



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz
International Programme for
a Culture of Peace and Dialogue

Philosophy Manual

A South-South Perspective



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Published under the direction of
Phinith Chanthalangsy and John Crowley

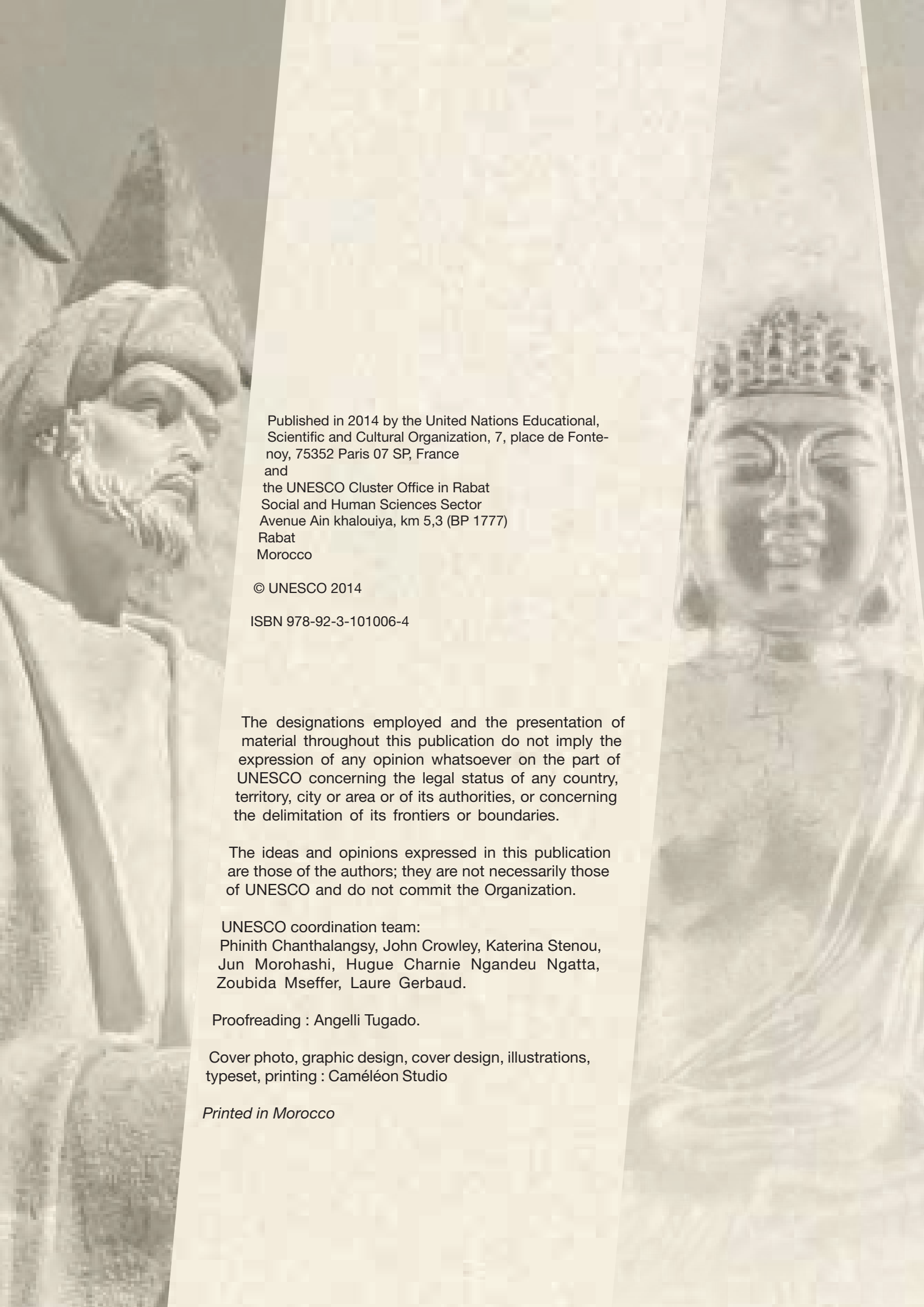
Coordinators

Ali Benmakhlouf (Morocco)
Enrique Dussel (Mexico)
Nkolo Foé (Cameroon)
Rainier Ibana (Philippines)

Scientific Committee

Abubaker A. Baqader (Saudi Arabia)
Ayoub Abu-Dayyeh (Jordan)
Souleymane Bachir Diagne (Senegal)
Ali Benmakhlouf (Morocco)
Betül Çotuksöken (Turkey)
Enrique Dussel (Mexico)
Nkolo Foé (Cameroon)
Raúl Fonet-Betancourt (Cuba)
Jinli He (China)
Rainier Ibana (Philippines)
Rozena Maart (South Africa)
Magali Mendes de Menezes (Brazil)
Suwanna Satha-Anand (Thailand)

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UNESCO coordination team:
Phinith Chanthalangsy, John Crowley, Katerina Stenou,
Jun Morohashi, Hugue Charnie Ngandeu Ngatta,
Zoubida Mseffer, Laure Gerbaud.

Proofreading : Angelli Tugado.

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typeset, printing : Caméléon Studio

Printed in Morocco



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FOREWORD

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is deeply attached to the promotion of the spirit of tolerance, co-existence and dialogue that is at the heart of Islamic principle. It is therefore with great pleasure that it has supported the implementation of ten projects by UNESCO through the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Programme for a Culture of Peace and Dialogue. The project “Philosophy in the Arab-Muslim world: inclusive approach through South-South dialogue” is specifically dedicated to enabling a full understanding of the richness of philosophical thought coming from the Arab region as well as Africa, Asia and the Pacific or Latin America and the Caribbean.

Inter-cultural dialogue is paramount in a globalized and inter-connected world, where mutual understanding is a key to ensure peace. As a field of self-questioning, philosophy is a fertile ground for developing a culture of tolerance.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is pleased to have accompanied all the steps of this South-South dialogue undertaking. Through interregional philosophical dialogues, the implementation of the project itself has resulted in constructive exchanges and fertilization among philosophers coming from four continents. We hope this initiative will seed renewed cooperation between thinkers all over the world to better highlight and build on intellectual heritage from the countries of the South.

This philosophical manual proposes a new perspective in promoting philosophical thinking through intercultural dialogue. We hope it will be a valuable tool for teaching youth on philosophical diversity in many countries, and will help to further build a culture of peace and dialogue, and encourage other innovative, inclusive projects of this kind.

**Saudi Delegation
to UNESCO**

PREFACE

UNESCO's principal mission of constructing the defences of peace in the minds of men and women is an infinite one which is constantly renewed as needs change over time. Today, it is with the publication of this manual and its South-South perspective, aimed at young people across the world, that we propose a renewal of this mission.

To those who, in today's hypermodern world of new technology and instant information sharing, argue that freedom has been achieved, we reply that freedom is never given, it is constructed every day with informed, consistent methods and knowledge, owned by all.


Philosophical reflection is the first of these methods for personal and collective emancipation aiming to develop critical thinking so as to free thought from servitude and ignorance. Philosophical thought is a human construct and it is inalienable. It refines and reinforces freedom of thought as an antidote to all forms of absolutism.

Dialogue, closely entwined with philosophical reflection, is another key method as it is through dialogue, "through speech", that ideas are articulated, views are exchanged, similarities are observed and mutual comprehension is achieved. Philosophy is not a solitary task; it represents dialogue with others and with other cultures. In a globalized world, this dialogue must take place on a global scale and must embrace the diversity of thinking which has not always been sufficiently disseminated or documented in traditional manuals but that has influenced people throughout history. It is this true, internationally open philosophical and intellectual diversity that will enable us to identify the best future prospects. UNESCO's Constitution states that "ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war". In the twenty-first century, this statement is more relevant than ever and it guides UNESCO's work at the head of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022).

The South-South Philosophical Dialogue project which led to the creation of this Philosophical Manual is part of this ongoing progress towards peace and intertwines the two methods of philosophical reflection and intercultural dialogue. In this way it provides young people and their teachers with materials for questioning the world, enabling them to grow into responsible, open and participative citizens.

Led by an enthusiastic team at the UNESCO Office in Rabat, this project was made possible by the support of Saudi Arabia under the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Programme for a Culture of Dialogue and Peace. This project completes, therefore, the cooperation with the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and I should like to thank Saudi Arabia for its generous backing.

UNESCO and its partners are pleased to provide this manual which I hope will benefit the largest number of young people possible. I hope that they learn that certainties are worth challenging, whether they are eventually affirmed or questioned, as part of an enriching reasoned examination which brings people together and promotes self-discovery. This process of reflection and dialogue is at the very heart of the impulse for peace. At the outset of this work, I hope that further publications like this one will enrich this promising project.



Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Today we are offering the world this book with the modest title “Philosophical Manual: A South-South perspective”.

The modest title should not, however, conceal the true significance of this work, misleading the reader into thinking, perhaps, that it is just another philosophical manual, despite the fact that it is from the “South” and dedicated to somewhat “exotic” philosophy. If we begin this brief introduction warning against the risk of drawing this potentially hasty conclusion, it is because this manual – on account of both its systematic and methodological structure and its contents – is a work that challenges us with a call to become committed to working towards an innovative turning point, not only in the perception of the theoretical purpose and social role of philosophy, but also as regards the task of philosophy teaching in contemporary societies.

As readers themselves will see, the work in this manual addresses, on the one hand, UNESCO’s important mission to promote peace in the world, and on the other, the role that philosophy must play as both critical knowledge and wisdom in this task. This manual can therefore be presented as an “instrument of peace” whose conception and realization corresponds, basically, to the express intention of showing that the philosophical traditions of the “South” represent a living and essential heritage for a humanity seeking peace as a form of coexistence and an expression of self-reconciliation.

It is necessary, however, to emphasize that there will be no true peace in the world if we do not spread throughout the world the belief that the “desire for power” must be decidedly opposed by the “desire for truth” and the “desire to do what is right”. True peace is not simply the result of political negotiations or strategic agreements between peoples and States, but the work of human beings with the training and the passion for seeking truth and doing good. True peace therefore has an anthropological basis, which is the humanized human being who is committed to truth and good as the common property of all humankind. This is precisely the fundamental importance that philosophy should have in promoting peace in the world today, as it represents the form of knowledge that quintessentially teaches human beings that the desire for truth and the desire for good come together in the desire to coexist in peace with oneself, with nature and with others.

Thereby, this manual invites us to rethink the theoretical purpose and social function of philosophy in the light of the need to promote peace in the troubled world today. However, we must insist in the idea already evoked that this manual invites the reader to undertake such a task from a specific viewpoint, which is that of the “South”, meaning a viewpoint that wishes to make visible the ways of seeking truth and doing good that have been marginalized by hegemonic epistemologies and policies. Hence, the focus is not on the negative or destructive criticism of hegemonic philosophical thought but on the visibility of the diversity of the ways of thinking and well-doing of humanity that have been marginalized.

The “South” is admittedly a problematic expression, most often referred to with quotation marks and epistemic caution rather than without. The concept cannot be reduced to the geographical sense of the term or its geopolitical meaning. It is understood without being given a rigid definition, much like the concept of “cultural area” whose contours are blurred, but whose effects are clear. This “South” is a perspective – that of marginalized societies – and implies a specific tradition, not a tradition in the sense of a set of customs and beliefs resistant to the flux of time, but a tradition in the sense of a living transmission that takes various forms: in Africa, where the notion of text is far from consensual, there is a strong oral tradition; in Asia and the Arab region there is a tradition of highly structured fundamental texts; and in Latin America, where there is a clear ‘before and after’ the Columbian colonization, there is a strong rupture and strong discontinuity.

In this sense, the book is like a map showing ups and downs and the paths to help guide the reader through the complex terrain, languages and spirits of philosophy in Africa, the Arab region, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. And as an additional aid for a better management of experiences in this philosophical journey, the book also offers a systematic structure that enables us to study the wealth of the “South” individually in the different areas, such as cosmology, epistemology, political forms of living together, gender equality, the environment and nature, and aesthetics.

During extremely fruitful sessions of philosophical dialogue, the scientific committee of the project endeavoured to harmonize the approaches without blending them into a uniform whole. The question of balance between choices of ancient texts and contemporary texts and between written texts and oral sayings was clearly raised. The Arab region and Asia focused on ancient texts, not to value traditional heritage in itself, but because this heritage is continually challenged by contemporary philosophy. It is worth recalling the words of A.N. Whitehead, who said that “the European philosophical tradition consists of a series of footnotes to Plato”, owing to the “wealth of general ideas scattered through them”.¹ The footnotes are far from being an accessory or a superfluity; they mean that commentary is a form of philosophy. When, for example, the Arab philosophers comment on Plato and Aristotle, through their short, middle and long commentaries, they are not a pale imitation, but they create an original philosophy that takes the form of an adaptation of the words of the ancients.

In the African context, the matter of oral transmission cannot be ignored as it sheds new light on what we call “text”. As orality exists mainly in delivery, the written text, by means of this characteristic, becomes a text with multiple variants, a text whose delivery is an integral component.

Lastly, for Latin America and the Caribbean, it is clear that there is an epistemic rupture between the pre-Columbian era and the colonial and post-colonial era. The fragmentary remains of Amerindian epistememes contrast with a modern philosophical production marked by the question of freedom of thought in relation to the colonial legacy.

Returning to the theme of these brief introductory remarks, namely the relationship between peace and philosophy, we should like to conclude by stressing the idea that peace requires the intercultural balance of diversity, but that the intercultural balance of diversity needs, as a condition of its potential, the knowledge of diversity and the resulting mutual recognition. In order to promote peace it is essential to promote communication and intercultural dialogue between humanity’s different traditions of thought. This is, ultimately, the message that the manual is trying to convey, as it resulted from sessions of philosophical dialogue initiated by UNESCO in 2004. Such a dialogue between traditions does not consist in erasing these specificities but in gauging them. The word “dialogue”, in its traditional meaning, implies “a journey through logos”. This is a journey of reason and comparison that the six themes selected for this manual help to build. Let us not forget, however, that any anthropological approach can take the step of “comparing the incomparable” in the words of Marcel Détiéne. From cosmology to living together, encompassing political, aesthetical and ecological experiences, this involves charting a course that can compare, for an audience of secondary-school students, necessarily plural philosophies.

Philosophical plurality also involves the plurality of languages and this manual is intended as a vehicle for dialogue that begins with and goes beyond language. This is admittedly a paradox, but this paradox is inevitable and fruitful when it comes to acquainting young people from different regions of the world with philosophical traditions from other horizons. To this end, UNESCO has achieved an intricate balance between exciting and unprecedented translations to make this manual available today in English, Arabic and French. Such work does not claim exclusive academic and scientific perfection and the translations proposed here are obviously open to future improvement; its immediate merit, however, will be to enable a transmission and dialogue of cultures that reaches beyond geographical and intellectual boundaries.

It is therefore a most welcome publication and we thank all those who have made it possible, especially UNESCO and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their essential contribution.

By the Scientific Committee and under the direction
and coordination of Prof. Raul Fornet-Betancourt

¹ A.N.Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, London, The Free Press, 1929, 1957, 1978, p. 40.

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A South-South Perspective

AFRICA



Coordinated by
Nkolo Foé



INTRODUCTION

The texts selected for this anthology capture the spirit of African philosophy. The challenge posed was considerable and entailed ensuring, as far as possible, that all of the greatest periods and trends in the history of African philosophy were represented. While such an undertaking was not without its difficulties, every effort has been made to include in each section of this anthology texts regarded as most significant in terms of cosmology, epistemology, politics, gender, ecology and aesthetics.

Cosmogony provides an overarching framework of reference for the entire volume. Indeed, it sheds light on virtually all other aspects of society and culture by crystallizing perceptions of being, of humanity's place in the world and of the role of the intellect. The latter occupies a central position in the great African texts, in which it is expressed directly through basic concepts, such as *Ptah*, *Atum*, *Maat* and *Thoth*¹, or indirectly by being embedded in key social and political institutions (Sections II and III), and didactic literature (Section VI). In perusing this anthology, readers will constantly need to cross-refer to its various sections, simply because the sectional themes are interrelated and mutually illustrative.

Agricultural economy holds the key to the particular tonality of African philosophical texts. It not only laid the social and economic foundations and shaped the anthropological experiences of early man, but



¹ **Ptah** is the god of the city of Memphis, the capital of Egypt during the Ancient Kingdom (about 2700–2200 BCE). He was the god of sculptors and blacksmiths and the Greeks identified him with Hephaestus, the blacksmith of Olympus. Ptah is the personification of the primordial mound, which emerged from Nun (the primeval cosmic waters), hence his name Tatenen, which means the Risen-Land. In the history of philosophy, Ptah is often compared to Xenophanes' intellectual god, who sets the universe in motion through the force of his intellect. **Atum**, a symbol of the setting sun, along with Khepri (the Sun reborn at dawn) and Ra (the Sun at its zenith), form the triad of the city of Onou lounou, named by the Greeks Heliopolis (the City of the Sun) and known today as Ain-ech-Chams (the Eye of the Sun). **Maat** embodies the universal norm and is also portrayed as the goddess of truth, justice, cosmic equilibrium and peace. Lastly, **Thoth**, whom the Greeks identified with their god Hermes, was the god who reckoned time; he was also the god of writing and of wisdom. Hermopolis was renowned for the knowledge and wisdom of its scribes.



agriculture itself introduced the spiritual dynamic that enabled an unprecedented surge in the progress towards civilization. L. Frobenius, P. Tempels, L. S. Senghor and others have highlighted the isomorphism between the life of plants and African civilization. They see a close resemblance between the form of this civilization and the plant life cycle, which involves the idea of germinating, growing, flowering and maturing. The selected texts show that while it is certainly possible for an agrarian civilization to develop mental faculties conducive to mysticism and intuition, a georgic cultural environment may as easily entail a different dynamic that is more focused on the regularities and laws that determine the existence of things. This, for instance, is the main feature of the cosmogonies examined.

