncretic border intellectuals such as Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie, and Chinua Achebe in spite of being immigrants rather than exiles in the West also experience some sort of ambivalence as they never totally belong to either of both cultures. Since a border could be social, geographical, psychological or ideological, so is its crossing too.

Specifically, the question that arises here is; does it imply that the individual scholar is determined? That is, does it mean that external forces beyond them, such as their socio-cultural environmental condition have determined them? The answer to the question depends on who asks the question. In a way, those factors as border could be conceived as external to the one who crosses. However, the social or the national borders are not in themselves relevant. It is the intellectual ambivalence they create in the one who crosses them that matters. The tension and the ambivalence are part of the constitutive make up of the scholar and are therefore not external. In spite of the borders crossed, the philosopher is responsible for his choices and therefore determines him/herself. This is the only condition that guarantees the truth value of what the philosopher says. Truth is guaranteed, not because all philosophers agree on anything, but because the philosopher expresses himself rather than being under an external influence. What the philosopher discovers is him/herself, what he/she concludes is what he/she is and the way

he/she goes about it depends on who he/she is. As Frederick Nietzsche puts it; “gradually, it has become clear to me that every great philosophy so far has been namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir” (Nietzsche 1966:13).

Therefore, in the process of revolutionising human thought, it is wrong for philosophers (either theoretical philosophers or practical and applied philosophers in any field or discipline) to see themselves as distanced from the objects of their analyses. This is the case because, philosophers are themselves the analyses that they make. The philosopher examines his own situation. Socrates examined his own life, the same goes for Sartre and Camus. Albert Camus (1955:3) tries to examine his own freedom, not a case study of the freedom of other people. Camus himself is included in the people whose freedom he examines (Camus 1955:3). Ludwig Wittgenstein is arguably one of the leading apostles of objectivity and its allied concepts such as certainty and positivism. In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that the world is all there is and towards the end of the book he acknowledges that the world and life are one and that I am my world (Wittgenstein 1976:1, 1.1, 5.62–5.63). P. F. Strawson also argues that the public world that he discusses is not independent of him (himself) (Strawson 1959:73).

By examining his own life situation, the philosopher does not begin from a theory, or at least he does not intend to. At least, he does not see himself as starting with a theory. To begin with a theory is to arrive with a position consistent with that theory. Internal consistency mechanism of theories makes it impossible for a theory to challenge itself. Since scientific truths are based on the foundation of theories, they cannot be challenged using the same method. Hence, a scientist could be one who is able to apply scientific theories accurately and dynamically, a philosopher of science is one who is able to challenge the assumptions underlying the scientific information and theories. To a philosopher, starting from a point of view of a particular theory would limit his scope of reasoning, freedom of thought and exchange truth for intra-theory internal consistency, because, the end of such analysis is already implied and premeditated at its beginning. As a result, a philosopher does not feel that he owes an allegiance to any ideology, theory, movement, discipline, method or even religion.

In that regard, the analysis of such a philosopher becomes an analysis about him/herself for the sake of him/herself and by him/herself and is in fact, him/herself. This quality of self-centredness and emotional involvement, instead of blurring the intellectual vision of a scholar, inspires moral commitment to sincerity and honesty in the analysis. That is, every scholar is determined to advocate what he considers true. What if a scholar deliberately chooses to be deceptive? Or as Hume prefers, to believe in one thing by virtue of intellectual analysis but to behave otherwise in real life situations? Even in such situations, the scholar in question is still being guided to the choice that he/she thinks is most appropriate at every point and moment of decision-making. The decision that he/she makes is a function of who he/she is. Ultimately, emotional involvement

brings about improved knowledge of the self and the world that can never be achieved through a person-independent self-acclaimed 'objective analysis'.

