ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND DOCTORAL RESEARCH TRADITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: WHY IS PHD A PHILOSOPHICAL "STRUGGLE"?

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ABSTRACT

From the beginning of doctoral studies, there are three broad traditions that define research in universities: empirical research that is *well-known*, conceptual research that is merely *talked about* and philosophical research that is *unknown* to doctoral students in universities. Given this setting, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996, 8)[1] and the Higher Education Act (Department of Education 1997, 1–2)[2] make provision for academic freedom and scholarly research in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Using the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) as a case study, the article shows how academic freedom is undermined by doctoral definition, doctoral teaching and doctoral writing that are primarily empirical, partially conceptual, and covertly philosophical. This is problematic considering that academic freedom and university autonomy are not irreconcilable but, rather, are closely and jointly connected. To 'safeguard' academic freedom, I reposition doctoral research in universities in general on four philosophical planes steered by universities themselves. These are: 1) the clarification of the concept PhD itself—freedom of clarity; 2) the development of 'self-governing' doctoral students—freedom to choose and decide without institutional influence; 3) the recognition of a single philosophical style of doctoral research—freedom to pursue knowledge and promote the public good; and 4) the promotion of new scholarship—freedom to rethink and re-imagine future scholars. Given its conceptual-philosophical nature, the article proceeds on the basis of conceptual clarity, analysis of the problem and rigorous argument—this approach does not adopt a theoretical frame, collect data, make findings, and draw conclusions. In the end, I argue for the primacy of philosophical research to be preserved at universities in post-apartheid South Africa.

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[1] The Constitution guarantees "academic freedom and freedom of scientific research" (Republic of South Africa 1996, 8).

[2] The Act's preamble reads: "It is desirable for higher education institutions to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationship with the State… the creation of knowledge… respect and encourage academic freedom and research… to contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with international standards of academic quality" (Department of Education 1997, 1–2).

Keywords: Academic freedom; research; university; empirical research; conceptual research; philosophical thesis; University of the Witwatersrand; post-apartheid South Africa

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the Higher Education Act (Department of Education [DoE] 1997) lies the idea of academic freedom, scholarly research and knowledge contribution in universities. Naidoo et al. (2019, 3) see the "written philosophical contribution of the students as the hallmark attributes of successful doctoral graduates". What this means is that the 'philosophiness'—or what is *philosophical*—of doctoral research does not necessarily reside in students' empirical approach, where *theory* is largely ignored, or their conceptual approach, which fails to understand the problems of practitioners— but depends on their "struggles"*,* which contribute to the philosophical discourse within their discipline. To put it bluntly, it matters not which tradition doctoral candidates embrace: the primacy of philosophical definition, philosophical teaching and philosophical writing is what should drive students' doctoral research in universities. In this article, the intention is to:

- revisit the concept of 'individual freedom'—and by implication the 'freedom' to pursue research in universities.

- show how the Wits' doctoral research agenda is mainly empirical and partly conceptual and silently philosophical in its definition, teaching and writing, especially at the School of Education.

- reposition academic freedom in doctoral research studies in universities through 1) the clarification of the meaning of the concept PhD itself; 2) the development of 'self-governing' doctoral students; 3) the recognition of a single philosophical style of doctoral research; and 4) the promotion of new scholarship in universities.

METHODOLOGY

This article aligns with Standish's (2014, 11) assertion that philosophical research is "not empirically researchable… centrally concerned with questions of meaning… quite often with some kind of struggle with ideas… to build up the argument". As a philosophical piece, this article interrogates the meaning of academic freedom, traces doctoral research traditions, identifies the limitation of a "well-known" empirical tradition and a merely "talked about" conceptual tradition, and argues for an "unknown" philosophical tradition that is earned through individual "struggle" in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. To achieve this, I

employ three forms of investigation. On the descriptive level, I revisit the concept 'individual freedom', the meaning of research and the idea of a university. On the analytical level, I proffer a critical analysis of how doctoral research at the Wits School of Education (WSoE) emphasises the empirical tradition, with less attention given to conceptual research and even less to philosophical doctoral work. Lastly, from a normative perspective, I reposition academic freedom in doctoral research studies in universities through the clarification of the meaning of a PhD itself; the development of 'self-governing' doctoral students; the recognition of a single philosophical style of doctoral studies; and the promotion of new scholarship in universities.

