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Résumé

L'auteur observe qu'en réaction à la critique de l'ethnophilosophie, est apparue une ethnophilosophie ayant revêtu un manteau scientifique, qui se justifie théoriquement et formule une contre-critique.

Cet article traite deux points de cette contre-critique, à savoir le reproche de l'occidentalisme et celui de l'élitisme.

L'occidentalisme est le reproche fait aux critiques de l'ethnophilosophie de manier un concept occidental de philosophie. L'auteur refute cela en développant différents points. D'autre part, il montre que l'ethnophilosophie est justement un projet intellectuel d'origine européenne (Tempels, Griaule, Lévy-Bruhl). Enfin, il insiste sur le fait que ce sont justement les critiques de l'ethnophilosophie qui veulent orienter le plus possible leur activité philosophique vers l'Afrique: présent et avenir des sociétés africaines.

L'élitisme est le reproche fait aux critiques de l'ethnophilosophie de réclamer une position élitiste par leur philosophie scientifique, finalement une position de pouvoir de la classe détenant la connaissance face aux masses. Ce reproche repose en fait sur une lecture imprécise des textes se rapportant à la question. Le concept strict de philosophie n'est pas plus élitiste qu'une notion qui peut être étendue à l'infini pour y intégrer les formes de la pensée africaine. D'autre part, ceux-là même qui parlent de "masses populaires" peuvent être accusés d'élitisme; c'est une forme de populisme, l'hypothèse que, dans la tradition populaire, tout est déjà présent et que la philosophie critique n'est pas nécessaire. L'utilisation des textes de Gramsci dans ce contexte, repose sur des interprétations grossières erronées.

L'auteur met en évidence toute la charge politique des notions d'unanimité traditionnelle, de domination du groupe, d'écrasement de l'individu, que l'on retrouve dans toutes formes de fascisme et néofascisme. Le refus de l'ethnophilosophie et du populisme est nécessaire à la démocratie, à la liberté d'expression et au développement africain.

OCCIDENTALISM, ELITISM: ANSWER TO TWO CRITIQUES

Paulin Hountondji
(translation by Dr. J.K.Chenda)

Allow me to make a few remarks, in a most direct manner, a clarification of the meaning, scope and aim of my criticism of ethnophilosophy.*

I am forced here to go through an exercise which I do not like; to respond point by point (or "fist by fist", in line with a joke of a friend of mine whom I can not mention here) to criticisms which sometimes just look like personal attacks. But I do it with much pleasure, because, beyond these "ad hominem" criticisms, founded mostly on a strong will not to understand, there are fortunately many others, which do justice to the problems presented and have the additional merit of pointing out real theoretical problems and, from time to time, at inaccuracies and other loopholes in my own formulations.

I will speak for myself, out of simple prudence, although the criticism of ethnophilosophy has also been elaborated, developed, continued, or simply accepted by others. For me the profound motivations seem to be essentially the same among different authors.

Something quite remarkable has been taking place in the field of philosophy for some years now: the birth of a learned ethnophilosophy. This ethnophilosophy is no longer content to describe world-views by presenting them "naively" as philosophies, but tries to justify that practice in a subtle and extremely refined way, by referring to the most modern doctrines. The old-fashioned ethnography, a plump, good child, which was only at ease in empirical research and prudently avoided any discussion concerning its own theoretical foundations, finds now strong support from leading edge of ethnography - aggressive, determined, equipped with science, philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics and armed with the sharpest concepts. An ethnography which is not only ready to justify the immersion of philosophy into ethnography, but to demonstrate by arguments without appeal, that such a practice of philosophy is today the only valid one in black Africa.

The fertility of the critique of ethnophilosophy is proved by the fact that, among other things, it has induced such a discourse. That it has provoked ethnophilosophy to question itself and its own theoretical status in a counter-critique of the criticism which took it as target. From now on nothing is as before. If the situation is such that the father of ethnophilosophy, Alexis Kagamé, can still publish, apparently without any misgivings, twenty years after his Philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être, when the first theoretical criticisms of ethnophilosophy were already widely known, a Philosophie bantu comparée¹ that **generalises the conclusions of his first analysis**², without bothering to found them conceptually, then the "young turks" of the renovated ethnophilosophy stopped short only of demolishing in their own way what was presenting itself as the critique of ethnophilosophy. Result: that critique, far from putting an end to ethnophilosophy, had on the contrary given it renewed vigour. It has forced ethnophilosophy to "double" itself by a **theoretical defence** of ethnophilosophy, by **an attempted grounding, conceptual justification** of that particular form of philosophical practice and an energetic counter-attack on the criticisms which put it in question.

The direction of the discussion has thus changed considerably. The problem is less the existence or non-existence of an African philosophy, than the nature, the meaning, the conditions of the possibility of philosophy in general. At stake are consequently the tasks of today's African philosopher, since the critic of ethnophilosophy is accused of employing a European idea of philosophy which is elitist, aristocratic, idealistic etc.. In order to justify the practice of ethnophilosophy, the practitioners of ethnophilosophy try to promote an alternative idea of philosophy. Whatever the issue of this new discussion, I consider it one of the most positive effects of the critique of philosophy to have imposed on it the need for a discussion on the meaning of ethnophilosophy. A discussion, that is, amongst the adepts of an intellectual practice which had up to that moment never been forced to present its theoretical credentials.

Now, let us examine very closely the argument of that counter-critique. That critique expresses itself, let me repeat it, in the most diverse tones, from the most peaceful to the most aggressive. I will not insist here on

some purely rhetorical formulations which are as irresponsible as they are effective and whose only function is to benefit those who express them, or sometimes to draw laughter. Koffi Niamkey, for instance, gives the impression that he wants to get rid physically of all those who criticise ethnophilosophy and for that purpose he suggests that "the archontes must be put to death"³. But he holds his gun so badly that one fears that it might turn against himself. The sociologist Abdou Touré, who can at times be a brilliant pamphleteer, seems to be happy when he can, with the help of his reproach of elitism, flog "our philosopher, he who has been awarded a degree in philosophy"⁴ and in general, all Africans "awarded degrees by the clique, the sacred college of doctors of philosophy"⁵: the doctors of sociology, apparently, would obtain their qualifications only from the "popular masses". In order to pretend this, one must have a good dosage of contempt towards those "popular masses".

It is better then, to go beyond such simplistic rhetoric in order to examine the true problems. In following the different criticisms, the principal questions emerge, which can be regrouped under the following headings, namely: the reproaches of occidentalism, of elitism, of idealism, of scientism, the question of the respective status of written and oral tradition, and the question of the genesis, collective or individual, of philosophical ideas. Since it is impossible to examine in the present article all these questions, I will deal here only with the first two.

The reproach of occidentalism

To many people the criticism of ethnophilosophy stems from an uncritical acceptance of "the European idea of philosophy". According to Abdou Touré and Koffi Niamkey, what is going on, "from Towa up to Hountondji" is a "hagiography of Western elitist philosophy" a "conscious

p.m. archonte: magistrate responsible for the highest functions in Greek city-states. NDLR.

or otherwise opting in favour of cultural neo-assimilationism, a perfect corollary to neo-colonialism"⁶. For Olabiyi B. Yaï, who takes up the same criticism, "it is obvious that from the moment that one presents European philosophy as a given thing, giving it the dignity of 'the' philosophy (...) and when one gives to the hypothetical African philosophy the command to conform itself to it in order to exist, the answer to the question of existence is known in advance (...). To present the problem of the existence of African philosophy, as of any other discipline, starting from an inevitably cultural definition of philosophy, is to start afresh the intolerable investigation of the personage of Montesquieu: "How can one be a Persian?"⁷. In the same line, Pathé Diagne, with his usual fluency, castigates at length what he calls "Euro-philosophy", a term that crystallizes the core of his criticisms against the critiques of ethnophilosophy⁸.

The reproach of occidentalism not only came from African intellectuals. It is shared by a good number of Europeans, as was possible to see during the round table whose text is published in Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture ²². It was believed that one could reconcile the African criticism of ethnophilosophy with the sophistic thesis of Heidegger stating that philosophy is European - not in an accidental way and through the effects of the course of historical circumstances - but in its very essence, and by virtue of an intrinsic necessity from which that course of historical circumstances must have naturally arisen; so that we should no longer speak, without stating a tautology, of "European - Western philosophy"⁹.

Such a reconciliation, as I have shown elsewhere, confuses two things. On the one hand the will, evident in Heidegger, to proclaim philosophy as an essential characteristic of European civilisation, thus causing the rejection as contradictio in adjecto of the idea of a non-European philosophy and the attempt, consequently, to include in the definition itself a geographical specification a priori. On the other hand the attempt at a conceptual clarification, which distinguishes the question of right from the question of fact, by affirming against Heidegger and other Western

^{22*} this is the french journal where this text first appeared

ideologists¹⁰, that neither philosophy nor science are, by right, the patrimony of Western civilisation, and by warning at the same time against a short-sighted cultural nationalism which would have us believe that an African philosophy, an African science, an African technology are already present, achieved once and for all in our so called traditional civilisations, which today we need only to dig up.

The two positions match so badly that the criticism of ethnophilosophy has included right from the beginning, as an explicit preamble, an extremely precise denunciation of European ethnocentrism as illustrated by Heidegger's sophisticated attitude in What is Philosophy¹¹. Macien Towa starts in fact his Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle¹² with a criticism of that text and also of Hegel's chatter concerning black Africa. In various oral presentations I had already myself devoted a no less severe criticism to Heidegger's sophism. Later I questioned what I considered, in Tempels' text and in those of his disciples, as a bad response to that same sophism¹³.

It is necessary today to emphasise this point, for the sake of clarity. Occidentalism, in matters of philosophy, is not that determination of sticking to a conceptual rigour which seems to be so objectionable to critics of the critique of ethnophilosophy. Occidentalism here is the ideological thesis claiming that philosophy should, rightfully and by a mysterious necessity, be of European essence. As the fantastic projection of accidental European historical successes into a timeless order, this projection would give that order its ultimate explanation. Yet this amounts to no more than a sophistic telescoping into each other of fact and legitimation. What can be and must be denounced as eurocentrism is the ideological space in which we register among others Hegel's propositions on black Africa and those of Lévy-Bruhl on the "primitive mentality", those of Husserl on the Papuas, of Heidegger on the European essence of philosophy and of many other thinkers, European or not, who believe in the omnilateral superiority of Western civilisation as such and underrate other civilisations in comparison. This is an argument which is only possible, when one looks closely, by hypostatizing the Western civilisation itself. By projecting behind the uninterrupted chain of accidents through which

that civilisation's actual configuration has been forged, something like an original form, prior to that configuration, and by neutralising in advance the unpredictable surprises of its future history.

Then, if this is correct, it is not by hypostatizing in our turn our historical cultures, that we shall get rid of occidentalism. Neither will it be by trying to rediscover by all means the same modes of intellectual creation, the same spiritual forms as in European cultures. It is, rather, by rediscovering them in their naked reality, in their own wealth and their own complexity, in their strengths and their weaknesses. It is not, therefore, by manipulating, by trickery, by distorting concepts forged by Europe during the course of its history to designate such and such of its specific forms of intellectual creation, that this can be achieved. We shall not give value to the intellectual productions of our people by forcing them into a concept of philosophy that is magnified out of proportion. On the contrary, we shall value them by respecting the originality of both their content and their form, the specific modalities of their social existence, their genesis and their operation.

I have never therefore claimed myself that pre-colonial Africa was intellectually a 'tabula rasa'. On the contrary I have said very explicitly and I am ready to say it again, that there are also in Africa, as in all societies of the world, traditions of millenarian thinking which need concede in nothing to Western traditions of thinking as far as coherence and depth are concerned. But I have added that any tradition of thinking is not necessarily philosophy and that it is to betray the wealth, the real complexity and history of pre-colonial African thinking if it is hurriedly called philosophy, if it is confined by using the word 'philosophy'.

I have said, and I am ready to say it again, that, that the inconsiderate application of this word, of which everybody (including the hardest adherents to ethnophilosophy) is ready to recognise its European origins, to the intellectual productions of our sub-continent, has been possible only at the expense of manipulating its usual meaning. And still more seriously, it has led to a flattening, to a particularly simplistic and impoverished vision of African thinking¹⁴.

I do not see in this statement anything resembling closely or distantly

that "contempt of the African culture" of which I am blamed. On the contrary, what seems clear to me is that the comparativist problematic in which ethnophilosophers enclose themselves, that determination to characterise at all and any cost African thinking as philosophy and to define its resemblances and differences with what is called, in an equally schematic fashion, Western philosophy (in singular), stems from a eurocentric attitude which erects, as a model and universal measure of all thinking, that particular form of thinking produced in the history of the West: philosophy.

Is this simply a quarrelling over words? One would tend to believe so. But the fact is this: the unconsidered imposition of the word "philosophy" on our traditions of thought has had very precise consequences for the particular way in which to interpret those traditions. It has led notably, as I have tried to show in my works, to giving it a unanimistic and idealistic interpretation, by emptying them of their real dynamism and complexity, by isolating them from the economic, social and political context which gives them meaning. The problem of the debate is therefore not only that of terminology. The true problem is that of method. The fact is that a criticism like Niamkey's, amounts to something like smashing an open door. Koffi Niamkey emphasises "the diversity and heterogeneity of cultural manifestations and of contradictory intellectual practices of our societies" blaming the ideological notion of "tradition", which is conceived as the opposite of modernity, of allowing "to represent African precolonial societies as harmonious and unanimous societies without contradictions, without oppression: a sort of imaginary Eden of lost ecstatic agreements"¹⁵. He realises, together with Abdou Touré, by leaning on Emmanuel Terray's massive work, that in the so-called traditional African society, we see appearing "on the juridical, economic and political plane ideological inflorescences (...) which exalt the principle of clan, ethnic and fraternal solidarity" and which, in fact, are nothing more than the expression of thinking of the dominant social group, coexisting and struggling with other thinking currents which thus become marginal¹⁶. Abdou Touré and Koffi Niamkey do not seem to realise that the recognition, the description, and the analysis of such a struggle of ideas in the so-called

clan societies, are precisely unimaginable within the rhetorical and methodological horizon of ethnophilosophy¹⁷. They do not seem to realise that such a study as that of Emmanuel Terray¹⁸, which they have done well to read, but which maybe they should have read better, far from contributing to the old project of a restoration of "philosophy" or "primitive philosophies", has been possible, on the contrary, only at the expense of a rupture leading to favouring, in relation to ideological superstructures, the material basis of the societies under study. Of course, the same rupture is possible in the study of today's industrialised societies, and notably in the reading and interpretation of what is conventionally called the history of Western philosophy. I did not and could not stress especially that point in my "Sur la 'philosophie africaine'", simply because that was not my objective. I thought that I should emphasise, on the contrary, that in the history of philosophy in the very societies where it takes form as written literature, which gives it the appearance of a self-centered cultural reality, it enjoys in fact only a very limited autonomy in comparison with the real history of the struggle for material existence. Therefore it is illusory as a matter of fact, and theoretically destructive, to pretend to be able to isolate in societies characterised by oral traditions a specific reality, autonomous, removed from concrete life, which could be baptised: the African philosophy, in singular. I have shown that such a "philosophy" is nothing but an abstraction, not an ennobling but on the contrary a bastardisation, not an enrichment, but an artificial reduction to a smallest common denominator of the multiple and contradictory currents of the real African thinking.

On the other side there is need to question even the history of the ethnophilosophical project as a project for the reconstitution of "African philosophy" and, more generally, of "primitive philosophies". The majority of the criticisms directed against my works miss precisely that dimension of the problem and do not see, consequently, to what degree ethnophilosophy is linked as a project, to the history of Western thinking. They fail to see to what extent in particular African ethnophilosophy, an expression among others of a justified cultural nationalism, goes back, as a scientific practice, to a long tradition developed in Europe. Is it neces-

sary to recall it here? Perhaps. Works on "African philosophy", conducted today by Africans themselves, are placed directly in a problematic inaugurated by authors like Tempels and Griaule, and thus takes place indirectly in a debate which goes back more and more closely to Lévy-Bruhl, Frazer, Tylor, Auguste Comte, maybe even to the Enlightenment and even further. The pretended originality of those works is therefore illusory. And if there is any occidentalism, there is none worse than that which consists in believing that one challenges the Western model, even when one rushes head on into the ways and avenues traced by the West during its history.

Let us read, for instance, Yaï's indignant requisitory against "those who uphold speculative abstract philosophy and maintain that Africa suffers from a philosophical void", and we shall be able to see where the neglect of the real history of the ethnophilosophical problematic can lead us. Dealing with those who "counteract" (sic!) these "abstract philosophers", and by giving examples of "concrete philosophies", he would like to adopt a "more radical attitude..", and "casting doubt on the very propriety of the question of whether an African philosophy does exist". "To the question: "Is there an African philosophy?" posed ingenuously by Towa and implied by the quotation marks of Hountondji and others of like mind, we pose another: "What is the source of this enquiry? Who, at times such as these, arrogates the right to put a question that can be innocent only in appearance?" Our speculative philosophers are unaware of the fact that this question can be asked only from a position of superiority"²⁹.

By this, Yaï echoes Koffi Niamkey and Abdou Touré who, finding it unbearable that ethnophilosophy should be questioned, had asked already years before "the question of the ground from which Towa and Hountondji speak"²⁰, and could give themselves a certificate of revolutionary authenticity by describing the latter as "watch-dogs" of neo-colonialism, defending their social positions of the assimilated intellectuals.

There is here only one thing which seems to be forgotten: the sacrilegious question, the impious doubt which arouses the sacred indignation of the so-called defenders of African thought, has not been invented ex nihilo by the "abstract philosophers", but has been imposed upon them,

as against their will, by an abundant literature which goes back at least to Tempels and even, as I have just remarked, to the end of the 19th century and beyond. Yaï's requisitory in particular, is founded from one end to the other, on a real inversion of temporal reports, a "hysteron-posteron", as the hellenists used to say. In fact the "concrete philosophies" were not given at the beginning to 'answer back' to the "abstract philosophers". They were given much earlier, long before the appearance of the so-called "abstract philosophers". It is exactly because the abundant literature thus produced began to be usurpative that some demanding spirits dared, at their own risk and peril, to start questioning the postulates of that literature. If such questioning "can only come from an eminence", then the eminence here is the reader, any reader who, exercising his right of free appreciation, refuses to be duped like a small child, and dares to ask for proofs.

