

QUEST

Philosophical Discussions

An International African Journal of Philosophy
Revue Africaine Internationale de Philosophie

Editors:

Tunde Bewaji (University of the West Indies, Jamaica; Ogun State University, Nigeria)

Pieter Boele van Hensbroek (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

Issiaka-Prospér Lalèyè (Université de Saint Louis, Sénégal)

Dismas Masolo (Antioch University, USA; University of Nairobi, Kenya)

Regional editor East Africa:

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania)

Editorial Board:

Clive Dillon-Malone (University of Zambia, Lusaka)

Paulin Hountondji (Université de Cotonou, Benin)

Gatian Lungu (University of Zambia, Lusaka)

Lolle Nauta (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

Henry Odera Oruka (University of Nairobi, Kenya)

Kwasi Wiredu (Univ. of South Florida, USA; University of Ghana, Legon)

Production: Laurence Charpentier, Sarah Lewis and Willem Storm

QUEST: Philosophical Discussions is an African Journal of Philosophy. It intends to act as a channel of expression for thinkers in Africa, and to stimulate philosophical discussion on problems that arise out of the radical transformations Africa and Africans are undergoing.

QUEST includes materials on both current subjects related to Africa, and subjects of general philosophical interest, serving an international public of professional philosophers and intellectuals in other disciplines with philosophical interests. Original articles written in either English or French will be published, each with a summary in the other language.

QUEST appears twice per year in June and December.

Contributions: Articles should normally not exceed 6,000 words in length and should be accompanied by an abstract of no more than 200 words. The latter should preferably be in French where the article is in English, and vice-versa. Manuscripts should follow the citation format of the journal. Contributors should provide a short biographical note.

Subscriptions: US\$ 35.- (institutions); US\$ 25.- (individuals); Africa US\$ 20.- (institutions); US\$ 15.- (individuals). Payment by credit card or cash; cheques payments should always include \$9.- to cover bank charges.

Quest, PO Box 9114, 9703 LC Groningen, The Netherlands

CONTENTS

Quest Vol.IX/2, Vol.X/1

G.E.M. Ogotu	
<i>Weep not ... philosophers never die. The death of a giant, the dilemma of the dilettante and the disintegration of a discipline</i>	5
F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo	
<i>An African savant: Henry Odera Orika</i>	12
Kai Kresse	
<i>Interview with professor Henry Odera Orika</i>	22
Kolawole Aderemi Owolabi	
<i>African philosophy and the African crisis</i>	33
Sémou Pathé Gueye	
<i>Le "Dépassement de la Philosophie". Réflexion sur le statut contemporain de la philosophie</i>	45
Christophe Yahot	
<i>La culture comme force</i>	71
T. Ebijuwa	
<i>Conscience, morality and social acceptability in an African culture</i>	87
Wim van Binsbergen	
<i>Black Athena and Africa's contribution to global cultural history</i>	101
Clarence Sholé Johnson	
<i>An analysis of John Mbiti's treatment of the concept of event in African ontologies</i>	139
C.B.N. Ogbobo	
<i>Some problems in the writing of the history of African philosophy</i>	159
Ho-Won Jeong	
<i>Politics of discourse on liberal economic reform: the case of Africa</i>	173
Anke Graness	
<i>Interview with professor Peter O. Bodunrin</i>	198
Lansana Keita	
<i>The hermeneutics of African philosophie (review)</i>	211
Lansana Keita	
<i>Meaning and development (review)</i>	218
L. Njinya-Mujinya	
<i>Information banks in rural Africa: A lacking building block</i>	227
Notes on Contributors	236
Cumulative Index QUEST, Vol. I - X	238

Editorial

A notre grand regret nous devons commémorer le décès d'une des plus importantes personnes de la philosophie africaine, professeur Henry Odera Oruka. Oruka a été membre de notre conseil éditorial et il a fermement supporté notre revue, en l'honorant souvent de ses articles qui provoquent les pensées. Lui-même est honoré par cette publication. En même temps nous compatissons avec sa femme et ses enfants, qui ont perdu un mari et père tellement fameux.

Un autre célèbre penseur africain, Nnamdi Azikiwe, a également décédé. Il faut le commémorer non pas seulement comme ancien président du Nigeria, mais aussi comme le grand inspirateur du nationalisme africain des décennies suivant la publication, en 1937, de son magnifique oeuvre "Renacent Africa".

L'actuelle édition double, pleine de contributions intéressantes, ramène *QUEST* au calendrier régulier de publication. Avec une abondance d'articles très variés et défiant les pensées, il nous a fait dur de ne pas dépasser les bornes de ce numéro. Nous espérons éviter de nouveaux retards de production de notre revue.

Editorial

To our great regret we have to commemorate, the death of one of the leading men in African philosophy, professor Henry Odera Oruka. Oruka was a member of our editorial board and a strong supporter of the journal, honouring it often with his thought-provoking articles. This issue is a special tribute to him. At the same time we sympathize with his wife and children for losing their great husband and father.

And yet another prominent African thinker passed away, Nnamdi Azikiwe. He will be remembered not only as former president of Nigeria, but also as the great inspirator of African nationalism in the decades following the publication of his magnificent *Renacent Africa* in 1937.

This double issue, overflowing with interesting contributions, brings QUEST on publishing schedule again. In receiving an abundance and wide variety of thought-provoking articles, we had difficulty in keeping the bounds for this issue in check. We hope to avoid further delays in the production of the journal.

Colleagues having access to E-mail services can now subscribe to the discussion list "AFRI-PHIL". The managers of the list, Emmanuel Eze and Bruce B. Janz, announce the list in the following words:

"The primary purpose of this list is to provide a forum for the exchange of views, experiences, techniques, and professional information pertaining to the teaching and study of the philosophical thought of African and African-diaspora cultures."

The list is conceived as a companion to a forthcoming new journal tentatively entitled *Africana: Philosophical and Cultural Studies*.

Subscribe to the list by sending a message to address:

LISTSERV@BUCKNELLE.EDU

Containing in the body of the message the subscription line:

SUB AFRI-PHIL Yourfirstname Yourlastname

**WEEP NOT ...
PHILOSOPHERS NEVER DIE**

**The Death of a Giant
The Dilemma of the Dilettante
and
The Disintegration of a Discipline**

Dr. G.E.M. Ogutu

*Citation read at the funeral service for
Professor Henry Odera Oruka
at St. Paul's Catholic Church, Nairobi
Thursday, December 21, 1995*

Born on Thursday, 1st June 1944, **Professor Henry Odera Oruka** died on Saturday, 9th December, 1995, having gone through the academic ranks to become a philosopher of world repute.

The purpose of this brief citation is to philosophically situate the late Prof. Odera Oruka and to identify and relate him to his philosophic family, genealogy and ancestry. To do this, we shall take off from the thesis that a philosopher's temperament is rare. Rare because it has to combine two somewhat conflicting characteristics: on the one hand, a strong desire to believe some general proposition about the universe or human life; on the other hand, inability to believe, contentedly, except on what appear to be more intellectual grounds. The more profound the philosopher, the more intricate and subtle must his jargons be in order to produce in him the desired state of intellectual acquiescence. That is why philosophy is obscure.

With humble beginnings at St. Mary's School, Yala, Henry Odera Oruka joined Uppsala University in Sweden where he earned himself BSc degree having studied Meteorology, Geography and Geodesy with Philosophy as an optional subject. He later proceeded to Wayne State University in the US, where he earned himself an MA degree in Philo-

sophy. His sound academic sojourn took him back to his former University Uppsala, for PhD in Philosophy.

For more than two decades, I have known and attended local as well as international philosophical conferences and seminars with Prof. Oruka and many eminent men and women from all over the five continents. The quality of being unforgettable or personally impressive, has not in my experience, been greatest in those who made the greatest noise at discourses, except in a few cases. Henry Odera Oruka was among the few.

Coming back to Kenya in 1970, Prof. Oruka was hired by the University of Nairobi as an Assistant Lecturer. Within a short span of time he moved from the junior status of an assistant lecturer to that of Professor of Philosophy in the same University. Sandwiched within his tight teaching schedule, Professor Oruka made use of his sabbaticals to be, among others, visiting Senior Lecturer at Ibadan University, Nigeria; visiting Professor Haverford University College Philadelphia, USA; visiting Philosopher in Residence, Earlham College, I Richmond, Indiana, USA. That was Odera the man, the world renown philosopher in the making.

Professor Oruka was the Founder/Chairman of the Philosophical Association of Kenya; Member of the Kenya National Academy of Sciences; Afro-Asian Philosophical Association; Inter-African Council for Philosophy; World Futures Studies Federation; and, member of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies.

A philosopher of profound acumen, a humanist of no mean achievement, Professor Oruka won Honourary Cultural Doctorate (1986); was included in Vol. 9 of *Men of Achievement*, (IBC Cambridge, 1983); included in the *International Book of Honour*, (IBI New Jersey, 1984). What a fete for a man so young!

To decipher the obscurity of Philosophy, Prof. Oruka extensively devoured books on literature and the life history of great creative writers. He admired Voltaire. He perused Tolstoy by whose life history he was mesmerised. He was decisively touched by August Strinberg's book *The Son of a Servant* that prompted him to start work on his own autobiographical novel - *Son of Wives* - a philosophically telling title given that Peter Oruka Rang'inya, his father had ten wives of whom his mother, Dolphine Nyang'or Oruka, was second in rank.

How did Prof. Oruka's philosophical inclination evolve? Let him tell us: "While pushing heavy rolls of paper at the factory from one corner to another, I was at the same time reflecting on the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is at all possible. I thought my experience at the factory had taught me many things and that without that experience knowledge of those things would have been impossible. Therefore, I draw the conclusion that *there is no knowledge without experience*. I then thought I had a great discovery I must write down for the world to know *before I die*". In his philosophical discourses, Prof. Oruka was concerned about three obstacles to wisdom and human justice, namely, socio-economic *deprivation*, cultural racial *mythology* and the illusion of *appearance*. These concerns explain Oruka's unfathomable roots in Ethics, Politico-Legal philosophy and African Philosophy. They also led him to identify and aspire for what he considered vehicles to philosophy, namely, *freedom, inspiration, and destiny*. In his own words "The urge to philosophize requires the ability to choose and to think alternatively even to that which is authoritatively established - this requires social *freedom*. As for *inspiration*, one may have a built-in psychology or a surrounding culture that motivates or dissuades a philosophical urge. In moments of fundamental crucial questions of life, a person would often be concerned about two things, *origin and destiny*". Odera Oruka was a perfect scmlage and advocate of his Luo roots and culture.

This then leads me to a panoramic view of the titles to Prof. Odera Oruka's brilliant and incisive treatises. They include, among others: "Mythologies as African Philosophy"; "Truth and Belief"; "Ideology and Truth"; "For the sake of truth"; *Ethics; The Rational path; The philosophy of Liberty; Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy; "Sagacity in African Philosophy"*; Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy; and Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and beliefs.

"Philosophy" means "Love of Wisdom". And philosophy in this sense is what men must acquire if the new powers invented by science and technology and handed over by them through modern information technology, to be wielded by ordinary men and women, are not to plunge mankind into an appalling cataclysm. It is along this line of thought that Henry Odera Oruka has contributed immensely to Philosophy in general and to African Philosophy in particular. I could not agree more with Oruka when he insists "that socio-economic *deprivation* with its accompaniments, *poverty and hunger*, is the greatest constraints to *mental development and creativity*". The most ingrained of our complexes are mythical: "myths about the civilization and the nobility of some races and the backwardness and slave-mentality of others". Oruka never hesitated to hold the bull by the horn, hence his apologetic stance on *African Sagacity*.

What of Odera Oruka's philosophic family, genealogy and ancestry? When Plato claimed that "the multitude cannot be philosophic", Odera's inquisitive mind was intuitively bubbling for response. He sought to find out why! The solution he has bequeathed to us runs through most of his works. It is that "A multitude, a crowd is often swayed by *appearance* rather than *reality*. It reacts to sound, glitter, self deception and exaggeration. Our concern with *appearance*, which is a disease of most people, in all societies, is an *obstacle to human intellectual creativity*". All that glitters is not gold.

What a mind Odera's was! In the words of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche "The man of genius is unbearable unless he possesses at least one quality - *cleanliness*". What a niche! As Odera once put it "It seems most people, all over the world, end up gaining *style* rather than *substance* from their education, otherwise there would be less prejudice, racism, tribalism, sexism, plus personal or national indifference to other cultures. These are germs of *ethnic and international conflicts*". To echo the words of Plato's often recalled work - *Republic* - "The main purpose of education is to produce *courage* in battle. There is to be a rigid censorship of the stories told by mothers and nurses to young children; there should be no reading of Homer, the degraded versifier who makes heroes lament and gods laugh; the drama should be forbidden because it contains villains and tricksters; and the government is to be in the hands of a small oligarchy, who are to practice trickery and lying - elaborate lying to persuade the population that there are biological differences between the upper and the lower classes."

Plato's city was, in his time, viewed as copy of the eternal city laid up in heaven; perhaps in heaven we shall enjoy the kind of existence it offers us. But, if we do not enjoy it here on earth so much worse for us. Alas, Plato's city could not be the ideal for our time and age. The ideal had to be sought elsewhere. No wonder Odera the thinker was concerned about Socioeconomic deprivation, cultural-racial mythology and illusion of appearance. To Odera, "A person who gains *substance* rather than *style* (appearance) from education would adopt some of the Socratic saying 'I know that I know not' and 'Unexamined life is not worth living'. And so he/she will always be willing to learn, amend prejudices and enhance the understanding of other peoples, other cultures. Such a person takes precaution against the *illusion of appearance*". It is this that makes the difference between scholarship and style-oriented naivety.

Odera nursed a humble but often thought provoking concern about the enigma surrounding the destiny of humankind, particularly among the poverty stricken peoples worldwide. It is, therefore, no surprise that as a member of the International Committee of the *World Futures Studies Federation* he succeeded in bringing to Kenya the *XIV World Conference of World Futures Studies Federation*, under the Theme: *Futures beyond Poverty; Ways and Means out of the Current Stalemate*.

As chairman of the Local Organising Committee for the conference, Odera often reminded us that "It is necessary in the modern world to revisit and reexamine the *philosophies* behind the practice of foreign aid, the *logic* behind current world economic distribution, and the *postulate* of environmental protection as the common concern of all mankind". Prof. Oruka's position on the poverty debate often reminds one of John Stuart Mill's dictum that "Poverty, in any sense implying suffering may completely be extinguished by the wisdom of society combined with the good sense and providence of individuals".

Our message of solidarity with the bereaved family, fellow dons at the University of Nairobi, Sage informants and friends all over the globe, fellow philosophers dead or alive is: *Weep Not...Philosophers Never Die*.

Yes, indeed yes, philosophers never die. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Epicurus, Democritus, Carneades and Philo; after two thousand five hundred years, are still with us. So are Plotinus Augustine, Sankara, Ramanuja, Al-Ghazali, Maimonides and Aquinas.

Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are not yesterday. And yet the philosophers of the period - Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Pascal, Leibniz - still engage us in philosophical discourses as if they are our contemporaries. What about the moulders of the scientific, social, economic and political thinking of the contemporary world; the likes of Hume, Rousseau, Hegel, Bentham, Comte, Schelling, Kant,

Fechner, Lequer, Feuerbach, Mill, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Varisco, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Hobbes, Igbal and Russell. Two weeks ago and earlier, Odera, whose death we are now mourning, would turn to any or several of them for a humorous chat or a dialogic. *Weep Not ... Philosophers Never Die.*

How can the father of the Sage Philosophy die, while his *Fourrung Orukan Framework* continues to be pondered, debated, and appraised, as the depth of his own sagacity, by the renowned African philosophers, the likes of : Paulin Hountondji, Innocent Onyewenyi, Peter Bodunrin, Lansana Keita, Byaruhanga Akiiki, Oyenka Owomoyala, Kwasi Wiredu, Penti Malaska, V.Y Mudimbe, Kucurradi Ioanna, J.O Sodipo, Okonda Okolo, Tsenay Serequeberhan, E. Wamba-dia-Wamba, Dismas Masolo, Didier Kaphagawami, Lucius Outlaw and Anthony Oseghare! *Weep Not ... Philosophers Never Die;* and Henry Odera Oruka, given the philosopher that he was, will not be the first, for indeed they never die. Sound scholarship begets immortality.

It is never easy to conclude a tale so tormenting and so painful. But, as Kenya, Africa and the world continues to mourn the brilliant, incisive and down to earth philosopher that Odera Oruka was, let us not condone social-economic deprivation, cultural-racial mythology and the illusion of appearance. True, Oruka has been humbled, silenced and subjected to perpetual immobility and rest; but, let us, those who are left behind, remember that - one thing is unavoidable for normal adult humans - MORAL RESPONSIBILITY. To be exempted one must be an infant or an idiot, or be otherwise incapacitated. For the rest of us, responsibility must be taken for *what we do* and - just as much - for *what we do not do*. We are just as responsible for not doing something as for doing something. Our challenge is to do something to immortalize *The Father of Sage Philosophy* - Henry Odera Oruka.

May He Rest in Peace. Amen.

AN AFRICAN SAVANT: HENRY ODERA ORUKA

F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo

Discovery of Philosophy

On December 9th, 1995 at around midday, Africa lost one of its best known philosopher, Professor Henry Odera Oruka. This happened through a tragic road accident along Mbagathi road, in Nairobi, Kenya.

Born on the 1st of June 1944 in Nyanza Province of Kenya, Odera attended Jera and Segga Boys Primary Schools for his early education. He then proceeded to St. Mary's school, Yala for his secondary education. During both his primary and secondary education, Odera Oruka was second to none in his classes. He did his undergraduate studies in Sweden at one of the renowned European university, Uppsala University; after which he moved across to the United States of America for his Master's degree at Wayne State University. For his Doctorate degree he went back to Uppsala University and graduated in 1970.

During his undergraduate studies at Uppsala, Odera Oruka was basically a student of science, registered in the Faculty of mathematics - natural sciences. He studied Meteorology, Geography and Geodesy. But on his own initiative and interest, he added Philosophy. His classmates and scholarship office found this rather awkward, they could not understand why Odera Oruka was interested in what to them was evidently a weird combination. They were to be even further surprised when after graduation in Science and Philosophy (a year ahead of his class), he opted to drop science and continue with Philosophy. This chagrined his scholarship donors so much that they terminated their sponsorship. This did not deter Odera Oruka from pursuing further studies in Philosophy.

Like a child determined to have things go its way, Odera Oruka with the assistance of some of his professors found his way to the Wayne State University where he obtained a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. While at Wayne State University he wrote a dissertation, which

years later he refined and had it published under the title *Punishment and Terrorism in Africa* in 1976. Because of the good academic impression he had left at Uppsala, he easily regained admission there, obtaining his Doctorate in 1970.

Life abroad was difficult for Odera Orika, however he found solace in reading whatever material he could lay hands on. He found the works of the following authors very resourceful and inspiring: Voltaire, Tolstoy, August Strinberg, Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi, Okot P'Bitek, John Locke, David Hume, George Berkeley, Bertrand Russell? V.W.O. Quine, F. Coupleston, Ingemar Hedcnius, Immanuel Kant, Plato, Friedrich Nietzsche.

While in Sweden as an undergraduate student, Odera Orika discovered and fell in "love" with August Strinberg's autobiographical novel *The Son of a Servant*. He thought that he had discovered a white person whose childhood life had been exactly as that of a village African child. Inspired by the book, he started writing an autobiographical novel titled *The Son of Wives*. He thought the title fitting because his father, Orika Ranginya, had ten wives. Odera Orika's mother was second in rank but he was obliged by custom to call any one of them 'mother'. His biological mother died when he was eight leaving three other younger children, a sister of five (Gaudencia, a brother of two (Maurice) and another brother of six months (Okoth). Okoth died a year after the mother's death. He died almost on Odera Orika's lap since after the mother's death, Odera had to abandon school to be his permanent baby sitter. His death was a blessing in disguise for Odera Orika, for it enabled him to resume School. The rest survived, but they had to be raised as multi-mothered mother-less children of all Odera Orika's father's wives.¹

Odera Orika's discovery of philosophy came in a strange way. He discovered philosophy during one summer, when still a student of science, while working at a paper factory in Sandvicken, Sweden.

While pushing heavy rolls of paper at the factory from one corner to another, he was at the same time reflecting on the nature of knowledge and how knowledge was at all possible. He thought that his experience at the factory had taught him many things and that without that experience, knowledge of those things would have been impossible. Therefore, he drew the conclusion that there is no knowledge without experience. Odera Oruka then thought that he had a great and magnificent discovery which he had to write down for the world to know before he died. Later, having gone a little deeper into philosophy, he was happy yet disappointed to learn that his so-called discovery was a well-known theory associated with 'British Empiricism'.²

Philosophic Sagacity

Within philosophical circles Odera Oruka will best be remembered for initiating the Philosophic Sagacity Movement in the year 1974. At that point two distinct schools of thought had emerged into the discourse regarding the question and nature of African Philosophy. These schools were referred to as Ethnophilosophy and Professional Philosophy.

Within ethno-philosophy, African Philosophy was construed as a lived communal endeavour, not identifiable with any individual in particular. African philosophy was regarded as being quite distinct from Western or European philosophy which was taken to be rigorous, critical and individual.

On the other hand, the school of professional philosophy which comprised mainly of professionally trained African philosophers asserted that whatever African Philosophy was, it had to satisfy the professional and academic criteria. In other words, it had to be individual and engrained with argument and criticism since, for them, philosophy is devoted to detailed and complicated argument.³

One popular and recurrent criticism that was levelled against ethnophilosophy was that, though it seemed to be tolerant to Africans by granting that they had a philosophy, in actuality it denied philosophy to them. What the school referred to as African philosophy was, not philosophy. It used the methodology that resembles the kind that is normally employed in cultural anthropology (also known as ethnology) in order to get to the underlying and basic principles of reality and behaviour of Africans, which it then described in philosophical language. The end-result was therefore neither ethnology nor philosophy, but a meaningless conglomeration of both, or euphemistically, ethno-philosophy.⁴

The professional school had also been criticized in that what it referred to as African philosophy was not purely African. The reasoning being that the professional philosophers having basically studied Western philosophy and hardly anything about African philosophy treated African philosophy from a typical western standpoint: They employed Western Logic and principles to criticize or create what they liked to call African philosophy.⁵ The end-result of what they qualified as African philosophy was therefore a scholarly exercise rooted in the west, not Africa. It was thus not convenient to call it, or refer to it as, African philosophy.

It was within the background above that philosophic sagacity emerged. It rescues African philosophy from the criticisms levelled against ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy, by making redundant the objection on the former and manoeuvring its way past the objection of the latter.

Within philosophic sagacity, the position is that even in traditional Africa there are individuals who are capable of critical, coherent and independent thinking. Philosophic sagacity, therefore, retains the basic tenets of the professional school. However, unlike it, it is an exposition of the wisdoms and beliefs of the individuals who have not been schooled in the formal educational system. More cautiously, it consists

of wisdoms and views of those who are not professionally trained philosophers, that is, neither classroom-taught nor self-taught.⁶ "A sage can be a very formally educated and literate person".⁷ Asserted somewhat differently, philosophic sagacity is an expression of the view that amongst the various African communities, exist individuals who despite the fact that they have not had the benefit of having contact with the so-called western philosophy⁸ are nevertheless, critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgement by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of communal consensus.⁹

In the philosophic sagacity project, three provinces of Kenya have so far been considerably covered. These are: Central, Western and Nyanza. Odera Orika almost single-handedly covered the first two provinces, his efforts were tireless. On the subject of philosophic sagacity, he has the following books: *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990; *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy*. Nairobi: Shirikon Publishers, 1990; *Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs*. Nairobi: Initiative Publishers, 1992. *Practical Philosophy* Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, forthcoming.

Five Mirrors

A few months after Odera Orika's death, and almost immediately after I had been discharged from hospital, I was sitting in my office in deep thought pondering the future of philosophic sagacity. Then all of a sudden there was a wind and a stapled paper fell on my desk from the top of my bookshelf. The paper turned out to be one by Odera Orika titled "Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy: Obstacles in Philosophical Dialogue". Interestingly, for almost three days I had been trying to trace that paper so as to go over it again. My aim was to relate Odera

Oruka's intellectual and academic disposition to the five mirrors he had identified in the paper.

In the paper Odera Oruka argues that in a philosophical dialogue where the nuances from social cultures and historical destinies are bracketed, there are five different mirrors (or positions) that can be delineated with respect to the influence of the subject of the dialogue. These are: One, the mirror of the **author** of the subject or text being discussed. Two, the mirror of the **participant from the rival school of thought**. Three, the mirror of a **member of the same school** of thought as the author. Four, the mirror of the **path-finder**. And lastly, the mirror of the **dim language participant**.¹⁰

This section of the paper is an attempt to show that Odera Oruka in his philosophical dialogue and discourse employed these five mirrors with commendable success (especially the first four). In using the first mirror, his attitude towards scholarship was largely to offer suggestions to the author of the subject and would be patient enough to listen and try to learn from the subject. In this regard, students who had the opportunity (or is it benefit?) to have their dissertations and theses directed by Odera Oruka can testify to his admirable use of this mirror.¹¹ Similarly, those who have read his works cannot fail to notice this aspect.

The initiation of philosophic sagacity project by Odera Oruka, is a reflection of his employment of the second mirror. As already noted philosophic sagacity emerged as a crossroad of both ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy. In his dealings with these two schools of thought, he did not hesitate to give them credit where it was due. However, because of some problems associated with them which arose because of his rational criticism, he thought that philosophic sagacity should carry the day.

In his academic relations with his colleagues notably P. Hountondji, K. Wiredu, I. Kucuradi, D. Masolo, B. Hallen, J. Sodipo, and C. Sumner

amongst many others, Odera Orika exhibited the reflection of the third mirror. Together with the others, they shared similar argumentative gestures, methodologies and terminologies in their address to the question of African philosophy, for example, despite some differences.

During his life time, Odera Orika tirelessly and with success employed the fourth mirror, he was an ardent path-finder. The movement of philosophic sagacity, for example, is a case in hand. Just in the same way that Marx recreated and advanced Hegel, so did Odera Orika extend and reorganize professional philosophy and baptised it in the name of philosophic sagacity.

Recurrent and rampant criticisms that had been levelled against philosophic sagacity, gave Odera Orika the impression that some of the critics had not quite understood what it was all about. Because of this, he wrote several articles and books in an attempt to elaborate and clarify what philosophic sagacity was. The critics had jumped the gun, he thought. He kept dimming to the critics that the table was not yet properly and fairly set for the dialogue. But some of the critics failed to follow what his complaints really were and they continued full lights with their criticisms.

Other Activities, Achievements and Honours

Odera Orika joined the teaching staff of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, in 1970. Because of his desire to have philosophy stand on its own in Kenya, he was instrumental in initiating and spearheading for the separation of philosophy from Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi. This was a fierce battle. However, when the battle was eventually won in 1980, he became the founder Chairman of the Department of Philosophy, a position he held for well over six years.

Between 1976 - 77, he was a Visiting Senior Lecturer at the Ibadan University (Nigeria). Between 1983 - 84, he was a Visiting Professor at Haverford College, Philadelphia (USA). Between 1988-89, he was a Visiting philosopher in residence at Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana (USA). Just before his death, he was supposed to go to Marxist College, Poughkeepsie, New York (USA) as a visiting professor for about a year.

Odera Oruka was a member of several local and international organizations. These included the Kenya National Academy of Sciences (KNAS), African Academy of Sciences (AAS), Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK), inter-African Council for philosophy (IACP), African Futures Studies Association (AFSA), Afro-Asian Philosophical Association (AAPA), World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF). Within these organizations he held the following positions: Chairman of PAK, President of AFSA, Secretary General of AAPA, Vice-President IACP.

Besides the above he was a member of the steering committee of FISP (Federation Internationale de Societes de Philosophie), was a member of the International organizing committee of WFSF, was a member of the editorial board of the following international journals: *Praxis International*, *International*, *Philosophical Quarterly* (IPQ), *Quest*, and was the chief editor of *Thought and Practice*.

Odera Oruka chaired various committees that successfully organized International Conferences in Kenya under the following themes: *Society and Truth* (August 13-17, 1981), *Philosophy and Cultures* (October 30 - November 3, 1981), *Philosophical Dialogue and Exchange Within Africa and Asia* (August 19 - 22, 1985), *Education and Ethics* (June 18 - 19, 1988), *Philosophy Man and the Environment* (July 21 - 25, 1991) and *Futures Beyond Poverty* (July 25 - 29, 1995).

He received the following international honours: Included in Volume 9, *Men of Achievements* (IBC, Cambridge, 1983), included in *International Book of Honours* (IBI, New Jersey, 1984), awarded a Honourary Cultural Doctorate in 1986 by the World University Round Table, awarded another Honourary Doctorate in 1993 by the University of Uppsala. To his credit, he published 14 books and over 50 articles in refereed and learned journals.

Notes

1. See *Philosophers on Their Own Work* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, Vol./Band 14), 172.
2. See *Ibid*, 173.
3. See Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and An African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 34.
4. See Foreword to H. Odera Oruka, *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy* (Nairobi: Shirikon Publishers, 1990), iv-v.
5. See *Ibid*, 19.
6. See F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, *African Philosophy: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy, 1995), 83.
7. H. Odera Oruka, "Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy: Obstacles in Philosophical Dialogues" in I. Kucuradi and R.S. Cohen (eds.) *The Concept of Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 177.
8. By Western Philosophy, it is meant the written thoughts of Western scholars, such as Plato, Aquinas, Russell etc.
9. H. Odera Oruka, *Trends in contemporary African Philosophy*, op. cit., 16.
10. See H. Odera Oruka, *Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy: Obstacles in Philosophical Dialogues*; op.cit., 174 - 175.
11. Odera Oruka directed several theses at the University of Nairobi, amongst them being: S.O.E. Onono-Wamonde, *Philosophy of Education in Kenya*, M.A. thesis, 1976. Raphael Joseph Njoroge, *Metaphysics According to the Analytic Tradition*, Ph.D. thesis, 1977. A.O. Mojola, *Knowledge and Belief Systems*, Ph.D. thesis, 1983. Antony Sunday Oseghare, *The Relevance of agacious Reasoning in African Philosophy*. Ph.D., 1985. F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, *On Justice and Justice in Law*,

M.A. thesis, 1987. Patrick M. Dikirr, *The Philosophy and ethics Concerning Death and Disposal of the Dead Among the Maasai*, M.A. thesis, 1993. F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, *African Sagacity and Ancient Greek Thought*, Ph.D. thesis, 1994. Oriare Nyarwath, *Philosophy and Rationality in Taboos with Some Reference to the Kenyan Luo culture*, M.A. thesis, 1994.

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR HENRY ODERA ORUKA

Held on the 27th of October 1993 at the University of Nairobi. Professor Odera Oruka died on the 9th of December 1995.

Interview by Kai Kresse.

Kresse: Prof. Oruka, you are one of the most famous African philosophers. Could you please give us a short sketch of your philosophical career?

Oruka: *Well, I studied in Kenya beyond the high school level and then from there I went abroad. I went to Sweden where I studied (in the beginning) mostly science with philosophy as one of the subjects - I couldn't get a scholarship to do philosophy during those days but only to do science - but on my own initiative I got into philosophy and I did both subjects at undergraduate levels. Then I left Sweden and went to study philosophy in the United States of America (U.S.A.). At that time main-stream philosophy Scandinavia and U.S.A. was mostly logical positivism and linguistic philosophy. But I was more interested - coming from science - in philosophy that would be useful for understanding the problems of Africa, for helping to liberate it and also sustain its independence, and for that matter I became naturally interested in ethics, social political and legal philosophy. These constitute what they call in Uppsala "practical philosophy". My studies were in the sixties and early seventies, so then I got my degrees from Sweden and my first degree and PhD were from Uppsala. While the MA was from Wayne State U.S.A., I came back to Kenya in the early seventies and started a career here as a lecturer of philosophy. When I came here the department was that of philosophy and religion combined and most of the staff were theologians and priests (mostly foreigners who had no time for African Philosophy). I came back here and although I had not necessarily specialised in African philosophy, I started researches in the subject and intensified the struggle to separate the department of philosophy from the department of religion. We succeeded in doing this nine or eight years later and I became the first chairman of the philosophy department. I started only three lecturers, but today as I am talking to you we have a staff of up to 14 in the department of philosophy alone. Today I am former chairman, but I am*

happy to be in such a position.

Kresse: In your concept of "Sage Philosophy" I think you tried to prove that philosophy and thus rationality is traditionally part of African cultures. But this is partly denied by some philosophers, even African philosophers. Why is it denied or why is there an opposition against your standpoint, what do you say?

Oruka: *I want to say in fact that rationality or reason is always a part of any culture, no matter whether the people are Chinese, African or whatever. Although we say this, it does not mean that rationality is immediate trait of everybody. In a serious sense this cannot be so. Only in a loose way you can say that everyone is rational. But in a serious way, every culture has people who specialize in science and in rationality, whether they are Greeks or whether they are whatever. Even in the Greek philosophy, not everyone was philosophical. How many ... Socrates, Plato etc. did we have? When the colonialists came to Africa they were interested in the mass of the Africans, not in the individual creative persons. If there were such people they were either exterminated or simply they were ignored, because the colonizers did not want to admit that from a culture, a "primitive" culture as they call the African culture, could come people of creative minds, either in a scientific or in a philosophical abstract sense. So they were ignored, the colonialist went with the mass culture, and a mass culture is always a culture which is indifferent to rationality, either in Europe or Africa.*

Kresse: And the opponents of your philosophy, what reasons do they give for denying rationality to Africa?

Oruka: *Even some of them are Africans. The reason they give is a very weird reason. Their reason is that rationality, reason, science, technology, all these are typical Western, typical European legacies. If we try to identify with these it appears they claim as if we are becoming either brainwashed or we are feeling an inferiority complex. They make a scientific, philosophical mistake, first: to think that science is*

Western only, and also that reason is Western or European. That is not true even if you go to the moon. What is true is that Europeans have had a long tradition practising science and rationality.

Kresse: In Sage Philosophy you interview sages, wise men or women in the countryside who grew up traditionally, the professional philosopher is the interviewer, he does the interviews. Is this a real philosophical work or is it not rather just a function, like a prompter in a theatre? What would you say? How can the philosophy be the philosophy of the sage if the interview is directed or led by the professional philosopher as the interviewer?

Oruka: *But that is in fact what happened even among the conventional classical philosophers. They were able to produce their thoughts only because they were led by their fellow philosophers producing questions and answers, - as you are now trying to question me. People write books and articles against others who then respond. That is a form of dialogue, you know. Many philosophers, even the great ones, have been able to produce their thoughts only because they were provoked by other philosophers. If they would not have been provoked, they would not have written down these wonderful thoughts. So in our system with the sage we are trying to provoke the sage - as a midwife - to be able to help him produce what is after all potential in him but which he has no forum generally to practice. That is what we are doing. However, if you say is that really philosophy, well, there is nothing like real philosophy. Philosophy is wider than that. I don't take the so-called typical Western conception of philosophy that philosophy must only be a systematical, rigid, logical argument. Philosophy can also be a kind of wisdom, it's a perspective on life and it can be expressed in many forms. It can be expressed even in a literary novel form, it can also be expressed in a dialogue which may outward look philosophically harmless. So there are many philosophical ways. Nietzsche is said to be a philosopher, but when you read Nietzsche and then you read Kant, you can see that Kant is a formal thinker, Nietzsche is Freudian and witty and still he is no less a philosopher.*

Kresse: Concerning African Philosophy and the development of African Philosophy, what do you think are the most interesting and important developments taking place in African Philosophy at this time?

Oruka: *Many things.*

First, is the fact that they are writing it down. That is very important. The texts, discussions, the debates are getting their ways into books and articles which may be preserved. And if they are preserved, that is quite a contribution to African Philosophy, for future generations. A problem current people have had is that they were starting from "tabula rasa": they had no previous texts, to go by and therefore many conclude there is no philosophy. But the future generations will find it easier, they will build on ready thought which is already preserved. So that is one thing.

Secondly, they are debating even among themselves. (Africans themselves) they are disagreeing which shows that African philosophy is not a communal consensus - which is what many people had thought i.e. that everyone agrees with everyone. The fact that we have disagreed very sharply that there are various schools of thought itself is also a very healthy fact, I think. Thinkers disagree, but they are always seeking a solution. So the fact that African Philosophers disagree is important.

Thirdly, they are also communicating with the rest of the world and the rest of the world pays attention to what is going on in Africa. Now some parts of the world have begun to take seriously the fact that there has been African philosophy.

Those three points I think are the three most important things on the issue of African philosophy today, there may be others.

Kresse: And in which fields of problems or in which philosophical questions is thorough critical philosophical reflection needed urgently, especially regarding Africa in the state it is in now?

Oruka: *It is needed in all fields. It is not good to say we should restrict to one area, although immediately I would stress that we need some African philosophers to be very good thinkers in the areas of*

epistemology and logic without apology that these are European matters. I think many of our upcoming students tend to go into the area of African philosophy of culture. And it seems as if doing African Philosophy is doing only culture philosophy. I mean one could also do epistemology, theory of knowledge, logic and apply them to Africa. I want some of our upcoming students to do logic, do epistemology, do other areas of philosophy.

Many dissertations we get at our universities tend to go in for works like Sage Philosophy. I have had as many as ten theses in this country alone - written directly on that kind of area. Fine, but I'm saying that should not appear as the only area. I'm not encouraging them, but I don't have enough guts to stop all of them, you know. But of course, apart from having said that, Africa is in a lot of social, economic and political problems. We need very good thinkers in the area of political philosophy in the area of social and legal philosophy, really. I mean good ones, not mediocre ones, because they could create something which could help get Africa out of its turmoil. Part of our problem is not only economic problems but also the facts of not having qualitative thinking to help people get out of their quagmire.

Kresse: In what way do you think can Africa or African thinkers give an important contribution to world philosophy or to the international philosophical debate?

Oruka: Through the kind of discussions they are doing already and also through discussing not only specifically African problems but also the problems which are philosophical anywhere. I think Africans should discuss other issues, African philosophers should even discuss German Philosophy and be sent to contribute to German Philosophy, discuss Chinese Philosophy, Indian Philosophy and interact with those philosophers, have debates, have seminars with them.

Kresse: I was also thinking of one question of you in that interview in court in an extract of Sage Philosophy where you are asked by the judge: "Do you believe that there are spirits?" and you answer: "I'm

still looking for a reason why I should not believe in spirits. Perhaps it would be a service to scholarship and law if you could provide me with a reason". I am just quoting this because I think in Europe or in Germany especially philosophers shy away from questions of religious or metaphysical or spiritual quality, so I thought that would be a point where Africans (African philosophers) think differently and maybe they can contribute something to philosophy on the "supernatural", or metaphysics. What do you think?

Orika: *Yes, I think so, I think they can. There are many European thinkers and American thinkers I think they shy away from that because they have been spoiled by "over-rationality", so-called. The use of and the belief in spirits are usually woolly. But in this particular case I think the person questioning me was not honest because they say they don't believe in spirits because they are civilized and Christian, that was their position, you see? And they do not have reason, a deep scientific philosophical reason for saying that spirits do not exist, you know. I have my reason. I was asked whether I actually believed or not, but I did not answer; I was just throwing the question back to him because I thought he could not get away with that. Because their position was that when you are educated, when you are a Christian, when you are a person like that you are beyond believing in things like spirits, like taboos, you know - which I think is colonial brain-washing because even some of the Christian beliefs are no better than taboo-beliefs. I would say I am looking for reason, that was not really my ultimate answer to that question as you can see.*

Kresse: If we turn over a bit to the field of political philosophy and regard your book The Philosophy of Liberty at the end of the first part you give a sharp critique upon the state African countries are in. You distinguish a ruling and a dominating class. The ruling class which is the ruling class of people on the country itself, and the dominating class mostly coming from outside, not living in the country but dominating the political and economical life in the country, and you say that the ruling class is used as a 'filter' by the dominating class. I think or I

felt that you were quite pessimistic in regard to the possibility of changing the structure of African states because you say that the independence needed for a social revolution is not there. Are you really very pessimistic or in what way do you think something like real social liberty can be achieved in Africa?

Oruka: *I think it can be achieved; I am not ultimately pessimistic. I think it can be achieved. It will take a long time. It will take education but as you see these last two years there have been beginnings of changes. But you see what's happening now, what's happening? There is a lot of twaddling again. Like you know Kenya tried to have a multi-party system and people were happy and shouted "there is going to be democracy!", but what is happening today? We seem to have gone back to square one. In the Philosophy of Liberty what I was saying is that the real social change by which you understand a real social-political change in Africa was being contained by the dominating class which was in fact not within Africa. For that matter it can be contained for a long time. If the dominating class would be living in Africa that would be a different matter. Social change can come very easily. It is different in countries like the former Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union the dominating class was within. So they were dominating and so the social change was meaningful, but in Africa what is immediately possible for us is to change the ruling class but changing the ruling class is just like changing names or persons, you see, because the dominating class will bring another group. So that's no social change but some sort of coup d'état, that's what I was trying to say. I do not know whether the situation has changed, I don't think so, even with the coming of democracy. Now the dominating class has even extended because the IMF and the World Bank - which were before not really part of the dominating class - have joined the big governments of the world as part of the dominating class so that countries of the African are now even more squeezed. Social change, if it will come in the immediate future it will have to come with also the support of a part of the dominating class. But they can take a long time to come.*

Kresse: So the prospect is to influence the dominating class outside Africa so that they influence their sponsored rulers to change Africa.

Oruka: *This is happening today, it's the cause of the so-called multi-party democracy in Africa for the last two or three years. Part of the reason why this has been happening is because there is some influence on the dominating class and you see that they put pressure on the African governments: "You must change to democracy, otherwise you will get no aid" etc.. You know that, yes? And even in South Africa, you know, part of the change of Apartheid has come from the influence of the outside forces.*

Kresse: You distinguish between six different levels of liberty. They are called economical liberty, political liberty, cultural liberty, religious, intellectual and sexual liberty. You say that economic freedom is the most fundamental and all the other freedoms are dependent on it. Now if we regard the bad economic hardships in Africa and furthermore take into account that it cannot get rid of them itself, must we not loose hope that Africa will be, will ever be free in the sense that you meant when you said "real freedom" that is freedom on all six levels.

Oruka: *Yes. It's a sad story but it has to be accepted, that if all these others liberties have to be meaningful in Africa, change has to take place on the economic level. Yes but due to the extent that Africa is so dominated economically and that it may not to be free for another 30 to 50 to 100 years, it will mean that those other levels will remain superficial. I think the example of South America has shown. South America got "independent" 200 years ago. Most of them have not yet developed to catch up with the rest of the so-called "free world". Why? Because they are economically dominated, they are not independent, not free. And they have been trying, places like Cuba had to go in a kind of suicidal way. They tried to get out. Chile, in 1973 completely got suppressed. So it is a sad position. But it's possible that Africa can really - with determination - can really get some kind of economic liberty, and then other things will follow. Take for example a place like Libya, Libya is not a poor country, and that's why it keeps talking big*

and even standing up to the U.S.A., you know. They can eat and they can function. So comparatively they are more independent than many of us in Africa.

Independent does not mean you have to be equal to the U.S.A. or the Germans, no it may simply mean that you have natural resources, indigenous resources on which you can depend for two or three years when you are at war with other nation(s). But if you cannot feed yourself the moment you begin to quarrel with say, the Germans (within one month) you are strangled, you see.

Kresse: One last question about the philosopher in general. Does a philosopher have a social responsibility or an obligation to work upon questions or problems concerning his society or his peers - or does he have total freedom of investigation?

Oruka: *What's the difference?*

Kresse: Well, is there something like a social responsibility of a philosopher to contribute to his society?

Oruka: *The communal well-being? Yes, I think there is as I think there is for all people, for all professionals ,isn't it? A philosopher has this, even in a deeper way than the other professionals. Because a philosopher is supposed really not just to be doing philosophy but to use his philosophy to understand the implications of all action in society. And to try to warn his people. So he has an even greater responsibility than just an ordinary professional. Although usually the philosophers are not easily listened to. Very few philosophers are lucky to really get people understand them or read them, you know? Even in Europe some philosophers become famous, because people read them usually second hand. Take example of Karl Marx: most of the people who talk about him never even have read him really. Even Kant, you know many of the Germans never even have read a page of Kant, but just because of his fame they talk about him. But usually, in their immediate surroundings the philosophers have often very few readers. Because even those who read them find them a bit dry and abstract, you know. You need to be*

an actor to get people to read you, or an entertaining novelist. But still it does not mean, a philosopher should give up because people do not read him. It is your responsibility as a philosopher to write what you think.

Kresse: So a philosopher cannot ignore the ethical aspect of his work?

Oruka: *Yes he/she must not. He must be committed. Even someone like Nietzsche who appeared philosophically reckless, I think he was very ethically committed in a way which we may not immediately understand, so it seems to me.*

Résumé

Cette étude traite le(s) rôle(s) que la philosophie pourrait jouer dans la résolution de la crise africaine. Premièrement l'état des affaires actuel de la philosophie en Afrique est présenté, disant que la philosophie africaine n'a pas contribué de manière pertinente au développement de la société africaine. Pour cette raison, l'essai suggère que la philosophie africaine puisse être plus valable pour la situation africaine en insistant sur l'essentiel traditionnel de la discipline étant la critique de la culture, basé spécifiquement sur la théorie de ce journal que la crise africaine est essentiellement une crise culturelle. L'étude continue avec une présentation de la crise culturelle comme un produit qui est au fond le résultat de l'échec de la société africaine à répondre aux provocations de la modernité par l'actualisation de la culture africaine, pour qu'elle puisse satisfaire les demandes contemporaines. L'argumentation de l'étude est que la modernité est désirable pour toutes les sociétés, parce qu'elle favorise l'esprit de dynamisme. Pour atténuer la crise actuelle, la société africaine doit absorber cet esprit de la modernité et le philosophe africain doit prendre la position d'avant-garde dans cette transformation culturelle. Dans ce cas, la philosophie africaine jouera un rôle plus significatif dans le développement de la société africaine.

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE AFRICAN CRISIS

Kolawole Aderemi Owolabi

For it is not the 'beliefs and myths' of the peoples of Africa in their intricate significance that are mind-boggling but the concrete misery and political insanity of the contemporary African situation.

Tsenay Serequeberhan

What should be the role of African scholars trained in philosophy in the efforts at resolving the prevailing crisis facing the African society today?* There is a sense in which questions of this nature have been the propelling force behind significant developments in the various intellectual disciplines as they relate to present day Africa. The gravity of the crisis facing Africa dictates that every intellectual discipline must define its own programme for resolving the crisis or face condemnation as irrelevant or unworthy of pursuit.

The essence of this essay in the light of this urgent need for relevance is to review the contribution of African philosophy to the resolution of Africa's problems; to see whether the contribution is adequate and if not to define a more commensurate role for philosophy in the light of its traditional status as the mother of all disciplines.

The crisis facing the African society today is of serious magnitude. The crisis has been expressed and defined from diverse perspectives confirming its pervasive nature. Indeed, every aspect of the society is presently facing one acute problem or the other. "The very existence of Africa" as Serequeberhan puts it "is at stake" [Serequeberhan (1991, p.24)]. This situation has originated the pessimism and gloomy mood which attend every discussion of the African society. And the predicament of the African society presently originates the term "Afro-pessimism" [Kilson and Cohen (1992, p.293)].

There are many dimensions to this crisis but the most apparent is the crisis of governance and the poor state of the economies of the African countries. The political and the economic aspects of the crisis are interconnected, indicating the common origin of the problems.

Articulating the situation aptly one can describe the crisis facing post-colonial Africa as the inability of the society to evolve adequate institutions and ideas for coping with contemporary demands. In essence, the crisis in its manifold facets can be described as a culture crisis. When we therefore conceive the African crisis as a cultural crisis, we mean that the totality of ideas, institutions and material inventions the African society developed for the running of the said society is no more capable of coping with contemporary realities.

The definition of the African crisis as a cultural crisis makes the African philosophers very relevant in the struggle to alleviate the crisis, because philosophy as a discipline is an exercise critical and constructive appraisal of the culture of the society. The question then is this: How far has African philosophy gone in this respect?

The question of the contribution of African philosophy to the resolution of the African crisis will not receive an immediate and encouraging response. This is because philosophy throughout its history in Africa has been devoted to the issue of existence and the nature of the discipline. According to professor Makinde:

So much debate had raged over the existence or non-existence of African philosophy that one may be tempted to think that perhaps what is known as African philosophy is nothing more than a controversy about whether or not there is indeed an African philosophy [Makinde (1989, p.89)].

African philosophers today are categorised into two orientations: the modernist orientation and the traditionalist orientation. The traditionalists are mostly those who agree with Tempels' descriptive method of doing African philosophy. These traditionalists believe that African community and its culture having been derided for so long by western scholarship ought to be defended by African scholars. This defence, they feel, is best carried out through an exposition of the logical structure and basic assumptions behind the African world-view [Oladipo (1989, p.31)].

The second orientation on the other hand, that is, the modernist

orientation is vehemently opposed to Tempels' methodology. Their position is that the descriptive discussion of world-views will not pass as philosophy in the original sense of the discipline; nor will it be adequate. The traditionalists according to professor Wiredu, if they are really philosophers must endeavour to clarify and critically evaluate the said world-views [Wiredu (1980, p.17)]. African philosophy, he argues further is not the mere description of world-view, it can only develop when the scholars are prepared to carry out their enterprise in a critical and rigorous manner.

The members of the two orientations have regarded their discussions as implicit contributions to the development of the African society. But the said contributions of the African philosophers is far from being satisfactory. This is clearly indicated by the present demand of the African society and people for the relevance of the discipline of philosophy to the society. Olusegun Oladipo in a recent book indicts both the traditionalists and the modernists for not responding adequately to the African problem. The African philosophers in the two camps are rather reflecting on externally-induced problematics [Oladipo (1992, p.5)]. This according to Oladipo is the reason behind the crisis of relevance currently facing philosophy in Africa.