WHAT IS ACADEMIC FREEDOM? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR RESEARCH AND THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY?

According to Scruton (2007, 2), academic freedom is defined as "freedom to pursue teaching, learning and research without regard for public utility of what is taught or studied, and unconstrained by external directives (whether from the state or from elsewhere)". Using Scruton's definition, I also understand academic freedom to mean the pursuit of doctoral research that is not constrained by universities' research agendas. In short, doctoral students have 'absolute' freedom and 'absolute' autonomy in their pursuit of doctoral research degrees. Schmitt (2009, 271–74) has defined autonomy as a kind of freedom:

> "Actual freedom requires the deliberate efforts of individual citizens. Autonomous persons think for themselves. They do not allow others to run their lives but try to make their own decisions. Autonomy requires that one be able to choose the less pleasant alternative of the moment for the sake of reaching long-range goals one has set for oneself… requires a strong character and the willingness to brave opposition, dissent, and difficulties… we have become time servers, fearful conformists, unthinking, timid, and lacking in imagination. Philosophers… urged us to seek autonomy in order to be 'our own' persons or to 'own oneself', to be different… to be unique, to go off in one's own directions… to experiment ... to float… to be uninvolved in somebody else's game… to own oneself… to feel real, not dazed… to live… to find real me… rather that somebody else's idea of that self; the wish to be reborn as oneself. "

Schmitt's (2009) idea of actual freedom demonstrates how doctoral degrees are earned through philosophical "struggle" by students in universities in many ways. First, academic freedom demands that doctoral students think 'independently' of the university, the Senate, the Faculty and lecturers—this is also crucial in maintaining institutional autonomy in order "to achieve the desired outcome" (Namakula and Ndaba 2024, 34–35). Second, individual freedom engenders 'thoughtful choices'—rather than the university, the Senate, the Faculty and the lecturers making choices for doctoral students. Third, actual freedom fosters active, self-help type of characters—doctoral "self-efficacy is key to achieve a desired [philosophical] goal" to

transform PhD candidates into philosophers at universities (Nwosu, Enebe and Nyakuwanika 2024, 91). If universities embrace Scruton's (2007) definition of academic freedom and Schmitt's (2009) idea of actual freedom, doctoral candidates' approach to research cannot be determined by the Senate, the Faculty and lecturers. Academic freedom requires doctoral students to purposefully *act* for themselves by taking a less travelled philosophical road that aids "self-regulatory human activity", (Maluleka and Mathebula 2022, 78). The point here is that academic freedom is both "a gift and a burden. Freedom [i]s never free!" (Maimela 2014, 149). Simply put, 'doctorateness' is achieved through individual *struggles* not only to learn, discover, explore and "recognise our own ignorance, but wishing to eliminate or at least diminish that ignorance" (Brickhouse and Smith 2009, 190). A doctoral degree that is earned "turns the eye of the soul from the dark cave of ignorance into the limelight of knowledge" (Akinpelu 1981, 30)—one could say to the 'philosophical world'. After all, all roads lead to a Doctor of Philosophy degree, and engaging in a continuous "struggle" for total emancipation is the burden for all doctoral candidates to bear. This is the philosophical approach to doctoral definition, doctoral teaching and doctoral writing yardstick for all universities.

The study will engage the following questions: What is research? What are the aspects of definitional research at the university? How is academic freedom likely to influence research at the university? In the words of Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014, 20), the word "'research' consists of two parts: the prefix 're-' and the root '-search'". Simply put, research means to 'examine again'. For example, a PhD student can research again on what has been said, written and published on 'academic freedom and its place in public universities in South Africa by using any of these three different understandings of research articulated by three authors:

> "Research is the systematic analysis of research questions by using empirical methods (e.g. of asking, observing, analysing data). Its aim is to make empirically grounded statements that can be generalized or to test such statements" (Flick 2015, 5).

> "Research is not just about gathering information, it is also about analysing and interpreting that information and using it to make predictions or to build theories about the way the world works—or parts of it at least!" (Evans and King 2006, 131).

> "Research is a form of disciplined enquiry leading to the generation of knowledge" (Koshy 2010, 1).