Therefore, in the process of revolutionising human thought, the philosopher does not see himself as distanced from the object of his analysis, because the philosopher studies the human society and condition in which he has a stake. Like Socrates, the philosopher examines his own situation through others and others through the self. This is not exactly the same as and perhaps opposed to the social scientist that sees himself as an expert coming to diagnose and prescribe remedies to societies with which he is intellectually or psychologically an 'outsider.' Perhaps the highest virtue in the social and natural science is the virtue of expertise. The social scientist needs to give his client the conviction and confidence of consulting the right person with solutions to his/her problems and of being in possession of 'the whole truth'. The philosopher is not necessarily an expert thinker, let alone with readymade solutions. The philosopher is merely someone who seeks wisdom, knowledge and enlightenment who is conscious of his ignorance as clearly as the social and natural scientists know their expertise. By making a barrier between subjects and objects or between the thinker and his thought or the object of his thought, such personal and private things like the self become a prison to the intellect.

To hold therefore the belief that a philosophical thought should necessarily be an objective analysis would mean to identify a necessarily objective philosopher or an ideologically, emotionally or culturally neutral philosophy. It would also mean the possibility of having a philosopher who emerges from no human, cultural or social context. This is half the truth. The other half would be the problem of criteria which would help to identify such a philosopher and his philosophy. By implication, it would mean that of all opposing and complementing thoughts in the history of philosophy are no more than a play on words, like Nero fiddling while Rome Burns. That would mean to find philosophers who exist outside of all natural, social, human and biological contexts. Therefore, scholars influenced by mathematics and oriented towards science who are of the belief that there is an objective philosophy which bears no relation with the philosopher, his experience and his intellectual environment is itself like a whirlwind. By implication, the criticism that Hamlyn levied against his supposed solipsists could be correct that there could be a self-independent world.

This in the true sense is the very point of African philosophy as represented by the communalistic foundation of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. This also is the point that many self-styled scholars who regard themselves as African philosophers seem to have missed. This point seems to be the most obvious unifying factor in the African thought systems and worldviews. Since this paper is not about African philosophy per se, I hope the readers excuse my unwillingness to provide any plethora of examples of such scholarly works in this regard. These scholars, who in some cases are regarded as custodians of knowledge on African philosophy, but who unreservedly are under the influence of modern naive positivist approach tend to itemise what in their opinion is wrong with Africans, should be done by Africans,

should be the ideal philosophical frame of mind for African people and referring to a seemingly 'objective Africa' out there in which they are not involved.

The *kpim*¹ of communalism in Africa is not the collectivism that denies the freedom of an individual person, which seems to have formed the basis of the debate and controversies among scholars of Africa such as Wiredu (1997, 2008: 332–339), Ikuenobe (2006), Menkiti (1984:171–181), Fayemi (2010:1–13, 2011: 259–276), Eze (2008:386–399) and Gyekye (2002:297–312), neither is it merely about any national identity or ethnicity as Wiredu (1995), Ramose (2002), Metz (2007:369–387, 2011:532–559, 2014:65–72), Praeg (2008:367–385), Venter (2004:149–160), Shutte (2001), Forster (2007:245–289, Chimakonam (2016:224–234) have touched (by supporting or opposing) in their writings. The core of African philosophy is not even about howling or hauling over of all the social and political predicaments of the people on colonialism as some of the earliest contemporary African scholars tend to show. It has to do more with seeing the joy and predicament of the other as mine than with making decisions or infringing on the freedom of the other. The individual freedom cannot be protected in a situation of an uncoordinated freedom because the freedom of one person necessarily curtails and impedes the freedom of the other person. When such a condition is universalised it only implies that it impedes the freedom of everyone and no one is free. The freedom of the individual is far more guaranteed and protected under the communalist *Ubuntu* system with its principle is universal harmony (Mangena, 2016:66–80, Mangena, 2012:1–17, Oppenheim, 369–388, Dolamo, 2013:1–10) than in the best of the alternative unbridled systems of individualism.

