

## CONCEPTUAL TAKE-OFF CONDITIONS FOR A BANTU PHILOSOPHY

We still cannot speak<sup>1</sup> of a Bantu philosophy today—or, more generally, of a Negro-African philosophy—without referring first of all to a pioneer work: *La philosophie Bantou*, by R. P. Tempels,<sup>2</sup> which in 1948 created for the first time an orthodoxy in this hitherto unexplored, or nearly unexplored, field. The fact that this orthodoxy has become accepted would certainly not be enough to justify a heresy. But there may, however, be good reasons to reject it.

In its time R. P. Tempels' work was well received, on the whole with sympathy by the Europeans whom it endeavored to reach, and with unreserved enthusiasm by the intellectuals of Central and West Africa, for whom it opened a way back to their native roots. Quite apart at the moment from any question of philosophy, the author interpreted something essentially and inherently African.

Taking this work for what it was originally intended to

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<sup>1</sup> The text of a lecture given at the Goethe Institute of Léopoldville, March 19, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Editions de *Présence Africaine*.

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be—a kind of guide to the Bantu soul for the use of colonizers—we should confine ourselves to a criticism only of its title. Furthermore, taking it for what it is intended to be—an impetus to systematic studies in the indicated direction—, it would not behoove us to reproach it for being incomplete, frequently too general, and, on a few points of detail, debatable. His understanding of the Bantu world entitles even R. P. Tempels to be the conveyor, in a word, of certain explanatory hypotheses that stem from the period of back-room ethnology and that are frequently distorted by superficial, even inexact documentation. Considering the dual purpose of the book, we cannot but pay tribute to the genuine sympathy to which it attests.

But we should nonetheless not ignore the fact that the work claims to be an outline of a philosophy and that it soon became customary among many African and even non-African intellectuals to quote it, to use it as such, and to disregard the enormous distance that separates an impetus from a first work.

A frank reappraisal appears to us to be in order, starting with the work in question. We would like to undertake it here by attempting to answer in order the following two questions:

1) Does a Bantu philosophy, within the admissible sense of the term “philosophy,” currently exist?<sup>3</sup>

2) In case the answer to the first question is negative, under what conditions could a Bantu philosophy be founded?

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### I. DOES A BANTU PHILOSOPHY CURRENTLY EXIST?

In sum, R. P. Tempels' work embodies a concept of life native to the Bantu peoples—also shared by all the peoples of black Africa—and centered about the idea of a vital force. The universe is conceived as a network of vital forces in perpetual interaction, in which the hierarchy of “beings” is based in relative

<sup>3</sup> The conference at which this article was originally presented was addressed to an audience composed in major part of Congolese students at the University of Léopoldville. We were confident that they would prefer as a matter of principle the bothersome, perhaps unpleasant truth to the maintenance of comforting illusions.

order, it seems, on their degree of condensation or intensity. The *muntu*, man-person, naturally enters into this vitalized universe, from which the dead are by no means excluded. Bantu ethics applies the practical norms inspired at the same time by respect for the hierarchy of forces, established as values, and the obligation, more or less individualized, to increase the force at one's own disposal.

Three aspects of R. P. Tempels' statement may be debated:

1) His title, because it is based on a confusion between the experienced and the reflective, or, if one prefers, between the common and the informed meaning of the word "philosophy;"

2) The persistence of this kind of confusion all through the work, in particular every time it is a question of philosophy, metaphysics, ontology, or even psychology;

3) In general, a nebulous basis and philosophical terminology make suspect many of his affirmations: those, for instance, that concern the relations between philosophy and science and lead to the belief that a Bantu "philosophy" could survive in a civilization receptive to science and modern techniques.

We will tackle the first of these three weak points; the others follow naturally. We will begin by demonstrating the confusion inherent in the title. Then we will take up the regrettable effects caused by this confusion, in the course of which we must point to the unintentional and compromising offshoots of Tempels' work.

Even taking into account some innovations of contemporary philosophy and what makes for the originality of great philosophical traditions, other than the Western, it is still permissible—and in some respects more than ever—to define philosophy as follows: as explicit, abstract analytical reflection, sharply critical and autocritical, which is systematic, at least in principle, and yet open, dealing with experience, its human condition, and the meanings and values that it reveals.

The field of experience to which philosophical reflection applies is the broadest possible: it covers moral, religious, political, esthetic, technical, and everyday experience, and, naturally, educated experience, or scientific experience in all fields, which is continuously being enriched and evolved into theories.

With regard to the term "reflection," it should be understood

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in the positive sense of a return from the object to the subject, of a questioning of the subject within the subject-object relationship. The subject is not precisely a particular, individual subject, but rather an impersonal or collective subject, distributed in space and throughout time, and expressed or projected into language. It follows from this that the return to the subject, the movement of reflection, could take the express form of a return toward language (whether this is everyday language, or some specialized language). Now this return toward the subject (that of a certain experience), or toward the language constituted by the subject—if reflection at least is denied the facilities of the implicit—will have to make itself explicit in turn in a new language, be it conceived as a language *on* the new language, or be it a language *on* the experience related to the subject, a language *on* lived experience. This second language, which is moreover critical and autocritical, is in the last analysis that of philosophy, philosophy of speech. To sum up, philosophical reflection requires the recognition and exploitation of a certain distinction between the subject and object, even if it must be stressed later that this thematic distinction remains tributary to a primordial, pre-reflective distinction. On the other hand, to qualify this reflection as critical, is to grant that it judges and reasons, that it is reason, that it is spoken in rational discourse, even though the latter might bear on an earlier language or on a perfectly irrational experience.