The discussion of this challenge of relevance by contemporary African philosophers is also not encouraging. It is surprising that instead of responding positively and inducing their reflection to the African situation, some African philosophers still insist that such a response to the demands of their immediate society is antithetical to the traditional essence of their discipline. An instance of this position is seen in the recent essay of professor Bodunrin titled: "Philosophy as Pivot in Economic, Social and Political Re-orientation" [Bodunrin (1990)].

In this essay, professor Bodunrin maintains that philosophy qua philosophy is a purely theoretical discipline. According to him, with philosophy he has in mind Western philosophy, because the word itself has its birth in Western culture. Philosophy therefore in the Western and original sense of the concept can not reflect on practical problems.

Philosophy, he says can only reflect on some perennial theoretical issues in the bid to prevent authoritarianism and orthodoxy which he considers to be impediments to societal development [Bodunrin (1990, p.13)]. These perennial problems, he posits, can not be totally solved but can at best be controlled by constant reflection on them. Any philosopher who thinks otherwise and argues that philosophy can solve other problems confronting the society is according to him ignorant of the real nature and essence of philosophy.

The claim of professor Bodunrin to the effect that African philosophy must conform to the tradition of Western philosophy by being a purely theoretical, must be challenged here because this attitude is responsible for the poverty and irrelevance of African philosophy today. Our first objection to Bodunrin's position is that historically speaking, Western philosophy is not essentially a theoretical discipline. If we see the discipline today as such, we must recognise that these abstract issues have their concrete roots in society. Secondly, even if Western philosophy is purely theoretical, no rule says that African philosophy must conform to the Western mode of philosophising. As Bodunrin himself notes in an earlier essay:

There is no reason why an African can not have the freedom which his Western counterpart has to investigate what he likes. [Bodunrin (1985, p.ix)]

The position of this paper, which shall become more explicit as we go in, is that every philosopher must define the focus of its reflection based on societal exigency. History has proved that social milieu determines the content of philosophy. The earlier generation of African philosophers might find it unnecessary to mediate on practical issues of their own society because those issues were not pressing them. But today when the very survival of the African man is seriously at stake, to philosophise otherwise will not only be irresponsible but be callous and insensitive in our eyes. The present generation of African philosophers who are daily experiencing the crisis within the society must redirect their thinking and commence philosophical appraisal of the

crisis-ridden culture. They ought to become very relevant in the project of transforming and emancipating the society and the people of the continent. As Serequeberhan recently puts it "African philosophy will find its own theoretical space from within African problems and concerns that are felt and lived" [Serequeberhan (1991, p.viii)].

African philosophy in reacting to the crisis of culture is not doing anything out of order, essentially philosophy as a discipline is the reflection of mankind on the ideas and institutions guiding their existence. Philosophy as Staniland defines it is "the criticism of the ideas we live by" [Staniland (1979, p.3)]. Philosophy therefore can be defined further as the criticism of the ideas and material inventions that a particular society originates for administering itself.

But we must not fail to express the fact that philosophy deals with culture not in the descriptive sense of the anthropologists but in the critical and prescriptive sense. Whereas the anthropologists may celebrate culture, the objective of the philosopher in relation to culture is to improve it. It is this critical essence of philosophy in relation to culture that informs William James' conception of philosophy as the habit of searching for alternative. The critical nature of philosophy in relation to culture can be explained more aptly with the clarification that Staniland gave for her definition of philosophy as a critical enterprise. Staniland explains that by philosophy being critical, she does not mean the negative destruction of culture. She explains:

By criticism I of course mean not negative appraisal; but rational, impartial and articulate appraisal, whether positive or negative. To be critical of received ideas is accordingly not the same thing as rejecting them: it consists rather in seriously asking oneself whether the ideas in question should be reformed, modified or conserved, and in applying one's entire intellectual and imaginative intelligence to the search for an answer. [Staniland (1979, p.4)]

The exact cultural theme that African philosophy should give precedence and critically appraise is the unsettled situation of the present

culture. As Basil Davidson has aptly explain, the cultural dilemma facing the society is the failure of institutions, the old ones are ineffective, the present brings confusion while the future ones are yet to appear [Davidson (1974, p.6)].

The genesis of this cultural situation can be traced to the colonial period. Colonialism as we know directly introduced modernism to Africa. The colonial order as professor Ekeh has consistently maintained brought "qualitative social changes" to Africa [Ekeh (1980)]. The whole of our traditional culture was affected by the colonial epoch. Professor Ekeh continues:

... the colonial period is unmatched in our history in the growth and development of institutions, constructs, and social processes. The moral and social order which formerly encased the pre-colonial indigenous institutions is burst by the social forces of colonialism and they seek new anchors in the changed milieu of colonialism. [Ekeh (1980, p.3)]

The present crisis is therefore a consequence of the failure of the African society to respond to this cultural challenge that colonialism represents.

The carefree manner with which policy makers treat the cultural dilemma of post-colonial Africa explains almost all facets of the crisis facing the African people today. We know for instance that the mode of production in Africa is still primitive. This is a disadvantage for the African economy which is in stiff competition with the advanced industrial complex of Western countries in the contemporary world. The ironical aspect of this issue is that despite the failure of the African state to review the existing culture, the individuals who make up the society have jettisoned some aspects of the old culture. The African people have discovered in their daily living that: "The resources in ideas, techniques, and in certain respects, values, offered by our traditional cultures are simply not adequate for our contemporary needs and interests" [Irele (1982, p.22)].

It is the responsibility of African philosophers to bring to the fore, the need for our policy makers to reexamine their positions and policy

based on new discoveries. They should even make it clear that unless we are bold enough to do away with the obsolete ideas and institutions within the society, the ideal of development may be difficult to realise. But such appraisal should also not lose sight of the obvious liabilities of the modern culture which the African society can not afford to adopt wholeheartedly. Precisely, African society should raise the genuine question that needs to be asked in the light of the present crisis of culture; that is the question: **How can the present African culture be transformed to enable it cope with the contemporary demands?**

Essentially, the African philosopher with his analytical tools should be very active in the effort of transforming the ailing culture of the society. The process of modernisation which has become associated with development must not be effected globally with Africa on the sideline. Africa also needs to modernize. Modernity in this sense does not mean a complete surrender to Western values. To even think that modernity is synonymous with Westernization is an error that we philosophers should correct because of the harm it can do to the psyche of the African man. Modernity is rather a combination of positive ideas from different societies. The only thing we can say is that historically speaking, the West contributed more in bringing this culture into being. It is indeed the spirit of dynamism that modernity promotes that the African society needs to imbibe. As Black says "modernity is more of an attitude, the attitude that society can and should be transformed" [Black (1966, p.7)]. It is this spirit that we need to adopt in Africa and allow it to guide our daily operations.

As African philosophers, we must let the people be conscious that our development can not be attained if we are completely insulated from others. Rather, in this effort at transforming the society, cultural borrowing is allowed. A culture in fact shows its superiority by its dynamism and its receptiveness to foreign ideas. What is important in cultural borrowing is that such a borrowing should be voluntary and the society at the receiving end should be aware of the particular aspect of the foreign culture it is adopting. The problem with our previous cultural interaction in Africa is that such an interaction is involuntary.

Foreign ideas were merely forced down our throats in the bid to make us conform to the whims and caprices of the foreign colonisers. This new process shall rather be a conscious effort on our part to interact with other cultures in order to get from the cultures the best ideas which will foster the development of our society.

On the whole, the position we are trying to make in this paper is the responsibility of the African philosopher today to the African people who are daily facing the threat of extinction. The African philosopher therefore has to relegate all other issues to the background and treat with urgency the predicament of his people. He needs to begin to investigate every aspect of the society and critically bring into the open those ideas, institutions and way of life are contributing to this retardation. In the past, the philosopher has been criticised for policing other disciplines. Today, the African philosopher should not mind this. He should go out and interact with the scholars in other areas, the scientists, the technologists, the social scientists and see the focus and essence of their enterprises. Those who are not giving deserved attention to the African plight must be made to conform. For example, the African philosopher should examine the state of our technology and try to put in the spirit of creativity necessary for technological development, to salvage our depressed economy.

The question has been asked: **For who and in whose interest are the African philosophers philosophising?** In this last decade of the century, the African philosopher must give philosophical expression to the existential crisis of its people. As African philosophers our problematics should not be the ones generated from outside - those are not only irrelevant but also pseudo-problems within the context of our society - but the pervasive crisis we are presently witnessing. African philosophers can only live up to their name by reflecting on the African crisis.

*This paper has benefited from my discussion with two of my colleagues Olusegun Oladipo and Chris Uroh. I also thank the reviewers of this journal for their suggestion.

Bibliography

Appiah, A.

1992 *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Apter, D.

1987 *Rethinking Development: Modernization, Dependency and Post Modern Politics*. California: Sage Publications.

Black, C.E.

1966 *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History*. New York: Harper and Row.

Bodunrin, P.

1981 "The Question of African Philosophy" in *Philosophy*, vol.56.

1985 *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives*. Ife, Univ. of Ife Press.

1990 "Philosophy as Pivot in Economics, Social and Political Reorientation" in *Imodeye: A Journal of African Philosophy*, vol.1, no.1.

Davidson, B.

1974 *Can Africa Survive? Arguments Against Growth Without Development*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Review Press.

Ekeh, P.P.

1975 "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.1.

1980 *Colonialism and the Social Structure*. Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Irele, F.A.

1982 *In Praise of Alienation*. Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, Ibadan , Nigeria.

1992 "The Crisis of Legitimacy in Africa: A Time of Change and Despair" in *Dissent*.

Kilson and Cohen

1992 "Africa, Crisis and Change" in *Dissent*.

Linton, R.

1963 *The Study of Man*. New York: Appleton Century Crofts.

Lyman, P.

1988 "Images and Realities of Responsibility Towards Africa" in *The Crisis and Challenge of African Development*, H. Glickman (ed), New York: Greenwood Press.

Makinde, A.

1989 "Philosophy in Africa" in *The Substance of African Philosophy*, C.S. Momoh (ed), Auchi: African Philosophy Projects Publications.

Mazrui, A.

1979 "The Cultural Fate of African Legislatures: Rise and Decline and Prospects for Revival" in *Presence Africaine*, no.112.

Morrow, L.

1992 "Africa: The Scramble for Existence" in *Time Magazine*.

Oladipo, O.

1989 "Towards a Philosophical Study of African Culture: A Critique of Traditionalism" in *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, vol.3, no.2.

1992 *The Idea of African Philosophy: A Critical Study of the Major Orientations in Contemporary African Philosophy*. Ibadan: Molecular Publishers.

Serequeberhan, T.

1991 *African Philosophy: The Essential Reading*. New York: Paragon House.

Staniland, A.S.

1978 "What is Philosophy" in *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy*, vol.VIII, nos. 1 & 2.

Tempels, P.

1959 *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine.

Thompson, L.

1992 "Some Problems of Democratisation in African Transitional Societies" in *Democracy, Democratization and Africa*, L. Thompson (ed), Ibadan: Afrikalink.

Toulmin, S.

1988 "The Recovery of Practical Philosophy" in *The American Scholar*, vol.59, no.3

Verene, P.D.

1970 *Man and Culture*. New York: Dell Publishing Co.

Wiredu, K.

1980 *Philosophy and An African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Summary

The problematic of "After Philosophy" is known to be as old as philosophy itself. The reason for giving it attention is that, in its contemporary developments, this problematic seems to be symptomatic of the changes and contradictions faced by our epoch. This what is shown first.

Then we make explicit what we personally regard as the real philosophical status of the debate. Our position is that behind the questioning of the epistemological status of philosophy, which is supposed to be outdated by the progress of the sciences and the way it structures the order of knowledge, what is really questioned is Reason, but also philosophical discourse as such or, more precisely, philosophical discourse.

We are ending with the suggestion that the debate, rather than clarifying the status of contemporary philosophy, opens the reflection towards an abyss of new and more critical questions. Maybe it is nothing but a new subterfuge by professional philosophy to remain alive and nourish its own servants.

LE "DÉPASSEMENT DE LA PHILOSOPHIE". REFLEXION SUR LE STATUT CONTEMPORAIN DE LA PHILOSOPHIE

Sémou Pathé Gueye

Introduction

Le thème du "dépassement de la philosophie" a l'âge de la philosophie elle-même. En effet, tout au long de l'histoire de celle-ci, surtout à des moments qui se sont avérés par la suite être des tournants décisifs, il n'a cessé d'être agité. Mais à chaque fois aussi, il a eu une signification particulière et recouvert des enjeux spécifiques qu'on peut essayer de restituer en interrogeant les conditions historiques concrètes dans lesquelles il a été formulé.

Si aujourd'hui ce thème, à travers ses différents développements dans la réflexion philosophique contemporaine, mérite encore l'attention de l'historien de la philosophie, c'est qu'elle est symptomatique des mutations et des contradictions de notre époque et reflète bien la façon dont elles sont vécues, intériorisées.

En effet, comme le souligne fort à propos L. Landgrebe, nous vivons à une époque qui "semble devenue incapable d'une réflexion sans nuage autour de sa propre essence"⁰, une époque à laquelle les questions de l'avenir du monde, et celle du sens de l'existence de l'homme et de la finalité de son action -questions philosophiques par excellence - se posent avec une exceptionnelle tonalité tragique.

A cet égard W. Stegmüller nous semble avoir raison de penser que "jamais auparavant, dans l'histoire, il n'y a eu une conscience aussi grande de la nature énigmatique du monde"¹.

C'est donc tout naturellement que, dans un tel contexte de doutes et d'incertitudes, contexte de crise² par définition, naissent et se répandent des visions du monde foncièrement pessimistes dominées par l'angoisse de la mort et que, dans les propos qui tentent de les exprimer, la même angoisse se ressent tout aussi fortement. D'où la floraison des discours de clôture, la profusion des communiqués annonçant les funérailles de l'homme", de la "philosophie", de l'"histoire" et la débauche de néologismes du type - post.

La problématique contemporaine du dépassement de la philosophie traduit bien cette tournure d'esprit; elle exprime, à sa manière, les bouleversements de notre époque ainsi que les remises en question et les incertitudes qui les accompagnent. C'est ce que nous essayerons de montrer dans la première partie de cette étude.

Nous nous proposons ensuite d'explicitier les enjeux philosophiques d'une telle problématique, en montrant notamment que, derrière la remise en question du statut épistémologique de la philosophie, remise en question qui serait rendue nécessaire par le progrès des sciences contemporaines et la façon dont il restructure l'ordre du savoir, c'est la Raison et ses différents avatars philosophiques qui est convoquée en procès, mais aussi le discours philosophique lui-même, ou plus exactement la philosophie comme discours, sommée, sur la base de l'analyse critique du langage, de reconnaître la vacuité de ses énoncés et la vanité de son exercice. Et nous laisserons entrevoir, pour terminer, que ce débat, loin d'apporter toute la lumière nécessaire sur le statut contemporain de la philosophie, ouvrira plutôt la réflexion sur un abîme de questions, aussi cruciales les unes que les autres. Ce qui donne légitimement à penser, ou qui a en tout cas pu donner à penser, que la proclamation persistante du "dépassement de la philosophie" n'est finalement qu'une nouvelle ruse de la philosophie professionnelle pour pouvoir mieux tromper son monde et continuer de faire vivre ses officiants.

Un contexte de crise

Dans un article publié il y a près de trente ans, le philosophe américain M.J. Adler faisait déjà un constat qui, au regard de la situation actuelle de la philosophie, garde toute sa pertinence:

"Nous avons eu toutes sortes de réforme philosophique, nouveaux départs, programmes thérapeutiques associés au pragmatisme américain, positivisme logique (aussi bien celui de Vienne que celui du Royaume Uni), philosophie analytique et linguistique (aussi bien anglaise qu'américaine),

la phénoménologie et l'existentialisme (essentiellement européens). S'il y a une chose que toutes ces philosophies ont de commun, c'est leur anxiété au sujet de l'impasse où la philosophie s'est fourvoyée, l'interrogation sur sa validité et sa signification, et leur tentative pour la tirer de cette situation et la remettre sur la voie du progrès et de la prospérité¹³.

C'est un diagnostic identique que formule encore L. Landgrebe lorsqu'il écrit:

"... la philosophie, au lieu de se concentrer sur un travail direct portant sur certains problèmes, est de plus en plus préoccupée par elle-même, avec une permanente autojustification et une réflexion permanente sur ses tâches et ses fonctions dans la société humaine... Le miroir sombre et brisé dans lequel elle se regarde, reflète ses conflits intérieures et son propre caractère problématique qui ne lui assurent plus une base solide pour consolider avec confiance ses positions et son chemin"¹⁴.

L'obnubilation de la réflexion philosophique contemporaine par la question de son propre statut et de son sort n'est certes pas gratuite. Elle n'est que l'intériorisation, dans et par la philosophie, de la crise profonde que traverse notre époque. En fait, les prémices d'une telle crise étaient déjà nettement perceptibles dès le début du siècle, comme le soulignait d'ailleurs à juste titre F. Châtelet:

"Dès 1900, cela ne va pas bien. Les grands principes qui ont servi à l'essor des Etats modernes ..., au moment même où ils rencontrent leur plus grand succès, se trouvent durablement mis en question ..., la mathématique-modèle de la rationalité depuis vingt cinq siècles-voit son autorité compromise; malgré les démonstrations kantiennees et les assurances positivistes, les sciences physiennnes subissent des transformations fondamentales; dans le monde politique,

le marxisme lui-même - doctrine d'opposition au système capitaliste - doit changer de statut jusqu'à devenir une scolastique justifiant un terrorisme d'Etat ..."⁵.

Un facteur essentiel de cette évolution réside dans l'essor prodigieux des sciences, dont les effets, au plan de la culture notamment, ont été considérables. Elles ont en effet transformé son contenu dans des proportions et modifié son cours dans des directions que nous ne faisons encore qu'entrevoir, comme le souligne d'ailleurs à juste raison J. Ladrière:

"Nous commençons à entrevoir, par sa dynamique même, de façon non explicite, non directement apparente, qu'elle (la science) a complètement bouleversé l'idée que la tradition occidentale s'était faite de la raison, de la vérité, des rapports entre la raison théorique et la raison pratique, de la qualité de l'homme et de la nature de l'historicité ..."⁶.

Une telle évolution, on s'en doute bien, ne pouvait manquer d'obliger la philosophie à reconsidérer radicalement son propre statut, et à s'interroger à nouveaux frais sur son rôle et sa place dans la culture. Car comme l'écrit fort justement Jean Toussaint Desanti, ce "ne sera plus désormais la voix d'autrefois qui, pour tous, proclamait la vérité. Il faut s'y résigner, le philosophe n'énoncera plus le savoir, d'autres en ont pris la charge"⁷. C'est tout naturellement donc que la philosophie se demande ce qu'elle deviendra désormais "devant l'éclatement des vérités, la multiplication des techniques et l'enchevêtrement des sciences"⁸.

Cette évolution affectera d'abord la *figure* du philosophe, avec l'apparition de ces "aventuriers d'un genre nouveau"⁹, comme les appelait François Châtelet, originaires de lieux fort éloignés de celui d'où parlaient traditionnellement les philosophes: de la médecine, de la linguistique, de la mathématique, de la sociologie, de l'anthropologie etc. Le *style* et l'*objet* de la philosophie ne seront pas non plus épargnés:

"La "philosophie des professeurs", constatait à ce propos aussi François Chatelet, "se maintient dans le sérieux et l'ennui avec l'appui de la psychologie et de la sociologie qui, ayant une fonction de régulation sociale se développent. En même temps surgissent, venues d'ailleurs, d'autres inventions. Des objets brisés, cassés, disparates ou évanescents (au regard de la tradition spéculative) s'imposent: l'inconscient, le langage, la science (...), la guerre, le (dit-on) parti, la (dit-on) folie, le (dit-on) primitif, l'art comme activité, comme masque et comme effet"¹⁰.

L'ébranlement des bases traditionnelles de l'activité philosophique et le brouillage des repères qui lui permettaient de se situer par rapport aux autres disciplines, vont donner de la philosophie contemporaine une image en clair-obscur, inspirant à l'observateur un sentiment assez mitigé, stimulante et décourageante à la fois.

Une première impression que l'on peut avoir en effet, c'est celle d'une certaine fragilité, d'une certaine inconsistance de ses fondations théoriques.

En effet, les vagues philosophiques défilent de nos jours à l'allure des modes vestimentaires, laissant derrière elles un arrière-goût d'inachevé et le sentiment qu'on ne saurait plus attendre du travail philosophique que d'éphémères prêt-à-porter intellectuels. Les médias s'étant mêlés de l'affaire, pour décider à leur guise de la philosophie qui mérite d'être prise pour telle et des philosophes dignes d'être adulés, l'activité philosophique se surprend à préférer de plus en plus l'ambiance fiévreuse des studios d'enregistrement et le bric-à-brac de leurs artifices scéniques, à la douleur de l'enfantement conceptuel dans les froids et austères cabinets de travail.

C'est ainsi que sous l'honorable prétexte de "penser la vie" comme Hegel fort opportunément le recommandait à la philosophie, celle-ci s'embourbe plutôt dans le quotidien, à la remorque de l'événementiel, c'est-à-dire de l'incessant. La pensée se donne en spectacle gratuit et l'idée se fait tape-à l'oeil. Il n'est donc pas étonnant

que la solennité radicale du questionnement philosophique ne soit plus assurée que grâce à la ténacité d'un petit carré de résistants assiégés de toutes parts par la frivolité intellectuelle ambiante. Il ne serait alors pas exagéré, de ce point de vue, de parler d'une certaine tendance à la dégénérescence, dont les racines historiques parfaitement assignables, seraient à situer dans la dynamique même des changements qui, depuis des décennies, avaient commencé à remodeler le visage du monde.

"Les effets de l'expansion économique, écrit à ce propos R. Caratini, l'avènement d'une société de consommation de masse, d'un Etat industriel avancé ..., des moyens informatiques qui dégradent la pensée en la simplifiant à outrance et en la faisant circuler à tous les niveaux, ont contribué à détruire le piédestal de la philosophie. Les nouveaux oracles ne sont plus les penseurs abstraits, ce sont les économistes, les hommes politiques, les porte-parole des syndicats de tous bords et leurs vulgarisateurs les journalistes; la révolution de Mai 1968, produit partiel de la critique philosophique de l'après-guerre a cloîtré la philosophie dans un ghetto: l'immédiateté de l'utile a condamné l'hésitation patiente de la réflexion, le tintamarre l'emporte sur le silence"¹¹.

Il conviendrait cependant, nous semble-t-il, de tempérer quelque peu ce qu'une telle présentation de l'activité philosophique contemporaine peut avoir d'un peu trop négatif.

En fait, quelque déroutants que puissent être la diversité des approches philosophiques, le renouvellement des styles et l'éparpillement des objets, l'allure générale de l'activité philosophique n'en comporte pas moins des aspects incontestablement positifs. En effet, aux prises avec toutes sortes de mutations qui ébranlent les bases de nos certitudes antérieures et fragilisent les fondations sur lesquelles avaient reposé jusqu'ici nos discours et nos pratiques, la philosophie, aujourd'hui plus que jamais, s'accommoderait difficilement de

l'immobilisme intellectuel, des systèmes clos, c'est-à-dire totalisants et totalitaires, et des convictions acquises au rabais.

Elle est tenue au contraire, sous peine de se marginaliser davantage, d'assouplir ses approches, d'élargir et de multiplier sans cesse ses perspectives, de relativiser ses principes, ses paradigmes et ses concepts, en les maintenant ouverts en permanence, pour rester constamment en phase avec une réalité qui évolue et se complexifie sans cesse. Là où de telles exigences ont été non seulement comprises mais aussi rigoureusement prises en compte, dans la formulation des questions philosophiques et dans l'élaboration de leurs réponses, il s'en est souvent suivi de formidables bouffées de fraîcheur intellectuelle dont on ne saura apprécier toute la portée régénératrice que lorsque se seront définitivement tassées les rumeurs de mort qui accompagnent aujourd'hui le fracas assourdissant des vieilles idoles qui s'effondrent.

Cela ne rend pour autant ni gratuite ni injustifiée l'inquiétude que la philosophie peut et doit avoir sur son propre sort, dans le contexte actuel de crise généralisée que nous vivons, contexte qui détermine non seulement la signification historique de la problématique du "dépassement de la philosophie", comme nous venons de le voir, mais aussi ses enjeux. Or donc à travers cette problématique, qu'est-ce qui, réellement, est en jeu?

Le roi est nu: Effondrement des illusions épistémologiques de la philosophie

C'est au regard de la façon dont les mutations en cours affectent l'ordre du savoir qu'il faut d'abord essayer de cerner les enjeux du "dépassement de la philosophie".

Dès sa naissance, la philosophie a nourri l'ambition de constituer non seulement un savoir, mais même le Savoir par excellence, celui qui, placé au-dessus de tous les autres, se considérait comme habilité à les régenter, à les assujettir à ses exigences et à ses finalités propres¹², à décider de leur valeur et de leurs limites. La position épistémologique prééminente qu'elle s'octroyait ainsi, la philosophie croyait pouvoir la

fonder sur le rapport privilégié qu'en tant que Logos, Discours de la Raison, elle était supposée entretenir avec les Idées (Platon), l'Etre en tant qu'Etre (Aristote), Dieu (dans la philosophie religieuse), le Sujet (Descartes, Kant), l'Absolu (Hegel), l'Histoire (Hegel, Marx) etc. C'est forte d'une telle position qu'elle s'était investie comme la seule instance, la seule autorité apte à "mettre en oeuvre un discours capable de déployer toutes les possibilités du savoir, d'en dévoiler d'un seul mouvement le fondement"¹³.

C'est cette prétention, fondatrice et normative, qui est devenue, au regard de l'évolution contemporaine du Savoir, de plus en plus intenable.

A l'aube des Temps Modernes d'ailleurs, elle avait déjà commencé à faire problème. En effet, à la faveur du processus de transformation du système féodal et d'édification des bases matérielles du capitalisme, des exigences nouvelles et croissantes apparurent au plan de la connaissance.

Elles aboutirent à la mise en place d'un nouveau paradigme de savoir tourné essentiellement vers la conquête du monde et la domination de la nature, un savoir destiné à, et capable de, selon le mot de Descartes, rendre l'homme "maître et possesseur" de la nature. La maîtrise d'un tel savoir était érigée en condition *sine qua non* de toute réalisation humaine et considérée comme une voie d'accès privilégiée à la liberté et au bonheur. Et c'est à cette fin ultime de la domination de la nature par la découverte de ses lois que la raison devait désormais se dévouer entièrement¹⁴.

C'est ainsi que la combinaison des ressources de la pensée mathématique¹⁵ avec la méthode des observations systématiques, entraînera une véritable "rupture épistémologique" (Bachelard) et la naissance, dans des domaines du réel qui étaient jusque-là pris en charge par les spéculations philosophico-théologiques, de sciences nouvelles dûment constituées, et mettant en oeuvre des procédures de découverte et de validation plus aptes à réaliser l'"accord des esprits" sur les connaissances qu'elles produisaient.

Un tel processus entraînera, à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début

du XIXe siècle l'apparition de sciences comme la chimie et la biologie, dans le sillage de la physique, dont la méthode¹⁶, pour la plus grande fécondité et la plus grande fiabilité qui lui seront reconnues, s'imposera de plus en plus comme celle par excellence de la science. Jusque-là confiné dans le domaine de la nature, ce mouvement s'étendra, à partir du XIXe siècle au "monde intérieur" de l'homme et aux différentes dimensions de la vie en société, donnant ainsi naissance aux sciences humaines¹⁷, à des niveaux et dans des sphères du réel considérés jusque-là comme les ultimes retranchements de la philosophie parce que supposées réfractaires aux normes et aux procédures quantitatives des sciences de la nature.

Même si certains spécialistes de ces dernières continuent de nourrir le doute sur la "scientificité" des dites sciences humaines, il demeure incontestable qu'elles ont fait avancer considérablement la connaissance dans leurs sphères d'intervention respectives, renforçant d'autant le pouvoir de l'homme sur le monde qui l'entoure et sur l'homme lui-même.

Comprise donc à la lumière de toutes ces évolutions qui ont progressivement restructuré l'ordre du Savoir et réformé les critères qui servaient à opérer le partage des disciplines et à définir leurs rapports mutuels et leurs prérogatives respectives, la problématique du "dépassement de la philosophie" révèle ici un des ses principaux enjeux.

En effet, ce qu'elle indique clairement, c'est l'effondrement progressif des illusions épistémologiques de la philosophie¹⁸; ce qu'elle vise, c'est bien le statut de celle-ci, notamment dans sa prétention de constituer une science parmi les autres, habilitée à orienter et à coordonner leur activité¹⁹

Le sort qui en découle pour la philosophie est à la fois paradoxal et tragique:

"Étrange destin, écrit à ce propos T. Oizerman, que celui de la philosophie! Synonyme de science pour les Anciens, la voilà qui doit se battre pour être reconnue comme telle aux Temps Modernes, et plus encore à nos jours. Qu'est-ce à

dire? La philosophie son-âge est vénérable - se serait-elle laissée dépasser par des sciences trop jeunes dans un marathon qui ne serait plus de sa force? Ou plutôt ce qui fut science pour l'Antiquité n'aurait-elle plus droit à cette appellation de nos jours ... Certes, une autre explication se présente à cette situation paradoxale ...: la philosophie ne serait-elle pas tombée dans la situation du Roi Lear jeté sur le pavé, comme personnage inutile, par ses propres filles après qu'il eut tout donné²⁰.

La raison en procès

A vrai dire, l'idée que la philosophie serait en train de "mourir" du développement des sciences qui aurait ruiné ses anciennes prétentions épistémologiques, notamment son ambition de constituer un savoir, aurait pu ne pas préoccuper les philosophes tant qu'elle n'émanait que de simples profanes en la matière. Mais elle ne peut plus manquer de donner à réfléchir quand ce sont des philosophes attirés, et parfois officiellement appointés comme tels qui la reprennent à leur compte et en font pour ainsi dire le leitmotiv de leur pensée. Cela aussi d'ailleurs pourrait, à la limite ne pas étonner.

Car tout compte fait, le remue-ménage iconoclaste dans lequel une telle attitude plonge aujourd'hui la philosophie, peut tout naturellement s'inscrire dans la continuité d'une tradition critique et autocritique sur laquelle, depuis sa naissance, elle avait fondé ses titres de noblesse, une tradition que notre époque n'aurait fait que radicaliser en une "pratique de l'irrespect"²¹, prolongeant et amplifiant ainsi les coups de boutoir de ceux que l'on a appelés les "grands maîtres du soupçon", Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein et Heidegger, pour ne citer que ceux qui nous paraissent les plus décisifs au regard du problème qui nous préoccupe ici. Mais ce que l'on gagnerait en assurance sur le sort de la philosophie en pensant ainsi, serait autant de perdu dans la nécessaire prise en compte du caractère radical, et à bien des égards, énigmatique, de la remise en question perpétrée par ces derniers à l'encontre de

l'antique "reine des sciences".

Sans doute, le rapport de Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein et Heidegger à la philosophie est demeuré somme toute ambigu, d'une ambiguïté telle que l'exégèse de leurs discours respectifs sur cette dernière, et l'interprétation du statut de leur pratique théorique, n'ont cessé d'alimenter les querelles de leurs émules les plus fidèles ou de leurs commentateurs les plus avisés²².

La fièvre des "relectures" suscitées durant ces dernières décennies par une telle ambiguïté n'avait d'ailleurs pas manqué d'aboutir parfois à la sacralisation dogmatique de certaines de ces exégèses, voire à la canonisation philosophique, c'est-à-dire à la neutralisation, de ces grandes figures du soupçon et, la mode aidant, de faire dégénérer leurs propos respectifs en une nouvelle scolastique s'entretenant de la rumination de ses propres catégories²³ et des acquiescements convenus des snobs intellectuels de tous bords.

Le grain ne doit pas cependant disparaître dans la paille. Car dans la critique marxienne de l'"idéologie", et ses effets matérialistes sur la remise en question du statut antérieurement dévolu à la conscience dans la philosophie idéaliste post-cartésienne, dans la double orientation "généalogique" et "symptomatologique" de la démarche théorique de Nietzsche, avec la démythification qui en a découlé des sacro-saintes notions de Vérité, de Bien, de Beau (et de leur cortège de fantômes "objectivité", "universalité", "neutralité", "désintéressement" etc), dans la restructuration du domaine psychique opérée par la psychanalyse de Freud, qui a conforté la dénonciation de l'illusion solipsiste d'une conscience autonome, qui serait toujours transparente à elle-même et dépositaire exclusif du sens authentique de nos pensées, de nos paroles et de nos actes, dans la reformulation radicale du questionnement sur l'Être, dont la nécessité découle tout naturellement chez Heidegger du diagnostic de cet "oubli" fatidique qui ouvre et clôt l'histoire de la métaphysique occidentale en une fin tragique marquée par la "planétarisation" de la pensée technicienne, la dissolution de l'"authenticité" du moi dans le monde indifférencié de ses propres oeuvres et la ploutocratie, enfin dans le dilemme fatal dans lequel

Wittgenstein a tenu à enfermer la philosophie, entre *se taire ou parler pour ne plus rien dire*, ce sont incontestablement autant de remises en cause, sinon de remises en perspective, qui s'opèrent et dont l'activité philosophique ne pouvait manquer de prendre sérieusement acte, dans sa quête d'une nouvelle réponse à la question de son statut et de son sort, telle qu'elle lui est concrètement posée aujourd'hui par l'évolution du monde.

Mais à tenter de comprendre au plus profond de leurs effets respectifs de telles remises en cause, on se rend compte que ce qu'elles visent de façon plus radicale encore, au-delà du Sujet et de ses avatars philosophiques, éthiques, psychologiques, métaphysiques etc, c'est *la philosophie elle-même* telle qu'elle s'est historiquement constituée en Occident, c'est-à-dire la philosophie dans sa quête éternelle de vérité mais surtout *dans son ambition multiséculaire de déployer en totale assurance, le discours privilégié d'une Raison souveraine, créatrice et dépositaire de sens, ultime garante de notre connaissance du monde et de notre pouvoir sur les choses*. C'est donc cette Raison qui, à travers la problématique contemporaine du "dépassement de la philosophie", se trouve convoquée aujourd'hui devant le tribunal de l'Histoire, non plus, comme chez Kant, pour y assumer le double rôle de juge et partie, mais comme accusée centrale et même comme coupable présumée, pour justifier la légitimité des titres qu'elle s'était antérieurement arrogés, reprendre à nouveaux frais les fondations devenues suspectes de ses édifices théoriques et conceptuels, et réexaminer sur des bases radicalement nouvelles, la valeur pour l'homme et la portée historique des pratiques qu'elle a jusqu'ici inspirées.

Interpellation de la Raison donc, cruciale au regard de ses enjeux, et qui s'effectue dans une diversité de perspectives qui, soit dit en passant, n'est pas sans donner l'impression d'une certaine "cacophonie"²⁴. Dans certains cas en effet elle semble être animée seulement par l'intention d'une simple mise en garde adressée à cette Raison, contre les étroitesse dogmatiques du rationalisme classique empêché par la trop grande rigidité de ses normes, de ses critères de validation et de ses procédures discursives, d'appréhender le réel dans

sa dynamique propre et sa buissonnante richesse.

Il s'agit alors ici d'une attitude plutôt anti-rationaliste qu'irrationaliste, attitude qui, comme l'illustrent la philosophie et l'épistémologie bachelardiennes, a permis une certaine "historicisation", c'est-à-dire un certain assouplissement "dialectique" de la Raison, et l'ébauche du concept nouveau d'une rationalité qui "se forme en se reformant", qui s'amende donc et s'enrichit en permanence, à la faveur du mouvement du réel et de la connaissance toujours renouvelée que nous en donnent les sciences, engagées elles-mêmes dans un processus continu d'évolution et/ou de révolutions²⁵.

Dans le sillage également de l'anthropologie structurale de Levi-Strauss, la critique du rationalisme classique, fondée ici sur une nouvelle lecture du mythe et une meilleure écoute des normes et procédures à l'oeuvre dans la "pensée sauvage", permettra non seulement de rompre avec cette forme particulière de l'éthnocentrisme occidental qu'est le logocentrisme²⁶, mais aussi d'exhumer de nouveaux types de "rationalité", jusque-là méconnues ou tout simplement refoulées (parce que se déployant des sphères et à des niveaux de réel inaccessibles à la raison calculatrice), des types de rationalité qui, parce qu'elles transcendent les dichotomies classiques entre le réel et l'imaginaire, l'être et l'apparence, l'essence et le phénomène, subvertissent de fait l'ordre ontologique et logique hérité de Platon et d'Aristote, ordre considéré depuis lors, en Occident, comme celui par excellence de la philosophie. Ce qui ne pouvait évidemment pas manquer d'attenter à la respectabilité des référents sacrés à partir desquels cet Occident ordonnait ses "grands Récits"²⁷.

Mais l'interpellation de la Raison a pu emprunter d'autres voies que celles dont nous venons de parler. Elle a pu par exemple s'inscrire dans une perspective, cette fois-ci plus ou moins franchement irrationaliste, visant à mettre au rencard la raison elle-même avec ses différentes modalités d'existence et d'exercice, au profit d'autres instances, "intuition", "désir" etc, que nous pouvons ranger dans la catégorie générique de "vie". Cette orientation qui, d'une façon ou d'une autre, emprunte les sentiers de la critique nietzschéenne de la

philosophie accusée de bâillonner le dynamisme de la "vie" sous la tyrannie du concept, s'est affirmée en Allemagne par exemple par toute une tradition qui est celle de la "philosophie de la vie".

Elle se ressent aussi dans la problématique hégéggerienne de l'"existence" et même, de façon ambiguë il est vrai, à travers certaines analyses de l'Ecole de Francfort, comme on peut le noter dans la *Dialectique de la Raison* d'Horkheimer et Adorno, *L'Eclipse de la Raison* d'Horkheimer, *Eros et Civilisation* et *L'Homme Unidimensionnel* de Marcuse etc. En tout cas dans le cadre de ce que les membres de cette Ecole ont appelé la "théorie critique"²⁸, l'interpellation de la Raison a pris la forme d'un procès de l'Aufklärung²⁹ accusé de l'avoir fourvoyée, en la faisant dégénérer en une "raison instrumentale", et d'avoir conduit l'histoire dans l'impasse d'une "Civilisation" orientée essentiellement vers la recherche de moyens de domination de la nature qui ont fini par se retourner contre l'homme lui-même, par se transformer en moyens de domination de l'homme par l'homme³⁰.

Ce dont on ne peut parler, le taire

Un dernier axe d'orientation de la réflexion contemporaine sur le "dépassement de la philosophie" procède d'une réflexion sur le langage. Il s'agira ici de mesurer l'efficace du discours philosophique à l'aune d'un concept nouveau de "sens" dont l'élaboration constituera une étape décisive dans le renouvellement de la question du statut de la philosophie.

L'approche de la question du statut de la philosophie par le biais d'une réflexion critique sur le langage n'est certes que d'une très relative originalité. En tout cas depuis Platon, cette question est solidaire d'une interrogation sur la nature du langage et sur le pouvoir des mots, que ce pouvoir soit appréhendé à travers leurs rapports avec l'essence des choses qu'ils sont sensés désigner ou avec la pensée qu'ils sont chargés de véhiculer. Des dialogues comme le Parménide, le Gorgias, le Sophiste, le Cratyle etc, sont là pour en témoigner.

D'ailleurs en explicitant ce qu'il a considéré comme le "pari"³¹ de

la philosophie naissante, F. Châtelet a bien souligné cet aspect. Ce pari que, dit-il, "la culture a repris sous des modalités multiples"³² résidait dans la construction d'un discours qui "satisfasse tout individu de bonne foi et lui permette de répondre efficacement aux questions théoriques et pratiques qui se posent à lui ..."³³. Il s'agissait, dit-il encore, d'obliger l'homme à convenir que sa parole "est autre chose que le simple reflet de l'intérêt, de la passion et du caprice"³⁴, de le convaincre qu'en parlant "il expérimente une réalité qui dépasse son statut empirique"³⁵, de l'amener par conséquent à essayer de "construire le système d'énoncés irrécusables auxquels tout individu de bonne foi ne puisse refuser son adhésion"³⁶. Dans l'intention platonicienne ainsi présentée se trouvaient donc des éléments d'une interrogation et d'une démarche intellectuelle qu'à partir des travaux du Frege et Russell, la philosophie contemporaine de l'analyse linguistique ne fera que prolonger d'une certaine manière. Le reconnaître comme cela se doit ne revient d'ailleurs nullement à sous estimer, encore moins à méconnaître, toute la portée de l'oeuvre d'un penseur comme Wittgenstein dans le développement d'une telle problématique. Incontestablement, la parution de son *Tractatus logicophilosophicus* constitue un événement majeur dont il convient, pour cette raison, de mesurer les conséquences dans l'élaboration ultérieure de la question du statut de la philosophie. Nous nous attarderons donc un peu sur les thèses de cet ouvrage.

La façon dont le *Tractatus* s'inscrit dans une problématique du "dépassement de la philosophie" est somme toute ambiguë, d'une ambiguïté qu'il faut d'ailleurs imputer, pour une part essentielle, à l'auteur lui-même et à la manière aphoristique, voire sibylline parfois, dont il a tenu à y exposer sa conception de la philosophie. Cela donne encore plus de prix à l'éclairage que ce dernier lui-même nous fournit, dans l'Avant Propos:

"Le livre traite des problèmes de philosophie et comme je le crois, montre que la formulation de ces problèmes repose sur un malentendu de la logique de notre langage. On pourrait résumer tout le sens de ce livre à ces mots: tout ce qui peut

être dit peut être dit clairement, et ce dont on ne peut parler il faut le taire³⁷.

L'aphorisme 6.53 précisera cette idée en ces termes:

"La juste méthode de la philosophie serait en somme la suivante: ne rien dire sinon ce qui peut se dire, donc les propositions des sciences de la nature donc quelque chose qui n'a rien à voir avec la philosophie et puis à chaque fois qu'un autre voudrait dire quelque chose de métaphysique, lui démontrer qu'il n'a pas donné la signification à certains signes dans ses propositions. Cette méthode ne serait pas satisfaisante pour l'autre - il n'aurait pas le sentiment que nous lui enseignons de la philosophie - mais elle serait ici la seule rigoureusement juste".

En d'autres termes, c'est seulement parce que les philosophes se laissent prendre au piège des mots du langage ordinaire qu'ils pensent traiter de vrais problèmes; la croyance en l'existence de "problèmes philosophiques" relèverait donc d'une illusion dont la source serait à situer dans la logique même de notre langage ordinaire. Faute d'objet la philosophie, dans son acception et sa démarche traditionnelles, doit disparaître, pour se transformer en une simple activité d'élucidation du langage. C'est là, en substance, la conception de Wittgenstein sur le statut de la philosophie dans le *Tractatus*.

Voyons maintenant comment une telle conception est argumentée dans le texte en commençant par signaler les thèses essentielles qui fondent cette argumentation et structurent le contenu de l'ouvrage. Nous pouvons les résumer de la façon suivante:

- il y a une isomorphie des structures logiques du monde, du langage et de la pensée;
- le monde est "ce qui est le cas" ou encore "l'existence d'états de choses", ces "états de choses" étant eux-mêmes constitués de concaténations de ces "objets".

- à chaque nom correspond un objet et un seul, et le même type de rapport existe entre proposition et états de choses
- le langage "manifeste" la forme logique du monde, c'est-à-dire ce qu'il a de commun avec ce dernier, mais ne peut pas l'exprimer.

Il apparaît clairement à travers ces thèses que le rapport entre langage et réalité est la clef de voûte du dispositif Wittgensteinien et c'est à la lumière d'un tel rapport qu'il va procéder à une distinction entre les propositions sur la base de ce qu'il appelle le "sens".

Le "sens" d'une proposition c'est "ce qui arrive dans le monde si elle est vraie et ce qui n'arrive dans le monde si elle est fautive". Les propositions tirent donc leur "sens" du fait de renvoyer à l'"existence d'un état de choses".

Ce qui signifie de façon plus précise, qu'elles doivent, pour être réputées "douées de sens", remplir deux conditions aussi nécessaires l'une que l'autre: celle de nous apprendre quelque chose de nouveau sur le monde et celle d'être logiquement bien formées. Seules les propositions des sciences de la nature remplissent cette double condition et peuvent ainsi d'être considérées comme étant "douées de sens"³⁸.

Tout en étant, comme les énoncés logiques et mathématiques "dénudés de sens", ceux de la philosophie n'appartiennent nullement au domaine de la science. En effet la philosophie ne nous apprend rien sur le monde en tant que tel et ne peut donc nullement prétendre au statut d'un savoir. Son exercice n'en est pas pour autant totalement inutile. Car à défaut de pouvoir produire des énoncés susceptibles de nous renseigner sur le réel, elle se consacre désormais à la "police du langage" (Ayer), en nous permettant par l'analyse critique, de distinguer les propositions "douées de sens" de celles qui en sont dénuées.

La limite ainsi assignée à la philosophie, notamment par la disqualification de son discours dans sa prétention de dire le réel découle donc en droite ligne de l'idée même que résume bien

l'aphorisme 3.01. "La totalité des pensées vraies est un tableau du monde". C'est cela même qui enferme le langage pour aussi dire dans la prison du monde. En effet, comme le dit l'aphorisme 4.12, les propositions "peuvent représenter la réalité mais pas ce qu'elles doivent avoir de commun avec la réalité pour pouvoir le représenter ...". Ce que les propositions ont de "commun" avec la réalité, c'est leur "forme logique". Or si celle-ci se donne pour ainsi dire à voir, à travers la structure du langage, elle n'existe pas pour autant dans le monde, mais plutôt hors du monde; elle a un statut transcendantal qui la met hors de portée du langage la rend indicible. C'est le sens de la formule: "ce qui peut être montré ne peut être dit".

En assignant ainsi des limites au dicible, le *Tractatus*, par la même occasion, laisse entrevoir un autre monde, celui de l'indicible qui est le domaine de prédilection de la philosophie: le monde des valeurs éthiques, esthétiques, religieuses etc, auquel on n'accède plus que par une démarche intellectuelle excédant le discours, la démarche mystique. Commentant le statut de la philosophie qui en découle, J.F. Malherbe écrit:

"La philosophie est vaine mais c'est la manifestation de cette vanité qui en montre la portée car, dans l'impuissance philosophique se manifeste l'autre du monde, l'élément mystique. L'exercice de l'activité philosophique exige donc une vision mystique du monde ...; la mystique, c'est la vanité du discours philosophique, transcendée en une vision éthique (silencieuse) du monde. La mystique c'est la philosophie devenue silencieuse"³⁹.

Le bref commentaire que nous venons de faire du *Tractatus* dont nous n'avons retenu que ce qui concerne directement la problématique du "dépassement de la philosophie" n'épuise pas bien entendu toute la réflexion de Wittgenstein sur le statut du discours philosophique. Il est notoire par exemple que sur ce point une évolution sensible de sa pensée s'opérera du *Tractatus* aux *Investigations philosophiques*. L'abandon du mythe d'un langage pur qu'il s'agirait de restaurer en

traitant le langage ordinaire par la méthode de l'analyse logique, et l'introduction de la théorie des "jeux de langage" ont de fait, dans ce dernier ouvrage, modifié l'approche de la question du statut de la philosophie, même si, entre ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler le "premier" et le "second" Wittgenstein existe sur ce point une certaine continuité que l'on pourrait situer dans la haine permanente de la spéculation métaphysique. Mais c'est incontestablement par les thèses développées dans le *Tractatus* que Wittgenstein influencera le plus la réflexion ultérieure sur le statut de la philosophie. C'est en tout cas la lecture qu'en feront les membres du Cercle de Vienne, lecture dont la fidélité est discutable il est vrai, mais qui fournira à l'empirisme logique une de ses principales cautions scientifiques et déterminera pour une part essentielle, le contenu de son programme d'"élimination de la métaphysique"⁴⁰.

Conclusion

Dans la *Philosophie chez les Autophages*, Jacques Bouveresse parle de la problématique contemporaine du dépassement de la philosophie comme d'une "espèce de comédie de la renonciation et de l'échec que les philosophes professionnels jouent si volontiers entre eux, pour en tirer généralement la conclusion qu'il est d'autant plus indispensable que la philosophie continue à être divulguée et enseignée"⁴¹.

Ce jugement n'est pas dénué de fondement, si l'on tient compte surtout du nombre considérable de philosophes contemporains régulièrement appointés comme tels, qui se sont fait une confortable célébrité de la constante réédition des funérailles de la philosophie. Paraphrasant Jacques Derrida, nous pouvons donc dire que, dans cette façon de faire "mourir" la philosophie, le Mort saisit le Vivant. Mais il importe malgré tout de nuancer. Car, à vrai dire, la philosophie ne gagnerait rien non plus à essayer de se rassurer à si bien compte sur son sort en réduisant la proclamation de son "dépassement" à un pur jeu qu'elle se jouerait à elle-même, et nous jouerait à nous aussi, pour

mieux tromper son monde. C'est que, comme nous avons essayé de le montrer tout au long de ce travail, ce ne sont nullement les raisons sérieuses qu'elle a de s'inquiéter qui manquent. De ce point de vue on peut tout juste rappeler cette mise en garde pertinente de Sloterdijk lorsqu'il écrit:

"La pensée philosophique aujourd'hui se brade sur une foire des autodépassements (...) et force sa voix dans l'empressement qu'elle met à rendre justice aux réalismes ironiques, pragmatiques et stratégiques. Le risque que comporte des métamorphoses réalistes de ce genre est manifeste: on en arrive finalement au remplacement du mauvais par le pire"⁴².

La prudence dont la suggestion se lit entre les lignes de ces propos s'impose d'autant que les vicissitudes contemporaines de la philosophie ainsi que les déficiences et les défaillances de toutes sortes qui semblent être de bonnes raisons de s'en passer ne constituent pas une garantie que la "post philosophie" chargée d'assurer sa relève ferait automatiquement notre affaire. Car à son sujet non plus, les interrogations ne manquent nullement.