Yaï writes also, with irony: "The rehabilitation came each time from somewhere else. Let some blasé American or European philosopher, "dogonical", discover a parallel between his new philosophy and the "world-view" of some African nation, and we as well have the right to a philosophy"²¹. Yaï does not see that what he is thus imagining for the future, has already happened in no mean measure. Here we are, more than thirty years now since this sort of "dogonical" westerner made his appearance in our history. It is more than one hundred years ago now that the ambiguous personality of the generous africanist came on the scene, and that we have been benefiting from his contribution in diverse ways. My criticism of ethnophilosophy intends to show precisely that this practice of philosophy, which is at the same time a certain practice of ethnography, is one of the worst ways to take into account the theoretical heritage of africanism.

A word more. The charge of occidentalism ignores this: the criticism of ethnophilosophy as it has developed over many years, has always been subordinated to an interrogation concerning the tasks of philosophy and of the philosopher in today's Africa. The answer to this question differs from one author to the other, which is a normal thing. But the interrogation itself shows to what extent Africa is here at the center of con-

cerns, to what extent the charge of occidentalism is consequently not pertinent. Because the problem presented no longer concerns comparing the relative values of European and African modes of thought, that the one should be appreciated or depreciated in relation to the other. The problem presented, rather, concerns the present and the future, in one word, the destiny of Africa: a political problem, in the most fundamental meaning of the word, the solution of which requires that we once and for all go beyond the fake choke of alternatives between traditionalism and modernism, cultural nationalism and assimilation, originality and alienation, authenticity and occidentalism etc., in order to have a critical and free relationship with our own history and with the histories of other people.

In response to that political question, and without wishing to prejudge the nature of the questions which from then on had to feed the thought of African philosophers, I emphasised that it is urgent for African thought - in order to assure its own progress, its relevance to the problems of our societies - to remove itself from the Western philosophical debate in which it is submerged at present. It should stop languishing in the vertical dialogue of every African philosopher with his European counterpart, in order to shift from now on, following a horizontal axis, to an internal debate in our societies concerning real philosophical problems, strictly geared to our actual preoccupations²². I have shown that African ethnophilosophy, the way it has developed historically, has been only a 'prise en charge' by the Africans themselves of a discourse on Africa initially produced in Europe and that the limitation to that single problematic has imposed on our philosophical practice an artificial outward-orientedness, a scientific replica of the outward-orientedness of our dominated economies. I have said that we must put an end to that extraversion, we must from now on think for ourselves and not for others and produce by so doing, new problem-fields, rooted in the concrete soil of our history of today. Is that still occidentalism? It seems to me to be the exact opposite.

The reproach of elitism

The reproach of occidentalism is sometimes associated with another reproach, which is massive and frightening in its simplicity, the reproach of elitism.

According to Abdou Touré and Koffi Niamkey, for instance, neither Towa nor Hountondji, those "hagiographers(*) of the western-elitist philosophy", have ever managed to place the concept of philosophy in the marxist theory of philosophical practice. Thus, they have failed to grasp the relationships that exist between their own philosophical productions and their social positions as intellectuals, and by refusing to give the title philosophy to thoughts of popular origin (...), they have (...) adopted the elitist ideologies of the black intelligentsia (...).

"The distinction between spontaneous philosophy and philosophy per se (...) (is) hegemonic-elitist, i.e. the distinction stems from the will that a group has to dominate the entire society by subjecting it to its dominating ideology which is promoted to the rank of 'good' thinking or systematic and rigorous thinking (...)

"(...) This attitude towards so-called fossil ideas stems from an intellectual position that underrates the intellectual productions of non-intellectuals (...). The attributes 'true' and 'false' simultaneously hide and indicate the conflict between the official ideas and subordinate ideas, the former being dominant, the latter dominated (...). The hegemonic attitude is explicit in Towa and Hountondji to the extent that they grant African ideas depreciating attributes such as: myth, unconsciousness, implicit, collective, unsystematic, spontaneous mythological. As pure intellectuals they only reproduce the institutional division of the society: a scientific philosophy for 'the highly placed', the elite; and another (religion in the final analysis) for "the lowly placed", the masses. They remain producers of ideologies serving to govern others like good traditional intellectuals"

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Refusing, on their part, to "back up that elitist prejudice whose aim it is to dominate society",²⁴ our two colleagues from the Ivory Coast try to

show, on the one hand, that the pretended seriousness of academic philosophy "is only a parody of scientific rigor", and, on the other hand, that the ideas of the popular masses, far from being inconsistent, fragmentary, and unsystematic, are perfectly "suited to themselves" and consequently contain a logic of their own ²⁵.

Niamkey repeats the same theme in "L'impensé de Towa et Hountondji". Denouncing the "disdain" which leads to the demarcation of "the world vision" in relation to "philosophy", he "notes" that "for Towa and Hountondji one would be able to speak of African philosophy or of philosophy as such only in so far as the African thinker sits, as a person approved by the philosophic conclave, at the western table of the Socratic banquet." For him, the distinction between modernity and tradition, philosophy and world vision, science and non-science "hides and indicates at the same time the secret fight for power, a fight for domination of "pseudoscience" by "science", a fight of philosophy against world vision. That fight is ultimately the expression of the determination of the carriers of knowledge to topple the authority of the pretenders, the carriers of false knowledge, in order to appropriate that authority for themselves (...).

"Every definition of philosophy corresponds to an objectivity from a class point of view (...). Towa and Hountondji (have) adopted a political position that corresponds to their "philosophy" i.e. in the last instance, to their class position of elitist-intellectuals (...). It is (...) a position that stems from the secular contempt shown by the professional thinkers toward other people's ideas. We have here a struggle for domination (...). Towa and Hountondji side (...) with the dominant thought against the dominated thought" ²⁶.

Olabiya B. Yaï repeats the same criticism. For him too the "escape into scientism, elitism and vain speculation" has meaning only in relation to the social position of "the subjects of abstract philosophical discourse (...). Intellectuals of colonized countries, they constitute by definition the elite. As philosophers, they become the elite of the elite, a pedestal from which they are determined not to come down to try themselves with tasks, considered humiliating, related to empirical research in contact with the masses. This is where stems the charm of scientism, of philoso-

phism (...). The choice of the speculative abstract tendency in philosophy is a class strategy (...). The noisy disdain for "pre-scientific philosophers" or "practical ideologies" is the bell that is tolled to announce the end of the traditional powers, as well as the introduction of the agenda of the well thinking philosopher who wants to share in the new neo-colonial power (...). Theorism may also lead to that sweet 'in-between' between the university chair and the political tip-up seat, a comfortable position which enables the philosopher to have a rightist conduct with a leftist discourse. This is a position which, objectively makes him in all aspects, while waiting for the best, "the clerk of the dominant group for the minor tasks of hegemony" (Gramsci)"²⁷.

It is most difficult to answer these highly ideological criticisms, in which rhetorical argument, political aggression, and other intentions are so confusedly mixed up, without falling into pure rhetorics oneself. But let's come to the facts. What is it then that caused the eruption of all this polemic? Towa's objection against the process of stretching the European concept of philosophy in order to accommodate the African modes of thinking; the distinction made by myself between a wide meaning and a narrow one, between a popular and a strict usage of the word "philosophy": a distinction which is, to tell the truth, common, and widespread, but which I have tried to apply in all strictness to the African context by forging, beyond the "vulgar concept" of African philosophy, a "new concept" founded on the most strict usage of the word "philosophy".

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This is what the accusation of "contempt", of haughty aristocratism is founded on. An exemplary misinterpretation. But where in this world has one been able to see in all the criticism of ethnophilosophy, the slightest "contempt" of popular thinking? By qualifying a certain concept of African philosophy as "vulgar", we have never claimed that African thinking is itself vulgar. On the contrary, what we were attacking was a certain exploitation of that thinking, the theoretical treatment of it by ethnophilosophy. The vulgarity here does not refer to the "traditional" thinker, nor to what are commonly called, by a elitist term if there ever was one,

the "popular masses". It is the vulgarity of the intellectual who theorises without shame about the "masses", at their expense and behind their backs, designating himself as the latter's spokesman and as the authorised interpreter of their "philosophy", with the secret hope that they will never have the means and the opportunity to contradict him. The vulgarity belongs to a concept or, more exactly, to an ideological notion resulting from the application of an eminently equivocal word to Africa, in its widest - and therefore most trivial - meaning, while at the same time applying it to Europe in its narrowest meaning. The vulgarity is to make two weights, two measures. To compare the cultural realities of Europe with a given norm, and while pretending to apply that same norm, to slacken it secretly, to tamper with it, with the aim of being able to apply it to another continent.

O.H. Oruka humorously denounced that manipulation of concepts:

What may be a superstition is paraded as "African religion", and the white world is expected to endorse that it is indeed a religion but an African religion. What in all cases is a mythology is paraded as "African philosophy", and once again the white culture is awaited to endorse that it is indeed a philosophy but an African philosophy. What is in all cases a dictatorship is paraded as "African democracy", and the white culture is again expected to endorse that it is so. And what is clearly a de-development or pseudo-development is described as 'development'; and again the white world is expected to endorse that it is development-but of course "African development"²⁹.

I am not going here to expand on the notions of religion, democracy or development. I am only going to bring to notice that the contempt, if there is any, is not on the side of the one who invites conceptual strictness, but of the one for whom Africa, and particularly its "popular masses", are able to carry, as subjects, only predicates diluted to the maximum, impoverished, emptied of their substance. That is, the one who starts, for that reason, to falsify the norms, to soften the concepts in

order to "adapt" them to that rebellious subject and thus make the predication possible. To respect Africa in this case is to utilise the simplest words, the most adequate ones, when describing her; not to project onto her excessively loaded notions, by pure artifice or for the simple pleasure of comparing her to other continents. To respect the thinking of the "masses", is to take that thinking as it is, without any distortion or falsification. Respecting that thinking is not trying to transform or idealise it, but to recognise its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its internal power of self-transcendence. Finally, in as much as one knows oneself as being part and parcel of those "masses", respect consists in participating in the development of that thinking with all conscience and in a responsible way.

That is not all. We must still go further, track down to its last hide-outs and identify clearly what hides behind that reproach of elitism. Let's put it bluntly: Yaï's position, as well as that of Niamkey's and Abdou Touré's, is evidently a form of what must be called populism. Because if they are right in mentioning not only the existence, but the unsuspected value, the multiform wealth of that precolonial African thinking which we still know so badly; if they are right to demand that the new African intelligentsia, educated at the school of the West, rediscover that wealth and link themselves again to the so-called traditional intelligentsia; if they do well to emphasise, more generally, the creativity of the "masses" in all fields, including that of knowledge (which so many times, to say it in passing, were already present, directly or indirectly, in Sur la "philosophie africaine"), they can not at the same time claim, without demagoguery, that this spiritual heritage contains everything and is fully self-sufficient. Neither can they pretend to believe that the primary task and even the only task of the new intelligentsia could be to exhume this spiritual heritage, to reconstruct it, to gather it, to defend it totally and without gradation.

But that is in fact what our three critics are trying to demonstrate. And to support their positions, they invoke the authority of Gramsci. What they say about the Italian revolutionary, or rather what they make

him say, the eminently insinuating way in which they interpret, solicit and sometimes falsify his text by superimposing on it a populist ideology foreign to him, deserves that we dwell on it for a while.

Abdou Touré and Koffi Niamkey quote in effect some of Gramsci's sentences gleaned here and there from a review article dedicated to the work of the Italian Marxist³⁰. Yaï cites quotations borrowed from Maria-Antoinetta Macchiocchi³¹. We can not seriously blame anyone for using only second hand quotations, since that incomplete work whose scattered pieces have been regrouped by Italian editors in an arbitrary order, is, in addition, only partially available in French translation. On the other hand can we not prevent ourselves from noticing how flippantly all three manipulate the few quoted passages in order to extract at their will from them a condemnation without appeal of what they themselves call elitism³². This is not the place to study for itself Gramsci's work. Let it be sufficient, for our purposes, to mention this double observation.

* Gramsci is, we grant, in a sense, a defender of "common sense", of the "spontaneous philosophy", of "folklore".

It is him, in fact, who invokes that "common sense truth" according to which "all men are philosophers"³³. It is him who writes, on the very first page of the collection published under the title Historical Materialism : "We must destroy the widespread presumption that philosophy is something very difficult, an intellectual activity belonging to a specific category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. We must demonstrate...that all men are "philosophers", by defining the limits and characteristics of that "spontaneous philosophy" as fitting to "everybody"³⁴. Gramsci is a deeply democratic revolutionary who believes in the real intelligence of the people, in their dynamism, in their ability to surpass themselves, in the obligatory dependence of the intellectual in relation to a given social class, in the necessity for him to become consciously, and not only passively, an "organic intellectual".

* But Gramsci remains, in spite of all that, the complete contrary of a populist. At no time does he claim that "common sense" is self-sufficient.

If he describes it as the "spontaneous philosophy of the masses", he generally puts the expression in inverted commas, in order to demonstrate the metaphorical character of the expression. Thus, he seeks to emphasise that this quasi-philosophy serves only as a point of departure, an initial condition for the possibility of a "philosophy of praxis" which remains to be founded, of a "philosophy of the masses" which, far from simply prolonging that "spontaneous philosophy", on the contrary, develops first as a critique and surpassing of common sense. That's all the difference, Gramsci writes, between philosophy of praxis and catholicism: "philosophy of praxis, far from confirming the "simple people" in the primitive philosophy of common sense, on the contrary takes them to a superior understanding of existence. If it recognises as necessary the contact between the intellectuals and simple people, that is not in order to debase scientific activity and maintain the unity at the lowest level of the masses, but precisely in order to raise an intellectual-moral block, making politically possible an intellectual progress of the masses and not of some intellectual groups"³⁵.

In the same way, if Gramsci is particularly interested in folklore, if he urges us to see in it "a very serious thing which must be taken seriously", the expression "of a conception of the world and life", specific to the people and opposed to the "official" conceptions belonging to the "cultivated estates" and to the "leading classes", it is still the same Gramsci who, in the same text, emphasises very seriously that the folkloric conceptions are "implicit to a high degree", "not elaborated", "un-systematical", "an indigestible agglomerate of fragments of all the conceptions of world and life which have succeeded one another in history and most of whose mutilated and contaminated traces survive only in folklore-"³⁶.

This indicates that the fact that he took folklore and the popular modes of thinking seriously, has never led the Italian thinker to their blind and demagogical validation. It led him, in a much more lucid way, to a project of critical study, destined to show, among other things, what in those cultural forms must be overcome in view of the real emancipation of the people.

There could be derived a lot more still from Gramsci concerning our subject. Alas, this is neither the place, nor the right moment. What is certain is that the thinking of the Italian revolutionary is much more subtle and balanced than those of our critics who invoke him to support their defence of "African philosophy" would have us believe. The criticism of ethnophilosophy deviates without doubt on many important points from Gramsci's themes: it does not deal with the same problems and did not develop in the same context³⁷. But on the precise question of "folkloric philosophy" it goes clearly in the same direction, apart from different emphases here and there.

We can now assess the properly political bearing of the reproach of elitism: the accusation of hegemonism, the idea that the distinction between a trivial meaning and a strict meaning of the word "philosophy" goes back, consciously or unconsciously, to a class strategy aimed at the domination of the popular masses by intellectuals in general and by professional philosophers in particular. I have already remarked somewhere else that in this sense Marx and Engels would also be elitist intellectuals, since such a work as German Ideology is from beginning to end a declaration of the rupture with what they scornfully call "ideology". Since historical materialism, such as they have laid its foundations, has been possible only at the price of such a rupture³⁸.

But the real problem is not there. The real problem is that the reference to the unconsciousness of other people in a debate which should be at the same time theoretical and political, can function, under certain circumstances, as purely rhetorical slyness intended to camouflage the absence of true arguments. I fear that this may be the case with our three Ivorian and Beninese critics.

The criticism of ethnophilosophy is not politically neutral, for sure. It is not an accident if Césaire believed, as far back as 1950, that he had to tackle Bantou Philosophy of Tempels in a text which appeared expressly as a political pamphlet, the Discours sur le colonialisme³⁹. Radicalising in a certain way the inspiration of that text⁴⁰, the criticism of ethnophilosophy pursues on its turn, by approaching the thing from the other end, that of theoretical discussion, an indirectly political aim. As far as I

am concerned I can say without a doubt that I was pursuing an aim which is not solely scientific when identifying at the foundation of works on "African philosophy" a theoretically indefensible unanimist presupposition, and when trying to substitute for it, on the basis of methodological principle, the hypothesis of an ideological pluralism in the pre-colonial African societies as in all societies in general⁴¹, and when describing philosophy as a debate with argument and counter-argument where the most diverse thoughts must be able to express themselves.

Having said this, I have myself indicated clearly enough what that aim was, so that no other stakes, supposedly unconscious, are arbitrarily superimposed on it. What I denounce in ethnophilosophy and which I rediscover curiously behind the revolutionary appearance of the populist discourse of our new critics, is the ideology of group domination, or, more exactly, of a certain group-idea imposed by the fist of intellectuals and of rhetoricians, the ideology of the crushing of the individual and at the same time all, from the most subtle to the roughest forms of fascism and neo-fascism. What is at stake today, in the criticism of unanimism is, on the one hand, the possibility for our peoples to develop, to transform themselves by surmounting, by an autonomous action of self-transcending, the multiple weaknesses which at a given moment made possible their defeat in the face of the West. At stake is, on the other hand, the status of the individual in modern African society, the question of democratic freedom and in particular of freedom of expression⁴². I cannot prevent anybody, if he so desires, to see in this double exigency the manifestation of a "struggle for domination". Anyway, it should be made clear at least that this struggle, if there is one, does not create an opposition between "professional philosophers" on the one side and the "popular masses" on the other, as they wanted to make us believe. The struggle is taking place at this very moment among all intellectuals, all equally "decultured", westernised and petty-bourgeois. The political prize of that "struggle" is surely in the final analysis the destiny of our peoples. Anyway, it is not evident that the best way of guaranteeing that destiny must be to keep the "masses" in the mystifying discourse of ethnophilosophy. Because, just as Gramsci said, "only the truth is revolutionary".