African cosmogony provides a basis for explaining everything, including man's rational activity. For example, the Memphite treatise exalts the creative power of thought, reason and the will. In its analysis of the process of knowing, it stresses the role of sensations, understanding and language. As an intellectual entity, Ptah also connotes the idea of metallurgy. In the systems examined, the blacksmith symbolizes intellectual and technological awareness of the world. In the *Ndomo* education system, too, he is portrayed as the inventor of the very principle of knowledge, the artisan of the opening of the mind, the initiator of intellectual labour and the promoter of human beings' spiritual faculties. Another important aspect of African cosmogonies is their reference to numbers. Such references support the idea that nature bears the stamp of the *Logos*, for the texture of the real is numerical and, "it is through numbers that we gain access to the essence of things."² That the question of a numerical structure to the world should be raised at all is in itself a matter of great philosophical and cultural significance. Some aspects of the thought examined tend towards panlogism. However, to do justice to this system of thought, it must be remembered that panlogism itself sometimes conveys the despair of a world threatened by uncontrollable occult forces. Now, the energies of Africa's sages were all channelled into controlling those forces, by projecting a powerful beam of light to the cosmos. Reason therefore pervades everything, even the content of tales, such as that of the Tortoise, which provides a defence of intelligence and cunning.³ This subject is covered by Section III of this anthology, which gives insight into one of the key concepts of African philosophy, *Maât* (Truth-Justice). *Maat*, which predated the Greek goddess *Dike*, covers the dictates of one's conscience, moral obligations, political laws and ritual duties. She concomitantly embodies the highest ideal of the State and a State-based conception of administration and justice.⁴ It is in this context that all public servants must base their conduct on the rational model proposed by the gods themselves. Each must conform to the image of Vizier Mentuhotep (1964–1919 BCE), who had the writings of Thoth on "his tongue ... and was more accurate in his judgements than the needle on the scales."⁵

Emphasis must be laid on continuity between this world view and the concept of "an achieved community of minds" that features in Marcien Towa's work. This concept is linked to such concepts as *enlightened consciousness and universal moral consciousness*, and they are all subsumed under the very definition of the nature of humanity, which entails striving towards agreement with others.

² Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, "Systèmes de numération et fonction symbolique du langage" [Counting systems and the symbolic function of language], in *Critique. Revue générales des publications françaises et étrangères*, August–September 2011, Vol. 67, No. 771–72, p. 710.

³ For a philosophical study of African tales, see Marcien Towa, *L'Idée d'une philosophie négro-africaine* [The idea of a Black African philosophy], Yaoundé, Editions Clé, 1979, pp. 31–38.

⁴ See Jean Yoyotte, "Le jugement des morts dans l'Égypte ancienne" [The judgement of the dead in Ancient Egypt], in *Le Jugement des morts* [The judgement of the dead], Paris, Seuil, 1961, p. 21.

⁵ Quoted by Adolf Erman and Hermann Ranke, *La Civilisation égyptienne* [Egyptian civilization], translation from the German by Charles Mathien, Paris, Payot, 1986, p. 114.



Concern for humanity is the very essence of the Manden Charter, which dates from the thirteenth century. The charter predates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by several centuries. Its rediscovery in the twentieth century was a major scientific and philosophical breakthrough, in view of the relevance of its aims concerning the right to life, the protection of the physical integrity of the person, the right to food, the freedom to associate with others, to express opinions and to act, the abolition of slavery and the education of children. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the philosophy expressed in traditional African texts has a strong moral dimension, with a deep concern for fairness and equality. The latter applies to all social categories, including women.

Africa acknowledges gender differences and rejects the repression of gender identity. This is the thesis of Djossou-Ségla, who refers to the roots of African philosophy on gender parity, which is part and parcel of the androgynous cosmos itself. The idea of ambiguous, neutral or repressed gender is akin to *alogia*. Accordingly, the concepts of *gender* and *gender trouble*⁶ appear extremely problematical from an African perspective. Gender separation and the dialectical tension that genders create lead to a reconsideration of the crucial question of a *generic human identity*. The latter requires full and total inclusion of women, with all of their attributes, in the philosophical definition of the human species. The issue thus stated is, of course, ontological, but it is also economic and political (see Section IV, Text 1). Only an agrarian-style social and economic system could have glorified women as “guardians of the home”, “repositories of the past” and the “guarantors of the clan’s future”.

An agrarian civilization stresses the general balance of things. Maat is an expression of this concern, which involves human beings, society and the cosmos. The texts in Section V therefore give fresh insights into “indigenous environmental ethics” and agrarian religion. Both assert the basic unity of humanity and nature, which means that humanity does not exist on one side and nature on the other. Humanity and nature are simply not viewed in isolation in environmental ethics and agrarian religion, which constrain human freedom in dealing with nature. The tapping of nature’s resources does not confer any right whatsoever to domesticate trees and animals. This is ruled out by totemism, which entails taboos on some rare or protected species. A taboo entails placing under an interdict living things, objects or actions that are held to be sacred. It is believed that some trees and animals exist in a special relationship to the supernatural, and so their destruction is forbidden. There is, then, nothing irrational about totemism. On the contrary, it is a reminder of the sacredness of nature and outlaws the breaking of that bond. In another sense, therefore, totemic prohibitions guide humanity towards the intellect.⁷ It is the brutal severing of this vital link with nature that explains the damage suffered by the ecological order, the sudden collapse of the political, social, moral and ontological order, leading to a lack of moral responsibility towards others and of any sense of belonging, the end of morality and of the rule of law, the rejection of humane choices, the transformation of the world into an icy void, in which humanity is incapable of concern for itself but survives, the absolute triumph of individualism,⁸ and so on.

The georgic metaphysic that pervades African art and aesthetics accounts for the balance struck between humanity and the environment, between culture and nature. The concept of *rhythm*, which means precisely the *harmony* of movements, lines, colours and values, reflects that balance. Indeed, rhythm, consonance and harmony constitute links to the other basic aspects of African metaphysics examined in this volume, metaphysics in which balance reflects the rational order of things, truth, justice, equality, goodness and perfection. In other words, art and aesthetics are not alien to reason, their antithesis. This justifies the link that binds aesthetics to the sphere of ontology and morality. The link

⁶ On this concept, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, translated by R. Needham, London, Merlin Press, 1991, pp. 72–91.

⁸ Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1972.



is inevitably established whenever art (poetry, folktales, epics etc.) is used to teach and is set the task of providing humanity with rational and exemplary models of behaviour. Such models may, however, border on conservatism. Another trend in African aesthetics, embodied in this anthology by Frantz Fanon, has therefore striven to engage with art, aesthetics and reason whenever they disturb, break with the past and trigger a new movement. When countries fought to gain their freedom, the time was ripe for redefining the aesthetic canons and the very purpose of art. It is reason in motion, then, grappling with a history which eludes control, which seeks to assert itself through ongoing changes in tales, epics, sculpture, drama and comedy. It is only in this way that art, in its role as demiurge, helps to found a new world and becomes Utopia.



I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

INTRODUCTION

The three treatises included in this section provide a good summary of the general spirit of African cosmogony. As a feature common to all of the great periods of history (Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the modern and contemporary period), this spirit is observable in major cross-cutting themes that revolve around water as the primordial element of the universe: primeval chaos, the self-engendered and intelligent cosmos, the cosmogonic egg and generation as the primary means of coming into being and of becoming. Technomorphism, at first glance an unusual addition to these traditional themes, abounds with philosophical implications.

The first text in this anthology is an old treatise engraved on stone around 710 BCE in the reign of Shabaka, a pharaoh of Sudanese origin. The original version of this cosmogony is thought to have been composed around 2500 BCE (fifth dynasty). This is one of the very first written texts in all world history. The Memphite document, based on Ptah, a self-engendered entity, is exceptionally rich. A chthonian spirit, Ptah represents the primaeval mound emerging from the primordial cosmic waters – hence his name Tatenen, the Risen-Land. Ptah possesses all attributes of a rational principle: he is the “Heart” (the seat of intelligence and thought); he experiences knowledge (emotional and intellectual), in much the same way as Xenophanes’s god. As the patron of metalworkers, he was equated by the Greeks to Hephaestus, the blacksmith god on Olympus.

The main features of the Memphite treatise are common to those of the other two cosmogonies included here. Firstly, the Heliopolitan document entitled “The Book of knowing the creations of Ra and (thus) of slaying the serpent Apophis” forms part of the *Bremner-Rhind Papyrus* and dates back to the fourth century BCE. A magical hymn initially, it exalts the infinite power of the universal demiurge, Ra, the Sun-God. Although not, strictly speaking, a chthonian entity, Ra, too, rises from the cosmic depths, as does Ptah. Furthermore, he resembles Ptah in being an intellectual, self-engendering principle. These two attributes are inseparable, for Ra bestirs himself and moves the universe through his consciousness of his own self. Ra is but one facet of a single entity that also comprises Khepri (the morning sun), who embodies the principle of becoming, and Atum, who embodies being and non-being, for his name means the totality of that which exists and does not exist. The philosophical importance of this treatise is therefore immense. The cosmogony expounded by the Mvet, the subject of our third text, is equally important.

The Mvet is the major literary and philosophical genre of the Fang people in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. The cosmogony is the necessary introduction to all Mvet epics, which are declaimed by poets who also sing and dance. Mastery of the reproduction narrative reveals the level of erudition of the *Mbomo Mvet* (the Mvet poet), who combines the talents of both poet and cosmogonist scholar. Unlike the amateur poet, who is “self-conscious”, “hesitant and embarrassed”, the scholar-poet must “speak his words boldly” and explain in scholarly fashion the genesis of clouds and mountains.⁹ The genesis dates

⁹ Extract from a Mvet narrative published by Eno Belinga, *Littérature et musique populaire en Afrique noire* [Literature and Popular Music in Black Africa], Paris, Editions Cujas, 1965, p. 144.

back to the primeval cosmic waters, from which a copper egg rose and exploded, to release the principal elements that constitute the world. The originality of the Mvet treatise lies in its extensive use of analogies based on mechanics. This technique is underpinned not by “relations of similarity” – the cosmos does not actually resemble the workings of a forge – but a “similarity of relations”.¹⁰ For example, the air between earth and sky bears similar relations as the bellows to the forge. The rationality of mechanics is rooted in its sole reliance on causes that are accessible to human understanding, since they are produced and used by human beings. Mvet cosmogonies afford, therefore, a new approach to African systems that could shed new light on some central aspects of pre-Socratic doctrines such as those propounded by Anaximander and Heraclitus, in which technomorphism plays a key part, too.



¹⁰ See Paul Grenet, *Les Origines de l'analogie philosophique dans les dialogues de Platon* [The Origins of Philosophical Analogy in Plato's Dialogues], Rouen, Editions contemporaines et Cie, 1948, p. 10.

I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

1 THE INTELLECTUAL, SELF-ENGENDERING COSMIC PRINCIPLE

TEXT 1 THE CREATION OF THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE THEOLOGY OF MEMPHIS

““

“Ptah, ... rise like Nefertem ... to the nostrils of Ra, and come forth upon the horizon each day (... *r srt R^c r^c nb*).

He came into being as the heart.

He came into being as the tongue (a thought) in the form of Atum. Great and powerful Ptah, who transmitted (his strength) to all the (gods) and their *kau* (plural of *ka*), through this heart and this tongue by which Horus became Ptah, by which Thoth became Ptah.

It happened that the heart and the tongue gained control over (all) limbs, by teaching (*hpr.n shm ib ns m^cwt [nbwt] hr sb₃*) that he (Ptah) is (as a heart) in every body (*wnt.f.m-hnt ht nb[t]*) and (as a tongue) in every mouth (*m-hnt r nb*) of all gods (*n ntrw, bw*), all men (*rmtt nb[t]*), all animals (*^cwt nbt ; ^cwt*, ‘small livestock’), all creeping things (*hf₃t nb[t]*; *hf₃t*, ‘intestinal worm’) and everything that lives (*^cnht; ankhet*), by thinking (*hr k₃st*) (as a heart) and commanding (*hr wd-mdw*) (as a tongue) everything that (*ht nbt*) he (Ptah) wishes (*mrrt.f*).

His (Ptah’s) Ennead¹¹ is before him (*Psd^t.f m-b₃h.f*) in the form of teeth (*m ibhw*) and lips (*m spty*): they are the semen (*mtwt*) and the hands (*drt^y*) of Atum (*ltm*). The Ennead of Atum came into being through his semen and through his fingers (*m mtwt.f m db^cw.f Psdt*). The Ennead (of Ptah), is surely (*hm pw*) the teeth and the lips in that mouth, proclaiming the names of all things (*ibhw spty m r pn m₃t rn n ht nbt; m₃t m*, ‘proclaim the name’) and from which (*im.f*) Shu and Tefnut came forth (*pri. N Sw Tfnwt*).

The Ennead created (*msi.n Psdt*, ‘The Ennead gave birth to’) the sight of the eyes (*m₃3 irty*), the hearing of the ears (*sdm msdrwy*), and the smelling of the air by the nose (*ssn fnd* ; lit.: ‘the seeing of the eyes, the listening of the ears, the smelling of the nose’), so that they inform (*s^cr.n*) the heart (*hr ib* ; lit.: ‘so that they send information to the heart’), which allows every concept to come forth (*nft ddi pri^crkyt nbt*) and it is the tongue that announces what the heart thinks (*in ns whm k₃st h₃ty*; lit. ‘by the tongue is announced what the heart thinks’).

Thus all the gods were created (given birth to), Atum and his Ennead (*sw msi ntrw nbw ltm Psdt.f*). Indeed, all the divine order came into being through what the heart thought and what the tongue ordered (commanded) (*sk hpr.n is mdw nb k₃st wdt ns*).

¹¹ The Ennead is a group of nine deities who encapsulate all the active forces at work in nature and culture. These deities are: Atum-Ra: the Sun; Shu and Tefnut: hot air and moist air; Geb: the earth; Nut: the sky; Osiris: the god of fertility and vegetation, representing both the fertilizing powers of nature and the civilizing moral ideal; Isis: personifying the throne and government legislation, the mother and protector of the pharaohs; Seth: likened to Typhon, embodies nature’s brute force, raging storms, hot and dry desert wind and so forth; and Nephthys: the patron goddess of the dead.

Thus the *ka* spirits were made and the *hemsut* (female) spirits were appointed, they who make all provisions and all nourishment (*htpt* ‘offerings’) by this speech (*sw ir k3w mtrw hmswt irr df3w nb(w) htpt nb(t) m mdt tn* (pour *tn*)). (Thus reward was given to) he who loves (*irr mrr.t[i]*) and (punishment to) he who hates (*msdi.t[i]*). Thus life was given (*di.[n] °nh*) to (*n*) he who is peaceful (*hry htp*) and death (*m[w]t*) to he who is criminal (*hry hbnt*).

Thus (*sw*) were made all work (*ir k3t nb[t]*) and all crafts (*hmt nb[t]*), the action of the arms (*ir.t °wy*), the movement of the legs (*sm.[t] rdwy*) and the functioning (*nmnm*) of all the limbs (*°t nb[t]*) in accordance (*hft*) with this command (*wdt-mdw tn*) which was thought by the heart (*k33t ib*), which came forth from the tongue (*pri.t ns*), and which gives value to everything (*irt im3 ht nb[t]*; *im3h* ... ‘according to the order conceived by the heart, expressed by the tongue and visible now in everything.’).

It happened that it was said (*hpr.n dd*): ‘Atum was begotten, the gods were brought into being by Ptah’ (*ir ltm shpr ntrw r Pth*). It is indeed Ta-Tenen who gave birth to the gods (*T3-tnn is pw msi ntrw*); from him came forth, (as well) all things, nourishment and provisions (*pri.n ht nb[t] im.f m htp df[3]w*), offerings of the gods (*m htpt ntrw*) and everything good and beautiful (*m ht nbt nfrt*). Thus, it was discovered and recognized (through wisdom) that his strength is greater than (that of the other) gods (*sw gm s33 °3 phty.f r ntrw*). Thus Ptah was satisfied (*sw htp Pth*), after he had made all things, as well as all divine words (*m-ht irt.f ht nbt mdw ntr [i]sk*).

He (Ptah) had given birth to the gods (*msi.n.f ntrw*),
 He had made the cities (*ir.n.f niwwt*),
 He had founded nomes (*grg.n.f sp3wt*),
 He had placed the gods in their shrines (*di.n.f ntrw hr hm[w].sn*),
 He had established their sacrifices (*srwd.n.f p3wt.sn*),
 He had founded their shrines (*grg.n.f hmw.sn*),
 He had shaped their bodies according to their desire (*stwt.n.f dt.sn r htp-ib.sn*).