Que nous réserve-t-elle en réalité? Clôt-elle définitivement la philosophie, mais quelle philosophie? Pour investir, à la place de la ci-devant philosophic, quelle pratique théorique et surtout, quelles assurances pourrait donner celle-ci de s'acquitter mieux que celle-là des tâches qui lui étaient antérieurement dévolues?

Si cette pratique n'est rien d'autre que la science elle-même, dont les progrès et les succès contemporains semblent avoir précipité le discrédit de la philosophie, a-t-elle, pour ainsi dire la carrure nécessaire pour assumer un si lourd héritage? Y est-elle sérieusement préparée, à en juger surtout par les problèmes et les contradictions de son propre développement? N'a t-elle pas, à cause de ces problèmes et de ces contradictions, trop à faire avec elle-même pour pouvoir prendre en charge ceux dont la philosophie avait fait jusqu'ici son propre lot? De telles interrogations ne peuvent évidemment pas trouver ici leurs

réponses, mais elle nous paraissent suffisamment importantes pour rendre nécessaire une réflexion ultérieure sur le statut décidément énigmatique de la "post-philosophie".

Notes

- 0 Cité d'après Andras Gêdo, dans *Crisis consciousness in contemporary philosophy*, Minneapolis, Editions Marxist Educationnal Press, 1982, p.16. Cet ouvrage de Gêdo, dont la version originale hongroise est parue en 1976, représente, à notre connaissance l'étude la plus documentée qu'un philosophe marxiste écrit sur la conscience de crise dans la philosophie contemporaine, malgré certaines faiblesses explicables par le contexte idéologique de sa parution.
- 1 W. Stegmuller, *Hauptstromungen der Gegenwartphilosophie*, Stuttgart 1969.
- 2 Soulignant l'importance théorique de cette catégorie de "Crise", G. Rohrmöser écrit: "Dans n'importe quelle analyse de la constitution interne de la société moderne la catégorie de crise joue un rôle de plus en central. Il n'y a pas une seule analyse de la situation actuelle se voulant compréhensible et responsable qui ne parte de la position selon laquelle l'état actuel de la société ... est critique", (*Die Krise der Institutionen*, Munich, 1972, p.9.).
- 3 M.J. Adler, *The conditions of Philosophy: Its Checkered Past, its Present Disorder, and its Future Promise*, New York 1965, pp.15-16.
- 4 L.Landgrebe, *op.cit*, p.16.
- 5 F. Châtelet, *Histoire de la Philosophie*, Paris, Editions Marabout, 1981, Tome 4, pp.19-20.
- 6 J. Ladrière, *Les enjeux de la Rationalité*, Paris, Editions Aubier-Montaigne/UNESCO, 1977, p.16.
- 7 Jean-Toussaint Desanti, *La Philosophie silencieuse*, Paris, Editions Seuil, 1975, p.7.
- 8 *Ibidem*.
- 9 F. Châtelet, *op. cit*, p.10.
- 10 *Ibidem*
- 11 Roger Caratini, *La philosophie*, Paris, Editions Seghers, 1983, Tome 1, p.14.
- 12 Dans la *Philosophie Silencieuse* (ouvrage déjà cité) J.T.Desanti, analysant le rapport traditionnel des Sciences et de la philosophie, le présente comme un "rapport d'intériorisation" (*op.cit* p.8), dans lequel la Science

"avec ses différentes régions, y apparaît comme le moment intériorisé" (*Ibidem*). Il cite, de Platon à Husserl, quatre formes marquantes de cette intériorisation: intériorisation à l'Eidos" (Platon), intériorisation à l'Entendement classique" (Descartes et les "Philosophes de l'âge classique"), intériorisation au Sujet (Kant dans sa période critique), intériorisation au concept (Hegel, Husserl, ...). Pour les développements consacrés à cette question, nous renvoyons à toute la partie I de l'ouvrage (pp.7-109).

- 13 J.T.Desanti, *op. cit.*, p.8.
- 14 Bacon peut être considéré comme le premier théoricien de ce nouvel idéal de savoir. En tout cas ce qui autorisera plus tard Adorno, à la suite de Feuerbach, à voir en lui le véritable précurseur de la "modernité".
- 15 L'apport de Galilée sera décisif dans ce nouveau paradigme de savoir en train d'être mis en place. Résumant la portée épistémologique de ce que l'ont appelé la "révolution galiléenne", J.T.Desanti écrit "Dès lors apparaît la rupture logique, l'émergence d'un autre *canon* de la science ... Le discours scientifique est un enchaînement dense: rien ne doit s'y formuler qui ne soit démontré comme conséquence de ce qui déjà a été formulé, démontré ou posé comme principe. Il en résulte qu'un tel discours, du seul fait qu'il se déroule conformément à ses normes immanentes, expulse en vertu de son seul contenu les énoncés mal formés ... Mais il y a plus. Le concept de cet ordre avait été déjà produit dans l'oeuvre d'Euclide, dans celle d'Archimède. L'essentiel n'est pas ici qu'il ait été "reproduit" comme forme d'un discours possible, mais que cette forme ait été investie dans l'exploration de la nature, au point de délimiter à *a priori* le champ des "observations": les phénomènes" (*op. cit.*, p.11).
- 16 Dans son *Introduction à la médecine expérimentale*, publiée en 1865, Claude Bernard proposera la première tentative de systématisation de ce que l'on appelle depuis lors "la méthode expérimentale".
- 17 Sur le processus de constitution de ces sciences ainsi que sur les problèmes liés à leur dénomination, à leurs rapports avec les autres sciences et à leur démarche spécifique, nous renvoyons à Piaget, *Epistémologie des Sciences de l'Homme*, Paris, Editions Gallimard/UNESCO, 1970.
- 18 Voir à ce sujet Jean Piaget, *Sagesse et illusions de la philosophie*, Paris, Editions PUF, 1965. Nous ajouterons que ce nous appelons effondrement des illusions épistémologiques de la philosophie ne signifie nullement que celle-ci n'a plus aucun rôle à jouer dans le déroulement de l'activité scientifique. Sur ce dernier point, nous renverrons à Mario Bunge dans la *Philosophie de la Physique* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1975) qui pose très

- bien à notre avis le problème de la nécessité épistémologique de la philosophie, notamment au chapitre 1 intitulé "Des bons et des mauvais usages de la philosophie" (pp.13-30).
- 19 Engels; dis *Ludwig Feuerbach et la fin de la philosophie classique Allemande*, que cette prétention de la philosophie, avec le développement des sciences, était devenue une "lubie impossible à concilier avec les faits dans leurs rapports propres et non dans des rapports fantastiques". Nous nous permettons de renvoyer sur ce point à notre article intitulé "Marxisme et Epistémologie: la philosophie comme science théorique" publié dans les *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines* de l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, No.22, 1992 (pp.1-16).
 - 20 T.Ötzerman, *Problèmes d'histoire de la Philosophie*, Moscou, Editions du Progrès, 1980, p.11.
 - 21 F. Châtelet, *op. cit.*, p.333.
 - 22 De ce point de vue, ce que Lucien Sève relève pour le cas spécifique de Marx est dans une certaine mesure valable pour les autres: "la question des rapports entre marxisme et philosophie recouvre une contradiction réelle, ce qui permet de prévoir qu'il est parfaitement vain de chercher une réponse unilatérale et satisfaisante" *Introduction à la philosophie marxiste*, Paris, Editions Sociales, n.254 souligné par l'auteur).
 - 23 Althusser, pour Marx, et Lacan, pour Freud représentaient, dans la philosophie française des années 60, des phénomènes assez caractéristiques. Sans ignorer leur rapport originel et fécond dans la "relecture" de leurs "Maîtres" respectifs, force est cependant de reconnaître que leur discours s'est progressivement "autonomisé" par rapport à leurs textes de référence, pour finalement vivre exclusivement de l'explicitation des concepts théoriques qu'ils mettaient en circulation.
 - 24 Dans l'introduction générale de leur recueil de textes intitulée *After Philosophy End or Transformation* (Massachusetts, Edition MIT, 1987) Kenneth Baynes, James Buhman et Thomas MC Carty parlent de la "cacophonie contemporaine" de la philosophie. soulignons au passage qu'organisé autour du thème de l'"après-philosophie", cet ouvrage donne une présentation assez complète des orientations développées dans ce sens, avec un choix assez judicieux des principaux auteurs français et anglo-saxons qui se sont exprimés sur la question.
 - 25 Nous ne voulons pas entrer ici dans le débat fondamental de l'épistémologie contemporaine, autour de la conception du processus de développement des sciences entre "rationalistes" et "romantiques" dont les figures emblématiques sont respectivement Popper et Kuhn.
 - 26 Voir à ce sujet, Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1967), *L'Écriture et la Différence* (Paris, Seuil 1967) et *Marges*

de la Philosophie (Paris, Editions Minuit 1972).

- 27 Voir à ce sujet J.F. Lyotard, *la Condition postmoderne* (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1982).
- 28 Voir à ce sujet, M. Horkheimer, *Théorie Critique* (Paris, Editions Payot, 1978); M. Jay, *l'Imagination dialectique-Histoire de l'Ecole de Francfort* (Paris, Editions Payot, 1971), *Marxisme et Théorie critique* (Paris, Editions Payot, 1978). En collaboration avec Gérard Raulot).
- 29 Dans la *Dialectique de la Raison* (Paris, Editions Gallimard 1974), Horkheimer et Adorno considèrent qu'avec la civilisation moderne reposant sur un nouveau mythe "celui de la technique", "l'esprit des Lumières retombe dans la mythologie". Dans le même sens, Horkheimer écrira: "Si par Lumières et progrès culturel nous voulons dire libérer l'homme de la croyance superstitieuse en des forces mauvaises, aux démons et aux fées, au destin aveugle, bref l'émancipation de toute peur, alors la *dénonciation de ce qui est communément appelé raison* est le plus grand service que la raison puisse rendre" (*Eclipse de la Raison*, Paris, Editions Payot, 1974, p.193. souligné par l'auteur lui-même).
- 30 Horkheimer et Adorno écrivent encore à ce propos: "les hommes payent l'accroissement de leur pouvoir par l'aliénation de ce sur quoi ils exercent ce pouvoir. La Raison se conduit avec les choses comme le dictateur avec les hommes. Il les connaît dans la mesure où il peut les manipuler" *Dialectique de la Raison, op. cit.*, p.27.)
- 31 F. Châtelet, *Histoire de la Philosophie*, T.I, p.41.
- 32 *Ibidem*, p.44.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibidem*, p.45.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logicophilosophicus*, Paris Editions Callimard 1961, p.39. *Toutes les références du Tractatus* renvoient à cette édition. Lorsque nous donnons dans le corps de notre texte le numéro de l'aphorisme cité, celui-ci ne fait pas l'objet d'un renvoi en note.
- 38 C'est à ce niveau, nous semble-t-il, qu'il faut souligner une nuance particulièrement importante chez Wittgenstein dans la mesure où elle éclaire toute l'originalité de son concept de "sens". Les propositions qui sont réputées "dénudées de sens" du fait de ne pas satisfaire à la double conditionnalité d'avoir un contenu informatif et d'être logiquement bien formées ne sont pas toutes absurdes, ou non-scientifiques. Celles de la logique et des mathématiques par exemple, compte tenu de leur caractère "tautologique" (elle ne nous apprennent rien de nouveau sur le monde), sont "dénudées de sens" pour Wittgenstein. Elles ne sont cependant ni

illogiques ni insensées ou absurdes, dans la mesure où elles respectent rigoureusement les normes et les exigences formelles d'intelligibilité et de recevabilité scientifique. On pourrait, pour mieux saisir encore la distinction opérée par Wittgenstein, se reporter au Husserl des *Recherches logiques*. Alors que pour Wittgenstein, ce qui est "sinnlos" (c'est-à-dire qui n'a pas de Sinn) - c'est le cas des propositions de la logique et des mathématiques - n'est pas nécessairement "unsinning" (c'est-à-dire absurde), Husserl, opposera au "sinnlos" et au "unsinning" entre lesquels il ne fait aucune distinction, le "Sinnvol" (doué de sens) qu'il distingue du "widersinning" qui renvoie à la proposition contradictoires (voir sur ce point les *Recherches logiques*, IV, paragraphes 12 et 14)

- 39 J.F. Malherbe, *Les Epistémologies Anglo-saxonnes*, Namur, Presses Universitaires de Namur, 1981, p.91.
- 40 Sur la problématique du dépassement de la philosophie dans l'empirisme logique, nous nous permettrons de renvoyer à notre article intitulé "Le statut épistémologique de la philosophie chez Karl Popper à travers sa critique de la problématique empiriste logique de l'élimination de la métaphysique" dans *Epistémé* No.3, Mars 1992, Dakar.
- 41 J. Bouveresse, *Le Philosophe chez les Autophages*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1984, p.12.
- 42 Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der Zynischen Vernunft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1983, vol.II, p.931. (Cité par Jacques Bouveresse dans *Rationalité et Cynisme*, Paris Editions de Minuit, 1984, p.35).

LA CULTURE COMME FORCE

Christophe Yahot

En 1952 Lévi-Strauss écrivait pour le compte de l'Unesco qu'«Il y a beaucoup plus de cultures humaines que de races humaines, puisque les unes se comptent par milliers et les autres par unités: deux cultures élaborées par des hommes appartenant à la même race peuvent différer autant, ou davantage, que deux cultures relevant de groupes racialement éloignés». ¹ Mais on ne saurait s'arrêter à ce jugement à une époque où les thèses sociobiologiques renouvellent la polémique sur les rapports entre dispositions biologiques (raciales) et productions culturelles [Thuiller (1981)]. En outre, on constate que partout l'humanité est secouée par des conflits de toute nature, notamment ethniques, politiques et religieux dont les conséquences apparentes et immédiates ont pour noms massacres de communautés, guerres sainte, terrorismes, chasses aux immigrés, institutions de communautés économiques exclusives, développement d'espaces economico-politico-culturels à vocation néo-colonial etc, et que naissant partout des foyers de tensions qui témoignent de la caducité d'une «éthique universelle», voire même de toute éthique. Il convient donc de s'interroger à nouveau sur la nature des rapports entre les hommes, les communautés, les cultures. Toutefois notre dessein ici n'est point de réchauffer un débat sur «races et cultures» dont nous savons très bien que les arguments ne peuvent servir qu'à alimenter la mauvaise foi, celle qui fait précéder le châtement du crime ou qui n'exprime que le ressentiment. Plus précisément il s'agira ici de nous interroger sur le degré d'implication de la Culture (prise au sens le plus large) dans les conflits entre les hommes, en montrant que ces conflits, même s'ils procèdent des spécificités biologiques et raciales, trouvent semble-t-il leur origine commune et essentielle dans le fait culturel lui-même! Aussi faut-il procéder à une analyse de la culture, de son principe, de sa fonction et de sa finalité, tant par rapport à l'individu que par rapport à la collectivité afin de mettre au jour la nature profonde de ces conflits, surtout si l'on convient avec A. Langaney qu'«Il n'est pas besoin de savoir que la notion zoologique de race ne s'applique guère à l'espèce humaine pour

comprendre que, dans le comportement raciste, la perception de la différence a plus d'importance que la différence elle-même»,² et c'est précisément cette «perception de la différence» que nous nous proposons d'interroger ici, notamment à travers la perception que nous avons de l'Autre à travers nos lunettes culturelles.

Une telle perception nous semble en effet plus efficiente et plus significative que tous les arguments scientifiques réunis. Du reste, on est si peu habitué à traiter la culture pour elle-même que sa signification profonde est toujours occultée par l'attention que nous portons à ses effets. Néanmoins une telle interrogation, si elle peut prendre ses sources dans le Culturalisme, ne peut y être réduite: le culturalisme a, il est vrai, le mérite de mettre en lumière la pluralité et la relativité des formes culturelles, mais l'argument de la spécificité des cultures, s'il nous interdit la constitution d'une science de l'homme rigoureuse et la croyance en des catégories universelles, ne peut avoir d'implications réelles en matière éthique ni donner quelque leçon que ce soit. Aussi est-il permis de penser que le culturalisme a, semble-t-il, outrepasser ses droits en faisant allégeance à la moralité, notamment en essayant de gommer les différences pour faire porter le «masque de l'humanité» à tous grâce à la mise en place de catégories abstraites à vocation universelle. Ainsi, par exemple, R. Benedict n'a rien trouvé de mieux, dans sa volonté de dépasser le relativisme, que de classer les cultures selon deux types essentiels: l'Appolinien et le Dionysien caractérisés, l'un par la modération et le respect d'autrui, l'autre par la passion et l'affirmation de soi» [Benedict (1950)].

Mais la question essentielle à nos yeux est celle-ci: a-t-on réellement saisi le sens profond de relativité et de la spécificité des cultures et dans quelle mesure est-on en droit d'hypostasier le dépassement du relativisme?

Il faut partir d'une hypothèse couramment admise: l'homme est un être conscient. Mais que veut dire conscience? La conscience renvoie à un objet, précisément à un savoir (*cum-scientia*). Cela signifie que la notion de conscience englobe dans son essence même un contenu qui lui est indissociable, en ce sens que par le fait même, c'est un

certain objet (contenu) qui la définit. La conscience en soi est donc toujours aliénation, aliénation en soi; elle n'est pas un simple réceptacle, une forme vide, mais une forme qui ne peut être que déjà informée. Par là on comprend que la notion de «conscience pure» est un simple jeu de mots, ou mieux un concept opératoire du genre «état de nature»; on comprend aussi par là qu'on ne saurait, par une sorte de processus régressif, remonter à une donnée «originnaire» c'est-à-dire à «l'état de nature de la conscience». Mais si la conscience est d'essence objective, si elle est inséparable d'un certain objet, on peut se demander: quel est cet objet?

Cet objet c'est la CULTURE qui, par le biais du langage, contribue progressivement à la formation de notre esprit, étant entendu que les dispositions biologiques représentent des conditions nécessaires mais non suffisantes. C'est donc de la culture qu'il faut partir pour comprendre le sens et la valeur de la conscience en tant que caractéristique fondamentale de l'être humain. En d'autres termes c'est en interrogeant la culture que nous espérons obtenir des réponses objectives sur le comportement humain, les rapports entre les hommes, les peuples, les raisons qui les animent, positivement ou non. Et bien plus que l'Histoire, la Psychologie, la Sociologie (cette dernière parfois attelée à la biologie) et toutes les sciences humaines qui tentent de nous expliquer les causes et les raisons profondes qui expliquent la complexité et la nature parfois déroutante des actes humains.

Dire l'humain ou la conscience, disions-nous, ce n'est pas définir quelque chose d'abstrait, une sorte d'être métaphysique dont l'Idée servirait de fondement rationnel et intelligible à la réalité concrète. Dire l'humain, ou la conscience, ce qui revient au même, c'est simplement une autre manière de dire la culture en tant que déterminant objectif de notre être. Et ce qui fait de nous ce que nous sommes, c'est-à-dire des êtres conscients, (avec tout ce que ce terme implique comme connaissance, éclairage), ce sont les VALEURS, essentiellement les valeurs. La nature, elle, n'en connaît pas; elle est ce qu'elle est. Et l'homme ne vit pas par et pour la nature mais contre elle. Sa «nature» à lui, sitôt né, c'est l'univers des valeurs sans lesquelles il serait

comme un aveugle. Comme l'aveugle l'homme sans valeurs avancerait à pas hésitants, il n'aurait aucun repère précis, certain, mais à chaque pas un nouveau repère, une nouvelle hésitation etc.. Comme l'aveugle, l'homme sans valeurs peut vivre, mais peut-il réellement exister? Assailli de toute part par des sensations multiples et diverses, peut-il vraiment leur donner un sens? Par les valeurs au contraire tout s'éclaire, chaque donnée sensorielle devient même «normale», c'est-à-dire en conformité avec l'activité de l'esprit qui ne peut être pure passivité mais anticipation, projection. C'est ainsi que le sens des choses n'est pas donné mais construit. Le sens des choses n'est donc pas dans la nature en tant que tel et on ne peut dire qu'un arbre est vrai ou beau en soi. Le sens est donc toujours notre sens, il témoigne de ce que nous appellerons ici notre «activité significative» qui se déploie dans un univers complexe et dynamique de valeurs que sont le vrai et le faux, le juste et l'injuste, le beau et le laid, le bien et le mal, mais aussi l'ami et l'ennemi, le pauvre et le riche, le supérieur et l'inférieur, le sauvage et le civilisé, le militaire et le terroriste

Par cette capacité à donner un sens aux choses l'homme en arrive à établir, peut être à moindre coût, une différence de degré et pourquoi pas de nature entre l'homme et la bête, l'homme et toutes les autres choses de la nature et, souvent même une différence entre lui et son semblable, faisant ainsi de tous ces êtres des êtres au second degré, des ingrédients ou presque. Ainsi l'histoire de l'humanité manifeste à bien des égards cet effort pour tourner le dos à la Nature, et l'esprit occidental (sans connotation péjorative aucune) a traduit de manière exemplaire cette suspicion presque légitime de l'homme à l'égard de la nature, en tant qu'il veut (qu'il faut) tout expliquer par l'homme et non l'homme par les choses. Ce «privilege de l'humain» est plus qu'une simple désobéissance aux lois qui régissent la nature, il exprime le refus absolu de l'homme d'appartenir à la nécessité, au hasard ou à la contingence, toutes choses qui ne trouvent leurs raisons d'être qu'en Dieu seul, et tout commerce de l'homme à la nature serait pour lui aussi un aveu sinon une reconnaissance de sa dépendance. L'homme ne se veut donc pas seulement un être différent mais un être Autre, une

créature privilégiée, maîtresse absolue d'elle-même qui peut procéder dès lors à la négation de la nature, du semblable et de Dieu. L'homme est donc la valeur absolue. Mais faut-il s'en féliciter?

L'homme est un être culturel: sa conscience n'a de sens que par rapport à la culture. Comme tel il est aussi son propre maître et on peut penser que la SOCIÉTÉ, dans son essence, dans sa signification profonde et fondamentale n'est rien d'autre que l'émanation de ce pouvoir absolu de l'homme: la société apparaît en effet comme l'objectivation ou la manifestation concrète de l'homme comme être de Valeurs et, en ce sens, la société peut être définie comme un ensemble systématisé de valeurs propres à un groupe humaine donné (on peut même dire quelles que soient les composantes raciales de ce groupe). Par la société, l'homme crée son propre univers de valeurs, et cet univers exprime la substitution d'un «état naturel» par «autre chose» qui obéit à un ordre différent, un ordre où l'homme n'a plus rien à craindre ni des forces naturelles (menaces externes) ni des autres hommes (menaces internes) face auxquels, individuellement, il ne peut rien. Face à la violence de la nature et des hommes-loup, la société apparaît donc comme la réponse intelligente à la lutte contre l'environnement et contre le semblable, lutte qui doit garantir la justice, la paix, la sécurité, en un mot un certain idéal de bonheur C'est pourquoi les théoriciens du contrat représentent, quelles que soient leurs motivations respectives, des Apologistes de la culture, car l'enjeu véritable, c'est le dépassement de la nature, le règne des valeurs.

Ainsi tout porte à croire que la culture, la société, sont synonymes de «bien», dans la mesure où elles manifestent une certaine «disposition éthique» de l'homme, disposition qui peut être mise au crédit soit des «instincts sociaux»,³ soit de la transcendance (liberté) propre à l'homme.

Mais quelle que soit l'origine qu'on accorde au phénomène culturel et à sa vocation éthique, force est de reconnaître dans le fait culturel lui-même une sorte de contradiction interne qui ne semble être ni une *réalité provisoire* ni une *réalité accidentelle*. Cette contradiction est surtout liée à la lutte des hommes entre eux, constituant ainsi une

menace interne à la culture comme telle. Et Rousseau, plus que tout autre, a été très sensible à cette contradiction. Sa philosophie manifeste en effet très clairement cette ambiguïté de l'état social-culturel qui, tout en ayant pour finalité de défendre les valeurs établies, semble n'accorder qu'une valeur presque nulle à l'individu (souvent même à un très grand nombre d'individus) eu égard aux intérêts de la collectivité. Dès lors une foule de problèmes nouveaux apparaissent: comment garantir à la fois les intérêts collectifs et individuels? Que valent véritablement les valeurs sociales? Peut-on mettre un terme à l'égoïsme etc.

Culturalistes, anarchistes, légalistes, réalistes et idéalistes, sociobiologistes, tous ont leur mot à dire. Mais au-delà de la coloration politique, psychologique, spirituelle et morale qu'on veut bien donner à tous ces problèmes, force est de reconnaître que ces questions indiquent qu'avec l'état social-culturel, nous nous trouvons désormais en présence d'une sorte de transmutation de la violence naturelle dans l'état social-culturel, et l'histoire de l'humanité n'est rien d'autre que l'histoire de ces conflits sociaux multiples et divers, toujours renouvelés, que relatent sans cesse écrivains, romanciers, poètes, philosophes qui, tous semble, fournissent une analyse puissamment descriptive des contradictions socio-culturelles. Ces contradictions se manifestent, épisodiquement, sous forme de «crise» variant quant à leur nature, leur ampleur et leur durée d'une part, et sous la forme d'une tension insidieuse et permanente dans les rapports entre les hommes d'autre part. Mais qu'elles soient de nature politique, économique, sociale, spirituelle, individuelle ou collective, ces crises et tensions ne traduisent-elles pas le caractère *pervers* du fait culturel lui-même?

Cela peut surprendre, mais la culture s'impose ici comme la clef de voûte de tous les mystères et contradictions qui entourent les rapports entre les hommes, et sans avoir la prétention de la considérer comme un objet d'étude à part entière au même titre que la géologie, la linguistique ou la psychologie par exemples, il faut néanmoins *interroger la culture*. Mais cette interrogation exige que nous ne nous laissions pas prendre au piège de l'Education, de la Morale et du

Manichéisme habituels.

La culture comprend un ensemble de valeurs matérielles et spirituelles, valeurs solidaires, si intimement liées que leurs distinction ne relève que de l'abstraction. Mais au plan individuel, force est de reconnaître que ces deux éléments ne sauraient avoir la même valeur.

Les créations matérielles sont des données *extrinsèques* et, comme telles, l'individu ne leur accorde qu'une importance relative, occasionnelle et contingente. Ainsi un objet d'art, un instrument technique, un vêtement par exemples ont une origine culturelle précise qu'on peut déterminer dans l'espace et le temps), mais ces éléments, par leur extériorité même deviennent étrangers à l'individu. D'ailleurs il est à remarquer que dans la culture, ce sont précisément les créations matérielles qui sont le plus facilement transférables ou échangeables d'un peuple à un autre sans qu'aucune précaution particulière ne soit prise ni par le «donneur» ni par le «receveur», et il n'est pas exagéré de dire que c'est par leurs composantes matérielles que les cultures peuvent véritablement se rencontrer-mais à la surface, dans une sorte de «civilisation matérielle universelle» dont on verra plus loin qu'elle ne peut avoir d'autre sens ou contenu véritable.

A l'opposé les données spirituelles relèvent d'une considération tout à fait différente. Elles constituent en effet un ensemble de valeurs qui, comme vision particulière du monde, comme éthique, déterminent et définissent l'Esprit et la conduite de la conscience individuelle et collective, et dire que «l'homme est le produit de sa culture», c'est dire qu'il existe un *enracinement* - au sens fort du terme - de l'individu dans ce système de valeurs spirituelles qu'on appelle culture. Et ce rapport existentiel, métaphysique, mystique même, conscient ou inconscient qui lie l'individu à SA CULTURE est avant tout autre chose le premier motif de sa dignité, de sa spécificité, de sa fierté et de sa valeur en tant qu'être humain, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'il a le sentiment d'appartenir à une communauté qui n'est pas matérielle mais spirituelle, et cela quelles que soient les normes et les valeurs de cette communauté au regard des autres. Dans cette perspective, il ne semble pas non plus exagéré de dire que la culture est comme une religion dans

laquelle tous les individus communient, partagent un sentiment commun et vouent un véritable culte à des valeurs non moins suprêmes et mystiques. Aussi toute culture apparaît-elle comme une véritable FORCE et, comme telle, éminemment dévastatrice.

De fait, ce n'est pas assez de dire que tous les sociétés humaines possèdent une culture; que l'art, la science, la religion, la technique etc. se retrouvent, à des degrés divers en toute culture car, en vérité, cette universalité du fait culturel' de laquelle on déduit même parfois une «nature humaine» fondamentale nous laisse en réalité complètement *indifférents*. En effet quand on la débarrasse de ces caractéristiques communes, de ces formes essentielle, on s'aperçoit très vite que le sens et la valeur d'une culture donnée résident toujours dans ce qui la différencie des autres: *l'accident l'emporte ici sur l'essence*.

C'est ici le lieu de rappeler l'échec de «l'éthique universelle» prônée par la civilisation occidentale repentante à travers le fameux slogan de «civilisation universelle». Cette entreprise d'universalisation avait pour contenu essentiel l'Homme: Droit de l'homme, respect de l'Autre etc.. Mais dans son principe cette entreprise a le tort de supposer un sujet humain général, un sujet qui serait partout le MEME, donc facile à identifier et à soumettre partout aux mêmes droits, libertés et devoirs, exactement comme dans la morale kantienne dans laquelle, à partir d'impératifs formels et a priori, le bien et le mal doivent être universellement valables pour tout être «raisonnable». Dans le même sens la psychanalyse qui suppose l'existence d'un sujet abstrait des contingences de l'histoire, du langage, des situations concrètes, et prétend instaurer par la thérapie une psychologie «normale» est une véritable imposture: tout réductionnisme culturel ne peut donc être que nihiliste et idéologique. Mais un tel nihilisme n'est pas innocent, il est même très profondément conservateur car il signifie tout simplement qu'en dehors de telle culture ou de tel système de valeurs, tout le reste ne vaut rien. L'Altérité n'est acceptée ou tolérée que sous la tutelle du Même. Ainsi le Bien n'est pas à définir, il l'est déjà et il doit réguler tous les événements, c'est-à-dire tout le «mal» qui peut se rencontrer en quelque endroit du globe. Et le fameux respect des différences cache

mal idée que le différent, cet autre, doit être partisan de cette «éthique universelle» qui met ensemble pêle-mêle la démocratie, la liberté d'opinion, le capitalisme, le droit international la sauvegarde de l'environnement, la francophonie, l'intégration économique etc.. En tout état de cause il faut déplorer avec P. Ricoeur qu'«En même temps qu'une promotion de l'humanité, le phénomène d'universalisation constitue une sorte de subtile destruction, non seulement des cultures traditionnelles, ce qui ne serait peut être pas un mal irréparable, mais de ce que j'appellerai provisoirement, avant de m'en expliquer plus longuement, le noyau créateur des grandes civilisations, des grandes cultures, ce noyau à partir duquel nous interprétons la vie et que j'appelle par anticipation le noyau éthique et mythique de l'humanité» [Ricoeur (1961, pp.445-446)].

Mais il ne faut pas s'y tromper. *L'incompréhension, le refus et la négation de l'autre ne sont pas des caractères étrangers à la culture, encore moins le privilège d'une culture particulière* (la culture occidentale en l'occurrence), *mais par une sorte paradoxale, des qualités propres à toute culture, c'est-à-dire des qualités sans lesquelles toute culture serait vouée à la disparition, à l'aliénation.* La force spirituelle d'une culture est ainsi ce qui fait en même temps sa valeur et celle-ci ne semble se révéler véritablement que dans cette capacité d'intolérance, de négation même de l'autre; cette «capacité d'intolérance» témoigne de la conscience qu'une culture a d'elle-même, c'est-à-dire affirmation de soi, privilège du soi, méfiance vis-à-vis de l'autre, création d'une culture toujours plus forte, plus intolérante. Telle semble être la dialectique culturelle de l'humanité, dialectique dont la «civilisation blanche» constitue sans doute le symbole jamais égalé et, à ce sujet, le jugement de R. Jaulin concernant la nature des rapports entre la «civilisation blanche» et les autres mérite une attention particulière: «Cette civilisation blanche se définirait donc par le privilège d'une certaine opération, et cette opération, je la nomme d'une façon intuitive négation. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme. Le principe de ce que j'appelle «négation», c'est le refus de la relation d'alliance, c'est-à-dire de l'altérité. L'autre, quel qu'il soit,

est traité comme une chose dont on va se grossir, et qu'on va détruire, pour se grossir de lui. Disons que le corollaire de la négation, c'est le privilège du soi. Or ce privilège du soi implique évidemment l'extension continue de l'univers «blanc» qui est en même temps transformation de l'univers en objet d'exploitation. La négation étant toujours négation de l'autre, il faut qu'il y ait quête de l'autre dont on se nourrit; et, lorsque cet autre est mangé, il faut trouver un nouvel autre. Il y a donc extension du système» [Jaulin (1972)]. Mais à vrai dire, le principe de la négation, et en dernière instance le privilège du soi, n'est pas un privilège de la civilisation blanche. Ce jugement, croyons-nous, a une valeur UNIVERSELLE car il est dans la nature même de toute culture d'être intolérante même si toutes n'en ont pas pleinement conscience ou qu'elles n'ont pas toujours les moyens d'opérer la négation de l'autre. Ainsi Lévi-Strauss constate avec raison que «Cette attitude de pensée, au nom de laquelle on rejette les «sauvages» (ou tous ceux qu'on choisit de considérer comme tels) hors de l'humanité, est justement l'attitude la plus marquante et la plus distinctive de ces sauvages mêmes. (...) L'humanité cesse aux frontières de la tribu, du groupe linguistique, parfois même du village; à tel point qu'un grand nombre de populations dites primitives se distinguent d'un nom qui signifie les «hommes» (ou parfait-disons-nous avec plus de discrétion-les «bons», les «excellents», les «complets»), impliquant ainsi que les autres tribus, groupes ou villages ne participent pas des vertus-ou même de la nature-humaine, mais sont tout au plus composés de «mauvais», de «méchants», de «singes de terre» ou d'«oeufs de pou»» [Lévi-Strauss (1961, pp.20-21)].

Ainsi peut-on dire que toute culture est synonyme de *force spirituelle* capable, au besoin, de produire pour sa survie des Kamikazes, des Croix gammées, d'organiser la chasse aux noirs, aux arabes, aux juifs etc.. C'est ici le lieu de souligner que dans la culture les valeurs sont toujours des *valeurs fonctionnalisées*.

En tant qu'être de valeurs, l'homme se caractérise en effet par la possibilité qu'il a de donner un sens aux choses. Et donner un sens aux choses signifie définir pour chaque homme et pour la communauté des

cadres commodes pour nos pensées et nos actes: le courage, le sauvage, le socialisme, la francophonie, la science, Dieu etc. sont des valeurs fonctionnalisées. Mais les hommes ne vivent pas seulement POUR ces valeurs, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'elles sont bonnes en soi et peuvent - ou doivent - constituer la finalité de leurs aspirations, mais PAR elles, c'est-à-dire en se servant d'elles simplement comme *moyens*. Concrètement cela signifie que l'homme ne peut tolérer que les valeurs qui représentent pour lui les cadres mentaux de sa pensée et de sa conduite, en un mot de son existence, ne soient pas reconnues par tous, et ainsi est-il amené à rejeter, à haïr et enfin de compte à pourchasser toutes les valeurs opposées aux siennes. Aussi faut-il se demander: le fondement, voire l'origine de la haine, du mépris, de la violence entre les hommes ne réside-t-il pas, beaucoup plus, dans le fait culturel lui-même que dans notre tendance naturelle à l'agressivité, étant entendu que ce n'est pas l'autre en tant qu'individu qu'on cherche à détruire mais à travers lui les valeurs qu'il est sensé représenter?

L'intolérance comme telle est semble-t-il inscrite au coeur même de toute idée de culture et de valeurs. Et cette union intime, perverse même, s'il est encore nécessaire d'en fournir la preuve, réside à n'en pas douter dans ce que les cultures ont de plus élevé: la RELIGION.⁴

N'est-ce pas d'ailleurs un lieu commun de dire que les religions qui sont par excellence l'instance supérieure où se trouvent définies, dans une culture donnée, les valeurs morales et spirituelles les plus pures sont aussi le lieu où se cultive l'intolérance la plus radicale? Mais quoi de plus normal Toute culture possède *sa religion* et celle-ci joue un rôle primordial dans la mesure où elle sert de fondement à tout le système social. Et on ne peut réellement séparer, encore moins comprendre l'organisation politique, sociale, économique etc. d'une culture donnée sans se référer directement ou indirectement à ses croyances spirituelles, morales et religieuses. L'histoire socio-culturelles et l'histoire religieuse sont toujours indissociablement liées. Ainsi, par exemple. la conscience juive, la conscience européenne, la conscience arabe se sont développées par rapport à une certaine identité religieuse. L'«Europe», jusqu'en 1789, c'était l'Europe «chrétienne». Et

aujourd'hui, il n'est pas erroné de dire que l'histoire du catholicisme rend compte, en même temps, de la culture occidentale; que l'histoire de l'islam rend compte, en même temps, de la civilisation arabe etc..

En tous les cas, les grandes religions révélées ont été diversement interprétées par chaque culture, voire même par chaque pays, et on peut observer, aujourd'hui encore, dans les événements quotidiens, le conflit qui a lieu à l'intérieur même des religions révélées et cela, à travers la formation de différentes églises ou de communautés spirituelles pas toujours conformes à l'orthodoxie (laquelle d'ailleurs?), surtout que l'objet de ce conflit, s'il est à bien des égards spirituels et religieux, est tout d'abord sinon essentiellement *culturel*, tout comme le sont l'enjeu de toutes les guerres saintes et autres choses semblables.

En somme les religions révélées ne peuvent que s'«incarner» dans des cultures bien données, à un point tel qu'il est désormais impossible de les comprendre sans se référer aux cultures qui, d'ailleurs, leur ont donné un sens. Le judaïsme, le catholicisme, le protestantisme etc. expriment avant tout des valeurs culturelles par définition irréductibles. Ainsi, même si personne n'ignore le fait que les religions révélées se veulent au-dessus de toute particularité culturelle ou idéologique - mais nous savons désormais ce que vaut «l'éthique universelle» - l'Afrique peut-elle recevoir sans condition les messages du Christ et de Mohamet? Comment accepter ces messages de seconde main sans se soumettre en même temps aux valeurs culturelles et politiques qui les soutiennent. Ou encore l'africain est-il véritablement capable de comprendre le sens profond d'une religion déjà formée ou informée par des cultures autres: quel sentiment de béatitude le paysan baoulé (ethnie de la Côte d'Ivoire) peut-il éprouver devant un tableau du Gréco? L'animisme ou plutôt le panthéisme fondamental des africains peut-il être occulté dans l'acceptation de la révélation, faut-il s'étonner, à défaut de permettre, de voir se développer de plus en plus en Afrique une «animisation» (qui n'est rien d'autre qu'une intégration) des religions révélées? A fortiori, si la religion apparaît essentiellement comme un relation au sacré, relation spécifique, singulière, peut-on véritablement parler de «religion universelle»: «On se demande comment le mot

religion peut être appliqué sans discrimination au Proche-Orient, au Judaïsme, au Christianisme et à l'Islam, ou à l'Indouisme, ou au Bouddhisme et au Confucianisme de même qu'aux peuples dits «primitifs». Mais il est peut être trop tard pour chercher un autre mot, et «religion» peut être encore un terme utile pourvu qu'on se rappelle qu'il n'implique pas nécessairement une croyance au Dieu, en des dieux ou en des esprits, mais se réfère à l'expérience du sacré et, par conséquent est liée aux idées d'être, de signification etc.» [Eliade (p.9)]

On le voit, la relativité et la spécificité des cultures ne peut avoir aucune implication éthique positive. Bien au contraire! Et contre ceux qui croient qu'il n'y a pas d'étanchéité des valeurs culturelles et que le monde va vers un certain «métissage culturel», ou qu'à l'avenir les conflits, essentiellement économiques, mettront aux prises les riches et les pauvres, il faut croire avec Samuel Huntington que «... dans le monde nouveau, les conflits n'auront pas essentiellement pour origine l'idéologie ou l'économie. Les grandes causes de division de l'humanité et les principales sources de conflit seront culturelles. Les Etats-nations continueront à jouer le premier rôle dans les affaires internationales, mais les principaux conflits politiques mondiaux mettront aux prises des nations et des groupes appartenant à des civilisations différentes. Le choc des civilisations dominera la politique mondiale. (...) Le sentiment d'appartenance à une civilisation va prendre de plus en plus d'importance dans l'avenir, et le monde sera dans une large mesure façonné par les interactions de sept ou huit civilisations majeures: à savoir, les civilisations occidentale, confucéenne, japonaise, islamique, hindouiste, slave-orthodoxe, latino-américaine et, peut être, africaine. Les plus importants conflits à venir auront lieu le long des lignes de fracture culturelle qui séparent les civilisations».⁵

Voilà bien des paroles à méditer.

Notes

1. Il s'agit de *Race et Histoire*, publié plus tard comme un court essai aux éditions Gonthier en 1961. Cf. Avertissement, p.7.
2. Cf. Revue le *Genre humain*, no.1, p.94.
3. Cette perspective est celle par excellence du «monisme naturaliste» du 20ème siècle, notamment chez Wilson, et qui consiste à faire dépendre tous les phénomènes humains d'un certain déterminisme biologique dans lequel la Nature constitue l'alpha et l'omega de toute réalité.
4. Sur ce point on pourra trouver un développement plus large dans notre étude sur «La foi rationnelle», en instance de publication dans la revue *Repères* de l'Université de Bouaké.
5. Cf. Le Monde diplomatique, no.495, juin 1995, et surtout «The clash of civilisations», *Foreign Affairs*, vol.72, no.3, 1993 (traduit en français par la revue *Commentaire*, Paris, 1994), souligné par nous.

Bibliographie

Benedict, R.

1950 *Echantillons de civilisations*. Paris: Gallimard. Trd. W. Raphaël.

Eliade, M.

La nostalgie des origines. Paris: Gallimard.

Jaulin, R.

1972 in *Entretiens*.

Lévi-Strauss

1961 *Race et histoire*. éd. Gonthier.

Ricoeur, P.

1961 in *Esprit*.

Thuillier, P.

1981 *Les sociobiologistes vont-ils prendre le pouvoir?* éd. Complexe.

Résumé

Cet article montre que c'est la conscience qui, dans la pensée Yoruba, est la dernière autorité morale. Une conscience bien développée conduit normalement à iwa rere ce qui est essentiel pour être accepté dans la société Yoruba. L'article développe ensuite l'idée que la conscience, en tant que "centrale" d'évaluation des jugements moraux, est essentielle dans toute discussion de l'ordre social de quelque société que ce soit, car elle permet la formation de bonnes relations sociales entre les personnes et la promotion de la solidarité dans sa globalité. Dans la société Yoruba, comme dans toutes les autres sociétés nigériennes, l'homme n'est pas conçu comme ayant été créé pour vivre dans l'isolement, il est créé pour vivre en compagnie d'autres hommes. Les personnes appartenant à la société ont l'obligation morale d'assurer le maintien de l'ordre social. Cela se fait par la promotion de la paix, de l'unité et d'un progrès en accord avec les normes morales dans la société. Nous avons tous une responsabilité morale dont la réalisation détermine notre valeur morale et notre place dans la société. Tout ceci ne peut être atteint que si l'on crée une atmosphère adéquate au développement d'une bonne conscience.

CONSCIENCE, MORALITY AND SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY IN AN AFRICAN CULTURE

T. Ebijuwa

In order to aid man in ethical living Olódùmaré (God) has put in him Ifá, àyà - "The oracle of the heart" or "The oracle which is in the heart". It is this oracle of the heart that guides man and determines his ethical life. One is a good or bad person in accordance as he responds to, or disobeys, the guidance of his inner "oracle". Thus, of a person who behaves shamelessly, callously, or wickedly, the Yoruba say, "he has no sense of shame, he has no oracle of the heart". This oracle of the heart is a person's conscience. [Idowu (1962: 154)]

Our major concern in this paper is to argue that èri-okàn (conscience) is the ultimate moral authority in Yorùbá thought and that this has some consequences for social acceptability in the traditional Yorùbá society.

The Yorùbá emphasise the significance of a person's good character in his daily life. As it is claimed, a person's well-being on earth and the world after depends on how he lived his life on earth. A person with a bad character is likely to re-incarnate into something unpleasant¹. When the Yorùbá say of someone ó s'ènià (He behaves as a good person should), they mean that he shows in his life and personal relations with others the right qualities of a person. The opposite description is kii s'ènià; n'se l ó f'awo ènià bo ra (He is not a person, he merely assumes the form of human being). This shows that the person is not socially worthy and by implication unfit to be called a person². The ethical quality which distinguishes a good person from a bad person is represented in the concept of iwà (character).

Iwà as used here is different from iwà as being. In fact, as Abimbola says, the word iwà (character) originates from the verbal root wa (to be, to exist)³. The addition of the deverbative prefix l indicate

that the meaning of ìwà can also be interpreted as 'the fact of being, living or existing'[Adimbola (1975: 393)]. In other words, ìwà (being) is different from ìwà (character). But if ìwà (being) is different from ìwà (character), the question then is what is the relationship between ìwà (being) and ìwà (character)? This question indicate that there is a gulf between ìwà (being) and ìwà (character). But this gulf can be filled if we take into cognisance, following Lawuyi and Taiwo, the fact that all things that are have ìwà (being). And that things are different from one another, and they are what they are by virtue of the qualities or attributes which inhere in them and by which they are defined [Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990: 146)]. As Lawuyi and Taiwo avers:

The sum total of those attributes which define each thing, which make it what it is, and in the absence of which it will not be what it is but something else, is what we generally refer to as the essence of the thing [Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990: 147)].

As they further remark:

Sometimes these attributes refer to what Aristotle would call the erga (characteristics activities) of the thing. For instance, for Aristotle, the erga of human beings consist of contemplation and the best form of life that human beings could have is the contemplative life (bios theoretikos) [Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990: 147)].

Now if we go back to our distinction of ìwà (being) and ìwà (character) we will discovered as already indicated above that as there are different ìwà (beings) in the world, so do we have different attributes or qualities which define their essence - and which invariably differentiates the beings from one another. If this is so, then we may in agreement with Abimbola say that ìwà (character) is the essence of being [Abimbola (1975: 393-394)]. A transformation which does not only differentiate a class of beings from another, it also within a particular class of beings differentiate one being from another, "their relations constitute value" [Lawuyi (1992: 50)]. In other words:

... being is something which is valued when it is related to others in its class in such a way that, through the activities of members of this class, it is also related to something else which enables us to interpret it as valuable. [Lawuyi (1992: 50)]

On this reading therefore, the concept of ìwà is not only that which differentiates a particular being from another, it is also, derivatively what can be used to characterise a man's life in ethical terms. [Adimbola (1975: 394)] Thus stated, when we say that a being has a good ìwà (character) we mean that being displays some qualities or have some attributes which conforms with his/her being and which we adjudge to be good as distinct from whose that are bad. In fact as Idowu puts it:

ìwà (character), according to the Yoruba, is the very stuff which makes life a joy. ... It is what distinguish a person from a brute. [Idowu (1962: 154)]

ìwà (character), in Yorùbá thought goes along with reputation. Ìwà rerc, that is, good character, has as part of its components the following: chastity before marriage especially on the part of women⁴, hospitality, opposition to selfishness, generosity, protection of women by men, high regard for honour, due respect to elders etc⁵. All these are encapsulated in the concept of ìwà.

The question then is: What is the basis of these components of ìwà which define Yorùbá ethics? We argue here that although these opponents are given expression in the concept of ìwà, the faculty of rational decision making which is supposed to provide a moral guide for our conduct is conscience. Conscience is the mind's "poor house", it is needed when an individual is to make an independent moral decision As Childless [1979: 317] puts it, "Conscience is a mode of consciousness or thought about one's own value or disvalue". One's behaviour is considered good or bad in accordance with the ways he responds to, or disobeys, the guidance of his conscience. In other

words, as part of its defining attributes, conscience also serves as the centre of self-criticism, self-assessment, and self-appraisal.

In the Yorùbá society, this evaluative character of conscience is put into play when they are faced with situations that demand critical assessment. For example, the Yorùbá would say, when something is suspected to be stolen, that "Kí èrì-okàn kó má jé yín", that is, whoever took this thing, may his/her conscience continue to judge him/her. This distinctive critical nature of conscience is also represented in one of the Yorùbá aphorisms, that èrì-okàn nì ijanu ènìyàn, literally meaning that, your conscience will always check or guide you in any deliberation. As a result of this critical character of conscience, people are able to assess their beliefs, actions and judgements to see whether they are good or bad.

The above shows the importance the Yorùbá attach to individual judgement in moral decisions. In this light it would be wrong to view morality entirely as having a social origin. True, society supplies the machinery for the promotion of its own existence. And to this end, it evolves a system of morality which it implants in everybody in the society. But, to ask the question, whence does X (morality) arise, or, what is the source of X, is to ask for that from which X starts. The idea that morality originates from society does not tell us what makes X reasonable, what gives it its sense of value, or what gives it its property of goodness. The point here is that the starting-point of X (i.e. morality) may be independent of the reason that X has some value. We are not here debating the question of the origin of morality, but, we believe that what gives a society its sense of solidarity and preservation is the collective conscience of the people adequately harnessed by some social factors. This view will be discussed later in the essay.

What role then does conscience play in the regulation of human conduct in traditional Yorùbá thought? And how is it developed in a person?

Let us begin with the former question. In this regard, we observe that conscience not only makes individual choice possible, it also

makes the achievement of human solidarity possible. For instance, the Yorùbá say:

Bí a bá nsé'gi nígbó, k'áf'òrán ro are eni wò (meaning that whenever a person breaks a stick in the forest, let him consider what it would be like if it were himself that was thus broken. [Idowu (1962: 166)])

This wise saying is a clear expression of what is called the "golden rule" - "Do unto others as you would want them do unto you". And it shows the role conscience plays in promoting what Idowu calls, perfectly good relations and happiness. Thus if, as Hobbes has said, morality is limited to those qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace and unity" (Leviathan, Ch XI), then for the Yorùbá these qualities are given expression in the concept of iwà which is cultivated in everybody's conscience. For example, the Yorùbá frown at any man having illicit affairs with another person's wife. Such offence usually carries a stiff penalty. In some cases the culprit is ostracised from the society [Idowu (1962: 159)]. This is to let the culprit know that what he has done is morally wrong and perhaps to deter others.