Notes:

* This text was originally published in French in Recherche, Pédagogie et Culture (Paris) no.56 janvier - mars 1982; a special issue on philosophy in Africa.

This text was already written out when we received the news of the untimely death, on 2nd December 1981 in Nairobi, of Alexis Kagame, presented here as "the father of African philosophy". I wish to express all respect for this man, whose erudition could be compared only to his goodness, his affability and his deep rooting in African culture.

I met him for the first time in 1973, at the university campus in Lubumbashi, where we were both invited, he by the Department of History, I by the Department of Philosophy. We met since then several times, notably in Addis-Abeba in 1976, in Cotonou, then in Dusseldorf in 1978 at the 16th world congress of philosophy.

Kagame's work, I must recall it, is not limited to his work on "Bantu philosophy". It includes several other researches, dealing specially with the oral traditions of his country. Posterity will keep from him the memory of a just man, with robust scientific determination, who devoted himself, in his own way but with greatest sincerity, to the rehabilitation of African culture.

1. Alexis Kagame, La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être, (Brussels: Acad. Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1956); La philosophie bantu comparée (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1976).
2. The categories of being were established, in the first work, from and in function of one language, the Kinyarwanda. La philosophie bantu comparée extends the investigation to 180 languages, the list of which is given in chapter I.
3. Niamkey Koffi, "Les modes d'existence matérielle de la philosophie et la question de la philosophie Africaine" in Koré, revue ivoirienne de philosophie et de culture, no 5,6,7,8 1977. Despite the way this author purposefully signs his publications, Koffi is the first name, and Niamkey the

family name.

4. Abdou Touré, Le marxisme-léninisme comme ideologie. Critique de trois théoriciens africains; A.A.Dieng, P. Hountondji et M. Towa (Abidjan, february 1980) (stencilled copy) p.17.

5. Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré "Controverses sur l'existence d'une philosophie africaine", in Claude Sumner (ed.) African philosophy. La philosophie africaine (Addis-Abeba: Chamber Printing House/Addis-Abeba University, 1980) p. 197 (papers presented to an international seminar, organised from 1 - 3 December 1976 by the University of Addis-Abeba, on the theme "Problématique de la philosophie africaine"; reproduced in alphabetical order of the authors).

6. Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, Op.cit. p.192 and 196

7. Olabiyi Babalola Yai, "Théorie et pratique en philosophie africaine: Misère de la philosophie spéculative (critique de P. Hountondji, M. Towa et autres)" in Présence Africaine, no. 108, 1978, p. 70. Yai's article has been the subject of a debate organised at the universities of Ife (Nigeria) and of Cotonou (Benin) on the 4th May and the 23rd August 1978. The English version was published in Second Order, vol.II, no.2, Ife, 1977 and in Positive review, vol.I, no.2, Ibadan, 1978.

8. Pathé Diagne, L'euro-philosophie et la pensée du négro-africain, suivi de Problématique néo-pharaonique et épistémologie du réel (Dakar: Sankoré, 1981/1982).

9. Supra "Table ronde sur la philosophie en Afrique" (Interventions of L.V. Thomas). Compare with Niamkey Koffi "L'impensé de Towa et de Hountondji" in Claude Sumner (ed.) African philosophy. La philosophie africaine Op.cit. p.185; "That philosophy as it has been taught to us would be exclusively Western (...), does not necessarily allow us to consider it in its essence as the patrimony of the West".

10. Heidegger, at this point, is evidently just an example among others. All philosophers of European history and culture, all those who have tried, directly or indirectly, to consider the destiny of the West as the only destiny determined by a specific calling and not comparable to any other, have succumbed, to different degrees, to the temptation of attributing an illusive necessity to fortuitous aspects of that history, of that

culture, of that destiny. Witnesses, among thousands, are those texts of Krisis, where Husserl meditating over "the crisis of the European world, ends up considering science and philosophy as an essentially European project, unfinished task which informs from the inside the history of the West and where we must ultimately find the condition of possibility of historicity as such, considered as a specific mode of existence of the West. In the same way as the Papua, as a reasoning being, inaugurates a new mode of life in the animal kingdom, also there should be, if we believe Husserl, a difference in nature and not only in degree between scientific reasoning and primitive reasoning. E. Husserl, " La crise de l'humanité européenne et la philosophie" transl. Paul Ricoeur, in Revue de métaphysique et de morale, 1950, p.225-258.

11. Martin Heidegger, Qu'est-ce que la philosophie, (Paris: Gallimard).
12. Marcien Towa, Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle, (Yaoundé: éditions Clé, 1971).
13. P. Hountondji "African wisdom and modern philosophy" in African humanism, Scandinavian culture: a dialogue (Copenhagen, 1970) records of a conference organised in August 1967.
14. I made that clarification already in "Sur la philosophie africaine" (Paris: Maspero, 1977), particularly p. 250 sq of the "postscriptum". I made it again in a presentation in December 1976 at a seminar in Addis-Abeba: P. Hountondji "Sens du mot 'philosophie' dans l'expression 'philosophie africaine'" in Koré, no. 5.6.7.8. 1977; and in Claude Sumner (ed.) Op.cit. p. 81 - 92. Also P. Hountondji "Que peut la philosophie?" in Alwin Diemer (ed.) Philosophy in the present situation in Africa (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag) and Présence Africaine no. 119, 1981.
15. Niamkey Koffi "L'impensé..." Op.cit. p.172
16. Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, Op.cit. p. 211 - 212.
17. Pathé Diagne emphasises also, in his book that there were in Dogon society, presented by Griaule (Dieu d'au (Paris: éd. du Chêne, 1978), Ogotemméli, anti-Ogotemméli and other currents of thinking. But, apart from the fact that this approach is new in respect of Griaule (who recognised, as far as he is concerned, the perfect representativeness of Ogotemméli). it does not put into question my criticism of ethnophilosophy,

as Pathé Diagne believes, but rather confirms it.

18. Emmanuel Terray Le marxisme devant les sociétés "primitives" (Paris: Maspero, 1972).

19. Olabiyi B. Yaï, Op.cit. p. 70

20. Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, Op.cit. p. 195.

21. Olabiyi B. Yaï, Op.cit. p. 83 - 84.

22. In their cited article Niamkey and Touré speak curiously "of Western philosophy considered as "true philosophy", in which Hountondji urges us to register our philosophical work in intimation of Amo, whose theoretical work has "registered itself from start to end inside and in terms of a European debate..." and to that effect they refer to my pamphlet "Libertés: contribution à la révolution dahoméenne" (Cotonou: Librairie Renaissance, 1973) p. 39 (ref. Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, Op.cit. p. 196). Hoe strange! A simple glance at the incriminated text shows that it says exactly the opposite: I found it disappointing, I was regretting that Amo's work had thus been registered in an exclusively European debate. I was seeing in it an evident sign of his failure as philosopher. I was saying that we must break today with that monstrous extraversion. Moreover the text of Libertés was just a repetition, in journal form, of an article from 1970, reproduced in Ch. 5 of Sur la philosophie africaine, where the same idea was already expressed (see p. 168 - 170). It is only too easy, alas, to cut down a citation in order to pervert its meaning.

23. Niamkey Koffi and Touré Abdou, art. op., p. 194-195-199.

24. Id., ibid., p. 200.

25. Id., ibid., p.203-204.

26. Niamkey Koffi, art. cit., p. 166-7, 171, 173, 184-185, 187-188.

27. Olabiyi B. Yaï, art. cit. p. 82-82.

28. Marcien Towa, Essai..., op. cit.; P. Hountondji, "Histoire d'un mythe" (1970), "African philosophy, myth and reality" (1973), texts reproduced in a recasted form in chapters 2 and 3 of Sur la philosophie africaine.

29. Henry Odera Oruka "Mythologies as African Philosophy" in East African Journal, vol. ix, no. 10, Oct. 1972; "Mythologies et philosophie africaine: une confusion" transl. by Grace and P. Hountondji in Conséquence, no.1, jan-june 1974. I let you know that now the author signs with Odera

H. Oruka.

30. Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, *Op.cit.* p. 197 - 199, 204; Gramsci is quoted from articles by Jean Thibaudeau "Premières note sur les écrits de prison de Gramsci pour placer la littérature dans la théorie marxiste" and Alberto M. Cirese "Conceptions du monde, philosophie spontanée, folklore" in Dialectiques, no.4-5, march 1974, p. 57-82 and 83-100.

31. Yaï, *Op.cit.* p. 76 quotes Gramsci from Antoinetta Macchiocchi For Gramsci (Paris: coll. Ponts, Seuil, 1974) p. 217-218. References given in Yaï's text (Gramsci: 1949, 120 and 125) are those of the edition of Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce, used by Macchiocchi.

32. For example, Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, denouncing the "cautioning of the hegemonical (...) in Towa and Hountondji" and the "disparaging attributes" conferred by the latter on precolonial African thought, oppose them to Gramsci for whom "the assignment of those attributes is closely linked to the very notion of people understood as the whole of the subordinate and instrumental strata. Indeed, it comes out "by definition" that "the people cannot have any conceptions which are elaborated, systematic, politically organised and centralised" (Dialectiques, no. 4-5 p.89) (Niamkey Koffi and Abdou Touré, *Op.cit.* p.199-200).

The authors do not notice that Gramsci speaks here without irony, that he is not reporting the ideas of idealists and other aristocrats, but that he himself is thinking indeed that peoples conceptions cannot have from the start those qualities of elaboration, of systematisation, of centralisation, and that they can acquire them only progressively during the course of a process which is no other that of the conquest of hegemony. Moreover, Alberto M Cirese's article is perfectly clear on this.

Yaï also falsifies in a very subtle way, by an apparently innocent interpolation, a text of Gramsci quoted from M.A. Macchiocchi: "...The philosophy of the mass, the philosophy of praxis can only be conceived under the form of a struggle, of a battle. But we must take as starting point common sense, the spontaneous philosophy of the masses, which must be made ideologically homogeneous (...). Its merit (of the spontaneous philosophy of the masses - sic!)...rests not only in the fact that common sense calls, although implicitly, for the principle of causality, but in

the fact that, in a much more precise way, it can be recognised..." (Yai, Op.cit. p.76). The interpolation implies that, in the text, "its merits" means "the merit of spontaneous philosophy of the masses", when in actual fact an innocent reading shows that it is about the merit of common sense. Yai may then conclude triumphantly: "Gramsci places as starting point the very thing which will give the creeps to our abstract philosophers and which they fear most: spontaneous philosophy of the masses" (p. 77).

What gives not only the creeps, but also dizziness, is the intellectual gymnastics by which they end up substituting for "common sense", designated by Gramsci as starting point, that "spontaneous philosophy of the masses", whose only grammatical function in the commented text is to be an apposition to the object "common sense", thus a metaphorical way of qualifying this common sense, by anticipation of that "philosophy of the masses" (or "praxis philosophy") which it must allow to constitute and which, itself, is still to come.

33. Antonio Gramsci, Il materialismo storico (Genua: Ed. Riuniti, 1971) p. 27. See Alberto M. Cirese's commentary, Dialectiques, Op.cit. p. 86.

34. Antonio Gramsci, Ibid. p.3 ; Alberto Cirese, Op.cit. p. 97-98.

35. Il materialismo storico, Op.cit. p.12; also quoted by M.A. Macchiocchi, Op.cit. p. 218-219.

36. A. Gramsci "Observations sur le folklore" in Literature and national life, quoted by Alberto M. Cirese, Op.cit. p. 86

37. I believe in particular that my criticism of unanimism, as a political critique (and not only theoretical) contradicts, at least at the level of some formulations, Gramsci's thesis on the ideological consensus, the necessity of making homogeneous the thinking of the masses, the intellectual conditions of harmony, the role of the organic intellectual of the proletariat.. It is all about the relation between theory and practice, philosophy and politics, the question of the essence, of power and of the modalities of intervention of a "praxis philosophy". In my article "Que peut la philosophie?"(Op.cit.) some of the reasons for my position can be found. But this is another problem, and does not affect the essential convergencies.

38. see P. Hountondji, "Sens du mot philosophie dans l'expression philosophie africaine" Op.cit.

39. Aimé Césaire, Discours sur le colonialisme, (paris: Ed. Réclame, 1950) Revised and published several times by Présence Africaine.

40. ...which attacked carefully "not the bantu philosophy, but the utilisation which some make of it with a political purpose". Discours sur le colonialisme, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962) p. 44.

41. Our anthropologist friends like to recall that this hypothesis, far from being new, goes back in their discipline at least a dozen years, and plays a role in important intellectual works. The philosopher, as usual, arrives here too late and seems to be smashing doors which are already wide open: "...Modern ethnology, sister of sociology, from which it receives stimulation and corrections in its perspective, while exchanging methods with it, ...(perceives) the differences, the conflicts, the social malfunctionings in the area of the relationships of dualism or pluralism which have been analysed several times in the last ten years. Too often, the pure philosopher, late by ten years, ignores that socio-ethnology of changes, without illusion on the pseudo-unanimity of thought or of political will" (Claude Rivière, "Les destins associés de la philosophie et des sciences sociales en Afrique" in Ethnopsychology, 34/1, Le Havre, jan.1979. p. 93).

I will answer elsewhere to Claude Rivière's brilliant criticism. Let it be enough here to observe that, if the recognition of social and cultural cleavages goes back effectively far enough (and even farther, I believe, that he said) in the history of anthropology, it has never been applied, until at very recent times, to the analysis of ideological superstructures in societies with oral traditions, even less to a systematic theoretical and methodological criticism of the enormous literature devoted to those superstructures. Therefore the tranquil happiness of ethnophilosophy.

42. The last three sentences are borrowed, almost word by word, from my article quoted before, "Sens du mot philosophie dans l'expression philosophie africaine".

Résumé

Cet article aborde la question de savoir quelle attitude doivent adopter les philosophes africains vis-à-vis de leur tradition culturelle. Il soulève en cela les limites importantes, théoriques et pratiques d'une approche - l'approche traditionaliste - de l'étude philosophique des systèmes religieux africains. Une approche qui vise essentiellement à mettre en évidence la structure logique de ces systèmes religieux et qui ne donne pas une analyse critique de leurs revendications, ni de leurs hypothèses et suppositions. On présente des arguments pour montrer que, ni les vues apportées par cette approche, ni le programme d'action proposé aux philosophes africains ne sont un modèle adéquat pour comprendre la situation africaine, ou ne contribuent à résoudre la crise d'identité africaine.

L'importante tâche du philosophe africain n'est ni de montrer l'unicité des visions du monde africain, ni de défendre la démarche de la pensée de "l'homme de la rue" Africain, mais de faire une évaluation critique de ces visions du monde en vue de définir quelle doit être leur part dans le développement de l'Afrique actuellement.

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN CULTURE:
A CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONALISM

Olusegun Oladipo

What should be the attitude of the African philosopher to the cultural heritage of his people?

This question, which is a significant offshoot of the debate on the question of African philosophy - i.e. the question of what we may mean when we talk of 'African Philosophy'¹ - is likely to occupy a significant position in the history of African philosophy. Indeed, there is a sense in which answers given to it can be used as a basis for grouping African philosophers into different schools of thought. The reason why this is the case should not be difficult to fathom. For if the function (or, at any rate, one of the important functions) of philosophy is the critical examination of 'the intellectual foundations of our life, using the best modes of knowledge for human well-being'², then the issue of how an African philosopher should relate (intellectually) to the cultural heritage of his people cannot but attract the philosopher's reflective and critical attention, moreso at a time when his people are confronted with a crisis of self-identity of no mean proportion.

Broadly speaking, there are two schools of thought on this issue. First, there are those Bodunrin aptly christens 'traditionalists', that is those philosophers who are concerned with 'the discovery of authentic African ideas and thought systems uninfluenced by alien accretions'³. For this school of thought, the African philosopher should be engaged in a combination of two tasks. First, he should attempt to defend African cultures against all false ideas about them that have been perpetrated by Western scholarship. Second, he should describe these cultures and their various elements as they really are. The task of the African philosopher, then, for this school of thought, should be to promote an understanding of African belief systems through the exposition of their logical structure and the assumptions on which they are based⁴.

The second school of thought, on the other hand, argues, very persuasively I think, that given the fact that Africans are engaged in

socio-economic and cultural reconstruction, the African philosopher, rather than content himself with a mere exposition of the logical structure of African belief systems, should engage in the important task of critically examining the intellectual foundations of African forms of life. And the point of doing this is to trace the source, and course of development, of our present troubles and see the best ways in which they can be tackled⁵.

In this paper, I reject the approach of the traditionalists in the study of African culture for three important reasons. First, by assuming that Africans have a world-view that is unequely their own and which can be contrasted with the scientific world-view believed to be characteristically Western, they imply that African societies and Western societies 'operate on two basically opposed mental capacities'⁶. To so conclude is to rule out the possibility that forms of life may overlap in terms of practical and theoretical ends which they serve and that this overlap may provide a basis for comparative assessment of the rationality or irrationality of beliefs or categories of belief. Second, the traditionalists' position leads to the absurd conclusion that every belief or social practice is rational. This is because it assumes that all that is required of a belief in order for it to be rational, is that it is comprehensible by fitting into a given cultural matrix. Yet, it should be clear that we can understand a belief, see its point or function in a belief system and still insist that it is not rational. This may be the case, for example, in a situation in which we see the belief or world-outlook has not been effective in enabling the people to achieve the goals for which it provides a basis. Finally, the traditionalists do not seem to recognise the close connection between collective world-outlooks and their socio-economic basis, nor do they take account of the changing nature of these world-outlooks themselves, in connection with the changes occurring in the society as a whole. They assume, quite erroneously, that African world-views are static and, therefore, that a romantic glorification of the past should be the primary task of African philosophers. They thus misunderstand the nature of the connection between critical philosophy and socio-cultural development.