So the gods entered into their bodies (*sw °k ntrw dt sn*) ... ‘of every kind of wood’, stone (*m °3t nb[t]*), clay (*m im nb*), and all kinds of other things that grow under his authority (*ht nb[t] rd hr-htw.f*; for *hr-htf*), in which they had taken form (*hpr.n.sn im*).

Thus all the gods and their *kaw* were gathered in him (*°b*, ‘to be united’), satisfied and associated with the Lord of the Two Lands¹² (*sw °b n.f ntrw nbw k3w.sn is htpy hnmy m nb T3wy*).”

”

Théophile Obenga, *La Philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique. 2780-330 avant notre ère*
 [African Philosophy of the Pharaonic period. 2780-330 BCE],
 Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 1990, pp. 68–70.
 Translation into English by UNESCO.

¹² The “Two Lands” were Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, considered to be two separate but closely related countries.

TEXT 2 THE BOOK OF KNOWING THE CREATIONS OF RA AND OF FELLING THE SNAKE APEP

“

Thus spoke the Lord of the Universe (*dd mdw Nb-r dr*). He said:

‘When I showed myself in existence, existence existed (*hpr.i hpr hprw*). I came into being in the form of the Existent, which had come into being in the Primal Time (*hprw.kwi m hprw n (w) hpri hpr ms sp tpy*). Having come into being in the way of being of the Existent, I therefore existed (*hpr.kwi m hprw n hpri hpr.i*). And thus existence came into being (*hpr hprw*), for I preceded the ancient gods that I made (*pw n p3. N.i iw ntr p3wtyw*), for I had antecedence over the ancient gods (*p3.n.i. m ntrw*), for my name preceded theirs (*p3 m.i*), for I created antiquity and the ancient gods (*isw iri.i.sp p3wt ntrw p3wtyw*). I made all that I desired in this world (*irry.i sp mrwty nbt m t3 pn*) and I spread over it (*wsh. N.i. im.f*). I reached out my hand (*ts.n. drt*), by myself (*w^o.i.kwi*), before they were born (*nn.msi.sn*), before I spat out Shu and Tefnut (*nn iss.n.i m Sw nn df.n.i m Tfnwt*). I used my own mouth (*ini.n.ir.i ds.i*) and Magic was my name (*rn.i pw Hk3w*). It was I who came into being in (my) way of being (*ink hpr.n.i m hprw*), when I came into being in the way of being of the Existent (*hpr.kwi m, hprw nw Hpri*). I (thus) came into being in antiquity (*hpr.n.i m p3wt t3*) and a host of ways of being came into existence from (this) beginning (*hpr 33 hpw m tp-^e*), (as before) no way of being had come into existence in this world (*nn hpr hprw nbt m t3 pn*). I did everything that I did (*‘ir‘i.n.‘i irry nbt*), being alone (*w^o.i.kwi*), before anyone else (but me) was shown to exist (*nn hpr ky*), to act with me in these places (*‘ir‘iw.n.f. hn^o.‘i m bw pwy*). There I created the ways of being from the strength (in me) (*‘ir ‘i.i hprw im m b3 pwy*). There I created in the Nun (*ts.n.‘i im Nnw*), while (still) drowsy (*m nn‘i*) while I had yet to find any ground on which to stand upright (*nn gmi.n.i bw h^o.n.i im*). (Then) my heart was filled with energy (*3ht n.i ib.i*), the design of creation appeared before me (*sntt n.i m hr.i*), and I accomplished everything I wanted to do, being alone (*‘ir‘i.n.‘i ‘irry nbt w^o.i.kw‘i*). Conceiving designs in my heart (*sntt n.i m ‘ib.‘i*), I created a different way of being (*km3.n‘i ky jprw*), and multitudinous ways of being were born of the Existent (*33 hprw nw Hpri*).’

”

Théophile Obenga, *La Philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique ; 2780-330 avant notre ère* [African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period, 2780-330 BCE], Paris, Editions l’Harmattan, 1990, pp. 56–57.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

First and foremost among the major themes that emerge from the selected texts is the theme of water, shared by all the great African cosmogonies (Heliopolitan, Hermopolitan, Theban, Kozimé, Fali, Mvet, Dogon, etc.). Water appears as the matrix of all beings, including the gods: Ptah, also called Tatenen, meaning “the risen land”, rose from the primeval cosmic waters. Atum and the Soul of Ra (personification of the Sun) were also brought into the world in the Nun, when nothing existed. As the only ontological constituent of the primordial world, water is the absolute primeval being, the original building block of the world. Texts refer to this being as the procreator, the master of all constituents of the universe.

Chaos does not denote nothingness, nor have the things that fill this world come from *this nothingness* through the action of a deity deemed to be uncreated or timeless. Chaos simply designates the world in its original formless state, and some African stories even suggest that “the world has never been created”, since it has always existed.²²

An equally pervasive theme, the self-genesis of the cosmic being, relates to an eternally evolving world. Thus Ptah is the body that moulded his own body and brought himself into being.

The triple “Khepri-Ra-Atum” concept accurately conveys the idea of self-engenderment, which is of great philosophical importance. Indeed, *Atum* evokes the fundamental notion of the *totality of what is and of what is not* and he thus dialectically embodies *being* and *non-being*, and presages the Heraclitean doctrine that incorporates nothingness and movement into the very heart of being, as if to put an end to the perception of the real as stable and immobile. Khepri as a concept refines this idea, since it means “to be born”, “to come into being”, “to become”, “to be transformed into” and “to be manifested” (in some form or another). In the “Book of Knowing the Creations of Ra”, the universe sets itself in motion, unaided by any external or superior force, when it becomes conscious of itself and therefore not as a result of an act of creation *ex nihilo*. The mediation of the living substance noted here is comprehensible only if tension within being, which presupposes the activity of a free subject, is acknowledged. It is this active subject which expands in the world and engenders other forms of being from the power that it releases. The question of the One and the Multiple is thus resolved.

The other important theme is intellect as an active principle in the cosmos. For example, in the Memphite theology, Ptah is portrayed as the heart, that is to say, intellect or reason.²³ In the history of philosophy, he is depicted as the intellectual deity par excellence and forerunner of the Greeks’ *Logos*. Ptah shares this quality with Khepri-Ra-Atum, who also sets the world in motion in awakening to consciousness and in using thought to create. This deity, who designs projects in his heart (in his reason) to complete the cosmogonic process, eventually becomes, therefore, an affirmation of (the value of) the intellect as an essential active principle and the original driving force behind the dynamism of the universe. This theme leads to another one – the basic intelligibility of the world. The presence of Ptah as intellect at the heart of the cosmos adequately explains why our world is rational and intelligible and why its laws can be grasped by our minds. In the great African texts, reason imbues everything – plants, animals, corporeal limbs, human beings and the civilizing works that they produce. For example, Ptah built the cities, established sanctuaries and created every kind of work and craft, in particular metalworking.

The connection between Ptah and metalworking specifies the intellectual and rational vocation of this Memphite entity. It is this relationship which connects the Memphite theology to the other great African cosmogonies, especially the selected Mvet cosmogony, in which metallurgy and technomorphism play crucial roles. In African systems generally, the blacksmith is depicted as having invented the principle of knowledge, since his art opens the door to the secrets of nature and enhances the development of human mental faculties. In Mvet doctrines, the cosmic copper orb has a very significant attribute, for it is the matrix of science-wisdom (*Nana ebaang feg*).

Although it is essential to the study of cosmogonies, historians of philosophy have paid very little attention to technomorphism.²⁴ This category will seem unusual only to those who do not know that in Greek philosophy,

²² Bohumil Holas, *Les dieux d’Afrique* [The Gods of Africa], Paris, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner S. A., 1968, p. 76.

²³ In the great African philosophical traditions, the heart is the seat of knowledge and of thought. For that reason it easily becomes as one with intellect, reason and understanding.

²⁴ Ivan Rožanskij is one of the few historians of philosophy to have studied this fundamental issue in particular. See his article entitled “Le cosmos et l’homme dans la philosophie présocratique” [“Man and the Cosmos in pre-Socratic Philosophy”], in *La Philosophie grecque et sa portée culturelle et historique* [Greek Philosophy and its Cultural and Historical Importance] (multi-authored), translation from the Russian by A Garcia and S. Mouraviev, Moscou, Éditions du progrès, 1985, pp. 39–59.

the bellows in the forge had, for example, enabled Anaximander to describe the space filled with air between the sky and the land.²⁵ Owing to the technomorphic metaphor, the real becomes intelligible. The process of creating objects, from melting the metals to pouring them into the mould, does indeed provide cosmogonists with an additional rational model for describing phenomena that seem to have occurred at the beginning of time and initially defied human understanding. The strength of the mechanics-based analogy lies in its capacity to establish “similarities of relation” and, as stressed by Paul Grenet, to subject the object to thought only indirectly “by substituting an empirical notion for the metempirical object, which in itself is inaccessible.”²⁶

QUESTIONS

1

After summarizing the relevant account in the selected texts, show the relevance of the idea of chaos to present-day philosophy.

2

Give an account of the fundamental question of being and non-being as it appears in the selected extracts.

3

Identify in the selected extracts the basic concepts that account for the idea of becoming.

4

The question of the One and the Multiple is a key aspect of the texts studied. Explain why, giving specific examples in support of your answer.

5

In the texts studied, identify the active principle that sets the universe in motion. How can the comparison between this active principle and the logos be justified?

6

How is the question of the unity of language and thought formulated in the Memphite theology?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

1

After the relevant documentary research, examine the similarities and differences between the African cosmogonies studied and the other major known cosmogonies, especially the Greek and Biblical cosmogonies. You should carefully distinguish between creationist and self-engendering cosmogonies.

2

Read carefully the fragments by Anaximander and Heraclitus (and the related doxography), then identify those aspects of their cosmogonies that are couched in the terminology of metalworking and compare them to the Mvet cosmogony studied here.

3

Many historians of philosophy claim that the idea of the world owing its existence to a rational principle is very similar to the Greeks' logos doctrine. Make a comparative study between Ptah and Xenophanes's intellectual god, for example.

²⁵ See extracts from Anaximander's doxography in J. Voilquin, *Les Penseurs grecs avant Socrate: de Thalès de Milet à Prodicus* [Greek thinkers before Socrates: From Thales of Miletus to Prodicus], Paris, Flammarion, 1964. See, in particular, Aétius, II, 13, 7 (DOX. 343); Aétius, II, 25, I (DOX. 355), p. 52. See, too, I. Rožanskij, *La Philosophie grecque et sa portée culturelle et historique*, pp. 41–42.

²⁶ Paul Grenet, *Les Origines de l'analogie philosophique dans les dialogues de Platon*, p. 49.



II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

The focus in this pivotal section is on three major texts. The first, written by Cameroonian epistemologist Emmanuel Malolo Dissakè, is an introduction to the captivating and instructive world of Egyptian mathematics, which is now known owing to a small number of historical papyri, especially the *Rhind Papyrus* (c. 1650 BCE), the *Berlin Papyrus* (c. 1800 BCE) and the *Moscow Papyrus* (c. 1800 BCE), which show how advanced mathematics were at that time. There are invaluable documents on multiplication, division (Problem No. 8 in the *Rhind Papyrus*), the decomposition of fractions (Leather scroll, British Museum) and the multiplication table for fractions (Problem No. 61 in the *Rhind Papyrus*), among others. In Egypt mathematicians introduced into their practices, questions of epistemological interest, appropriate to the status of their science. Thus, Ahmes defines mathematics as an ideal tool for learning about the real. For this celebrated Egyptian mathematician, “accurate calculations” entail “access to knowledge of every existing thing and every obscure secret.”²⁷ Mathematics thus paved the way for physics. Malolo Dissakè’s text is doubly interesting – philosophically and didactically. It shows how Egyptian mathematicians combined rules of method for the attainment of knowledge with educational principles that facilitated a scientific approach to youth education. The fact that Egyptian mathematicians addressed the question of case-based, and even exercise-based, teaching so early and with such rigour attests to their great and bold advances in intellectual matters.

In its written form, Egyptian mathematics provides researchers with simple analytical tools for studying epistemological issues. Oral mathematics requires rather more effort, method and imagination. This is apparent in the oral construction of numbers studied by the Senegalese epistemologist Abdoulaye Elimane Kane. Oral numbers are used by millions of people in Africa who count and make calculations, ranging from the simplest to the most complex operations, in their daily activities. Parentheses are an operational concept in such contexts because they permit an irregular sequence of operations – addition, multiplication and even subtraction – in the expression of numbers. As clarity about a number’s components is absolutely vital when referred to verbally, markers must obviously be used in order to differentiate the elements of an utterance clearly. In writing, the preference is for parentheses, whereas in the spoken medium markers take the form of grammatical inflections (word endings) or special syntactical features. This is the import of the dual linguistic and mathematical ordering that is central to Elimane Kane’s considerations, which are based on actual examples drawn from the Pulaar- and Wolof-speaking worlds (Senegal). The second selected text by the same author is equally interesting, for the study of “natural mathematics” shows that there is an implied *logos* in one of the oldest, most primitive and most universal number systems, which is the form of counting that is inspired by the mathematical organs of the human body, namely the five fingers of one hand, on which base 5 has been derived, the ten fingers of both hands, which account for

²⁷ Quoted by André Pichot, *La naissance de la science. 1. Mésopotamie, Egypte* [The Birth of Science. 1. Mesopotamia, Egypt], Paris, Gallimard, 1991, p. 228.



the 10-based decimal system, and the ten fingers plus ten toes taken together, which account for the 20-based system. According to the author, by contributing to the establishment of bases in the numeral system, these parts of the body are no longer mere organs but are genuinely transformed into instruments of knowledge.



Pyramids de Giza, Egypt

II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

1 EGYPTIAN MATHEMATICS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LEARNING

TEXT 1 *EGYPTIAN MATHEMATICS UNDER THE PHARAOHS AND THE MODERN THEORY OF SCIENCE, EMMANUEL MALOLO DISSAKÈ*

“

The striking feature about Egyptian texts is the extraordinary rigour with which the exposition moves forward. Although one can always disagree with the way the problem is laid out . . . nearly all of them are imbued by a strong sense of organization. It is as if the scribe, proceeding by stages, had set himself the task of leading the learner, step by step, to a predetermined outcome, the completion of his education. This reveals a certain philosophy of learning, the crux of which appears to be that education consists in starting with the simplest and progressing to the most complex; in so doing, the learner discovers the methods' rules and secrets (sometimes written down, sometimes only implicit) that lead to the resolution of the difficulties encountered; at the same time, one must never lose sight of the purpose of education, which is primarily the fulfilment of specific social duties. While it may be required to deal with hard facts, education is never confined to meeting that requirement, which is but a minimum one. An attempt will now be made to give insights into this philosophy of learning.

It is often said that Egyptian papyri are sets of solved 'problems'. This description of Egyptian mathematics amounts to a strong position on the subject, a position that hinges somewhat on the word 'problem'. The idea behind the word 'problem' is that it creates for everyone a difficulty that must first be examined individually or collectively in order next to decide on how best to tackle it, identify the terms in which it is posed and then solve it successfully. In short, there is something intrinsically indeterminate, so to speak, about the nature of a problem and about the way in which it is understood, in terms of solving it or even the possibility of solving it; it poses a problem. In the light of these points, it could easily be argued that Ahmes's textbook has nothing to do with this type of entity. Ahmès knows exactly what he is expounding, what is involved, how one should proceed in order to find the answer, and what that answer is. Instead of *problems*, we shall use the word *cases* or even *exercises*. What is being labelled a problem is really a *case*, which has been elucidated before being placed before the reader. It is actually an *exercise*, in other words, an opportunity for the youngest learners to train their minds and to train themselves through *exercises* so that, by learning the basics, they will acquire skills for tackling more difficult future exercises that will not be so very different in principle and in kind from those previously encountered. The master-scribe should *display* his learning and exercise his mastery by varying the ways of solving problems and revealing the many aspects that will make the learner discover the secret within the exercise in question. Nothing extraordinary is ever discovered; and so the mathematics involved seems ordinary, simple and lacking in scope. Yet, that very ordinariness holds all that is essential, for therein lies the mystery. Against this background, the problem for the history of science is subsumed under questions such as: what is education through cases or by means of exercises? What are its inherent motivating forces? What role do mathematical proofs play?

”

Emmanuel Malolo Dissakè, *Mathématique pharaonique égyptienne et théorie moderne des sciences*, Paris : © Éditions Dianoïa, 2005, pp. 60-62.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

2 LOGICAL STRUCTURE AND LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE

TEXT 2 “THE LINGUISTIC AND MATHEMATICAL STRUCTURE OF ORAL NUMERATION UTTERANCES”, ABDOULAYE ELIMANE KANE

“

Studying the ways in which numbers are expressed in spoken numeral systems opens up many possibilities for comparing the linguistic and the mathematical structure of such utterances. [It is worth pointing out] that this form of numerical expression, which may be called their parenthetical structure, should be of considerable interest to linguists and mathematicians concerned with the teaching of their discipline in African languages.