In a nutshell, there are a few points worth mentioning about these three definitions of research. First, Flick's references to 'empirical', 'methods', 'asking', 'observing' and 'data' are strongly reminiscent of the entrenched, "well-known" empirical tradition at Wits, as the reader will see

in the next section. Second, Evans and King's words 'gathering information', 'analysing', 'interpreting information' and 'build theories' point to a slight shift from empirical tradition to the conceptual tradition that is merely "talked about" at Wits as a case in point. Third, Koshy's terms like 'disciplined', 'enquiry', 'generation' and 'knowledge' point to the philosophical tradition that is not explicitly researched at the Wits School of Education. A close analysis of Koshy's phraseology denotes individual "disciplined, balanced inquiry conducted in a critical spirit" (Thomas 2017, 24). It suggests that PhD students may investigate a phenomenon using empirical methods to build theories that lead to the contribution of new knowledge. Also, empirical and conceptual definitions—and, by extension, teaching and writing—are a means to another end, and that end is a contribution to philosophy in Schools of Education in general. One can as well deduce that, Koshy's (2010) philosophical contribution is only possible if doctoral students use Scruton's (2007) definition of academic freedom and Schmitt's (2009) idea of actual freedom in universities. A philosophical contribution to knowledge is not possible without individual freedom, and this is the nature, the purpose and the goal of embarking on a doctorate journey. The Higher Education Act's (1997) references to 'scholarship and research', 'knowledge', 'academic quality', 'scientific knowledge', 'creation of knowledge', 'advancement of all forms of knowledge' is strongly reminiscent of academic freedom as a precondition for academic excellence. This is a philosophical project for doctoral students in universities, as shall be discussed later.

Throughout history, the function of universities centred around three dominant held traditions: research, teaching, and community service. For Morrow (2009, 113), this traditional "way of thinking about the functions of higher education is not wrong, but it is a cliché, with the opacity of lethargic thinking [and] does little to enable us to understand what is distinct about higher education". To demonstrate the importance of this assertion, reference to Kotzee and Martin's (2013, 628–29) two general descriptions of the purpose of the university, i.e. the "narrow social goods and the distributive justice accounts" which gives a general outlook of the universities and the distinctive account, which focuses on scholarly excellence and transforming PhD candidates into philosophers at universities, respectively is critical as shown below:

> "through intellectual advances the university… identif[ies] and educate[s] the future scientists, leaders, artists and intellectuals who will serve society.… To provide some form of social benefit… the goods promoted by the university are interchangeable goods such as income, jobs, or social capital" (Kotzee and Martin 2013, 627–29).

> "distribut[ting] opportunities for power and wealth fairly throughout society… setting right past social injustices… seeking to redistribute life chances in some egalitarian fashion.… In this regard,

the affinity that exists between the 'job opportunities'… and the 'levelling playing field' and 'remedy'… is important… can be seen as concerned about access to jobs… as a conduit to well-earning or well-regarded positions in society" (Kotzee and Martin 2013, 627–30).

"as far as the primary role of the university—the promotion of scholarship—goes, university teaching should focus on the moulding of students into potential scholars in the discipline.… By this we mean that what must set the university educated person apart is the acquisition of knowledge of, or the development of, forms of understanding derived from some scholarly field or collection of fields" (Kotzee and Martin 2013, 634–35).

As a point of amplification, Kotzee and Martin's 'narrow social goods' aim to mobilize a useful labour force for the benefit of the economy—this is a social project meant to address the needs of South Africa. Second, the distributive distribution recognises social injustices, emphasises job opportunities and strives for egalitarianism to 'right the wrongs' of the past in South Africa. A university is understood as a distributive project concerned with questions of justice in society. Third, the primary role of the university and its promotion of scholarly knowledge is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa and the Higher Education Act, reflected in Scruton's (2007) definition of academic freedom and Schmitt's (2009) idea of actual freedom and envisioned in Koshy's (2010) philosophical thesis in four ways: 1) The pursuit of scholarly knowledge is an academic project to which doctoral students are committed to all the time; 2) Scholarly excellence is a form of self-control that is "develop[ed and nurtured within an individual", to use Dupré's (2007, 178) words; 3) Consequently, promoting scholarship allows doctoral candidates to make empirical meaning of profound theoretical issues; and 4) Treating 'sociology' and 'history' not as marked, different and opposing ends of scholarly excellence strengthens the unity of a single philosophical style of inquiry in universities. It is against this backdrop that Kotzee and Martin (2013, 625) maintain that the 'narrow social goods' and 'distributive justice' accounts, "while no doubt important, are insufficient". Hence, I argue that individual freedom is consistent with the philosophical definition of research and by implication the primary function of the university. It is to the research traditions at Wits that I now turn my attention.