To prevent people from involving themselves in this kind of affairs some men put certain juju on their women usually referred to as Magun (do not climb) to punish men that have affairs with their wife. Most victims of such illicit affair usually die of this juju (magun). The issue here is not one-sided. Men, as social and moral agents are not outside the limits of this kind of moral sanctions. In fact, there are women who control their husbands sexual acts by putting juju on them also. This is done in such a way that whenever the husband want to have an affair with another woman his sexual organ will seize to function.

This brings us to the second question of how conscience is developed in a person. Here, we believe that the cultivation of conscience is not an entirely individual thing. It is aided in various ways, particularly, in the formative stages of a person's life. One major way by which

conscience is cultivated is through tradition. If you ask a Yorùbá man why he pours libation on the ground before taking his gin, the answer will be "oun à dáyé bá ni" literally meaning it is a practice handed over to us through tradition. Tradition plays an important role in a child's education. It is a critical factor in the inculcation in the individual of the value of society. And since the elders are believed to be more experienced in this tradition than the younger ones, they are believed to be more important agents of moral upbringing.

Apart from tradition, another factor which is important in the cultivation of conscience is the family. In Yorùbá, like in most other Nigcrian societies, the family is composed of not only the parents and the children but it is extended to the grandparents, cousins, nephews, in-laws, brothers and sisters. The family which is the closest system to the moral agent in the formative age contributes significantly to the development of moral consciousness. Most of the value-systems we imbibe are inculcated into us through the socialising influence of our family. Through such process, especially in the formative years, habits, customs and norms prevailing in the society are internalised. At this level the moral attitude of the people begins to take congruent shape.

It is important to note here that it is not the case that all the norms inculcated into the people are used in the guidance of their conducts. Whereas some are completely imbibed, others may change with age and circumstances, or may even not be made use of at all. This is made possible in view of the evolutionary character of our moral ideas. For example, it is possible for an individual who insisted on a particular moral principle today to have a different moral attitude towards it the next day. This indicate that the values from those socializing agents, for example tradition, can also change in view of the dynamic nature of morality.

At this juncture, it could be argued that since we have a situation where one may feel conscience bound to perform an action which another man's conscience would condemn, conscience cannot be the ultimate moral authority in Yorùbá thought. For, it is possible, one might argue, to ask the question that if the deliverance of different

men's conscience conflict, how shall we know which to trust? Or put differently, if any particular command of the "inner voice" may be wrong, how do we trust it at all? One notices a slight drift into subjectivism here. This is so because since each person can invoke his own conscience to interpret and justify his own conduct to others, there is the possibility of conflict of moral judgments. In this way, there is the general tendency to see conscience as the protagorean "measure of all things". This is the sense of subjectivism that is apparent in the above view.

The trouble with this argument is that it does not take into account the social character of conscience. Conscience is not an entirely individual affair. It is cultivated in everybody through certain social institutions. Through these institutions, moral norms, rules of conduct, criteria of evaluation and the mechanism for the control of human behaviour are implanted in everybody. This way, everybody becomes aware of what *iwà* is in the society. Indeed, during the process of development and regulation of human behaviour, there is the evolution of a sense of shared moral beliefs. Thus, the charge of subjectivism and confusion cannot be sustained against the position that conscience is the ultimate moral authority.

Now, a person with well cultivated conscience (*èrí-okàn*) is usually said to have *iwà rere* (good character), which is very essential in the consideration of social acceptability in Yorùbá society. However, as *iwà rere* creates room for good social relations, it is laid upon everybody in the society to act in such a way as to promote human solidarity and above all, the good of the society at large. A person with *iwà rere* is therefore usually called *Omolúwàbí* (literally meaning one who behaves as a wellborn). The concept of *Omolúàbí* goes beyond mere material acquisition. It refers not only to the ability of a person to promote the good of others, but also to create an enabling atmosphere where others can realise their life aspirations. In this regard, as Wiredu puts it, what is good in general is what promotes human interests. Similarly, what is good in the more narrowly ethical sense is, by definition, what is conducive to the harmonisation of those interests⁶. In

other words, a person's action or inaction should be other-regarding. This is one aspect of the concept of Omoluábi that has been eroded by modernisation in the society, particularly, its tendency to promote individualism. Indeed, this sense of individualism generated partly as a result of the socio-economic circumstances has led people to be self-centred. In this respect we may say that the basis of morality in conscience is destroyed. This is one of the aspects of contemporary society that should be controlled if we go back to the kind of conscience-based morality we have in traditional Yorùbá thought.

But as indicated by Akinwowo this sense of individualism is an unnecessary deviation from the social order or what he calls self-alienation or social pathology [Akinwowo (1990: 112-113)]. The point here is not that individuals do not play any role in the development of any moral system, rather, our argument here, in disagreement with Akinwowo, is that the spread of individualism cannot lead to the distinction or breakdown of Ajobi (family), (a concept Akinwowo believes can breakdown by socio-economic and historical conditions) if we take into consideration the social character of conscience. As individual's conscience is being develop by the society's social institutions - of which the family is a part, there is as already noted above the evolution of a sense of shared moral beliefs which guide the conduct of everybody in the society. A sense which we recognise not only as individuals, but as individuals whose action in the scheme of social relations should be guided by the interests of others. So to say that the development of individualism occasioned by the existence of social and economic conditions in a society will lead to the breakdown of Ajobi (family) is not totally correct. It only show what Akinwowo himself recognise as self-alienation. An action which if pursued by everybody will lead to social disintegration Here while we may agree with Akinwowo when he says that:

A genuine social being is one who works daily, and sacrifices willingly, in varying ways, his or her cherished freedom and material acquisitions for self-improvement as well

as for the common good. For without one, the other cannot be achieved. [Akinwowo (1990: 113)]

We may ask the question why Akinwowo still hold that the development of individualism can lead to the breakdown of ajobi (family). Is the promotion and preservation of the values of the family not part of the common good?

But, what is the significance of this conscience-based morality in Yorùbá thought? The significance of the idea that conscience is the ultimate moral authority in Yorùbá thought is that it shows that morality is not a prudential thing. It is one of the ways of regulating the behaviour of human beings without resulting into coercion. In other words, in an attempt to build a moral society, there is the need to create an enabling environment where individuals can develop their conscience. Good conscience leads to good character, but good character can evolve only in an atmosphere of good social relations between individuals, social groups and societies. Put differently, any attempt to create a moral atmosphere in any society without the proper cultivation of conscience, as it is being done in some African societies, is bound to collapse.

Another implication of this paper is that it shows that morality in Yorùbá thought is not purely religious affair. Hence we agree with Oladipo when he writes that:

... the existence of a sense of right and wrong, even, the admission that this is given by the deity, does not sufficiently explain the nature of moral rules, and the authority they have on people's conduct, in Yoruba societies. [Oladipo (1987: 49)]

Thus far, we have, shown that conscience is the ultimate moral authority in Yorùbá thought. A well developed conscience we have argued, usually leads to iwà rere which is very essential for social acceptability in Yorùbá society. We argued further that conscience, as the "power house" for the evaluation of moral judgements, is essential in the discussion of the social order of any society. This is because it gives room

for good social relations amongst people and the promotion of global solidarity. In Yorùbá society, like any other Nigerian society, man is believed not to have been created to live in isolation, he is created to be in fellowship with the other man. "He is", as Awolalu puts it, "a being in relation" [Awolalu (1976: 8)]. People in the society have a moral obligation to keep it in order. This is done by the promotion of peace, unity, and progress in accordance with the moral norms in the society. We all have a moral responsibility, the performance of which determines our moral worth and social acceptability. All these, we argued, cannot be achieved if the enabling atmosphere is not created for the development of a good conscience⁷.

Notes

1. For examples of those things a person with a bad character may re-incarnate into see Makinde [1983] and Rom-Kalilu [1993].
2. A person is here distinguished from merely a human being It is conceived as that which has the ability to make independent and rational decisions. See Ebijuwá [1991 and 1995].
3. See Abimbola [1975] and for an artistic perspective of this concept see Abiodun [1983].
4. For a clearer exposition of the image of Women in Nigerian Society, see my "Image of Women as Chattel in Nigerian Cultural Milieu: sociolinguistic and Philosophical analysis" PaPers in English and Linguistics (Forthcoming)
5. For a comprehensive discussion of these components: Idowu [1962: 154-166]
6. On this view see Wiredu [1992]
7. For extensive and helpful comments of an earlier draft of this paper, I am grateful to Drs O Oladipo and R O M Rom-Kalilu I also thank all who commented when the paper was presented at a staff seminar in the Department of General Studies, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria.

Bibliography

Abimbola, W.

1975 "Ìwàpẹ̀le: The concept of Good character in Ifa Literary corpus" in Abimbola (ed) [1975].

Abimbola, W. (ed)

1975 *Yoruba oral Tradition*. Ife: Department of African Languages and literatures

Abiodun, R.

1983 "Identity and the Artistic process in Yoruba Aesthetic Concept of Ìwà" in *Journal of Culture and Ideas*, Vol 1, no 1.

Akinwowo, A.A.

1990 "Contributions to the Sociology of knowledge from an African oral poetry" in Albrow and E King (eds)[1990].

Albrow, M. and King, E (eds)

1990 *Globalization. Knowledge and Society*. London: Sage Publications.

Awolalu, J.O.

1976 "Sir and its Removal in African Traditional Religion" in *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol 10, no 1.

Childless, J.F.

1979 "Appeals to Conscience" *Ethics*.

Ebijuwá, T.

1991 *Women's Autonomy and the problem of Abortion*. Unpublished dissertation, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria.

1995 "Views of women in Yoruba Culture and their impact on Abortion Decision" in *Women and Health: A Multi-disciplinary Journal of Women's health issues*, Vol 22, no.3.

Idowu, E.B.

1962 *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*. Longman Group Ltd.

Lawuyi, O.B.

1992 "Yoruba Aesthetics: Material Representation and criticism" in *Literary Griot*, Vol.4, nos 1 and 2.

Lawuyi, O.B. and Taiwo, O.

1990 "Towards an African sociological Tradition: A Rejoinder to Akinwowo and Makinde" in Albrow and King (eds)[1990].

Makinde, M.A.

1983 "Immortality of the Soul and the Yoruba Theory of Seven Heavens (Orun meje)" in *Journal of Culture and Ideas*, Vol. 1, no. 1.

Oladipo, O.

1987 "Morality in Yoruba Thought: A Philosophical Analysis" in *QUEST*, Vol.1, no.2.

Rom-Kailu, R.O.

1993 "Costumes and the Origin of Egungun" in *African Studies*, Vol.52, no.1.

Wiredu, K.

1992 "The moral foundation of an African Culture" in Wiredu and Gyekwe (eds)[1992].

Wiredu, K. and Gyekwe, K. (eds)

1992 *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies 1*. Washington DC: The council for Research in values and Philosophy.

Résumé

D'une façon critique et consentante au même temps, cet article traite du projet de M. Martin Bernal comme effort de faire éclater le racisme inhérent aux conceptions qui dénie les antécédents de la civilisation grecque classique dans l'Égypte et l'Asie occidentale. L'auteur contraste la réception minimale du projet de Bernal aux Pays Bas et ailleurs, avec son appropriation et popularisation, aussi avides que distordues, dans les mains de savants africains et afriquaméricains: en termes du continent africain comme influence civilisatrice principale sur l'Europe. Suit une discussion des pièges idéologiques de l'histoire culturelle et surtout de la quête des origines. Deux études de cas, sur l'histoire et la diffusion mondiale de la divination géomantique et des jeux de table mancala, suggèrent un modèle alternatif pour la contribution des civilisations africaines à l'histoire de la culture mondiale: d'abord participation active et précoce (néolithique), suivi par un retranchement ou une involution culturels plus tardifs. L'argument met l'emphase sur la futilité d'une analyse en termes de continents entiers, en faveur d'une analyse en termes de régions, et de complexes socio-culturels qui enfourchent plusieurs continents.

BLACK ATHENA
and
Africa's contribution to global cultural history¹

Wim van Binsbergen

1. Martin Bernal's project²

Martin Bernal, sinologist and professor of government at Cornell University, U.S.A., is the son of a famous British chemist cum Marxist historian of science; being half Jewish half Irish, with childhood memories of World War II, meant that issues of identity and racism were built into his biography. So were anthropology and Africa; before marrying J.D. Bernal, his mother was betrothed to an anthropologist who died during field work in Melanesia - on the spur of this connection, young Martin Bernal, as a freshmen, lived for a year at the house of Meyer Fortes, the famous anthropologist. The family's tea plantation in Malawi, long ago converted into politically more acceptable assets, earned young Martin his first extensive stay in Africa and knowledge of his first African language, Chi-Nyanja.

These multifarious intellectual influences combined to make him turn, in mid-career, to a set of questions which were rather remote from his original academic field; at the same time they are crucial to the North Atlantic intellectual tradition since the eighteenth century C.E., and to the way in which this tradition has hegemonically claimed for itself a place as the allegedly unique centre, the original and unprecedented historical source, of the increasingly global production of knowledge in the world today. Is — as in the dominant Eurocentric view — modern global civilisation the product of an intellectual adventure that started, as from scratch, with the ancient Greeks — the unique result of the latter's unprecedented and history-less achievements? Or is the view of the Greek (read European) genius as the sole and oldest source of civilisation, merely a racialist myth, whose double aim has been

- to underpin delusions of European cultural superiority in the Age of European Expansion, especially the nineteenth century CE, and
- to free the history of European civilisation from any indebtedness to the (undoubtedly much older) civilisations of the Fertile Crescent extending from Egypt through Canaan and Phoenicia, to Syria, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Iran and the Indus Valley.

Here Minoan, subsequently Mycenaean Crete occupies a pivotal position as either 'the first European civilisation in the Eastern Mediterranean'; or as a Semitic-speaking island outpost of more ancient West Asian and Egyptian cultures; or as both at the same time. The most likely view would stress — foreboding the equally dissimulated dependence of medieval European civilisation on Arab and Hebrew sources — a vital Semitic contribution to the very origins of a civilisation which has bred the most vicious antisemitism (both anti-Jew and anti-Arab/ Islam) in the course of the twentieth century.

Bernal's monumental *Black Athena*, projected as a tetralogy of which so far the first two volumes have been published, addresses these issues along two main lines of argument. The first volume, besides presenting an extremely ambitious outline and provisional (but as yet largely unsubstantiated) documentary, linguistic and archaeological results for the project as a whole, is mainly a fascinating exercise in the history and sociology of European academic knowledge. It traces the historical awareness, among European cultural producers, of ancient Europe's intellectual indebtedness to Africa and Asia, as well as the subsequent repression, since Romanticism, of such awareness with the invention of the ancient Greek miracle. The second line of argument presents the converging historical, archaeological, linguistic and mythological evidence for this indebtedness, which is then symbolised by Bernal's re-reading (taking Herodotus literally)³ of Athena, apparently the most ostentatiously Hellenic of ancient Greek deities, as a peripheral Greek

copy of the goddess Neith of the Egyptian western delta town Sais — as *Black Athena*.

2. Black Athena's reception in general and in Holland

Reception of the two volumes of *Black Athena* has been chequered. Established classics scholars entrenched in the Greek tradition have often been viciously dismissive, but far less so the specialists in e.g. archaeology, the Ancient Near East, and comparative religion. It is impossible not to be impressed with the extent and depth of Bernal's scholarship — he shows himself a *dilettante* in the best possible tradition of the *homo universalis*. At the same time, much of his argument is based on the alleged substantial traces of lexical and syntactic material from Afro-Asiatic (including Ancient Egyptian, and West-Semitic) languages in classical Greek; here one has reason to wonder whether his skills in theoretical and comparative linguistics do in fact sufficiently extend beyond the Sinic language family.

Where Bernal's central thesis was picked up most enthusiastically, immediately to be turned into an article of faith, was in the circles of African-American intellectuals. Here the great present-day significance of *Black Athena* was rightly recognised: not so much as an academic correction of remote, ancient history, but as *a revolutionary contribution to the global politics of knowledge in our own age and time*. The liberating potential of Bernal's thesis has been that it has accorded intellectuals from outside the politically and materially dominant North Atlantic, White tradition an independent, even senior, historical birth-right to full admission and participation under the global intellectual sun. Egypt is claimed to have civilised Greece, and from there it is only one step to the vision that Africa, the South, Black people, have civilised Europe, the North, White people; the ultimate answer to the imperialist (including cultural-imperialist) claims of the 'white man's burden'. Such a view clearly ties in with a host of current African-American and African publications making similar claims (e.g.

those of Karnak House publishers, London)⁴ or with the dominant, Egyptocentric idioms among present-day African intellectuals in, e.g., Nigeria, Senegal and Zaire. But coming from an internationally respected academician who is socially and somatically an outsider to Black issues, the impact is truly enormous. Here *Black Athena* is built into the ongoing construction of a militant Black identity, offering as an option — not contemptuous rejection, nor parallel self-glorification as in the context of Senghor's and Césaire's *négritude*, in the face of the dominant, White, North Atlantic model, but — the explosion of that model. And this leads on to its replacement by a model of complex intercontinental intellectual interaction, in which Europe is affirmed to have been, for the better part of the last few millennia, merely a remote receptive periphery of the civilisations of the Fertile Crescent. With the exponential expansion of Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptological studies in the course of the twentieth century we hardly needed Bernal to formulate this insight in the first place. In fact, he soon had to admit that he had underestimated the extent to which views similar to his own were already in the air even among classics scholars. Yet *Black Athena* has done a lot to drive this insight home in circles thirsting for it while building and rebuilding their own identity.

Although Egypt is a part of North East Africa, there is a double blind spot here. An obvious sequel to the *Black Athena* thesis would be to explore the roots of Egyptian civilisation in its turn. Towards ancient Egyptian origins, people from elsewhere on the African continent, e.g. the once fertile central Sahara, made the principal contributions, albeit the decisive transition to an Egyptian civilisation tends to be attributed to the cultural hybridisation when this neolithic African stock was confronted, as indicated by the Naqada II archaeological finds, with a phenotypically different population often interpreted as militant invaders from West Asia.⁵ What did the interior of Africa thus contribute to 'Black Athena'? Also one might expect the argument on Afro-Asiatic languages to be traced further inland into the African continent. These steps obviously Bernal could not yet take. He can hardly be blamed for this, not only in view of the enormity of this additional task

and of the scope of his actual accomplishments, but also because Africanists have so far, with few exceptions,⁶ let him down. They have refrained from exploring the implications of Bernal's view for the historical, political and intellectual images of Africa which Africanists professionally produce today, and which — perhaps more important — circulate incessantly in the hands of non-Africanists, in the media, public debate, and identity construction by both Whites and Blacks in the context of both local and global issues. The reasons for the Africanists' non-response are manifold and largely respectable:

- African pre-colonial history, the great discovery of the 1960s and early 1970s, has largely gone out of fashion as an academic topic, and so have, more in general, — until the recent emergence of the globalisation perspective — grand schemes claiming extensive interactions and continuities across vast expanses of time and space.
- Linguistic skill among Africanists has dwindled to the extent that they are prepared to accept without further proof the linguists' dismissive verdict on *Black Athena's* linguistics.
- Egyptocentric claims have been persistent in African Studies in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ In addition to avoiding the 'Egyptianising' scholarly studies by established Africanist anthropologists and archaeologists of an older generation, present-day Africanists are particularly concerned not to revive the cruder forms of Egyptocentric diffusionism as in the works by Elliot Smith and W. Perry (the *first* Manchester School in anthropology, before Max Gluckman founded his), who saw Egypt as the only global civilising force, whose seafarers presumably carried their sun cult throughout the Old World and beyond.⁸ Another spectre to be left locked up in the cupboard is that of the civilising Egyptians (or Phoenicians, for that matter), invoked as the originators of any lasting physical sign of civilisation in sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Great Zimbabwe complex in the country of that name.⁹ Somewhat more recently, Egyptocentrism has been so

vocally reiterated in Cheikh Anta Diop's work,¹⁰ that excessive care is taken among many Africanists today to avoid that sort of issue.

- Quick to recognise the ideological element in the Africas as propounded by others, Africanists — most of which are North Atlantic Whites — are rather less accustomed to consider, self-consciously, the political and identity implications of the images of Africa they themselves produce.

One cannot, without much further consideration, rule out the possibility that, as a fruit of a similar inspiration to which Bernal attributes the emergence of the myth of the Greek genius, African Studies too have a built-in Eurocentrism that prevents it from seriously considering such a totally reversed view of intellectual world history. Here there is a tremendous critical task for African and African-American scholars today. In an earlier generation we have seen how African scholars like Okot p'Bitek and Archie Mafeje have sought to explode the Eurocentric implications of the then current work in the anthropology of African religion and ethnicity.¹¹ In the study of Asian societies and history, the critical reflection on the models imposed by North Atlantic scholarship has developed into a major industry, ever since the publication of Said's *Orientalism*.¹² But where are the Black scholars to do the same for Africa? The names of Appiah, Diouf, Mazrui, Mbembe, Mudimbe, could be cited here; but their most obvious intellectual peers, the exponents of 'African philosophy' today, seem more concerned with re-dreaming rural Africa along dated anthropological lines, than waking up to the realities of cultural imperialism and repressive tolerance in intercontinental academia. It is here that *Black Athena* is playing a most valuable role.

Finally, in The Netherlands reception of *Black Athena* has taken long to materialise, and is still minimal, either within or outside the (locally thriving) field of African Studies.¹³ The situation in e.g. Great Britain does not seem to be substantially different.

Thus three strands of argument come together around *Black Athena*:

- the detached scholarly evaluation of the historical evidence for Bernal's claims, both of Ancient Europe's indebtedness to West Asia and North East Africa, and of the construction, in recent centuries, of the Greek miracle as a Eurocentric, racialist myth;
- the appropriation and application of the Bernal thesis by African--American and African intellectuals in the process of identity construction and in the politics of global knowledge construction — as a counter-force against Eurocentrism and scholarly racism;
- the critical scholarly extrapolation of the Bernal thesis (and its popular reformulation at intercontinental scale) with regard to African material beyond ancient Egypt.

3. Ideology and cultural history

Black Athena's potential role in identity formation today is complementary to the specialist (and no less heated) academic debate on Bernal's awe-inspiring *dilettante* contributions to ancient cultural and religious history and to the sociology of knowledge of North Atlantic classical studies since Romanticism.

At one level of analysis Bernal restates and popularises, with great display of synthetic scholarship, what many archaeologists, Assyriologists, Egyptologists, Semitists including Arabists, students of the history of science and the history of ideas, students of the history of magic, divination and astrology, students of Hermetic and Gnostic texts, or of comparative religion and mythology, have come to realise at least several decades ago on the basis of evidence so overwhelming and so comprehensive that it almost leaves Bernal's feats of scholarship in the shadow.¹⁴ The roots of North Atlantic civilisation, including what used to be portrayed as the classical Greek genius — allegedly incom-

parable and without historical antecedents — , have been shown to lie to a considerable extent outside Europe, in North-eastern Africa (Egypt) as well as (to an extent less emphasised by Bernal) in the rest of the Ancient Near East: Ancient Mesopotamia, Iran, Syria, Anatolia, Canaan, Crete, probably even the Indus civilisation with which Mesopotamia had such extensive contacts. Of course this insight lends a most ironic commentary to North Atlantic cultural hegemony as enforced by military and economic dominance in the Late Modern era.

Will Bernal's specific thesis regarding the details of early Greek history ultimately stand up to the methodological and factual tests of linguistics, archaeology and comparative religion? Collections of critical reactions from classical scholars and ancient historians¹⁵ may be read as suggesting that scholarly opinion is now converging to a negative overall assessment. One cannot rule out the possibility that part of this rejection is merely a chauvinistic reaction from classics scholars who see their sacrosanct discipline and its founding fathers unpleasantly accused, by Bernal, of built-in anti-Semitic and anti-Egyptian, or in general anti-non-European, racism. But can an entire discipline be so blinded as to its own founding fathers? New insights in the sociology of knowledge, the importance of paradigms as blinkers, the emergence of textuality as a new perspective on canonical texts including those of a scholarly nature, have created, in recent years, such an industry of re-reading and re-assessing as to make it highly improbable that only an outsider, Bernal, could identify whatever where the ideological agendas of the founding fathers; ancient historians and classicists, too, are increasingly picking up these issues,¹⁶ and it is just possible that their inside view, if less critical or critical for different reasons from Bernal's, allows us to arrive at a more balanced view.

Originality is not necessarily the hallmark of truth. Bernal is simply right in reminding us of the consistent ancient record that claims Greece's extensive indebtedness to West-Africa and Egypt, and, for instance, extensive spells of travelling and studying in Egypt, Mesopotamia, perhaps even India, for such major Greek intellectuals as Plato, Pythagoras, Plutarch, and many others. Recent research¹⁷ is ex-

ploring the Greek intellectual indebtedness to the very Achaemenid ('Persian') civilisation whose proud military confrontation, at Marathon and Salamis, virtually — and largely through the impact of Herodotus' long-winded interpretation of the Persian wars in his *History* — marks the beginning of European geopolitical consciousness as an ideological self-definition against 'the East'.

It is no accident that delusions about the pivotal place of Africa in the world's recent cultural history (meaning the latest few millennia) come at a time, the 1990s CE, when increasing processes of globalisation in the world at large do nothing but increasingly marginalise the African continent: an island of poverty and international debt, participating in no more than 1% of the world's trade flow, getting less and less income out of even a lightly increasing production of crops such as cocoa, coffee and groundnuts, on the verge of being given up by development agencies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, torn by ethnic and civil war, with more than a dozen postcolonial states having effectively ceased functioning, etc.

Just as it is no accident that we are forced to discuss these issues today, in a context where — with the unification of 'Europe' gradually taking political and economic shape — geopolitical ideologues are desperately looking for a binding symbol to define Europeanness as against the rest of the world: Is it to be Christianity? The Celtic heritage of Hallstatt and La Tène? Napoleon? Charlemagne? Prometheus? Athena? The Greek heritage? Minoan Crete, after all?

'Europe as a concept ought to be struck from the record of history',

Spengler boldly states in his *Untergang des Abendlandes*,¹⁸ one of the earliest and most uncompromising attempts, among European scholars, to escape from Eurocentrism. His great admirer, Toynbee,¹⁹ although in his later years more optimistic than Spengler as to mankind's chances of working out some sort of intercultural compromise, knew the civilisation of the West to be only one among a score of others, waxing

and waning at the tide of time. 'L'Occident est un accident', the French Marxist thinker Garaudy²⁰ reminds us half a century later, in a plea for a dialogue of civilisations. Recently, a new branch of intercultural philosophy has emerged (around the work of such authors as Kimmerle and Mall)²¹ in order to explore the theoretical foundations for post-racial and post-hegemonic cultural exchange at a global scale. Meanwhile, a more pragmatic axiom of cultural relativism has been the main stock-in-trade of cultural anthropologists ever since the 1940s; it has guided individual field-workers through long periods of humble accommodation to local cultural conditions very different from their own, and on a more abstract level has battled for a theory of cultural equality, emphasis on culture in planned development interventions, etc. Much like all other civilisations, the West has developed an ideology of ethnocentrism, and in recent centuries it has had the military, ideological, technological and economic means of practising this ethnocentrism aggressively in almost every corner of the world; unlike many other civilisations, however, the West also has formed the cradle of intellectual movements (the sciences, technologies, art, international law, philosophies, of the twentieth century) that in theory critique and surpass Western ethnocentrism, and that in practice observe a universalism that hopefully forebodes the emergence of a global world culture in which individual cultural traditions may merge and partly dissolve. Many would agree that (besides hunger, disease, infringement of human rights, war and environmental destruction) lies one of the most crucial problems for the future of mankind.

In my opinion — and this goes against popular appropriations of *Black Athena* — this universalism owes a specific original debt to the creativity of classical Greek culture, which means that the Greeks, like we all, did attempt to stand on the shoulders of their unmistakable predecessors in the Ancient Near East. Admittedly, much of the production systems, the language, the gods and shrines, the myths, the magic and astrology, the alphabet, the mathematics, the nautical and trading skills, of the ancient Greeks were scarcely their own invention but had clearly identifiable antecedents among their longer established

cultural neighbours. Citing such eminent authorities as Cassirer, Cornford, Snell and Frankfort c.s.,²² Peter Gay in his masterly reassessment of the Enlightenment (which was among other things a rekindling of the ideals of classical civilisation) points out that this is not true for 'sustained critical thinking', in other words philosophy as a deliberately distinct realm of human symbolic production.²³ This applies particularly to syllogistic logic, which could be argued to be one of the bases of universalism. Trigger's point appears to be well taken as far as Egypt-Greece cultural exchanges are concerned:²⁴

'That the ancient Egyptians, like the peoples of other early civilizations, did not distinguish as we do between the natural, supernatural, and social realms renders improbable Martin Bernal's (1987, 1991) efforts to trace the origins of classical Greek religion and philosophy back to Egyptian sources.'

At the same time the development of philosophy was neither a Greek prerogative, nor a sufficient condition (although arguably a necessary one) for the development of modern global science. Schools of logic developed not only in Greece but also in ancient India and China. The examples of medicine, alchemy and engineering, both in the Ancient Near Eastern/ Hellenic/ Hellenistic / Late Antiquity / Arabic / European tradition, and in China, make clear that science does not spring just from logic but also from the systematic practical, trial-and-error-based knowledge accumulated for centuries at the interface between artisanal and intellectual pursuits. Whatever the subtle ramifications of the hitherto largely unfathomed long-distance impact across the Old World may have been, only by a radical re-reading of the historical evidence (which inevitably has an ethnocentric bias) could these connections be said to be at the root of the specific forms of modern science, technology and philosophy which made the West and subsequently the emerging global culture of today. Such a re-reading has been Joseph Needham's *Science and civilisation in China*.²⁵ This most impressive project (in a way complementary to *Science in history*²⁶ by J.D. Bernal Sr. -

who benefited from Needham's advice - must have appealed to that of the Sinologist Martin Bernal Jr., in scope, in anti-Eurocentric orientation, and as an exercise in universal scholarship. Repeatedly, and to my mind convincingly,²⁷ Needham stresses the possible, likely, or certain contributions of China to European intellectual and technological achievements; *Yellow Athena?* Nor was the West Asian and North African contribution to modern global science limited to some initial, pre-Greek formative period: Aristotelian logic, Aristotelianism, and most of Hellenic and Hellenistic science in general would never have been revived in the West in the early second millennium CE unless through the extensive mediation and elaboration of Arabic thinkers (Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, foremost), with Maimonides and other medieval Jewish scholars acting as intermediaries.

In the field of scholarship there are limits to the extent to which origins truly matter, truly illuminate the past and the present. This is particularly clear from the vantage point of anthropology, which Frazer once defined as a science of origins,²⁸ but which since the structural--functional revolution affecting that young discipline in the 1930s and '40s, (*until quite recently*) has lost all interest in origins, geographical distribution patterns, even in causes, instead largely limiting itself to a contemplation of synchronic interconnectivity of diverse socio-cultural phenomena within typically a narrow geographical horizon. And even a more properly historical approach to social and cultural phenomena and their changes would insist that *origin, provenance, is not to be equated with subsequent local transformation and performance in maturity.* Islam at its earliest stage was largely a creative peripheral reformulation of, already mutually interrelated, Jewish, Gnostic and Christian strands of religious thought and practice; but it soon grew into a world religion in its own right, up to the point where current anti-Islamist prejudice in the North Atlantic region among nominal Christians is scarcely mitigated by the sense of shared historical roots.

In all likelihood the link between the Greek goddess Athena, patron goddess of the capital city of Greek civilisation in its heyday, and her Egyptian counterpart Neith, did go much further than a mere

superficial likeness cast in terms of the *interpretatio graeca*. Bernal urges us once again²⁹ to take the testimony of such ancient writers as Herodotus seriously and literally, as evidence that the Greek Athena merely represented the grateful adoption, into some North-east Mediterranean backwater, of splendid and time-honoured Egyptian cultural models — perhaps even in the course of physical Egyptian colonisation, as Bernal maintains. In this respect Athena might be called 'black'— not so much as the name of a skin colour, but in the sense of representing a counter-current to the dominant civilisation — much like blacks, women, homosexuals, refugees and the urban poor were the 'blacks' of the 1970s and '80s CE.³⁰ The more important point is not only to acknowledge the Egyptian, or in general Ancient Near Eastern essential contributions, *but also to recognise that Athena outgrew her presumable Egyptian origin*, became a focus of increasingly distinctive unpredictable local cultural development on Greek soil, and (as the goddess of the mind, of mental processes), at best characterises *both* the indebtedness of Greek and ultimately Western civilisation to Egypt, *and* the Greeks' own independent developments at the same time.

There is something thoroughly disconcerting in the emphasis on origins, as attends the debate on *Black Athena* and many other discourses on charters of identities confronting each other, not so much in the distant past, but in the world today. Origins are almost by definition too humble than that they are clearly perceptible to empirical research. At best the question of origin reduces a given socio-cultural phenomenon to the transformative combination of a number of earlier such phenomena, while the examination of the latter's own origins is left for a subsequent project. In this sense, the scholarly literature abounds with titles on origins, and legitimately so. The quest for origins however implies that whoever undertakes it, is satisfied as to the preliminary question of the classification and the unit of study of his chosen subject; if different decisions are taken on these points, the quest will yield totally different results or will have to be called off altogether. Implicit refusal to admit this means that reification and the quest for origins

often go hand in hand. Often then the ostentatious search for origins is not truly historical but merely programmatic, and theoretical primordial constructs (which because of their lack of empirical grounding are prone to ideological one-sidedness anyway) pose as historical 'firsts'. This is one of the reasons why most anthropologists would no longer be enthusiastic about Frazer's definition of their discipline.

With their ideological overtones and their invitation to conjecture, quests for origins are particularly cherished in the context of the identity formation of social groups, classes, racial groups, ethnic groups, nations. The very language of identity (as in ethnic and religious attempts at self-definition) tends to succumb to the *essentialistic* suggestion that it is some primordially established, fixed quality or nature at the beginning of time, which determines present-day qualities and performance — instead of seeing the latter as being realised in a dialectical, contradictory, and largely unpredictable *historical process*: a process, not of *remaining an essence*, but of *becoming* — usually becoming more than one thing at the same time, switching from one identity to the other, and being conscious of the arbitrary nature of all socially upheld identity. Thus the pursuit of 'origins', however legitimate as an academic activity under certain conditions,³¹ ultimately even risks to be co-opted into the camp of *Blut und Boden* — not necessarily with Naziist overtones, but at least of a frame of mind brooding on tangible essences about which one does not argue lest one is forced to admit the *historically constructed and optional* nature, of an identity one hoped could pass for primordial, unalterable, God-given, intransigent. It is the frame of mind in which people feel justified to kill over ideas.

These attempts at greater historical and analytical subtlety would probably be lost on those who have already proceeded to blow up Bernal's original thesis beyond recognition: to the grotesque claim (never of course made by Bernal himself) that ultimately global cultural history had its roots primarily in Africa — not just in the Africa of the remotest Palaeolithic (where that continent has consistently yielded the oldest vestiges of fossil humanity; there is a case not only for 'Black

Athena' but even for 'Black mankind' as a whole...) but in the recent, post-Neolithic context.

Such sweeping claims at the continental level belong to the realm not of empirical research, but of ideology in identity formation. Their predilection for the notion of 'origin' betrays as much. Yet they acquire such vehemence as liberating and mobilising truths, and attract such enmity in that capacity, that detached historical and comparative enquiry may yet serve as a useful antidote, demarcating the domain which should be reserved for empirical knowledge production even in the face of the rising hopes and ambitions of a minority whose birth-right has been denied for too long on the international scene.

The fundamental question then is how to do justice to these honourable culture-historical ambitions without falling into the trap of spurious historical claims of precedence and seniority. What is required is a different mode of thinking about cultural dynamics and interdependence. Are 'continents' or 'races' viable units of analysis in this connection? It is scarcely likely, not even if these claims come from African and African-American authors seeking to overcome the frustrations inherent to their social and historical position in the world system. We know that 'facts' of cultural distribution and history never speak for themselves, have no independent objective existence, but are to a large extent determined by the paradigmatic selectivity under which they are produced. The racist bias which *Black Athena* seeks to explode is unlikely to be totally absent from other products of North Atlantic scholarship besides classical studies, e.g. from African Studies; and its counterpart, unjustified Afrocentrism, constitutes essentially the same sort of bias.

It is here that empirical research may come to the assistance of philosophy. In the context of critical, comparative empirical research, involving a complex body of data (whose components have each been collected for different purposes, under varying ideological conditions often including blatant methodological naivety), such biases can be hoped to become manifest, or to cancel out. Empirical research is not an alternative to analytical and ideological critique, but it may open

up vistas and suggest new models and interrelations which otherwise would have remained outside our theoretical scope. Much of the identity discourse in the hands of African philosophers, literary writers and politicians is of an aggregate and extremely abstract nature, and pays insufficient attention to the details, the attending specific social practices and experiences, the specific dynamics and the range of variation of cultural history between, and within, African countries and periods of African history. Moreover these discourses have strictly confined themselves to the African continent, as if intercontinental cultural exchange began only yesterday, with the Maxim gun and airport art. Today however it is no longer necessary to discuss these matters in broadly sweeping terms. A century of specialised ethnographic and historical research on Africa, however teeming with biases, has allowed us to proceed to much greater precision, dividing up cultural heritages on the African continent into component strands and linking each of these strands specifically to global cultural history. What we lose in the process is an, ideologically attractive, blanket concept of mystical Africanness — focus of so much positive and negative bias. What we hope to gain is a more realistic view of the continental and intercontinental connections of the varieties of cultural achievements, borrowings and transformations — so that the continent itself (which in the course of two millennia has inflated from the designation of a minor North African region to become a myth of racial identity encompassing a sizeable section of mankind) can be relegated once more to a culturally and politically indifferent land mass and nothing more.

What does an analysis of the type advocated suggest as to Africa's place in long-term global cultural history? Is Africa the unique and universal matrix of origins as in Afrocentric popular appropriations of *Black Athena*? Is it the mere receptive, passive end station of imported culture produced by the genius of other continents, as in racialist myths? Do more subtle models of exchange and transformation present themselves?

4. *Two case studies: geomantic divination and mancala board-games in Africa and elsewhere*³²

In order to explore these alternatives, I will offer two — extremely truncated — case studies, tracing the trajectory of two famous genres of African cultural production widely attested across the continent since the sixteenth century CE, and featuring in many constructions of Africa as a continental cultural unit: *geomantic divination*, and *mancala*. Geomantic divination is based on the systematic production, distinction, and interpretation of 2ⁿ combinations of lines, seeds, pebbles, or wooden or ivory tablets. The term *mancala* refers to a family of board-games where, under elaborate rules, a fixed number of pebbles or seeds is repeatedly redistributed over a number of holes placed in 2 to 4 rows, and captured.

These two cultural systems are part and parcel of African life, cutting across the many cultural and linguistic boundaries which that continent exhibits. But are they unique to Africa? Do they have an African origin? Are they perhaps merely extensively localised forms, on the soil of the land mass we have chosen to call Africa, of cultural production which have a much wider distribution in the world, and which essentially originated outside that land mass? Does their African-ness lie in this localisation? Is that the reason why they are so dominant and ubiquitous in Africa? Or is the geographical claim in itself correct but is the very concept of Africa as a viable unit of cultural analysis, misleading?

4.1. *A Neolithic context*

I have elsewhere argued a Neolithic context for the emergence of board-games and divination.³³ These cultural forms are specific modellings of time and space, linked to agriculture and animal husbandry as man's most drastic redefinition of space and time before the rise of modern communication and transport technology. This sets a base-line

beyond which I for one do not feel compelled to seek for historical clues and geographical connections. The parcelling up of a local area in adjacent yet separately worked and administered fields, surrounding a localised community whose ritual unity is expressed by a shrine or temple, a cemetery, a megalithic structure, etc. — a community whose main *raison d'être* may well have been to pool resources not only against outside attack but also against internal food shortages, through pooling and redistribution —, fits the Neolithic archaeological record (and the form and rules of mancala) fairly well. It also has a link with the iconography of historical early agricultural communities, in whose representations a grid-like pattern not unlike a mancala board is a recurrent feature, even although we may not assume the correspondence to be as neat as in the earliest forms of Sumerian, Egyptian and Chinese writing, where such a pattern indeed means 'field'. Here may be the key to the layout of the mancala board.³⁴

Also in geomancy one would see the many variations of the 'art of drawing lines in the sand' as primarily an evocation of the several transformations of space through which the environment is turned into a productive field, through demarcation, clearing, ploughing, irrigation perhaps, and harvesting. Significantly, whatever departure from more original forms we encounter, there is always the link with the ground: if the divination no longer takes place on the actual ground but in a miniature representation such as the square West African divining-board, then at least its bottom has to be filled with sand; if the soil imagery has been almost entirely abandoned and the system reduced to the fall of four tablets, these are at least cast upon the soil — typically a soil which is transformed by covering it with a sacred cloth or skin. I think it is highly significant that at the beginning of the session the Southern African diviner usually smacks down, with great relish, onto the soil the bag containing his tablets — thus awakening the spirits of the soil (his ancestors, notably).

4.2. Geomantic divination

Geomancy constitutes a ubiquitous and dominant family of divination systems, including such famous members as *Ifa, Fa*, 'Sixteen Cowries' (Nigeria and West Africa in general), *Sikidy* (Madagascar and Comoro Isl.), *Hakata* (Southern Africa), *Ilm al-raml* (North Africa).³⁵ Africa is often presented as the continent in which divination is still part of everyday life, and these prominent divination systems tend to be presented as incorporating the very spirit of African life today and in the past. The material apparatus in all these regions is very different, ranging from divination chains, or shells cast in a square, rimmed wooded board covered with sand in West-Africa, or four tablets in Southern Africa; to piles of grain or pebbles in the Indian Ocean area, and the

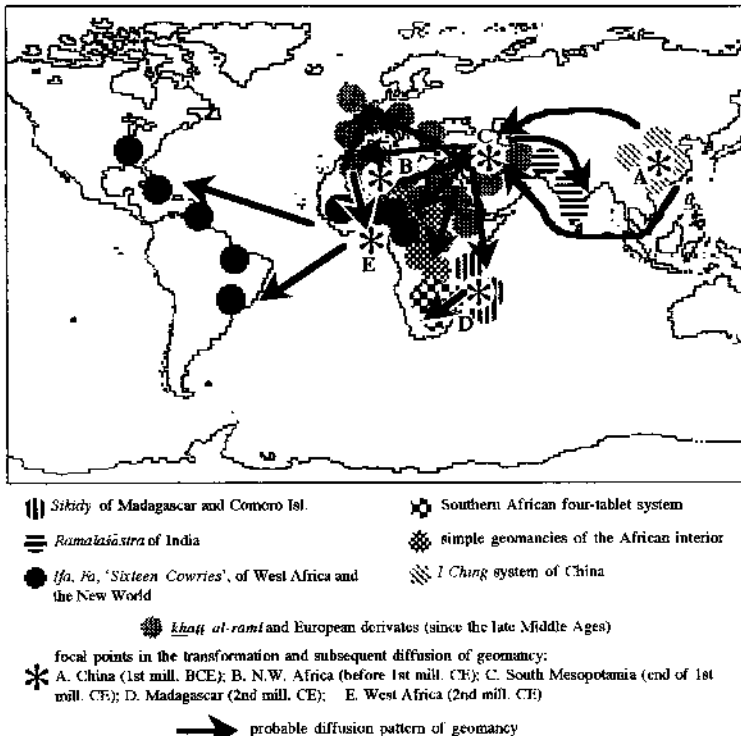


Fig. 1. Geographical distribution and probable diffusion pattern of geomantic divination.

forceful 'hitting of the sand' (*darb al-raml*) with a stick, in the North and North East Africa. With the exception of the Southern African variant (where the tablets' fall is interpreted directly, i.e. without the construction of a standard geomantic symbol) the result produced by the apparatus is interpreted, through a process of transformation and elimination, as contributing one horizontal line, of one or two dots, to a four-line geomantic symbol, of which there are of course sixteen. A written or memorised key (the catalogue) provides the interpretation of each geomantic symbol, and of their combinations.

The available evidence allows us to map the geographical distribution of the geomantic family as in Figure 1, as a basis for the reconstruction of its geographical diffusion.³⁶

According to the current state of historical reconstructions, the Hellenic, Hellenistic, Hermetic, Jewish, Persian, African, Indian and Chinese borrowings into the Arabic literate corpus of geomancy point to a drafting (after unsystematic earlier forms) of the classic, strongly astrological geomantic system in Southern Mesopotamia (probably Basra) in an Isma'ili context in the tenth century CE. Subsequently, the system's rapid and successful spread over the Arabic and Jewish intellectual world, and hence into Europe, Africa and the Indian Ocean region, was largely due to its re-formulation (in a famous and much circulated treatise known, among other titles, as *Kitab al-fasl fi usul ilm al-raml*) by the Berber shaykh Muhammad al-Zanati (c. 1200 CE). An early, original North West African input into the system is suggested by al-Zanati's origin, by the early circulation of Berber names for the sixteen basic geomantic configurations, and by the prominence of proto-mancala and proto-geomancy in the latter-day North West African material.³⁷ Yet the latter-day *Ifa*, *Fa*, and 'Sixteen Cowries' in West Africa derive directly from the Arabian prototypes. A careful examination of the binary mathematical structure of both the Southern African four-tablet divination system, and the more directly Arabian-derived forms of geomancy found in the Indian Ocean region led me to hypothesise historical connections which could subsequently be ascertained when I found identical items in the interpretative cata-

logues attending the divination system in these two more or less adjacent regions. The four horizontal lines of the standard geomantic symbols, where each line can take two values (uneven or even, one dot or two), turned out to be transformed into four tablets, where each tablet can take two values (obverse or reverse); in the process, the attending interpretative catalogue was partly maintained, partly localised.

4.3. *Mancala*

The term *mancala* refers to a family of board-games where, under elaborate rules, a fixed number of pebbles or seeds is repeatedly redistributed over a number of holes placed in 2 to 4 rows, and captured. The pioneer in this field, the late nineteenth-century American museum anthropologist Culin,³⁸ claims the mancala game to constitute 'Africa's national game' — a claim since repeated many times and still upheld by some major authors in this field, Townshend³⁹ and Russ.⁴⁰ Of the five families of board-games into which Murray⁴¹ classifies all known historic types, Africa is claimed to exhibit only one, for which he employs the generic, Arabic name of *mancala*. This type of game was first attested⁴² in the *Kitab al-Aghani* by the Arab author Abu'l Faradj (897-967 CE). Mancala is found all over sub-Saharan Africa; this game appears to have been that continent's only board-game outside clearly Arabianised or Europeanised contexts.

Figure 2 summarises the world distribution of mancala, and suggests the underlying pattern of diffusion.⁴³

Townshend has extensively argued against the central role Murray had attributed to Asia and to Islam in the spread of mancala, and in favour of a uniquely African origin and transformation of the mancala family of board-games, so much so that even their distribution in Asia should be directly derived from African models alleged to be recently imported to South Asia by black slaves. Already twenty years ago Townshend⁴⁴ complained that everyone (except Leakey⁴⁵) seemed to be utterly determined to find by all means a non-African origin for this family of board-games.

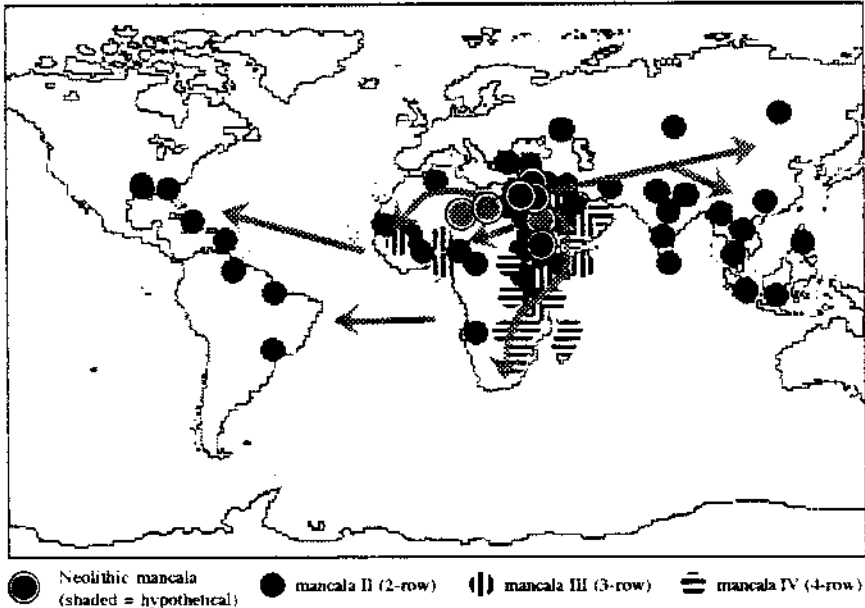


Figure 2. Geographical distribution and probable diffusion of mancala

In 1979 this point was repeated even more forcefully:

'The conclusions I personally draw from all this are:

- (i) that 4-row Mankala is of black-African origin;
- (ii) that there is a better prima-facie case for 2-row Mankala being of African than of Asian origin;
- (iii) that there is a distinct possibility of Mankala having been introduced whether by slaves or returned travellers from Africa to Asia (Leakey's conclusion of 40 years ago); and
- (iv) that the 'ki-Arabu' forms of 4-row Mankala may have been brought to the East African coast from the interior (e.g. the Lake

Malawi region) by Arabs or their African employees or possibly by some earlier current of cultural diffusion.⁴⁶

Townshend's view, although politically correct, is misleading. It actually forces him to manipulate the data.⁴⁷ It would be much better to use the considerable archaeological evidence, from various sites in East and Central Africa, of mancala-like rock art.⁴⁸ These mancala patterns (if that is what they are, despite their vertical placement, which defies their being used for actually *playing* mancala) have not been convincingly dated, and might be as recent as the East African Iron Age. However I would prefer, with Townshend and Leakey, to interpret them as neolithic. The geographical parameters of the Fertile Crescent were formulated⁴⁹ before it was generally realised that in Africa, both in the once fertile central Sahara and in the Ethiopian highlands, independent neolithic domestication of crops and livestock had taken place. Combining this with the evidence on neolithic mancala from Egypt, Jordan and Cyprus, any strict distinction between Africa and Asia becomes irrelevant and misleading: the neolithic transformation process producing mancala touched parts of both continents, as did the attending linguistic processes which were to lead to the rise of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Thus mancala did not spring from Africa any more than it sprung from Asia: it was produced in the Fertile Crescent, redefined so as to stretch deeply into North West and North East Africa, and straddling both continents. But here again — like when we compared Athens with Sais — we should add, to the argument of origins, the argument of subsequent maturation. If part of the cultural material that went into the making of both geomancy and mancala derived from cultures situated on the African land mass, it is clear that both systems owe at least as much of their final ramifications and success to the Islamic connexion: by decisively re-formulating this material in terms of the fully-fledged, strongly astrological divination system of *khatt al-raml*, and by putting the effective and pervasive vehicle of Islam and Islam-oriented trading at the disposal of both geomancy and mancala as a main vehicle of spread.