Let us now return to Randjärv's analysis of Vettik in EHTV. The only condition by which the writings of Vettik could be considered as true descriptions of the social, cultural and political situations of Estonia at the time is that those writings were honest descriptions by Vettik as Randjärv has argued. However, the only condition to guarantee that those writings were honest descriptions by Vettik is that the contents of the letters were personal thoughts from his own volition. Furthermore, the condition that guarantees that the contents of the letters were personal thoughts from Vettik's own volition is that they have not been caused by any factor external to him. This is the very reason why the position of Randjärv that Vettik's correspondences are true reflections of the state of affairs has to be taken with caution.

The belief of Randjärv that scientifically scrutinizing an uncensored correspondence such as personal letters would necessarily reveal not only reliable information about the confidential and private world of its writer, but also objective facts of historical significance about the code of patterns from the past, and that as a source of history, private correspondence allows drawing an integral picture of the mentality, slang and customs of the era and the daily life and the

¹ *Kpim*, especially among African scholars, has become, as its tone suggests, an acceptable concept since Pantaleon Iroegbu's use of the term in the titles of his text *Metaphysics, the Kpim of philosophy* in 1995. The concept derives from Igbo language meaning the point, exact or nucleus.

mentality or the concealed social nuances of an era should be accepted with caution.

Her paper also advocates a scientific (positivist) study of uncensored personal correspondences as sources of history and creates the impression that other alternatives such as political writings, purely academic writings or censored correspondence are incapable of revealing much about the writers as would the uncensored personal letters. In other words, EHTV denotes the view that personal letters, especially those by Vettik are causally determined by the social milieu in which they were written because it gives the impression they could not be un-exact or inaccurate simply because it is the situations themselves that were so glaring that they imposed themselves on the mind of Vettik who had no option but to put them down in writing as sincerely as they have imposed themselves on him.

The truth of it is that if those ideas contained in the letters have imposed themselves on the mind of Vettik to such an extent that in spite of the fact that all other similar writings are usually bedevilled and beclouded by emotion but his are exceptional, then there is the need to exercise caution because it appears that Vettik was not writing out of his own volition. What is most probable is that he was merely responding to the factors that have causally determined him. The implication is that the contents of his correspondences are mechanical responses to and effects of external causal influences, and therefore cannot be taken seriously as expressions of truth which for most part are dependent of the freedom of the mind to think and decide freely.

Truth therefore is a product of the free mind and the free mind implies self-portraiting or making the portrait of one's self. Suffice it to say that if intellectuality is to be taken seriously as an expression of the true (putative or otherwise) states of affairs, then it must be self-portraying. Following the suggestion from the Ubuntu system (in which there are no them (pluralised them) but only we (pluralised we)) that the world will be a better place if borders (geographic, social, racial, psychological or ideological) are eliminated because they are artificially created barriers, scholars in the various disciplines and fields may begin to understand that truth is not external to the knower and therefore cannot be caused by anything external, that objectivity does not necessarily imply externalism. It will also imply as Nietzsche suggests, that every great philosophy is the personal confession and an unconscious memoir of its author (Nietzsche 1966). Invariably, it will reveal the universality of Ubuntu and its necessity for the survival of the human kind.

An aspect of EHTV that has not been given much attention so far has to do with the statement that in spite of the fierce battle of the Soviet regime against nationalism, it could not subdue, unknot, invalidate or undo the target objectives of Estonian nationalism. This has been the point that has also for decades eluded some Afro-apologetics who think there is the theoretical need to defend their Africanness against any other. The upshot of which as a result of the postcolonial development challenges of Africa, they begin to think that colonialism must be blamed for all the ills of Africa. What is not very clear in the case of EHTV is