It may seem surprising, in the case of oral numeration, that the concept includes the notion of parenthesis, which is an ideal means of expression in writing and an operator whose history and use in mathematical procedures are highly technical. It could even be argued that it is inappropriate to resort to such a notion in oral numeration, but an analysis of these modes of expression makes it easier to understand and to justify this label. Such an analysis also provides the means of establishing the scope and the limitations of oral numeration and of reflecting on its improvement.

Oral numeration is, to a large extent, dependent on the properties of the language in which the numbers are named and constructed. Syntax and order are inevitably closely connected and are, at the same time, logical notions. Expressing a number by stating the successive powers of the base in which it is formulated and moving from the largest to the smallest is an act of ordering. It is logical and mathematical in nature. For example, twenty-three thousand seven hundred and ten.

To refer to the multiplicand before the multiplier in expressing the same number and the same powers is a feature of the language specific to each culture and to the syntax of that language. In one sense, syntax, too, constitutes an act of ordering. There is no doubt, therefore, that a linguistic structure and a mathematical structure coexist in the same oral utterance.

... The parenthetical structure ... designates very precisely an irregular *succession of operations, namely addition, multiplication and sometimes subtraction*, in the expression of a number. Furthermore, owing to this *heterogeneous* succession, it is necessary, *in order to meet the requirement of clarity* of the oral statement of the constituents of a number, to introduce markers that may be expressed as parentheses in the written word and through word endings and/or syntactical peculiarities in speech.

The parenthetical structure is used to express a number whenever the language has no single, distinct lexeme for a number or, more usually, when *large numbers involving several constituents* are expressed.

[When it comes to] the expression of small numbers, [we can say that] whereas the number 10 is expressed by a single, distinct lexeme in French, Pulaar and Wolof (dix, Sappo, fukk) numbers such as 35, 42, 66 and



77 have, understandably, a more complex linguistic and mathematical structure, in varying degrees, when we pass from one language to another.

Let us take the number 35:

French: trente cinq

Pulaar: cappante tati e joy (literally: 'tens, three times plus five')

Wolof: ñett (i) fukk ak juroom (literally: 'three times ten plus five').

It will be observed that French makes no mention of the operation of addition, either in the linguistic or the mathematical structure. Moreover, the number for thirty is designated by a single lexeme. When the same number is expressed in Pulaar and Wolof the parenthetical structure surfaces immediately, notably the operation of multiplication to express the component 'thirty' and of addition in the case of the other component. A further point is that Wolof and Pulaar do not follow the same convention in the sequencing of the constituents of multiplication (putting the multiplicand before or after the multiplier).

[When it comes to expressing] large numbers [to illustrate the point, we can use] the number 12,728.

French : Douze mille sept cent vingt-huit.

Pulaar : Ujunaaje sappo e diddi e teemedede jee didi e noogas e jeetati

Translated into figures: $1000\ 10+2 + 100\ 5 + 2+20 + 5+3$.

To make this translation, written in figures, more intelligible, parentheses must be used in the appropriate places. The figure must thus be read as:

$1000 (10+2) + 100 (5+2) + 20 + (5+3)$.

... Clearly, we are faced with a paradox: that of explaining oral procedures by means of markers which are specific to a written positional system and which actually belong, to a different kind of logic. It is quite definite, however, that the utterance of this large number with its many constituents corresponds to this parenthetical system. There is indeed an observable irregular sequence of operations involving addition and multiplication, together with linguistic peculiarities that influence the positioning of the multiplication constituents: Wolof and Pulaar do things differently from each other.

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Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, "Structure linguistique et structure mathématique des énoncés en numération orale", *Revue sénégalaise d'histoire sociologie, philosophie des sciences et techniques*, No. 3, May 1992, Episteme, pp. 89–97.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

3 OUR RATIONAL RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

TEXT 3 “NATURAL MATHEMATICS AND RATIONALITY”, ABDOULAYE ELIMANE KANE

“

... Knowledge is generally constituted in an area of human practices, on the basis of which and through the observation and repetition of invariant relations, humanity establishes rites, rules and laws in order to act and to anticipate.

It is therefore important to revisit the question of the relationship between oral numeration and rationality by explaining the following hypothesis: the numeral phenomenon (that is to say named and ordered) is different from, and represents more than, the observed and experienced natural phenomenon.

I shall start with the example of the ‘hand’, which is so often invoked as an argument for the importance of base 5 to the idea that the corresponding numeral systems merely reproduce what is most immediate and familiar to human beings – the human body.

It has rightly been stressed that the hand and the human body first prompted the idea of a base because they each form a single unit while being composed of units. However, it has not been sufficiently stressed that as soon as either serves as a base (quinary in the case of the hand and vigesimal for the body with the ten fingers of both hands being added to the ten toes), then it is no longer an organ but an instrument. In fact, a base in a numeral system is an artifice, and as an artifice it gives insights into the culture and thence to the formulation of a strategy for measuring that which is initially uncountable, superabundant and chaotic. To that end, suffice it to consider that once the base is established, it generates its own succession of powers, each one of which has only the vaguest of connections with its distant ‘natural’ origin, the bodily organ in question. Successive powers of the base are named and, as mentioned above, take on a mediating function and serve as new units. This is still clearly visible in the history specific to certain groups such as the Mande peoples, who have introduced, successively or concurrently, additional bases such as 5, 20, 60, 80 and finally 100, while keeping the same word *kémé* to refer to them. This instrument is unquestionably much more than an organ. The *logos* is deeply ingrained in it. Oral numeration, despite its limitations in comparison to written numeration, creates in the immensity of the diverse and the irrational (the natural) a ‘world’ of sayables, precisely in the sense that anything that is capable of being named can equally have a *relation* to another; in this specific case, the relation is between two numbers, then among several. Furthermore, in classical Greek, *logos* actually meant ‘number’ or ‘a succession or set of objects.’ This is what was to be demonstrated.

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Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, “Mathématiques sauvages et rationalité”, in Paulin J. Hountondji (ed.), *La Rationalité, une ou plurielle?* [Rationality, one or plural?], Dakar, CODESRIA/UNESCO, 2007, pp. 218–19. Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

The fundamental epistemological issues of African mathematics must be addressed in any study of African mathematics. To begin with Ancient Egypt, the short introductory statement by Ahmes, the mathematician and teacher, to the *Rhind Papyrus* perfectly sums up the position of the science of numbers in the hierarchy of knowledge. The idea that mathematics provides rules for studying and understanding the real is important. It was the rapid advances of civilization that established mathematics as the queen of the sciences for measuring quantity, magnitude and duration in the physical world. Mathematics provides techniques for solving the most abstruse puzzles in the universe, ultimately in order to provide the appropriate tools for gaining precise knowledge of the nature of things. It supplies the most perfect model of rigour during the process of acquiring knowledge of the real.

The rigour of expository progression is striking in mathematical writing. The new feature here is the way in which mathematicians combine methodical rules for accessing knowledge with educational principles so as to give young people a scientific education. Ahmes's exercises are therefore doubly interesting, both scientifically and didactically. An effective scientific education presupposes first and foremost that the master-scribe himself fully grasps the subject matter. According to Malolo Dissaké, the master proves this by varying the problem-solving procedures and by expounding those aspects that can stimulate the young pupil's curiosity. This method of scientific education, which is original even by today's standards, raises a series of questions that are really epistemological and comprise, in particular, a fundamental but very controversial question in the case of Egyptian science – the question of *proof*.

There is, however, yet another type of epistemological and methodological question that mathematics was incapable of answering on its own, namely the crucial question of the source of knowledge, which was solved, in a very modern way, by the Memphite theology (see Section I). Indeed, according to this treatise, sensory knowledge is subsequently reconstructed by the mind before it is embodied in the word, which gives it its form. The word is the necessary condition for knowledge becoming an *idea*. The other central problem raised in the treatise concerns the intelligibility of our world. The placing of Ptah, or intellect, at the heart of the cosmos suffices to explain why the world is rational and intelligible and why its laws can be grasped by our reason. Accordingly, and this is the ontological and gnoseological point of panlogism, all developments in nature, history and society are the outcome of the logical activity of reason. As Abdoulaye Elimane Kane shows (Text 3), even the seemingly most elementary of phenomena, namely counting systems that use a base of 5, 10 or 20, corresponding to the parts of the body (fingers and toes), forms part of a natural faculty of abstraction which allows human beings to form much more general notions. Far from involving an exclusively unmediated relationship with the body, the faculty of counting is evidence that, in oral cultures, too, humans are driven by rational activity, which enables them to establish order and to structure “the immensity of the diverse” in order to make it intelligible. In other words, human beings' relations, including relations with things and data, are always rational. The same *logos* is at work in the parenthetical structures studied by the same author. In this case *logos* stems from a seemingly simple idea that, once applied, proves to be formidably complex. The idea is that oral numeration is largely dependent on the properties of the language that is used to name and build numbers. Syntax and order are therefore indissolubly linked and are concomitantly revealed as logical notions. The ingenuity of using grammatical inflections and syntactic peculiarities to introduce markers into elements of oral numeration, where written numbering uses parentheses, indisputably constitutes the originality of the subject under investigation.

QUESTIONS

1

In what sense can it be said that for the Ancient Egyptians, as for Galileo, “mathematics explains nature” or that “nature is a sort of great book written in the language of mathematics”?

2

At what point do fingers and toes cease to be mere organs and become genuine instruments of knowledge?

3

Using Text 3 as the starting point, show what the scientific spirit consists of.

4

Draw on Text 2 to show how the connection between mathematical and linguistic structure is expressed in oral counting systems.





III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION

This section consists of three essential texts. The first is entitled “Instructions to Vizier Rekhmire” and dates back to the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt (1550–1292 BCE). It is an autobiographical funerary text, relating Vizier Rekhmire’s installation ceremony during the reign of Thoutmosis III. The Eighteenth Dynasty marks the high point of Egyptian civilization. The civic maturity that was in evidence at the time accounts for early attempts to establish a *public space*, governed by the principles of reason. Special attention was given to the definition of legal norms and ethical laws in conformity with Maat (Truth-Justice) principles. The text broke new ground philosophically and culturally, for as there was no genuinely public space regulated by the principle of Truth-Justice at the time, the original idea that every judge should perform his duties *in full view of the public gaze* would have been incomprehensible. In this text, the State and the judiciary seem to be permanently under the control not only of those appearing in court but also of public opinion in its entirety. The Maat philosophical concept alone requires one to be critical of State power and raises the fundamental question of the *dictamen* of conscience, moral obligations, political laws and duties toward the individual. The text stresses a judge’s duty to be considerate toward defendants, the requirement of firmness being tempered by gentleness rather than inspiring terror.

Concern for the human person is the focus of the text entitled “The Manden Charter: The Mandinka Declaration of Human Rights”. This document, also known as the “Kouroukan Fouga Charter”, is now on the law syllabi of West African universities. The Charter was probably proclaimed in 1236 after Soundjata Keita’s victory over Soumaoro Kanté in the early days of the Mali Empire. The Kouroukan Fouga Charter was “rediscovered” at a workshop held in Guinea by the *Centre d’études linguistiques et historiques par tradition orale* (CELHTO) from 3 to 12 March 1998. Recited in turns by nine “griots,”²⁸ the Charter was redrafted as a constitutional text by Sirimani Kouyaté, himself a griot and also a judge at the Court of Appeals of Kankan in Guinea Conakry.

In several respects, the Manden Charter evokes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its rediscovery in the twentieth century by Africa’s scientific community constitutes a major cultural and philosophical milestone in terms of its stated objectives of the right to life and food. It lays emphasis on the protection of freedom of expression, association and action. These freedoms influence all other freedoms, especially the freedom of thought and the freedom to have control over one’s own person. The provision on the abolition of slavery is central, since the Charter asserts that such a practice debases the human person and strips him of his dignity. The other important provision, with undeniable and far-reaching philosophical and political implications, concerns the education of children in order to prepare them for cooperation and social exchange, which alone are capable of fostering the sharing of common values in later life.


²⁸ In sub-Saharan Africa, “griots” are wandering poet-musicians. They are widely credited with supernatural powers and therefore enjoy a large measure of freedom of speech.



It is these values which, in the selected text by the Cameroonian philosopher Marcien Towa, justify the crucial concept of an “achieved community of minds” inspired by the German philosopher Hegel. The *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l’Afrique actuelle* [An essay on the problem with philosophy in Africa today], from which the extract in this volume has been taken, was written in a climate marked by a bitter ideological struggle against the Negritude tendency embodied by Léopold Sédar Senghor,²⁹ on the one hand, and, on the other, the ethnologically based philosophy (ethnophilosophy) inspired by Placide Tempels’ *Bantou Philosophy*.³⁰ In African philosophy, negritude and ethnophilosophy had recycled certain categories borrowed from late nineteenth-century Romanticism and encouraged a distrust of reason and philosophical culture. The selected text is a response to that particular approach from a philosophical standpoint aimed at eliminating points of view, opinions and dogma from all discussion. The text’s basic argument is that the foundations of the human community are undermined by failure to engage in critical debate, since such failure makes rational agreement among people, societies and cultures impossible. The rise of postmodernist categories of “dissensus” and “disagreement” and the rejection of consensus heighten the philosophical relevance of Marcien Towa’s text.

²⁹ See Marcien Towa, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Négritude ou Servitude?* [Léopold Sédar Senghor: Negritude or Servitude?], Yaoundé, Editions Clé, 1980; *Poésie de la Négritude* [Negritude Poetry], Sherbrook, Editions Naaman, 1983.


³⁰ Placide Tempels, *Bantou Philosophy*, translated by the Rev. Philip King, Présence africaine, 1959.



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

1 GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

TEXT 1 “INSTRUCTIONS TO VIZIER REKHMIRE”



“ Heed these words, being a vizier is not a sweet and pleasant thing; sometimes, it is even as bitter as gall ... Petitioners from the South and from the North, indeed from all over the land, will come. ... And you must see to it that everything is done in accordance with the law, in accordance, also, with their right, by ensuring justice for every individual. A judge must live in full view of the people, for the water and the wind report everything that he does, and no-one is ignorant of his actions. If a mistake occurs in what another judge does and it is not declared through the mouth of a court official, it will be learnt through the person being judged: indeed, this person, who is at the official's side, will say: 'This is not [fair treatment].' Heed these words, the best protection for a judge is to act according to the law, when he responds to the petitioner's claims; in this way, the person being judged will not be able to say: 'I have not received justice.' Consider this maxim, which is in the Book of Memphis and which says: 'A king is venerated if his vizier is respectful of the law. ...' (Beware also) of what was done by Vizier Khety, namely he wronged those close to him to the advantage of others. ... But it is an abomination of God to show partiality.

These are my instructions, which you must always observe. Treat those who are known to you like those who are not known to you, those who are related to you like those who are strangers to you. The judge who acts thus will prosper here in his office. Do not dismiss any petitioner without having heard what he has to say. If one of them comes to you to complain, do not reject what he says ...; you may dismiss him, but only after explaining to him why he is being turned away. Heed these words, it is often said that, even more than seeing his complaint upheld, a petitioner likes to be listened to sympathetically.

Do not feel anger toward a person unjustly; only be angered by those who deserve it. Inspire fear, so that people are in awe of you; the (true) judge is the judge whom people fear. But heed this also, a judge's worthiness rests on administering justice; if a man is [excessively] feared, the people will think that there is bad in him, and it will not be said of him: he is a man. [If a judge] speaks untruths, [he will depart, as he deserves to].


Heed these words, you will achieve success in the performance of your duties by practising justice, for what people desire more than anything is that the vizier's acts should be fair; it is he who scrupulously upholds the law. ... Heed, then, these words: the vizier's chief scribe is called the 'Scribe of Truth-Justice'. ... As for the hall in which you will hear cases, there is, inside it, another 'broad hall', called 'of the two Maats', where you will deliver your verdicts.

”

Claire Lalouette, *Textes sacrés et textes profanes de l'ancienne Egypte. Des pharaons et des hommes*
[Sacred and profane texts of Ancient Egypt. By the pharaohs and by men],
Paris, Gallimard-UNESCO, 1984, pp. 182-84.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



2 | COMMUNAL LIFE AND RIGHTS



TEXT 2 THE MANDEN CHARTER: THE MANDINKA DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

“

The children of Sanin and Kontron declare: every human life is a life.
It is true that one life comes into existence before another life,
But no life is more 'senior', more respectable than any other life,
Just as no life is superior to any other life.

The children of Sanin and Kontron declare: every life being a life, any wrong done to a life demands reparation.

Therefore, no-one may blame a neighbour without good reason;
No-one may wrong another human being;
No-one may cause suffering to others.

The children of Sanin and Kontron declare:
That all people must watch over their neighbour;
That all people must venerate their parents;
That all people must educate their children;
That all people must provide for their family's needs.

The children of Sanin and Kontron declare:
That all people must watch over the land of their fathers.
Fatherland, country, land of the fathers
Also, and above all, mean humanity:
For if people disappear from the face of any country, from any strip of land,
Decline and desolation will follow.

The children of Sanin and Kontron declare:
Hunger is not a good thing,
Nor is slavery a good thing;
There is no greater calamity than these two things
In the world.