4.4. *The convergence of geomantic divination and mancala*

What strikes us is the similarity between the distribution and diffusion patterns of mancala and geomancy. Although their earliest history differed, both took root, diversified and transformed in Africa, and both spread from there the New World. The differences concern the periphery of their geographical distributions. Contrary to geomancy, which from the early second millennium CE spread to Europe across the Mediterranean, mancala never made it to Western Europe before the toy manufacturing industry along with the African airport art industry seized on the idea. In the Far East mancala was a bit more successful than its esoteric distant cousin, geomancy, in penetrating Indonesia and the Philippines. But whereas geomancy, in the form of *I Ching*, has been a very old and central (although not necessarily indigenous) part of the culture of China as a whole, it is only in Southern China that we encounter mancala. In general, these patterns of diffusion show that Africa is not merely a passive importer of culture but also a place of active transformation and subsequent export of culture for global use.

Within the African continent, this convergence is also to be found at the regional level. As a detailed study of the iconography of the four tablets indicates, geomantic divination has reached Southern Africa via a corridor (for many centuries an important trade route, along which notions of more or less divine kingship, Asian trade goods against gold and cattle, and Indonesian as well as — much later — Islamic cultural influences travelled) linking Tanzanian and Mozambican groups like the Konde to the Shona-speaking groups on the highlands of Zimbabwe, and from there on to Sotho/ Tswana speaking groups to the south and west of Zimbabwe. For students of mancala this must ring a bell: in this part of South East Africa, the pattern of spread of four-tablet divination coincides with that of four-row mancala, whose virtual confinement to East and Southern Africa almost certainly shows it to be an African development. It is a tantalising question for further research to decide whether

-
- four-row mancala caused the apparatus of geomancy to be altered towards a four-tablet system, or
 - four-tablet geomancy caused the incomparably more complex four-row variety of mancala to be produced out of the existing two- and three-row variants, or finally
 - it was the classic four-line geomancy (*Ilm al-raml*) which produced both the four-tablet geomancy and the four-row mancala.

5. Conclusion

My overview of two major classes of pan-African cultural phenomena, mancala board-games and geomantic divination, has revealed fascinating generic and formal interrelations and distribution patterns, both within each genre and between these two genres. These two significant cultural items of latter-day African culture suggest that it is a typical pattern of African cultural history to see

- active early participation in global cultural origins and flows (central in the case of early mancala, more peripheral and hypothetical in the case of early geomancy), followed by
- subsequent entrenchment — ‘cultural involution’ is perhaps the word — so that later, newer global trends are no longer picked up and locally fed back into the earlier models; instead the latter localise themselves to the extreme, taking up residence in the very texture of local cultures and absorbing the latter’s symbolism and cosmology so effectively that the result is something uniquely local, i.e. ‘African’, having lost all explicit references to, in fact virtually all traces of, an earlier intercontinental exchange.

In West Africa and Southern Africa practitioners and clients, for instance, are no longer aware of the Arabian provenance of their geomantic divination; for Southern Africa, until recently, scholarship shared this ignorance. Inward-looking localisation, severance of intercontinental cultural ties and conscious references, the relativity yet of

continental boundaries, and the general quality of being a backwater (much like Northwestern Europe before the second millennium CE) — these are some of the features of the model of African cultural dynamics suggested by my case studies. Admittedly, Africa turns out to be capable of cultural export and transmission (e.g. to the New World), but the cultural items it exports tend to remain peripheral in the destination continent, limited to immigrant groups who define their identity by reference to these imports. This is in many ways the opposite of the model of 'Africa civilising the rest of the world' as in the grotesque popularisations of the Bernal thesis. It is not a model that applies to all instances of cultural interrelations involving Africa, as the case of jazz music clearly shows. It does not contradict the Bernal thesis in its original form, since the unit of analysis is not land masses, but civilisations; and in that light it is rather more significant that ancient Egypt, along with the central Sahara and Ethiopia, belonged to a chain of early civilisations in the extended Fertile Crescent, than that these early civilisations were situated on the African land mass.

Two swallows do not make summer, yet I submit that the underlying model explicitised in these two cases, has rather general applicability when it comes to assessing Africa's place in the world's cultural history during the latest few millennia. Thus Africa can claim both the initial glorious contributions, and the subsequent stagnation and involution. This will only come as a disappointment to those who think (rather racialistically) that, despite the universally acclaimed quality of culture as something which is acquired, learned, not in-born, yet it is only primordial roots in a remote past viewed essentialistically, which qualify us for entry to the global scene. Meanwhile the more important message is that 'Africa' is the wrong unit of analysis.

My argument suggests that regions of cultural initiative are not fixed rigidly and once for all on the map, but show considerable dynamism, influencing each other, now taking precedence, then sinking into relative stagnation as compared to near and far neighbours. Such regions are typically the size of states, a few hundred kilometres across, not of continents. It is the monstrous blowing up of the Black Athena

paradigm — in the hands of enthusiasts trying to define a collective identity — to the scale of entire continents interacting, which deprives the model of all scientific value and reduces it to a mere geopolitical and ultimately racist myth. Continents are far too large, too heterogeneous and too capriciously shaped, and their natural boundaries (oceans, seas, deserts, a narrow isthmus in the case of Africa's boundary with Asia) far too porous and too conducive to human interaction, than that they can function as viable units of analysis in cultural and social history — *unless, under modern conditions of technology, organisational structure and international ideology, political actors themselves set out to define their interactions in geopolitical terms by explicit reference to the map.* Before the self-conscious political exploitation of the concept of Africa on a truly continental scale, map in hand, in the nineteenth century CE, Africa only existed as a land mass, not as a self-conscious cultural, social or linguistic unit. None of its many cultures, societies and languages ever encompassed the entire land mass, and each tended to share many traits with similar units outside that land mass, in what we now call Asia and Europe. These continental distinctions did not make much sense in the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic past, up to scarcely 10,000 years ago, and the instructive pattern of intercontinental continuity then deserves closer attention from present-day scholarship as to its impact on cultural continuities today.⁵⁰ Instead, historians, linguists, anthropologists, writers, politicians and most recently African philosophers have dreamed up — partly in response to myths of Europeaness, partly as a specific focus on the construction of 'otherness' — myths to define a distinct cultural Africaness which was to be coterminous with the land mass or with the dominant somatic human type inhabiting it — characterised by considerable pigmentation of the outer skin. Here Hegel set a trend from which Western thought still has not distanced itself sufficiently:

'Jencs eigentliche Afrika ist, soweit die Geschichte zurückgeht, für den Zusammenhang mit der übrigen Welt verschlossen geblieben; es ist das in sich gedrungene Goldland, das Kinderland,

das jenseits des Tages der selbstbewußten Geschichte in die schwarze Farbe der Nacht gehüllt ist. Seine Verslossenheit liegt nicht nur in seiner tropischen Natur, sondern wesentlich in seiner geographischen Beschaffenheit. (...) Der eigentümlich afrikanische Charakter ist darum schwer zu fassen, weil wir dabei ganz auf das Verzicht leisten müssen, was bei uns in jeder Vorstellung mit unterläuft, die Kategorie der Allgemeinheit. Bei den Negern ist nämlich das Charakterische gerade, daß ihr Bewußtsein noch nicht zur Anschauung irgendeiner festen Objektivität gekommen ist'.⁵¹

As a proud answer to European racism projected onto Africa, the Black American and African attempts at ideological self-assurance are as understandable as they are tragic: all these dreams of *Africanité*, *négritude*, tracing pharaonic and Ethiopian images all across the surface of that large continent, letting Black Athena and her African human followers sally forth from the African continent on their way to civilise Europe.⁵² In another way they are also a new phase in a recurrent phenomenon in North Atlantic thought: the cyclical infatuation with Egypt.⁵³ The future of Africa and of Black people living in or originating from that continent, should not be projected as lying with these half-truths, but in a radical rejection of racialist claims to a particularistic birth right, in favour of models stressing the common heritage of universal humanity, in the light of a common future.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference on *Black Athena: Africa's contribution to global systems of knowledge*, African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands, 28 June, 1996. I am indebted to Rijk van Dijk for co-organising the conference with me; to the African Studies Centre for funding it; to Jan Best for useful advice towards its realisation; to Martín Bernal, Josine Blok and Pieter Boele van IJensbroek for useful comments towards the present paper; and to the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS), where the present argument was largely conceived and written

- while I was a member of the theme group on Magic and religion in the Ancient Near East (1994-95).
- 2 Bernal, M., 1991, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic roots of classical civilisation, I. The fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985*, London etc.: Vintage, reprint of the original 1987 edition with Free Association Books; Bernal, M., 1991, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic roots of classical civilisation, II. The archaeological and documentary evidence*, New Brunswick (N.J.): Rutgers University Press; also cf. Bernal, M., 1990, *Cadmean letters: The transmission of the alphabet to the Aegean and further west before 1400 B.C.*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
 - 3 On Egyptian Athena: *Hist. II* 28, 59, 83 etc., and in general on the Greeks' religious indebtedness to Egypt: *Hist. II* 50ff. The identification of Neith with Athena was not limited to Herodotus but was a generally held view in Graeco-Roman Antiquity.
 - 4 Finch, C.S., 1990, *The African background to medical science*, London: Karnak House; Rashidi, R., 1992, *Introduction to the study of African classical civilizations*, London: Karnak House.
 - 5 Cf. Baumgartel, E.J., 1986, '(a) Predynastic Egypt', in: Edwards, I.E.S., C.J. Gadd & N.G.L. Hammond, eds., 1986, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 1 part 1: *Prolegomena and prehistory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd ed., first ed. 1970, pp. 463-498. We shall come back to this point.
 - 6 E.g. Jewsiewicki, B., 1991, 'Le primitivisme, le postcolonialisme, les antiquités "nègres" et la question nationale', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 31, 121/ 122: 191-213; Young, R., 1994, 'The postcolonial construction of Africa', paper read at the conference 'African research futures', University of Manchester, April 1994.
 - 7 Cf. Bruil, H., 1951, 'Further details of rock-paintings and other discoveries. 1. The painted rock 'Chez Tac', Leribe, Basutoland, 2. A new type of rock-painting from the region of Aroab, South-West Africa, 3. Egyptian bronze found in Central Congo', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 4: 46-50 (which establishes for a fact the occasional penetration of items of ancient Egyptian material culture far into sub-Saharan Africa); Meyerowitz, E.L.R., 1960, *The divine kingship in Ghana and in Ancient Egypt*, London: Faber & Faber; Petrie, W.M.F., 1915, 'Egypt in Africa', *Ancient Egypt*, 1915, 3-4; Schmidl, M., 1928, 'Ancient Egyptian techniques in African spirally-woven baskets', in: Koppers, W., ed., *Festschrift / Publication d'hommage offerte au P. W. Schmidt*, Vienna: Mechitaristen-Congregations-Buchdruckerei, pp. 282-302; Seligman, C.G., 1934, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A study in divine kingship*, London: Routledge; Seligman, C.G., 1913, 'Some aspects of the Hamitic problem

- in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 43: 593-705.
- 8 Smith, G.E., 1929, *The migrations of early culture: A study of the significance of the geographical distribution of the practice of mummification as evidence of the migration of peoples and the spread of certain customs and beliefs*, 2nd ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, first published 1915; Smith, G.E., 1933, *The diffusion of culture*, London; Perry, W.J., 1918, *The megalithic culture of Indonesia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Perry, W.J., 1923, *The children of the sun: A study in the early history of civilization*, London: Methuen; Perry, W.J., 1935, *The primordial ocean*, London: Methuen.
- 9 Caton-Thompson, G., 1931, *The Zimbabwe culture: Ruins and reactions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; facsimile reprint, 1970, New York: Negro Universities Press; MacIver, D. Randall, 1906, *Mediaeval Rhodesia*, London: Macmillan; Beach, D.N., 1980, *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900-1850: An outline of Shona history*, Gwelo: Mambo Press; Bent, J.T., 1969, *The ruined cities of Mashonaland*, Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, Rhodesiana Reprint Library, volume 5, facsimile reproduction of the third edition, Longmans, Green & Co., London/New York/Bombay, 1896, first published 1892.
- 10 Diop, C.A., 1989, *The cultural unity of Black Africa: The domains of patriarchy and of matriarchy in classical antiquity*, London: Karnak House; Diop, C.A., 1974, *The African origin of civilization*, Westport: Lawrence Hill.
- 11 Mafeje, A., 1971, 'The ideology of tribalism', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 9: 253-61; Okot p'Bitek, 1970, *African religion in Western Scholarship*, Kampala: East African Literature Bureau.
- 12 Said, E.W., 1979, *Orientalism*, New York: Random House, Vintage Books; Turner, B.S., 1994, *Orientalism, postmodernism and globalism*, London/ New York: Routledge; C. Breckenridge & P. van der Veer, 1993, eds., *Orientalism and the postcolonial predicament: Perspectives from South Asia*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 13 This is best substantiated by the modest length and the relatively obscure venues of publication, of whatever Dutch literature exists on *Black Athena*: Best, J., 1995, 'Racism in classical archaeology', in: *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, H., 1995, 'Was Athene zwart?', *Amsterdamse Boekengids Interdisciplinair*; Derks, H., 1995, *De koe van Troje: De mythe van de Griekse oudheid*, Hilversum: Verloren, p. 86; Leezenberg, M., 1992, 'Waren de Grieken negers? Black Athena en het Afrocentrisme', *Cimedart*, Feb/ Mar. And outside academia, in the context of drama

- production: Ockhuyzen, R., 1991, 'Het verzinsel van de Griekse beschaving', in: Aischylos, *De smekelingen*, transl. G. Komrij, Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books / Theater van het Oosten, pp. 11-13.
- 14 Cf. Childe, V.G., 1929, *The most ancient East: The oriental prelude to European prehistory*, London; Kramer, S.N., 1958, *History begins at Sumer*, London; Ncubebauer, O., 1969, *The exact sciences in Antiquity*, New York: Dover, 2nd edition; first published 1957; Saunders, J.B. de C.M., 1963, *The transitions from ancient Egyptian to Greek medicine*, Lawrence: University of Kansas Press; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., & Wiggermann, F.A.M., in press, 'Magic in history: A theoretical perspective and its application to Ancient Mesopotamia', in: T. Abusch & K. van der Toorn, eds., *Magic in the Ancient Near East*, Groningen: Styx, and extensive references cited there; Quispel, G., ed., 1992, *De Hermetische gnosis in de loop der eeuwen*, Baarn: Tirion; van den Broek, R., & Vermaseren, M.J., 1981, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic religion: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the occasion of his 65th birthday, Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain*, vol. 91, Leiden: Brill; Fontenrose, J., 1980, *Python: A study of Delphic myth and its origins*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press; reprint of the 1959 first edition.
- 15 Peradotto, J., & Mycowitz Levine, M., 1989, eds., *The challenge of 'Black Athena'*, special issue of *Arethusa*, Buffalo, N.Y.: Department of Classics, State University of New York, 1989; and especially the recent anthology of reviews, from which however all positive reviews have been omitted: Lefkowitz, M.R., & MacLean Rogers, G., 1996, eds., *Black Athena revisited*, Chapel Hill etc.: University of North Carolina Press.
- 16 E.g. Blok, J.II., 1994, 'Quests for a scientific mythology: F. Creuzer and K.O. Müller on history and myth', *History and Theory*, theme issue on *Proof and persuasion in history*, pp. 26-52.
- 17 Cf. Kingsley, P., 1996, 'Meetings with Magi: Iranian themes among the Greeks, from Xanthus of Lydia to Plato's Academy', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*; Kingsley, P., 1994, 'Greeks, shamans and magic', *Studia Iranica*, 23: 187-198.
- 18 Spengler, O., 1993, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, Munich: DTV; first published 1923, Munich: Beck; p. 22 n. 1: 'Das Wort Europa sollte aus der Geschichte gestrichen werden.' And he goes on in the same footnote:
' "Europa" is leerer Schall. Alles, was die Antike an großen Schöpfungen hervorbrachte, entstand unter Negation jeder kontinentalen Grenze zwischen Rom und Cypem, Byzanz und Alexandria. Alles, was europäische Kultur heißt, entstand zwischen Weichsel, Adria und Guadalquivir [

- in other words, way outside Greece] . Und gesetzt, daß Griechenland zur Zeit des Perikles "in Europa lag", so liegt es heute [early 1920s, recently reconstituted from the Ottoman Empire ... WvB] nicht mehr dort.'
- 19 Toynbee, A., 1988, *A study of history: A new edition revised and abridged by the author and Jane Caplan*, London: Thames & Hudson; this edition first published 1972.
 - 20 Garaudy, R., 1977, *Pour un dialogue des civilisations: L'Occident est un accident*, Paris: Denoël
 - 21 Kimmerle, H., 1983, *Entwurf einer Philosophie des Wir: Schule des alternativen Denkens*, Bochum: Germinal; Kimmerle, H., 1991, ed., *Philosophie in Afrika: Afrikanische Philosophie: Annäherungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff*, Frankfurt am Main: Qumran; Mall, R.A., 1995, *Philosophie im Vergleich der Kulturen: Interkulturelle Philosophie, eine neue Orientierung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
 - 22 Cassirer, E., 1941, 'Logos, Dike, Kosmos in der Entwicklung der griechischen Philosophie', *Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift*, 47, 6, Göteborg; Cassirer, E., 1953-7, *The philosophy of symbolic forms*, 3 vols., New Haven: Yale University Press, English translation by R. Mannheim of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Berlin, 1923-9; Cornford, F.M., 1957, *From religion to philosophy: A study in the origins of Western speculation*, New York: Harper and Row; first published 1912, London; Cornford, F. M., 1952, *Principium Sapientiae: The origins of Greek philosophical thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Snell, B., 1955, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes: Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen*, Hamburg: Claassen & Goverts; Eng. tr. *The discovery of the mind: The Greek origins of European thought*, New York: Harper & Row; cf. Onians, R.B., 1951, *The origins of European thought: About the body, the mind, the soul, the world, time, and fate: New interpretations of Greek, Roman and kindred evidence also of some basic Jewish and Christian beliefs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Frankfort, H., Frankfort, H.A., Wilson, J.A., Jacobsen, T., & Irwin, W.A., 1957, *Before philosophy: The intellectual adventure of Ancient Man: An essay on speculative thought in the Ancient Near East*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, first published 1946. More recently, the work of Jean Bottéro has been remarkably penetrating on the point of Ancient Near Eastern rationality, e.g. Bottéro, J., 1974, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures: En Mésopotamie ancienne', in: *Divination et rationalité*, Paris: Seuil, pp. 70-195; Bottéro, J., 1992, *Mesopotamia: Writing, reasoning, and the Gods*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, esp. ch. 8: 'Divination and the scientific spirit', pp. 125-137. Also cf.

- Larsen, M.T., 1987, 'The Mesopotamian lukewarm mind: Reflection on science, divination and literacy', in: Rochberg-Halton, F., ed., *Language, Literature and history: Philological and historical studies presented to Erica Reiner*, New Haven (Conn.): American Oriental Society, p. 203-225.
- 23 Gay, P., 1973, *The Enlightenment: An interpretation*, vol. I. *The rise of modern paganism*, London: Wildwood House; first published 1964; p. 464.
- 24 Trigger, B.C., 1995, *Early civilizations: Ancient Egypt in context*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, first published 1993; p. 93.
- 25 Especially: Needham, J., with Wing Ling, 1961, *Science and civilization in China*, vol. 1. *Introductory orientations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; first edition 1954; Needham, J., with Wing Ling, 1956, *Science and civilization in China*, vol. 2. *History of scientific thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; many more volumes have meanwhile been published.
- 26 Bernal, J.D., 1969, *Science in history*, 4 vols., Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- 27 Cf. his magnificent discussion of Taoism, or of Chinese influence on Leibniz's binary mathematics; Needham c.s., vol.#2, o.c.
- 28 Frazer, J.G., 1922, 'The scope and method of mental anthropology', *Science Progress*, 64, April 1922, p. 586.
- 29 For a recent refutation of the 'liar' thesis which has haunted the image of Herodotus in the European classical tradition, cf. Pritchett, W.K., 1993, *The liar school of Herodotus*, Amsterdam: Gieben.
- 30 Ironically, we note that even in that respect 'black' would be a misnomer since Egypt has such socially 'black' connotations only from a present-day North Atlantic perspective, whereas it must have been a thoroughly superior ('white') civilisation in the second and early first millennium BCE --- so that from an Egyptian perspective it would be the peripheral Greek Athena, not the Saitic Neith, who could be 'black'. Such contradiction and oscillation of terms is characteristic of any, inherently contradictory, discourse of identity. The skin colour, and by implication, the phenotypic 'Africanness' of the ancient Egyptians has been subject to heated debate, echoes of which reverberate in the context of the reception of *Black Athena*. Iconographic conventions attributed differential pigmentation according to class and gender, which in itself is proof that the phenotypic situation on the ground must have been complex and variegated --- as it is in Egypt today. Only a few clearly identified, late dynasties of Egyptian royals are certified to have had a black skin. Black soldiers, emissaries and slaves are abundantly attested in ancient Egyptian iconography, but not as the dominant endemic

physical type but as foreigners, whose influx was at times controlled by legislation; cf. Darlington, C.D., 1969, *The evolution of man and society*, London: Allen & Unwin, ch.7. The dominant interpretation, referred to above, of ancient Egyptian civilisation as rising from a hybridisation involving a West Asian, non-African element may in itself be yet another version of the racist myth which the *Black Athena* thesis seeks to explode; then again, it may be a correct reading of the archaeological evidence.

- 31 I have myself been engaged for several years now in discovering 'the origins of Islamic geomancy' — and, I believe, legitimately and successfully so.
- 32 An earlier version of this section was presented at the International Colloquium 'Board-games in Academia', Leiden University, 9-13 April, 1995; as well as at a seminar I gave at the Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Municipal University of Amsterdam, 12 May, 1995. I am indebted to the participants in the discussion on these two occasions. I also register my indebtedness to Alex de Voogd for introducing me to the literature on mancala, and to Irving Finkel for invaluable suggestions and encouragement. For further theoretical discussion, cf. van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1996, 'Time, space and history in African divination and board-games', in: Tiemersma, D., & Oosterling, H.A.F., eds., *Time and temporality in intercultural perspective: Studies presented to Heinz Kimmmerle*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- 33 Van Binsbergen 1996 'Time', o.c. Cf. Anonymous, 1990, 'Playing board games in the Stone Age', *Geographica*. *National Geographic Magazine*, 177, 2; Rollefson, G.O., 1992, 'A Neolithic game board from Ain Ghazal, Jordan', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 286, May 1992: 1-5. Considerably later are the Bronze Age mancala 'gaming stones' (boards cut in stone) found elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean basin: Lee, J., 1982, 'Early Bronze Age game stones from Bab edh-Dhra, Jordan', *Levant: Journal of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem*, 14: 171-174 (with 3x10 cups a three-row mancala); Swiny, S., 1980, 'Bronze Age gaming stones from Cyprus', *Report of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus*, 54-78. Similarly, Deledicq & Popova, who wrote a brilliant study of the finite mathematics of the mancala game, claim that mancala originates in Mesopotamia: Deledicq, A., & Popova, A., 1977, *Wari et solo: Le jeu de calculs africain*, Paris: CEDIC.
- 34 Gilbert, P., 1965, 'Irrigation, jeux de damier et sens du rectangle dans l'art égyptien', *Chronique d'Égypte*, 40: 72-78.

- 35 The literature, both scholarly and practical, on geomantic divination is fairly voluminous, and much of it is of excellent standards; I can only present the barest selection here. For a recent review by the author of one of the most original contributions in this field, cf.: Jaulin, R., 1991, *Géomancie et islam*, Paris: Christian Bourgeois. On the West African material, cf.: Cf. Kassibo, B., 1992, 'La géomancie ouest-africaine: Formes endogènes et emprunts extérieurs', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 32, 4, no. 128: 541-596; Traoré, M.L., 1979, 'Vers une pensée originelle africaine: Exposé géomantique, critiques de la négritude et du consciencisme', Thèse de 3^e cycle, Paris-IV, unpublished; Abimbola, 'W.', 1976, *Ifa: An exposition of the Ifa literary corpus*, New York: Nok. For a more popular overview, also dealing with the spread of geomancy to late medieval Europe, where it became a standard and increasingly popularised form of divination as from Renaissance times, cf.: Skinner, S., 1980, *Terrestrial astrology: Divination by geomancy*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, which however should be used with caution when it comes to the early history of geomancy. On geomancy (*Sikidy*) on Madagascar in relation to the general African material, cf.: Trautmann, R., 1939-1940, *La divination à la Côte des Esclaves et à la Madagascar: Le Vôdoù Fa — le Sikidy*, Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, no. 1, Paris: Larose; Hébert, J.C., 1961, 'Analyse structurale des géomancies comoriennes, malgaches et africaines', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 31, 2: 115-208. Merely for the sake of brevity, may I further refer to my own recent writings for extensive references on geomancy in Africa, the Islamic world, Asia and Europe: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1994, 'Divinatie met vier tabletten: Medische technologie in Zuidelijk Afrika', in: S. van der Geest, P. ten Have, G. Nijhoff & P. Verbeek-Heida, eds., *De macht der dingen: Medische technologie in cultureel perspectief*, Amsterdam: Spinhuis, pp. 61-110; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1995, 'Four-tablet divination as trans-regional medical technology in Southern Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25, 2: 114-140; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1996, 'Transregional and historical connections of four-tablet divination in Southern Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26, 1: 2-29; all in preparation for my forthcoming monograph: *Four tablets: A Southern African divination system in its transregional and historical context*.
- 36 van Binsbergen 1996, 'Transregional', o.c.; van Binsbergen, in preparation, o.c.
- 37 Griaule, M., 1937, 'Note sur la divination par le chacal (Population dogon de Sanga)', *Bulletin du Comité d'Études Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*, 20, 1-2: 113-141; Paulme, D., 1937, 'La divination par les chacals chez les Dogon de Sanga', *Journal*

- de la Société des Africanistes*, 7, 1: 1-14; Pâques, V., 1964, *L'Arbre cosmique dans la pensée populaire et dans la vie quotidienne du Nord-Ouest africain*, Travaux et Mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie de l'Université de Paris, no. 70.
- 38 Culin, S., 1896, 'Mankala, the national game of Africa', *US National Museum Annual Report*, Washington, pp. 595-607.
- 39 Townshend, P., 1976-1977, 'The SWA game of || hus (das Lochspiel) in the wider context of African Mankala', *Journal SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* (Windhoek), 31: 85-98; Townshend, P., 1979, 'Mankala in eastern and southern Africa: A distributional analysis', *Azania*, 14: 109-138; Townshend, P., 1979, 'Games of strategy: A new look at correlates and cross-cultural methods', in: Schwartzman, H.B., ed., *Play and culture*, New York: West Point, pp. 217-225; Townshend, P., 1982, 'Bao (Mankala): The Swahili ethic in African idiom', *Paideuma*, 28: 175-191.
- 40 Russ, L., 1984, *Mancala games*, Algonac (Michigan): Reference Publications.
- 41 Murray, H.J.R., 1952, *A history of board-games other than chess*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 42 Murray, o.c., p. 165.
- 43 On the basis of Murray's detailed data: o.c. pp. 178, 240f; with additional input from Townshend (1979, 1979, 1980, o.c.), as well as from the other references on mancala quoted in this paper.
- 44 Townshend, 1976-77, o.c., p. 95.
- 45 Leakey, L.S.B., 1937, *White African*, London, pp. 165-173.
- 46 Townshend, 1979, 'Mankala', o.c., p. 127.
- 47 The mancala literature's pet reference to Egypt goes back to a non-specialist source on Ceylon: Parker, H., 1909, *Ancient Ceylon*, London: Luzac & Co., pp. 587-603. There the Egyptian material merely appears in passing in the discussion of mancala on Ceylon — for which Townshend feels compelled to suggest an unrealistically recent date; but there are also serious Egyptological sources, e.g.: Petrie, F., 1927, *Objects of daily use*, London, p. 55, plate 47. Contrary to Townshend's suggestion, there can be little doubt that we are dealing with mancala boards here: a three-row lime-stone mancala board, with separate bank for the accumulation of gaming pieces.
- 48 Costermans, le Dr., 1949, 'Relevé des stations préhistoriques dans les territoires de Watsa-Gomabri et de Dungu', *Zaire*, iii, 2: 154-166; Viereck, A., 1973, *Die Felsbilder von Twyfelfontein*, Windhoek, picture 21, p. 45; Cole, S., 1954, *The prehistory of East Africa*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 265; Jensen, A.E., 1936, *Im Lande des Gada*, Stuttgart:

- Strecker & Schröder (as quoted in: Zaslavsky, C., 1990, *Africa counts: Number and pattern in African culture*, Brooklyn (N.Y.): Lawrence Hill, second paperback edition; first published 1973, Boston: Prindle, Weber & Schmidt, p. 126, fig. 11-6); Anfray, F., 1970, 'Notes archéologiques', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 8: 35. Townshend is well aware of this material, cf. Townshend 1976-77, o.c., p. 91 n. 1, p. 92.
- 49 Breasted, J.H., 1935, *Ancient times: A history of the Ancient World*, New York: Harper & Brother, first published 1926.
- 50 Cf. Edwards, I.E.S., C.J. Gadd & N.G.L. Hammond, eds., 1986, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 1 part 1: *Prolegomena and prehistory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd ed., first ed. 1970, notably: Garrod, D.A.E., 1986, 'Primitive man in Egypt, Western Asia and Europe in palaeolithic times', pp. 70-89; Clark, J.G.D., 1986, '[Primitive man in Egypt, Western Asia and Europe] in mesolithic times', pp. 89-121; Hughes, D.R., & Brothwell, D.R., 1986, 'The earliest populations of man in Europe, Western Asia and Northern Africa', pp. 156-172.
- 51 Hegel, G.W.F., 1992, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Werke 12*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1st Suhrkamp edition 1986, pp. 120-122; posthumously published on the basis of his lecture notes 1822-1831; cf. Kimmerle, H., 1993, 'Hegel und Afrika: Das Glas zerspringt', *Hegel-Studien*, 28: 303-325.
- 52 van Sertima, I., ed., 1985, *African presence in early Europe*, New Brunswick: Transaction. One is intrigued to see, for instance, an academic sociological study like Blakely's embellished by the assertion (p. 290; allegedly made on Bernal's authority) to the effect that 'the denial of the African origins of Western civilisation is a result of scholarship dating only from the eighteenth century...'
- 53 Cf. Curl, J.S., 1982, *The Egyptian revival: An introductory study of a recurring theme in the history of taste*, London: Allen & Unwin.

Résumé

L'examen par John Mbiti du concept d'événement dans les ontologies africaines peut être récusé pour des raisons conceptuelles et axiologiques. En ce qui concerne les raisons conceptuelles nous montrerons que le compte rendu de Mbiti est illogique, et pour ce qui relève des problèmes axiologiques qu'il est en désaccord avec les pratiques des sociétés africaines.

AN ANALYSIS OF JOHN MBITI'S TREATMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF EVENT IN AFRICAN ONTOLOGIES

Clarence Sholé Johnson

Introduction

In his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti elaborates, among other things, a conception of event that he takes to be universal to Africans.¹ Mbiti's account is intricately bound up with his discussion of African conception of time; thus, an analysis of the claims he makes about the concept of event in African ontologies should commence with an elaboration of his account of time.

According to Mbiti, traditional African conception of time is anaphoric or backward looking. It is limited to the present and the past. This is in contrast with Western conception that looks toward and culminates in the future. The upshot of Mbiti's discussion is that, strictly speaking, Africans have no conception of a future, except that which is nearly present or, as he says, that which is certain to occur.² In the context of event, Africans similarly have no sense of a future event to the extent that time is a measurement of event and African concept of time commences with the present and proceeds backwards. My aim in this study is to examine Mbiti's interpretation of African conception of event. Specifically, I will exhibit some of the absurd practical consequences, in the domain of ethics, politics and economic planning and development, that follow upon Mbiti's discussion.

Structurally, the paper will be divided into two sections. In section I, I will sketch out Mbiti's general discussion of time as it bears upon his account of the nature of event in African ontologies. In this connection, I will outline also what I consider some general features of event in African systems of thought. And in section II, I will exhibit what I take to be some of the practical consequences of his views.

The concepts of time and event in traditional african ontologies

Mbiti commences his discussion with a definition of time in African ontologies. He says that time is "simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur" (p.17). This said, Mbiti then declares that, for Africans, 'What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of "No-time"' (ibid.).³ The most significant consequence of this view, says Mbiti, is that it shows that time in traditional African thought is two-dimensional: "time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future" (p.17, emphasis in text).

Mbiti explains the non-existence of (the concept of) a future saying that, for Africans, contra Westerners, "events which lie in . . . [a future] have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time" (p.17). Even so, Mbiti recognizes that there is a regularity in nature as a result of which one can expect reasonably, and therefore can predict, the possible occurrence of some events. For example, the cattle-rearing Ankore people of Uganda know when to milk their cattle; when to draw water; when to shepherd their cattle to the watering places; and when to return the cattle to their *kraals* or sleeping places etc. (pp.20-21). The Ankore people live this life on a daily basis; indeed, they form this habit out of an expectation of the recurrence of the cycle of activities in which they have been engaged as far back as they can remember. In any case, in spite of this observation, and given Mbiti's definition of time already noted, such *expected* events do not fall into the realm of time. The reason is that they are merely possible, not actual, occurrences. On the other hand, because there is every likelihood that they may occur, they cannot be discounted as non-events.

To account for this kind of anomalous, even seemingly paradoxical, situation Mbiti distinguishes between "actual" time and "potential" time. Actual time consists of "what is present and what is past." Actual time 'moves "backward" rather than "forward"' (p.17).

Potential time, by contrast, designates future events. In the sense in which Mbiti uses the expression "future events," these are events that are "certain to occur" or that "fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature" (p.17). Mbiti does not explain a critical philosophical issue here, namely, how (the concepts of) certainty and inevitability can be ascribed to a future. In any case, this is the conceptual framework within which Mbiti situates his discussion of the concept of time in African ontologies.

Mbiti then proceeds to illustrate the claims he has made, as described above, by invoking empirical research that he had conducted on the Kikamba and Gikuyu languages of the respective Kenyan ethnic groups. Adopting two Swahili concepts, designated by the terms *Sasa* and *Zamani*, Mbiti suggests that the vocabulary of the peoples in question is restricted only to the *Sasa* and *Zamani* periods. Generally, the *Sasa* period covers the immediate future -- i.e. events that are about 2 to 6 months away -- the present, and the recent past. Mbiti characterizes this period as the "Now-period" (p.17) or the period of "now-ness" (p.22). Generally, this period should be read as an enlarged present. According to Mbiti, this is typically the period with which Africans are preoccupied; it is the period of immediate concern for Africans because, after all, this is "where" or "when" they exist (p.22).

Zamani, on the other hand, commences with the immediate past and extends to the indefinite past. Given that time, for Africans, moves backwards, it is clear that the *Sasa* culminates in the *Zamani*. Indeed, as Mbiti says, *Zamani* is constituted by *Sasa*; hence *Sasa* is Micro or Little Time and *Zamani* is Macro or Big Time (pp.22-23).

The concept of event that emerges as African in Mbiti's discussion can be reconstructed now from the account of time he has offered. To begin, Mbiti limits events only to present and past occurrences, given his restriction of African conception of time to the present and the past. Thus, it would be accurate to define an event, for Mbiti, as any occurrence that can be described using either the present or past tense.

As an illustration, my writing this paper yesterday and my continuing to write it at this moment are two distinct events. Both events belong to what Mbiti describes as the Sasa period. True, Mbiti speaks also of immediate 'future' occurrences. However, I do not think that this remark should be taken too seriously in view of Mbiti's claim that Africans do not have a conception of a future time. Indeed, that claim makes suspect the very distinction Mbiti draws between actual and potential time. For it follows from his claim that Africans do not have a conception of a future time that, *a fortiori*, Africans cannot (be expected to) have a conception of events as future occurrences. After all, the notion of event, implying as it does the notion of change, is logically inseparable from the notion of time, the latter of which is the measurement of change. It would be appropriate, therefore, to characterize the putative future occurrences of which Mbiti speaks as an extension of the present. Indeed, such a characterization would be quite consistent with Mbiti's description of immediate possible occurrences as *certain*. I submit, even if dogmatically, that Mbiti's ascription of certainty and inevitability to such possible occurrences may well be an attempt to render his system consistent by bringing those occurrences into the Sasa period. But even if this were not the reason Mbiti uses the concepts of certainty and inevitability, still, one should assume that he would use those concepts if only to make his system consistent.

Another feature of events in Mbiti's discussion is that they are spatio-temporal realities. This is implicit in several of his claims, but especially the claim that the Sasa period, the period of present experience, feeds into the Zamani, and hence that Zamani is the repository of all experiences. It is in light of this claim that Mbiti says of the history of each African people that it 'moves "backward" from the Sasa period to the Zamani, *from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go*' (p.23, emphasis added). What this shows is that, according to Mbiti, experience is fundamental to African conception of event as to their conception of time. It follows from this view that, for Africans, it is unintelligible to speak of events

that have not occurred, just as it makes no sense to speak of a time that has not been experienced.⁴ Indeed, to speak of a time that has not been experienced entails the logical incongruity of speaking of unowned experiences. Mbiti says as much in the statement that "Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real" (p.17). One can extend this reasoning to events and say that, according to Mbiti's understanding of African ontologies, events have to occur in order to be real.

Additional evidence for this reading of Mbiti can be obtained from his claim that actual time is the ultimate concern of Africans because actual time is of the present. In other words, it is with the present, the world of experience, that African people are concerned. Accordingly, Mbiti concludes that Africans "set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on *what has taken place*" (p.17, emphasis added). Clearly, then, because experiences occur within a space-time continuum, or, alternatively, because events occur within a spatio-temporal framework, they are therefore spatio-temporal realities.⁵

3. Two other important features of events in African ontologies that Mbiti failed to bring out in his discussion, however, are causality and purposefulness. To these I now will turn if only to supplement Mbiti's discussion.⁶ I begin with causality.

Causality is central to the notion of event in African ontologies precisely because of its connection with the concept of agency, the latter of which is of the utmost importance to the African. Africans attribute agency to all natural occurrences and in so doing they attribute a cause to all natural phenomena. For this reason, it can be said that Africans believe very strongly in the principle of universal causation according to which every event is believed to have a cause in terms of which the event is explained.⁷ Furthermore, it is in light of this principle that, for Africans, nothing occurs by chance. As I will show later, the concept of chance is incompatible with African thinking.

In general, Africans recognize two types of causes: proximate and ultimate causes. Proximate causes are spatio-temporal entities

(including persons) that are believed to bring about events. For example, a river that overflows, submerges an entire city and in the process destroys life and property, would be regarded as the proximate cause of the destruction. A person who, by spreading malicious rumours about a neighbour, causes the neighbour to commit suicide is the proximate cause of the neighbour's death.

Ultimate causes, on the other hand, are non spatio-temporal entities such as God, traditional divinities, deceased ancestors and even some spirits that are believed to be inherently malevolent. By nature, these entities are transcendental. But more than anything else, they are believed to be the directive forces of all that happen and exist in the empirical world. Furthermore, their presence in the empirical world is manifested in otherwise mysterious forms of behaviour of familiar objects. According to the Krios of Sierra Leone, for instance, a door that suddenly slams shut as if by the action of a person or a strong wind, except that neither a person nor a wind is obviously the cause of the event, is indicative of a visitation of a deceased ancestor. Generally, it is through such forms of behaviour by inanimate objects that deceased relatives are believed to manifest their presence in the home.

The distinction between proximate and ultimate causes reflects a hierarchy in the arrangement of ontological entities in African conceptual scheme. Usually, entities are arranged in the following descending order. First, there is a supreme being. This being is followed by various traditional divinities, which in turn are followed by ancestral spirits -- i.e. the spirits of deceased ancestors. Following the ancestral spirits are humans, and below humans are animals. Finally there are plants and other inanimate entities such as rocks etc. As noted above, the supreme being, traditional divinities, and ancestral spirits are all transcendental. They are aspatial and atemporal beings. Humans, animals and inanimate entities, on the other hand, exist in space and time. There is thus a dual realm in African ontologies with pure spiritual entities occupying the higher realm and human and other spatio-temporal entities occupying the lower realm.

Given such a hierarchy, all spatio-temporal entities, insofar as

they are not spirits,⁸ function only as proximate causes. Thus, if a person's house got destroyed by fire, fire is undoubtedly the proximate cause of the destruction. If the fire was deliberately set, then the person who set it is also part of the proximate cause. But to invoke a proximate cause is to give only a partial explanation. A complete explanation must make reference to ultimate cause(s). (Gyekye, 1987: 77-83.) And ultimate causes are completely spiritual or non-spatiotemporal. In African systems, to give the ultimate cause of any phenomenon is to explain *why* the phenomenon occurred. And such an explanation invariably makes reference to spirits. This then takes us to the other characteristic that Mbiti failed to bring out in his discussion, namely purposefulness.

Africans believe that spirits are the originative causal agents in the world, and hence that spirits are the directive forces of all that happen in nature. In other words, for Africans, there is a certain teleology in nature in the sense that whatever happens or exists in nature is purposeful, being ultimately the result of the activity of spirits. In this regard, no event or action occurs randomly or by chance. Indeed, the concept of randomness or chance, in the sense of not being subject to the principle of causality, is foreign to African systems of thought. The reason is that a chance event, *qua* event that does not admit of causal explanation, is purposeless. But, *ex hypothesi*, no such events are logically and ontologically possible, at least for Africans. Thus, for Africans, the notion of a chance event implies a contradiction.

It trivially follows from this view of the purposefulness of nature that, for Africans, there is a reason for every event in the spatio-temporal realm. To be sure, humans are not always able to explain certain occurrences. Why, for example, did an earthquake occur when it did and not at another time? Or why is it that a tornado destroyed all but one rickety house in an entire community even though all the other houses were on its path? But it does not follow from the human inability to explain such events that the events are inexplicable. Quite the contrary, human inability to explain such events is simply an indication of the limitation of human capacities. Only spirits, who are

believed to be the ultimate causes of everything, know the reason for such events because, after all, *they* are the causal agents of those events. And to say that only spirits know the reasons for certain events is to say that only they know the purpose(s) to be achieved by those events.

Causality and purposefulness are pivotal therefore to any discussion of event in African ontological systems in view of African belief in spirits. Mbiti's failure to include these items in his discussion of what he takes to be African conception of events is certainly not owing to his unawareness of the place and role of spirits in African ontologies. I suggest, rather, that his error of omission is inadvertent, perhaps owing to his not realizing the philosophical import of these issues for a discussion of the key elements in African ontologies. But notwithstanding such omission, and using the principle of charity, the following can be presented as a summary of Mbiti's overall view of the characteristics of events in African ontologies: (i) Events are past and present occurrences. Africans have no conception of events as future occurrences. (ii) Events are spatio-temporal realities; (iii) Events are causal in nature; (iv) Events are always purposeful.

Some absurd consequences of Mbiti's view

Mbiti's analysis of the concept of event in African ontologies is problematic, as I will soon show in delineating some axiological consequences that follow upon his key claims. First, however, I wish to exhibit a conceptual difficulty into which his analysis lends itself. The difficulty concerns both the claim that African conception of event is limited to the present and the past and the very intelligibility of Mbiti's claim when applied to the issues of punishment and responsibility-attribution in African systems. I begin with the concept of event as past and present experiences.

The claim that African conception of event is restricted to present and past experiences cannot be sustained in light of other beliefs that Africans hold. As Mbiti himself observes, Africans, like other peoples,

anticipate certain occurrences such as death, marriage, birth, growing up, and farming when the season arrives etc. Saying that these are anticipated occurrences entails that they are construed as *possible*, as distinct from actual, occurrences; it is to say of them that they are *expected to occur*. But if Mbiti is right in the account of event that he has elaborated, these anticipated occurrences would turn out to be past or present events. In other words, for Africans, according to Mbiti, an anticipated event would be an event that has *actually* occurred; it is an actual past or present occurrence. The question that arises, however, is whether or not this is really how Africans construe anticipated occurrences? Put otherwise, is it the case that, for Africans, to anticipate an event is to say that the event has actually occurred either in the present or in the past as Mbiti suggests?

Despite Mbiti's claim about the empirical study he undertook of the Gikuyu and Kikamba groups, I submit that this is not what Africans mean. To begin, there is an obvious logical absurdity in the notion that one is anticipating the past or the present, wherein the anticipating is concurrent with or posterior to the event anticipated. One cannot anticipate getting married when one is already married. Nor can one anticipate *having been* in danger

-- that is, the anticipating occurring some time later than the situation anticipated. More generally, it makes no sense to speak of one anticipating anything if that which is purportedly anticipated already exists or has existed. The reason is that anticipation logically implies the non-existence of the situation anticipated. Put otherwise, to anticipate some situation S is to say both that S *does not as yet exist* but that (in view of certain kind of facts of which one is aware) S may come about. Given this sense of what it means to anticipate some state of affairs, it is therefore logically absurd to speak of anticipating an event in the manner described by Mbiti. For to characterize some event E as anticipated, on his account, is to say both that E has occurred (or that it occurred at a previous time) and that E is yet to occur. Strangely, it is precisely to such a logical absurdity that Mbiti's account commits African peoples -- a very good reason for one to be

particularly wary about the position Mbiti advances as African.

This is certainly not to suggest that Mbiti's overall endeavour is without merit. There can be no doubt that the task he undertakes is laudable in itself given the spirituality of African peoples. However, the price Mbiti pays (and is asking Africans to pay) for a coherent account of transworld communication in African systems is exceedingly high. There are very serious doubts that when Africans talk about time, event, immortality and the like, they intend to convey the idea that they have a peculiar logic in which absurdities are intelligible; or that they collapse the spatio-temporal into the non-spatiotemporal; or even that they collapse or reduce time and change or alteration into *human* experiences such that in the absence of human beings these would not exist or occur. Indeed, Africans would seem a peculiar breed (or species) in that, on Mbiti's account, they affirm logical absurdities and organize their lives around such absurdities. When one recalls much of what has been written about the putative lack of the reasoning capacity of Blacks, a presumed genetic deprivation in virtue of which Blacks at one time were deemed sub-humans, which view was used to rationalize slavery, colonization and the oppression of Black peoples, one is forced to observe that Mbiti's views serve only to reinforce, even if by implication, those stereotypes especially of Africans.⁹

It might be urged, perhaps, that I am making too much of Mbiti's view of the anaphoric character of time and event in African systems. After all, the objection might go, Mbiti is an educated Black African who undoubtedly is knowledgeable about the very scientific (read: anthropological, physicalistic etc.) models to which reference was made in the prosecution of the view of the supposed mental deprivation, even inherent stupidity, of the Black person. Granted such knowledge, then, it is impossible that he would advance a position that serves to reinforce standard stereotypes about Africans in particular and Blacks in general.

My response to this objection is that it does not follow from Mbiti's being educated that he perceives the damaging implication of the view he is advancing, namely, that the view promotes the racist

literature on which the rationalization for the African holocaust and exploitation had long depended. To see this, consider that Mbiti's preoccupation in presenting the kind of account of time and event that he does is to show, among other things, that, contra Western systems of thought, there is in African conceptual schemes a continuity between the eternal and temporal realms and that, as a consequence, the traditional objections usually brought against christian belief in a life after bodily death will not apply in African systems.¹⁰ And in prosecuting this thesis he utilizes the idealism of Bishop Berkeley by offering an account of time and event in terms of individual, sense experiences. In other words, Mbiti, drawing upon Berkeley's dictum "*Esse est percipi*" ("To be is to be perceived"), offers an account of each of time and event according to which neither exists unless in the context of actual human experiences.¹¹ It is this preoccupation, the pursuit of which is done within a Berkeleyan framework, that handcuffed Mbiti and prevented him from perceiving that his use of the framework is more detrimental to African peoples than it provides insight into their metaphysic. Thus, there is no inconsistency in saying that Mbiti may be aware of the racist literature against African peoples but at the same time is unable to see the direct consequence of the borrowed conceptual framework within which he articulates his ideas.¹²

But suppose one accepts Mbiti's account. What are the implications of that account for responsibility-attributions in African systems? Would it mean that Africans cannot make such attributions? If they do, however, does this mean that such attributions are applied only retrospectively?

The ascription of moral (and legal) responsibility to an agent at some time T₁, presupposes the performance (or non-performance) of a certain act A, by the agent at some previous time T, and for which the agent is deemed a fit candidate for praise or censure.¹³ Similarly, the promulgation of sanctions to encourage or prevent the performance of any act entails that agents may think it appropriate to perform or refrain from the act.¹⁴ It is significant that in either type of situation,

one in which sanctions *actually* are applied and one in which they merely are prescribed to encourage or discourage the performance of an act, responsibility-attribution cannot (and does not) pre-exist the act. What this shows, even if trivially, is that we only attribute responsibility for a given act at a later time, i.e. after the act has been performed (or been omitted). Similar considerations apply to the practice of ascribing punishment to agents. When we met out punishment for a supposed wrongdoing we are saying, in effect, that because of what an agent did or failed to do at some previous time s/he justly deserves to suffer some form of pain at a later time.