To reply in the negative, we would say that there is no implicit philosophy; that there is no irrational philosophy; that there is no naive or immediate philosophy; that philosophical language is not a language *of* experience but a language *on* experience or on the language of experience. We might add, contemporary examples to the contrary being only apparent, that there is no such thing as a visionary philosophy, composed of disparate parts, which excludes any line of systematism.

On the contrary, a *vision of the world*, provided it is expressed, is language *of* lived experience, language *of* experience (tied to a particular experience), language of life or action, poetic or not, of whatever kind, charged with symbols; that it is immediate and uncritical language; and that nothing can prevent it from being visionary and, up to a certain point, irrational.

For, what R. P. Tempels sets forth, or rather sums up, and partially interprets, is nothing more nor less than a vision of the world: a vision of the world perceived and experienced as an anthropocentric network of vital forces in constant interaction. This vision of the world is, on the whole, coherent, the conveyor of a code of morals, of a religion, and of a tradition of wisdom. It is in no way a philosophy.

This statement calls for just a minor qualification. To the exact extent to which R. P. Tempels assembles his materials (oral tradition, anecdotes, the sentences of tribunals, proverbs, fragments of myths), to the extent to which he chooses, translates, and finally also *rationalizes* his own language, does he place in perspective the language or the experience, whose faithful interpreter he aspires to be; only to this extent does he initiate reflection. Nevertheless, at no time does the recorder language or the language recorded become critical: they do not object, dispute or question, for example, by measuring themselves with other languages and other visions of the world. The language recorded remains in any case a mythical language, the expression of what is now called, following Schelling, mythical consciousness, *acquired in* primordial experience.

The title of R. P. Tempels' work is therefore based on a misunderstanding, on an error of vocabulary, if not a confusion of the levels of thought: it substitutes the usage of the term "philosophy" in common parlance for its informed usage.

This misunderstanding in itself could have remained harmless. Moreover there is no reason why the common usage of the term "philosophy" should be condemned. Clyde Kluckhohn's article on "The philosophy of the Navajo Indians," published in 1949, had no deleterious effects. Nothing prevents the formulation of a "philosophy" of the Croatian peasant or the German industrialist, provided it is done, as it were, in quotation marks or, at least, that it avoids confusing a vision of the world and the philosophy that exploits it. But R. P. Tempels' work conserves the misunderstanding, because it does not dispel it.

The most serious result is that this confusion has established a fashion. Quoting Tempels, African and sometimes non-African authors—such as J. Jahn—have come to depend on this Bantu "philosophy." The semantic error has even been generalized.

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Without any precautionary distinction made between lived experience and reflection, allusions to the "psychology of knowledge," to "traditional metaphysics," to "existential dialectics," to the "logic of black Africa" have multiplied.<sup>4</sup> And the contexts in which these badly controlled designations appear unfortunately only increase the confusion.

Everything is treated in this literature somewhat as though it were enough to give a name to something (disciplines or methods) for it to exist. It seems to us that it is high time to end the period of complacency toward these quid pro quos, for which sooner or later the Negro-African intellectuals will have to pay the price (unless heaven knows what nefarious conspirators have an interest in their remaining deceptive as long as possible).

The truth is that some are ready to consciously perpetuate the mystification as a lesser evil. What does it matter, they reason, if it is a lie, if this lie is effective, if it contributes to the reawakening of African cultural consciousness. What does it matter—we interpret here—if we talk of a Bantu philosophy before such a philosophy exists, if the anticipation itself contributes to make it exist. We have strong doubts that those intellectuals from black Africa who have really come to adopt critical reflection and have accepted all its risks, could still agree today to perpetuate a fraud. At any rate we cannot fail to hope not.

Following in the line of "Bantu philosophy," we should mention separately *The Bantu-Rwanda Philosophy of Being*,<sup>5</sup> a work by A. Kagame which develops further and sums up, by way of a linguistic investigation, R. P. Tempels' statements.

Even if this work deals only with a vision of the world, at least two distinctive features should be recognized. In the first place, the author follows very closely throughout an established language, the Kinyarwanda, the repository of the Bantu-Rwanda

<sup>4</sup> This counter-sense—and others of the same genre—pervade the various articles gathered in the volume *Aspects de la culture noire*, Paris, Fayard, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences coloniales*, N.S. XII, 1, Brussels, 1956. The author uses the "Bantu" graph; we keep the term "Bantu" for the sake of uniformity.

vision of the world, which is in accord with that of the earlier work. Further, the reflection here is better evolved, even though it falls short of being critical.

The type of procedure used by Kagame may be described as follows: he depends, in the first place, on a very general system of concepts borrowed from Aristotle, among others, the group of categories of being; he then looks for the approximate correspondences of these concepts in certain Kinyarwanda categories, which had been established previously by grammarians into grammatical categories, that is, the four categories or classes of being:

- umuntu* (man, thinking substance);
- ikintu* (thing, non-thinking substance);
- abantu* (place, combining space and time);
- ukuntu* (modality, encompassing the seven Aristotelian categories: quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, position and possession).