As long as we have quivers and arrows,
Hunger will kill no-one in Mande,
If famine should befall it;
War will never destroy a village
So that slaves can be taken;

This means that henceforth, no-one will put a bit into the mouth of another human being,
In order to sell that person;
No-one will in future be beaten in Mande,
Let alone be put to death, merely for being the descendant of a slave.

The children of Sanin and Kontron declare:

On this day slavery in its very essence has been eradicated,

'Between walls', between borders in Mande;

From this day onwards, raids are outlawed in Mande,

The torments arising from these horrors will disappear from this day on in Mande.

What a scourge famine is! A hungry person knows neither shame nor restraint.

What terrible suffering the slave and the hungry person endure,

Especially when they have no-one to turn to for help;

The slave is stripped of dignity in every part of the world.

Earlier generations say to us:

Human beings are individuals, who are made of flesh and blood,

Of marrow and sinews, of skin covered with hair and of hair that covers the head, who nourish themselves with food and drink;

But their 'soul', their spirit is sustained by three things:

- Seeing whom it pleases them to see
- Saying what it pleases them to say
- And doing what it pleases them to do.

If their soul lacks any one of these three things,

It will suffer as a result

And will most certainly decline.

Accordingly, the children of Sanin and Kontron declare:

All people will henceforth have control over what happens to their person,

All people will be free in their acts, within the 'prohibitions and laws of their homeland'.

This is the Mande oath,

Which is addressed to the ears of the whole world.

”

Youssef Tata Cissé and Jean-Louis Sagot-Duvaurox (translators), *La Charte du Mandé et autres traditions du Mali*
[The Manden Charter and other Mali traditions],
Paris, Albin Michel, 2003.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

3 COMMUNAL LIFE AND THE EXERCISE OF THOUGHT

TEXT 3 *AN ESSAY ON THE PROBLEM WITH PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICA TODAY, MARCIEN TOWA*



“ When it is asserted that reason has proven incapable of attaining theoretical truth in the field of metaphysics, the conclusion drawn is not that greater methodological rigour is required but that it is right to settle metaphysical questions on the basis of feeling and subjective opinions and to substitute for proofs descriptions of the simple, inner life of the conscience, considered all the purer when it is the least critical. Popular philosophy may well appear to rest on conviction and personal understanding and to exclude authority and arbitrariness, but since the unmediated representations and inner feelings are accepted without examination as soon as they are revealed, they still constitute authority of a kind, the inner authority of heart and conscience ... In all of these currents of thought, everything is based on moral instinct, on what is *felt* to be rights and duties, and so on. Morality and religious dogmas mould the content of this way of thinking. If this content is based only on feeling, it will take one form in one person and a different form in another; the deciding factor can only be arbitrary subjectivity. Popular philosophy does not seek intellectual penetration so much as edification through impassioned enthusiasm for the beautiful, the sacred or religion, considering that it has found in this ardent zeal a short cut to truth, sparing itself the need to follow the long path of philosophical culture, the rich and profound journey along the path that leads the mind, and the mind only, to knowledge. The result, a disappointing one, is, in fact, merely an assumption based on ready-made ideas that are not considered helpful to debate, although they are readily invoked in order to judge or condemn ideas to the contrary. Resorting to common sense, to the purity of conscience or to the innocence of the heart as the ultimate basis of the ‘truths’ proclaimed by popular philosophy actually rules out any likelihood of dialogue and agreement between people ... Popular philosophy, therefore, through its appeal to the heart, to inner feelings or to intuition as the supreme arbiter of what is true and false, destroys humanity’s roots, for it is the nature of humanity to strive for agreement with others; human nature only really exists in an achieved community of minds.

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Marcien Towa, *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l’Afrique actuelle*, Yaoundé, Éditions Clé (1971) 2006, pp. 64–65. Translation into English by UNESCO.





COMMENTARY

It is by defining the human community as united by the *strong bonds of reason* that African thought has, since antiquity, raised the fundamental question of the political forms of living together. The common theme of the texts in this anthology is *reason as a principle unifying* superior human groups. Reason is understood in a variety of ways – as Truth-Justice (*Maat*), moderation in all acts, fairness, equality, respect for the human person, an achieved community of minds, respect for the law, submission to rights, the equality of all before the law, impartiality and objectivity of the judiciary, a sense of proportion and avoidance of excess in human behaviour. The basic proposition of the texts reviewed is, therefore, that only observance of the principle of reason and practice of truth and justice allow society and the State to be constituted, to be maintained and to remain stable.

The Egyptian text selected is central, because it leads directly to current philosophical debates concerning the definition of a public space as a space in which reason can be exercised and deliberations held, and which is open to all enlightened minds. The pivotal idea here is that individuals form a community of rational exchanges. Hannah Arendt's and Jürgen Habermas's work on the "public space" concept could enhance one's understanding of this issue. This notion does indeed refer to a process in which individuals, forming themselves into a group and making use of their reason, occupy the public space dominated by the State's authority and transform this space into a forum in which the most radical criticism can be made of everything that the State represents. If there were no genuinely public space, some basic assertions made in this text, such as the novel idea that "a judge should (live) in full view of the public" in performing his duties, "for everything he does is carried by the water and the wind, and no-one remains ignorant of his actions", would be unintelligible. The same is true of another idea, recommending impartiality when passing sentence, since defendants who feel wronged are always quick to denounce publicly all injustices against them. In this world in which the law is sovereign, the judgement passed by public opinion is primordial, and biased judges will have everything to fear from the terrible sentences handed down by public opinion, which is pitiless in punishing the flaws of those in public office. A number of other cardinal virtues are recommended to these men: a balance should be struck between necessary firmness (the judge must be feared) and benevolence, for there is inevitably something perverse about any public servant who inspires only terror; and impartiality and fairness should prevail, not only with regard to strangers but also close relations. Egyptian judicial, juridical, political and administrative writings are replete with images of the needle on the scales, the plumb line and weights – cardinal virtues which Thot, the guardian of the rational bureaucratic State, and Maat, the supreme embodiment of the true and the just, impose on humans.

The texts featured in this section portray an optimistic view of life and of human nature. Without optimism, the particular tone of the Manden Charter and Marcién Towa's text would be unintelligible. The ideal world implicit in these texts is neither aggressive nor primitive, nor are human beings perceived as inhumane to each other. It is a world in which peace, tolerance, concord and friendship – which alone ensure the preservation of society and the State – are built through proper education of the soul. Towa extols philosophical education or "the long road of philosophical culture" by which the mind accedes to true knowledge. He contrasts a philosophical education and "intellectual penetration" with "edification through impassioned enthusiasm for the beautiful, the sacred and religion", as an unwarranted short cut to the truth. According to the author, such a short cut does not prepare minds adequately for rational exchanges, since only ready-made opinions, undiscussed preconceptions, unmediated intuitions are recycled interminably, all fostering discord, violence and separation. In Marcién Towa's view, however, humanity's essence is genuinely underpinned neither by violence nor discord, and still less by separation, but by concord and agreement with others, which is evocative of a common world, governed by jointly defined and freely accepted norms and laws. Genuine cooperation, which is synonymous with an *achieved community of minds*, therefore begins with a critique of personal points of view. Critique is the necessary starting point for any rational exchange of arguments, points of view and opinions.

It is through norms and laws that the common world not only brings people together but also prevents them from quarrelling and fighting endlessly. The novel idea of an achieved community of minds points to a world of reason and constant interaction, which can bring people together. The meeting of minds constitutes a genuine institution not because of the large number of individuals (the crowd) that make up the group but because of those individuals' capacity, by using their reason, to deliberate, negotiate agreement, and forge links on the basis of enlightened and duly argued consent. The individual targeted in the critique of popular philosophy is no less than the intuitive subject, as unadapted to argued exchanges as to cooperation. According to Towa, the main cardinal vice of popular philosophy is the right to settle crucial questions on the basis of feeling, subjective opinion and the rejection of argument, demonstration and proof.

The Manden Charter contains reasoning based on general, objective principles, and the modernity of its propositions is very much in evidence. These propositions concern features crucial to living a good life: the inalienable right to life, every life being a life; equality of status in one's enjoyment of life – such equality means that no life is superior to any other life, in the same way as no life is more worthy of respect than another; the right to enjoy physical and moral integrity – such a provision means that no one has the right either to assault or to torment others; the appeal to patriotism, which prescribes one's duties to the nation; the right to good food in acceptable quantities for the individual's moral and psychological balance – “a hungry person knows no shame or self-restraint”; the duty of the entire body politic to educate its children, to make them better prepared for social exchanges and cooperation; the outlawing of slavery, since slavery strips human beings – in the broadest meaning of the word – of their dignity; the right to offer the human soul its favourite sustenance, namely freedom of association (people have the right to see whomever they wish), freedom of expression (people have the right to say whatever they wish) and freedom of action (individuals have the right to do what they wish). These freedoms are vital sustenance for the soul and as such influence all other freedoms, especially the right to think, the right to decide what happens to one's person and individual responsibility.

QUESTIONS

1

In Text 1, identify those passages which substantiate the claim that African thought predates the idea of a public space. How is such a public space characterized?

2

According to the instructions to Vizier Rekhmire, “if a man is [excessively] feared, the public's opinion will be that there is something bad about him.” Discuss this statement.

3

In asserting that judges must always remember that “what they do is carried by the water and the wind”, Egyptian law seems to attach considerable importance to public opinion. How can this requirement be reconciled with the demand for the impartiality of justice? Does justice not run the risk of being subjected permanently to the dictates of public opinion and the crowd?

4

In Text 2, identify those passages which clearly herald the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and show what makes the Charter philosophically and politically relevant today.

5

Identify, in the traditions of your own society, systems of thought that are similar to what Marcién Towa calls “popular philosophy”.

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

1

Look for documentary evidence of any possible links between the concepts of Maat (Egypt) and Dike (Greece).

2

Read Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Highlight those passages in which Aristotle makes a case for distinguishing between universal and individual justice. Compare this with the two definitions of the Maat suggested in Text 2.

3

Marcién Towa: “It is in the nature of human beings to strive for agreement with others”. Do you agree? Organize a debate on this statement contained in Text 3.

IV GENDER EQUALITY

INTRODUCTION

Two significant texts have been selected to study the question of gender in Africa. The issue at stake in the debate on which we have decided to focus, as noted by the Beninese philosopher Ariane Djossou-Ségla (text 1), is radically to redefine human nature itself. The philosopher argues that it is primordial to include women in the definition of human identity. It implies a process in which dialectical gender tension must be maintained. Such tension would enhance understanding and consideration of women's experiences, not as appendages to men, but as beings who have desires, a will of their own and are free.





The second text, from Léopold Sédar Senghor's work, raises some important questions with many historical and philosophical implications. One such question concerns the status of women as "guardians of the home" and, in this respect, "repositories of the past and guarantors of the future" of the group. This warrants comparison, philosophically, with the role of the Greek *oikos* or household (see commentary). The other fundamental philosophical question suggested by this text bears on the right to use a matronymic. This marked a decisive gain for systems based on maternal rights, which are deeply rooted in African societies (matriarchies). The issues surrounding matronymics are philosophical, but they also have a political and a social dimension. The right to use and to transmit a name speaks volumes about the bearer's ontological status. Aristotle's reflections on the distribution of gender-specific ethical virtues are illuminating in this respect, the Stagirite's own position being that a man is better equipped by nature than a woman to command others. Politically, the right to use a matronymic secures for women full enjoyment of additional rights, such as the right to associate the child with the mother's family, the right to transmit a title or inheritance, the right to keep her own clan's gods in the home and so on. In Africa, the idea that marriage does not automatically doom a woman to servitude is of central importance. Such a change of status would only have been possible if marriage corresponded to the founding of a new family and the wife's integration into her husband's clan. Senghor, however, fully understood that marriage was no more than an alliance between two clans who cooperate (within the specific framework of marital union), each preserving its own personality, freedom and rights.

IV GENDER EQUALITY

1 FEMALENESS AND HUMAN IDENTITY

TEXT 1 “HOW CAN THE GENDER ISSUE BE USED TO CORRECT THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION CONCERNING HUMAN NATURE?”, ARIANE DJOSSOU-SÉGLA

“

Women can be included in human nature, not as an addition of what was absent, femaleness, or as the removal of what was totally present, maleness, but rather as a proper consideration of a palpable human identity without repressing sexuation.

This means that human nature recovers its real significance as a concept that distinguishes between human and animal. It also means, socially, that ‘human’ would be identified as much with women as with men, because, however abstract the identification of civil society or political society may seem to be in socio-political theory, it cannot avoid referring to some sort of actual reality conveyed by examples that serve either to confirm or to refute the conceptualization in question.

Our position implies that the purely biological content of the previous gender categories should be retained, but without dismissing their potential psychological effects, so that those same categories can be enhanced as considerations and as valid benchmarks. The distinction between animal and human retains its importance at this level of generality. In specifying human characteristics, however, both men and women would be factored in. The philosophical tradition concerning human nature can be corrected at this level.

Our own approach focuses on gender acknowledgement in socio-political theories. This approach can be traced directly back to the recommendations of feminist methodology concerning the need to break with the suppression and neutralization of gender difference ... Acknowledgement of the latter will lead to the establishment of a genuinely human body of knowledge and will provide a basis for future political action. In other words, if gender difference is acknowledged to establish such a body of knowledge, it can only have a positive effect in reconstituting our conception of human nature. The inclusion of women in the definition of human nature leads to an understanding of women’s experiences as human beings and to the construction of societies in which they are fully accepted and participate as members without any mutilation whatsoever of their abilities, so that they remain, in a word, intact.”

”

Ariane Djossou-Ségla, “Comment corriger la tradition philosophique de la nature humaine par la question de la femme?”, in Paulin J. Hountondji (ed.), *La Rationalité, une ou plurielle?* [Rationality, one or plural?], Dakar, CODESRIA/UNESCO, 2007, pp. 94–95.
Translation into English by UNESCO.





COMMENTARY

In order to understand gender doctrines in Africa, it is important to mention some cosmogonies of the region that highlight the idea that the primeval world is both male and female, and that neither element of the pair has precedence over the other. For instance, Ptah is composed of an equal proportion of female and male attributes. Firmly rooted in the African world view, this imagery features in more recent accounts of creation, as borne out by the neocosmogony of the Lk people (Uganda) (see Section V, Text 4). This text does indeed invoke a hermaphrodite deity, whose attributes are evocative of Ptah's. This is how it starts: "In the beginning, god was twain, half-male, half-female."

Ariane Djossou-Ségla embraces this perspective: in her view, a being is necessarily male or female. However, this duality makes no sense if it is perceived in terms of fusion; it makes sense only in terms of tension, a dialectical separation in preparation for some higher unity achievable only by society and culture – the fields in which contradictions generated by history are expressed and resolved. Therefore, the African viewpoint, whether expressed through ancient texts (Egyptian, Dogon, etc.) or modern documents (Djossou-Ségla), demonstrates the need for generic human identity to be redefined and for women to be included in that redefinition. This differs radically from the Greek myth expounded by Plato in *The Symposium*. Plato's myth is characterized mainly by nostalgia for origins and the desire to regain the primordial world that preceded the division of humanity into male and female. In his myth, the contradictions that beleague the world could seemingly be resolved only by a return to nature, to the primordial unity. In Greek thought, however, the ideal realm of primeval unity is the locus par excellence in which the male element annexes and absorbs the female element, viewed as an appendage. It is precisely this kind of viewpoint that Ariane Djossou-Ségla rejects because, under the pretext of suppressing or neutralizing gender identity, it avoids the basic issue of acknowledging women's experience.

The second text underlines that at some point in African history, the political imbalance was tipped in favour of a maternal-right system known as a matriarchy. As Senghor points out (Text 2), it is "the agrarian nature of the black world" that explains the hegemony of this right. The matronymic is one of the most significant vestiges of the matriarchal system, which found its true home in Africa. The name given to a person is important both philosophically and legally because it betokens the bearer's ontological and legal status.

Senghor explains women's privileged position in terms of their status in the home. As the "ever-present" family member, the supreme "giver of life," women are also "the guardians of the home" and, as such, "repositories of the past and guarantors of the clan's future." Matriarchy is the political system that corresponds to this scheme of things. From the standpoint of the Graeco-Roman world view, there might be some discomfort at this intermingling of the domestic and the political spheres, the home seeming somewhat to be the antechamber to the *agora*. The home, in which she reigns supreme, creates the impression that the keys of the city are being placed in her hands. It is not at all incongruous, therefore, that the African woman, in the same way as Isis herself, devises "stratagems for success, including the laws of government".³¹

This view, too, contrasts, for instance, with the Graeco-Roman view in which the man was in control of both the public and private spheres. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the man's control in the political sphere began with the assertion of his authority within the home and family, as Marcus Porcius Cato argued.³² Indeed, in the Roman family system – in which *familia*, *famulus* literally meant *servant* – only one person was free and enjoyed the full range of citizens' rights: it was the head of the family, the *pater familias*, who had the "power of life and death" over the household, which consisted of his wife, his children and his slaves. In Roman law, all family members were described as being "under his control."

³¹ Paul Masson-Oursel, *La Pensée en Orient* [Oriental Thought], Paris, Armand Colin, 1949, p. 39.