Given Mbiti's account that Africans do not have a conception of a future, however, it should follow that Africans cannot make responsibility-attributions as described.¹⁵ Yet the evidence clearly suggests otherwise. If one reads Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in part as a sociological document of life in traditional Ibo society, for instance, one sees that Okonkwo's accidental killing of Ezeudu's son, at Ezeudu's own funeral, viewed by the society as a transgression against societal norms, necessitates as punishment the ostracization and exile of Okonkwo.¹⁶ We see that both the attribution of responsibility for an action and the dispensation of punishment *succeed* the wrongdoing that constitutes a violation of a societal norm. This is but an example of a traditional African society engaged in an axiological practice along the lines delineated above. This aside, Africans traditionally make atonement for what they consider grave transgressions -- for example, transgressions against the divine -- by importuning deceased ancestors, those individuals who in Mbiti's framework exist in the *Zamani* and are ontologically closer to the divine than humans, to intercede with the divine on their behalf. The belief that transgression against a divine is ground for vengeance by the divine motivates the act of pleading with the deceased ancestors for their intercession so that the anticipated punishment may be mitigated or averted. It is in such contexts that Africans perform acts of libation and other rituals of fellowship with the ancestors, the object of which is to solicit assistance and guidance from the ancestors in respect of

some future state of affairs. The *expectation, hope, desire or wish* is for the attainment or avoidance of some future state of affairs, not for a present or past state of affairs as would be entailed by Mbiti's account. It would seem then that, contra Mbiti, axiological practices in traditional African societies are not applied retrospectively. But more importantly, the very existence of such practices in traditional African societies calls into question Mbiti's account of (non-futuristic) events and even belies his *description* of African ontologies.

Yet it might be protested against my criticism of Mbiti that it simply does not follow from Mbiti's denial of the concept of a future in African discourse that his discussion of time precludes responsibility-attribution. On the contrary, it might be said, where T1 and T respectively refer to the present and the past (or, alternatively, to a later time and an earlier time), to ascribe responsibility at T1 for some act implies, on Mbiti's account, that the performance or omission of the act was at an earlier and different time, T. Given the backward direction of the flow of time in Mbiti's account, the attribution of responsibility is done always at a later (or present) time for an act that is performed or omitted at an earlier (or past) time. Thus Mbiti's account of time in African thought does not result in the bizarre consequence being claimed, namely, that African systems disallow the ascription of responsibility for acts as normally understood.

But this objection conflicts with, even contradicts, Mbiti's account of the direction of time and event. According to Mbiti, time flows from the present to the past and not the other way around as is advanced by the objection. This means that the present is the earlier and the past the later point in Mbiti's framework. Accordingly, any act for which responsibility is to be attributed has to be committed in the present (or earlier) time for responsibility to be meted out in the later (or past) time. The question that arises, therefore, is whether or not, for Africans, responsibility-attribution is a past act? To which the answer is a simple but emphatic "No". The objection would have been plausible if indeed time (and event) moved backwards in African ontologies as is claimed by Mbiti. The fact, however, is that they do not and that, furthermore,

Africans view the said phenomena in much the same way as others, namely, as progressing from the present to the future and not as Mbiti says. It is in virtue of this direction of the flow of time that Africans, like others, make responsibility-attributions as they do. The thrust of my argument, in sum, is that Mbiti's claims about the backward movement of event and time in African ontologies is just not true.

I have been particularly severe in my criticism of the accounts of time and event that Mbiti presents as African because I believe that those accounts, especially as they pertain to the concept of the future, at best are misleading and at the worst are unrepresentative of African conceptions of the phenomena in question. By elaborating some consequences that follow upon Mbiti's discussion, consequences with which Mbiti no doubt would disagree because of their logical oddity and sometimes downright erroneousness, I have called into question the position Mbiti has outlined. Yet it is precisely those accounts, especially that of the concept of time, that according to Mbiti "[hold] the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts of African peoples." Furthermore, Mbiti says, "The concept of time [as he has elaborated it] may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation (whether of political, economic, educational or Church life)" (p.16).

Consider, however, that if Mbiti was right in his supposed description of African ontologies, he would have provided the single most decisive philosophical and anthropological explanation why, for example, contemporary African societies are undeveloped as they are; why Africa has been unable to overcome her present socio-economic ills; why Africans thus far have not been able to create a kind of political structure and climate that would ensure political stability, economic growth and development especially after many of them had attained independence; why African countries *seem* ungovernable and hence why it may be necessary, perhaps, for external agencies to dominate and govern Africa for her own good. Mbiti's answer to these

and a lot more questions would have been decisive: Africans are not forward-looking, not by choice but by nature. Unlike Western and other societies that think ahead and plan for the future Africans cannot because their mental life is limited to the immediate present and the past. The drastic speed with which most, if not all, of Africa retrogressed, both politically and economically, after they had attained political independence from the colonial oppressors is substantive evidence confirming the natural direction of the African vision and thought process: backwards.

Since African "way of life" will have been explained now as a natural consequence of a peculiar African way of thinking, given that Africans have no choice in their way of thinking they should not therefore be held responsible for the pain and suffering that follow upon their economic and governmental activities. Responsibility-attribution is unintelligible at best and unjust at worst in such a hard deterministic system, for it is the equivalent of (say) holding a person responsible for being short or tall, white or black, ugly or deformed. Instead, Africa should be pitied in her endeavour to defy nature.¹⁷ The only way Africa could change her ways, to save her from herself, is either through some form of genetic engineering that would alter the direction of her thinking and synchronize it with most of the rest of the human species, or through being dominated and colonized for her own good. Either option requires an external paternalistic agency. Mbiti's discussion thus will have been a very good argument for this or a similar type of conclusion. These are only some of the absurd practical consequences that can be deduced from Mbiti's supposed description of African ontologies.

Conclusion

In this study I have argued the following: (a) that Mbiti's supposed account of the concept of event (and also of time) in African ontologies is riddled with conceptual difficulties that constitute grounds for its

immediate rejection; and (b) that his discussion flies in the face of the axiological practices in Africa. By bringing out what I take to be some of the implications of Mbiti's views I have shown that those views can only serve to perpetuate some of the well-known stereotypes of African peoples. Mbiti's account, if true, has the consequence of decisively providing a diagnosis of many of Africa's problems, especially in the areas of political governance, economic planning, development and all other spheres of life. In raising the above conceptual and axiological issues, I have endeavoured to exhibit the implausibility of Mbiti's views and, by extension, to pre-empt any attempt to ground an explanation of Africa's multifarious problems on the notion that African conceptions of event and time are anaphoric as he claims.¹⁸

Notes

1. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969). All references to Mbiti's views are to this work.
2. Mbiti does invoke the concept of an immediate future; but, as I will argue, this concept should be understood as an extension of the present. Indeed, I will claim that the immediate future is but an enlarged present in Mbiti's discussion.
3. Notice that 'No-time' itself is an ontological category insofar as the term seems referential. Mbiti does not pursue this item in his discussion.
4. We have here another reason to regard as otiose the distinction Mbiti draws between actual and potential time.
5. If one were to adopt a contemporary model to explicate the position just described one would say that, for Mbiti, Africans hold a particularistic view of events. This view, well articulated in the contemporary literature by Donald Davidson, considers events as distinct particulars. See Davidson's "The Individuation of Events" and "Events as Particulars" in *Essays on Action and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

6. To be fair, Mbiti does offer what might be considered a limited discussion of the concept of causality in his elaboration of the idea of God as the creator or originator of man and all natural phenomena. (See chapter 9, especially pp.92-95.) And to that end he recounts a series of creation stories from various African ethnic groups to illustrate the view of God as the cause of man's existence and sustenance. But other than this there is no discussion of causation as a philosophical concept, especially in its relation to the concept of event and change. Such omission might perhaps tempt some to think that Africans do not have a philosophical concept of causation. I give reasons in this section to show that such a temptation must be resisted.
7. For an extended discussion of this issue see Kwame Gyekye *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), chapter 5.
8. Humans are not pure spirits to the extent that they are spatio-temporal entities. As Mbiti notes, they ascend to the spiritual or transcendental realm after death. See his discussion on pp. 162-65.
9. The supposed mental deprivation of the Black person has been explicitly and unabashedly articulated by some of the most influential philosophers in Western civilization. For example, David Hume's well known footnote in the essay "Of National Characters" testifies to this claim. Immanuel Kant speaks of the "fundamental difference between the two races of men [the black and white races]," and adds that this difference "appears to be as great in mental capacities as in color." Hegel similarly says that Africa "is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it -- that is in its northern part -- belong to the Asiatic or European World" (Qtd. from the Introduction of "African Philosophy: The Point in Question," in *African Philosophy* [ed.] Tsenay Serequeberhan. New York: Paragon House, 1991), pp. 5-6.
10. I owe this insight to G. Munda Carew. For an extensive discussion of Mbiti's account of the concept of time in African systems of thought see Carew's "A Critique of John S. Mbiti's Traditional African Ontology" (in *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, Vol. 8 [June 1993]), pp. 170-89.
11. It is to be noted that although Berkeley defines physical objects -- and one might include events -- as a series of sense data, and although, *a priori*, sense data cannot exist unsensed, he does not go on to argue that objects cease to exist in the absence of human sensors. He advances a

- phenomenalistic account according to which God, the supreme sensor and cause of all experiences, would be having all experiences in the absence of human beings. It is in this way that Berkeley tries to meet the objection that his theory allows for things ceasing to exist in the absence of *human* perceivers. See section 48 of Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *Berkeley's Philosophical Writings* (ed.) David M. Armstrong, (New York and London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1965), p.80. On Berkeley's theory, then, events do not cease to occur in the absence of humans, nor does time cease to exist. One does not find a similar line of reasoning in Mbiti.
12. Another substantive argument that can be brought against Mbiti is that, inasmuch as his position is dependent on the borrowed conceptual framework of Bishop Berkeley, the limitations of Berkeley's idealism would count *ipso facto* against his position. I shall not pursue this argument, however, since I wish only to show that there are other grounds for rejecting Mbiti's views than the standard arguments against idealism and phenomenalism.
 13. An act (or action) here is an event of a certain type, usually a form of behavior that is presumed either to have been performed with an intention or a motive, or to have ensued from a person's character. Thus, on this definition, all acts are events but not all events are acts. For example, the wind blowing profusely, a river flowing, the sun setting are all events; however, they are not acts (or actions).
 14. We have here an instance of the familiar Kantian "'ought' implies 'can'" dictum.
 15. I should note that Mbiti, in discussing the concept of evil in African systems (Chapter 17), addresses the notion of agency in considering the individual as a candidate for sanctions. For example, he observes among other things, that moral evil (such as adultery, stealing etc.) qualifies the individual as a candidate for punishment because its commission implies an exercise of choice on the part of the individual. Natural evil, too, (e.g. flood, famine, drought) is presumed punishment for some wrongdoing either by the society as a whole or by an individual taken as a corporate member of the society. In any case, the commission of the supposed wrongdoing here, as in moral evil, implies the exercise of choice. I consider these observations as strong evidence against the central claims of Mbiti's discussion of time and event in African

ontologies.

16. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, African Writers Series, (London, Ibadan & Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1958), Chapter 13. The citation here is to the 1976 reprint and reset edition.
17. An alternative to saying that the peculiarity with which Africans view the world is natural might be that Africans are socially *culturalized* to view the world as they do. But then this position, with its universalistic import, would need to be supported by strong (read: equally universal) empirical evidence. Doubtless, such evidence will not be forthcoming. So this option too will not redeem Mbiti.
18. I thank Michael Gomez, Mac Dixon-Fyle, George Carew and Tina Johnson for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

**SOME PROBLEMS IN THE WRITING
OF
THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY**

C.B.N. Ogbogbo

People will not look forward to
posterity who will never look
backwards to their ancestors.
- Edmund Burke.

Indeed, that African philosophy exist is manifestly obvious. Yet as observed by a professional African philosopher [Oladipo (1992:3)] amongst the impressions most scholars have of philosophy (until very recently) is the view that (i) Western philosophy was the philosophy (ii) that the history of philosophy was that of Western philosophy [Oladipo and Lewis (1970:vii)]. While the impressions regarding the first have changed significantly, due to the efforts of professional African philosophers, no major step appear to have been taken to right the wrong associated with the second assumption. In essence, there exist a paucity of texts on the history of African philosophy. This vacuum, it is argued has made the comprehension of African philosophy more problematic.

To better our appreciation and understanding of African philosophy, the writing and knowledge of it's history is a necessity. "One function history seeks to perform as an intellectual discipline", J.F. Ade-Ajayi notes is "to elucidate a problem by tracing it's antecedents" [Ade-Ajayi (1985)]. In this way history aids the process of development. The need for the history of whatever philosophy one undertakes has been amplified by B. Russell. For him, "to understand an age or a nation we must understand it's philosophy". Conversely, he observes that the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy. [Russell (1974:14)]

Therefore, in undertaking to understand African Philosophy, there is the need to understand the history of the intellectual processes and ideas generated in Africa. Issues such as who the initiators of these

ideas are, the circumstances under which they were produced and have been shaped over the years, aspect of continuity and change in these ideas and ultimately, how they have influenced African Societies at different times, should engage our attention. G. Sogolo makes the same point in his observation that an emerging ... philosophical tradition needs to be nourished within the context of the ... Culture, history and experience of the people". [Sogolo (1993:XIV)]

It is in recognition of the above that there exists a history of philosophy of different groups, areas of people. For, it's been argued that while a universalist toga can be arrogated to the philosophical discipline, there is however a sense in which philosophy is culture-bound and so limited to a group or geographical area. We can therefore talk about those of American philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Greek philosophy, etc. There is also a history of Western philosophy which encompasses a wider categorisation. In all the cases mentioned, the existence of their philosophy and what it entails is some-what clear to all their practitioners. So, have they also gone ahead to study the history of their philosophy.

On the African Scene, the picture is not exactly the same. African philosophy as a discipline is still grappling with a basic problem of identity and recognition. One of the recent and closest approximation of a history of African philosophy is D.A. Masolo's *African Philosophy: In Search of Identity* which although is a historical piece, is principally concerned with issues relating to the development of African philosophy as a discipline rather than it's History. Thus the work is focused on major themes and trends practised and studied by professional African philosophers. In all, Masolo will seem to have emphasised the existence of African philosophy and attempted at identifying the major themes that have been the focus of practitioners of African philosophy.

Another piece of historical work that touches on aspects of African philosophy is I.C. Onyewuenyi's *African Origins of Greek Philosophy*. As is apparent, the main thrust for exploration is Greek philosophy. What the author sets out to do is to discover like Chiekh Antia

Diop, the African colorations of Greek philosophy. For the historian of African philosophy, the book will serve as a valuable source of material for the writing of a History of African philosophy.

The two attempts discussed above cannot strictly come under the categorisation of works dealing with the History of African philosophy. It is thus submitted, that what has deepened the crisis being faced by African philosophy, is the lack of its history. If African philosophy is to tackle its problem of relevance to African development, its practitioners must have a clear perspective of where they are coming from, where they presently are and where they intend to be. In this, they would have inculcated an enduring sense of the history of the discipline - necessary for making philosophy very relevant in the search for solution to the African problem of development. That African philosophy is facing a crisis of relevance is not principally due to the unwillingness of its practitioners to take the African experience (in the philosophical arena) seriously. Rather, it is their lack of a comprehensive picture of African philosophical experience down the ages; which they require to distill in themselves the African past. In the words of a philosopher, "experience provides the raw materials for philosophizing" and so the African philosopher will do better if his reflections are based on the experiences of his ancestors.

The main poser that arises from the above is simply this; if there exists abundant literature on the History of other philosophies, why the transparent paucity in the case of African philosophy? Could it be that it is because the discipline is comparatively still young? Or are there more fundamental problems checkmating the writing of its History? What perhaps exists as history of African philosophy is at best its disjointed fragments. It is argued that this is so, mainly because of the problems associated with writing the History of African Philosophy.

J.F. Ade-Ajayi as far back as 1980 noted that there are themes preferred by Historians of African history and conversely, those neglected by them. [Ade-Ajayi (1980:33-40)] The history of African philosophy can be classified under intellectual history. Yet this has remained one of the neglected areas by professional Historians. If we

agree that there is an intellectual dimension to African impoverishment and marginalisation, then there is the need for a crucial process of intellectual re-awakening and development. To facilitate this, a history of the intellectual development of Africans is imperative. How and why they think in a particular way in a particular period, belongs to the realm of history. It is therefore opined that a history of the processes of intellectual development cum generating of ideas will facilitate our understanding of African philosophy.

Given the importance of intellectual history in the search for outlet for African developmental quagmire, it is surprising to note that this area of specialisation has remained a neglected theme; particularly as it concerns intellectual history of Africans before the 19th century. Again, the explanation for this can largely be located in the ambit of problems associated with the writing of intellectual history in pre-literate African Societies.

The researcher of the History of African philosophy will notice that while there exist a draught of literature on the history of African philosophy down the ages, same cannot be said of the 19th and 20th centuries. Attempts made so far on writing aspects of the history of African philosophy have focused largely on the contemporary era. Again, this have in most instances taken the form of biographical studies in which ideas of the persons studied are examined. It is these studies that have been referred to earlier as fragments. For instance, in the Department of History, University of Ibadan, the course 'African Political Thought' is a good attempt at teaching students aspects of the history of African philosophy. Although it usually begins with a brief introduction which covers philosophy in traditional Africa, it's main focus is on the more recent times¹. Issues such as African Ideologies and their propagators are discussed, the various political ideas of prominent Africans and Africans in Diaspora are also examined. Amongst such political ideas are the Nationalist and Pan-Africanist thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikwe, Leopold Senghor, etc, and the revolutionary theories of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral.

Commendable as this effort is, from a holistic view, it forms only an adjunct of what is being advocated for in this piece. There should first be a detailed History of Ancient/Traditional African political thought, which would serve as a launching pad for the study of contemporary African Political ideas, that is being concentrated on. It must also be noted that even when this has been done, it still remains a microcosm of what is being called for in this paper. For, it is limited only to political thought. An examination of the History of African philosophy should encompass other socio-cultural and economic thoughts of the people.

Furthermore, even published texts on the history of African philosophy tend to also concentrate on the more recent past² and as usual, with emphasis on politics. They are either focusing on some African ideologies that emerged after political independence - such as Ujamaa, Jamahiriya, Nkrumaism, African Socialism etc or on some notable personalities whose ideas contribute to African political philosophy³. The point in emphasis, is that a large chunk of the History of African philosophy has not been written. The vast pre-colonial era and the intellectual ferment of the period is yet to be given adequate attention by scholars. In fact the history of African Philosophy in all it's ramifications, even political philosophy, have received little or no attention.

Conceptual and Methodological Problems

A fundamental problem that confronts the historian of African philosophy, is that associated with a definitive concept of African philosophy. Exactly what the nature and Scope of African philosophy as an intellectual discipline should be remains polemical. As a result, the works of scholars who believed they were treading the part of African philosophy have been reclassified as either pseudo-philosophy or ethno-philosophy⁴. Yet what the yardstick for practising actual philosophy should be, remains uncertain. The various classifications have arisen due to the unsettled question of what constitutes African philosophy. If the nature of the discipline is uncertain, it follows that the scope will

equally be shrouded. For the historian, the unclear nature and scope is a fundamental problem. This is because since the boundaries are not delineated, the issues under examination will usually remain blurred.

A good historical work will normally be explicit about the period of coverage and its scope of study. These two are essential in order to give the work a structure and character based upon which analysis can be made. However, our African philosophers have asked us to gloss over the issue of a definitive concept of the discipline essentially because professional philosophers are yet to agree on what it should be. [Sogolo (1993: XI-XX)] For others, the discipline has other more pressing issues such as that of relevance to the developmental aspirations of the continent. To them, engaging in definition of African philosophy is distracting and problematic. [Oladipo (1992: 17-18)] If philosophers cannot arrive at a consensus on this issue of definition, but agree that the debate on what should constitute African philosophy be rested (because it is not of immediate importance), it is humbly submitted that to get out of the present crisis of relevance there is a need to clearly define what constitutes African philosophy. Furthermore, as we have tried to show earlier, a clear definitive, concept of African philosophy is necessary for scholars working or intending to work on the history of African philosophy. It is pertinent to emphasise that what is being called for here is a guideline of what and what constitutes African Philosophy and not necessarily a Universally accepted definition of the subject. If and when this is done, a major obstacle towards the writing of the history of African philosophy would have been surmounted.

It will be pertinent to turn our attention from the conceptual to the methodological problems that confront historians of African philosophy. Generally, in the writing of African History, historians have usually adapted either the thematic and/or the chronological approach. These approaches or a combination of them will usually pose some problems for the historian of African philosophy.

As it is evident in the few works available, there is the problem of periodization and categorisation in African philosophy. In most African Universities where African Philosophy is taught, it is often the case

that periodization usually takes the form of Traditional and Contemporary African philosophy⁵. For the historian, this periodization is not only too broad, but cumbersome to deal with.

While it is the usual practice for the historian to study his subject matter with time frames which are in most cases styled as epochs, era or ages, this is however still based on one form of categorisation or the other. Generally, and for our purpose, categorisations could be of two types. The geographical, in which the African continent is divided up into several regions. Hence we can have West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, Central and North Africa histories. Or even into smaller Units of historical convenience as is the case with the forest, Coastal or Savannah belts of West Africa.

Apart from these geographical groupings, Categorisation could be in form of major themes or keywords. In such situations, areas and periods are studied based on a thematic approach. Amongst some of the major themes in African History are the Atlantic Slave trade, the trans-Saharan trade, the Jihads, Scramble and partition, Colonialism, Nationalism, etc. Other keywords by which the Organisation of African History may be patterned include, sub-headings like non-centralised societies, theocratic states, etc. These themes and keywords are most times organised regionally under sub-headings. [Webster (1965: 1)] Titles under these sub-headings are usually a product of their relationship to one another. Thus a title like Islamic Revolutions will have sub-titles like the Futa-Toro Jihad, the Futa-Jallon Jihad and the Fulani Jihad. An obvious implication of the above categorisations and periodization in African history is the fact that only in very few instances do we have major themes running through the entire continent in the same period.

Omer-Cooper has opined that in writing the history of Africa, there are no neat periodization or categorisations. Most time what we have are arbitrary nature of the temporal and spatial divisions we impose on the subject matter. [Omer-Cooper (1964)] Yet arbitrary as they may seem the historian cannot completely escape from using them. For the history of African philosophy, there is a need to blend

both approaches very carefully since the African philosophical past exist in fragments of the present.

It has been argued earlier that, the ideas of a given people are usually a function of their circumstances and environment at a particular point in time. Since philosophers of any place and period are products of their environment, it is argued that African philosophy can be approached from these compartments - that have shaped the lives and conditioned the ideas of the philosophers. This does not however preclude us from a holistic approach. There are not too many instances of major themes running through the length and breadth of the whole continent at the same period - especially before the 15th century. While for instance, the 15th century can be regarded as the period of early European contact and interaction with most parts of Africa, same cannot apply to North Africa. Thus, in the pre-European contact era, there are not too many historical experiences that run through the continent at the same time. This creates a difficulty for the historian of African philosophy when drawing parallels. African philosophy down the ages have very few common parallels and even when they are identified, it would perhaps be more appropriate to adopt case studies before making general assertions about African philosophy. Such case studies could be regional or based on periodization. However, in doing this, there is the need for extreme caution when intermingling periodization and categorisation in the writing of the history of African philosophy.

For instance, the ideas of the organisers of the International Conference on African Philosophy as contained in the fliers announcing the Conference reveals some of our fears⁶. The sub-themes have been structured based on thematic and Chronological approach⁷. Amongst the questions that will agitate the mind of the historian is whether such adopted themes are applicable to the whole continent during the period ascribed to them. Moreover, the sub-themes portray African philosophy as a product of external stimuli. Thus out of seven sub-themes, five of them deal with external influence. The sixth sub-theme reflects the problem associated with periodization. Can the 18th and 19th centuries be regarded as part of the colonial period, when we know that not up

to five percent of Africa was under Colonial rule by the beginning of the 19th century. [Amene and Brown (1981)] Certainly, by this time Slave trade was in it's decline and so should not fall squarely into the 18th and 19th centuries periodization.

With captions like Ancient period in the history of African philosophy, one begins to wonder which periods would be classified as the middle and modern ages. Are such classifications not a borrowing from European History? Can same be applied to African History? Answers to these questions are certainly pointers to the need for care in our approach to the history of African philosophy.

The last problem to engage our attention is that of sources for the historian of African philosophy. This problem partly explains why attention is usually focused on the colonial and post-colonial periods to the neglect of the non-literate era of African societies. In fact the early mention of Ethiopia and Egypt in the flier for the Conference is partly because they had evolved a form of writing which until recently was regarded as the most and perhaps only credible way of keeping records of the past, and not necessarily because African philosophy started in Egypt. [Ogbogbo]

Part of the problem of sources in African philosophy bother on the way ideas are generated in Africa. Unlike the Western Societies, most philosophical ideas in African communities are usually a product of group effort. It is true that ideas are generated by individuals, but before they become applicable to the Society at large, they most often undergo refinements or even transformations overtime before finally crystallizing into that community's philosophy. The individual is largely swallowed up by the community when philosophical views are examined. This does not deny the fact that the primary generator of ideas are the individuals within the society or that the individual in Africa cannot have his philosophy. However, as succinctly put by G. Sogolo "traditional African philosophy is communalistic ... it is a body of thought attributed to the community rather than to individuals". [Sogolo (1993: 6)]

For some scholars like P.O. Bodunrin, this amounts to having philosophy without philosophers. He has argued that the concentration on collective thought of people as in Africa is not proper philosophy. [Bodunrin (1981)] Philosophy he asserts is properly studied through the examination of the thoughts of individuals. This view simply attempts to use Western models of philosophy as a parameter for assessing what should be accepted as African philosophy. In this respect, it will suffice to heed the warning of the new imperialism which seeks to use Africans to belittle African achievements. [Ikime (1979: 6)] The important thing as shown by A.B. Herman is that the pronouncements whether of a community or individual on philosophical issues should be rationally and critically assessed. [Herman (1976: 1)]

If we thus accept that the communalistic approach of Africans constitute philosophy we are still faced with certain basic problems. The non-literate nature of most African societies in the past poses a major obstacle. The historian of African philosophy is not only interested in the end product, but the processes that brought it about. Consequently, he is interested in the conditions that led to the generation of a particular idea, its modification or refinement over time, the circumstances necessitating such change(s) and the personalities behind the idea and its changes. Thus, researching into the non-literate era of African philosophy is an enormous task. However, we must not shy away or be dissuaded by its enormity, for so were historians confronted with similar problems at the birth of African History. [Dike (1980: 13-22)]

Conclusion

In solving the problems discussed above, African philosophers and historians must brazen up to the challenge of reconstructing the African philosophical past. This joint effort is necessary if we are to link the thought of great African thinkers and African communities with the circumstances, historical and social in which they thought. For it is important to know what questions stirred the minds and spurred

them towards holding a particular idea. To be able to achieve this, a variety of sources in the investigation of the African Philosophical past is as necessary as the need to encourage and actually begin a multidisciplinary research into the subject. Certainly, an apt starting point will be the initiation of joint projects by History and philosophy departments in our institutions of higher learning.

Notes

- 1 This is reflected in the course outline for 'African Political Thought' for the past four years.
- 2 See amongst others July [1968], Friedland and Rosberg [1964], Nyerere [1968], Nkrumah [1964], Hajja [1980] and Ogunmodede [1986].
- 3 This includes personalities such as J. Nyerere, L. Senghor, N. Azikiwe, K. Nkrumah, F. Fanon, A. Cabral, E.W. Blyden, W.E.B. Dubois, M. Garvey, etc.
- 4 Amongst such works are those of J. Mbiti, Kagame, P. Tempels, etc. See Bodunrin [1981: 216]
- 5 This is the case with most Nigerian Universities such as Ibadan, Lagos, Ife, etc
- 6 The International Conference on African Philosophy with the theme "African Philosophy down the ages. The problem of its History and Historiography" was held at the Seminary of SS Peter and Paul, Ibadan, Nigeria from 27-31 March, 1995
- 7 The Sub-themes proposed are as follows:
 - 1 ANCIENT PERIOD: 10,000 B.C. - 7 B.C. Egyptian and Ethiopian Philosophies e.g. of Hermes Trismegistus, Amenhotep IV and Skandes; Hermopolitan, Heliopolitan, Memphite and Thebean Traditions.
 - 2 GREEK PERIOD: 6 - B.C. - Birth of Christ e.g. African roots and foundations of Greek thoughts (Alexandrian Academy).
 - 3 EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD: 1st - 6th Centuries A.D. e.g. the philosophies and contributions of the North African Church fathers e.g. Augustine, Tertulian, Origen and Cyril.

- 4 ISLAMIC AFRICAN PERIOD: 7th - 13th Centuries A.D. Philosophical thoughts of African Islamic Scholars of North African and West African Empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai etc.
- 5 PERIOD OF EARLY EUROPEAN EXPLORATION AND CONTACTS WITH AFRICA: 14th - 17th centuries A.D. e.g. Za a ya eqob and Waldat Heywat.
- 6 WESTERN COLONIAL PERIOD: 18th, 19th Centuries A.D Slave Trade and the consequent mental retardation.
- 7 CONTEMPORARY AGE: 20th century A.D. Post-Independence renaissance of the African Philosophical thought. Problems and prospects. The future of African Philosophy.

Bibliography

Ade-Ajayi, J.F.

1980 "A Critique of themes preferred by Nigerian Historians", *JHSN*, Vol.10, No.3.

1985 "History and the Social Sciences", Kenneth Dike Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan.

Amene, J.C. and Brown, G. (eds)

1981 *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Ibadan.

Bodunrin, P.O.

1981 "The Question of African Philosophy", *Philosophy*, vol.56.

Dike, K.O.

1980 "African History Twenty-five years ago and Today", *JHSN*, Vol.X, No.3.

Friedland, W. and Rosberg, C. (eds)

1964 *African Socialism*, Stanford.

Hajja, S.G.

1980 "The Jamahiriya Experiment in Libya: Oadhafi and Fousseau", *JMAS*, Vol.18, No.2.

Herman, A.L.

1976 *An Introduction to Indian thought*, Englewood.

Ikime, O.

1979 "Through Changing Scenes: Nigerian History Yesterday. Today and Tomorrow". An inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan on 26th October 1979.

-
- July, R.
1968 *The Origins of Modern African Thought*, London.
- Nkrumah, K.
1964 *Consciencism Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation and Development*, London.
- Nyerere, I.
1968 *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, Oxford.
- Ogbogbo, C.B.N.
"Of Origin, Egypt and African Philosophy" Forth coming.
- Ogunmodede, F.I. Chief
1986 *Obafemi Awolowo's Socio political philosophy. A Critical Interpretation*, Rome.
- Oladipo, O.
1992 *The Idea of African Philosophy*, Ibadan.
- Oladipo, O. and Lewis, J.
1970 *History of Philosophy*, London.
- Omer-Cooper, J.D.
1964 "The Question of Unity in African History", *JHSN*, Vol.3, No.1.
- Russell, B.
1979 *History of Western Philosophy*, London.
- Sogolo, G.
1993 *Foundations of African Philosophy A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought*, Ibadan.
- Webster, J.B.
1965 *Reading List on African History*, Nigeria.

Résumé

Analysant la politique du discours de la réforme économique libérale, cette étude premièrement traite la manière dont la communauté politique internationale discute le développement africain. Après une analyse de l'ajustement structurel elle cherche des politiques alternatives. Les stratégies économiques, néolibérales ainsi qu'orientées vers les besoins humains, sont discutées en relation avec leurs implications pour la bien-être des pauvres. La dernière partie de l'étude traite la discussion sur les réponses indigènes à la crise économique en Afrique et la nature du discours de l'ajustement économique. L'argumentation principale de l'étude est qu'un modèle économique néoclassique a été imposé à l'Afrique, ce qui est dû aux relations disproportionnées de pouvoir entre institutions financières internationales et pays africains, plutôt qu'à une décision à la base d'une logique économique ou d'un intérêt au bien-être de l'humanité.

POLITICS OF DISCOURSE ON LIBERAL ECONOMIC REFORM: THE CASE OF AFRICA

Ho-Won Jeong

The discourse on economic reform for the last two decades has been influenced by institutions which promote free market development strategies. Their dominant status helped the World Bank and the IMF set the agenda on international development. Neo-orthodox economic policies repackaged under the name of structural adjustment has been sustained by global trends toward economic and political liberalism as well as intellectual and financial resources of international financial institutions (Jeong, 1996a). Notwithstanding occasional disputes with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and other institutions, the political and intellectual support of World Bank and IMF programs has not been weakened by Western industrialized countries.¹

Despite their dominant status in the discourse of international development, structural adjustment programs also generated opposition at both political and technical levels. The performance of adjustment policies was less successful in Sub-Saharan African countries than in Newly Industrialized Countries which export manufacturing goods. Doubts were raised about the implementation and sustainability of Bank/IMF programs in low income nations (Burdett, 1992; Ghai, 1991; Rimmer, 1995; Schatz, 1994). However, these criticisms did not reduce the dominant impact of neorthodox economic ideology on policy making at international and national levels. In this context, the critical issues include structural conditions and process which affect discourse on development.

In examining politics of discourse on liberal economic reform, this paper will start with how African development has been discussed in the international policy making community. After reviewing the nature of structural adjustment, it will look at policy alternatives. Neoliberal and human need oriented economic strategies will be discussed in the terms of their policy implications for the welfare of the poor. The main

argument of the paper is that a neoclassic economic model was imposed on Africa by imbalanced power relations between international financial institutions and African countries rather than was chosen by sound economic logic or concern with human well-being. The final section will be devoted to the discussion of indigenous responses to economic crisis in Africa and the nature of discourse on economic adjustment.

Different Perspectives on African Development

Since the early 1970s, African economy was crippled by several factors, including balance of payments problems, accumulation of foreign debts, and fiscal deficits caused by falling revenues and failure to cut expenditures. The external deficit grew along with deteriorating terms of trade. The continent's debt increased by an average 22 percent a year from 1973 to 1983, far exceeding the growth of production output and export. Fiscal deficit increased with public subsidies, heavy government investment in state enterprises, and declining tax revenues. Inflation was triggered by rises in imported oil prices and the public deficit. Real per capita growth declined in many poor African countries (Husain, 1990; Roth, 1991). From the 1970s to the mid 1980s, per capita agricultural production in Africa fell about one percent a year. The dismal economic conditions have become a serious issue.

There are two conflicting approaches to understanding problems in the African economy. One school argues that capitalist economic development strategies were not successful because of the dependence relationship between African economies and the capitalist world system (Amin, 1991; Wallerstein, 1986). It is held that African countries have problems with capital accumulation needed for economic development due to post-colonial extraction of surplus of capital from Africa (Adedeji, 1992:6). Western industrialized countries shifted profit to the center by utilizing cheap raw materials and labor in the periphery. Since African countries concentrate on the production of raw materials

and agriculture, they are more vulnerable to fluctuations in prices of their exports in the world market.²

According to Samir Amin, one of major proponents of dependency theory, African countries would not be able to prevent their own rural exploitation as long as they are involved in capitalist relations. (Amin, 1991) Their development suffered from inequality in global economic exchange. Therefore, a strategy to build the economy on a national basis and develop regional alliances for the exchange of goods and resources ought to be adopted to recuperate the African economy. In this view, African countries should essentially de-link their economy from the world capitalist system and establish their own economic community. They should also gradually build up technology which is appropriate to their own economic requirements.

Contrary to the claims of dependency school, proponents of liberal economic theories, represented by the popularly known Berg Report, insist that problems in African economy are mainly related to the weak performance of their export sectors in the international economy (World Bank, 1981). Most importantly, the problems are rooted in shortcomings of economic policies and structure of African countries (Kennedy, 1994). The success of African economy relies on the performance of agriculture. However, many local producers reduced the production of both export and food crops in the 1960s and 1970s for the reason that there were not sufficient producer price incentives (Bates, 1983). The problem was exacerbated by the government policy to overtax farmers for extracting revenue for industrial development.³ It is suggested that difficulties in African economy are primarily caused by the misuse of human and material resources linked to such economic strategies as import substitution industrialization.

The liberal economic school argues that in considering that the government's efforts to control resources led to economic decline, it is more desirable to take a free-market approach which guarantees efficiency through competition (Lofchie, 1994). Since Africa has comparative advantages in agriculture, African countries should pay more attention to increase in agricultural production for economic

recovery. The prices of agricultural commodities should be raised to give incentives to farmers, and more investment is needed for export crop development. Thus this approach emphasizes a shift of economic strategy from investment in industrial production to more input in agricultural production.

Structural Adjustment and Its Alternatives

Structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s are based on liberal economic theories which stress promotion of trade and free market mechanisms. Several World Bank reports on Africa represent these views (World Bank, 1989a, 1989b, 1981). These reports propose the shift of resources from investment in industries to agriculture and put much priority on price incentives for farmers and support for a private sector. It criticizes the statist economic development model and attributes the economic decline to a badly neglected agricultural base, overvalued exchange rates, inefficient local industries, and price controls. The stress on the increase in agricultural production is justified in terms of its comparative advantages in an international market.

In considering the deteriorating social and economic conditions for the poor in Africa, however, much debate has been done on social and economic impact of adjustment. Stringent retrenchment of state employees was too extensively introduced to many poor countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic where private sectors are weak. In one analysis, after implementing adjustment programs, many countries experienced reduced real incomes, increased poverty, deteriorating social conditions without any significant improvement in their external account (Bowen, 1992; Onimode, 1992:64; Bread for the World Institute, 1990:40-65). Urban poverty rose with the increase in unemployment rates. Government expenditures on social services and food subsidies were reduced in 55 percent of African countries. The level of real investment stagnated in

60 percent of African countries with Fund programs (South Commission, 1990).

The reduction of government functions put growing pressure on the maintenance of public goods such as primary and secondary education and basic health care (Mkandawire, 1992:307). UNICEF and ILO are concerned about the long-term implications of government budget cuts in health, education, and other social welfare sectors for the poor. UNICEF studies suggest that the deflationary nature of adjustment programs has adversely affected the living standards of poor families, especially women and children (Cornia et al., 1987, 1992). The ILO also reports declines in wages and incomes among low income classes and massive retrenchment of workers (ILO, 1990). These studies are contrasted with the World Bank argument that the share of public spending in social welfare sectors apparently did not decline in the 1980s (World Bank/UNDP, 1989).

The ECA and UNICEF developed their alternatives within the context of a response to the structural adjustment programs being imposed by the donor community. Alternative proposals generally accept the necessity of structural reforms in the midst of government deficit and falling state revenues, but they are quick to point out that adjustment programs based on demand constraints are insufficient in dealing with gross economic problems in Africa. The fiscal aspect of adjustment should be modified by the investment in basic education, training, credit, and technology.

In the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme (AAF-SAP) proposed by the ECA, state expenditures on the military and on the non-productive public sector should be reduced. The reduction in spending on the military and the non-productive sector should be diverted to the social sectors so that such services as health and education would receive an annual average of 30 percent of public spending. In addition, state revenues should be raised through levying high tax rates on luxury items, and they could be used for subsidizing essential commodities such as staple foods. The removal of subsidies other than those for the social welfare sector and basic

industries, however, is necessary for reducing deficit. The production of food crops should be secured, and land reforms are essential to the development of an agricultural sector and the promotion of food production. In addition, at least 20-25 percent of public investment should be allocated to agriculture. More foreign exchange should be allocated for agricultural inputs and for essential imports to industry (ECA, 1989). ECA also emphasizes the involvement of local people in the building of infrastructure and community development. The empowerment of people at the grassroots level is crucial for enhancing government accountability.

UNICEF's Adjustment with a Human Face approach also provides a major challenge to orthodox adjustment programs. While it pays attention to the need of achieving macro-economic balances, it gives a different priority to demand management policies. The major policy goal is the protection of the poor in the worsening economy rather than achieving immediate fiscal balance and balance of payments conditions. It focuses on assistance to vulnerable groups such as women households and children who need to develop their own capacity (Cornia, et. al., 1992, 1987). In fact, the Adjustment with a Human Face approach adopts more expansionary fiscal and monetary policies, compared with austerity measures of a neo-classical economic approach. The adjustment approach with a focus on basic human needs sheds light on supply expansion through wage, interest rate, and exchange rate reform policies. Contrary to a Bank/Fund orthodox adjustment approach which puts stress on balance in macroeconomic variables, the main target of these policies is the poor.

In response to criticisms, the Bank began to offer modified version of orthodox reform since the late 1980s. Social Dimensions of Structural Adjustment was cautiously created at the margins of a liberal economic programs.⁴ The Bank launched the "African Capacity Building Initiative" which seeks to rebuild, though with Bank and donor terms, some of the institutions and skills destroyed in the 1980s by the market forces.⁵ In addition, human resource development gained a growing attention, and such issues as capacity building have been

perceived as essential for the success of economic reform. The Bank's work on the effects of economic destabilization on households pays attention to investment in health and education services for the poor in longer-run development (World Bank, 1990). In addition, the Bank developed programs in some countries which can compensate the negative impact of economic stabilization. These programs focus on education, primary health and other basic services. Public works employment and nutrition support programs have also been established to help those affected by structural adjustment. However, despite the efforts to reduce burdens for the low income class, macroeconomic balance still remains as the main policy goal of neoliberal reform.

Political Conditions for Liberal Economic Reform

The structural adjustment package has dramatically undercut the legitimacy of the state and revealed its weak and dependent character. The foreign domination makes the state accountability to its own people look weak. The weakness of the state is considered in terms of its inability to protect its interests in negotiation and implementation of Bank/Fund adjustment programs (Lehman, 1993:6). In addition, macroeconomic crises have brought to light long-hidden government inefficiencies and corruption, especially when people are called upon to shoulder the burden of austerity to save the economic system which provides wealth to a few. Therefore, the emphasis on participation and democracy brings new dynamics for the political economy of structural adjustment.

Since the initiation of structural adjustment, the World Bank and other donors have reacted against the central feature of the African state's structure which is characterized as patrimonial. According to the 1991 World Bank report, "it is common to find tariffs, tax incentives, or special regulations designed to protect special-interest groups. In some cases, 'predatory' states have designed policies and programs to transfer resources to very narrowly defined interest groups, and they

have resorted to coercion when the legitimacy of such policies was questioned."(World Bank, 1991:130) With the growing impatience with the lack of institutional reform, donor communities began to believe that transcending inherited political economy has become inevitable in pursuing liberal economic reform.

Demand for political liberalization follows the efforts of economic liberalization. In a new African political economy, pluralism is seen as an inevitable outcome of privatization and deregulation. Especially since the early 1990s, the Bank and Western donors began to stress dismantling the ubiquitous one-party state, reduced reliance on coercion, recognition of myriad NGOs, and expansion of civil liberties. Democratization of excessively centralized corrupted polities is essential for successful reform of overly state-centric and stagnant economies. These political conditionalities are often related to free market assumptions. The market systems require rule by law, predictable procedures, accountability and transparency in decision making (Turok, 1992:49). Thus, liberal democracies are believed to nurture free market forces.

Given an insufficiently developed bourgeoisie class in Africa, however, the experiment with pluralistic democracy would not quickly generate a strong political base for a free market reform. In the discussion of democracy, moreover, informal and popular forms of participation failed to be recognized, reverting to old-fashioned notions of national constitutions, elections, parties, etc. The orthodox topologies fail to go beyond formal political structures to treat the bases of any sustainable democratization, which really lie in local communities and processes. Thus, some see political conditionalities as designed to bring to power governments which will be more pliable to Western pressure rather than intending to reduce the power of African elites. In the Bank's terms, empowerment means strengthening individual entrepreneurs over the state sector in the economy. According to the Director of the World Bank's Operational Policy Development Unit and his consultant, participation includes an increased commitment to policies and projects, a willingness to share costs and an interest in

sustaining the benefits (Adams, et al., 1994:36). In the post-adjustment era, however, the character of any domestic coalition for sustainable African development would have to be reflective of popular interests, including peasants and workers (Shaw, 1993:114).

The relationships between structural adjustment and democracy are not easy to define. In the view of Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), no matter how many political parties an African state may have, it will not change the price of cocoa, coffee, cotton, or copper (Turok, 1991:52). It is also not clear how the lack of democracy has so far hindered the adjustment as proposed by international financial institutions. The advocates of structural adjustment often regard interest group opposition as illegitimate. To overcome obstacles to liberal economic reform, the oppression of such groups as trade unions has been justified. Indeed, some of the strong adjusters have done it in an extremely undemocratic manner.⁶ The current practice of structural adjustment contrasts with the liberal political message.⁷ Democracy is incompatible with the adjustment packages imposed from outside (Beckman, 1992; Mkandawire, 1992).

While external donors prefer stronger political liberalization as a means of eliminating an inefficient and corrupt government, "many Africans think such development will protect them from the ravages of externally imposed liberal economic reform programs with heavy social, and hence, political costs." (Callaghy, 1994a:233) To them, democracy means popular participation (Fortman, 1994). This irony is well reflected in the October 1991 election in Zambia urged by the World Bank and international donors. The free and fair election replaced the incumbent President Kaunda by the national trade union leader Frederick Chiluba. Kaunda's defeat is attributed to popular resentments against economic stabilization programs which he introduced in 1990.

Indigenous Responses to the Economic Crisis

International intervention in African political economy as well as recognition of structural problems of African economy facilitated various indigenous responses. While government leaders suggested the utilization of a self-reliance development model on the continent, attempts also have been made to generate a development strategy based on popular participation at a local level. Though these two approaches represent the continent's efforts to deal with the same economic problems, they reflect different ideological and political orientations to African development.

Initially, African leaders considered their own strategies through the formulation of the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000 (LPA). The LPA was adopted at an OAU summit meeting of heads of African states convened in 1980. The meeting developed its own diagnosis of the problems, and prepared an action plan. With its emphasis on the adverse effects of international economic trends on African development, the major goal of the LPA is to help African countries achieve self-sustaining development by the end of this century in many areas of the economy, including food, agriculture, technology and industry (Cummings, 1992).⁸ In order to cultivate the virtue of self-reliance, Africa's huge resources must be applied principally to meet the needs and purposes of its people, and Africa's almost total reliance on the export of raw materials must be changed.⁹

The lack of progress for the implementation of the LPA was later recognized in Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990 (APPER), a document produced by the July 1985 Addis Ababa summit, as well as the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-90 (UN-PAAERD).¹⁰ In the 1990s, this recognition led African leaders to accelerate efforts to build an African Economic Community designed to eliminate customs duties among member states. In addition, pledges were made to cooperate in the areas of finance as well as food, agriculture, industry,

science, and technology (OAU, 1991). Given Africa's marginality in the international division of labor, national and collective self-reliance by default may be inevitable unless either adjustment conditions change or the global economy becomes less competitive (Shaw, 1993:40). However, regional integration and delinkage from the western capitalist system as parts of the strategic solutions for Africa's problems cannot be achieved unless African leaders realistically understand the dynamics between North and South. In addition, African leaders failed to involve the African masses as well as indigenous institutions in the development process.¹¹ The LPA and APPER ignored the importance of cognitive factors and the role of local values in economic growth and development strategies.

The dissatisfaction with African political elites to rectify the dominant structure of political economy raised the voice of intellectuals and masses. Political leaders cannot afford to maintain "the naive and untenable conviction that their different national or regional plans are to be implemented by foreign entrepreneurs or foreign aid agencies utilizing savings of non-Africans." (Adedeji, 1992:13-14) The new source of energy can be found in cultural transformation which has not been given due consideration. In an African trade union leader's view, "people without culture will not only be uncivilized, but will also have no future." (Sunmonu, 1990:22) In order to be liberated from any form of economic and political dependence, all efforts at development need to be sensitive and responsive to the cultural realities of indigenous societies. Local values and norms, which reflect general feelings towards development, should be able to shape economic and social organizations. According to one of distinctive African intellectuals, "a people who have a crisis of identity are also likely to have a crisis of perception." Part of the problems can be attributed to short visions of "so-called educated Africans (who) look at the developed countries through lenses crafted for them by those countries." (Adedeji, 1992:9-10)

The cultural dimension of development is a key to the empowerment of ordinary people whose prospects for better material

conditions have not been improved, if not worsened, by a market economic system. The concept of empowerment is excellently described in the document of African Chapter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation adopted at an international conference held in Tanzania, in 1990. Popular participation "is ... the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and in designing policies and programmes that serve the interests of all as well as effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in its benefits."(African Chapter for Popular Participation, 1990:3) Even in terms of efficient resource mobilization, local knowledge and values are more essential than exogenous macroeconomic models based on quantitative analysis. Thus major dimensions of development problems can be investigated within the socio-cultural structure of indigenous society given that a lack of identity prohibits sustained development (Asante, 1991:68). The expansion of the informal sector to supplement the shrinking formal economy is matched in the political sphere by the emergence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) replacing the diminished state structure (Bratton, 1990; Sandberg, 1994; Shaw, 1990). As seen in Tanzania in the 1990s, in response to the adverse impact of adjustment programs, there has been a substantial increase in community groups which represent the interests of women and children (Kiondo, 1993:171). Support for strategies to build an informal sector and civil society requires the transformation of development thinking.¹² Self-organization of poor people is essential for the success of participatory approaches to economic reform. Economic well-being of ordinary Africans would not be protected by either Bank structural adjustment programs or the Lagos Plan which represent top-down approaches to developmental problems. The only solution to dependency on external resources is found in efforts to strengthen indigenous capacity to build a local economy.