Kagame considers other concepts in a like manner: existence, cause, end, knowledge, will, and ethical concepts such as good, evil, interdiction, etc. In the process he delineates the Bandu-Rwanda ontology, cosmology, theory of knowledge and ethics.

To what extent does reflection enter into this scheme, and how far is it developed? Aristotelian concepts serve the author as "instruments," as he himself explains. We would prefer to call them *reflectors*. The grammatical categories of the Kinyarwanda are thought through in Aristotelian concepts and, with a few adjustments, are promoted into philosophical concepts. Furthermore Kagame takes the trouble to justify, as briefly as possible, his method; he furnishes a few explanations concerning the reflector concepts and, occasionally, points out the differences between these and reflected concepts.

Nevertheless, at no time does critical reflection intervene. At the point where the author appears on the verge of serious reflection, he turns back, satisfied, to the Bantu-Rwanda vision of the world and his instruments. These latter, finally, as the vision of the world itself, are merely arranged, regrouped, "rationalized," with the result that they are sometimes inflated.

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We will easily allow such imagery as “the borders of the world,” an expression that means literally, “the country’s borders,” or others such as “where the sky is supported by palisades of reeds” (p. 158). But when Kagame pretends to extract the principle that “all that has a surface must have a limit,” the representation of the world in three stages, borrowed from a Rwanda tale, or that “no body is infinite,” we must agree that he is guessing; he is no longer describing, and since neither does he criticize, we must say that he is magnifying, that he is extrapolating.

Basically, Kagame hesitates between an inventory in which the concepts are sociological, or linguistic generalizations, and a critique of this inventory, which would be the only thing liable to authorize its constructive philosophical usage. An inventory of philosophical *virtualities* of a language is one thing; the application of these virtualities to the consideration of a problem or a sum of given philosophical problems is another.

The title of Kagame’s book and finally his entire project are an improvement over R. P. Temples’ misconception. If one takes the position that the confusion of the types or levels of thought constitutes somewhat more than a minor error, one would be inclined to prefer, because of its more modest scope, the recent tract by F. Lufuluabo on the Luba concept of being, in which this time the inventory of a few philosophical virtualities, those of the Tshiluba, does not arrogate to itself the name of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Let’s talk plainly. If we do not intend to compromise, in Africa, the project itself of philosophy, to confound the informed use of this term with its indiscriminate use, it must be conceded that a Bantu philosophy does not exist. What does exist, certainly, is a vision of the world proper to the Bantus, a vision that is cohesive, original, a nucleus of wisdom. Given favorable circumstances, it could have at one time given birth to a philosophy in the full sense of the term. We now must pose the question, under what conditions and within what limits could it still do so.

<sup>6</sup> *La notion luba-bantoue de l’être*, Documents et Recherches, Centre Eglise Vivante, Louvain, 1964.

## II. UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS AND WITHIN WHAT LIMITS COULD A BANTU PHILOSOPHY BE ESTABLISHED TODAY?

The eventual founding of a Bantu philosophy requires a set of necessary conditions, some general (conditions that are obligatory for the awakening of any philosophical tradition), the others particular to the situation of Bantu Africa and also of black Africa in general.<sup>7</sup> We believe we can re-group them into five categories which we will examine in turn, although very summarily.

1) In order to found a philosophical tradition, it would be necessary, naturally, to have qualified personnel, philosophers, native or imported, in sufficient number—enough pathfinders to inspire a creator. Barring a miracle, the blossoming of philosophical vocations sufficiently numerous to initiate a tradition would require without delay a cultural environment, open to culture in the broad sense, not just to techniques; a cultural environment which, if it does not give an impetus to vocations, is at least receptive to them, instead of letting them atrophy on the fringe of society. In contemporary black Africa, this *tête d'oeuvre*, if we may call it this, would almost certainly be recruited from among university people with the requisite orientation toward philosophical acquisition, whether it is directly or indirectly, through the momentum generated by contact with some awakening discipline.

But an initial difficulty arises from the apparently reduced number of Bantu students who are really, or at least professionally, interested in their cultural heritage. At any rate at the University of Léopoldville, very few students pursue studies on cultural anthropology and African philology. Moreover—and as much as a limited experience could teach us—there are hardly any who are truly informed about their customs, their oral literature and their mythology.

This is not to do them an injustice. Not seeing clearly where Africa is headed, they nevertheless are aware that, for better

<sup>7</sup> We call attention to the fact that we have not concluded that there is no Negro-African philosophy, although the credit side of the balance sheet may be meager: works of L. S. Senghor, Alioune Diop, Sékou Touré and Kwame N'Krumah. We will deal later with the work of N'Krumah.

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or worse, it is committed on a road, no doubt irreversible, of exchanges with technically and culturally developed countries. But a fruitful pursuit of this system of exchange requires more and more positive knowledge of all types: economic, juridical, social, mathematical, physical, biological, etc. Quite naturally, the Bantu student—and in general the student from black Africa—feels more secure in this area, even if it is only a superficial security, menaced by ground swells.