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Before we start discussing these matters in detail, let us give a summary of the views of the traditionalists, so as to bring into sharper focus the main strands of their position.

In main, the position of the traditionalists is an attempt to justify African culture 'against external contempt and underestimation'⁷. It is a concerted effort at repudiating the image of African societies painted by some Western anthropologists (James Frazer, Edward Tylor, Max Muller etc.) who - having taken for granted the universal validity of the logico-scientific criteria of rationality developed within the context of Western cultural activities - saw in African belief systems and ritual practices a bundle of false hypotheses about man and nature which did not correspond to any objective reality.

On the basis of the assumption that 'each race is endowed with a distinctive nature and embodies, in its civilisation, a particular spirit'⁸, the traditionalists reject any attempt at placing African beliefs on the rationality scale in terms of criteria of rationality developed within the context of human and social activities which are products of a world-view which, for the traditionalists, differs in significant respects, if not totally, from the African world-view. Their view on what should be the attitude of the African philosopher to the world-view of his people, either expressed or implied in their works, is this. That since cultures differ in the way they interpret experiences because they operate with different assumptions about the nature of reality, a people's culture can be understood only by unearthing those assumptions, theories and concepts in terms of which they interpret experiences. And since different interpretations of experience yield different philosophies, no philosophy can claim to have the final word on the meaning of existence as experienced⁹. This being the case, the argument continues, philosophy in Africa cannot benefit from what is called a 'universalist view' of its concerns. To be relevant to the African situation, it has to be 'a reflection on the cultural experience, or the exposition of the basic assumptions, concepts and theories which underlie African cultural experience and activities'¹⁰. In other words, it should primarily be con-

cerned with a rational justification of African belief systems and the assumptions on which they are based. The whole point of doing this, of course, is to correct the distortions of African world-views that is a direct result of attempts by some Western anthropologists to superimpose alien criteria of rationality on them. The tr. can therefore be seen to be arguing, not only that there are no context-free norms of rationality, but also that African belief systems constitute a distinct form of life, the justification of which should be the primary preoccupation of African philosophers.

It should be clear from the summary of the position of the tr. given above, that they have some point in their favour. It is a fact, for instance, that a people's interpretation of life may differ from culture to culture. Even within the same culture, interpretations may differ from person to person and from one period to another¹¹. But if people's reactions to experiences are so conditioned - environmentally and historically - there should be no doubt that there can be no absolute way which represents the 'true' way of interpreting such experiences. It is therefore the case that no philosophy can escape the influence of the assumptions and concepts which provide the framework within which reality is interpreted in the cultural milieu in which it operates. Thus any philosophical activity in Africa, if it is to be authentically African, must relate consciously to those assumptions and concepts which underlie the African cultural experience.

The error of the traditionalists, then, lies neither in their contention that reality is open to different interpretations (this, of course, is an empirical fact), nor in their characterization of philosophy as a cultural activity. Rather, the error lies in the move they make from the acknowledgement of these facts to the conclusion that there is a picture of the world that is peculiarly African and that there is a distinctively African form of rationality - the justification of which, in their view, should be the preoccupation of the African philosopher. For, as I intend to show in the course of the discussion, one can admit these facts and still argue that the different interpretations of reality under consideration are complementary rather than contradictory and, there-

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fore, that there is a sense in which we can talk of diffusion of criteria of rationality between, and within, cultures.

But first, let it be noted that the idea of a distinctive African mode of thought or form of rationality can be traced to the very beginnings of modern African thought¹², which developed as 'part of a comprehensive process of reflection by African intelligentsia upon our historical being'¹³, a process which itself was set in motion by the colonial experience. The significance of this idea is best captured in the meaning of the twin concepts of 'African personality' and 'Negritude'. These concepts provided rallying points for a concerted and articulate reaction by the African intelligentsia to the denigration of the African experience by the imperialists. They also provided the intellectual foundation for some socio-political doctrines - 'African Socialism' for example - that later became the framework for political action in some African countries. Thus, by postulating a distinctive African mode of thought whose coherence and rationality can only be seen within the framework of African conceptions of reality and the social activities they engender, our tr. (in contemporary African philosophy) are heirs to a significant intellectual tradition. The significance of this intellectual tradition consists in replacing the conception of Africans 'as untamed in their intellectual activities and so incapable of making distinctions between intellectual categories'¹⁴ with the image of a people with 'a coherent system of institutions and customs, animated by spiritual and moral principles of the highest order'¹⁵.

But to what extent can we say that the insight provided by this tradition of thought, which may be adequate for the interpretation of the African reality as defined by the colonial experience, is also adequate for the task of post-colonial socio-economic reconstruction?

In considering this question, let us examine the claim of the traditionalists that Africans have a unique mode of thought, with distinctive criteria of rationality¹⁶. This with a view to seeing whether or not there is any kind of justification for the 'great divide' between African and Western cultures as suggested by Levy-Bruhl.

The traditionalists, as we can see, postulate a kind of theoretical consensus among Africans. They see 'beneath the various manifestations of African civilization and beneath the flood of history which has swept the civilization along willy-nilly, a solid bedrock which might provide a background for certitudes; in other words, a system of beliefs'¹⁷. The bedrock of this system of beliefs they see, curiously enough, in the work of a European missionary, Father Tempels¹⁸, whose 'avowed purpose in undertaking the study of Bantu philosophy was to arrive at the understanding of the profound workings of the Bantu mind in order to facilitate the integration of Christian principles within its schemes of values'¹⁹. Thus, for them, the nature of 'African Metaphysics' is captured in the saying: 'The African identifies being with life, or rather with life-force'²⁰ and if anybody was in doubt what the 'African mode of knowing' is, he simply needed to be reminded that this mode of knowing is a holistic one in which dualisms such as that between man and nature, subject and object, mind and matter, are totally absent²¹ - a sentiment poetically expressed by Senghor when he writes:

The African is, as it were, shut up in his black skin. He lives in the primordial night. He does not begin by distinguishing himself from the object, the tree or stone, the man or animal or social event. He does not keep it at a distance. He does not analyse it.

Once he has come under its influence, he takes it like a blind man, still living, into his hands. He does not fix or kill it. He turns it over and over in his supple hands, he fingers it, he feels it. The African is one of the warms created on the third day ... a purely sensory field. Subjectively at the end of his antennae, like an insect, he discovers the other. He is moved to his bowels, going out in a centrifugal movement from the subject to the object on the waves sent out by the other²².

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This kind of metaphysics and epistemology which constitutes the 'African Mindset' is contrasted with a uniform 'Western Mindset' which, again uniquely, is analytic and consequently, institutes all kinds of dichotomies: between man and nature, subject and object, body and mind etc..Again we have to return to Senghor, the apostle of Negritude, for a proper characterization of this contrast. He writes:

The life-surge of the African, his self-abandonment, to the other is thus actuated with reason. But here reason is not the eye-reason of the European, it is the reason-by-embtace which shares more the nature of logos than ratio. Ratio is compass, setsquare and sextant, measure and weight where logos, before its Aristotelian tempering, before it became diamond, was living speech, which to the most typically human expression of neuro-sensory-impression, does not cast the object untouched, into rigid logical categories. African speech in raising itself to the Word, rubs and polishes things to give them back their original colour, with their grain and their veins, shooting through the rays of light to restore their transparency, penetrating his surreality, or rather their unyielding reality, in its freshness. Classical European reason is analytical and makes use of the object. African reason is intuitive and participates in the object²³ .

These contrasts prepare the ground for the relativist claim that, in trying to understand a people through their cultural expressions, we must judge each culture both in terms of its basic assumptions about reality and in terms of its goals²⁴ .

But I ask: can the traditionalists be right? Is there, in fact, any basis (empirical or theoretical) for the kind of water-tight distinction they draw between African and European 'Mindsets' such that the two

are mutually exclusive?

Now, it can be argued, contra the traditionalists, that the only thing we can legitimately talk about, given the diversities among the people of Africa, is not any metaphysical or mythic unity, but a variety of the metaphysical world-views of myriad races and cultures²⁵. In this view, the thesis of a collective African philosophy is nothing but 'a smokescreen' behind which each author is able to manipulate his own philosophical views. It has nothing beyond this ideological function, it is an indeterminate discourse with no object²⁶.

However, to argue in this manner is to imply that the thesis of a unique African mindset is an empirical claim, which it is not. It is, in the words of Prof. Irele, "not so much a descriptive analysis of African culture but a synthetic vision"²⁷. In bringing out the inadequacies of the traditionalists project, therefore, we have to move beyond this rather cheap critique of their position to a more penetrating analysis of its underlying assumptions. And in doing this, the issue that urgently presses for attention is the issue of the extent to which traditionalists are right in postulating a kind of rigid and unbridgeable gap between the 'African Mindset' and the 'European Mindset', between the African mode of knowing which is both emotional and rhythmic and the European mode of knowing which is characteristically descriptive and analytical. The question, again, is this: Can the traditionalists be right?

The answer to this question cannot but be negative. For there is no society without some science and technology, and in every society, there is mutual interplay between 'forms of life'; between, for example, the religious and scientific forms of life. It is a known fact, for instance, that in traditional African societies there were methods of healing and diagnosis which relied purely on naturalistic principles like those that now obtain in modern (Western) medicine. It was not every disease that had to be attributed to the agency of the gods, malevolent spirits etc.²⁸. So, it is incorrect to assert that traditional Africans were totally unscientific in their activities - both practical and intellectual. In any case, we do know, as aforementioned, that there has always been a mutual interplay between forms of life. This can be seen from the ob-

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servation that religion and science have always interacted²⁹ .For example:

The alchemists experimental techniques and low-level empirical knowledge made a large contribution to chemistry, but interestingly,their experimentation and study of nature seems to have been imbued with an attitude that is religious in nature³⁰ .

However, a more telling blow on the position of the traditionalists is the realisation that even in Western societies, there are scientists who are deeply religious and also people who still believe in and practice witchcraft³¹ .This situation vividly suggests that forms of life need not be mutually exclusive; indeed they can be, and are in many cases, complementary.

Given the observations made above, it should be clear that there is no basis for the kind of rigid distinction between 'Mindsets' made by the traditionalists.We can see that there is a kind of overlap between those conceptions of reality and modes of knowing that are thought to be unique each to Africans and Europeans.This situation, in my view, provides some justification for some attempts at assessing some African traditional beliefs in terms of (Western?) sciento-technical criteria of rationality.

This issue of rationality brings me to the examination of a fundamental assumption which underlies the position of the traditionalists.- This is the assumption that a system of beliefs is rational once we can understand it within the context of the socio-cultural activities which define it.That this assumption is fundamental to the position of the traditionalists can be seen in the dogmatic manner in which they venerate what they regard as the distinctive African mode of thought.As Prof. Bodunrin puts it:

They hardly see why others may refuse totally to share their esteem for the system they describe.They do not raise philosophical issues about the system (because for them no philosophical problems arise once we "under-

stand" the system); therefore they do not attempt to give a philosophical justification of the belief system or the issues that arise it³² .

We can, for instance, find elements of this kind of attitude in Sodipo's analysis of the Yoruba conception of cause and chance and the scientific conception³³ .Sodipo has done this with a view to showing, not only the differences between them, but also that the Yoruba conception 'fits very well into the Yoruba traditional systems of belief, especially our religious belief system'³⁴ .Nowhere in the analysis is any attempt made to answer the very important question as to which of the two conceptions is more efficacious in dealing with experience.The same attitude can be noticed in the exposition of Chewa cultural ideals and systems of thought attempted by D.N. Kaphagawani and H.F. Chidani-'modzi in their illuminating article,"Chewa Cultural Ideals and Systems of Thought as Determined from Proverbs:A preliminary Analysis"³⁵ . We see in this article that, although Chewa culture stresses the connection between knowledge and action, it is, at the same time, protective of authority.Like most traditional cultures, it stresses the preservation of tradition as against a critical engagement with it.The question that arises then is this: should a philosophical study of a people's culture, or better still aspects of it, be a mere exposition of the logical structure of the people's beliefs or should it go beyond that to consider the implications of such beliefs for human productive activities? Like Sodipo, the authors of the article just mentioned appear to have settled for the first option; for nowhere in their article is any attempt made to resolve the tension in Chewa culture between a concept knowledge that stresses action and that which favours the preservation of tradition.But, how justified is this kind of attitude?

Let me, in examining this issue, quickly make a logico-epistemological point, which is that a belief, activity or practice is not justified simply because it is understandable and, therefore, has a point or rationale. The fallacy involved in the inference from the fact that a belief has point to the conclusion that it is rational, becomes clear when we consider the following.It is ,for example, a fact that the major

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super powers (the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) spend astronomical amounts of money on arms build-up. Surely they can be said to have a point in doing this, which is to say that the arms race, although frightening, had a kind of deterrent effect; that it could ensure what was fondly called balance of power (terror) between the contending powers. But, as it is now becoming obvious to the super powers, we cannot say that this action is rational given the following: First, the fact that the arms-race tended to exacerbate world tension, both in terms of its scope and intensity; second, the fact that money wasted on instrument of destruction could be used, not only to improve these developed (developing?) societies, but also to aid genuinely poor nations which find it difficult to sustain for their peoples the barest conditions for survival; finally there is the fact that the monumental arms build-ups constitute serious health hazards to the world and its inhabitants. Or, to take a less volatile example, in political terms, a man who has an acquisitive urge for cars and satisfies this urge by piling them up, when there are people around him who are in dire need of means of sustenance, can provide a rationale for this action. But can we say that this action is rational?

The above illustrations are given in an attempt to show that it does not follow from the mere fact that a belief or action has a point that it is rational. From these examples, although the super powers or the rich man may provide some rationale for their actions, such actions could still be judged to be irrational. Thus we may agree with the traditionalists that beliefs in magic, witchcraft, oracles, spirits etc. have a point in the context of the societies in which they exist and yet find them wanting on the rationality scale.

But here the argument may still be inconclusive. The traditionalists could argue, and I think with some justification, that they are not claiming that all beliefs are rational, but that the criteria of rationality in terms of which beliefs are assessed should not be external to the forms of life in which they obtain. But why should this be so, given the fact that forms of life are not mutually exclusive and they do overlap to a considerable degree?

It seems to me that the position of the traditionalists on this matter rests on their failure to make a clear distinction between the issues involved in this debate. The two issues that are being conflated by our traditionalists are these: (i) the question of how best to study the thought systems of our peoples; and (ii) the question of whether there is any justification for employing so-called alien criteria of rationality in assessing the beliefs of our peoples.

While the position of the traditionalists can be seen as an adequate answer to the first question (for how do we study a thought system without understanding the point or rationale of the belief that are its major elements?), it surely cannot be an adequate answer to the second question. This is because, as I have tried to show, we may see the point of a belief or activity within the context of a given culture, we may see the function(s) it performs in that culture and still insist that it is not a rational belief. But on what grounds do we base this insistence? Can it be because it does not correspond to a given reality or that it does not appear to be the best alternative in a given situation? In short, on what grounds are we justified in questioning a belief when it has been established that it fulfils certain functions within the culture in which it exists?

I do not think that a legitimate case can be made for the claim that a belief is not rational because it does not correspond to some given reality. To argue in this manner is to suggest that we can have a starting point for knowledge which is without presuppositions and that there is 'a meaning-in-itself which understanding seeks to uncover'³⁶. Yet, we do know that 'understanding is grounded in a network of beliefs and practices out of which the very fabric of our lives are woven'³⁷, and, consequently, that there is nothing like an absolute set of standards of judgement and value against which all beliefs and cultural practices can be measured³⁸. On this point I agree with the traditionalists. But are we then to say, on the basis of this admission, that all beliefs and practices are equally valid as means of realising societal goals and objectives?

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My answer to this question is definitely negative. For if it were the case that every belief or societal practice is equally effective for the realisation of societal goals and objectives, we should always be satisfied with our beliefs and societal practices: there would be no need for comparing alternative systems of belief in terms of the extent to which they enhance or hinder attempts to deal with experience by those who hold them; Africans would not have had the colonial experience in the first place, let alone the socio-cultural disorientations engendered by that experience. Indeed, if it were true that every belief or social practice is equally effective for the realisation of goals, there would be no need for philosophy as a critique of reason (pure or practical), for literature as a form of social consciousness or science as a search for better ways of enhancing the conditions of mankind. That we have all these activities is enough indication that, among alternatives, there is a sense in which we can say that one belief or set of beliefs and social practices is better than others as a means of dealing with experience.

Thus we should be prepared to see our conceptions of reality, modes of knowing etc. as presuppositions whose limitations can be revealed when compared with the presuppositions of other forms of life in terms of the extent to which they are adequate as means of realising our objectives. These goals are not static; they are usually defined or redefined in terms of the nature of our encounter and interaction with nature and one another. There is therefore a constant need for a critical engagement with our culture, our world-views, assumptions and values. This should be done with a view to determining these beliefs and activities that can best enhance our ability to accomplish our goals, both theoretical and practical.

Inability (refusal?) to see the close connection between a people's world outlook, their values, assumptions and prejudices, on the one hand, and the means through which man comes to terms with his environment, on the other hand, makes the traditionalists see a form of life as a closed system; they view it as something static, a commodity as it were, which could be preserved, revived, bought and sold and

exhibited by a people. Hence their recommendation of an approach to a philosophical study of African thought systems that emphasizes the mere exposition of the logical structure of a world outlook which is just a product of a given socio-economic formation, and their belief that any attempt to subject some aspects of this world outlook to critical analysis, in the face of present realities, is a betrayal of the African experience. But we do know that a culture is not a finished product. It is something that is constantly in the making in consonance with the dynamics of the continuous evolution of human societies³⁹. It is, therefore, not something we want to preserve in all cases. Rather it is something, aspects of which we may want to reevaluate, depending on the nature of our socio-economic reality and the ends (both theoretical and practical) which we have set for ourselves. Thus what determines which aspects of our culture (beliefs, social practices and values) to promote and which to consider anachronistic are the demands of action as defined by our socio-economic reality at any point in time.