RESEARCH TRADITIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND: A CASE STUDY

What is empirical research? How is empirical research reflected in the university's empirical agenda? As already mentioned, Flick (2015) has defined empirical research is a type of 're-search' that collects data, makes findings, and draws conclusions:

> "In the main it consists of collecting data, providing analysis and drawing conclusions on the data [with] particular elements… the title, abstract, introduction, literature review, theoretical or conceptual framework, method, results, discussion and conclusion [and recommendation]" (Bartlett and Burton 2020, 40).

As we shall soon see, I show how empirical research is communicated to doctoral candidates at Wits through a rigorous study of key official documents. First, the university's "Strategic Plan for Research" states that:

> "The concept of research with impact is best explained through reflection on these three ambitions ... discovery research, translational research, and innovative research… the core values that shape further components of this Plan include respect for empirical research methodologies… focused on evidence-based knowledge development" (Wits 2022, 2–3).

Second, the "University Rules and Syllabuses" restate that

> "The University has the power in terms of its Statute and the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 to determine the entrance requirements in respect of its curricula and… the minimum requirements for the readmission to a curriculum leading to a qualification in a faculty of the University" (Wits 2024, 13).

Third, the Faculty of Humanities' "Standing Orders" direct that

> "The PhD thesis must comprise a minimum of six chapters ... Introduction: Aim, Rationale, Theoretical Orientation, Selective Literature Review and Research Design.… An outline of the theoretical orientation of the thesis.… A discussion of the method of data generation and analysis, including ethical considerations" (Wits 2018, 1–2).

In the context of this article, three positions are noteworthy about the empirical research tradition at Wits: 1) While the "Strategic Plan for Research" is commendable and inspirational for embracing different types of research, it is biased in that it gravitates towards the empirical tradition over the other two (i.e. conceptual and philosophical traditions). Flick's (2015) empirical definition overshadows both Evans and King's (2006) conceptual and Koshy's (2010) philosophical definitions. Second, the Senate's "Rules for the Faculty of Humanities—Education" point to the right of the university to determine what may be taught (teaching of research) and how it will be taught (teaching methods). Worryingly, the Senate's empirical outlook puts academic freedom and university autonomy at odds with each other. Third, the Senate's empirical approach to research aligns with the structure of the doctoral thesis laid out by Bertram and Christiansen (2014, 40), where an introductory chapter is followed sequentially by the "literature review, theoretical or conceptual framework, research methodology, findings,

analysis, and conclusion". In a nutshell, the Senate's inclination towards empiricism can be interpreted to mean that "research of this type is of high prestige" (Robson and McCartan 2016, 4).

This debate on research attracts further questions on what conceptual research is and its central features. In addressing these questions, three different forms of inquiry emerge. First, theoretical research "refers to original exploratory formulations advanced without benefit of systematic and original collected empirical data" (Thyer 2010, 469). Second, the literature review is the foundation through which "researchers gain information regarding the current knowledge base in their areas of interest, refine their conceptualisations and operationalisations, and identify problems that are likely to arise during their studies.… Its results provide the groundwork for every other stage" (Sowers, Ellis and Dessel 2010, 504). Third, "critical analysis engenders the promise of impersonal, critical and coherent objectivity—in a word, science" (Epstein 2010, 524). In light of these three key features of conceptual research, the WSoE's "Research Design for MEd Dissertation and PhD Thesis" course reads:

> "Each student is allocated a supervisor for their… [t]hesis (PhD). Supervisors will advise students on what research methods they should emphasise and how to approach data analysis. In broad terms the proposal should contain: a literature review of conceptual and empirical research… a review of relevant theoretical debates and issues which will assist you in developing a conceptual framework.… A research methodology section which states clearly (1) in the case of an empirical study, what data you will collect and the data collection instruments you will use; or (2) in the case of a conceptual study, what kinds of arguments and analyses you will develop in order to reach your conclusions. Some preliminary ideas as to how you intend to analyse the data. The course has a core related to general research methodology, covered in a series of lectures—each designed to enable students to understand the common principles that guide educational research: Research paradigms.…Qualitative research.… Quantitative research.… Mixed methods… conceptual studies.… Data collection.… Qualitative data analysis"(WSoE 2024, 2–5).