To say that a Bantu or a Negro-African student is uprooted culturally is not a cliché. If traditional values are not foreign to him, he is at least indifferent to or distrustful of them. Hence, the virulence of certain Africanist demands are explained by the bias that springs from a bad conscience. But, apart from their excesses, they are no less signs that a readjustment to the policy of acculturation may follow a necessary, if however not sufficient, condition for the founding of a Bantu philosophy.

Concretely speaking, on the level of university teaching, an eventual cycle of philosophical studies in the true sense could be tied to cultural anthropology and African philology, without however allowing itself to be completely incorporated.<sup>8</sup> Its followers could comprise linguists as well as anthropologists having speculative pursuits as well as philosophical dispositions receptive to some form of African re-acculturation.

2) It is not unthinkable that a Bantu philosophy could be elaborated within a vacuum. But from the start, instruments of analysis, controls and reflectors would have to be available. Philosophical creation throughout the ages has only very rarely ceased depending on the fruitful use of powerful reflectors. Aristotle "reflected himself" on Plato, Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle, Kant on Hume, Jaspers on Kierkegaard, Sartre on Heidegger and Hegel, Radhakrishnan on Bergson; and, more generally, the innovating current in India on a certain selected Western tradition, following the example of what was done for nearly a century by Japanese philosophy.

Reflectors, so frequently indispensable for a renewal, are necessary *a fortiori* to the founding of a philosophy; today more than ever, if we consider the road taken by thinking humanity

<sup>8</sup> Its establishment is doubtless not possible in Congolese universities.

from the beginning of this axial period, as Jaspers calls it, which between the ninth and fourth century before our era witnessed the progressive detachment of philosophical reflection from myth, simultaneously in India, the Far East and Greece. It is difficult to conceive of how a Negro-African culture, which is ambitious to create for itself a true philosophy, could save itself the trouble of prolonged or even permanent contact with at least one of the great existing philosophical traditions. Without constant airing, philosophical thought, more than any other, becomes retarded and dulled, precisely because it does not respond to a vital urgency.<sup>9</sup>

Hence it follows that there could be no Bantu philosophy—or Negro-African philosophy—worthy of the name without the deliberate acceptance of a well-conceived cultural cross-breeding.

The question is frequently raised these days in Africa of the necessity to put an end to cultural cross-breeding.<sup>10</sup> This is an explosive attitude that needs urgent clarification. For what does it mean? What would be the sense of doing away with cultural cross-breeding? Perfect assimilation is a utopia. Is a program of perfect counter-acculturation any better? Some people who want a happy future for black Africa would be glad to see it left entirely to itself, in a situation of radical challenge, conducive to the advent of a creative civilization. Let us pass over the unlikelihood of this and simply ask, without pursuing the point, whether there are not good, less good and bad situations of challenge. Is the situation of challenge in which black Africa finds itself at this moment in any case not enough? Would not the intention to radicalize it be to cede to the dangerous temptation of revolutionary purism, which in any event in black Africa has not engendered anything convincing. Perfect assimilation and rigorous counter-acculturation both being rejected, if we admit then that a reasonable counter-acculturation cannot escape compromise and if an attempt is made at some sort

<sup>9</sup> We carefully avoid reducing philosophy to the level of ideology (in the sense of a minimal speculation closely tied to a concerted action.)

<sup>10</sup> Cf. B. Verhaegen, "L'université et les étudiants. Sociologie d'une grève," *Présence Africaine*, December 1964.

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of "naturalization" of science and technique that would not be a farce, why then still attack cultural cross-breeding? The exhortation to put an end to it is no more than a dangerous slogan, more liable to prolong a state of upheaval and deviate precious energies than to eradicate the psychological consequences of the colonial period.

Moreover, "cultural cross-breeds" are not lacking in the world's philosophical tradition. The Arabs are heirs of Aristotle, the Scholastics, of the Arabs. Spinoza, Wittgenstein and Berdiaeff were cultural cross-breeds, as, closer to our time, any number of Germans and Poles who emigrated to Anglo-Saxon countries, the majority of contemporary Japanese philosophers and, nearly everywhere outside of the West, the thinkers who have rallied to Marxism.

After all, to be a cultural cross-breed ceases to be a stigma, once one recognizes it as such, once one accepts it and proceeds from there. In the perspective of a civilization of the universal,<sup>11</sup> it is at the worst a lesser evil and it could be a positive force.

3) Furthermore, the founding of a Bantu philosophy would require an inventory of values to be preserved: attitudes, original linguistic resources,<sup>12</sup> certain mental categories, and finally symbols that as symbols are food for thought, as P. Ricoeur recently put it.

The inventory would have in any event to remain flexible. What is important to preserve are not ready-made affirmations, fixed representations or some system of rigid categories, too easily shaken by scientific or technical experience, nor artificially reaffirmed myths in a technical-scientific world which does not cease to invalidate them. It is a question rather of preserving inspirations, some hierarchy of values that would retain in its place an enriched concept of *muntu* (person), some form of joint liability in re-examining, in view of the upheaval in social, political and economic structures, the dynamic schemas and

<sup>11</sup> To use the happy expression of U. Campagnolo, "L'Afrique entre dans l'histoire," *Comprendre*, 21-22, 1960, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> We presume that this philosophy would be expressed in Bantu language. This may not be indispensable. But we are skirting the question, as the even more delicate one of the choice of the most adequate of the dominant languages.

symbols extracted from the mythology of vital forces (for instance, the concept of cosmic solidarism, the understanding of the world as a word). These inspirations, these forms, these patterns and symbols, applied to specific philosophical problems, could serve as the basis for a philosophy of life or a philosophy of the logos that would naturally have to be in accord with the findings of contemporary science. To preserve inspirations and symbols is approximately what Spinoza had in mind, as a philosopher concerned with morals and politics, when he rethought the basic tenets of Judaic tradition. He was schooled in this tradition as well as in Cartesian logic.