Now, if we acknowledge the fact that the socio-economic reality of Africa today is characterized by a "search for culture" which, no doubt, has its roots in the socio-economic disorientations engendered in African societies by the colonial experience, and if this search manifests itself in the form of a dilemma poignantly characterized by Bodunrin when he writes:

We want to forget our colonial past. We want to forget the unfavourable image of us painted by, chiefly, the Western man. At the same time, however, we are anxious to improve the lot of our people. We want technological development⁴⁰ ,

then it should not be difficult to see the need for African philosophers to be very critical in their study of African thought systems. And the question we need to constantly ask is not so much the question of what we were (a question which our traditionalists are never tired of saking) but the related questions of what we are and where we are going. These are questions which suggest, not a mere analysis of the past to the point of its arrival today, but a rational examination of

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present ends'⁴¹. Answers to these questions should not only illuminate the present, but also suggest a project for the future.

It therefore becomes clear that neither the insight offered by the traditionalists nor the programme of action they recommend for African philosophers can be regarded as providing a proper model for the understanding of the African condition or an appropriate recommendation for the resolution of the African crisis of identity. The important task for the African philosopher, then -if he is genuinely interested in seeing Africa emerge from the morass of ignorance, hunger and want in which she is presently submerged- is not the demonstration of the uniqueness of the African world outlook nor even a defence of the 'thoughts of the crowd'. The important thing, it seems to me, is to show the contribution which that world outlook has made to the determination of the African condition. Where this is seen to be negative, the search should be directed to an alternative outlook or combination of outlooks. An authentic African philosophy has to be a philosophy of action. It certainly cannot be a combative phenomenological sketch of the African world outlook.

Nothing in this point implies that we jettison all our traditional beliefs, social practices and values. Rather, the suggestion is that we critically analyse them with a view to determining which of their elements we can retain and which we can jettison in the light of contemporary socio-economic realities in Africa. It should therefore be obvious that nothing in the critical approach to the study of African thought implies a wholesale inculcation of the "scientific spirit". Rather the point is that we should not hesitate to imbibe aspects of that "spirit", or any other "spirit" for that matter, that we think, in combination with some useful aspects of our traditional world outlooks, can serve us better in the struggle for survival in a largely competitive world⁴².

Notes:

1. Significant contributions to the debate on this issue include the following: Kwasi Wiredu "On an African Orientation in Philosophy", Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy, July 1972, reprinted in Kwasi Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture (Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 26-36, Paulin Hountondji, African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, translated by Henry Evans with the collaboration of Jonathan Ree, (London: Hutchinson University Press for Africa, 1983), pp. 33-107; P.O. Bodunrin, "The Question of African Philosophy", Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, April, 1981, vol. 56, No. 216, pp. 161-179; Odera Oruka, "The Fundamental Principles in the Question of 'African Philosophy'" - Second Order, Vol. IV, Number 1, January 1975, pp. 44-55; Olabiyi Yai, "Theory and Practice in African Philosophy: The poverty of Speculative Philosophy", Second Order, Vol. VI, Number 2, July 1977, pp. 3-30; and K.C. Anyanwu, The African Experience in the American Market Place, (New York: Exposition Press, 1983), 119pp.
2. Kwasi Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture, (Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 62.
3. P.O. Bodunrin in P.O. Bodunrin (ed.), Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives, (University of Ife Press Ltd., 1985), p. XI.
4. See, for instance, Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarships (Kampala, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, 1970); and K.C. Anyanwu, The African Experience in the American Market Place, (New York: Exposition Press, 1983), 119pp.
5. Representative figures of this school of thought include Profs. Kwasi Wiredu, P.O. Bodunrin and Paulin Hountondji. See, for instance, Kwasi Wiredu, 1980, op.cit., P.O. Bodunrin, 1981, op.cit. and Paulin

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- Hountondji, 1983,op.cit..
6. Isidore Okpewho, "Myth and Rationality", Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies, No.1, April 1981, pp.31-32.
 7. Paulin Hountondji, "Reason and Tradition" in H.Odera Oruka and D.A.Masolo (eds.), Philosophy and Cultures, Proceedings of the 2nd Afro-Asian Philosophy Conference, October/November, 1981 (Nairobi: Bookwise Ltd., 1983), p.143.
 8. Abiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1981), p.70.
 9. See K.C. Anyanwu, "Philosophy and African Culture", The Philosopher: An Annual Magazine of the National Association of Philosophy Students, University of Ife Branch, Vol.2, No.1, December 1984, p.16.
 10. K.C. Anyanwu, 1983, op.cit., p.42.
 11. It should be noted, however, that our traditionalists do not seem to appreciate the temporal dimensions of the variations in the interpretation of experiences within, and between, cultures, hence, they erroneously present African world-views as static and unchanging.
 12. For a lucid and comprehensive history of the development of this thought, see Abiola Irele, 1981, op.cit., pp.67-116 and Abiola Irele, - Introduction to Paulin Hountondji, 1983, op.cit., pp.7-30. A useful account of the development of this thought, particularly its political aspect, can be found in Olsanwuche Esedebe, "The Emergence of Pan-African Ideas" in Onigu Otite (ed.) Themes in African Social and Political Thought, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publ., 1978), pp.75-103.
 13. Abiola Irele, 1983, op.cit., p.11.

14. Isidore Okpewhe,op.cit.,p.31.
15. Abiola Irele, 1981,op.cit.,p.97.
16. Now that the ideological battle for the recognition of the humanity of Africans has been won, we can settle down to a critical examination of some of those claims that were crucial pillars of this battle.We have to do this in order to map out realistic programmes for African development in all its interlocking facets.
17. Paulin Hountondji,1983,op.cit.,p.59.
18. Placide Tempels,Bantu Philosophy,(Paris:Presence Africaine,1959).
19. Abiola Irele,1983,op.cit.,p.16.
20. L.S.Senghor,Prose and Poetry, edited and translated by John Reed and Clive Wake,(London,Nairobi,Ibadan and Lusaka:Heinemann African Writers Series,1976),p.36.
21. See K.C.Anyanwu,1983,op.cit.,pp.61-75.
22. L.S.Senghor,1976,op.cit.,pp.29-30.The emphasis in the quotation is Senghor's.
23. Ibid.,pp.33-34.All emphases are that of Senghor.
24. See K.C.Anyanwu,1983,op.cit.,p.26.
25. This argument is put up by Anthony Appieh in his article,"Soyinka and the Philosophy of Culture" in P.O.Bodunrin (ed.),1985,op.cit.,p.257.
26. See Paulin Hountondji,1983,op.cit.,p.62.
27. Abiola Irele,1981,op.cit.,p.73.

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28. Cf. Tola Olu Pearce, "Medical Systems and the Nigerian Society" in Olayiwola A. Erinsho (ed.), Nigerian Perspectives in medical Sociology (published by the Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary Williamsburg, Virginia U.S.A., 1982), pp.119-120; and Godwin Sogolo, "On a Socio-Cultural Conception of Health and Disease" in A.T.Tymieniecka (ed.) Analecta Husserliana, Vol.XX, -1986, pp. 159-173.
29. For a very interesting historical account of this kind of interaction between science and religion, See R. Hooykaas, Religion and the rise of Modern Science (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1972).
30. J.B. Maund, "Rationality of Belief- Intercultural Comparisons" in S.I. Benn and G.W. Mortimore, Rationality and the Social Sciences (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), pp.46-47.
31. Cf. Kwasi Wiredu, 1980, op.cit., pp.37-50.
32. P.O. Bodunrin, 1981, op.cit., pp.172-173.
33. J.O. Sopido, "Notes on the Concept of Cause and Chance in Yoruba Traditional Thought", Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy, Vol.II, Number 2, July 1973, pp.12-20.
34. P.O. Borundin, 1981, op.cit., p.174.
35. Journal of Social Science, University of Malawi, Vol.10, 1983, pp.100-110.
36. Lawrence M. Hinman, "Can a Form of Life be Wrong?", Philosophy, July 1983, Vol.58, No.225, p.350.
37. Ibid., p.349.

38. This point is admirably made by Barry Baner and David Bloor in their article, "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge", in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (eds.), Rationality and Relativism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1982), pp. 19-47.
39. This, it seems to me, is the reason why the problem of "Cultural Identity and Individuation" is by no means easy to tackle. It is also, I suggest, the reason why it has not been easy to pin down the notion of "culture" or any of its associated concepts or elements to any neat definition.
40. P.O. Bodunrin, "Scientific-technical Rationality and African Identity" in Alwin Diemer (ed.), African and the Problem of Its Identity, (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang GmbH, 1985), p. 38.
41. D.A. Masolo, "Some Aspects and Perspectives of African Philosophy Today", Africa, Vol. XXXV, No. 3-4, September to December, 1980, p. 38.
42. I am grateful to Dr. Godwin Sogolo of the Dept. of Philosophy, Univ. of Ibadan for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Résumé

Cet article traite de la relation entre pouvoir, langage et construction de vérité, d'après la philosophie de Foucault. Tout comme Nietzsche, Foucault met l'accent sur la présence cachée, mais néanmoins présence universelle du pouvoir dans le langage, dans les normes de notre civilisation et, de cette façon, dans notre formation mentale, morale et physique; dans notre personnalité et notre culture. Ces formes de pouvoir ont plus d'influence que le pouvoir "matériel", comme la force physique ou économique dont parlent les théories marxistes par exemple. La science et tout une série de scientifiques spécialisés tels que thérapeutes, travailleurs sociaux, prêtres, écrivains jouent un rôle central dans la façon invisible de "discipliner" l'individu dans le monde moderne.

Le présent article traite en détail de la vision de Foucault de "l'architecture politique" cachée du langage humain, des mots, des phrases, des propositions et des énoncés de la parole (speech-acts). La question de la signification des mots et des énoncés admis fait l'objet d'une querelle, de manipulation, de stratégie etc., donc de pouvoir. Il ne s'agit pas du pouvoir d'une classe dominante, c'est un tout bien trop diffus; il faut plutôt penser à "l'expertocratie", au monde de l'expert qui maintient le système. Dans la société moderne, le pouvoir apparaît essentiellement dans la "manière de discipliner" qui se base sur ce qu'il est "raisonnable" ou "normal" de considérer; la "volonté de vérité".

FOUCAULT ON LANGUAGE AND POWER: A RECONSTRUCTION

Teodros Kiros

Introduction

The importance of the "word" as the discloser of human truths as well as the vehicle of thinking is not foreign to the tradition of political philosophy. Plato's Seventh Letter, for example, addressed itself to the relationship between the "word" as the name giver and the nature of thinking. Plato accused the sophists as well as the sophisticated poets of his day as the fundamental abusers of word or, broadly speaking, as the abusers of language. They abused language when they used it as a tool of mystifying thought. Language was even abused more when it was effectively used as a justification of lies. The concealed power of the word as the **presenter of truths** was far from the intentions of the clever sophists. The feigned truths of the sophists were exposed for what they are: sophisticated lies, by the sharp and ethical mind of Socrates. In this sense, we may conclude, Plato was acutely aware of the political dimension of the abuse of language.

Without directly naming Plato, but under his powerful spell, Foucault forcefully articulates the argument that language is not only the presenter of truth, as the late Heidegger contended or a communicator of truth as Habermas continues to argue, but is the tool of power. Power speaks through language--the language of the experts of knowledge. Power uses words, sentences and propositions to privilege certain modes of thinking and forms of life at the expense of the demolition of others. Power uses language to judge, to evaluate, to normalize, and to discipline the very fundamental ways by which we perceive the world.

The interpenetration of language and power has become intense and prominent during modernity. The rise of scientific discourse and the privileged position of representational thinking through the unusually pervasive role of the proposition has effectively prevented the entrance of meditative or non-scientific thinking--thinking through the

straightforwardness and sincerity of ordinary statements.

This paper seeks to show the subtle relationships between power, language and the construction of truths as Foucault sees it. An awareness if this intricate relationship is pivotal to modern political theory, a tradition of discourse that attempts to shed light on the following questions:

- (1) How are modern citizens susceptible to the subtle manipulation of language, of the type of language that does not teach the art of critical and meditative thinking?
- (2) How are the experts of scientific discourse manipulating language as such? What are their methods, if any?
- (3) In what ways does Foucault help us to discover our own self-thought and self-examined interests in order that we may become critically aware citizens capable of self-government in the ethical realm of seriously living our lives--taking care of ourselves.

I.What Is Power?

Long before Foucault, it was Nietzsche who, with a disarming honesty and astonishing consistency, attributed the very origin of language--the language of human speech--to the ubiquitous concept of power. The concepts of "good and evil" or "good and bad", Nietzsche lectured both his contemporaries and us the moderns, are not merely innocent words whose function is the facilitation of human thinking. In fact, these concepts are infused with the mystically designed power relations among and between human beings. Language itself is an expression of power as are the language-speaking human beings, through whom power makes its very presence felt by those upon whom power imposes itself. Power, whatever its precise nature may be, unmistakably **presences** itself insofar as its effects could be carefully analyzed in all human practices and activities: ethics, religion, science, medicine, sexuality, art, etc.. To understand what power **may be**, as opposed to definitively unravel what power **is**, the thinker-analyst should seek to

study the effects of power, which among other things, is the need to sensitively study the **values** that have formed modern men and women. These **values** are moral and political in essence (but not, as is often understood, apolitical), which leads Nietzsche to characterize the process of value formations as a **distinctly political** enterprise produced by **the subtle yet diffuse, present yet hidden play of power.**

In a famous passage, Nietzsche wrote:

Now it is plain to me, first of all, that in this theory, the source of the concept "good" has been sought and established in the wrong place: the judgment "good" did **not** originate with those to whom "goodness" was shown! Rather, it was "the good" themselves; that is to say, the **noble, powerful, high-stationed, and high-minded**, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is of the first rank, in contradiction to all the **low, low-minded, common and plebeian**. It was out of this pathos of distance that they first seized **the right to create values** and to coin names for values The pathos of nobility and distance, as aforesaid, the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a "below"--that is, the origin of the antitheses "good" and "bad". (The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to **conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power** on the part of the rulers: they say "this is this", they seal everything and event with a sound and, as it were, take possession of it.)¹

I would now like to submit the thesis that Foucault's project as a whole--his original concept of language, his unique understanding of the very linguistic conventions of medicine, the law, the social sciences,

and even his comprehension of our very private desires and passions--has been deeply penetrated by the negative meaning of power as Nietzsche forcefully characterized it above. Foucault, I argue, has internalized the meaning of power in the sense that Nietzsche understood it. I will now provide some key notions of power as Foucault understands the term, and in which the Nietzschean dimension is transparent:

I would like to distinguish myself from para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role because power would be a fragile thing if its only functions were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage, and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong, this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire--and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it.²

or again,

This reduction of power to law has three main roles:

- (1) It underwrites a scheme of power which is homogeneous for every level and domain--family or state, relation of education or production.
- (2) It enables power never to be thought of in other than negative terms: refusal, limitation, obstruction, or censorship. Power is what says no. The challenging of power, as thus conceived, can appear only as transgression.
- (3) It allows the fundamental operation of power to be thought of as that of a speech-act: enunciation of law, or discourse of prohibition. The manifestation of power takes on the pure form of "Thou Shalt Not".³

Again,

One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over the others. It is a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised. This seems to me to be the characteristic of the societies installed in the nineteenth century. Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns. Certainly everyone does not occupy the same position; certain positions preponderate and permit an effect of supremacy to be produced. This is so much the case that class domination can be exercised just to the extent that power is dissociated from individual might.⁴

Finally,

The power of the **Norm** appears through the disciplines. Is this the new law of modern society? Let us say rather that since the eighteenth century, it has joined other powers--the law, the word (parole) and the text, tradition--imposing new determinations upon them. The **Normal** is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and the establishment of the *ecoles normales* (teachers' training colleges); it is established in the effort to organize a national medical profession ... it is established in the standardization of industrial processes. Like surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity⁵

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an "ideological" representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called "discipline". We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represents", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of Truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.⁶

From the above passages that we provided, we can draw the following propositions about the concept of power:

- (1) Foucault's chief Nietzschean feature is that human beings are fundamentally value-creating beings; in their capacity of producing values, they created a language; the languages thus created are names of human objects and human practices; the concepts of "good and bad" or "good and evil" are the prime examples of how human beings exercise their reasoning and judgmental faculties; these concepts and many others like them tend to permeate the various ways in which we are formed--that is to say, the way we develop our mental, moral, and bodily-selves; in one word, it is the formation of character and culture.
- (2) The possibility of understanding the formation and constitutions of the characters and cultures of **modern individuals** (the individuals formed from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century) requires a subtle sensitivity to the power relations that are at work in the human and natural sciences via a study of the **evaluative premises** of the sciences, which modern individuals seem to have uncritically absorbed in the form of belief systems and **habitus**.
- (3) One of the most important effects of power is its astonishing production of highly "disciplined" individuals; the disciplined in-

dividual of modernity, however, did not consciously choose to discipline himself/herself. Rather, one of the silent forces of power is that it disciplines gently through the internalization of values, such as the law, the norm, or the normal, etc.. Power produces truths and non-truths.