³² In 195 BCE, rebellious Roman matrons demanded that parliament repeal the *Lex Oppia*, which, in the name of austerity, forbade women to wear gold jewellery or multicoloured garments, during the First Punic War. Cato, misogynist and hostile to their request, declared: "If, gentlemen, each of us had held on to our rights as husbands in our homes, we would not be in this situation. This is what it has led to: women's tyranny, having already destroyed our freedom of action within the family, is now destroying us in the forum". Quoted by Indro Montanelli, *Histoire de Rome* [A History of Rome], Paris, Editions Mondiales, 1959, p. 168.

Senghor's text above contradicts completely the claims arising from the very principle of *pater familias*. In Africa, for example, the woman holds sway in the home: it is her preserve. This sovereignty allows her to develop a special relationship with men, in which domestic rights and privileges constitute a qualification that gives her access to the government of the city itself. The great African texts – to name but those in this anthology – also show the incongruous nature of the other grand claims associated with the attributes of the *pater familias*: the “power to take a life” and the right to have his wife under his total control (“in hand”). Senghor shows clearly that marriage does not deprive a woman of her rights in Africa, since she is in an alliance, in which, as a representative of her clan, she not only keeps her name – which she may transmit – but also her personality, rights, freedom, ancestors and gods. This state of affairs would never have been possible if Africa did not have a conception of philosophy that was open to the inclusion of both genders in the definition of a generic identity of humanity.

QUESTIONS

1

With reference to Text 2, show how, from a philosophical standpoint, a name allows a person's identity and status within the social hierarchy to be defined?

2

On the basis of Text 2, describe the role of the home as the key factor in defining the social and political status of the person (man or woman) who manages it.

3

Drawing on Text 1, explain how acceptance of gender duality enables the philosophical tradition to be corrected in relation to the definition of human nature?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

*In Africa, the home liberates the woman; in Greece, the *oikos* enslaves her. After reading Xenophon's *Economics*, compare the main arguments given therein with the African conception of the home as it is expressed by Léopold Sédar Senghor in Text 2.*



V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

INTRODUCTION

The African conception of nature, the environment and ecology is illustrated by four landmark texts. Although they belong to very different geographical regions and historical periods, all four texts have a measure of thematic unity and give new insights into ecological ethics in ancient, traditional and modern Africa.

Closely bound up with agrarian religion, the selected texts portray the gallery of zoomorphic and phytomorphic spirits that people the African pantheon. These spirits coexist with the cosmic forces that permeate nature – the sky, the earth, the stars, the sun, the moon, the rain and so on. The African pantheon reflects the peasantry's concerns. The function of agrarian rites is to regulate sowing and harvest times. Similar rites govern the fishing and hunting seasons. These rites end with prohibition decrees that strictly define hunting and fishing areas. The prohibitions throw light extensively on zoolatry (animal worship) and dendrolatry (tree worship). This is of particular philosophical interest in the texts by Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Ethiopian philosopher Workineh Kelbessa.

Totemism, through which plants and animals suddenly emerge as prominent members, so to speak, of a family that includes the intimate elements of the cosmos, is important. The crucial philosophical issue of the unity of humanity and nature then arises: it is forbidden to isolate human beings from nature. Human freedom in dealings with flora and fauna is severely restricted. The *ecumene*, as the “home (*oikos*) of human being”,³³ shows the philosophical relevance of this fundamental issue. It denotes “appropriateness of the place to a certain being” or a being's ontological adaptation to its environment. This is the interesting point of Text 3, which refers to the romantic world of the public park in which the human being and nature merge into one. This text belongs to a poetic genre that was popular in Egypt from 1500 BCE. During that period of prosperity and optimism, human beings communed with plants. Plants constituted a safe haven for budding or fully blossomed love and were themselves “beings” endowed with feelings and passions. Such “beings” filled women with the boundless energy that they drew from nature.

The contrast with Ik cosmogony (Text 4) in this regard is striking. The total lack of symbolism in Text 4 is in stark contrast to the world of abundant poetry and sacred references that characterizes Texts 1, 2 and 3. Ik cosmogony, reconstituted by the American anthropologist Colin Macmillan Turnbull in the 1960s, tells of the dereliction of human beings in a lifeless, mineralized environment. According to the legend, the birthplace of the Ik people was the Nile Valley in north-eastern Uganda, from which they were expelled after the Egyptian Empire collapsed. The development of the Kidepo National Park around the middle of the last century severely disrupted the habitat that had moulded the body and soul of Ik hunters-gatherers-collectors for thousands of years. Rendered helpless and forced by the government to turn to farming barren land, the Ik were doomed to starvation. This explains the Tantalus syndrome that particularly colours their cosmogony. The Ik saw the

³³ Augustin Berque, *Ecumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains* [Ecumene. Introduction to the Study of Human Habitats], Paris, Belin, 1987, p. 17.



extreme hunger to which they were doomed as the price to be paid to expiate their sins against the gods. The Ik suffered so cruelly that hunger eventually became established in its own right as a metaphysical entity and moral category, with the capacity to overshadow the categories of good, evil, justice and truth: to the Ik, good meant having a full stomach and evil meant suffering the pangs of hunger.





the stars, solar cycles, the movement and the cries of birds, the nature of entrails, the behaviour of domestic and wild animals and the condition of trees in order to grapple with practical problems of everyday life and future problems. From their practical experience, they know the growing characteristics of each crop and tree, suitable environments, the number of months of rain required, planting and harvesting times, crop care and crop labour requirements. ...

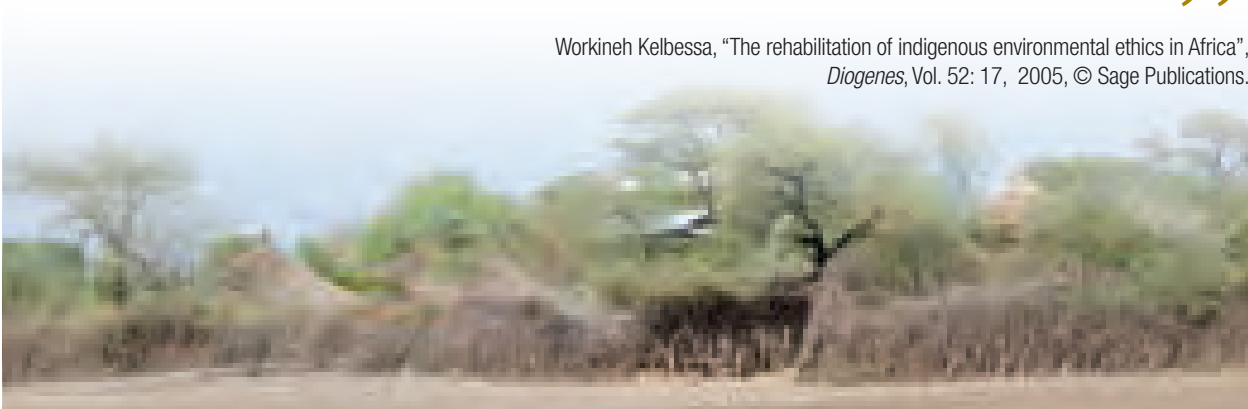
But the Oromo are not exclusively pragmatists. The bonds between the environment and the rural people are not only material but also spiritual and moral. Normative principles are implicit in the thought and practice of the Oromo people. For them, land is not only a resource for humans' utilitarian ends, but also it has its own inherent value given to it by *Waaqa* (God). For the Oromo, *Waaqa* is the guardian of all things, and nobody is free to destroy natural things to satisfy his/her needs. The Oromo believe that the law of society is based on the laws of *Waaqa* as given in nature . . . Likewise, many Africans believe that land is not something they own. It does not belong to them; rather it belongs to God. . . . Humans are not the masters of the universe. Instead they are the friends, the beneficiaries and the users although they are at the centre of the universe. . . . It is believed that some trees have a special relationship with God and should not be touched by the axe. Individuals who violate this principle are morally wrong. This shows the traditional link between religion and ethics. . . . Oromo peasant farmers and pastoralists argue that some activities have their own moral codes, independent of any religious beliefs, such as tilling the land, animal husbandry, planting trees and hunting. The fundamental aim of the people in pursuing these activities is to fulfil their basic needs. In other words, in those cases there is no direct reference to religious sanctions of any sort. In fact, as has been discussed earlier on, when one unnecessarily exploits the land and its resources or neglects his children, one conflicts with both the laws of God and the Oromo secular moral code of ethics. In addition, this code of ethics is not immutable. The Oromo people critically reflect on and develop their moral rules through discussion and within the framework of their national assemblies, so as to maintain their contemporary efficacy under changing conditions, technologies, and the modern world. ...

Whatever the case, like non-anthropocentric modern environmental ethics, the Oromo world view regulates the freedom of human beings in their dealings with nature. Thus, the Oromo world view has fostered a responsible attitude towards nature, plants and animals. The essence of this view is to live in partnership with the natural environment.

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Workineh Kelbessa, "The rehabilitation of indigenous environmental ethics in Africa",
Diogenes, Vol. 52: 17, 2005, © Sage Publications.

Oromo village, Ethiopia



V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

3 NATURE AND AESTHETICS

TEXT 3 LOVERS AND PLANTS IN THE PARK

“

The pomegranate tree said: ‘My seeds are like her teeth and my fruit is like her breasts. I am the most beautiful tree in the park and I stay here. The loved one and her soul mate stroll beneath my branches, which are inebriated with wines and liquors, and impregnated with oil and fragrant essences. All plants in the park die, but I do not. I survive all twelve months of the year, I stay the same. When one of my flowers falls, another flower opens up in me. I therefore rank as first in the park, but *they* judge me to be the second. If that were to happen again, I would no longer be silent about them. I would no longer hide her, and her fault would be known to all. The lover will then be discovered. ...’ The reed-built summerhouse was a well-protected place. ‘You see, the pomegranate tree is right. We must praise him. Let him act as he will, all day long, for it is he who hides us’. The fig tree opened its mouth and its leaves said: ‘It is right to obey my mistress’s orders. Is there anyone to match her? If (one day) she were without her maidservant, I would be her servant. I was brought from the land of Syria, like a captive for the beloved. She has planted me in her park. ... She does not fill my body with water from a goatskin. They seek me out to be at ease. ... As true as I live, my beloved, I yearn for you to be brought close to me!’ Then the little sycamore, which she had planted with her own hand, opened its mouth to speak. The rustling of its branches evokes a liqueur made from honey. He is handsome and the tips of his delicate branches are becoming verdant. He is laden with ripe fruit, redder than jasper, his fruit resembles a turquoise gemstone and his bark is like porcelain. ... He invites anyone who is not (yet) in his shade to enjoy its coolness. He slips a letter into a young girl’s hand, the gardener’s daughter, and bids her to hasten to her beloved: ‘Do come and spend a moment with young companions, the park is jubilant, beneath me there is a summerhouse for you. My masters are overjoyed, like children, when they see you. Send your servants first, with everything that you will need. Racing towards you makes one inebriated without having (yet) drunk. The servants have arrived, with the provisions, beers of every kind and a variety of cakes. An abundance of yesterday’s and today’s flowers and fruits of every kind, for refreshment. Come, then, and spend a happy day, then again tomorrow and the next day, three complete days of rest in my shade. Her companion sits on her right, she delights him and behaves as she says she would. In the area where beer is being drunk, the revellers disturb the calm, but she has moved away with her beloved. Beneath my shade, this beautiful woman walks about, while I am silent, and I shall utter no (indiscrete) word to reveal what I have seen.’

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Claire Lalouette, *Textes sacrés et Textes profanes de l’ancienne Egypte. Mythes, contes et fables* [Sacred and profane texts of Ancient Egypt. Myths, tales and fables], Paris, Éditions Gallimard–UNESCO, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 262–64.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

Cosmogonies and agrarian religion are an inexhaustible source of information in any philosophical study of the African conception of ecology. In the continent's main cosmogonies, water has a central place in the hierarchy of things. In this context, the primeval cosmic ocean is not only synonymous with a world still governed by chaos and peopled by untamed natural forces, it is also, more importantly, the matrix of beings in the making and a natural reserve of vital forces. Agrarian religion requires people to live in symbiosis with plants and animals, which are sacred because of that obligation, which accounts for totemism and for tree and animal worship. Mere superstition does not suffice to explain why, throughout the continent and from antiquity to the present, entire communities are loath to give up the idea that some animals and plants embody the spirits of ancestors, or why a sacred animal is associated with nearly all Egyptian divinities. Totemic clans (clans of the cat, the lion, the leopard, the sparrow-hawk, the monkey and the goat – as in the Mvog Ebanda clan) still subsist in some parts of Africa, in spite of the modernization of societies.

Texts 1 and 2 are therefore interesting because L. S. Senghor and Workineh Kelbessa reveal the rational basis that has enabled such ancient traditions to withstand the passage of time. That basis must be sought in the desire to protect rare and precious species. The rationale for plant and animal totemism lies in the refusal to isolate human beings from their environment or to make the domestication of trees and animals an end in itself. The selected texts show that agrarian religion is to some extent related to “farmers’ poetry”,³⁵ which similarly enjoins human beings to venerate nature as their *abode* and *provider*. Humanity should treat nature kindly and exploit it with moderation. The idea of an “abode” is important, for it refers to the origins of ecology, which is derived from *oikos*, *home* or the natural human *habitat*. It requires new philosophical links between geography, the environment and ontology, an approach favoured by A. Berque.³⁶ Opening up ecology to ontology provides new tools for a full understanding of phenomena that so intrigued Colin Turnbull among the Ik people: wholesale desocialization and decivilization, the erosion of feeling, the mineralization of the human soul, the disintegration of the family nucleus and of the social fabric, and the end of morality, religion and art.

By the same token, the very idea of progress, central to some trends in African philosophy can be reexamined. In the name of progress, the political authority behind the Kidepo National Park project wished to transform the hunter-gatherers into farmers. The broad implications of this issue force one to question, along with Immanuel Wallerstein, whether the historical systems often imposed on indigenous peoples really do mark an advance on the previous systems that were destroyed or transformed, in view of the vast amounts of knowledge lost as a result of the expansion of the ideology of universalism.³⁷ Now when the authorities established the national park in north-eastern Uganda, they did so in total ignorance of one vital fact, namely that “the hunter-gatherers were among the world’s best conservationists”; and, before their environment was severely disrupted, the Ik considered overhunting to be one of the major crimes: it was a sin against the order established by the gods themselves.³⁸

³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Orphée noir” [“Black Orpheus”], in L. S. Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle opésie nègre et malgache de langue française* [Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language], Quardridge collection, Paris, PUF, 2011.

³⁶ Augustin Berque, *Écoumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains*.

³⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 82.

³⁸ See Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People*, p.25.

QUESTIONS

1

Agrarian religion tends to confer the same value on animals and plants as on humans in the order of beings. Explain why.

2

It is said that nature is man's home. Drawing on the selected texts, give arguments to support this view.

3

According to L. S. Senghor, "it is inhumane to isolate human beings from their environment and to domesticate animals and trees" and, according to Workineh Kelbessa, "no-one is free to destroy anything in nature to satisfy his needs".

- a) Examine these views by comparing them with the Cartesian project in which human beings own and have dominion over nature;*
- b) How can such ethics be reconciled with the demands arising from the development and the industrialization of the African continent, in particular?*

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

1

According to the Manden Charter (Section III, Text 2), "hunger is not a good thing [because] a starving person knows no shame and no restraint". Choose specific examples from Colin Turnbull's book (The Mountain People) to illustrate and support this statement.

2

According to Augustin Berque, "ontology lacks a geography and geography lacks an ontology" (Ecumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains [Ecumene. An Introduction to the study of human habitats], Paris, Belin, p. 9). Organize a debate on the philosophical issues in geography and ecology.



VI ARTS AND CREATION

INTRODUCTION

There are four major texts in this section. Texts 1, 2 and 3 are very representative of the literary and philosophical trend – predominant in Africa – which gives pride of place to aesthetic forms that have emerged from the distant past and have become established as traditions and as heritage. In his research into African art and aesthetics in the 1930s, the Senegalese poet, philosopher and statesman L. S. Senghor aimed to lay a sound philosophical foundation for the theory of Negritude, which was then in its infancy. Senghor regarded art and aesthetics as the perfect medium through which the “black soul” could be expressed most fully and most clearly. Following the footsteps of Leo Frobenius, the German ethnologist and philosopher, Senghor, too, wished to explain the “essence of life.” To his mind, that essence lay in art and originated in feeling, in emotion. Senghor asserted, as did Frobenius, that “by penetrating life styles, we also approach the essence of styles”. The basic philosophical problem that he endeavoured to solve, however, was the place of reason in the hierarchy of the faculties. African art was the fitting solution. In Senghor’s eyes, “emotion” and “intuitive reason”, “art” and “poetry” and “image” and “myth” are synonyms,³⁹ but his unbridled tendency to see everything through the eyes of the German Romantics – as did Frobenius before him – did not prevent him from finding some precious gems in the enormous corpus of materials on which he worked. Therein lay his true genius and it shines through in the selected text as evidence of his thorough understanding of issues relating to African art. In particular, Senghor identifies the precise justificatory basis of African art – the existence of a georgic and bucolic metaphysic.