4) We would like to regroup a fourth set of conditions under a term borrowed from aeronautics, through the intermediary of the economic theory of development, and submit that there will be no Bantu philosophy without an undertaking such as a *conceptual take-off*. The problem is not, of course, to extract from this obligation a slogan. It is doubtless vain to attempt to planify or decree a cultural take-off and to locate it later on with precision. It should come about naturally through the impetus acquired in a protracted and intensified effort toward acculturation. As a matter of fact, it is in the making.

In short, first of all, by "take-off" we mean the purposeful entry into an age of mature, critical, autocritical and constructive thought. In Kagame's book, as we have seen, there is a glimmer of reflection. It occurs within the framework of, but does not go beyond, the present movement in Africa of a return to its past, which J. Jahn, the author of *Muntu*, places at the core of his concept of Neo-African culture. The movement of return leads directly to an inventory. We know what this inventory consists of in Kagame's thesis: a system of general concepts lifted out of grammatical categories. A study of the sociology of knowledge would uncover a system of mental categories in harmony with a world of small, enclosed societies, which have been retarded to the level of a subsistence economy, which are endowed only with the means for survival, and which lack the techniques for expansion.<sup>13</sup> Without looking here for any simplistic relationship between cause and effect, there would be

<sup>13</sup> This is suggested in particular by the absence of a clear distinction between time and space.

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nothing absurd in wanting to define and ascertain a correlation between an economic-social<sup>14</sup> and a conceptual take-off.

But what should be understood by conceptual take-off? In sum, it implies a frank departure of thought from myth, that the reflective consciousness be liberated from mythical consciousness. By myth we mean an association of ideas and images, endowed with relative permanence within a more or less extensive community, in which it delineates the patterns of attitude and basic behavior. If mythical consciousness is firmly rooted, if myths persist, it is due to their intrinsic cohesion and their appropriateness to a composite whole of economic-social conditions. Myth represents first of all security. It provides an answer to all questions. It reduces the extraordinary to the familiar, thus denoting a temporality that is proper to it, the temporality of repetition.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the myth suffices to support a wisdom, which is a wise, dignified, balanced and happy way of being in the world. The existence of a traditional wisdom will normally make a philosophical pursuit appear superfluous or even dangerous, for we do not know whether or not the quest for a new wisdom will destroy ancient norms. A well-established wisdom hinders a speculative venture, a philosophical quest.

And then Technique enters the picture, all the techniques of expansion, furthering positive science. The sudden introduction of techniques into the underdeveloped countries acts at first like a new myth, ready to destroy the old. In a general way modern technique in all fields is a devourer of myths. But even if we contend that the West has only surpassed the great myths to give itself over to the great myth of technique, we must at least grant that there is an acute awareness in the West of the necessity to discard myths while continuing to reinstate them.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The criticism raised against Rostow's concept do not seem to us to negate it. Cf., for example, those of Raymond Aron in "La Théorie du développement et les problèmes idéologiques de notre temps," *Preuves*, April 1963.

<sup>15</sup> On this question see L. V. Thomas, "Temps, Mythe et Histoire en Afrique de l'Ouest," *Présence Africaine*, 1961, 4, and, more generally, G. Gusdorf, *Mythe et métaphysique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1953.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the proceedings of a recent conference on "Technique and Casuistry" at the Institute of Philosophical Studies, Rome, 1964.

Considering it from a sufficiently large perspective, the West entered the reflective-critical and technical-scientific age in two phases. The Greek phase, in which critical reflection first blossomed, closed the first mythical era; the modern phase opens the technical-scientific age, radicalizes critical reflection and initiates criticism of myths to the point where today they are thematized. In India and the Far East, the interval was considerably longer between the birth of philosophical thought and the beginnings of the "modern revolution." To continue with the case of the West, to which we could add the case of Japan, the economic-social take-off has, in all, benefited from a long critical-reflective maturation. Now the immense task that presses upon black Africa would consist ideally in the accomplishment of these two mutations simultaneously, which would amount to synchronizing its entry into the reflective-critical and the technical-scientific age. On the philosophical level, this means, for example, that black Africa, in particular Bantu Africa, cannot simply pass from the age of Hesiod to that of Anaximandros, from the Vedas to the Vedanta; it should jump—not to burden ourselves with geographical particularities—from the myth of Dogon to a philosophy of life in agreement with physics and contemporary biology.

As we stated earlier, critical reflection must take off from the myth. What does this take-off involve? It would constitute, in a manner of speaking, a multiple analysis. It would involve a sum total of interrelating conceptual dissociations, or perhaps rather, the emergence of pairs or groups of concepts, lifted out of a state of insufficient differentiation or simply none at all.