whether it would still have maintained the same opinion if the post-Soviet fate of Estonia had been fatally and intractably woeful like the case of the post-colonial Africa lamented by African scholars as Kah (2012:26–41), Nkrumah (2007:176–177), For instance Ibrahim Farah, Sylvia Kiamba and Kesegofetse Mazongo (2011), Austin (2010:11–32), Falola (2005) and Rodney (1973) blame the erstwhile colonial intruders for contemporary problems of the continent. Others such as Owoye and Bendardaf (1996), Uneke (2010:111–128), Lawal (2007:01–07), Achebe (1984) and Andvig (2008) in similar manner have theoretically externalised the political office holders in other to blame them for the problems which Africans themselves (at least by the implications of the theoretical views of this scholars), are not the cause (and therefore cannot undo). In the same vein though EHTV gives credit to Estonian nationalism for its resilience to confront the vicissitudes, it is not so glaring, going by its seemingly positivist and dichotomist outlook, if, like the scholars of African studies listed above it would not have identified an external cause for the calamities of Estonia had the story been different than it is. Whether or not EHTV would have blamed its woes on the Soviet government had the situation changes or it may do so in the future if the fortunes of Estonia are reversed does not belong to the scope of this article. That should be a debate for another day.

4. Conclusion

This article explains why the positions in Laine Randjärv's analysis of the numerous correspondences of Vettik should be accepted as a reliable source of intellectual history with caution. It argues that the condition necessary for its acceptance as a reliable source of historical information is that it is a true product of human volition which is often undermined by the positivist inclinations of modern scholars.

It argues that the viability of private letters does not merely lie in the fact that private letters are first-hand recordings of events so that it allows studying social processes through intimate thoughts shared by people who have been at the centre of events as Liisi Eglit (2012, as used in Randjärv 2012:99) has suggested. More important is the fact that the letters, whether from sincere hearts or otherwise, are nevertheless the reflections of their writers. This is short of saying that the writer is necessarily the letter that he writes, and unless this cognitive and logical condition is met, a letter (either personal or otherwise) is of no scholarly importance to the study of history.

Consequently, this paper recommends, following its understanding of Ubuntu from an African phenomenological worldview that truth as objectivity is mind-dependent contrary to the dominant view of the dichotomist positivist philosophy, which originates from the Cartesian dualism that truth is person-independent. The paper concludes in support of the position of Randjärv's article that intellectuality is border crossing. It nevertheless goes further that the border crossing is made

possible not because of any form of mental transposition but by the intellectual self-portrait implied in written letters. Following the advice of Randj arv that one must approach these sources with great tact because black-and-white judgment cannot be applied for situations and relations described in letters, therefore, further critical evaluation is still required to properly understand and identify methods by which private correspondences could be employed as viable sources of history.

Addresses:

Cyril-Mary P. Olatunji
Department of Philosophy
Practical and Systematic Theology
College of the Human Sciences
University of South Africa

and

Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
Adekunle Ajasin University
Akungba-Akoko
Ondo State, Nigeria

E-mail: cyrilbukryp@yahoo.com

Mojalefa L.J. Koenane
Department of Philosophy
Practical and Systematic Theology
College of the Human Sciences
University of South Africa

E-mail: koenamlj@unisa.ac.za

References

- Achebe, C. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1983.
- Ahluwalia, P. (2010) *Out of Africa: post-structuralism's colonial root*. London: Routledge.
- Andvig, J. C. (2008) *Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa and its sources of evidence*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.
- Annuk, Eve (2003) "Tekstid ja vastutekstid: kirjavahetused stalinismi kontekstis". [Texts and counter-texts: letters in a Stalinist context]. *Keel ja Kirjandus* (Tallinn) 11, 838–840.
- Aquinas, T. *Summa Theologiae*, part 1, Qu 86, Article 1 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by W. D. Ross, Vol.111. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928.
- Aspers, Patrick (2000) "Subjective or objective rational choice theory" *Working Paper series on Social Mechanisms* 5, 1–23.
- Austin, G. (2010) "African economic development and colonial legacies". *International Development Policy Series*, 11–32.
- Ayey, A. E. (1960) *A Handbook in the history of philosophy*. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc.
- Barton, David and Nigel Hall (2000) *Letter-writing as a social practice*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Bennett, J. (1971) *Locke, Berkeley and Hume*. Glasgow: Oxford University Press.
- Burrowes, James (2010) "Husserl's Arguments against logical psychologism and his conception of ideal objects". In James Burrowes, ed. *Judgement, responsibility and the life-world*, 74–82. Murdoch University. Available online at <<http://philosophy.murdoch.edu.au/jrl/termsandconds.html>>. Accessed on 06.01.2017.