- (4) The king, history, and the sovereign individual are not any longer useful to locate the origin of power; the king, the effective historical moment, and the genuinely sovereign individual are no longer the visible embodiments of power. Power has become truly invisible, its effects, however, run through the soul and body of the modern individual, it follows him/her up until his/her death, and its embodiments are all individuals--the individuals whose function is the disciplining of one another without the direct intervention of the king, the historical hero, or the sovereign ruler. Power governs indirectly.
- (5) Language in concert with the linguistic subject--namely the modern educator, the writer, the novelist, the public policy analyst, the priest, the psychoanalyst, the social worker, even the therapist-- come to the aid of power in that they function as the conscious and unconscious since they are themselves disciplined--**disseminators of hegemonic ideas**: norms, beliefs, or standards, etc..
- (6) The analysis of power must be extended beyond the well-known "materialist" Marxist thesis that the state and its apparatuses control, structure, determine or prohibit concepts of the good and evil, moral and immoral in an explicitly repressive way. For Foucault, in order for the state to explicitly practice the above repressive measures, it must already have existing power relations; the state is not fundamentally structural but super-structural; it invests meaning to a whole set of relations such as "the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology", and so on. To put it differently, **the state, as a super-structural source of power, governs indirectly through the disciplining power of ideas with distinct material effects on the everyday life.**

II. LANGUAGE AND POWER

For Foucault, the question or, if you prefer, the problem of language revolves around at least four central questions which I wish to formulate as follows:

- (1) How are the components of language: words, sentences, propositions, and statements formed, and what is the nature of the formations?
- (2) Who determines what is and is not to be accepted as language?
- (3) What are speech acts?
- (4) What are the explicit relationships between language--in the senses of (1), (2) and (3) above--and power?

I will deal with these four questions below.

1. How Are the Components of Language: Words, Sentences, Propositions, and Statements Formed?

For Foucault, the formation of language--the words, sentences, propositions, and statements--is always examined within the horizons of the intriguing questions of knowledge and power. The horizon of the knowledge and power questions envelops or frames the formation of the design of language, or if you prefer, the order of language. This linguistic horizon conditions the fundamental process by which letters are formed into words, words are further formed into sentences, out of which propositions are structured and through which thoughts are expressed in the form of statements. It is the hidden political architectonic of human speech that are Foucault's foci when he raises the question: what is it that we human beings do to the various components of language when we utter a word, construct a sentence, craft a proposition, or express thought, feeling, or intention? His question is never what we do **with** language, but rather what we do **to** it; or better still,

what can we do with language once we become conscious of what we do to it?

One of the chief tasks of words is the power given to them as they seek to **represent thoughts**. In this exceedingly difficult representational task, words really seek to literally represent thoughts, just like thought attempts to represent itself. The ideal of authentic representation, in which representation is equal to standing for, is the approximation of the most precise thinking done by the most adequate words.

As Foucault puts it, "from the classical age, language is deployed within representation and in that duplication of itself hollows itself out".⁷ Prior to the classical age, the signaling function of words, as well as the rhetorical use of words, mattered significantly; indeed, it is the sign function of words that commanded the attention of the linguist in his/her quest of the origin of human language, particularly the origin of the **phonetic act**--for example, the noise "Brr...". With the emphasis on the representational function of words arises, however the discussion of general grammar, that is the notion that words should be combined into a grammatical formation that will eventually constitute a linguistic convention, which language-speaking beings must necessarily master if what they say or what they write is to be accepted as language that makes sense.

Words of course, as Plato⁸ and Hobbes recognized, were initially defined arbitrarily such that a noise such as "Brr..." was not accepted as a sensible word, whereas a proposition such as "The cat is on the mat." was accepted as a sensible combination of words that is subject to verification. In the end, Hobbes, in particular, emphasized that words are nothing more than an arbitrarily founded system of notations, which were imposed upon language-speaking human beings by covenant and violence.⁹ The apparent order that one sees in language is imposed from outside; the order was not founded by **intersubjective agreement**; rather, it was imposed upon words by **violence**. The so-called universal language is ultimately a language founded upon domination, and not upon the free spirited dimension of intersubjective agreement. The

modern universal language, such as English, is the final by-product of a long historical evolution of the oldest "mother language". In Foucault's own words:

The oldest were the mother languages. The most archaic of all, since it was the tongue of the Eternal when He addressed Himself to men, was Hebrew, and Hebrew was thought to have given rise to Syriac and Arabic; then came Greek, from which both Coptic and Egyptian were derived; Latin was the common ancestor of Italian, Spanish, and French; lastly, "Teutonic" had given rise to German, English, and Flemish.¹⁰

Furthermore, in addition to the above evolutionary growth, languages evolved in accordance with the effects and impacts of migrations, victories and defeats, fashions and commerce; that is to say that the smooth evolution of the original language of the Eternal is deeply affected by the political dimension of power relations between the victors and vanquished, the exploiters and the exploited, the commercial invaders and the invaded. The continuous flow of the words of the Eternal are interrupted by the historical acts of the passions and the desires of the powerful, the arbitrary imposers of a system of notations which rigidly defined the representational function of words once and for all, or so it seems.

Words are often nothing more than human noises, human cries, human attempts to say something. It is, however, when words somehow become combined so as to produce the famous proposition that one can say that language definitely began, and this according to the classical age's one-sided view of language. For the classical age, language is a tool of communication made possible by the systematic ordering of words, the immediate consequence of which is the verifiable proposition. Thus, a word, in and for itself, is simply a human cry or a noise until after it joins another word or other words to form the discourse. Humans, like animals, can utter an expression A, but it is when humans, unlike animals, utter the proposition B that language become C--that is,

discourse.

A proposition is founded upon the logics of General Grammar, which is minimally composed of verb, subject, and object, out of which a proposition is designed--for instance, the proposition "This is John". The verb, in particular, is considered to be an indispensable part of language; the indispensability of the verb constitutes the ideology of this linguistic philosophy of the classical age. Foucault is determined to penetrate this ideology so as to unmask the undercurrent of power relations upon which it is based.

Put the following question to Foucault--what is the function of the verb in language? Foucault replies: "The verb **affirms**."¹¹ Consider the function of the verb in the proposition--"This is John." The verb "is" here judges by affirming the links between the words "this" and "John"; it thus says that "this" is "John", but not that "this" is "Paul". By affirming certain links it excludes other; thus "This is X." cannot mean "This is Y."; "This is John." cannot mean "This is not John.". The entire essence of language is concentrated upon that undisputed and wholly internalized affirmative power of the verb.¹² As Foucault puts it:

Without it [the verb], everything would have remained silent, and though men, like certain animals, would have been able to make use of their voices well enough, yet not one of those cries hurled through the jungle would ever have proved to be first link in the great chain of language.¹³

The verb, as was indicated earlier, is an indispensable and powerful part of language. Remember that it is only a part. The whole is language as such which, among other things, was founded upon the relationship of the word to what it is a sign of. The classical age abolishes the importance of the sign, elevates the importance of representation and dogmatizes the affirmative power of the verb, the "verb to be". In the course of time, the verb, which is only a very important part of language, comes to dominate the structure of language. The part becomes the whole; the verb becomes language as such. But asks

Foucault, "from where does this power derive?"¹⁴ Foucault answers: "Comparing language to a picture, one late-eighteenth-century grammarian defines nouns as forms, adjectives as colors, and the verb as the **canvas** itself, upon which the colors are visible".¹⁵

Words classify the things of external nature as well. Thus, "things", such as Earth or Sun, are called substantial nouns whereas those that signify human manners, such as good, just, or round, are designated by the name, adjectival nouns. The substantival, as opposed to the adjectival, noun connotes "subsistence" or "unperishability" of things that can subsist by themselves; adjectivals are marked by their "perishability" and "accidentality" in marked contrast to substantivals. Thus, substances are designated by substantivals whereas accidents are designated by adjectivals. By these modes of designations, words began to become articulated discourse; they become devices under the service of the speaking subject. Through the power of the new articulative function allotted to words, words which originally were nothing more than unpenetrable human cries become breakable and controllable. The "endless murmurs", the inexhaustible values that words are impregnated with, gradually gives way to the classical period's dream of reducing words to propositions, and thus "... each word, down to the least of its molecules, had to be a meticulous form of nomination".¹⁶ Eventually, the propositional form of language becomes the object of a science, the most privileged mode of representing true thought.

The power of words to name is a fundamental function of language, which Plato long ago argued in the Seventh Letter.¹⁷ Human beings, as speakers of language, emit inarticulate cries very much like animals do. That first inarticulate cry was the beginning of language; it was an expression of a deep feeling. That inarticulate cry, that gesture, was meaningful; it said something, it stood for something, and it was an attempt to name something. It was this something that Plato attempted to characterize in the Cratylus; since then, the naming function of language has become a prominent feature of the origins of language. The naming function of language in the wake of the classical period develops into the theory of designation.

Designation, as opposed to simple naming, implies the possibility of ordering human cries into words and sounds that can generalize similar feelings, gestures under one totalizing category. Under the science of designation, "... it is no longer a particular oak that is called tree, but anything that includes at least a trunk and branches. The name also became attached to a conspicuous circumstance: night came to designate not the end of this particular day, but the period of darkness separating all sunsets from all dawns. Finally, it attached itself to analogies: everything was called a leaf that was as thin and flexible as the leaf of a tree".¹⁸

Foucault concludes his complex reflections on the origin of language with a striking passage that reads:

From the theory of the proposition to that of derivation, all classical reflection upon language-- all that was called "general grammar"-- is merely a detailed commentary upon the simple phrase: "language analyzes". It was upon this point, in the seventeenth century, that the whole Western experience of language was founded-- the experience that had always led men to believe, until then, that **LANGUAGE SPOKE**.¹⁹

For the classical age, the name-- that ideal of impeccable precision, that brightness which is beyond all confusion-- is the end of discourse. I will put all that has been said thus far in a notational form, which I call it (1) below.

(1) For the classical period, to speak language A is to be able, and to wish, to master how to use words. Through words, one can at the minimum articulate human cries such that one could then proceed in an ordered way to articulate sound X, and then to designate X with the precise name Y; the end of this systematic procedure is the representation of thought Z. This is the level of precision that language has reached during modernity.

In what follows, I will proceed to discuss the relationship between language, as characterized above, and what Foucault calls "life and labor"; it is hoped that this discussion will complicate out ordinary understanding of language as the basic tool with which human beings communicate. There may be more to language that goes beyond the simple task of naming-- for example, the complex relationships among practical activity (e.g., life, labor) and language. It is precisely this intriguing relationship that I wish to summarize below.

First, **labor**. How did this word, this concept, come to mean a definitive articulation of human activity? In order to feed themselves, a biologically determined human need, human beings discovered that by applying their intelligence, by carefully disciplining themselves, and by a skillful use of their muscles, they can work on land, and thereby produce food by which they can subsist. They found an already carefully ordered word and concept--labor-- which they then used to designate **their life-producing and protecting activity**. Note here, however, that it was not merely the ready-to-hand availability of a simple name and its representative function that enabled human beings to designate the sophisticated activity of labor. The facilitative function of the word constituted only part of the human story of the origin of language. It was the human need of food, and the subsequent application of intelligence and muscles in order to conquer hunger, and overcome scarcity and death that made it possible for human beings (a) to discover the human activity of labor, (b) to envelop out of curiosity the new activity by a word, a concept, (c) to appropriate intelligently a human cry and to characterize it precisely as an activity. As Foucault ably puts it, "It is no longer in the interplay of representation that economics finds its principle, but near the perilous region where life is in confrontation with death".²⁰ I would like to put what has been said in the form (2) below.

- (2) A practical human need A made it possible for human beings to reflectively capture, in language B, that very human need A by calling it, say, "labor"; a practical human need provides a conducive condition for language to emerge. Therefore, there is an

inextricable interrelationship between the human proposition--"This human activity is called L (labor)."-- and the struggle between life and death, which made it possible for that particular proposition to make sense, to meaningfully capture the precise essence of human practical activity. Life and language are interpenetrating such that the need to subsist implies labor.

Although it was average human beings who, in the quest at struggling against the facticity of their finitude, discovered language to identify and characterize an otherwise dormant practical activity and called it labor, it was the classical economists--Smith and Ricardo--who intellectualized what human beings simply called laboring. Thus, for Smith, labor is the constant measure of the natural price of things; and for Ricardo, the conditions of production: the cost of production, the variety of the soil, and the ever-fluctuating price of labor become the necessary conditions that go on to determine the absolute value of labor. Marx further complicates the discussion by introducing the radical theme of the extraction of surplus value at the point of any production under the conditions of alienation in order to capture the essence of labor.²¹

Note that the word labor did not mean the same thing, or put more precisely, the word labor was not used to characterize an abstract activity in essentially the same way. Thus, for Smith, it was the absolute measure of value; for Ricardo, it was the most unreliable measure of value; whereas for Marx, it was a denial of the measure of human value insofar as it was grounded upon the exploitation of man by man.²² Each concept was a mode that produced truth. In a formal language, labor does not have the same meaning to Smith, Ricardo, and Marx in that it could be an absolute measure, a non-reliable measure, or a denial of value. The question that one is tempted to ask here is that: which of these three views of labor, or productions of truth, is an adequate characterization of what the average person is doing, and which the average person has linguistically called labor? The answer to this question is still being hotly debated by classical, neo-classical, and

Marxist thinkers. Following Foucault's thinking, however, we can at least provisionally say that the answer to this question is, in the end, determined not "scientifically" but politically. The conception of labor is integrated as a nature-like language by **conventionally** hegemonic linguistic **expressions**, which stipulates that laboring is a natural process in which employees work for employers in exchange for given salaries.

2. Who Determines What Is and What Is Not Accepted as Language?

Foucault's thesis in his attempt to answer the question is that: it is those who **speak, and speak in specific ways, under definite circumstances, assuming certain authorities and strategists** who determine what is and is not accepted as language. In a passage in which Nietzsche's name is directly mentioned, Foucault writes:

For Nietzsche, it was not a matter of knowing what good and evil were in themselves, but of who was being designated, or rather who was speaking when one said Agathos to designate oneself and Deilos to designate others. For it is there, in the holder of the discourse and, more profoundly still, in the possessor of the word that language is gathered together in its entirety.²³

By using concepts such as discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, transformation, tradition, influence, author, development, evolution, etc., we take the risk of truly disturbing the tranquility of the unities and thus are confronted with genuine theoretical problems. These concepts are inherently shaky unities and questionable hypotheses. These concepts must be dissolved, disturbed, and deconstructed if they are to be usefully appropriated.

Statements, like concepts, are also very questionable unities which ought to be subjected to deconstruction. Statements, as components of language, are not adequate for the understanding of the constitution of language either. From the standpoint of authority, it is the speaking subject, with definite intentions, and with a strategic mastery of the

rhetorical dimension of language, who states: "X is Y." That which makes this particular statement acceptable, among other things, is the authority that Person A assumes when A uses the affirmative word "is" to assert the statement "X is Y.". Furthermore, Person A, as a speaking subject, articulates his/her thoughts, intentions, or feelings by making statements, which actually hide certain invisible murmurs. The apparent statement then is covered by the hidden sub-language, or sub-text; a statement is thus less of a complete assertion than it is an event, an inexhaustible human cry, the meaning of which is never completely understood. Consequently, one easily speaks without fully disclosing what one means; and, due to a lack of critical awareness as well as one's finitude constraints without fully disclosing the meaning of one's statements. The speaker often assumes that his or her statements are true, incorrigible, unlimited by finitude, and thus acceptable propositions. The statements of the law, medicine, psychology, biology, economics, or political science--the human sciences as such--are profoundly affected by their uncritical acceptance of concepts or statements as unproblematic. It is this arrogance of the finite speaking subject, who uses human discourse--such as concepts, statements, propositions, or speech acts--without an awareness of his/her finitude and historicity that disturbs Foucault.

Statements are not unities, not coherently developed, and do possess crystal-clear meanings; instead, they are divisions, incoherent, with inexhaustible meanings.²⁴ The statements of the human sciences are filled with the specific languages of experts. It is always the doctor (representing medicine), the psychologist, or the judge (representing the law) who are speaking. Those who speak are conferred with the authority to speak; they speak within a linguistic community that is itself penetrated by power, of which the conferring of the authority to speak is a definite convention.

We must now ask Foucault: what then is a statement? We must further ask: Is a statement a proposition, or a sentence, or a speech act? Foucault's response may be summarized as follows. **A statement is not a proposition.** Consider the statements (a) "No one heard." and (b)

"It is true that no one heard." These two statements are indistinguishable from a logical point of view. Both statements seek to report that something did not get heard by someone. Statement (a) does it in such a way that it is not properly structured since it lacks the verb "is", whereas statement (b) is propositionally well formed and has a different enunciative function--it begins with "it is true that ...", whereby a report is being asserted as true. Clearly, statements are like propositions in that they have the well-formedness of a typical proposition, but they are unlike propositions in that both have distinct enunciative functions. If a propositional structuration is a necessary and sufficient condition for a statement to be a proposition, then (a) is not a proposition whereas (b) is. Foucault argues that this criterion is determined by power, and is not objectively convincing.

Is a statement a sentence? Consider the following statement: "that man." "That man." is a statement, but is it a sentence? Strictly speaking, according to grammarians, the statement is not a sentence in that it lacks verb, subject, and predicate. The subject-predicate validity talk of the grammarians is really a dogma; that is impervious to thought and discussion. But a dogma, by definition, precludes the possibility of critical validation and, in that sense, cannot be justifiably used as a valid criterion which is to be used to distinguish a proposition from an ordinary statement. Foucault's reasons for the rejection of the above criterion is tied with his attempt to analyze the question: is a statement a speech act? Foucault does not say much about speech acts, but I will reserve the discussion for later when I deal with the third question, which asks what speech acts are.

A statement, when used by those who speak, defies a strict definition, but it does have an enunciative function which is determined by the rules of use--rules that are anchored upon the passions of the holders of power. A statement such as "The Golden Mountain is in California." is not accepted as a meaningful statement because it has a defective (unhappy) structure in that the possible referent cannot be verified and that verification is an accepted criterion by which statements are designated as true and false. Consider the sentence: "Color-

less green ideas sleep furiously." Clearly, given the accepted rules of usage, the sentence is meaningless. The statement does not fit the accepted frameworks of language games. Consider, however, that the sentence may be a description of a dream, part of a poetic text, a coded message, or the language of a drug addict or a mad man/woman. If it is under any or all of the above circumstances, could the sentence be meaningful? Sure, you might say, particularly if the rules of usage included another rule which stipulates: "Any proposition is a statement if a part of the proposition refers to something which is not necessarily a visibly existing thing, but a **referential possibility**." According to this rule, the sentence can become an acceptable statement if the rules of usage are left open to generate new meanings with new references.