Each of these dissociations would warrant careful examination. We will confine ourselves to considering and describing briefly the most decisive, indicating which should be abandoned in the process.

The dissociation of the subject and object shortens the way to reflection. We may affirm as well that to pass to reflection is, essentially, to dissociate the subject and the object and that it is the task of reflection to thematize this passage. The participating consciousness, committed to a pattern of vital forces, remains outside reflection; the spontaneous language of participation, the codification of this language, are acts *of* the participating

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consciousness and not its positions. They remain outside a philosophy of participation. The two phases distinguished here in the history of Western civilization are expressed also as phases of dissociation between subject and object. The Greek phase was that of the first political philosophy, related to morals and distinct from a natural philosophy, albeit subject to Nature; the modern phase corresponds to the rise of a philosophy of subjectivity capable of actuating a harmful consciousness, and, at the extreme limit, of justifying anarchy.

At the same time that the subject and object are made precise and meaningful, an explicit conceptual distinction should be made between the I and the others. This distinction, in which a partial break with experienced solidarity would be reflected,<sup>17</sup> would clarify the fact itself of the question of others. In reality a movement of this sort is well under way among Africans who have broken away from the influence of their native environment—which is the case with the majority of students. However, even though reflected and critical, this break between the I and the family, the village, the ethnic environment, is only rarely recognized and admitted; this fact is one of the major aspects of conflict particular to the black African intellectual.

Nature and surnature (categories of the perceptible and the metaphysical), technical action and the act of faith should also emerge in sufficiently sharp contrast; the same for the concrete and the abstract, in order to assure the possibility of speaking abstractly about the concrete. From whence would follow the frank dissociation of the named object and the term, a condition for any theory of signification, including logical semantics; hence also the distinction, in the language, of the aspects of expression and of communication, destined to avoid the confusion between the magic and the cognitive relationship. The urgency for making such a distinction becomes evident if it is realized what place of choice Negro-African culture gives to corporeal expression, to poetry, to christenings, and in general, to the thesis of the power of the word.

The entry into the technical-scientific age—the age of measure, of organization, of planification and production—also

<sup>17</sup> Claimed by Neo-African culture, this value is as much psychophysical as moral.

requires the dissociation within the category of *abantu*. The analysis of this category, in Kagame's thesis, depends on the distinction made between time and space and even considers the concept of time.<sup>18</sup> But having specified this, Kagame rejoices in finding time and space reunited in Kinyarwanda into a single category, because, he claims, this makes it possible to determine movement and to give it its "transcendental unity." "Whence it appears"—the author concludes—"that the founders of our philosophy, in establishing place and time as one category..., proved themselves to be profound intuitive metaphysicians."<sup>19</sup> Kagame appears suddenly to forget that it was precisely his preliminary distinction between time and space that made it possible for him, by arranging, to determine movement.

The metaphysical reasons that may be marshalled to devalue the uniform time of technique and science should not prevent the recognition of the necessity to distinguish it from mythical time and from that experienced time, petrified in local space, unsupported and buried in a "past long dead," which, it seems to us, gives the Neo-African vision of the world one of its characteristic features.

Finally, it seems indispensable that a mature concept of freedom, which is the distinctive mark of the subject, take the place of the limited concept of corporeal freedom (the condition of a free man as opposed to the condition of a slave), to effect a synthesis of corporeal freedom, of the faculty of decision and of the assumption of responsibility for one's actions and their rationally recognized consequences. This concept would assume the power to make a break and a new beginning, in a state of responsible independence, as distinct from caprice, and without the pretension of abolishing history by the word. This concept would represent the reflection, by individual consciousness, of a constructive political, cultural and technical revolution, by the individual who intends to become responsible for his destiny and is unwilling to fall back into a state of dependence. Similar observations transpose Rostow's concept of self-supported and cumulative growth into the history of consciousness.

<sup>18</sup> The discussion, however, is summary and peripheral to the problematics of our time.

<sup>19</sup> Kagame, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

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With regard to the related problem of volition, Kagame regroups under two headings, "to want to want" and "to want not to want," a certain number of concepts designating nuances of consent and refusal. It would be useful to explore the Bantu vocabulary, on this point among others, and to locate as precisely as possible the uses and connotations of terms such as—to stick to the *lingala*—*nsomi* (free man), *bonsomi* (state of free man), *ndinga* (will), *kokana* (to decide, to be decided). But what R. P. Tempels and other authors tell us on the subject of the mythology of vital forces, of their tenacity, and their frequently uncontrollable eruptions, apparently leaves only a limited place to the mature concept of freedom-autonomy. The unforeseen effects of these forces are too easily given to *a posteriori* justifications. It is in this area, above all, that mythical thought easily nullifies the extraordinary. Certainly, a similar reduction is not really irrational: reason is the power of identification, of reduction. It is only that we are dealing in this case with a short-term rationalization.