Discourse on Economic Development

The domination of a neoliberal economic model can be explained in terms of the structure of the discourse and policy making environments. Policy agendas can be determined by the relationships of various policy making agents who have their own organizational interests and ideologies. Diverse organizational values of agencies involved in African development often result in different perceptions as to economic strategies. In addition, the nature of discourse represents the structure of an issue area in which power and resources are unevenly distributed. While the Bank and the Fund put a major priority on reduction in inflation and balance of payments, UNICEF and others stress growth of production and income among the poor. The IMF and the World Bank can more easily co-opt officials at Ministry of Finance and Central Bank of an African government, many of whom have been trained in Western liberal economic theories. On the other hand, supply oriented economic policies of UNICEF, ECA, and ILO, and other UN technical agencies are more likely to be supported by Ministries of Planning, Health, or Education (Jolly, 1988).

In considering rich financial and personnel resources, the Bank and the Fund have been more effective in building adjustment coalition in Africa. The challenge to Washington prescriptions would never be regarded as serious without the mobilization of alternative resources and broad international political coalition. This is likely to be the case for comprehensive, yet idealistic self-reliance strategies as well as UNDP's call for "a global compact for human development"(UNDP, 1991:84). Theoretically, people-centered development may be more appealing than the ideology of laissez-faire or liberal capitalism. Yet unequal distribution of financial and political resources influences the discourse of Bank/Fund cross-conditionality versus alternative development strategies.

Since the 1990s, the Bank began to give more consideration to infrastructures and basic needs which were important in many Bank projects during the 1970s. However, continual revisionism at the

conceptual level has few impact on country framework papers and negotiation terms (Jeong, 1996b). Despite the recognition of some longer term issues of development such as industry and technology, the intense and incomplete structural adjustment process has diverted discourse on African political economy to short term questions of debt and trade.

In spite of its dominant role in the discourse of structural adjustment, international financial institutions do not have detailed knowledge and data, analytical frameworks, institutional capacity, and resources to implement new lessons (Callaghy, 1994b:186). Bank reports are often dotted with observation on the limits poor governmental capacity imposes on the choice of policy options (World Bank, 1994). However, there is a lack of understanding the contextual variables such as good governance which are essential for implementing policy changes. For example, though democratic institutional reforms are emphasized, they are often regarded as a diffuse and difficult variable to manipulate.

In the discourse of adjustment reform, the relationship of Africa to the rest of the global economy has become a less important question. The old distinctions between more and less industrialized, more or less self-sufficient countries were replaced by new categories of 'strong' and 'weak' reformers. The division reflects World Bank/IMF indicators and interests.(Shaw, 1993:70) In IMF reports, the biggest macro-economic improvements took place where reforms were the most forcefully implemented (IMF, 1994). However, the strength of strong implementation is seldom quantifiable or comparable across countries. In considering the pseudo-scientific nature of economic forecasts, clear-cut conclusions have always proved difficult to draw.

Search for a New Political Economy of Development

Perhaps, the most tragic aspects of debate about Africa's future is that it is dominated by the international community, especially those who are farthest removed from the African realities. In another observation,

the application of classical liberal ideals to African political economy has rarely been questioned other than by Africans (ECA, 1989). This feeling is well reflected in the remarks of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)'s former Executive Secretary Adebayo Adedeji that "Africa has moved from being at the periphery to the periphery of the periphery of the global political economy -- the permanent political underdog of the world, the world's basket case." (African Leadership Forum, 1990:24)

African development can be best served both "when (a) no single foreign source of ideas and finance has disproportionate power, and (b) African indigenous technical capacity is built to the point where genuine policy dialogue, based upon mutual respect, takes place between external donors and African policy makers." (Helleiner, 1992:787) For many African countries, however, the choice seems to be very limited given the lack of their own resources and their dependent relationship to the international economy.

To find a new political economy of development which serves the interests of Africa requires the recognition of the distinctive features of the continent in an era of economic crisis and the re-examination of the logic of macroeconomic theories into a local context. Unless there is a dramatic change in the intellectual environment of Western donors, structural adjustment will continue to be a dominant economic strategy for Africa in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, issues of development strategies relating to such matters as the role of a public sector, the degree of open market, and an appropriate level of income distribution remain matters of political and professional disagreement, in which ideology and politics are at least as important as economic analysis.

The alternative political economy of development needs an understanding of a human dimension of economic policy making in which culture and indigenous knowledge should be seriously considered. There should be "an opening up of political process to accommodate freedom of opinions, tolerate differences, accept consensus on issues as well as ensure the effective participation of the

people and their organizations and associations."(ECA, 1990:3) Development issues should not ignore human perceptions and local input. Unless this basic human dimension of the African crisis is reflected in the formulation of future strategies, "there will be no breakthrough in social and economic transformation."(Adedeji, 1992:9-10)

Conclusion

The discourse on the requirements for development in Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to be twisted by struggle between different economic and political interests. While social safety nets such as food or income subsidies can help ease the pain of adjustment, they are still considered inefficient and potentially costly methods by the Bank and the Fund. The crucial linkage between the two goals of long-term development such as faster growth and poverty eradication have not been fully explored.¹³ Policy change was made difficult, in part, by dominant political and intellectual postures in major Western industrialized countries which control international institutions. Whereas basic needs oriented approaches remain less favorable, the supremacy of monetarism has weakened the use of fiscal instruments in the direction of compensating the negative impact of stabilization measures.

The discussion of the appropriateness of structural adjustment in Africa has mostly focused on factors which can influence policy performance. However, the discourse on African development cannot be purely based on technical solutions to economic problems. The implementation of development strategies should not be separated from political and social contexts which affect human decisions. Since the problems may not only be economic but also political-ideological, we need to take a more broad analytical framework. The increasing demands for participation and democracy both from local and international forces since the early 1990s will inevitably affect the direction of discourse for African development. Studies on African

development for the 1990s and beyond require a new set of approaches and responses which go beyond established liberal economic theories as well as self-reliant models.

Notes

1. The hegemonic role of international financial institutions has been questioned by institutions which are supported by or sympathetic to Africa. They provided alternative explanation about the causes of economic problems and development priorities. Especially, ECA and OAU reintroduced self-reliance strategies in dealing with African crises while UNICEF brought back a line of basic needs theories.
2. Some believe that there are systematic forces at work in world markets which tend to reduce the gains of the poor countries in international trade; consequently, trade may actually widen the gap between the rich and poor countries (Amin, 1991). This view was more popularly accepted by African policy makers especially in the 1960s and the early 1970s.
3. The agricultural marketing board system was often used as the economic launching platform for import-substituting industries. The financial resources controlled by the marketing boards, especially the foreign exchange earnings, have gone to provide for expenses associated with purchase of replacement machinery, spare parts, raw materials, patent and license fees, etc.
4. It was first introduced to Ghana as the Programme of Action for the Mitigation of the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD).
5. For example, the African Economic Research Consortium was created to seek to reconstruct intellectual and organizational resources at national and regional levels by building networks of economic research and centers of graduate training. On the other hand, the Consortium is designed to provide the bases for teaching a neoclassic economic paradigm which is quite compatible with that of adjustment.
6. Authoritarian governments have some advantages in implementing austerity measures required by stabilization efforts (Jcong, 1996b).
7. The negotiations between IMF and World Bank officials and a few government representatives are normally made secret, and the Fund-Bank programs rarely reflect broad national consensus. For a case study of an

adjustment policy making process, see Jeong (1995).

8. More specifically, the LPA is intended to transcend inherited colonial traditions and restructure society to achieve national and collective self-reliance in economic and social development for the establishment of a new international order.(OAU, 1980)
9. In the views of African leaders, liberal economic measures strengthen the tendency toward the reproduction of the existing conditions, especially the dependence on external financial flows, the overemphasis on trade, and the lack of economic autonomy. The failure to mobilize domestic resources, material and human, is a major cause of underdevelopment in Africa. In opposition to structural adjustment that is likely to increase the dependence of Africa on the global capitalist economy, the Lagos plan attempted to achieve self-reliance within the regional economy. African political elites argue that adjustment is an external requirement and not logically connected to the internal dynamics of the crisis. They maintain that as long as African countries remain within the orbit of the international capitalist system, they cannot escape periodic crises that spill over from the problems of the core capitalist countries. The production structure of African countries is lopsided in the sense that it is heavily dominated by export-oriented agriculture, a small industrial base, and a mining sector almost totally dependent on external finance, management, and technology. The overdependence on external markets for the export of a narrow range of agricultural and mineral products led to financial imbalances.
10. Africa had somewhat naively tried to divert the 'counter-revolution' posed by structural adjustment through its prior development of the Lagos Plan of Action in the early 1980s. In retrospect, this constituted the final version of traditional dependency responses: economic nationalism that advances self-reliance through state-managed programs. It was insufficiently supported both politically and financially to be successful. Lagos plan was overshadowed by the contrary and controversial Berg Report (Cummings, 1992).
11. The Organization of African Unity, bureaucratically responsible for the LPA's implementation, simply was unable to meet its obligations. The problem with administration, staff, research and development capabilities, and finance could not provide the necessary structural mechanism for implementing a strategy as complex and diverse as the Lagos Plan of

Action.

12. In Africa, however, there is a shortage of all kinds of NGOs, and NGO resources and capacities are limited (Gibbon, 1992:219). In addition, such intermediary institutions as interest groups and mass media are too weak to transmit the input and demand of civil society to the state (Sandbrook, 1993:107).
13. Liberalization of markets and elimination of budget deficits, however important they may be, do not constitute a development strategy by themselves.

References

Adams, James and Jennifer Rietbergen-McCracken. 1994. "Participatory Development: Getting the Key Players Involved." Finance and Development. September. Vol. 31. No. 3. pp. 36-7.

Adedeji, Adebayo. 1992. "The Dimensions of the African Crisis." Kennett, David and Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, eds. Structural Adjustment and the Crisis in Africa. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press. pp.1-28.

Amin, Samir. 1991. "The Interlikage between Agricultural Revolution and Industrialization: Alternative Strategies for African Development." in Adedeji, Adebayo, Owodunmi Teriba, and Patrick Bugembe, eds. The Challenge of African Economic Recovery and Development. pp.551-563.

Asante, S.K.B. 1991. African Development: Adebayo Adedeji's Alternative Strategies. London: Hans Zell Publishers.

Bates, R. 1983. Markets and States in Tropical Africa. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Beckman, Bjorn. 1992 "Empowerment or Repression?: the World Bank and the Politics of African Adjustment." in Gibbon, Peter, Yusuf Bangura, and Arve Ofstad, eds. Authoritarianism, Democracy, and Adjustment: the Politics of Economic Reform in Africa. Uppsala: the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies. pp. 83-105.

Bowen, Merle. 1992. "Beyond Reform: Adjustment and Political Power in Contemporary Mozambique." Journal of Modern African Studies. Vol. 30, No. 2. June.

Bratton, Michael. 1990. "Non-Governmental Organizations in Africa: Can They Influence Public Policy?" Development and Change. 21. no.1:87-118.

Bread for the World Institute. 1990. Hunger 1990: Report on the State of World Hunger. Washington, D.C.

Burdette, Marcia, ed. 1992. Rethinking Structural Adjustment in the 1990s. London: Macmillan.

Callaghy, Thomas M. 1994a. "Civil Society, Democracy, and Economic Change in Africa: A Dissenting Opinion About Resurgent Societies," in John W. Harbeson, et al. Civil Society and the State in Africa. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. pp. 231-254.

Callaghy, Thomas M. 1994b. "State, Choice, and Context Comparative Reflections on Reform and Intractability," in Apter David E. and Cal G. Rosberg. eds. Political Development and the New Realism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Cornia, Giovanni Andrea, Rolph van der Hoeven, and Thandika Mkandawire., eds. 1992. Africa's Recovery in the 1990s. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cornia, Giovanni Andrea, Richard Jolly, and Frances Stewart, eds. 1987. Adjustment with a Human Face. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Cummings, Robert J. 1992. "A Historical Perspective on the Lagos Plan of Action." in Nyang'oro, Julius E. and Timothy M. Shaw, eds., Beyond Structural Adjustment in Africa: The Political Economy of Sustainable and Democratic Development. New York: Praeger.

ECA. 1989. African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment. New York: ECA.

Fortman, Bas de Gaay. 1994. "Conceptualizing Democracy in an African Context." Quest. Vol. 8. No. 1. pp. 61-75.

Ghai, Dharam, ed. 1991. The IMF and the South: The Social Impact of Crisis and Adjustment. London: Zed for UNRISD.

Gibbon, Peter. 1992. "The World Bank and African Poverty, 1973-91." The Journal of Modern African Studies. Vol. 30. No.2. June. pp. 193-220.

Harbeson, John W. 1994. "Civil Society and Political Renaissance in Africa," in John W. Harbeson, et al. Civil Society and the State in Africa. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. pp. 1-32.

Helleiner, G. K. 1992. "The IMF, the World Bank and Africa's Adjustment and External Debt Problems: An Unofficial View." World Development. Vol.20. No.6. pp. 779-792.

Hutchful, Eboe. 1994. "Smoke and Mirrors: The World Bank's Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) Programme." Review of African Political

Economy. No. 62. pp. 569-584.

Husain, Tariq. 1990. "Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa." in Obasanjo, Olusegun and Hans d'Orville, eds. Challenges of Leadership in African Development. New York: Crane Russak. pp.56-73.

Hussain, Mohammed Nureldin. 1992. "Between Legitimacy and Dominance." Turok, Mary. ed., The African Response: Adjustment or Transformation. London: The Institute for African Alternatives. pp. 91-102.

ILO. 1990. Labour Review. Geneva: ILO.

IMF. 1993. Economic Adjustment in Low-Income Countries--Experience under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility. Washington, D.C.

Jeong, Ho-Won. 1996a. "Political Economy of African Development," Transnational Associations. 1/1996. pp. 18-21.

Jeong, Ho-Won. 1996b. "Managing Structural Adjustment." SAIS Review. Vol. XVI. No. 2. Summer/Fall. pp. 155-164.

Jolly, Richard. 1988. "Poverty and Adjustment in the 1990s," Lewis, John P. (ed). Strengthening the Poor: What Have We Learned? Washington, D.C.: Overseas Development Council. pp.163-176.

Kennedy, Paul. 1994. "Political Barriers to African Capitalism." Journal of Modern African Studies. Vol. 32. No. 2. June.

Kjondo, Andrew S. Z. 1993. "Structural Adjustment and Non-Governmental Organizations in Tanzania: A Case Study." in Peter Gibbon, ed. Social Change and Economic Reform in Africa. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet. pp. 161-183.

Lehman, Howard P. 1993. Indebted Development: Strategic Bargaining and Economic Adjustment in the Third World. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Lofchic, Michael F. 1994. "The New Political Economy of Africa." Apter, David E. and Carl G. Rosberg, eds. Political Development and the New Realism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. pp. 145-83.

Mkandawire, Thandika. "The Political Economy of Development with a Democratic Face," Cornia, Giovanni Andrea, Rolph van der Hoeven, and Thandika Mkandawire., eds. 1992. Africa's Recovery in the 1990s. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Nelson, J.M. 1986. "The Diplomacy of Policy-Based Lending," R.E.Reinberg and V.Kallab (eds). Between two Worlds: the World Bank's Next Decade. Washington, DC: Overseas Development Council. pp. 67-86.

Onimode, Bade. 1992. A Future for Africa: Beyond the Politics of

Adjustment. London: Earthscan Publications.

Organization of African Unity (OAU). 1991. "Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community." Abuja. June.

OAU. 1980. Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000. Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies.

Picard, Louis. A. 1994. "The Challenge of Structural Adjustment." in Picard, Louis A. and Michele Garrity. Policy Reform for Sustainable Development in Africa. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. pp.1-18

Rimmer, Douglas. 1995. "Adjustment Blues." African Affairs. Vol. 94. No. 374. January. pp. 109-113.

Roth, Michael. 1991. "Structural Adjustment in Perspective: Challenges for Africa in the 1990s." in Deng, Lual, Markus Kostner, and Crawford Young, eds. Democratization and Structural Adjustment in Africa in the 1990s. Madison: University of Wisconsin. pp. 31-42.

Sandberg, Eve. 1994. The Changing Politics of Non-Governmental Organizations and African States. New York: Praeger.

Sandbrook, Richard. 1993. The Politics of Africa's Economic Recovery. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schatz, Sayre P. 1994. "Structural Adjustment in Africa: A Failing Grade So Far." The Journal of Modern African Studies. Vol. 32. No. 4. December. pp. 679-692.

Seshamani, Venkatesh. 1994. "Structural Adjustment and Poverty Alleviation: Some Issues on the Use of Social Safety Nets and Targeted Public Expenditures," in Rolph van der Hoeven and Fred van der Kraaij, eds. Structural Adjustment and Beyond in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. pp. 114-125.

Shaw, Timothy M. 1993. Reformism and Revisionism in Africa's Political Economy in the 1990s. London: St. Martin's Press.
Development." Africa Today 37, no.3:5-22.

Smith, Patrick. 1994. "Aid Conditionality is 'Swamping' Africa." Africa Recovery. Vol. 7. No. 3/4. December 1993-March 1994. p. 15.

South Commission. 1990. The Challenge to the South (New York: OUP).

Streeten, P. 1987. "Structural Adjustment: A Survey of the Issues and Options." World Development. Vol.15, No.12. pp.1469-1482.

Sunmonu, Alhaji Hassan A. 1990. Strategies for Development in Africa: An African Worker's View. Lecture Series No.60. Lagos, Nigeria: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.

Turok, Ben. 1992. "What does the World Bank mean by Empowering Ordinary People." in The African Response: Adjustment or Transformation. Proceedings of the IFAA (Institute for African Alternatives) Workshop held at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in January 1991.

UNDP. 1991. Human Development Report 1991. New York: UNDP.

Verhelst, Thierry G. 1990. No Life Without Roots: Culture and Development. London: Zed Books.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1986. Africa and the Modern World. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.

World Bank. 1994. Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results, and the Road Ahead. New York: Oxford University Press.

World Bank. 1991. World Development Report 1991: The Challenge of Development. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

World Bank. 1990. Making Adjustment Work for the Poor: A Framework for Policy Reform in Africa. Washington, D.C.


World Bank. 1989a. Sub-Saharan Africa: from Crisis to Sustainable Growth -- A Long-term Perspective Study. World Bank: Washington, D.C.

World Bank. 1989b. Africa's Adjustment and Growth in the 1980s. World Bank: Washington, D.C.

World Bank. 1981. Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank and UNDP. 1989. Africa, Adjustment and Growth in the 1980s. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Young, Roger. 1988. Zambia: Adjusting to Poverty. Ottawa, Canada: the North-South Institute.



ERIYA BEGUMISA
BUGAMBA
PUBLIC LIBRARY
&
RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

A Village Library & Research and Development Point With Lofty Visions

National & President's Address:

P. O. Box 1226, Mbarara - UGANDA

Date.....

Founder's C.M. Address:

Sernanders väg 8 - 119,
S - 752 61 Uppsala, SWEDEN

ERIYA BEGUMISA
BUGAMBA
PUBLIC LIBRARY
&
RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Named for E. Begumisa - a man whose single most significant contribution to Bugamba was his role as a role model and as an educator, administrator and local entrepreneur. As a matter of fact, his day-to-day life did, in general terms, serve as an outstanding example to be emulated. With an abundant unflagging ambition to do, he largely lived his life for others as long as he lived on the soil of Bugamba.

May whosoever reads these words, be it a Munyabugamba, or an outsider working, operating or simply sojourning in Bugamba, live or leave with the feeling that he/she has done his/her best, through what he/she has done and/or said, left undone and/or unsaid to promote the image and standard of living of Bugamba.

[This facility is for people of all faiths: Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, traditionalists, etc.]

The above statement was designed for the sign post for the library-cum-centre.

Interview with professor Peter O. Bodunrin

During the process of formation of the postcolonial African philosophy Professor Peter O. Bodunrin became well-known as one of the most distinguished critics of the so-called Ethnophilosophy. He argued against the reconstruction of African philosophy out of folkphilosophy and traditional thinking. Oriented on an Occidental understanding of philosophy he defines philosophy as critical, systematic and analytic reflective thinking and rejects the existence of an African logic or epistemology. Therefore his opponents accused him to be Westernized and to have lost his African identity. Bodunrin stood during the debate on "What is African philosophy?", which dominated the last 20 years of African philosophy, on the side of famous philosophers like Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji and Henry Odera Orika.

Prof. Bodunrin's work concentrates on the domain of logic and epistemology. He published various articles among others in *Second Order* and in *Quest*. He is the editor of *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives*. Ile Ife, 1985. With an essay on "Philosophy in Africa - the Challenge of Relevance and Commitment" he contributed to the collection *Postkoloniales Philosophieren: Afrika*. Ed. Herta Nagel und Franz M. Wimmer. Wien/München/Oldenburg, 1992.

He was interviewed by Anke Graneß in Ibadan on September 11th, 1995.

Graneß: Prof. Bodunrin, for 20 years already a debate is dominating philosophy in Africa: the debate between Ethnophilosophy and its critics on the question "What is African philosophy?". You are well-known as one of the most consequent opponents of the so called Ethnophilosophy. On the other side, Ethnophilosophers are calling you a "Westernized" or analytic philosopher. What is your view on this debate today?

Bodunrin: *I agree that it is right that too often, I probably was guilty of that, at once taken my career of denial of what people now call African way of life, I rejected it. And I had to at that time, because too many things were being proposed as philosophy in this country, too many cheap philosophies without background. People will come and tell you the story of twins in their home town, various ceremonies in their home town and then they tell you, that is philosophy. What is now philosophy?, I said. I know it represents a whole way of life, so I now agree that the whole way of life is worthy to study. But I do not agree that somebody, who does not study that way of life, is not*

African. If I choose to study Western philosophy, if I choose to study Socrates, if I choose to study Bertrand Russel - that's my choice and I am allowed to do that. Now, so I agree that the Western is one way of looking at the world, the Nigerian is one way of looking at the world, the Chinese is one way of looking at the world, the Islamic is one way of looking at the world, the Christian - this are different worlds of thought. And we must respect them from where we are. I think, only with more respect and mutual understanding can the world survive, just more mutual recognition - I recognize you for what you are, you recognize me for what I am. But the world cannot stop here.

Lets go to the next stage to argue well. You are this way, I am this way and - the way I am is better that the way you are. The heart of, the reason for our study of all different cultures is to be able to choose for us as individuals, maybe as a nation what we shall do, what we prefer. And therefore we have to be able, however unpleasant it may be to our own cultures, to ourselves, we have to be able to say: A is better than B.

Now, when we are evaluating then the next question is: Why do you say so? We have to have reasons, we have to have arguments, we have to have a logic.

Now, when you say: What kind of logic do you use?, than people are saying Western logic. I don't think there is a Western logic. There is no Western mathematics, no Western science. What is called Western logic now is largely Arabic. The Indians have contributed much more to contemporary logic than the Western world. Quine was a Jew. So, all we now call Western logic is just an evolution, is a tool that developed to a certain level. We had to have a logic.

Now, if you can fashion your own logic, fine, I will evaluate it. I don't mind anybody fashioning an African logic, if you can. It would be nice. I would be willing to look at it. If we can fashion our Chinese logic, okay, but why you want to reinvent the wheel?

So, this is where I think are slight differences between me and some other people. Because I belief that it is not sufficient to just understand each culture handling, how it operates, how is the thinking mood there,

etc.. The next stage must be that we want to make up our mind: we want to choose what we want to do, how we shall be here. our choices, our preferences. And in doing that we are already evaluating, we are already saying: all things are not equally good. We can't be everything. I cannot be eclectic. picking this and this and this. And even when we pick. we will have criteria, some criteria of picking what we want our culture to be, a criteria of selection. That involves we must be able to defend our choices. And the best way to defend our choices is to have arguments in support. Those arguments can be empirical, they don't need to be a priori. One argument that I have used often is mere empirical world-view.

You tell me the African way of life has its own logic and so on. Okay, and I ask the question: If it is equally good as the Christian scientific world-view, how is it that this traditional societies are among the poorest in the world today? How is it that they are among the most backward in the world today? And then my colleagues will say: What you mean by backward?, that in things of the mind we are richer, in the ways of life we are richer, in family life we are richer, our general love for our neighbour is richer. That's true. But that is not to say that you could not have an Eurocentric way of life.

So, if it is true that we have some superior way of thought, how is it that the West is our head? The Soviet Union had a philosophy, but she had collapsed. Isn't this a trial of a way of life over another?

Okay, we don't want to go the way of the West, but everybody wants to conquer this, whether you are living in the most remote village of the world, you want to conquer this: you want conquer hunger, you like to be able to move from one place to the other in the shortest possible way. Why unreasonable security? This is basic to all human beings, they are instinctive. By human nature this are goals which we promote, which have a living environment, probably they have children.

I think that a way of life is worthy of some attention over another way of life that has not equally succeeded. That is not to say, that's all we are living for. That is not to say that in having succeeded there were no problems. There may be problems. But I rather have let us get there

to the problems and we solve them.

I do also have one basic reason, why I no longer say there are no spirits, I no longer say that there are no witches. I no longer say that. I used to say that there are no spirits, no witches. But I now say: given that they are, what is there significance, what do they bother me, of what use are they, why must we bother about them? For by definition they are transempirical. We cannot know things about them. Now, it seems to me to be futile for human beings to spend their time thinking about what they say cannot be known. And that is what I think about the trinity in the Christian tradition - in the description of my church (Bodunrin is catholic) I am told that trinity is a mystery: we cannot come to a comprehension.

I do not mind people engaging their whole career in it. They are welcome. They spend all their lives thinking about those things. But when they want to explain it to me as a superior way of life, they must show more of it, they must prove it to me, they must convince me. And the only way they can convince me, this are valid arguments.

Graneß: I understand and I share your way of argumentation to a certain degree. But I think that we are always coming into trouble when systems of thinking are confronted with each other. I mean, you as a philosopher can easily say: Give me a proof and I will believe. But let me give an interesting case of such a confrontation from Guatemala: A farmer killed the medicine man of his village because he suspected him to prepare some black magic against him and his family. So, he feared that he and his family will be affected. Thus, to defend his family he killed the medicine man.

Bodunrin: *It happens here any time.*

Graneß: Well, and the legal system in Guatemala, which is fashioned after the European example, sent him, of course, into jail. Now, the philosophical or ethical question is: Is it right to send him into jail or not. Because for him, in his worldview, it was an act of self-defence, in the view of the legal system it was murder.

Bodunrin: *I would send him into jail, too. The question I want to ask is this: You want to know, whether the Guatemalan court was right or wrong?*

Graneß: Yes.

Bodunrin: *Okay, I want to say this: What would happen, if everybody is allowed to do that? You see, if everybody were allowed to do that, we would have a problem. We would need a firm evidence. I could someday just wake up and say: oh, you hate me ...*

Graneß: Yes, but the thing is that without the influence of the European legal system in this certain community this man would not have had any problem. The problem arose today only because of the confrontation of two systems.

You want to argue that it is impossible that everybody does what he wants. Right, but in this certain community it is not the case, that everybody can act arbitrary. He has to give a reason, a proof for his action, as well. The proof will be a different one than in our system, but convincing for every member of his community.

In my opinion, the prison sentence is very problematic. For me it would be very, very difficult to come to a decision in such a case. Because, I think, it is a question of dominant. The European system is the one which dominates the contemporary society. Well, insofar you have the right to say, I want to send him into jail.

Bodunrin: *I don't agree with you. The confrontation of cultures is inevitable. We no longer can avoid it. The cultures cannot be islands onto themselves any more. That's the point I am making. There is no way in which we can not interact with each other. There is no way were we can say: oh, its all right in Guatemala if somebody thinks that somebody might hurt you or kill you it is allowed to kill him. You can't say that. Cultures inevitably must teach each other. There is no way to avoid it now all over the world.*

Its a question of what aims of society we want to promote, and in the particular case we are talking about the question: De we want to adopt

or to let people go the Guatemalan way? They are allowed and won't do anything about it, because in their culture it is right for them to kill their enemies that way. Would it bother us? Don't we have to think more about that? Are they right? Is their thinking right? Don't we have to find out, whether that way of thinking is right or whether it is prescientific or unscientific? Whether there are other explanations? And if there are other explanations that are much more empirical, should not we adopt it?

For instance, you know, in this part of our country we used to believe the small pocks are a God given thing, and when I was young if anybody had small pocks, we were supposed to pray. But now we get vaccines. There is no new case of small pocks in Nigeria today. Was it God? That God is dead and that have done the experts. I suppose, if we were to keep in purely within the African way of life we will not investigate at all the causes of small pocks, because it is a divined thing and closed for inquiry.

Another example: If your child dies, you have a misfortune. Now you can look for a little woman who is responsible. You don't need to examine yourself for selfcorrection, you don't have the need to work harder, you don't need to go over your past life to see, what is it that I have gone wrong. At once you can pick up somebody who did it.

Look at the Guatemalan case now. If his family is misfortuned in one way or the other they wouldn't think about it. They would not think of anything. They would just look at the agents. And that unties progress. That's my point.

Graneß: But, generally you are thinking that there is something like progress in human development?

Bodunrin: *Of course.*

Graneß: What are, in your opinion, the criteria to differentiate between a good way of life and a bad way of life, or a good decision and a bad decision in these cases?

Bodunrin: *I think we have to be able to identify some certain rules of*

the society. Survival is one thing. That is a basic human instinct, because even if you are the most polite, moral, religious group at the world, you can't survive when the whole culture perishes.

If you judge things under the standard of this world than survival is one thing. And then I think that any kind of system that enables us to survive more is better than the one that does not enable us to survive. Because as I have said: survival is the most basic for all living things. Even the cockroach will run away from danger, the fly will run away, the ante will run away. So, it seems to me the most basic for our existence that's survival. And when I say survival it is survival in a competitive context, because the world is by nature competitive, whether we like it or not. Nobody is going to leave the Africans alone, not any more.

That's my point. We can no longer be islands onto ourselves.

Graneß: Let us come to another topic. What do you understand by intercultural philosophy?

Bodunrin: *Intercultural philosophy - that is just philosophy. That is what philosophy is: taking one point of view and illustrating it from several points. So are our cultures: taking a point in ethics, the case you mentioned in Guatemala, seeing, what people think about it, what the Nigerian think about it. And finding out whether there is a basis for those thinking and then we must find the judgement. What I don't like is a philosopher ending in analysis and not coming to the judgement. We must come to the judgement, because the whole basis is: We want to know what shall we do. The judgement might be faulty, might be wrong, but it always will be challenging. So, I think intercultural philosophy is philosophy and that's the way philosophy has to be. I don't know whether there is anything other. Philosophy is intercultural by nature. You cannot have philosophy until this confrontation of ideas. That's the point. Does anybody have a challenging idea if he doesn't find a criticism? It is the confrontation of ideas, the confrontation of cultures bringing philosophy into place. That is my position.*

Graneß: Is mutual understanding possible?

Bodunrin: *I think it is possible. If it is not possible, what is the whole scholarly enterprise about? What are we doing? I mean, why are you here studying, why did I go to the U.S.A. to make the PhD. if we can never understand each other? We can. Its difficult, but understanding between cultures is possible. And as I have said: to say that understanding between cultures is not possible is to presuppose that cultures have no overlapping elements. There are overlapping elements, there are series of family resemblances, there are similarities between cultures. It may be that when you take all the elements of a particular culture in totality they will stand contrary to another culture. But this is not to say that they don't have anything in common. I can approach the differences from the elements that are common to us. If you carry this kind of thing into extreme, in fact, no human being can understand each other. I don't have your pain now. The only way I know that you have pain is by your doing things which I would do when I have pain. That's why I have an image to have pain. I know that you are happy when you do the kind of things I would do when I am happy. Beyond that I have no access to your mind. So, to some extent, yes, I cannot fully understand you. And therefore its to some extent I cannot fully understand another culture. But that is to ask too much. Scientists, the philosophers, must not ask too much. We can not have a perfect understanding of another culture, nor our own culture, nor our own selves. We cannot have sufficient understanding of each other culture. I think what Mr. Rorty and others are saying is that no matter what you claim to know about another culture, you can always find that you are wrong from one item or the other. So, why not, why not. We might be wrong.*

Graneß: The main objection of Rorty is, if I remember right, that he claims I cannot discover in another culture what I do not know already from my own system. For, I ask my question out of my thinking system and recognize therefore only what I already know. Thus, he claims that thinking is always contextual bounded.

Bodunrin: *To some extent that is true. But then, even then you can still know a lot. When a scientist makes an investigation, what is he looking for there? He takes some quantity of blood from a patient and he can be looking for everything in the world; he can test it for malaria, or he wants to know whether he has sugar etc.. You must credit what you look for. That is human nature. Its the only way to study. Why must we be sad about that? I mean its foolish. Why to be so disappointed that you see only what you are looking for? You see what you are looking for. What interests me is what I am looking for. That is the nature of man. I don't pity myself for that. I mean you see what you are looking for and what constitutes a problem for me, what I want to find out. Why pity yourself?*

So, I think we can learn, we can understand each others culture. We cannot know everything, but we can know a lot.

Graneß: What do you think about the possibility to translate philosophical terms?

Bodunrin: *That's very difficult. I am a classicist. I did Greek and Latin. And we usually find it very difficult even to try to translate a Greek term into Latin. Its even more difficult to try to find an English equivalent to some words, even a word like democracy. There is nothing in English what is equivalent to a democracy as practised in ancient Greece, where slaves were not allowed to participate, woman were not allowed to participate. Only a few people formed the demos. There is no word to translate that. You cannot translate without residual. You cannot translate philosophical terms without remainder. What you probably can do is not to use one word, but you have to describe. It is difficult to look for one word. So, take some others which are available.*

You find in the bible the ancient Jews. They didn't had a word for cousin. Its like Yoruba. There is no word for cousin. So, some people were referred to as the brothers of our Lord in the bible, who are just relations. They were called brothers of our Lord. They were just cousins and relations. It took a long time before that was discovered.

So, if you were trying to translate the word brother in the bible, you translated the Jewish word brother into the English word brother. That lost a lot of meaning. So, that happens very often here. I don't think you can translate absolutely. And you need a lot of contextual knowledge.

Graneß: Do you think that an universal ethics is possible?

Bodunrin: *When we are making ethical statements we are making cognitive claims. We have to differentiate between that kind of knowledge and scientific knowledge. That kind of knowledge claimed in ethics is not nature, is of a type which is context depended and also determined by the choices we have made, society has made. They are not arbitrary. They are born out of empirical circumstances. In fact most of the claims in ethics, most of the claims we call good or bad, they are things that enable society to survive. And I will stress this: these claims, they guarantee the survival of the society, of the individual societies. Basically, I think philosophers have not made enough about this survival. Whether we are in science or in ethics or in philosophy: survival is the main thing.*

Well, universal ethics has to be possible. It is possible as an idea, it may not be attainable. I think by and large we move towards that. It is possible, but there are particular difficulties. Its going to be a long, long time to come.

Graneß: Is there something like an African ethics in ancient times and is there something like an African ethics in the contemporary academic philosophy in Nigeria?

Bodunrin: *When people say: give me an African ethical statement - when people ask such question, then nobody can, I cannot answer that kind of questions. But if you mention specific ethical claims you cannot answer that kind of question in a broad perspective. That's one of the mistakes, my colleagues make. You have to be an African, an African answer this question ... I cannot answer this question with yes or no. You have to tell me which ethical code you are talking about. Now, if*

you tell me a particular moral principle then it makes sense to say: lets look for a theoretical foundation of it. But people just say: Do Africans have a theoretical background for their ethics? I cannot answer that question. I think its a question that has totally failed. Maybe it is Western?

When you talk of African ethics I don't know a very big treatise on ethics. Omoregbe (Josef Omoregbe: Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Study. London 1979) wrote a certain thing, just a compendium of general ethics, more an introduction into ethics. There is African morality of course. I think what you want to ask is: Are there theoretical foundations of it? There must be, there must be. Whether philosophers have given enough attention to it, I don't know, but there must be justification for it. I don't know whether there are ethics. But basic claims in ethics are universal.

Graneß: Now I would like to come to the problem of truth, what is maybe more a logical or epistemological problem. Do you think that something like an universal truth is possible?

Bodunrin: *I don't think there is. I think there is truth for any system. And I think it depends on what you are talking about. But there is what my colleague professor Wiredu has defined as a warranted assertion. Now, what you call truth is something what has the best evidence in support at a given time. What I mean by that is, something what we accept as true today maybe false by tomorrow. What the people are looking for "real truth", I think is probably not attainable. Even when we had what "real truth" is, we would not be able to recognize it as "real truth", we would not be able to identify it. So I think truth is relative. Truth to think is the hardest, the best hypothesis we have. I am not talking about formal truth, truth of mathematics and logic, where we settle the rules, where we settle the axioms. Once you settle axioms, of course, than truth becomes merely formal. I am not talking about those truth. But empirical truth, truth about this universe, they cannot be formal systems. I think truths about the universe are hypothesis.*

Graneß: And universal validity, especially in the ethical respect? You told me that there is a basic norm, our survival.

Bodunrin: *It is most weak. We must accept that, okay. One of the truths of the universe is a decease. If you were shot in the head you will be dead in the next minute. These are truths.*

Suppose, even as universal truths as they are now, its just possible that we may discover something which makes bullets reflect when it comes to a person. We may be able to discover a world where gunpowder does not fire, because there is no oxygen or something, where bombs don't explode. We may be able, we don't know. But for all we know this is universally valid.

Graneß: My final question is what are your future projects?

Bodunrin: *At the moment I am Vice Chancellor of Ondo State University in Ado Ekiti. which means I have not been teaching for years now. You know I am five and a half years away from this thing. I have been writing, but I have not been teaching. I am writing and attending conferences, examining, I am doing reading PhD work. And I have been reading assessments of other philosophers who want to be promoted. So, I know, what they are talking about and that is good for me, and to some extent I have done more work than when I was teaching. But I have not taught in a classroom for a long time and I will be back in two and a half years time. I will be back in my position here in Ibadan.*

I will get a year sabbatical to pursue and I will go back to my classroom. And that's the time to really propound theories. I am 59 now and when I come back I will be 62 plus. And that's the time to do solid work in philosophy.

Graneß: Your students will have good luck.

Bodunrin: *Unfortunately I lost a lot of my manuscripts. My office has been burnt. (In august 1995 the whole Department of Philosophy burnt down) I lost the manuscript of three books I was been thinking about.*

This would have been on African philosophy.

People have said things against me and so I collected a lot of critical points.

And then I had solutions to problems of symbolic logic. When I went to the United States I have taught logic. And the book has answers, it has a key. If you teach American students and you tell them the solution they are serious about it and they tell you other keys, they are giving you proofs from somebody else. So I worked out solutions to every problem I saw, my own solutions to all the problems I saw. Logic is what I am interested in.

And I lost another manuscript: In the years I was head of the Department for nine years, I was dean for two years, I was Deputy Chancellor for three years and all my special interest was the history of the Department of the University (in Ibadan). All the special papers I kept are lost now and that is a big loss. So, my research has to start all over again. That's a pity.

I have kept all what people are saying about me, and I have to answer. How does anybody talk about African philosophy without talking about me?

REVIEW

THE HERMENEUTICS OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

by Tsenay Serequeberhan. New York: Routledge, 1994; pp ix and 161.

Reviewed by Lansana Keita

Discussions in African philosophy in recent years have been much concerned with how to weave into the fabric of modern philosophical discourse the cosmologies, ethics and aesthetics of Africa's precolonial societies. This was what the ethnophilosophical debate was all about. The methodological tactic was to employ the concepts and language of modern philosophy to engage in comparative analysis of assumedly similar concepts in African cosmologies.

On the other hand there were those post colonial African theorists who argued for a modern African philosophy inspired by the radical philosophies of Europe, that is Marxism especially. These theorists regarded the ethnophilosophical program as catering to the tastes and preconceptions of intellectuals in the European metropolis. The spirited discussions of theorists such as Hountondji, Wiredu, Towa *et al* testify to this.

Tsenay Serequeberhan's *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy* attempts to offer a third alternative to this two track approach by arguing for a hermeneutical approach to African philosophy. But first he seeks to justify his appeal to the hermeneutical method by arguing that the present post-colonial situation of Africans requires a method of analysis that examines "the way in which philosophic discourse itself originates from and is organically linked to the concrete conditions of existence and the life practices of the horizon within and out of which it is formulated" (p.17).

The justification for the hermeneutical approach that Serequeberhan seeks, it should be noted, is prompted by concerns that it not be viewed as a fad, and inauthentic as a mode of analysis for the African condition. He points out that Gadamer "the father of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics" has complained that every interpretation now

appeals to hermeneutics as a basis for philosophical interpretation. Dia Wamba has also raised questions about the suitability of the appeal to European schools of thought to explain the dynamics of African social life.

The question, of course, is whether Serequeberhan has succeeded in his adoption of an admittedly novel methodology. I believe that the answer is in the positive given that his methodology allows him to marshal under one theoretical umbrella a set of thinkers and ideas that are not normally discussed comparatively within the context of philosophy. Thus we have discussed within the context of African philosophy the theories and practices of thinkers such as Fanon, Cabral and Nkrumah. Serequeberhan also offers an interesting statement on the problems generated by the adoption of either an essentialist particularism of a Senghor or the universalistic scientism of Marxism as represented by Nkrumah and Hountondji. According to Serequeberhan "Senghor's *essentialist particularism* arrogates to the African a difference which is (in spite of Senghor's 'good' intentions) the ground for inferiority and servitude" (p.52). The reference here, of course, is to Senghor's well known opposing of the cultural profile of Europe (with its supposedly logocentric Greek origins) with that of Africa (with its supposedly emotivist epistemology).

Serequeberhan's critique of Marxian analysis for Africa is that Marxism judges the progression or regression of human groups in terms of a "sequential unfolding of the world-historical dialectical symbiosis of man and nature" (p.33). This symbiosis of man and nature is determined by humanity's capacity to subordinate and control nature by technical means. Serequeberhan finds this scientific approach unacceptable because the idea of the progressivity and regressivity of human social groups must itself be based on a criterion which itself must be evaluative rather than scientifically objective (p.43). Furthermore the "scientific universalism" of Marxism "in the guise of 'universality' and

'objectivity' surreptitiously universalizes Europe and subordinates Africa" (p.43).

Serequeberhan's argument against Senghor's *essentialist particularism* is indeed justified since what this approach to human culture does is that by freezing human cultures into typologies, it essentially biologizes them. But the empirical facts of the history of human culture cannot support this, when, for example, the Greeks (invented as Europeans to link them racially and culturally with groups with whom they had little in common until elements of Greek were adopted by these groups) were engaging in discursive argumentation the roving bands of peoples to the West and North of them (disparagingly dismissed as "barbarian") were engaged in practices and thought patterns that even Senghor would have difficulty in describing as logocentric and analytical.

One might say that no serious intellectual now regards Senghor's essentialism as having much merit but this generic view of African culture has now seeped into the general consciousness of Europe and other parts of the world. The "marginalization of Africa" (a favourite phrase of Western pundits vis à vis Africa), despite its great natural wealth coupled with a fascinated focus and exaggerated reporting when human disasters occur, suggests the belief (conscious or unconscious) of Africa as the most natural (that is like nature) place in the world. Consider, for example, the sensationalistic reporting both by the international agencies (comfortably housed in Geneva) about war and disease in Africa.

But with reference to the Marxian program I believe that Serequeberhan is correct in his critique of its evaluative and teleological approach to the dynamics of human social change, but I am inclined to agree with one of Marxism's central claims, that is that in the case of humankind, biological evolution has produced a kind of creature whose specific disposition has not only been to adapt to nature but also to transform it maximally. Other creatures do indeed transform nature to satisfy their

needs but none as efficiently as the human creature. The reason for this is the human brain which allows for abstract thought and a creative manipulation of the environment. Thus the history of humankind can be characterized as one in which there is a constant interplay between human society and its environment.

In fact the main reason why a few countries of Western Europe were able to conquer Africa is that the Europeans, at the initial encounter, had a greater knowledge of nature and knew how to manipulate it for their own ends. Hence we have the superiority of the musket over the lance and sword - a fact the Europeans exploited to the maximum. But the mistake the Marxians make is to assume that the human organism is merely another aspect of organic nature while ignoring the fact that the abstract reasoning or kind of thinking that the human brain makes possible for the human also endows this creature with the capacity to make moral judgements.

Thus the Nazi extermination of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and others in Europe is not generally regarded as a mere event in organic nature. Europe experienced a moral and intellectual crisis as a result of the Nazi program, and the relative silence on the part of European intellectuals at the immorality of an European engendered Atlantic trade in humans to the Americas and the violence against Africa's peoples in order to effect the colonial enterprise - suggesting inner moral anxieties, demonstrate the limitations of the Marxian enterprise.

In chapters titled "Colonialism and the Colonized" and "The Liberation Struggle" the author offers some useful analyses and reviews of the standard anti-colonial literature. We have here trenchant discussions of the ideas of Fanon, Memmi, and Cabral. We witness again an analysis of the violence that accompanied the colonial enterprise and the Eurocentric justification for it; but we are also informed of the intellectual and material response to it by African activists and theoreticians.

I consider Serequeberhan's retrospective discussion of the ideas of Fanon and Cabral very useful, given that in the West and neocolonial Africa the ideas of these thinkers have been pushed to the background.

On account of the success of the Westernized African in sliding into the institutions created by colonialism African universities rarely see to it that the works of the intellectual facilitators of African independence become standard fare in classroom curricula. But the scathing criticisms of the African bourgeoisie by Serequeberhan reminds us that the intellectual struggle against neocolonialism continues.

Yet one would have preferred at the same time some explanation of how such a group came into existence. A comment on this phenomenon would be instructive. The European colonial enterprise was successful in that it introduced into African society three major institutions into which were channelled elements of African society. These institutions are the Christian Church and the Mission School, Civil administration, and the Colonial Militia (now developed into regular armies). After the pacification of those areas where there was resistance to the European irruption, the above mentioned institutions were then imposed on the survivors. So successful was the ideology that accompanied the colonial enterprise that those Africans who were drawn into the above mentioned institutions did, for the most part, identify with them. The colonized African regarded those institutions as sources of worthwhile and prestigious careers.

Thus the fight for independence from the colonial powers was not about the redemption of an humiliated Africa but about the African bourgeoisie demanding that it have full control of the institutions created by the colonial powers. This artificially created bourgeoisie does not generate capital (there is no African counterpart of the East Asian bourgeoisie which is heavily involved in commerce and manufacture), and is parasitical on their nations' resources by way of the control of the state. In most instances the African bourgeoisie (especially its

armies) is not a clone but a caricature of its European counterpart. This explains the contempt for it expressed by Serequeberhan.

The concluding chapter of the text titled "Africa in the Present Context of Philosophy" argues in summarizing that "the compelling theoretic and moral responsibility of African philosophical work" is "to appropriate the historic and emancipatory possibilities of our postcolonial present" (p.117). To this end the author argues for the paradigmatic preeminence of the works of Fanon and Cabral. We recall that Serequeberhan's intellectual task is to establish the foundations for "selfemancipation" as he put it.

Yet its author fails to discuss the works of Cheikh A. Diop a necessary element in any self-emancipatory program for African philosophy. This is where some weakness in Serequeberhan's text is to be detected: Fanon and Cabral were harshly critical of the colonial order and its dynamics but they did not live to establish the foundations for a reconstructivist program.

While the works of Fanon and Cabral are vaguely historical Diop recognizes the importance of precolonial African history in establishing a specific sociological template which could serve as the basis for future intellectual work. The single mention of Diop reduces that author's works to "a longing for the greatness' of ancient Africa". Although Diop is viewed in the West as a controversial thinker - if only because he sought to reclaim the history and civilization of ancient Egypt for Africa - his writings on precolonial Africa cannot be read as anything but historical and sociological analysis. Diop also wrote prescriptively on the advantages that would accrue to Africa were there regional economic unification.

Serequeberhan also fails to discuss the ideas of the political economist Samir Amin (the author of the excellent text *Eurocentrism*) who argues

for a delinking of African nation states from the West - as a way of breaking neocolonial linkages.

I mention these two authors just to emphasize that the critical stances of Fanon and Cabral, though a good starting point, are not enough to effect the selfemancipation that Serequeberhan recommends. The struggle in Africa today is essentially ideological. What I mean by this is how can African intellectuals work out the right kind of theory as a necessary condition for the right practice. This is an important task given the high levels of false consciousness among Africa's populations, one of the bedeviling legacies of colonialism. More specifically, what is required are serious discussions on the nature of the modern state in Africa, the issue of democracy, human rights, market economics, capital formation, human capital formation, the relationship between Africans on the continent and those elsewhere (what we have here is the practical importance of the idea of Pan Africanism), the logic of regional integration, and so on.

The struggle also involves the larger questions such as whether Africa needs a cultural revolution, or merely political and economic transformations. This enterprise would require a close interaction between philosophical analysis, and the social and technological sciences as they now exist in Africa. If the hermeneutical method allows this holistic Africa-centred approach to the African problematic then Serequeberhan's text definitely breaks new methodological ground.

REVIEW

MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT by Messay Kebede

Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994; pp. 248.

Reviewed by Lansana Keita

Perhaps no issue has more concentrated the minds of non-Western intellectuals than that of how to attain modernism for their societies by way of economic and technological development. The reason for this interest is the practical one of remarking on the technological and material advantages enjoyed by those countries viewed as modern and developed.

In strictly quantitative terms such countries are regarded as wealthy and productive in the sense of developing more goods and services to their citizenries. As a rule such countries are viewed as having the sociological structures necessary to create those amenities which make life satisfying from a purely material standpoint. And again, in terms of the physical well-being of the individual such societies are also seen to provide more in terms of health services. Proof of this is that the statistical data show that the average life span of the citizenries of the developed nations is greater than those of other nations. Examples of such nations are those of Western Europe, the United States, Canada and Japan.

It must be noted that most of the theorists who discuss and write about such matters are development economists and other social scientists in the areas of political science, anthropology, and so on. Thus Messay Kebede's text *Meaning and Development* is important if only because it is written by a philosopher.

Instead of focusing purely on the issues of annual economic growth rates and balance of payments author Messay Kebede examines development from a multiplicity of standpoints including ethics (with a focus

on the idea of happiness and obligation), science and its axiology, history, and the logic of culture change.