- Camus, A. (1955) *The myth of Sisyphus*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Chimakonam, Jonathan O. (2016) "The end of *ubuntu* or its beginning in MatolinoKwindingwi-Metz debate: an exercise in conversational philosophy". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 35, 2, 224–234.
- Dauphin, Cécile (2002) "Les Correspondances comme objet historique: un travail sur les Limites". *Sociétés et représentations* 13, 43–50, 44.
- Dobson, Miriam (2008) "Letters". In Miriam Dobson and Benjamin, eds. *Ziemann Reading primary sources: the interpretation of texts from modern history*, 57–73. New York: Routledge.
- Dolamo, R. (2013) "Botho/Ubuntu: the heart of African ethics". *Scriptura* 112, 1, 1–10.
- Eglit, Liisi (2012) "Kirjad, päevikud, mälestused Esimeses maailmasõjas osalenud eesti sõdurite sõjakogemuse allikana". [Letters, diaries, memoirs as a source of war experience of the Estonian soldiers in WWI.] *Eesti Ajalooarhiivi toimetised*, as used in Randjärv, Laine (2012).
- Eze, M. O. (2008) "What is African communitarianism? Against consensus as a regulative idea". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27, 4, 386–399.
- Falola, T. (2005) *The dark webs: perspectives on colonialism in Africa*. Durham. North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.
- Farah, Ibrahim, Sylvia Kiamba, and Kesegofetse Mazongo (2011) "Major challenges facing Africa in the 21st century: A few provocative remarks". Paper read at the International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy in Africa – Strategies to confront the Challenges of the 21st Century: Does Africa have what is required? 14th–17th July. Berlin.
- Fayemi, A. K. (2010) "A critique of consensual democracy and human rights in Kwasi Wiredu's Philosophy". *Lumina: An Interdisciplinary Research and scholarly Journal* 21, 1, 1–13.
- Fayemi, A. K. (2011) "A critique of cultural universals and particulars in Kwasi Wiredu's Philosophy". *Trames* 15, 3, 259–276.
- Forster, Dion (2007) "Identity in relationship: the ethics of *ubuntu* as an answer to the impasse of individual consciousness". In C. W. Du Toit, ed. *The impact of knowledge systems on human development in Africa*, 245–289. Pretoria: Research institute for Religion and Theology.
- Giddy, P. (2009) "Objectivity and subjectivity: an argument for rethinking the philosophy of syllabus". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 28, 4.
- Gyekye, Kwame (2002) "Person and community in African thought". In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, eds. *Philosophy from Africa: a text with readings*, 297–312. Johannesburg: Thomson Publishing.
- Husserl, E. (1970) *Logical investigations*, trans. J. N. Finlay. London: Routledge.
- Ikuenobe, Polycarp (2006) *Philosophical perspectives on communalism and morality in African Traditions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Iroegbu, Pantaleon (1995) *Metaphysics, the Kpim of Philosophy*, Owerri: International Universities Press.
- Kah, H. K. (2012) "'Africa must unite': vindicating Kwame Nkrumah and uniting Africa Against global destruction". *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, 10, 26–41.
- Kant, I. (1985) "Metaphysical foundations of natural science". Trans. J. Ellington. In: *Kant's philosophy of material nature*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Kant, I. (2009) *Critique of pure reason*. Transl. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kendrick, Maureen E. and Hizzaya Hissani (2007) "Letters, imagined communities, and literate identities: perspectives from rural Ugandan women". *Journal of Literacy Research* 39, 2, 195–216.
- Lawal, G. (2007) "Corruption and development in Africa: challenges for political and economic change". *Humanity & Social Sciences Journal* 2, 1, 1–7.
- Locke, J. (1690) *An essay concerning human understanding*. Peter H. Nidditch, Bk. 2, Ch. 1, art. 1–4.
- Mangena, F. (2016) "African Ethics through Ubuntu: a postmodern exposition". *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 9, 2, 66–80.
- Mangena, F. (2012) "Towards a hunhu/ubuntu dialogical moral theory". *Phronimon* 13, 2, 1–17.