5) A series of convergent objections may be foreseen to these imperatives of conceptual promotion and dissociation. What good is it, it will be asked, to conceptualize the individual and to place in question experienced solidarity, if the problem is, after all, to rediscover it in the name of moral exigencies, if not metaphysical theory? What good is it to abstract the subject, if then, in agreement with the later Husserl and his followers, the philosophers of existence, it must be re-tied basically to the object and the world in a description of pre-reflective existence? Why still dissociate time and space, if modern physics geometrizes time? Why overextend the analysis if the fashion is now toward the global; why accumulate partial perspectives on social phenomena when the sociologists vie with one another in repeating that these are essentially total phenomena; why becloud history, if historicism is in crisis, if the prospective threatens the habits of retrospection? What good is it still to isolate reason since rationalism has broadened, to obstinately forget life in studying matter, if, after this, the search is made at the base of the inanimate—following Teilhard de Chardin—for the ultimate conditions of the living.

These questions in effect are convergent: they all proceed

from what we would like to call the general temptation to make short-cuts, against which, it seems, a good number of black African intellectuals defend themselves rather badly.

Out of this a fifth and last group of probably necessary conditions for the founding of a Bantu philosophy emerges. It concerns the desirable attitude of the Bantu intellectuals—and, more generally, Negro-African intellectuals, in confronting the new culture, to be elaborated by the inevitable means of an immense work of assimilation and, in case of need, of a very cautious naturalization. At any rate, two kinds of easy temptation lie in wait for them. We have just indicated short-cuts as one; the other can be traced to the cult of difference. Let us deal with them in turn.

When time is short, one is inclined to take the shortest route. Confronted with a choice of systems, of themes, of procedures of thought elaborated by foreign cultures, one will appeal in preference to those that seem to take immediately into consideration certain particularities, certain habits of African thought. This explains the popularity of procedures and systems of a dialectical character, of globalist methods and theories, expressly oriented toward the concrete: Marxism, which is naturally also seductive for other reasons; the philosophies of existence which bring together man and the world, mind and nature, thought and action, phenomenon and being; or even the spiritualized pan-vitalism of Teilhard de Chardin.

It goes without saying that we do not underrate the process of globalist or dialectical methods, of philosophies of existence, of Marxism or of Teilhardism. Nor is there a question further of contesting the possibility of a remarkable reception of these systems and methods by African thought. What is damaging is solely the haste to adopt superficially, or to adapt these systems and methods without imposing either the analytical asceticism required to master them or placing them in a fruitful confrontation with opposed systems and methods.

The haste to embrace dialectics, the concrete, the global, the immediate leads to errors in perspective. It risks fostering a misunderstanding of the historical and analytical preliminaries of present syntheses of globalist procedures. It favors mistaken equations between the pre-analytical and the reconstituted synthe-

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sis. A philosophy of the concrete, for instance, does not represent a "grasp" of the concrete, but primarily a multiple disjunction of it; in other words, a work of the *raison-cœur*, to use President Senghor's term. A philosophy of the immediate is not only a "mishaping" of the immediate—it would be worth more to substitute photograph albums for treatises of philosophy—but the result of reflection that has been forced to isolate analytically an "immediate," pervaded by preliminary explanations and deformed in everyday life by the easy paths of habits. The classic distinction between soul and body loses substance, with various contemporary authors, only after a careful and critical dialogue with classical theses. Merleau-Ponty's theory of the sentient body, for example, critically situates dualism, materialism and idealism. The current conception of the pair space-time, investigated by physics, is accessible only by taking their traditional distinction as a point of departure. The unfortunate melange that would revive their confusion may easily be imagined: analytical and dialectical, structure and history, organigrams and genealogical trees.

We do not stress the danger of short-cuts without cause. Among a harvest of examples, we will point to just two, borrowed, it is true, from a non-Bantu environment, yet a Negro-African one.

Pleading the case for a "doctrine of totality" in sociology, a Togolese author once formulated a "working hypothesis" in five principles<sup>20</sup>:

"1) Every society is a whole; 2) every society at any particular moment of its history possesses certain structures; 3) these structures always have meaning; 4) they gravitate around a focal point; 5) if we understand the nucleus around which all gravitates, we are directly at the pivotal center of the whole body..." Such truisms logically follow the author's earlier line of reasoning, when he attacks fragmentary studies of societies, for instance the "study of the system of parentage as though it constituted an entity in itself." We admit, in fact, that the understanding of a particular social structure requires that it be situated in its effective

<sup>20</sup> F. N'Sougan Agblemagnon, "Totalités et systèmes dans les sociétés d'Afrique Noire," *Présence Africaine*, 1962, 2, pp. 13-22; e.g. p. 15 and p. 21.

global context, if we are dealing with a monograph, and that it be measured against other structures, in the case of a broader study. However, the author of this article goes further: "What is more serious is that parts extracted from very different wholes are even compared..." Either this statement is a slip, and the slip is in itself significant, or it is intentional and what it thus contests so lightly is nothing less than the principle itself of comparative structural analysis. An ideology of hastily conceived counter-acculturation risks multiplying "short-cuts" of this sort — truisms, counter-sense and nonsense — inspired by the aim to "totalize" before the obligations of an analysis have been met and satisfied.