Philosophy must solve the question of beauty in art, which is probably the most complex issue in all African aesthetics. The selected text by the Senegalese philosopher Alassane Ndaw tackles this formidable question. Over and above any utilitarian significance, what is it that makes a work of art intrinsically beautiful? Do Africans have clear awareness of such beauty, independent of religious connotations and ideological frameworks, for example, which beset it on all sides? Assuming that “the beautiful” exists, what does it consist of? Ndaw’s view is that the African tradition has rarely sought to define the norms of pure beauty, of “the beautiful” as such. Yet this has not prevented the African artist – or the consumer of African works of art – from establishing a rigorous criteriology for recognizing what is beautiful to the eye. If such a criteriology is posited, it will be possible to settle the crucial question of stylistic differences.

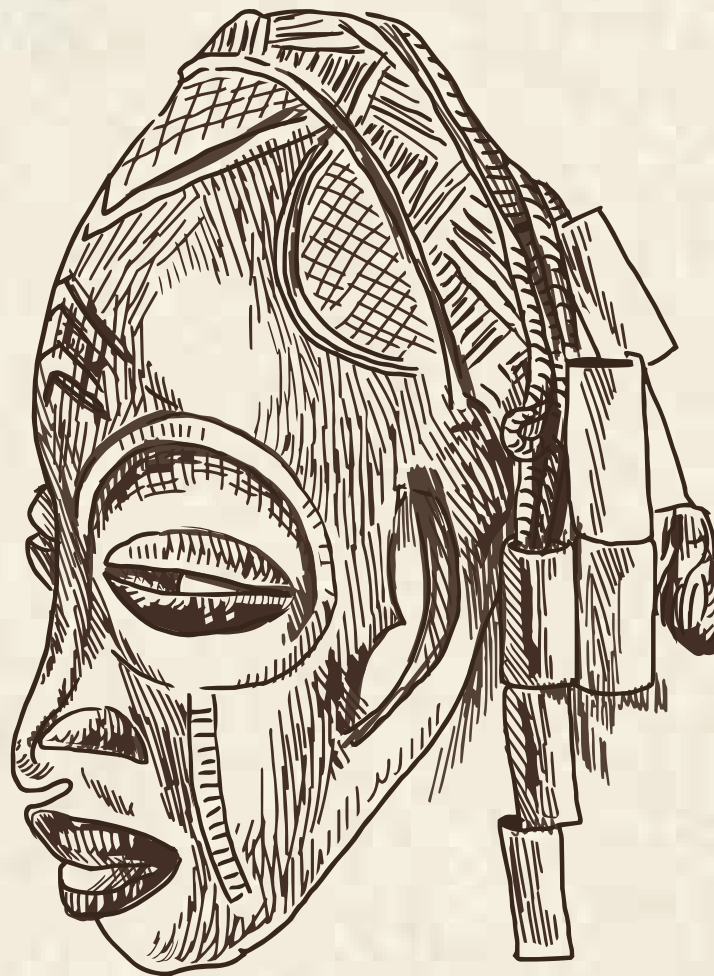
However, the debate on these fundamental issues will be otiose if one does not enter the real world of the artist’s studio to witness in that very place the raw material being moulded and shaped into something “beautiful” as an idea and stylistically as a particular way of expressing the beautiful. This is the interesting thing about the text on Fang statuary by Louis Perrois, a French authority on African art. First of all he challenges the idea of “author,” so fiercely contested in intellectual or artistic creation in the African world. He then reviews the categories used to appraise the beautiful. Those categories must be examined in order to see how art is

³⁹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, foreword in *Leo Frobenius 1873-1973. An Anthology*, edited by Eike Haberland, translated by Patricia Crampton, Wiesbaden, Frantz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1973, pp. IX–X.



defined in relation – and often in contrast – to technology, which it resembles. Other important issues, linked to those raised above, are also dealt with, especially the author's independence in relation to the group and the sacred.

In contrast to the above texts, the selected text by Frantz Fanon – an African psychiatrist and philosopher born in Martinique – belongs to a different strand of African aesthetics. It pursues a very different aim. Fanon does not set out, as did Frobenius, Senghor and Alassane Ndao, to capture the aesthetic forms of the past which, once crystallized, have been transmitted to later generations as traditions. Fanon pioneers a new and original approach in an attempt to capture the transformations that art and aesthetics have undergone, especially as a result of the national liberation struggles from the late 1950s onwards. The periods of instability that he identified in Algerian culture apply as well to many other countries on the African continent, especially those which experienced struggles for independence. In this respect, the Mvet literature of central Africa constitutes extremely fertile ground for testing the laws unveiled by Fanon in the emblematic case of Algeria.



2 | THE QUESTION OF THE INTRINSICALLY BEAUTIFUL

TEXT 2 “BLACK AFRICAN AESTHETIC AWARENESS”, ALASSANE NDAW

“

The development of Black African aesthetic awareness consists in attempting to determine the specificity of the aesthetic function of art, by seeking, beyond utilitarian, social and religious connotations, that which makes an object beautiful in itself and that which makes Black Africans aware of this beauty independently of ideology and theories of ethnicity. Our task, therefore, is to determine the nature of this beauty independently of ideology or theories of ethnicity, in short, to determine the nature of this beauty. Can it be defined? The African tradition has never really been concerned to define the norms of pure beauty, ideal beauty, beauty in itself. ... However, it has created an extremely precise criteriology that permits recognition of fine workmanship and finish and everything that makes objects pleasing to the eye, ‘good to look at’, even though the creators’ intention is to evoke the presence of the invisible forces that beset humanity and the cosmos rather than to produce a work of art. This criteriology permits identification of styles that may be dominant in a particular ethnic group, though, in fact, whatever the criterion used, a truly successful work of art is immediately acknowledged to be so. Its perfection is self-evident and it instantly achieves an absolute quality. It is its own hallmark and sets its own standards.

”

Alassane Ndaw, “La conscience esthétique négro-africaine”, in *Art nègre et civilisation de l’universel* [Black art and a civilization of universals], Dakar/Abidjan, Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975, pp. 105–06.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

VI ARTS AND CREATION

3 THE ARTIST, THE AUTHOR AND HIS CREATION

TEXT 3 “ REFLECTIONS ON THE AESTHETICS OF THE FANG PEOPLE. FROM TECHNOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES TO PHILOSOPHICAL NOTIONS ”, LOUIS PERROIS

“

The Fang sculptor is no more a ‘modest, anonymous craftsman’ than sculptors elsewhere in Africa. Echoing the views of Fagg, Leiris and several others, Laude stresses that African sculpture is not as short of authors as is claimed and, among the Fang, as among all other groups, the sculptor is well known, is sometimes valued and sought after, and is invariably regarded as a talented artist.

The word for sculptor is *mba*⁴⁰ and for the activity of sculpting a statue, *ba*. The statue itself is denoted by *éyéma*, while a drawing will be *éveghle* or *mveghle*. Interestingly, the word *mba* has the same root as the qualifiers *mban*, which means beautiful (in stature, e.g. a beautiful woman with a good figure = *mban monga*) and *mbamba* (beautiful in one’s movements, e.g. a graceful bird = *mbamba onôn*). The sculptor is therefore someone who makes beautiful things. The notion of beauty appears to be linked to all sculptural work, but the words for good and beautiful are often used interchangeably. The word *mvê* means both good and beautiful (or morally beautiful, in much the same way that ‘a *good* deed’ in English becomes, in French, ‘une *belle* action’). This has sparked the idea that the sculptor is a craftsman who is intent on making well-finished objects and that he has a professional conscience, which contributes in no small measure to his reputation.

The *mba* sculptor may also be a blacksmith, albeit without any particular religious or magical responsibilities, as in West Africa. He is a craftsman in the same way that other craftsmen are craftsmen (or an artist, if you like, since we shall presently see that his technical skill gives him a certain fame which other craftsmen, basketmakers, potters and blacksmiths, do not have). The only discernible difference is that his work is difficult and special, work in which only talented individuals can succeed. Basketmakers are generally all competent workers, as are potters, but although their work demands care and attention, they do not create anything original. As an examination of the objects in the collection clearly shows, no two statues are identical. In the case of baskets or fishing nets, it is quite different; the items produced are all identical. In addition, sculpture demands a talent that is not bestowed on everyone.

The artist is paid for his work ... Often, he comes from the same village or clan as his customer who, therefore, is not obliged to give specifications because the artist already knows how the statue or the head is to be shaped. However, the object’s originality (the specific character of workmanship within the sub-styles) is the sculptor’s responsibility alone. The customer wants something good, in a particular style, but it is the artist’s task to produce a work that is both representative of the clan’s traditions and unique in its design. When respondents

⁴⁰ *Mba* evokes the idea of making or producing as well as sculpting.

are asked to explain one detail or another, they very often reply, 'that depends on what the sculptor feels or decides'. The customer only judges the outcome, but knows that the work will not be a copy of a statue from another, similar lineage (which, alas, does happen nowadays), but a unique model sculpted specifically for him.

When all is said and done, the sculptor must be an *elite craftsman* who is conscientious about his work (whereas basketwork, pottery and metal artefacts are usually poorly finished), who cannot neglect or compromise the aesthetic quality of the work produced.

... A sculptor does not enjoy any religious or magical prerogatives. A sculptor may not even have attended the *Melan* initiation ceremony or belong to the lineage that commissioned the figure, which shows that the distinction between the image and reality is very clear. Indeed, the artist merely shapes a piece of wood, which has no sacred significance until it is placed on the *nsèkh byéri*, the box containing ancestral remains. Even then, the material form is merely a symbol of the clan's existence, a portrait of the ancestor, which serves to create a presence through the expressive power of a harmonious arrangement of geometrical shapes, rather like a photograph, which, through the magic wrought by a few traits, can evoke the memory of someone dear and recreate a link that, in reality, has long been lost.



”

Louis Perrois *La Statuaire fan, Gabon* [Fan Statuary, Gabon],
Mémoire Orstom n° 59, Paris, ORSTOM/IRD, 1972, pp. 141–42.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

all identical to one another. Now it is a prerequisite of art and aesthetics that no two statues should be alike, as each work of art should have its own personality, which distinguishes it from all others. The other feature that distinguishes art from technology is that art demands more care, attention and talent. Perrois makes the very important point that the products of technology – basketwork, pottery, functional metal objects – are usually of poor quality in terms of their finish. The fact that the artist, being committed to the aesthetic quality of what he produces, cares more about finish suffices, in African aesthetics, to validate the concept of the beautiful, apprehended in its purity and independence.

In regard to progress achieved since Leo Frobenius's research, it could be said that valuable time has been wasted for African aesthetics owing to the suspicion with which the concept of the beautiful in African art has been viewed. Frobenius himself broached the question of the beautiful in no uncertain terms in his treatment of "African style". He wrote of "splendid, plush velvets, made of the finest leaves of specific banana-tree varieties; soft, luxurious fabrics, silky and brilliantly coloured and woven from raffia fibres; powerful ceremonial javelins, their blades embellished with delicate copper inlays; bows so elegantly shaped and adorned with such admirable motifs that they would bring distinction to any armoury; gourds decorated with excellent taste; wood and ivory carvings beautifully designed and expertly crafted."⁴¹

Leo Frobenius felt justified in writing of an "African style", which he considered to be "externalized in the movements of all black people" – in art, dance, fables, tales, myths and legends. He stressed that "the coarse, austere, solemn and functional style" common to Black Africa and pre-Islamic Egypt was a manifestation of "the plenitude of their moral world"⁴². It was this stance that set African philosophical aesthetics on the quest for an "irreducible core" containing a concentration of all the basic elements that would convey the specific feature of African culture. Two routes lead to that core. Firstly, an examination of the motifs of African art points to the existence of a georgic and bucolic "metaphysic". The widespread representation of fauna and flora is a common feature of Ancient African art and of Negritude poetry, which J.-P. Sartre justifiably dubbed "farmers' poetry". The second route explores the question of rhythm, which is at the very heart of Senghor's doctrine. The "ontology of rhythm" (to quote Souleymane Bachir Diagne)⁴³ postulates that behind words, masks and melodies, "there is a being". This enabled Senghor to link African aesthetics to the sphere of existential ontology and morality. It is true that these things happen whenever art teaches a lesson and sets itself the task of providing exemplary models of behaviour that the narrative, for instance, locates in the remote past, as attested by the expressions "once upon a time" and "it all happened a very long time ago" (Text 1). Thus, art, in its didactic role, set moral benchmarks, in order to inspire and to regulate an individual's behaviour. Such ontological and moral preoccupations were anathema to Fanon's revolutionary sensibilities, for he, in total contrast, advocated capturing in art and aesthetics the crucial moments of instability, the first signs of collapse, a break with the old and a new departure. These moments correspond to the heyday of nationalism and the nationalist struggles for independence. It was during that key period in African history that genuinely bold attempts were made to redefine the mission of art and aesthetic canons. Art thus became a weapon, in furtherance of "the nation's existence". Art as combat, which authorizes the aesthetic canons to be turned upside down, is always in a state of tension, always changing with the times. Only this kind of art and aesthetics allowed Fanon to replace the expressions contained in Senghor's text with different demands, expressed in such Utopian terms as "the story you are about to be told happened somewhere but it could just as easily have happened here today or could happen tomorrow" – "Utopian", because Fanon dreams of a different world, free from the grip of colonialism. What Fanon sees in the changes that affect every area of art – tales, epics, popular songs, sculpture, drama and comedy – is the stirrings, or rather the proclaiming, of a new world. The Mvet epics of Central Africa are, even today, a rich source of material for verifying the laws uncovered by Fanon in the Algerian context.

⁴¹ Leo Frobenius, *Leo Frobenius 1873-1973. An Anthology*, p. 67.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 69.

⁴³ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Léopold Sédar Senghor. L'art comme philosophie* [Léopold Sédar Senghor. Art as Philosophy], Paris, Editions Riveneuve, 2007, p. 56.

QUESTIONS

1

On the basis of Texts 1 and 3, show, giving specific examples, how the idea of the beautiful is expressed in African art and aesthetics.

2

Text 3 highlights the difference between art and technology. How is this difference expressed?

3

Show how a balance is struck between the aesthetic function and the moral purpose of art in Text 1.

4

Is the quest for the beautiful compatible with political commitment in art?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

*Using Pablo Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* as an example, show how African art has inspired modern art and aesthetics.*





A South-South Perspective

ARAB REGION



Coordinated by
Ali Benmakhlouf



INTRODUCTION

This presentation of Arab philosophy in the framework of a South-South philosophical dialogue under the auspices of UNESCO seeks to provide clarifications of everything but does not claim to be exhaustive. This seems paradoxical: how can the reader be given an overview if everything is not covered? During the preparatory meetings a number of themes were identified as likely to be present in the different cultural areas. The choice of the texts offered here was made on that basis. The common thread running through them is a reflexive and conceptual approach in which the rational side of humankind dominates in the face of the vicissitudes of life. Our philosophers agree in saying that the less well prepared for it people are by reason, the more severely will they be affected by chance. Reason should therefore be cultivated for the sake of the salvation of humankind, cultivated both in its highly speculative and contemplative form, and in its practical, aesthetic and pragmatic form.

This anthology draws from the work of the first Arab philosopher, al-Kindī (eighth century). He asserted that there was continuity in the search for truth. According to him, philosophical knowledge is a direct continuation of prophetic knowledge. The former adopts an argued language, the latter an inspired language, but there is more continuity than discontinuity between inspired discourse and argued discourse; the difference in style is not as to the truth itself but as to the forms of transmission of the truth. Truth itself remains one and the same. Some centuries later, Averroes (Ibn Rushd, twelfth century) added that every truth bears witness to itself and to all other truths. There is no half-truth or any double truth – one connected with faith, the other with reason. For al-Kindī, this continuity between the two types of discourse, prophetic and philosophical, is forged under the aegis of science, of “ilm”. This word “ilm”, science, was frequently used in the early centuries of Muslim civilization and refers equally to intellectual life, religious life, daily life and political life. Nothing should hinder it. This idea is essential and still has a certain currency: religion should not be dissociated from culture. We need to avoid the “holy ignorance” that makes us adopt dogmas without their historicity, without their patient elaboration. Religion has three faces: the institution, dogma and feeling, and the three have a history. Of the three, the one most subject to criticism is, of course, the religious institution.

Continuity between prophets and philosophers reflects a strategy to defend and justify philosophical reflection. It not only has to be shown that there is no overlap between religion and philosophy and that the latter is therefore not superfluous: in addition, those who see it as contradicting religion have to be countered. Here all the resources of reason are deployed: it has to be demonstrated that one can study and comment upon Aristotle, according to whom the world is eternal, without being accused of unbelief. Similarly, the God of the philosophers does not at first sight seem to be the same as that of the Koran, but his qualities or essence of omniscience and omnipotence, wisdom and immutability of will, are all qualities that the philosophers recognize that God should have. The fact that theologians argue as to whether those qualities reside in or are inherent to God does not in itself weaken the divine essence from a philosophical point of view.