- Menkiti, I. A. (1984) "Persons and community in African traditional thought". In R.A. Wright, ed. *African philosophy*, 171–181. New York: University Press of America.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of perception*. Trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Metz, T. (2007) "Ubuntu as a moral theory: reply to four critics". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 26, 4, 369–387.
- Metz, Thaddeus (2011) "Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa". *African Human Rights Law Journal* 532–559.
- Metz, T. (2014) "Just the beginning for ubuntu: reply to Matolino and Kwindigwi". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33, 1, 65–72.
- Nietzsche, F. (1966) *Beyond good and evil. Prelude to a philosophy of the future*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Nkrumah, K. (2007) "What must be done". In G. M. Mutiso and S.W. Rohio, eds. *Readings in African political thought*, 176–177. London: Heinemann.
- Nkrumah, K. (2007) "Continental government for Africa." In G. M. Mutiso and S.W. Rohio, eds. *Readings in African political thought*, 344–346. London: Heinemann.
- Nkrumah, K. (1998) *Africa must unite*. London: Panaf.
- Oppenheim, C. E. (2012) "Nelson Mandela and the Power of Ubuntu". *Religions* 3, 369–388.
- Owoye, O. and I. Bendardaf (1996) "The macroeconomic analysis of the effects of corruption on economic growth of developing economies". *International Review of Economics and Business* 43, 1, 227–246.
- Pivcevic, E. (1970) *Husserl and phenomenology*. London: Hutchinson University Library.
- Praeg, L. (2008) "An answer to the question: what is [ubuntu]?" *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27, 4, 367–385.
- Putnam, H. (1986) *Realism and reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Psillos, Stathis (2004) "Philosophy of science". *The Routledge companion to twentieth century philosophy*, 618–657. London: Routledge.
- Ramose, M. B. (2002) *African philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare: Mond Books.
- Randj arv, Laine (2012) Across the borders: unfolding the personality of creative intellectuals through their correspondence – the epistolary heritage of Tuudur Vettik". *Trames* 2, 16, 2, 97–123.
- Rodney, W. (1973) *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
- Rorty, R. (1999) *Philosophy and social hope*. London: Penguin Books.
- Rorty, R. (1991) *Objectivity, relativism and truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Russell, B. (1940) *An inquiry into meaning and truth*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc.
- Shutte, A. (2001) *Ubuntu: an ethic for a new South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Strauss, D. F. M. (2009) *Philosophy: discipline of the disciplines*. Grand Rapids: Paideia Press.
- Strawson, P. F. (1959) *Individuals: an essay in descriptive metaphysics*. London: Methuen, 1959.
- Uneke, O. (2010) "Corruption in Africa South of the Sahara: bureaucratic facilitator or handicap to development?". *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3, 6, 111–128.
- Venter, E. (2004) "The notion of ubuntu and communalism in African educational discourse". *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23, 2–3, 149–160.
- Vervliet, C. *The human person, African ubuntu and the dialogue of civilisations*. London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd.
- Wheeler, G. and Pereira, L. M. (2007) "Methodological naturalism and epistemic internalism". *Chisholm v4*, 15, 30, 1–17.
- Wiredu, Kwasi (1995) "How not to compare African thought with Western thought". In Albert Mosely, ed. *African philosophy: selected readings*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Wiredu, Kwasi (1997) "Democracy and consensus in African traditional politics". In Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed. *Postcolonial African philosophy*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Wiredu, K. (2008) "Social philosophy in postcolonial Africa: some preliminaries concerning communalism and communitarianism". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27, 4, 332–339.
- Wittgenstein, W. (1976) *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, transl. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.