As is evident in the quote above, what we see is a shift from Senate's *well-known* 'experience-ism' (empirical tradition) to the WSoE's 'conceptual-ism' (the conceptual tradition). By reorienting the discourse in this way, the "Research Design for MEd Dissertation and PhD Thesis" "the master-apprentice model of supervision dominates" (Lamberti, Kluyts and de Klerk, 2024, 121) and the research design lecturers become research-midwives who, through knowledge, give birth to philosophers at the School of Education. Embedded in the research design programme is a dualist view of Evans and King's (2006) conceptual and Flick's (2015) empirical research directions to a successful doctoral graduate envisioned in Koshy's (2010) philosophical research. Even so, Evans and King's (2006) conceptual elements are hesitantly

conveyed and superseded by the empirical orientation of this research teaching programme. The "Research Design for MEd Dissertation and PhD Thesi*s"* leaning toward the empirical tradition reinforces my view that the "well-known" empirical tradition is what is most common and 'popular' among lecturers and PhD candidates alike—and this throws light on why doctoral students are not worried in playing the roles given to them by the university's empirical agenda discussed earlier in this section. From this perspective, the mere "talk about" conceptual research downplays a more tolerant, definitional approach taken by the university's "Strategic Plan" and waters down the Faculty's conceptual elements as well. In my view, the "Research Design for MEd Dissertation and PhD Thesis" could be described as a superficial shift from empirical tradition (experience-ism) to conceptual tradition (conceptual-ism).

One hopeful philosophical note is that the university's "Strategic Plan for Research" and the "Research Design for MEd Dissertation and PhD Thesis*"* are not blind to the primacy of a philosophical thesis.

The "Strategic Plan for Research 2023–2027" asserts:

> "The mission is to produce people, skilled in the art of thinking and problem solving, who can use their new knowledge to address the world's problems, and to tap the rich opportunities for innovating new knowledge from our position in the Global South" (Wits 2022, 3).

The "Research Design for MEd Dissertation and PhD Thesis" declares:

> "Thesis is the term reserved for an extended piece of writing based on research that makes an original and significant contribution to knowledge that may incorporate creative work or publications integral to the overall argument and is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy qualification" (WSoE 2024, 13).

Two key points can be deduced from the university's philosophical outlook. First, Wits perceives 'new knowledge' as a key to address global, regional, and local challenges and problems. This laudable emphasis on philosophical research needs to be applauded and praised. Second, as is to be expected, knowledge contribution can only be found, or reflected, in the PhD thesis (i.e., this is the final chapter that pulls together overlapping arguments). The key question in this thesis chapter is: What is the new knowledge being contributed to academia? In the same breath, the "Information for the Guidance of Examiners for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy" (Wits 2014, 1) expects candidates to submit a philosophical thesis that shows "a substantial contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the subject chosen". What this means is that the university recognises that a Doctor of Philosophy degree can only be awarded if the thesis contributes to the advancement of knowledge. For me, it is imperative that the university, Senate, Faculty, lecturers and doctoral students recognise and embrace the fact that doctoral studies there is no determinism—students are free, academia is freedom, and academic

freedom is achieved through individual "struggles", feeling pain and mental suffering. The agony of philosophical research starts with questions of conceptual clarification including the very nature, the purpose and goals of a doctoral project itself—clarification criteria. This is followed by the building, construction and production of new knowledge, which constitutes argumentative criteria. Lastly, there is a need to demonstrate the ability to build an academic argument persuasively to meet the knowledge criteria. Thus, a reposition of philosophical research to safeguard academic freedom in universities in South Africa becomes a necessity.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDIES IN UNIVERSITIES: WHY PHDS ARE PHILOSOPHICAL STRUGGLES?

As academics know, the title 'PhD' is an abbreviation of the Latin term "philosophiae doctor", which means 'teacher of philosophy'. A doctoral degree thus indicates that an academic scholar has made a philosophical contribution in the thesis. Badenhorst (2011, 45) explains how doctoral degrees are earned through" struggle":

> "For a PhD, substantial contribution and innovation is needed. One of the first questions I get from PhD students is: "How do I know I'm making an original contribution?" My answer is. ... You are unique. You bring distinctive qualities to this [thesis]. For PhD students, the sheer volume of work, the reading, thinking, collecting data and analysing, means that your conclusions will be original. If you approach the process honestly with passion, you will contribute in huge ways."