Kebede's goal in this text is to raise and answer questions relating to the modalities by which those countries viewed as non-developed could transcend their present status within the context of modernity. The author examines standard theories on this matter especially those of Weber, Marx, and Rostow. Kebede recognizes a debt to the Weberian thesis that the growth of capitalism in the West must be explained not in terms of a basic desire for wealth and richness but in terms of the idea of duty motivated by a Christian Protestantism whose main value was ascetism in the service of God. Kebede writes : "In making wealth acquisition into a duty willed by Cod, Protestantism could not but liberate the impulse to acquisition from all bonds and restrictions. And in being such a service, acquisition broke with direct consumption" (Kebede, p.65).

Although the religious impulse as described by Weber is a specifically Western phenomenon Kebede seeks to generalizc the thesis of ascetic abnegation, sobriety, and thriftiness by pointing to similar orientations in Japan and China. His general point is that development cannot take place if the goal of economic and cultural activity is enrichment and wealth acquisition for immediate consumption. Thus "the issue of development and underdevelopment, that is, the problem of culture change, is rightly defined as the transition from the ethics of happiness to the ethics of duty" (Kebede, p.203).

It is to this concept of duty that Kebede appeals to explain the cultural transformation of Japan. Consider his reminding us that "the ethical dimension of development taught us to recognize ethical bent, or duty--mindedness in any move which goes against inclination or gives up cherished values" (Kebede, p.171). It is this, according to Kebede, that explains the cultural changes that the Japanese Samurai and the Chinese Confucians underwent. It was duty that forced the Japanese elites

(by way of the Meiji Restoration) to seek modernization in terms of values alien to the traditional ones. Thus "business turns out to be an even greater assertion of capitalist values" (p.172). And "confucianism also evolved according to the same process. Familism and filial piety found the best outlet in enterprise" (p.172). It all could be summed up as "a process displaying negation of some traditional values for the purpose of rescuing higher ones" (p.171).

According to Kebede modernism is the goal of development and this in turn requires change. But in order for the goal of modernism to be attained change must be sanctioned by tradition. He writes : "Unless change is sanctioned by tradition, unless it is the enhancement of tradition it ends in failure " (p.162). In practical terms this meant historically that ruling elites in Europe were not replaced by rising classes in political revolutions, but that these groups transformed themselves by appeal to a salvational ethos. The examples Kebede offers are those of Great Britain and Germany (pp. 154-155). Accordingly, the French Revolution which led to the physical elimination of an aristocracy to make room for a new bourgeoisie was an exception in Kebede's view. One notes immediately that this thesis of social change is opposed to that of Marx's.

Kebede's thesis here is interesting but it cannot be supported by the facts. Industrialization in Europe was principally the task of new class elements who developed radically different modes of social organization. The aristocracies in Europe sought legitimacy in the principles of the divine right of kings sanctioned not by merit but by hereditary privilege. The parliamentary system in Britain (two separate political houses with distinct traditional orientations) and the elimination of the Russian aristocracy to make way for the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party, both offer support for this thesis.

With reference to the important question of how the transition to modernism has taken place and should take place, one must admit that

there are yet no definite answers. In a general way one could hypothesize that at certain points in history and in certain locales a conjuncture of forces produce new technologies and novel modes of social organization. These forces may be internally generated as a result of external factors. We can call this phenomenon weak diffusion. Or they may be spread directly by means of trade, i.e. strong diffusion.

But what is crucial is that the receiving community be psychologically and intellectually ready to receive the new technologies and ideas. This would mean that change would be internally generated whether by a new class or a self-transforming elite. It is here that I disagree with Kebede's thesis that traditional elites must necessarily lead the change, if it is to be proven successful.

What seems to be an impediment to change and perhaps the ultimate cause of retrogression for societies is when change is imposed forcefully from the outside in the guise of what are generally known as colonialism and imperialism. It is the forceful diffusion of technologies and ideas on newly encountered societies that has produced the decimation of the old societies of the Americas, Australia, and the serious problematic of the newly constructed societies of Africa.

This brings us to the intriguing question of how valid is Kebede's general thesis vis à vis Africa? It could be that traditional African societies just did not have enough time to develop some kind of salvational ethos of the initial advent of the Europeans. Or maybe the slow but long-term "bleeding of West Africa by way of the infamous *Traité des Noirs* just made the development of any salvational ethos impossible. We recall that Songhay, the last important pre-colonial state structure in West Africa was destroyed at the battle of Tondibi in 1595. And Songhay did appear to have the ingredients for developing a salvational ethos.

Kebede points out how the theory of African socialism and the concept of negritude could be viewed as "attempts to establish a linkage between the African traditional communal ethos and modernity" (p.19-1). But this African communalism, according to Kebede, was a hindrance to

modernization. Yet the African past was indeed in need of being revived given the buffeting African society was subjected to from the sixteenth century onwards. One aspect of the European colonization of Africa was the cultivated view that African thought was inherently irrational" (p.191).

The function of African philosophy, the author tells us, was to make the case for "the rational endowment of African thought" (p.192). He argues that "for most African scholars the question of African philosophy should be confined to this commemorative objective. It should not meddle with questions related to culture change and modernity" (p.192). But Kebede sees this purported function of African philosophy as very limited, given the obvious necessity for discussions on change and modernity vis à vis contemporary Africa. I find this circumscribed view of philosophy in an African context somewhat problematic given the discussions and polemics raised by Hountondji, Towa, Taiwo and others against the ethnophilosophical project.

What then does Kebede suggest as the intellectual preconditions for culture change and modernity? There is first of all the critique of Marxism as incapable of explaining social life given its reduction of capitalist economic activity to pure self-interest.

As he put it : "If human beings are naturally social beings, then all the more reason why we should understand their ideas and actions, be they capitalist or not, as the fulfilment of obligation rather than as egoism" (p.205).

For Kebede, the idea of obligation leads to that of "worthiness as the principal motivation of human beings" (p.205). And in sum "the ethical

will and scientific standard supply respectively the content and form on the basis of which worthiness stands up for the award of meaning" (p.207).

So the solution to the problem of development then (for Africa in particular - given the confirmed successes of the West, and East Asian society) should be a focus on an ethics of duty (obligation). But what is it that prompts this focusing on an ethics of duty rather than one of happiness? The answer is that "Africa must dispose of its innocence" by attaining "internalized guilt" as the means to a salvation ethos. The "guilt" in this instance refers to that incurred by an African inability to withstand Europe's colonial project which, according to Kebede, led "the violation of the traditional communal order" (p.194).

In his discussion Kebede often makes reference to the way in which Japan, threatened with colonization by the West, managed to modernize. He claims that what helped was "the leadership of a dynastic elite" (p.195). And this was "a requirement that none of the underdeveloped countries could meet" (p.195). I believe that Kebede made an error here since there were examples of "dynastic elites" in Africa at the advent of the colonial era. One might consider the cases of "dynastic elites" in the Hausa (now Northern Nigeria) and Amhara (then Abyssinia) societies. Also of significance is the fact that the "modernizing elites" of precolonial West Africa never saw fit to develop a salvational ethos despite extensive contact with the West (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Benin, for example).

Perhaps the most important (because original) of Kebede's points is that concerning the "interiorization of guilt" on the part of those affected by the European colonial project. It is this psychological response to the European project that I believe was the inspiration for the intellectual and political efforts of C.A. Diop,

Fanon and Nkrumah. The problem is that the modernizing social groups who were in the best position to implement the ideas of these thinkers were never really interested in such. These groups never felt guilt (or shame) since "such mentality is as much alien to distress and anxiety as it is filled with the desire to consume and to acquire privileges" (p.198). I want to believe that the mentality of such social groups continues to be a fascinating topic for both sociological and psychological analysis.

I must state that despite its focus on the all-important psychological aspect of cultural and economic development, Kebede's text suffers from a neglect of the actual political events that created the conditions for the lack of a salvational ethos in Africa, while the opposite occurred in Japan and other parts of East Asia (Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc). I propose the hypothesis that the Cold War between the West (led by the United States) and the socialist communist bloc (led by the new defunct USSR) is at the base of the erasure of any attempts to configure a salvational ethos in Africa. Ideas and leadership that might have encouraged a salvational ethos among Africa's modernizing classes all fell victim to the brutal politics of international *realpolitik*.

The counterfactual question one must ask is this : "How different would the political and cultural landscape have been had Lumumba, Cabral, Olympio actually led governments, or had Nkrumah survived?" But at the same time one must recognize, in response to Kebede's critique of the bureaucratic aspirations of Africa's "educated elites", that there was much ideological popularity of the idea of socialism (with its accompanying governmental bureaucratic) among certain elements of this group.

The Cold War is supposedly over and the nations of Africa are now urged by the West to embrace democracy and the market system. In this ongoing dynamic Africa does indeed need a salvational ethos as Kebede states but Africa's recent history continues to haunt it. The

African nation state was an externally imposed creation of the colonial enterprise. In the process the ethos that characterized the precolonial African personality was greatly impacted on and distorted. Thus it is difficult for the post-colonial modernizing groups to feel guilt at the colonial enterprise given that the psychic basis for such exists only minimally.

Thus in order to generate conditions for a salvational ethos one must begin with a reexamination of concepts such as socialism and Pan-Africanism. Given the paucity of capital among Africa's modernizing groups the state is the only structure that has the scope to marshal adequate quantities of capital for developmental purposes. The problem would then be to develop the right kind of ethos to hold the allegiance of the modernizing state bureaucrat. But the intriguing question is how possible is this? How quickly can Kebede's prescriptions transform an African state bureaucrat into something resembling his or her counterpart in places like Japan, Singapore, or even Norway?

Similar considerations apply for the concept of Pan-Africanism. An examination of the history of the idea of Pan-Africanism could provoke sufficient guilt to seriously tackle again the question of the unification of those whimsically created mini-states of Africa. We recall that the Pan-Africanist idea was developed to counter the humiliation engendered at what historians refer to as "the carving up of Africa" by the colonial powers. The result of this colonial enterprise is a set of nation states with no apparent meaning in the world today -- caricatures all of the European nation state.

But most important, the basis for any salvational ethos in Africa would first of all require a recognition of the importance of the history of Africa. Then a spirited African-centred approach to issues such as government, the nation state, general culture, economic theory, and science could very hopefully lay the foundations for development and meaning.

In sum, Kebede's text is interesting especially for its orientation as a philosophical text. While recognizing that genuine change must develop out of tradition, Kebede's text does not limit itself to mere ethnophilosophical discourse. He argues for modernity as change that "sought the protection and enhancement of traditional beliefs, values and systems of power" (p.156). Kebede (writing from the University of Addis Ababa) hopes ultimately for an interaction between the ethical will and scientific method to produce what he describes as "worthiness" as a precondition for "meaning". *Meaning and Development* should provoke lively debates among those concerned to solve the puzzles of development and modernism - in Africa particularly.

INFORMATION BANKS IN RURAL AFRICA

L. Njinya-Mujinya

Much of the twentieth-century world is moving and changing at a terrific speed, thanks to technology and the information revolution. The print and electronic media, and the latter in particular, are playing a crucial role in that revolution which is slowly but steadfastly sweeping across the globe. Even then, it will take some time for this phenomenon to peaceably conquer and maximally benefit many areas of the world. Quite a number of factors, ranging from pretended poverty¹ to great want of awareness of the unfathomable usefulness of the revolution in point, certainly incapacitate many of the earth's local neighbourhoods from taking advantage of it. All the same, through increased awareness, better and foresighted rural leadership, concerted effort and planning, such constraints could be overcome in nearly every rural person's interests. Rural folk, in Africa as elsewhere in the world, are definitely gifted with great psychophysical resources which, if unleashed and exploited, could flood their lives with lots of knowledge, psychosomatic wealth and comfort, and a determination to be masters of their circumstances and destiny.

It is now well-known that any society's attempt to create and enjoy a high standard of living is dependent on several interlinked factors. Two of the most important conditions are accessibility of necessary information and the individual community's ability to communicate with itself and with its counterparts at local, regional and international planes. Far from being self-contained and self-sufficient, each and every society, whether it is African or non-African, needs other societies. It needs to keep abreast of what is happening all around it; to learn from its next-door and distant neighbour's achievements and failures; and to be helpful to neighbours in need. Equally, it requires to constantly remain fully awake to sources of opportunities and potential dangers to itself; to always assess its successes and shortcomings in view of other people's performance and deficiencies, and so forth. Similarly societies separately need to ever be in contact with themselves as they are presently as well as they were down the centuries. Stated otherwise, every community ought to keep track of whence it

has come and whither it is heading. Under all circumstances it ought to keep record of its fortunes and misfortunes and, accordingly, ongoingly organize and reorganize itself. Indeed it is commonplace that a people's accomplishments are to a great extent decided by a true knowledge of their past and contemporary history and how best they have turned that history to good account. In reality a society without a clearly delineated past cannot have a present let alone a future that is rewarding to the maximum. In making this claim, this writer is certain that he is singing from the same song sheet as many people. All the above and more needs of a society can therefore most fruitfully be fulfilled through instituting serious information banks at convenient points within the precincts of individual communities. Let us now centre on the implications of this for rural African communities, communities far from key urban centres.

For African rural societies to achieve any meaningful level of material and mental freedom and satisfaction it is evidently vital for each one of them to establish at least one full-fledged information bank in every sub-county. Such banks or information centres, it is worth noting, should be located in the most central and easily reachable places if they are to be helpful to a majority of those they are intended to serve. Having information banks so distributed in Africa's up-country areas, the present writer believes, would go a long way in liberalizing accessibility to and control over knowledge on that continent, innovating and democratizing knowledge in/on Africa. While African national governments may be interested in instituting in their rural territories the kind of banks being talked about, the present writer thinks that that should be none of their business. What they can and indeed ought to provide is a political atmosphere conducive to the implementation of the idea of village information banks. The greater responsibility of starting, developing and maintaining such banks ought to be shouldered by the grassroots communities in co-operation with political, educational and religious institutions at the local levels. Well-read men and women from these communities could be great assets as they could contribute meaningfully toward charting policies

and programmes for the banks. They could even, where necessary, be in the vanguard of initiating and promoting this idea. Because the local taxpayer has invested a lot in these people's education, they should in fact consider helping in this regard. For as the Judaco-Christian Bible reads, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12: 4X). Together, the people in any local neighbourhood could work out ways and means of stocking their information banks with pertinent material. Consider these, for example. They could individually contribute printed and audio-visual materials. The most able amongst them could give as much literature as possible. People with small private libraries could consider donating them for the larger communitarian cause. Again they could also raise funds from themselves and set it apart for buying relevant literature, necessary equipment and the like. And in African countries with significant publishers, booksellers and authors, these could be kindly asked to make literature contributions to as many village information banks as possible. Altogether, the purpose of this material would be to serve as an eye-opener and to stimulate the locals to be theoretically and practically creative. With their minds and eyes being widely opened in this process, these people would cease being preyed upon by researchers and writers of many shades. Let us unfold this.

Those inquirers, speaking generally, often come to African rural communities smiling, receive red-carpet welcome and finally get whatever data they like from the locals. But these unsuspecting locals are generally not conscious that they are being used, or even sometimes being misused and exploited, in the interests of scholarly wars from which they generally gain nothing or just chicken-feed. For at the end of the day, the inquirers, on whom they over-generously shower the proverbial 'African' hospitality, stab the locals in the back! Naturally, some researchers do that more than others. But how does that happen? When it comes to analyzing and interpreting the treasured data from the locals, those inquirers and writers do so in ways that are many times a disadvantage(s) to the locals' image. On the contrary, the writers' efforts come off well, bringing in such large gains as diplomas,

degrees, royalties, big titles, promotions, fame, immortalization and so on. Thus while these writers are busy harvesting and enjoying the rewards from the information given by the locals, these locals' image languishes in some sort of hell. It is represented as less than this or that, as not measuring up to this or that standard, as not this or that.

Perhaps what is quite interesting here is that many a time the locals are misrepresented, wilfully or unwilfully, by the researchers under discussion. Very frequently, the information supplied by the locals is understated, overstated and/or generalized by these investigators. However, as most locals, if not all, never get a chance of accessing what has been written about them,² there is no way of knowing that to say nothing of correcting it. With the creation of rural data banks, like the Eriya Begumisa Bugamba Public Library and Research and Development Centre³ in upcountry Uganda, that would be possible. A provision requiring African and foreign fieldworkers,⁴ in any rural African society, to deposit a copy each of their published findings in the society's data bank, would easily enable the locals to check such distortions.⁵ In so doing too they would participate as partners and equals in academic discussions concerning them, thus ceasing to be merely topics of scholarly discourses. In addition this measure, or more correctly requirement, would hold in check those researchers and authors who abuse and exploit unsuspecting locals. Should a writer, for one reason or another, ultimately decline to provide the wanted copy, the local population should acquire it at their own expense if it can be found. Obtaining publications from the kind of investigators and writers in point, by the way, would be an additional means of swelling the numbers of publications in Africa's rural information banks. The putting of this idea into serious practice would also do much to counter the quite unfortunate trend where there are incredibly more works on Africa in foreign countries than in Africa itself.

Because a writer's work would thus be locally available for reading, analysis and criticism, writers that tread on people's toes unnecessarily would no more find gullible audiences to use as guinea-pigs. There is also a way in which the requirement being discussed would

indirectly be beneficial to individual researchers and writers on things African. More than previously, a researcher would now know that there is a great possibility that his or her writing would be double-checked for accuracy by those on whom he or she is researching. Most probably, this would do a lot to push him or her to be exceedingly particular about matters of detail and precision. In a word such investigators and writers would, willy-nilly, be forced to give fairly balanced pictures of their problems of study. Where they do not know, they would confess ignorance rather than giving the false impression that they know it all. In the long run therefore this system of keeping a kind of surveillance over the writers would further promote discipline and academic honesty among researchers about Africa. Maybe even individual African governments could consider writing the requirement in question into their national laws. As much as this would not be a one-hundred percent never-failing measure against possible defaulters, it would help to underline the importance attached to the obligation. Certainly, in many cases, it would be hard for national administrations to bring defaulters to book; but then such offenders would risk losing their names in the eyes of the local host communities. And the next time they bounce back for further field research, they would probably get no attention. Defaulting, apparently, would suggest that there was something bad that the defaulter was trying to hide from those on whom he or she wrote. The possibility of losing a particular community's good will at a future point would therefore oblige many a writer to provide copies of their publications. So would the likelihood of being suspected of wrong motives. For individual rural African societies to effectively and extensively share, cross-check and gain from any work written about them, the individual information centres could organize public seminars at which given writings would be reviewed and discussed. Every such new work could be critically studied at a special pre-arranged sitting--with notes, if need be, being taken down in summary form for future use. The so-called well-learned members of these communities could play a leading role in this connection. A selected

individual could read the book, article, monograph or whatever, summarize its contents and prepare to guide seminar attenders through it.

The type of data banks that we are here proposing need not only be mere receivers and depositories of information, important as that role may be. Depending on how well organized and how financially firm they are individually, they could even engage in research about their local communities and related subjects.⁶ Their results, published as monographs or in book form, could be an income-generating resource as the publications could be marketed locally, nationally and internationally. Local, regional, national and international researchers paying calls could, indeed, be a sure source of customers. For this publishing venture, of course, the data banks would need some starting substantial sums of money, but where would it come from? As for production of some relevant publications, they could organize local fund-raisers. The rich among these local populations could make considerable charitable contributions for which, in turn, they could be thankfully recognized by, say, having their names engraved and immortalized on special plaques. Another possible source of funds is that local governments could levy a small amount of money on each taxpayer every year. This levy would be collected once as part of the administrations' direct taxation. That both local and international users of given data banks could pay, for example, membership, associate-membership or service fees is yet another way of generating needed funds. A further source of funds is that from time to time, those information banks could mount exhibitions of very rare old publications--locally and internationally published. Persons coming to see these rare items could each pay a small fee. In fact collecting and occasional display of old works could very easily be diversified and turned into museum wings in the data banks in point--extensions that could constantly yield revenue. Many other money-creating means could really be tried as well. To keep their clientele posted about them, the information banks could even run biweekly or bi-monthly newsletters. Through these media they could constantly inform their patrons about achievements made, failures sustained, obstacles experienced and

events and plans in the offing. By undertaking the preceding and more activities, the information banks would definitely contribute immensely toward making the press more and more part of African culture.

To sidestep being caught in political crossfire, which the African continent frequently experiences, local communities would need to desist from naming their information banks after living political or controversial figures, however celebrated they may be. The banks could bear the names of the individual communities. They could also be named for dead illustrious Africans, more especially those that were born and raised in the given societies. Another alternative is that they could be named for very old outstanding members of the communities that have over generously given of their talents and other material resources for their peoples' good.

Although as projects the information centres under discussion may want to avoid being too ambitious, they would need to meet a few basic requirements to be worthy of their name and objectives. Every such centre should be accommodated within neat and presentable premises, preferably in its own small- or medium-size permanent building. Initially, however, a data bank could begin in a small rented or free-of-charge little room. Each one should be manned by a small staff of at least two persons reasonably trained in the management of information. For a variety of reasons, the vision of rural data banks, as here outlined, would certainly be more feasible in some African countries than in others. There are, for instance, countries with large non-sedentary populations that are forced by conditions to occasionally split up and move from place to place. Individual researchers and authors about such people would undoubtedly have difficulties in keeping in contact with them. If these folk initiated data banks, they would, doubtless, be exposed to manifold hazards, including unexpected bad weather. All the same they could try creating information banks that the larger splinter groups could carry with them when they change addresses. Anyway in these people's and Africa's interests, African national governments with significant mobile groups should look into encouraging them to

lead a sort of settled life. It is noteworthy that some African leaders have done and are still doing this.

There goes the clarion call to the proposed programme of data banks in rural Africa. We must underscore, however, that the wide-extending creation of such banks would inevitably bring with it what some people would consider evil ideas and practices. Rural African groups therefore would need to be at the ready to deal with unwanted ideas and fashions like those that are morally corrupting. One effective way of handling this potential problem would certainly be to censor all incoming literature and audio-visual texts. 'Bad' documents would then be weeded out before reaching the shelves of a data bank. For this purpose, each community would thus need to institute a censoring committee consisting of a few people with necessary expertise.

Now, to sum up, this writer wishes to say that whether or not the idea of widespread rural data banks is practicable, it remains true that rural Africa is much in need of necessary scholarly and non-scholarly information. We may differ on how this need can be fulfilled, but it is there; and its fulfilment or nonfulfillment will do much to decide the future of Africa in relation to the rest of the world.

Notes

1. Cf. Godfrey Tangwa, "Democracy and Development in Africa" in Njiny-Mujinya, L., ed. (forthcoming 1997). *Philosophy in Africa Today*. In Tangwa's words, "Africa is the richest and most variegated continent on earth: geographically, climatically, historically, culturally, linguistically and resourcewise. That much is a palpable fact, requiring neither proof nor, for our purpose here, any further elaboration or analysis. Africa is also paradoxically, the poorest continent on earth. Precisely because of its variegated riches, Africa is the most exploitable as well as exploited continent on earth. So it is on account of its exploitation and exploitability that Africa can be called a paradoxical continent: the richest as well as the poorest continent on earth." (Introduction)

2. In most cases the first and last times that these locals ever have access to the data supplied by them is when they give it in its raw form to the investigator.
3. Founded in 1994, this centre's main aim is to equip the residents of Bugamba subcounty, in South-western Uganda, with relevant data for enabling them to better understand and to take greater advantage of themselves and the world around them. Specifically speaking, it is situated some two hundred miles or so from Kampala City. It is a monument to Eriya Begumisa, a man now pushing eighty-two years, for whom it was gratefully named in recognition of his pioneering work as a religious and secular educator and administrator in that region. Begumisa, who now lives at his farm in Biharwe in Mbarara District, Uganda, was also a shining example as a business entrepreneur while working and residing in Bugamba.
4. What one particularly has in mind here are researchers in any of the humanities and social sciences: History, Religious Studies and Theology, Geography, Education, Literature, Languages, Philosophy, Sociology, Political Science, Women Studies, Anthropology, Economics, Law and so on.
5. Taking account of the fact that local populations, at least members of them, make contributions to researchers' investigations, they deserve to be rewarded for that. One useful way of doing so would be to place at least one copy of one's findings in their information bank. Again since as a rule investigators do not pay those locals that give them information, the best way is to pay them in kind with the copies in point.
6. These data depositories could also serve as archives into which the local populations could collect all important personal and public documents no longer desired by individuals and institutions. Locals and non-locals would actually find these materials of great use when studying and writing about particular issues such as when reconstructing the social-historical record of a given community.

Notes on Contributors

G.E. Azenabor is lecturer in philosophy at Lagos State University and a PhD candidate in African Philosophy.

Wim van Binsbergen is researcher at the *African Studies Centre*, Leiden University, The Netherlands and professor in Anthropology at the *Free University* of Amsterdam. He wrote many scientific books and articles (especially on the subject of religious change in Africa), as well as novels and poems. One of his current activities is to be co-director of a large scale research programme on 'Globalization and the formation of comunal identities'.

T. Ebijuwá teaches philosophy in the Department of General Studies, Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria. His areas of interest are, Logic, Ethics, Feminist philosophy and African philosophy. Recently he wrote a guest editorial "views of women in Yoruba society and their impact on abortion decision" in *Women and Health: a multy-disciplinary journal of women health issues*. Columbia University, 22/3, 1995.

Anke Ganesh is a PhD candidate at the University of Leipzig in Germany. She is studying African philosophy for a number of years. She is preparing a book "Henry Odera Oruka In Memoriam" which will appear this winter at Peter Lang Verlag.

Sémou Pathé Gueye enseigne au Département de philosophie de l'Université Cheikh Anté Diop de Dakar, la philosophie générale, l'histoire de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine et l'épistémologie des sciences sociales. Dans ce cadre, il a une seminaire doctorale sur le theme: "La problematique de la "fin de l'histoire" et l'analyse théorique de l'évolution contemporaine des sociétés africaines". Sa thèse de Doctorat d'Etat en philosophie, "La position du marxisme dans le débat contemporain sur la mort de la philosophie" est ... en 1987 à la Sorbonne (Paris I). Il a publié une vingtaine d'articles dans différentes revues sénégalaises, africaines et internationales sur des questions de la histoire de la philosophie, d'épistémologie et de science politique.

Ho-Won Jeong is a faculty member of Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University. His past research includes the economic causes of conflict and sustainable development. His articles appear in various international journals. Dr. Jeong is currently convener of the International Peace Research Association's Global Political Economy Commission.

Clarence Sholé Johnson is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. He earned his doctorate from McGill University in Canada, specializing in Hume. His areas of research and teaching are Modern Philosophy, Ethics, Epistemology and Elementary Formal Logic.

Dr. Johnson's publications have appeared in major scholarly journals in Canada and the United States, and he has contributed entries on "Essence" and "Event" to the forthcoming Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy" (ed.) V.Y. Mudimbe.

Lansana Keita is professor in Philosophy at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone. He taught at a number of American universities and published a several books and a large number of articles.

L.Njinya-Mujinya is theologian and founder and overall co-ordinator of *JARP* (Journal of African Religion and Philosophy) published in Kampala, Uganda. He was educated at Makerere University, Harvard University and Uppsala University, taught at Makerere University and was director of the Makerere University theology programme for roman catholic seminaries, protestant, and other theological colleges in Eastern and Central Africa.

F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo is lecturer in the department of Philosophy, University of Nairobi, Kenya. His areas of interest are: African Philosophy, Socio-political philosophy, and Logic.

C.B.N. Ogbobo lectures at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts University of Ibadan, Ibadan (Nigeria). One of his interests is the study of the African philosophical past. Recent papers are "Of Origin, Egypt and African Philosophy", and "Explaining the Crisis in African Philosophy - a historical perspective".

G.E.M. Ogutu lectures in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Nairobi and chairman Nairobi of the World Futures Studies Federation.

Kolawole Aderemi Owolabi is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. His doctoral dissertation is on Edmund Husserl's Epistemology. He has published in the *Nigerian Journal of Philosophy*, *Ufahamu*, *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* and other academic journals both within and outside Nigeria. His book: *No Easy Path to Democracy: Reflection on Democratic Transition in Africa* is nearing completion.

Christophe Yahot has a doctorate from the University of Dijon in France and lectures at the Ecole des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, UFR Philosophie et Sciences Sociales of the Université de Bouaké in Ivory Coast.

CUMULATIVE INDEX of QUEST, VOL. I - X

Articles

Adeigbo, F.A.

The metaphysical Presuppositions of the Concept of Teleology in the Nicomachean Ethics. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.71-82.

Ahikire, J.

Bringing Women Back in a Search for alternative Historiographies. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.3-22.

Bello, A.G.A.

Philosophy and an African Language. Vol.I, no.1, pp.5-11.

Bewaji, J.A.I.

Dr. Chr. Neugebauer's Critical Note on Ethnophilosophy in the Philosophical discourse in Africa: some remarks. Vol.V, no.1, pp.95-102.

Truth and Ethics in African Thought: A Reply to Emmanuel Eze. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.76-89.

Binsbergen, W. van

Black Athena and Africa's contribution to global cultural history. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.101-137.

Boele van Hensbroek, P.

Kuhn's Philosophy of Science and the Social Sciences. Vol.I, no.1, pp.67-82.

Social Science as Societal Debate. Vol.I, no.2, pp.68-79.

In Memoriam Roni Khul Bwalya. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.5-9.

Bwalya, R.M. Khui

On Kaundaism. Vol.I, no.1, pp.31-38.

ContRanganathan. Vol.I, no.2, pp.81-92.

The Great Thought: Reflections on Idealism (poem). Vol.IV, no.1, p.65.

Bwele, G.

Axes du Temps en Afrique et en Occident. Vol.V, no.2, pp.48-62.

Carew, G.M.

A Critique of John S. Mbiti's Traditional African Ontology. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.78-91.

Cocks, J.

Cultural Theory looks at Identity and Contradiction. Vol.IV, no.2, pp.38-60.

Depelchin, J.

Beyond Elite Politics: A Comment on Wamba-dia-Wamba's Beyond Elite Politics of Democracy in Africa. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.100-105.

Diagne, O.

Voix et Existence. Vol.V, no.1, pp.36-49.

Diawara, M.

Reading Africa through Foucault: V.Y. Mudimbe's Re-affirmation of the Subject. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.74-93.

Dimi, C.

La Tribu contre l'Etat en Afrique. Vol. VIII, no.1, pp.45-60.

Ebijiwa, T.

Conscience, morality and social acceptability in an African culture, Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.87-98.

Eboh, M.P.

Democracy with an African Flair. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.92-99.

Eze, E.

Truth and Ethics in African Thought. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.4-19.

Federici, S.

Academic Freedom in Africa. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.57-66.

Journey to the native Land. Violence and the Concept of the Self in Fanon and Gandhi. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.47-70.

Gaay Fortman, B. de

Conceptualizing Democracy in an African Context. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.61-75.

Ghadegesin, S.

The Ethics of Polygyny. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.3-30.

Gnanagbe, G.

Le Poète dans la Cité Platonicienne. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.21-34.

Goma, L.K.H.

Foreword. Vol.I, no.1, pp.2-4.

Granness, A.

Interview with professor Peter O. Bodunrin. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.198-210

Gucyc, S.P.

Le "Dépassement de la Philosophie". Réflexion sur le statut contemporain de la philosophie, Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.45-69.

Hallen, B. and Sodipo, O.

The House of the "INU". Keys to the Structure of a Yoruba Theory of the Self. Vol. VIII, no.1, pp.3-24.

Harris, L.

The Characterisation of American Philosophy: The African World as a Reality in American philosophy. Vol.II, no.1, pp.25-36.

Hoffmann, G-R.

European Attitudes to African Philosophy. Vol. VII, no.1, pp.44-55.

Conference report. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.130-134.

Hook, J.M. Van

African Philosophy: Its Quest for Identity. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.28-43.

Hountondji, P.

What Philosophy can do. Vol.I, no.2, pp.3-28.

Occidentalism, elitism: answer to two critics. Vol.III, no.2, pp.3-30.

Hunt, G.

On Anyanwu's Conception of African Aesthetics. Vol.I, no.1, pp.23-29.

Ihonvbere, J.O.

Is Democracy Possible in Africa? The Elites, the People and Civil Society. Vol.VI, no.2, pp.84-108

Irele, D.

Rorty's Critique of Philosophy: The Implications for the Search for a Method in contemporary African Philosophy. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.83-94.

Irung Tshitambal'a Mulang

Mythe et Philosophie; Réponse à Elungu, Towa et autres. Vol.I, no.1, pp.13-22.

Pourquoi cette Fidélité excessive de la Philosophie Négro-Africaine Contemporaine à la Philosophie Occidentale. Vol.II, no.1, pp.3-14.

Jeong, H-W

Politics of discourse on liberal economic reform: the case of Africa. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.173-197

Johnson, C.S.

An analysis of John Mbiti's treatment of the concept of event in African ontologies. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.139-157.

Kambaji wa Kambaji

Quelques Réflexions sur les fondements épistémologique de la Connaissance Sociologique. Vol.II, no.2, pp.53-72.

Kaphagawani, D.N.

Some Issues in contemporary Africa: A philosophical Perspective. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.77-92.

Kapongola Kibambe-Kia-Nkima

Philosophie, Ideologie et acteurs economique en Africa. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.18-41.

Kasanda, S.M.

The African Scholar Through the "UNZA Graduate". Vol.II, no.2, pp.23-29.

Kasi, L.

L'Anti-ideologue dans la lutte Politique en Afrique. Vol.II, no.1, pp.15-22.

Kasongo, P.K. and Kolo, M.

La Presse et les Ideologies ou la Problematique de l'Apolitisme dans le Journalisme. Vol.II, no.1, pp.39-57.

Keita, L.

Sen, Individual Rights and the Paretian liberal. Vol.I, no.1, pp.75-82.

Biology and Sociology - A false Synthesis. Vol.II, no.1, pp. 59-73.

Research Disciplines in the African Context: A Revised Paradigm. Vol.III, no.1, pp.3-19.

Barnes, Bloor and the Sociology of Knowledge. Vol.V, no.2, pp.90-105.

Neoclassical Economics: Science or Ideology? Vol.VII, no.1, pp.56-77.

La Vraie Face de la Democratie: A Note. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.97-103.

On Ethics and scientific Research: A Note. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.116-120.

La Tribu contre l'Etat en Afrique: A Reply to Charles Dimi. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.131-137.

Kigongo, J.K.

Human Rights in the Context of Uganda's Political Experience. Vol.V, no.1, pp.74-79.

Kimmerle, H.

The Question of Relevance in current Nigerian Philosophy. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.66-73.

Non-Africans on African Philosophy. Steps to a difficult Dialogue. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.69-77.

Kiros, T.

The Concept of Self-Determination and the Crisis in the Horn of Africa. Vol.I, no.2, pp.53-67.

Foucault on Language and Power: A Reconstruction. Vol.III, no.2, pp.53-84.

A practical Idea of Blackness. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.25-44.

Kishani, B.T.

Language Problems in Anglophone Cameroon. Present Writers and future Readers. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.101-129.

Khuyskens, J.

World Conference of Philosophy (report). Vol.V, no.2, pp.115-116.

Koenis, S.

Dewey and Merton on Science and Democracy. Vol.III, no.1, pp.76-83.

Kolo, M. and Kasongo, P.K.

La Presse et les Idéologies ou la Problématique de l'Apolitisme dans le Journalisme. Vol.II, no.1, pp.39-57.

Konaté, Y.

Le Syndrome Hampâté Bâ ou Comment Naissent les Proverbes. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.23-46.

Kresse, K.

Interview with Odera Oruka, Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.22-31.

Kudadjie, J.N.

Some implications of the Dangme concept of SëSëë for moral philosophy and moral education, Vol.IX, no.2, pp.

Lalèyè, I-P.

Conscience et Culture. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.10-27.

Temps et Développement. Vol.VI, no.2, pp.

Langley, W.

The Right of Self-Determination in International Law. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.4-17.

Lauer, H.

Saying is not Believing: Some Fallacies of Fundamentalism. Vol.VI, no.2, pp.

Realities of 'Social Construct': A Comment on Appiah's "Illusions of Race".

Vol.VII, no.2, pp.107-113.

Lungu, G.F.

Pragmatism or Crude Utility? A Critique of the Education with Production Movement in Contemporary Africa. Vol.V, no.2, pp.74-89.

Makhabane, T.E., Ramose, M.B. and Maphala, T.G.T.

In Search of a Workable and Lasting Constitutional Change in South Africa.

Vol.V, no.2, pp.4-31.

Maphala, T.G.T., Ramose, M.B. and Makhabane, T.E.

In Search of a Workable and Lasting Constitutional Change in South Africa.

Vol.V, no.2, pp.4-31.

Miller, S.R.

Just War Theory and the ANC's armed Struggle. Vol.IV, no.2, pp.80-102.

Freedom of the Media: A philosophical Analysis. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.67-84.

Mombo Kubele N'Suka

Causalité et Réalité chez Jean Piaget: Approche Critique de l'Epistémologie Génétique. Vol.III, no.2, pp.85-91.

Mudimbe, V.Y.

Response. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.99-101.

Muhigirwa Rusembuka, S.J.

Critique Nietzscheenne de la Métaphysique: Aurore ou Crépuscule? Vol.I, no.1, pp.55-65.

Nauta, L.W.

Dogmatists and their Critics - A Philosophical Inquiry into the Roots of Rigidity. Vol.II, no.2, pp.31-51.

Neugebauer, C.

Ethnophilosophy in the Philosophical Discourse in Africa: A critical Note. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.42-64.

Hegel and Kant - A Refutation of their Racism. Vol.V, no.1, pp.50-73.

Ngoma-Binda, P.

La Vraie Face de la Démocratie. Définition, Vertus et Limites. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.31-56.

Nieuwenhuijze, C.A.O. van

Culture and Development: On the Prospect of paradigm Change. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.35-66.

Njinya-Mujinya, L.

Information banks in rural Africa: A lacking building block, Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.227-235

Ocaya, V.

Logic, Fallacy and the Law of Evidence. Vol.III, no.1, pp.32-44.

Ochieng'-Odhiambo, F.

An African savant: Henry Odera Oruka. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.12-21.

Ogbobo, C.B.N.

Some problems in the writing of the history of African philosophy, Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.159-171

Ogutu, G.E.M.

Weep not ... philosophers never die. The death of a giant, the dilemma of the dilettante and the disintegration of a discipline. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.5-11.

Okolo, C.B.

'Wonder' as Path to African Philosophy. Vol.III, no.1, pp.20-31.

The ontological Status of African Folk-Philosophy. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.106-115.

Oladipo, O.

Morality in Yoruba Thought. Vol.I, no.2, pp.42-51.

Towards a philosophical Study of African Culture: A Critique of Traditionalism. Vol.III, no.2, pp.31-51.

On a History of African Philosophy (Conference Report). Vol.IX, no.1, pp.138-141.

Oruka, H.O.

For the Sake of Truth - Response to Wiredu's Critique of "Truth and Belief". Vol.II, no.2, pp.3-21.

Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy: Obstacles in philosophical Dialogues. Vol.IV, no.2, pp.20-37.

Parental Earth Ethics. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.20-29.

Rejoinders. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.106-109.

Jaranogi Oginga Odinga, a Eulogy. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.95-100.

Outlaw, L.

The Deafening Silence of the "Guiding Light": American Philosophy and the Problem of the Color Line. Vol.I, no.1, pp.39-50.

Owolabi, K.A.

African philosophy and the African crisis. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.33-42.

Oyugi, E.

Human Rights in Africa. Vol.III, no.1, pp.46-59.

Procee, H.

Beyond Universalism and Relativism. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.44-55.

Ramose, M.B.

Hobbes and the Philosophy of International Relations. Vol.V, no.1, pp.18-35.

African Democratic Tradition: Oneness, Consensus and Openness: A Reply to Wamba-dia-Wamba. Vol.VI, no.2, pp.

God is late, what next Prof. Van der Walt? Vol.IX, no.1, pp.85-105.

- Ramose, M.B., Maphala, T.G.T. and Makhabane, T.E.
In Search of a Workable and Lasting Constitutional Change in South Africa. Vol.V, no.2, pp.4-31.
- Salami, Y.K.
Anomalous Monism and the Mind-Body Problem. Vol.V, no.2, pp.106-114.
- Scholze, W.
Human Rights between Universalism and Relativism. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.56-68.
- Serequeberhan, T.
African Philosophy: An Exposition. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.93-106.
- Sodipo, O. and Hallen, B.
The House of the "INU". Keys to the Structure of a Yoruba Theory of the Self. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.3-24.
- Sterling, M.C.
The ethical Thought of Martin Luther King. Vol.V, no.1, pp.80-94.
- Sogolo, G.
Popper's Hermeneutics and African Thought. Vol.II, no.2, pp.75-85.
- Storm, W.
Bantoe-Filosofie vs. Bantu Philosophy. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.67-76.
- Tangwa, G.B.
Criticism and Survival. An Interpretation of Popper's Theory of Evolution. Vol.V, no.2, pp.32-47.
- Colonial Legacy and the Language Situation in Cameroon.* Vol.VI, no.2, pp.24-43.
- Colonial Legacy and the Language Question in Cameroon: A Reply to dissenting Voices. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.121-130.
- Tchafu Mwamba
Afrique, Ou Est-Elle? Vol.I, no.1, pp.51-53.
- Uroh, J.
Colonialism and the Language Question: A Reply to Godfrey Tangwa. Vol. VIII, no.2, pp.130-139.
- Uyanne, F.
Truth, Ethics and Divination in Igbo and Yoruba Traditions: A Reply to Emmanuel Eze. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.90-96.
- Wamba-dia-Wamba, E.
Philosophy and African Intellectuals: Mimesis of Western Classicism, ethnophilosophical Romanticism or African Self-Mastery? Vol.V, no.1, pp.4-17.
- Homage to the Great African Savant Cheikh Ante Diop.* Vol.V, no.2, pp.63-73.

- Beyond Elite Politics of Democracy in Africa*. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.28-43.
- The Place of Pan-Africanism in World History*. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.3-20.
- Wanjohi, G.J.
- St. Thomas Aquina's Philosophy of Education*. Vol.II, no.2, pp.87-104.
- Westerman, P.
- The European Example. A Continent Path towards Democracy*. Vol.III, no.1, pp.60-74.
- Wiredu, K.
- La Question de la Violence dans la Philosophie Contemporaine Africaine*. Vol.I, no.2, pp.30-40.
- Are There Cultural Universals?* Vol.IV, no.2, pp.4-19.
- Yahot, C.
- La culture comme force*. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.71-84.
- Zolua, B.M.
- De l'Idéologie comme Correlat des Termes Idéologiste et Idéologue*. Vol.IV, no.2, pp.62-79.

Reviews

- Birt, R.E.
- A returning to the source: the philosophy of Alaine Locke* edited by L. Harris. Vol.IV, no.2, pp.103-113.
- Bcwaji, T.
- Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* edited by H. Odera Oruka. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.104-111.
- African Philosophy - Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and contemporary African Realities* by Segun Gbadegesin. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.140-147.
- Boele van Hensbroek, P.
- Praxis International*. Vol.I, no.1, pp.83-85.
- Einführung in die Afrikanische Philosophie* by C. Neugebauer. Vol.V, no.1, pp.114-117.
- Philosophie, Ideologie und Gesellschaft in Afrika: Wien 1989* edited by C. Neugebauer. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.87-90.
- Carew, G.M.
- Empowering People: Building Community, Civil Associations and Legality in Africa* edited by R. Sandbrook and M. Halfani. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.150-154.

Harriott, I.H.

The theory and practice of autonomy by S. Dworkin. Vol.V, no.1, pp.118-122.

Hoffmann, G-R.

Philosophie in Afrika - afrikanische Philosophie by H. Kimmerle. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.78-83.

Irele, D.

Democracy and Socialism in Africa edited by R. Cohen and H. Goulbourne. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.117-120.

Kaphagawani, D.N.

Oginga Odinga: His Philosophy and Beliefs edited by I.I.O. Oruka. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.110-113.

Kasanda, S.

Philosophy of Education and Education of Philosophy by C.B. Okolo. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.102-105.

Keita, L.

On Wiredu's "Philosophy and an African Culture" and Hountondji's "African Philosophy: Myth and Reality". Vol.II, no.1, pp.74-80.

After Philosophy - End or Transformation edited by K. Baynes, J. Bohman and T. McCarthy. Vol.III, no.1, pp.84-88.

Anthropology as Cultural Critique by G.E. Marcus and M.M.J. Fischer. Vol.III, no.2, pp.92-94.

The Invention of Africa by V.Y. Mudimbe. Vol.IV, no.1, pp.94-99.

Eurocentrism by S. Amin. Vol.V, no.1, pp.104-113.

Civilization or Barbarism by C.A. Diop. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.113-120.

Economics - Mathematical Politics or Science of Diminishing Returns by Alexander Rosenberg. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.148-151.

Meaning and development by T. Serequeberhan. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.211-217

The hermeneutics of African philosophie by M.Kebede. Vol.IX, no.2/Vol.X, no.1, pp.218-226

Kluyskens, J.

The essential readings of African Philosophy by T. Serequeberhan. Vol.VI, no.1, pp.84-87.

In my Father's House by Anthony Appiah. Vol. VII, no.2, pp.114-116.

More, M.

Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning by David Theo Goldberg. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.142-149.

Ngoma-Binda, P.

Réciprocité - Coopération et le Système Palabrique Africain. Tradition et Herméneutique dans les théories du développement de la conscience morale chez Piaget, Kohlberg et Habermas par Olivier Ndjimbi-Tshiende. Vol.VIII, no.2, pp.152-159.

Owalobi, K.A.

The Idea of African Philosophy by Olusegun Oladipo. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.121-126.

Ramose, M.B.

Postkoloniales Philosophieren: Afrika edited by H. Nagl-Docekal and F.M. Wimmer. Vol.VII, no.1, pp.121-124.

Visible Injustice looking for Invisible Justice by Hennie P.P. Lötter. Vol.VIII, no.1, pp.112-124.

Ranuga, T.K.

Negotiating change in South Africa by M.B. Ramose. Vol.V, no.2, pp.120-123.

Storm, W.

Journal review: Educação e Filosofia. Vol. IV, no.2, pp.114-116.

Philosophy of Liberation by E. Dussel. Vol.V, no.2, pp.117-119.

Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel by Olusegun Oladipo. Vol.VII, no.2, pp.127-129.

Technology Education: A Christian Perspective. IRS study-pamphlets. Vol.V-III, no.1, pp.125-127.

Udefi, A.

In the Tracks of African Predicament: Philosophy and contemporary Socio-Economic and Political Problems of Africa by Dipò Irele. Vol.IX, no.1, pp.1-55-157.

Editeurs:

Tunde Bewaji (University of the West Indies, Jamaica; Ogun State University, Nigeria)

Pieter Boele van Hensbroek (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

Issiaka-Prospér Lalèyè (Université de Saint Louis, Sénégal)

Dismas Masolo (Antioch University, USA; University of Nairobi, Kenya)

Editeur Afrique oriental:

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania)

Conceil Editorial:

Clive Dillon-Malone (University of Zambia, Lusaka)

Paulin Hountondji (Université de Cotonou, Bénin)

Gatian Lungu (University of Zambia, Lusaka)

Lolle Nauta (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

Henry Odera Oruka (University of Nairobi, Kenya)

Kwasi Wiredu (Univ. of South Florida, USA; University of Ghana, Legon)

Production: Laurence Charpentier, Sarah Lewis et Willem Storm

QUEST: Philosophical Discussions est une revue africaine de philosophie qui sert de moyen d'expression pour les penseurs en Afrique et qui vise à stimuler une discussion philosophique sur les problèmes surgissant des transformations radicales dont l'Afrique et les Africains sont témoins.

QUEST contient des points de discussion actuels se rapportant à l'Afrique et des questions d'intérêt philosophique général, et s'adresse à un public international de philosophes professionnels et d'autres intellectuels qui sont intéressés par la philosophie. Des articles originaux écrits en anglais ou en français sont publiés, avec un résumé en français ou anglais respectivement.

QUEST paraît deux fois par an.

Contributions: les articles ne devront pas dépasser les 6000 mots et devront être accompagnés d'un résumé d'un maximum de 200 mots. Le résumé devra être en français de préférence quand l'article est en anglais, et *vice-versa*.

Abonnements: US\$ 35 (institutions); US\$ 25 (personnes; Afrique: US\$ 20 (institutions); US\$ 15 (personnes).

Quest, P.O. Box 9114, 9703 LC Groningen, Pays-Bas

CONTENTS

Quest Vol.IX/2, Vol.X/1

G.E.M. Ogutu	
<i>Weep not ... philosophers never die. The death of a giant, the dilemma of the dilettante and the disintegration of a discipline</i>	5
F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo	
<i>An African savant: Henry Odera Oruka</i>	12
Kai Kresse	
<i>Interview with professor Henry Odera Oruka</i>	22
Kolawole Aderemi Owolabi	
<i>African philosophy and the African crisis</i>	33
Sémou Pathé Gueye	
<i>Le "Dépassement de la Philosophie". Réflexion sur le statut contemporain de la philosophie</i>	45
Christophe Yahot	
<i>La culture comme force</i>	71
T. Ebijuwa	
<i>Conscience, morality and social acceptability in an African culture</i>	87
Wim van Binsbergen	
<i>Black Athena and Africa's contribution to global cultural history</i>	101
Clarence Sholé Johnson	
<i>An analysis of John Mbiti's treatment of the concept of event in African ontologies</i>	139
C.B.N. Ogbobo	
<i>Some problems in the writing of the history of African philosophy</i>	159
Ho-Won Jeong	
<i>Politics of discourse on liberal economic reform: the case of Africa</i>	173
Anke Graness	
<i>Interview with professor Peter O. Bodunrin</i>	198
Lansana Keita	
<i>The hermeneutics of African philosophie (review)</i>	211
Lansana Keita	
<i>Meaning and development (review)</i>	218
L. Njinya-Mujinya	
<i>Information banks in rural Africa: A lacking building block</i>	227
Notes on Contributors	236
Cumulative Index QUEST, Vol. I - X	238