We will take the second example from a book, the mention of which is inevitable considering the fame of its author. Without commenting on its quality, originality and solidity, it must be granted that the four first chapters of *Consciencisme* by Kwame N'Krumah<sup>21</sup> constitute a philosophical undertaking. In fact he sets in motion a kind of philosophy with a strong ideological component, determinedly materialist (in the manner of Engels), determinedly egalitarian and held to be adequate to the post-colonial situation and to the work of development that the liberated countries must tackle. Finally, his last chapter is devoted, as the title indicates, to a discussion of the "mathematical formulation of the system." What a sorry masquerade it is! Symbolic statements—correctly constructed and likely to impress readers who are not forewarned—give the air of a strict discipline to peremptory, vague or contestable affirmations which they merely shorten and naively transform. We are told, for instance, by way of a definition, that a colony is a "territory in which negative action exceeds positive action," or, more scrupulously, that a "territory is a colony if and only if the action..." Under what conditions, does a territory then become free? He then gives the equation,  $g. \longleftrightarrow D (na > pa)g \longrightarrow (pa > na)g$ . By way of clarification, territory  $g$  is liberated only if in this territory a certain factor  $D$ , called the "dialectic moment," transforms the excess of negative action over positive action into its reverse. We are also assured, with similar devices, that free territories

<sup>21</sup> Kwame N'Krumah, *Le Consciencisme*, French translation, Paris, Payot, 1965.

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must unite in order to avoid falling back under the colonial yoke, and that socialism necessarily involves "simultaneously materialism, consciencism, dialectics and national unity."<sup>22</sup> Et cetera. One could just as well dress in the same raiments an argument for tyranny, a theory of occult influences, and an apology for colonialism. Where is the short-cut here? We could assume that the author has conceived, from a distance, a project of axiomatic construction; we can see no other justification for his venture. But in this case he has disregarded the most elementary rules of the procedure, which, as we know, in the fields of science and human action has not gone beyond the stage of first cautious prefigurations. The symbolic statements of "consciencism" cut short any serious derivative: their sum, if it is not a joke, wholly begs the question.

Another prejudicial temptation is to give importance to originality, or rather, to the cult of African difference.

It is understandable that the peoples of black Africa, more than any others, are anxious to affirm their originality, to mark their difference, both past and present. It is understandable that in times of crisis, change and reconversion, the claim of a noble past might become extravagant. It is perfectly normal, moreover, that the peoples of black Africa proclaim their right to a future that would express their personality.

But this triple and legitimate preoccupation, as secondary as it ought to remain, is too frequently in danger of becoming an end in itself, and to this extent it vitiates from the start any cultural endeavor. It happens to have inspired, for instance, a rudimentary theory of the pure and simple equivalence of cultures in which the standpoint of wisdom is enabled to eclipse unilaterally the standpoint of science.

Basically, an Africanization that would motivate above all the desire to differentiate oneself at any price would be a wrong road, because it would lead back to the rejection of the benefits of "reflectors." It would lead, if need be, to perhaps some original system of thought, but it would be seriously in danger of remaining peripheral to a universal civilization, to which Africa, as Alioune Diop and others stress, has the legitimate ambition to contribute.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 169.

One could, in this connection, enlarge on a possible quest for a philosophy of vital forces, which would remain faithful to the vision of the world as R.P. Tempels and A. Kagame conceive it. Let us suppose that it succeeded in ejecting the concept of being, to the profit of the concept of force. Logically, the classical questions of definition would be translated into questions relative to form. This kind of an undertaking is entirely conceivable. However, instead of a massive impregnation of the world by Negro-African culture, the system of procedures of thought corresponding to a philosophy of vital forces would remain for internal use. The classical question of definition, "What is?," clearly bearing the traces of its Greek origin, has nonetheless become a basic, nearly universal question—more detached, more speculative than "the question of force" (or of power, negative or positive), more open than the latter to a theoretical and abstract culture, and at the same time more efficient.

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We have posed the problem as to whether a Bantu philosophy is possible. We have answered that it is, given a set of conditions. One of these conditions would be, if not to abandon, at least to put the brakes on the cult of difference. But, isn't the project of a Bantu philosopher one of the expressions—and one of the most adventurous ones—of the cult of difference? This may be feared.

Plato did not seek to formulate an Athenian philosophy, but to resolve, among other things, the problem of the one and the many. Descartes did not propose to build a French philosophy, but first of all to discover a criterion of truth that would permit him to harmonize geometrical physics with reason, and with reason, and with the basic tenets of Christian faith. And Kant was not engaged in mulling over a project of Prussian philosophy: he tried to validate, in opposition to Hume's corrosive scepticism, the necessity for Newton's mechanical propositions and the moral need for freedom, divorced from nature. Only after the fact, and knowingly, could historians of philosophy speak of a Greek philosophy, a German philosophy, or point out, as N. Baladi has done, certain "constants of French thought."

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We certainly do not claim—it would be sinning by hasty induction—that an ethnic or nationalistic motivation cannot, in principle, lead to the establishment of a philosophy. But we do not see a convincing example of it; and, so far as a Bantu philosophy is concerned—or even a Negro-African philosophy—it must be agreed that such motivation has hardly inspired, up to now, any more than counter-sense and truisms.

What can be done in the future except hope that Bantu intellectuals with a philosophical vocation, instead of questioning themselves on their “Bantuity,” will approach, with the help of universalizing procedures, precise philosophical problems and endeavor to contribute to the progress of philosophy in other ways than in the form of over-valued inventories or too complacently accepted evidence. Doubtless their contributions would be in effect Bantu, but they would be Bantu as something in addition.