From an academic freedom perspective, a firm grasp of the very meaning of a PhD is a "sine qua non" for scholars who advance knowledge by demonstrating exceptional skills in four areas. First, "originality" is connected to doctoral students' voices, their new discoveries, and contribution to the their fields of study. Second, "theoretical positioning" refers to doctoral students' adopted conceptual frames—or preferred theoretical frames—plainly stated, firmly guarded, and persuasively accounted for. Third, "scholarly excellence" is aptly expressed by Mathebula (2023a, 23), who declared that "advancement of scholarly knowledge is an intrinsic, valuable, worthwhile and desirable human activity that can only be "pursued"—highlighting that a PhD degree cannot simply be *given* to doctoral students. Fourth, one segment (or chapter) in a "PhD thesis" "hones in on and gives more importance to the creation, generation and production of new knowledge" (Naidoo et al. 2019, 7). This chapter in PhD thesis seeks to answer the question: What is the new knowledge being contributed to doctoral research studies? Of concern is that this philosophy chapter is often mentioned obliquely, or hard to find, if not ignored completely, in PhD theses. In the absence of a robust dialogue between conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, review of literature and collection and analysis of data—

characterised by rigorous arguments that inform credible findings and conclusions—we should withhold the appellation 'doctor of philosophy' from the doctoral graduates in universities. In all honesty, I think that this philosophical aspect of the PhD is "the next stage of struggle whose battle must be waged" (Gordon 2016, 177) especially in Schools of Education. Concurring with Badenhorst (2011) and Gordon's (2016) views are Naidoo et al. (2019, 5) who "regard doctoral education studies as being highly disruptive". So, the universities, the Senates, the Faculties, the lecturers and doctoral students ought to use the word PhD actively, not passively.

At the heart of individual freedom, philosophical research and universities lies the idea of 'self-government', i.e. self-regulatory scholars. As Tavadze (2024, 173) states, "the notion of a "scholar," refers to an individual who pursues knowledge out of inner calling and cares about the common good":

> "This is not a call for lawlessness or a disregard for institutional structures. It is a call for transcendence, a going beyond what is immediately evident. Beng a scholar, however, demands conscious intellectual actions and applications. And since academic space might evidently not lend itself to the freedom necessary for scholarly actions and thought, it follows that the only way for a scholar to be free is to become detached from the framings and constraints of the institutionalization of academic work" (Waghid and Davids 2024, 202).

As we can see, Tavadze (2024) and Waghid and Davids' (2024) idea of self-governing scholars is useful in many ways. First, Tavadze defends scholarship as an expression of academic freedom and as a way of achieving the common good. Second, Waghid and Davids notion of a scholar as a wanderer is synonymous with philosophy as a scholarly activity that enables independent and critical thinking about matters that affect them, society and the world. The notion of 'self-governing' students in autonomous institutions stems from Sartre's (1974, 50–53), transphenomentality of Being, that is "being-for-itself whose "destiny is infinite ... full. ... The law of being of the "for-itself", as the ontology foundation of consciousness, is to be itself in the form of presence to itself". In this way, by exercising individual freedom of choice, doctoral students can "develop the capacity to articulate themselves rationally and autonomously, engaged with others' views to develop their own independent analyses and make pronouncements about more improved forms of living" (Waghid 2023, 19) in institutions of learning. By espousing the idea of 'self-governing' agents, doctoral students have the freedom to opt out of a seemingly authoritarian disciplinary tradition that violates individual freedom, that is the genuine self—self-determination and self-discipline. In summary, the idea of 'self-governing' students by autonomous universities can be defended on the basis that: 1) it aids academic freedom; 2) it gives doctoral students' the power and propensity to *act* for themselves;

and 3) it is built on the phrases "'I am', 'We are' and 'I am because We are'" to cultivate individual philosophical minds through doctoral studies (Mathebula 2023b, 189–90).

To go back to the primary function of the university mentioned in Section 1, the social and distributive projects should not be conceived as opposing ends of a single philosophical inquiry in Schools of Education. As such, the concept Citizen Scholar:

> "proposes that universities should not only promote scholarly pursuits but also actively engage in fostering responsible and participatory citizens and brings these two learnings together to be embedded in all educational activities. This entails instilling a set of skills and cultural practices that go beyond disciplinary knowledge, extending the purpose of education to a broader societal context. The notion of the Citizen Scholar is rooted in the belief that universities bear a social mission to mobilize knowledge for the betterment of society… highlighting the importance of education in promoting social good, challenging power relations, and addressing societal inequalities" (Arvanitakis and Hornsby 2024, 69).