Statements are not brute facts, but "laws of possibility"²⁵, which defy the facticity of things; statements are not authored by undefinable human speakers of language; statements are parts of a network of other statements, but never are they "independent statements"; statements are not "events" that occurred in a particular time and place; statements are not "ideals" that are one day going to be completely understood without traces of any dark region that is not fully known.²⁶ For Foucault,

... The enunciative function reveals the statement as a specific and paradoxical object, but also as one of those objects that men produce, manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose and recompose, and possibly destroy Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry.²⁷

It is precisely this powerfully articulated statement that allows me to argue that this statement is a direct descendant of Nietzsche's forceful statement which I quoted earlier: "For it is there, in the **holder** of the discourse and, more profoundly still, in the **possessor** of the

word that language is gathered together in its entirety." Foucault has inventively appropriated the Nietzschean insight of the origin of language in the corridors of the holders and possessors of the word, the proposition, the statement, or language as such.

The statement, for Foucault, cannot be defined in terms other than the language of power: challenge, struggle, manipulation, composition, or destruction. However, we can describe a statement. A statement, we might say, is a systematic ordering of words with the following characteristics:

- (a) it belongs to a person's speech in a text;
- (b) it has neither hidden or visible definite meanings, but only an infinite possibility of meanings;
- (c) it is a product of history which is practiced by men, and is therefore historically analyzable;
- (d) it has an enunciative function revealed with flashes of meanings in sentences, affirmations, series of propositions articulated by a finite human user of words; and
- (e) it makes possible the understanding of speaking a human language, or engaging in a discourse.

A discourse, for Foucault, has a technical meaning:

We shall call discourse a group of statements insofar as they belong to the same discursive formation; it does not form a rhetorical or formal unity, endlessly repeatable, whose appearance or use in history might be indicated (and, if necessary, explained); it is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history; the problem is not therefore to ask oneself how and why it was able to emerge ... it is from beginning to end, historical ... ²⁸

With these bold words, Foucault seeks to understand language not as a speech act, not even an ideal communicative, but simply a historicized

discourse.

I asked earlier: who determines what is and is not to be accepted as language? I am now in a position to directly answer the question based on the details I provided above. Foucault is well known for his denial of one of the Marxist dogmatics--the existence of an empirically identifiable "ruling class" that determines the contents of the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the modern human subject. For him, the ruling class, a highly self-controlled class itself, is much too diffusely spread to be in a position of determining how individuals who are structurally outside of its circle ought to think, feel, and intend. Thus, it is not the ruling class who systematically determine what is and is not to be accepted as language. Rather, it is those who speak: the medical expert, the high priests, the judges, the acclaimed university professors, the psychologists, the anthropologists, the sociologists, the political scientists, or the economists--the **experts** as such--who diffuse certain vocabulary, disseminate certain "normal" ideas, establish certain models, popularize effective notions of the good, the noble, the beautiful, and then systematically intervene in the private and public spheres to educate the human subject of modernity. Those who speak do of course frequently speak as members of a class; to that extent, the concept of class does illuminate the social positions, the fields, or the class spaces of those who are speaking. The discourses of the experts, however, are relatively autonomous from a direct determination and linear guidance by the ruling class. **The discourses are themselves normalized and disciplined by hegemonic ideas with a material basis--ideas that give language its component words, sentences, propositions, and statements--which are in turn systematically ordered as acceptable modes of discourse with conventionally internalized rules of the formation of objects, concepts, effective strategies of manipulation, rules of appropriation, inclusion, exclusion, and accumulation.**

3. What Are Speech Acts?

Relative to the intricate reflections on statements, Foucault does not discuss speech acts in a sufficiently extensive way. Consequently, my explications of speech acts below will be very brief.

In my earlier discussion of statement, it was concluded that statements cannot definitively be distinguished from sentences and propositions; whenever rigid distinctions are made, they are made not so much by "good reason" than by conventions which are often beyond critical discussions but are merely bordering on the threshold of beliefs. Some beliefs are accepted as knowledge, others are outrightly rejected. The discussion earlier included what speech acts are and whether statements are equal to speech acts. It is this theme that I wish to examine here. Foucault asks: "Can one not say that there is a statement wherever one recognize and isolate an act of formulation--something like the speech act referred to by the English analysts?"²⁹ The term "speech act" does not refer to (a) speaking aloud or speaking to oneself, (b) writing, (c) the intention of the individual who is speaking, or (d) the result of what a speaker has said. Rather, the term "speech act" refers to the **operation** that is being carried out by words in such a way that words are invoked to exact: promise, order, decree, contrast, agreement or observation, and also refers to **statements** that are made regardless of their consequences.³⁰ In a nutshell, the above is what characterizes speech acts for Foucault.

Statements are not enough to produce speech acts; more is needed to understand what speech acts are. Statements such as "I promise to do A", or "I accept B as my wedded wife", etc. are also individually formed sentences, and the sentences of which the statements are formed, as was discussed above, are composed of words--words that are arbitrarily chosen, objectified, and deeply penetrated by human passions, desires, intentions or thoughts. All those problematics that haunt the origin of language equally, strongly, and profoundly haunt the origin of speech acts as well. Speech acts, contrary to the admirable ideals of the "English analysts", cannot escape the abuses of statements. Speech

acts, like statements in particular and language in general, suffer considerably under human political power. **Speech acts, like statements, are used and abused, circulate, appear and disappear, emerge and hide, allow and prohibit desires, are subservient to and defiant of masters, participate in human challenges and struggles, and become theme of appropriation and rivalry.** Speech acts are consequently not above language; they are intimately bound with the destiny of words, sentences, and propositions in the hands of the power-holding speaking subject. Speech acts are subject to uses and abuses by the **holders of power**; they are integral aspects of historicized discourses.

4. What Are the Explicit Relationships between Language and Power?

It will be remembered that the central conclusion of Question 1 is that the components of language--words, sentences, propositions, and statements--are intimately interconnected in such a way that words in particular were stamped with arbitrarily imposed rigid meanings. Thus, languages originated in the form of a multimeaning-ridden human cry, human noise, and human gesture. The cry, the noise, and the gesture, however, give way to the origin of the word; the word in turn is assigned a series of representational, classificatory, functional, and designatory tasks, articulated by the birth of sentences, which are further ordered into statements, and finally speech acts. It was further argued earlier in Question 2 and Question 3 that language in general and speech acts in particular are, in a structured way, organized, circulated, and manipulated by the holders and possessors of power. It is the intricate connection among 1, 2, and 3 above with the subtle and hidden structure, role, and function of power that I will now address.

People are speakers of language, and their speech proliferates. The proliferation of speech does not readily strike us as perilous in any apparent way. The structure of human discourse, of which human speeches are a part, however, is "at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and dangers, to cope with chance

events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality".³¹ This is Foucault's first hypothesis in his famous work--The Origin of Discourse--the themes of which will be analyzed below.

In any society, there are rules of exclusion, however silent or salient they may be. The most well-known rules are those of **prohibition**. All speakers of language somehow come to the realization that they cannot say, do, or express anything they want. There are various forms of prohibition: rules, covering objects, rituals, and the privileged or exclusive right to speak about a particular subject, each of which complements and reinforces one another in everyday life.

From the Middle Ages onwards, however, the methods of prohibition are craftily changed. The most conspicuous change was the introduction of the concepts of the **reasonable**, rational, and **normal** on the one hand, and the contrasting concepts of the unreasonable, irrational, and mad on the other hand. Put differently, reason is explicitly used to distinguish the allowable from the prohibited. Thus prohibited were the words, speeches, desires, or the feelings of the mad. Whatever the non-conformist, the eccentric, the apparently wild, the unsubmitive, the rebellious, the stubbornly critical, or the innovative spirits said, thought and felt was overtly and covertly designated as mad, and consequently dismissed as mere noise, worthy, if at all, only of symbolic relevance in the theater, on the streets of an alienated city, or in the abandoned corners of shanty towns, prisons, and hospitals. The respected linguistic utterances, which were to be elevated to the status of the royal roads to truth, were those deemed and honored as being sufficiently rational, reasonable, and normal to function as the genuine, and serious sources of the "will to truth".³²

This "will to truth", Foucault claims, enjoyed and continues to enjoy the freely given institutional support of the **power holders**: firstly, the experts as such and, secondly, publishers, editors of books, journals, or literary figures, each of whom are profoundly penetrated by human desires and power.³³ The "will to truth"--contrary to what is explicitly affirmed, namely that truth is free of domination and accessible to all human beings--in fact feeds on the silent rules of prohibi-

tion, exclusion, discrimination, one-sidedness, prejudice, and often dogmas which are beyond interrogation and beyond critical discussion. The "will to truth" suppresses, judges, and kills gently.

The ideal of commentaries, as was just asserted, is the unfolding, the discovery, and the explication of hidden meanings within the phenomenon/field of the "same", the "repetition"; the ideal of a discipline, on the other hand, is not interpretation of meaning, but the endless formulation of "fresh propositions". These fresh propositions--in order to be accepted, understood, and used by the dominant figures within the restricted circles of **discipline** leaders--must satisfy certain necessary and often sufficient conditions. The propositions must belong to an identifiable and known theoretical field, must use "**conceptual instruments and techniques** of a well-defined field", must somehow situate themselves within the context of the "within the true", and should not contain too many infelicities and brute errors.

Both commentaries and disciplines as discourses, "constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules".³⁴ Discourses are controlled by implicit and explicit controls. Rituals, contrary to public beliefs, are subtle means of restriction, and often operate without a speaker's awareness. To give a public speech is to consent uttering linguistic expressions within the horizon of the ritual; the ritual **defines** the qualifications required of the speaker. The minimal requirements are: (a) the speaker has to be the appropriate person to utter expression, thought, or feeling; (b) the speaker must definitely occupy an honored, respected, recognized position in a theoretical field; (c) the speaker must exhibit a mastery of the relevant gesture--bodily expressions, signs, symbols--to his/her addresses, and (d) the speaker discreetly follows the supposed, or imposed meaning of words that are being used. All discourses and disciplines see to it in their own systematic ways that conditions (a), (b), (c), and (d) are adhered to by the speakers who speak as representatives of certain theoretical fields.

There are also "fellowships of discourse", whose function is to

preserve or reproduce discourse, to see to it that knowledge and information is circulated to certain individuals **only**, and that certain forms of knowledge are kept in secret since they are sources of the **aristocracy of knowledge**; in this capacity, they perform their knowledge power, and they use knowledge itself as **power**. Religious, political, and medical discourses in particular are the most secretive knowledge and sensitive discourses in the hands of the experts of modernity. "Fellowships of discourses" are much more dangerous than doctrines in that they, unlike doctrines, are not diffused easily or noticeable. Doctrines have recognizable and identifiable community of followers, however uncritical the community of adherents may be; fellowships of discourse govern without identifiable leaders and known followers; doctrines have speaking subjects-subjects who speak, lead, and convert via familiar ideas and concepts, and explicitly appeal to a given class, social group, race, nationality, interest, struggle, or revolt; fellowship of discourse governs and appeals covertly.

We must also recognize the way discourse is appropriated socially. The social appropriation of discourse is most evident in the field of education. As Foucault bluntly put it: "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it".³⁵ The educational system is, for Foucault, nothing more than the ritualization of language, particularly the originary component of language which is the word as such. The educational system ritualizes the word and the speakers of the words; it particularly develops "doctrinal groups" and fellowships of discourse; it uses erudition and knowledge as powers--powers that do not so much enlighten but deliberately obscure, hide, mystify, exclude, or limit. What is true of education is also true of judicial and medical systems.

Discourses are not based, as is often asserted, on the principles of continuity, universality, and disclosure of the inner depth, the unthought, the unconscious, the temporarily hidden, or even the essence of things themselves. Foucault rejects the above principles; in their stead, he introduces new principles, which are **discontinuity, specificity,**

and exteriority. When one is thinking, feeling, or simply speaking, we must not uncritically assume that one is thinking, feeling, and speaking an idea in which there is a residue of the unconscious which should be rendered conscious, or an incomplete idea which should be completed, or the implicit which should become explicit, or the unsaid which must be completely and competently said. None of the above assumptions prevail in true discourse. Discourse is marked by the distinguishing feature of **discontinuity**, composed of identities and differences. Similarly, the principle of **specificity** declares that discourses are **not** characterized by a system of significations or a forest of symbols--significations and symbols that are anxiously waiting for the patient disclosure in the hands of the speaking subject. The speaking subject in fact is known for the violence, as opposed to patient deciphering; he/she does to the things of the world, if not to the world itself. Finally, the principle of **exteriority** holds that if we are to ever understand what discourses are, we had better pay serious attention to the appearances of external things.

By stressing the three principles, Foucault seeks to undermine the traditional history of ideas so as to replace it with the single thesis that ideas are neither continuous nor exclusively about self-consciousness on the route toward absolute knowledge (Hegel).³⁶ I asked the question earlier: what are the explicit relationships between language--in the senses of Questions 1, 2, and 3 discussed-- and power? I am now in a position to answer this questions in a series of propositions:

- (1) Foucault, following Nietzsche, considers the will to truth as the will to power, and that power is augmented by knowledge and that knowledge is never objective or disinterested. Knowledge is selfish since "it is the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other."³⁷ Words, sentences, propositions, statements, and speech acts are ultimately grounded upon the play of instincts, impulses, desires, and fear. Language is then produced on the state where the above elements struggle, challenge, manipulate, rival against each other. Language is not

- the effect of harmony--an inherent telos oriented toward understanding--but is the effect of hatred, resentment, and struggle.
- (2) Prior to the modern age, the intellectual functioned as the conscience, consciousness, and even the eloquence of a suffering, stifled, and suppressed community. The intellectual used, or attempted to use, language to organically articulate, analyze, or disclose subtle political, social, and economic relationships manifested in the networks of power. Gone are those days! The intellectual now, at the height of modernity, has become an "object" or "instrument" in the spheres of knowledge, truth, consciousness, and discourse. Previously, the intellectual spoke through and with knowledge; strove for truth; attempted to maintain dignity, principles, and uprightness; and used discourses to explain, to illuminate, and to conscientiously decipher. Now, knowledge, truth, and discourses speak through the intellectual; the intellectual is no longer the subject but merely an object, an instrument of discourses. The intellectual **assumes** the right to speak and to represent others; with that assumption, the intellectual has taken away something precious from others--the fundamental right to speak, to think, to feel, and to desire. Nobody can truly speak, think, or feel for others. Speaking for others is a fundamental manifestation of power.
- (3) The way in which language as such is manipulated by power is visible and invisible; appears and disappears; is performed gently and brutally; threatens and exercises force; and socializes through hegemonic interests and norms. Power is ubiquitous, enigmatic, and conditioned by class struggles, or secretive. Diffuse power disciplines through **habitus** as opposed to mere habits, manipulates the passions and desires. There is an undeniable relationship between the origin of language, power, desires, and human interests.³⁸ Power is everywhere and nowhere, and yet language is inescapably affected by it.³⁹ Power is there for a structured purpose; language is infused with power, and power feeds on structured dispositions or habituses.

Foucault on Language and Power

Notes:

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecco Homo. Edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) pp. 25-26.
2. Michel Foucault, Power Knowledge (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 57.
3. Ibid., pp. 139-140.
4. Ibid., p. 156.
5. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) p. 184.
6. Ibid., p. 194.
7. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p. 73.
8. Plato, "Seventh Letter", in Hans-George Gadamer's Dialogue and Dialectic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) pp. 93-124.
9. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p. 82.
10. Ibid., p. 89.
11. Ibid., p. 94.
12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 95.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 103.
17. Plato, "Seventh Letter", in Hans-George Gadamer's *Dialogue and Dialectic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) p. 100.
18. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p. 113.
19. Ibid., p. 115.
20. Ibid., p. 257.
21. Ibid., pp. 255-263.
22. I have given a detailed and original reading of economics and moral philosophy in Smith, Ricardo, and Marx, which parallels Foucault's own interpretations in many aspects. My work, however, is more constructive than Foucault's analytics of values. Teodros Kiros, The Human Condition in Africa: Political Economy Encounters Morality (Forthcoming).
23. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p. 305.
24. Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) pp. 1-71.
25. Ibid., p. 91.

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26. Ibid., pp. 91-104.
27. Ibid., p. 105.
28. Ibid., p. 117.
29. Ibid., pp. 82-83.
30. Ibid., p. 83.
31. Ibid., p.216.
32. Ibid., pp. 218-219.
33. Ibid., p. 219.
34. Ibid., p. 224.
35. Ibid., p. 227.
36. Ibid., pp. 229-237.
37. Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 203.
38. Ibid., pp. 229-237.
39. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969) p. 93. For a truly clear--perhaps the clearest--formulation of power that Foucault gives, see the discussion on pp. 92-97.

Summary

The article gives a critical analysis of Jean Piaget's conception of a genetic epistemology.

A short historical survey of theories in epistemology brings out the originality of Piaget's views.

The author points out the strengths of Piaget's genetic epistemology and finally formulates some profound criticism.

Causalité et Réalité chez Jean Piaget;
Approche Critique de l'Épistémologie Génétique¹

Mombo Kubele N'Suka

La philosophie des sciences suscite à l'heure actuelle auprès de nombreuses personnes une curiosité et un intérêt certains. Il en est ainsi non seulement parce que l'essor de la science est aujourd'hui considérable, mais aussi parce que toute philosophie, à un moment ou à un autre de sa méditation, est amenée à réfléchir sur la science et à lui assigner une place parmi les oeuvres de l'esprit.

Par ailleurs, lorsque l'on considère les réalisations techniques de la science, on est frappé par l'admiration que les hommes d'aujourd'hui leur vouent, l'espoir qu'ils investissent en elle et, parfois aussi, la crainte qui, à leur sujet, les étirent. Dans ce dernier cas surtout l'on se demande si l'homme n'est pas en train d'être aliéné par le développement et les conséquences d'une machine qu'il a lui-même mise en marche. L'on comprend alors et aisément que les progrès théoriques de la science puissent poser et posent des questions d'interprétation qui, bien des fois, renouvellent les problèmes philosophiques classiques et de temps à autre leur trouvent des réponses inattendues.

La plus importante de ces questions est sans conteste celle touchant la réalité du monde extérieur. A son sujet bien des questions surgissent dont celles-ci: le monde qui nous entoure est-il pensable, connaissable? Y a-t-il entre notre pensée et lui une certaine correspondance, une certaine parenté?

C'est pour répondre à ces questions et à bien d'autres analogues, et pour lever des points d'interrogation suspendus dans notre tête que nous avons jugé utile de concentrer nos efforts sur un thème de recherche où se trouveraient confrontés l'intelligence et le monde matériel, et de prendre Piaget comme réflecteur, lui qui a suffisamment abordé ce problème.

¹. Résumé de la thèse de doctorat soutenue le 12 février 1988 à L'Université de Lubumbashi, Zaïre.

Pour résoudre ce problème, Piaget a eu recours au concept de genèse de la causalité aux fins d'en découvrir l'infrastructure sensori-motrice. Pour ce faire, il a dû recenser les réactions du nouveau-né à toute forme de stimulus externe.

Le objet de cet article consiste donc en une étude critique du concept de genèse de la causalité tel qu'il est vu, présenté et analysé par Jean Piaget dans son épistémologie génétique. Parce que critique, cette étude nous conduira donc à dégager une éventuelle originalité de sa conception.

L'originalité de la solution piagétienne

Pour faire ressortir l'originalité de la solution piagétienne au problème de la causalité, il nous a paru nécessaire de considérer le concept de causalité à travers l'histoire de la pensée. Cette histoire nous paraît, c'est aussi l'avis du célèbre philosophe écossais John Burnet, comme la voie obligée par laquelle les concepts se renouvellent.

Avant Aristote, les premiers philosophes ont cherché la cause première des phénomènes de la nature qui les environaient. De leurs conceptions respectives il se dégage un dénominateur commun: cette cause première était conçue comme une réalité matérielle. Une telle conception traduisait, de toute évidence, une vision du monde moniste et transcendante.

L'histoire de la causalité d'Aristote à Maine de Biran est celle de la simplicité croissante. En effet, des quatre causes distinguées par Aristote, puis deux unies en une seule - formelle et efficiente - de Descartes à Maine de Biran nous assistons au passage d'une conception analytique de la causalité (celle dans laquelle le rapport rationnel entre la cause et l'effet est perçu comme un rapport de déductibilité) à une conception synthétique (celle où la cause et l'effet sont unis par un lien surajouté et qui demeure extérieur à ses termes).

C'est Hume qui aurait joué un rôle appréciable dans cette transformation dans la mesure où, réfléchissant sur la physique de Newton, il aurait mis en exergue l'hétérogénéité irréductible de la cause et de l'effet, c'est-à-dire l'impossibilité de passer de l'une à l'autre selon les exigences de la seule raison. Hume a donc aussi ruiné la conception analytique de la causalité.

Kant a été amené, quant à lui, à fonder autrement la relation causale. Le concept de cause désignant, selon lui, une sorte particulière de synthèse consistant en ce que, à quelque chose, par exemple A, quelque chose d'entièrement différent, par exemple B, s'ajoute selon une règle.

On voit là transparaître la vision du monde dualiste: mécaniste d'une part (empirisme: Hume) et rationaliste d'autre part (Descartes et Kant). Enfin, pour Maine de Biran la causalité est conçue comme un sentiment de notre moi interne projeté sur le monde grâce à l'effort musculaire.

En considérant les théories des épistémologues contemporains: Meyerson et Brunshvicg, nous avons retenu les considérations ci-après: Pour Meyerson, la causalité se réduit à l'identité dans le temps. Selon lui, chaque fois que nous jugeons ou affirmons d'un objet qu'il a telle détermination, la cause explicative vient s'identifier avec l'effet qu'elle éclaire. Le principe de causalité se ramènerait à celui de l'identité. Brunshvicg, utilisant la méthode historico-critique en vogue, estime que la causalité se définit par la seule considération du développement de l'histoire de la pensée scientifique.

Selon Piaget, les théories de la causalité d'Aristote à Maine de Biran sont souvent articulées en termes psychologiques. C'est pourquoi il préconise, lui, pour traiter de la causalité, de recourir - en complément à la méthode historico-critique - à la méthode psychogénétique, qui cherche à comprendre les processus du développement de la causalité à partir de structures mentales.

Piaget se propose comme objectif: de découvrir, à travers les tests expérimentaux appliqués aux enfants, l'infrastructure sensori-motrice de la catégorie de la causalité. Cette dernière est définie par lui comme

étant la connexion entre les objets et le sujet: ce qui signifie d'une part les actions et opérations du sujet sur les objets, et d'autre part les actions des objets les uns sur les autres.

Ceci suppose de ce fait même que ces objets existent en dehors de nous, et qu'ils agissent les uns sur les autres sans nous. D'où le problème à résoudre est le suivant: comment ces interactions entre objets sont-elles pensées? Ce qui revient à dire: comment le sujet explique-t-il les phénomènes de la réalité? C'est là le problème central de la causalité (c'est-à-dire l'attribution des opérations aux objets) chez Piaget. Celle-ci inclut dans ses diverses manifestations la réalité. Donc, on ne peut parler de la causalité chez lui sans évoquer nécessairement la réalité. Le concept de causalité implique celui de réalité: il s'agit bel et bien d'une implication et non d'une identité.

Piaget a dû consacrer à ce problème important la plupart de ses recherches. Il a d'abord, dans les *Ecrits antérieurs aux "Etudes d'épistémologie génétique"*, considéré la cause dans son sens restreint comme un agent actif sur lequel un sujet pousse ou tire, exerce ou manifeste un pouvoir quelconque; ensuite, dans les *"Etudes d'épistémologie génétique"* dans son sens large: comme la notion générale d'explication. La causalité est donc conçue par lui comme toute explication d'un phénomène matériel.

Dans les *Ecrits antérieurs "aux Etudes d'épistémologie génétique"*, nous avons considéré la causalité enfantine (de 0 à 4 ans et de 4 à 7 ans) et la causalité rationnelle (de 7-8 ans à 9-10 ans et de 11-12 ans et plus).

Le niveau élémentaire est caractérisé par l'indifférenciation entre le sujet et son environnement, c'est ce que Piaget appelle, à la suite de Baldwin, adualisme; et la causalité de ce niveau demeure entièrement anthropomorphique ou égocentrique. En effet, l'enfant n'attribue aux objets que ses propres actions. Ce stade, avons-nous remarqué, ne présente guère d'intérêt épistémologique. Au niveau des opérations, nous avons distingué des opérations concrètes qui ont leur champ d'action du côté des objets, et les opérations formelles qui ont comme trait distinctif un pouvoir de raisonnement à partir des hypothèses et une distinc-

tion entre la nécessité des connexions formelles et la vérité de leur contenu.

Abordant les travaux d'"Etudes d'épistémologie génétique", nous avons étudié l'explication causale que Piaget tient pour synonyme de causalité. La caractéristique principale de cette théorie est que l'objet est censé faire quelque chose, qu'il est actif, il devient lui-même un opérateur. Ensuite il existe une correspondance entre les structures opératoires et les structures causales: en d'autres termes entre les structures du sujet et celles de l'objet. Et cette correspondance se réalise dans l'organisme: point de départ de l'activité psychologique du sujet et objet pour la biologie.

Appréciation Critique de la Théorie Piagétienne

La théorie piagétienne de la causalité que nous avons étudiée constitue une nouveauté, une originalité incontestable par rapport aux théories antérieures de la causalité. Cette nouveauté, cette originalité réside:

- premièrement dans sa conception selon laquelle l'action du sujet constitue la source de la causalité dès lors qu'elle impose ses schèmes aux objets. Ce concept d'action est au centre de sa pensée: c'est par lui que Piaget assure l'explication et la vérification de tout phénomène de vie comme de tout pensée. Ce concept d'action que Piaget enrichit en l'appelant opération constitue une originalité, une nouveauté par rapport aux concepts d'habitude, de croyance et d'attente de Hume. Bref, c'est dans l'action que le sujet devient le trait d'union entre l'expérience et la raison.

- Deuxièmement dans sa position du problème de la causalité, c'est-à-dire attributions des opérations aux objets, en rapport avec le développement cognitif. D'où la correspondance entre les stades du développement de la causalité et ceux du développement opératoire, sauf que dans ce cas les opérations sont attribuées aux objets. Ce qui revient à dire que l'objet est conçu comme un agent actif, un agent opérant, c'est-à-

dire qui opère sur d'autres objets.

- Troisièmement dans l'option méthodologique qui privilégie, dans son épistémologie génétique, l'expérimentation et la vérification au détriment de la réflexion spéculative. Le grand mérite de Piaget qui marquera son nom dans l'histoire de la pensée, est donc celui d'avoir créé une base d'expérimentation propre à la gnoséologie.

Bien qu'incontestablement révolutionnaire, grandiose et passionnante, l'entreprise de Piaget comporte des limites que nous synthétisons comme suit: 1) Piaget confond l'épistémologie génétique avec la théorie de la connaissance et avec l'épistémologie tout court d'une part, et avec l'épistémologie scientifique d'autre part. 2) Ces confusions lui ont suscité la réaction des philosophes et d'autres épistémologues. Selon eux, l'épistémologie génétique et les recherches menées dans ce domaine, celles de la causalité en l'occurrence, relèvent du psychologisme. Cette réaction est fondée. En effet, le développement du sujet qui est exposé est celui du "sujet épistémique". Si l'on considère cette notion du "sujet épistémique", on ne peut s'empêcher de reconnaître que Piaget se réfère à un sujet universel, un sujet transcendantal qui dépasse les sujets particuliers, individuels. D'où le "sujet épistémique" se range sous la bannière d'un psychologisme transcendantal. 3) C'est donc cette notion du "sujet épistémique" qui a submergé Piaget dans une universalité d'une psychogenèse telle que le sujet individuel n'a plus joué son rôle véritable. c'est également cette notion du "sujet épistémique" qui l'a enfermé dans un solipsisme tel qu'il n'a pas pu tenir compte, dans son épistémologie génétique et dans sa théorie de la causalité, de certaines réalités: il s'agit notamment de

- 1° l'évolution de l'enfant avant la naissance;
- 2° la psychologie pathologique;
- 3° et l'existence des sujets anomaux (nevrosés ou psychopatiques) et exceptionnels (par exemple le cas de génie).

4) En ce qui concerne sa théorie de la causalité, c'est-à-dire la causalité systématique, nonobstant la nouveauté et l'originalité reconnues à celle-ci, par sa méthode d'aborder les concepts par des "cercles concentrique", Piaget a dû faire un double emploi du mot causalité: dans un sens restreint et dans un sens large (comme théorie générale de l'explication); et ce, pour n'aboutir, au bout du compte, qu'à la même conclusion: les deux ont le même développement psychogénétique. Pourquoi alors ce double emploi? C'est ce qui fait que, malgré l'efficacité de cette méthode de "cercles concentriques", celle-ci aboutit souvent à la polysémie des concepts et crée ainsi des confusions. Et ceci donne finalement l'impression qu'il existe chez Piaget un perpétuel recommencement à zéro, alors que l'épistémologie piagétienne est constructiviste et exclut de ce fait même un commencement absolu.

Au total, la notion du "sujet épistémique" ruine l'entreprise piagétienne. En effet, même si Piaget ne s'intéresse pas, dans le développement des connaissances, aux individus, mais uniquement au sujet universel, il ne cesse d'être lui-même sujet individuel, et de ce fait il ne pouvait fonder son épistémologie que sur le sujet individuel. Avec cette notion du "sujet épistémique" qu'advient-il de l'épistémologie génétique, et par ricochet de la théorie piagétienne de la causalité? Qu'en est-il du statut épistémologique de cette épistémologie génétique? Cette question est demeurée si brûlante que ni Piaget, ni ses collaborateurs du Centre International d'épistémologie génétique n'ont pu faire "l'épistémologie génétique de l'épistémologie génétique".

REVIEW

Anthropology as cultural critique.

By George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986,xiii,pp. 205.

A Review by Lansana Keita.

Anthropology as a research discipline has, perhaps, more than any other shaped the way in which the European world came to view the indigenous inhabitants of the other continents. It was Europe's technical advantages (often translated into military force) that led to the ideological paradigms whose vocabularies were founded on the specific oppositional terms of civilized/primitive, people/tribe, advanced/backward, developed/underdeveloped, etc..

Anthropology was developed specifically for the purpose of studying what were regarded as exotic and unchanging alien types. Sociology, on the other hand, was reserved for the study of European man in a constantly changing society. I say this because the term anthropology would seem suggest not only the study of social man but also the study of man as a biological entity- hence the importance ascribed to physical anthropology. It was the classical anthropological paradigm that granted scientific respectability to such curious (in retrospect) terms like "negro", "negroid", etc., and such dubious appellations as Semite, Hamite (in reality terms derived from Hebrew folklore). But consider again terms referential of indigenous non-European people loaded with evident value content which become thoroughly embedded in the languages of Europe: Pygmy, Bushman, Australian Aboriginal, Melanesian, American Indian.

The point is that classical European anthropology through masquerading as an objective scientific discipline served as an ideological justification for the irruption of Europeans into other areas of the globe. The fundamental premise of classical anthropology was as follows: Since most non-European cultures were ostensibly primitive and their purveyors evolutionarily not as advanced as European man, it was simply the course of natural history if such cultures and their bearers were overcome by Europeans.

But the decolonization of Asia and Africa and the spirited evolution of some of those societies on the path toward modernism has led to the questioning and reformulation of some of the key premises of anthropology. It is this connection that Anthropology as Cultural Critique affords much insight into the transformation and problems of orientation and confronting the discipline of anthropology. The authors, George Marcus and Michael Fischer point out early in their text the criticisms now being mounted from non-European sources. They write, for example:

Edward Said's Orientalism (1979) is an attack on the genres of writing developed in the West to represent non-Western societies. His brush is broad and indiscriminate ... Yet poses in his book no alternative form for the adequate representation of other voices or points of view across cultural boundaries, nor does he instill any hope that this might be possible. He in fact practises the same sort of rhetorical totalitarianism against his chosen enemies as he condemns (p.1)

The authors explain this growing trend as partially due to "the unfavorable shift in the relative position of American power and influence in the world, and with the widespread perception of the dissolution of the ruling post-war model of the liberal welfare state at home." (p.9)

The significance of this book derives though from the authors' analysis of the way how the self-questioning of anthropology fits into concerns about the status of the social sciences in general. All this comes after the dominance of such paradigms like British functionalism, French structuralism, etc., especially in anthropology. In other words Anthropology as Cultural Critique may be viewed as a critical history of the discipline of anthropology -- a surrogate sociology of the non-European world.

But in this post-modern (for the European) intellectual period in which new orientations and moorings are sought the authors point out ("The Repatriation of Anthropology as Cultural Critique") how a perceptible new trend in anthropology (given the lessening of the appeal of the "primitive/exotic") is that of the critical evaluation of modern Western society with appeal to techniques similar to those employed by the anthropologist. The authors make reference here to the influence of the

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Frankfurt school theorists notably Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Benjamin.

While elaborating on the new trend of cultural critique the authors make the point that this new approach expresses itself in terms of the "defamiliarization" techniques of epistemological critique and cross-cultural juxtaposition. (pp.137-138) According to the authors defamiliarization by epistemological critique arises from the very nature of traditional anthropological work: going out to the periphery of the Euro-centric world where conditions are supposed to be most alien and profoundly revising the way we normally think about things in order to come to grips with what in European terms are exotica. (pp.137-138)

The goal here is to use insight gained on the periphery to "raise havoc with our settled ways of thinking." (*Ibid.*) This approach obviously serves as the basis for defamiliarization by cross-cultural juxtaposition.

Yet perhaps what is most important here for the contemporary theorist who hails from those cultures which were the object of Euro-centric analysis is that he should join in this discussion to help point out the inaccuracies of analysis presented by orthodox anthropology. The task could prove to be somewhat difficult given the embeddedness of old concepts in the lexicon of the colonial languages and the modes of expression normal at the university and "educated" class levels in Africa, say. Consider the ease with which center and "sophisticated" periphery now casually accept the concepts of "tribe", "Africa South of the Sahara", "black Africa", all coined by the colonial anthropology for functional purposes. The basis for these terms, it should be evident was a highly suspect physical anthropology.

It is on this basis that Anthropology as Cultural Critique breaks new ground in the way it lays bare the idea of how much Europe's conception of the non-European world was really ideological in nature. It is in this sense that I recommend this book as an exercise in applied epistemology and the sociology of knowledge.

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ERRATA

pour Kambaji wa Kambaji, Quelques Réflexions sur les fondements épistémologique de la Connaissance Sociologique, publié dans QUEST Vol.II no.2.

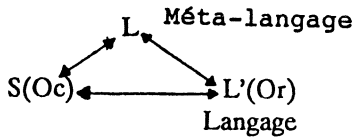
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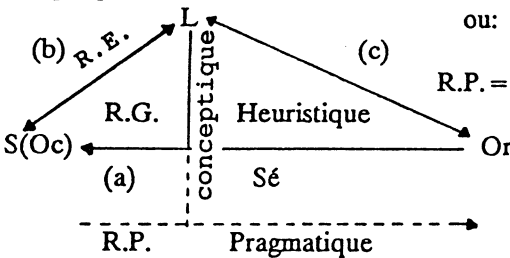
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ou: R.E.=rupture épistémologique
R.G.=rupture gnoséologique
R.P.=rupture praxéologique
Sé =Sélection

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