Drawing from Arvanitakis and Hornsby's (2024) idea of citizenship scholarship three points about research positions in universities in general and in South Africa can be detected. First, Citizen Scholars should strive to advance their own research (i.e. the pursuit of knowledge and promote care for common good) in South Africa—integrating academic freedom and social justice projects. Second, using Wits University as a case study, academic freedom is undermined by doctoral definition, doctoral teaching and doctoral writing that are primarily empirical, partially conceptual, and covertly philosophical. Sadly. Thirdly the 'philosophiness' of our doctoral degrees depends on the scholarly excellence that comes from experience-ism (personal experience) via originality (expression of one's own ideas) to 'doctorateness' (pursuit of knowledge)—anchoring the primacy of the philosophy approach to doctoral research in universities in South Africa. As Hountondji (1997, 15) persuasively demonstrates, "we need to move beyond the present impasse ... beyond the mute coexistence of discourses… to bring them face to face within the unifying context… to create bridges, to re-create the unity of knowledge, or in simpler, deeper terms, the unity of the human being". From Bartlett and Burton's (2020), Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2024) and Hountondji's (1997) point of view, philosophical rigour cannot be suppressed unless doctoral students reject the very meaning of a PhD itself—or do not undertake the journey (road) to wisdom at all.

In my humble view, universities in South Africa must re-imagine a new scholar. Drawing from Boyer's (1990) book "Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate", Peterson's (2024: 163-64) four functions of a new scholar are:

> "First is "the scholarship of discovery", which is broadly synonymous with research within and beyond university. Second is "the scholarship of integration", which is focused on the finding

connections, interdisciplinarity and offering interpretations. Third is "the scholarship of application" which concerns value and social benefits. Fourth his te scholarship of teaching involves the scholar in a continual process of further learning… keeping the flame of scholarship alive."

As far as can be judged, Peterson's (2024) idea of scholarship supports the claim that 'doctorateness' is achieved through individual *struggles*—this is a recognition that new knowledge is produced through discovery, through integration, through application and through teaching. For our purpose here, Peterson's (2024) 'comprehensive' view of scholarship has three connected features: analysis, synthesis and improvement. What I was able to establish in this section is that: 1) Universities should place *philosophical thesis* at the core of their research lives, and philosophy becomes the tool with which to define, teach and write re-search—this is the discovery test; 2) Having said that, a *philosophical thesis* evolves into two-faceted parts, that is theoretical and practical ends of a single continuum—this is the integration indicator; 3) In relation to the point above, *philosophical researchers* have two objectives: the pursuit of knowledge with the aim of achieving the common good—this is the application yardstick; and 4) *Philosophical thesis* helps to bring these two modes (theoretical and the practical) to life— this is the teaching benchmark. If the analysis of what it means to be a new scholar above is accepted, the fear of love of wisdom becomes real, it is here to stay and is staring doctoral students, the guardians of universities and political parents in South Africa in the face. For me, the term '*philosophiae doctor'* has lost its meaning—it seems dead and buried in the corridors of our universities. Its philosophical re-awakening depends on our appetite to reposition doctoral research, our determination to readjust university research agendas and our willingness reconsider the meaning of scholarship broadly in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to identify the genesis from which the connection between academic freedom, research traditions and doctoral research at a university must begin. The article has demonstrated that the principal goal of the university is to promote and produce teachers of philosophy. Selecting Wits as a focal point, the article has shown that academic freedom is undermined by doctoral definition, doctoral teaching and doctoral writing that are primarily empirical, partially conceptual, and covertly philosophical. In the light of our case study, repositioning doctoral research hinges on the clarification of the meaning of a PhD itself; the development of 'self-governing' doctoral students; the recognition of a single philosophical style of doctoral research; and the promotion of scholarship of discovery, integration, service

and teaching in universities is critical. Doctoral students' ability to freely produce *new* knowledge is the ultimate end of any doctoral research journey that seeks to produce new scholars in Schools of Education. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the Higher Education Act (Department of Education 1997) and Wits Strategic Plan for Research 2023–2027 are noble and inspirational. Regrettably, these three 'official' declarations remind us of a legal-policy framework devoid of philosophical research experiences by all and sundry, research teachers, postgraduate supervisors and doctoral students in South African universities.

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