Al-Kindī emphasizes the validity of knowledge that assumes that arguments can be tested by reason through conjecture and refutation. Averroes adds that it is pointless to enquire obsessively into the origin of knowledge: it does not matter where knowledge comes from, what matters is its validity. Averroes employs a powerful image: using a tool does not raise the question as to whether or not it belongs to religion. When the sheep is slaughtered during the Festival of the Sacrifice, one does not ask oneself whether or not the knife has belonged to coreligionists but whether it is sharp: “if someone other than ourselves has already examined that subject, it is clear that we ought to seek help toward our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor on the subject, regardless of whether this other one shares



our religion or not. For when a valid sacrifice is performed with a certain instrument, no account is taken, in judging the validity of the sacrifice, of whether the instrument belongs to one who shares our religion or to one who does not.”⁴⁴

When Averroes presents to us the entirely dialectical thesis of the confrontation between those who hold the world to be eternal and those who hold that it was created in time, he delights in pointing out that this is not a logical opposition, in other words an opposition according to contradictory propositions that means that when one is true the other is necessarily false. These dialectical propositions are composed of numerous similarities in their relative opposition: according to whether they stress the relationship between the world and beings subject to generation and corruption, or whether they emphasize the relationship between the permanence of the world and the eternity of the universal Agent, they tip the scales in one direction or the other. But this is not a matter of argument over words or over semantics. Hence it is important to ensure that words are used precisely so as to avoid dissension among people who randomly accuse each other of being infidels.

In practical terms concerning the introduction of law, the rational approach is hypothetical and deductive. The resources of reason are deployed according to a genesis of things with regard to their effectiveness and not their factualness. For example, in one of the texts presented here, al-Fārābī imagines a “first ruler”, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau did later in the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men*. This first ruler is like “the first man who, having enclosed off a piece of ground got the idea of saying ‘This is mine’... an idea of property, which depends on many previous ideas which could only have arisen in succession”, as Rousseau put it, which clearly illustrates the genealogical method. This genealogical method begins by “setting aside all the facts” in order to be able to make things intelligible. They are not “first” in terms of origin but in terms of the hypothetical and deductive manner seen in a genealogical approach that seeks to account for the concomitant genesis of political power and human forms of the grouping together of people.

There is here a pragmatic concern to turn away from the myth of magnificent origins strongly maintained by theologians. Philosophers choose to emphasize the effects rather than the origins of things, leaving the act of ruling to God and the understanding and practice of effects to human beings. The tradition of the mirror for princes in the Muslim world is emblematic of this pragmatic concern that judges a concept by its consequences and things by their effects. Little research has been done into this tradition.⁴⁵ It has nothing to do with either the legal tradition strongly represented by the much studied schools or the classical philosophical tradition concerning the political themes of good governance, and the search for happiness or perfection.

It is a realist and pragmatic tradition concerned not with legitimizing power but with rules that are useful for understanding the course of events or what happens accidentally in history: for example, how power is established and maintained?

As early as the establishment of ‘Abbāsīd power in the eighth century, the mirror for princes was structured thematically as a reflection on the art of governing with indications of calculating rationality.

⁴⁴ Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*, translated by George F. Hourani, in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (eds.) with the collaboration of Ernest L. Fortin, *Medieval Political Philosophy: a Sourcebook*, Agora Editions, the Free Press, New York, 1963, pp. 166–67.

⁴⁵ See the recent book by Makram Abbas, *Islam et politique à l’âge classique* [Islam and Politics in the Classic Age], Philosophies, PUF, 2009.



There are epistles, tales such as *Kalila and Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (said to be one of the sources of La Fontaine's fables), as well as works that take the form of political manuals: a whole sheaf of texts written as breviaries for the use of princes. They include different styles to deal with political effectiveness without reference to any golden age. The art of governing is not a founding principle for policy but a genre that includes treatises, tales, sermons, dialogues, epistles and poems. The fable is the most common form as, like a gurgling fountain, it proceeds on different levels of meaning, on themes that inform the masses as much as princes of the need to soften forms of power in order to maintain those very forms over time.

Commenting on Plato's laws, al-Fārābī draws our attention to the wisdom of the prince who surrounds himself with advisers: "He should take extreme care with ministers, men of experience and individuals of sound advice and sound policy for the time when he will need to consult them, whether in time of war or of peace, for legislators and citizens do not include a profusion of such men, and they should necessarily be given a rank for the well-being of communities".⁴⁶

Therefore a prince rules with advisers since they, like a glass, steel or paper mirror, enable the prince to move more quickly in the government of things and to avoid mistakes. They are the exhortation to act righteously; they supplement the prior work of the philosopher.

From an historical point of view, there is no shortage of examples. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) explained how the Umayyids and the 'Abbāsids (the first two Muslim dynasties) introduced succession according to clan. This matter of succession by clan was a pragmatic concern to maintain power much more than as to whether or not it complied with the prophetic origin that determined decisive political choices. It was a matter of explaining genealogically and rationally how the idea of the clan had emerged: "They cannot be blamed because they gave preference to their own sons and brothers, in that respect departing from the Sunna of the first four caliphs. Their situation was different from that of the (four) caliphs, who lived in a time when royal authority as such did not yet exist, and the (sole) restraining influence was religious. Thus, everybody had his restraining influence in himself. Consequently, they appointed the person who was acceptable to Islam, and preferred him over all others. They trusted everybody who aspired to (the caliphate) to have his own restraining influence". But this religious authority "weakened" over time. "The restraining influence of government and group was needed. If, under those circumstances, someone not acceptable to the group had been appointed as successor (to the caliphate), such an appointment would have been rejected by it. The [chances of the appointee] would have been quickly demolished, and the community would have been split and torn by dissension."⁴⁷

The authors who wrote advice for princes were in many cases involved in politics: they were either senior government officials, like Ibn Muqaffa', or representatives of jurisconsults, like Al-Māwardī. They discussed questions of political consent and decision-making; they stressed the trust needed in order to forge the social bond. Cunning and dissimulation were also part of an instrumental and calculated rationality, but dissimulation is not always untruth, as the fable of the ascetic told by al-Fārābī illustrates. An ascetic dressed as a reveller, pretended to be drunk – disguised himself, in other words – and as he approached the gate of the city, which he was planning to leave, said that he was the ascetic that the prince was searching for in order to kill him. But the guards let him leave the city because they thought he was joking: "It is related, for example, that a certain abstemious ascetic was known for his probity, propriety, asceticism and worship, and having become famous for this, he feared the tyrannical sovereign and decided to run away from his city. The sovereign's command went out to search for and

⁴⁶ al-Fārābī, *Plato's Laws*, translated by Muhsin Mahdi, in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (eds.) with the collaboration of Ernest L. Fortin, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, Agora Editions, the Free Press, New York, 1963, §73.

⁴⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, New York, Bollingen Foundation, 1958, p. 281.



arrest him wherever he was found. He could not leave from any of the city's gates and was apprehensive lest he fall into the hands of the sovereign's men. So he went and found a dress worn by vagabonds, put it on, carried a cymbal in his hand and, pretending to be drunk, came early at night out to the gate of the city singing to the accompaniment of that cymbal of his. The gatekeeper said to him, 'Who are you?' 'I am so and so, the ascetic!' he said jokingly. The gatekeeper assumed he was poking fun at him and did not interfere with him. So he saved himself without having lied in what he said".⁴⁸

The use of this fable, in which the effects of rhetorical persuasion combine the pleasure of the tale with the truth of things was a logical and political issue for medieval philosophers. Al-Fārābī, like Avicenna, for example, had indicated the scope of application of rhetoric. Since its primary purpose is to persuade, at first glance (*badi' al-ra'yy al-mushtarak*) it complies with the habitus of the community, of the many who have difficulty accessing dialectical questions and controversies, and even more difficulty accessing demonstrative questions. Rhetoric reigned supreme over the "*jumhūr*", the masses, who were not the people in the modern sense of the term. Rhetoric reigned supreme over the mind of the masses because it was based on obscuring possibilities other than those that were decreed by the political power and the forms of propaganda that it used. This power therefore maintained this obscuring of possibilities in order to ensure its conservation.

The theme of living together is therefore very much present in the medieval philosophers but it is dominated by the power of rhetoric. It was in a sense Ibn Khaldūn who brought this living together into play, trying to give, not its essence but its genesis, not the essence obstructed or prevented by the ignorance of the crowd, but the provenance and genealogy of political power, in order to understand its workings. The difference in language from that of the Aristotelian philosophers is well known: the concepts of essence and accident had lost their metaphysical force. They continued to be used but were applied to a different field: history. It was now a question of taking up the accidents of history and seeking their meaning.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, there is a real demiurgic aspect to history: in every age it is as though a new man comes. Rather than thinking, as the theologians did, that God creates the universe at each instant, it is enough to tell oneself that the great historical upheavals make it seem that humanity is created anew. The demiurge may therefore intervene in history. What is important here is that in a single expression Ibn Khaldūn gives an epistemic value and a methodological value to the historical rationality that he pursues: "When there is a general change of conditions, it is as if the entire creation had changed and the whole world been altered, as if it were a new and repeated creation, a world brought into existence anew".⁴⁹

The history of societies is not therefore caught in messianism or the reign of ends, but in the modifications of relations between people (*tabdīl al-ahwāl*). History is not the passage of preordained destiny, it is not the account of a meaning that has been or will be completed. It takes into consideration the emergence of political power, acquisitions of wealth, the burgeoning of arts and sciences, with the underlying idea that history interests us because it never really passes, but rather informs the present, which resembles it.

Much nearer our time, on the basis of a profound knowledge of texts from the Muslim tradition, Ali Abdel Razek invokes numerous verses of the Koran in his book *Islam and the Foundations of Power* (1925) in order to demonstrate their rational and philosophical value. He quotes Ibn Khaldūn many times to show how purely historical constructions have sought to avail themselves of the status of being religious givens. There is no contradiction between the constructions of history and religious feeling or belief, however. On the contrary, historical reflection and religious belief fuel each other: not only do Koranic verses provide philosophers and historians with material, but historical and philosophical reflection in

⁴⁸ al-Fārābī, *Plato's Laws*, p. 84.

⁴⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, p.80.



their turn endorse the Koranic verses by showing the philosophy they carry: this is the message of Averroes updated by Ali Abdel Razek. The verses on cosmology are an invitation to the study of physics and Aristotelian metaphysics, according to Averroes. It is, moreover, wrong to think that al-Ghazālī, in the late eleventh century, put the brakes on philosophy in his book *The Incoherence of Philosophy (tahāfūt al-falāsifa)*; it was rather that he expressed another form of philosophy in the great sceptical tradition that saw in the metaphysics of Aristotle taken up by the philosophers Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and al-Fārābī, a claim that surpasses human faculties. Ibn Taymiyya (fourteenth century), and al-Suyutī, (sixteenth century), made the same criticism in their times. Philosophical pluralism comes at this price: there is room in the reflection both for sceptics like al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) and metaphysicians like Averroes. It cannot in any sense be said that the one is *against* philosophy and the other *for*, as a certain ideological reading would have it today.

This ideological reading is strengthened by the polemic introduced in the nineteenth century by Ernest Renan on the supposed philosophical flaws of Islam. According to Renan, since Averroes the world of Islam has been caught in a tautology: “God is God”. Thus he denied any historical movement to the Muslim world, fixing it in a formula as its unfortunate destiny. Jamal ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, his contemporary, responded to him in a famous article in 1883, emphasizing the secularizing work of reason that takes place in history and operates in all cultures without exception. All peoples have a legitimate share in profane science, provided they make an effort aided by their elites. None of the people are condemned to remain closed in upon themselves in a putative essence bestowed by religion.

Let us return to the medieval world, because reading the Ancients is a tool for understanding the present. In his way, Ibn Bājjā (Avempace, eleventh century) was concerned with the dialectic between the local and the global to which social and human sciences researchers devote so much attention today. Through the fortunes of a word, “rule”, he traces the various meanings that make us act with a view to an end in order to avoid the chaos that always threatens. Ibn Bājjā speaks to us about the rule of the world, the rule of the community and the rule of the home. These are not of course comparable realities, but at each of these levels of reality a rational “rule” operates for obtaining the best effect with the least means. In the human order, rule is a rule that operates under the aegis of relations. One rules oneself *with a view* to something or *with* other people. One can meet someone by chance, with neither intention nor a request, but it may also happen that there is an intention and a movement towards someone (here we find the issue of rule with a view to an end); and this may be either for a pleasure we share with animals or for the benefit of one of the two persons; in this case it is a desired encounter. There is also encounter with a view to mutual assistance, which is therefore the civil meeting for which a specific “rule” is required. Then, gradually, other encounters take place on a scale on which the intellectual meeting is at the top: this is the “rule of the solitary being”. The solitary being is not alone. *Al-mutawahhid* isolates himself only in order to connect better. If he isolates himself in order to learn, it is to understand better the course of events from which he has distanced himself. The intellectual encounter itself takes several forms, the divine encounter being the encounter with a view to receiving or giving knowledge, the most noble encounter. Recalling the passage in Plato’s *Timaeus* in which the soul is presented as mortal and immortal,⁵⁰ Ibn Bājjā pointed out that humanity is a middle state between corruptible beings and incorruptible beings. He situates humans in an environment in which they can neither lose concern for their corruptible part nor forget the orientation towards what is properly theirs: the incorruptible intellect. The other version of this isolation of the wise man is of course provided by the mystical tradition, highly developed in Arab countries owing to Islam. Ibn ‘Arabī, a contemporary of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), took the mystical experience to such lengths that he adopted a veiled language of parables impossible to fix in concepts with set contours. His images are fluid and expressive: they aim at a universality of human experience and seek to broaden human awareness so that it can temper the

⁵⁰ Plato, *Timaeus*, 72d.



incarcerations for which religions can be responsible when their dogmas separate and divide people. Let us read his poem, a hymn to love:

“My heart can take on
any form:
a meadow for gazelles,
a cloister for monks,

For the idols, sacred ground,
Ka’aba for the circling pilgrim,
the tables of the Torah,
the scrolls of the Koran.

I profess the religion of love;
wherever its caravan turns along the way,
that is the belief,
the faith I keep.”⁵¹

There is nothing better than a tale to express this concern for self, others and the world. Ibn Tufayl (Abubakr, twelfth century), who owed much to Ibn Bājjā, imagined an insular place in which to deploy the theme of humankind and its environment. Insularity and utopia go hand in hand. It is a question of imagining a place the exteriority of which enables it to be taken as a standard of measurement of human societies. The device of utopia is frequently misunderstood: it is not a question of putting forward an ideal to be complied with, but of presenting a standard of measurement to aid understanding. Here, the island plays the role of this non-place, this *atopos*. Ibn Tufayl is careful to point out that it is a temperate island. On it is to be found an individual of the human species, washed up there by chance and brought up by a doe: the first form of a necessary symbiosis between man and animal. Developing the faculties of observation and analysis, this man, Hayy Ibn Yaqzān, whose very name is eloquent – “living son of the awakened” –, exercises his vigilance in order to understand himself on the basis of his understanding of his environment. Ibn Tufayl’s strength is to link together the themes of understanding and care: one understands things better if one is concerned for them and cares for them and oneself.

Thus, by examining the animals on the island, Hayy Ibn Yaqzān comes to develop the idea of similarities and differences. He arrives at the concept of species, except that of the human species because no being resembles him. This idea is crucial. It lies at the heart of Ibn Tufayl’s enterprise: the primacy of the universe over anthropology. Cosmological knowledge takes precedence over anthropological knowledge. We are born of the world, we do not confront the world or those like us. There is an anthropological shift away from humans who, unfortunately for them, think they are the centre of the universe. It is through the fiction of this upbringing that comes the recognition of the primacy of cosmological knowledge over anthropological knowledge. Four fifths of the book pass without the presence of other humans and the last fifth shows the difficulty of living together, so much does the resonance of rhetorical persuasion – that again – obstruct full deployment of humanity’s creative intelligence. The authority of custom, combined with political subjugation, restrains human development. The set of texts presented here is a puzzle the piecing together of which amounts to this idea.

⁵¹ Ibn ‘Arabī from poem 11 of the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* [The Interpreter of Desires], translated by Michael A. Sells.

I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

1 COSMOLOGY TESTED BY AVERROES' SEMANTICS

INTRODUCTION

Averroes (Ibn Rushd) (1126–1198) was an Andalusian philosopher born in Cordoba. He was a doctor, a judge and a philosopher. He was a commentator of the works of Aristotle, particularly his works on logic. This text, an extract from the *Decisive Treatise*, is a work halfway between law and philosophy. In it Averroes shows how the practice of philosophy can be justified by Muslim law. One of the questions raised is that of the creation versus the eternity of the world. This is a major theological and metaphysical theme. Averroes reformulated the question by converting the theological issues into semantic issues. The thesis of the beginning of time, which is Plato's as well as that of the Ash'arite theologians, or the thesis of the eternity of the world attributed to Aristotle, does not give rise to such contradictory theses as first appears in the context of a polemical discussion of this question. As our text says, "the doctrines about the world are not so very far apart from each other that some of them should be judged as constituting unbelief and others not. For this to happen, opinions must be divergent in the extreme, that is, contraries such as what the dialectical theologians suppose to exist on this question; that is [they hold] that the names 'pre-eternity' and 'coming into existence' as applied to the world as a whole are contraries. But it is now clear from what we have said that this is not the case".⁵²

How is the contradiction between these two theses to be reduced? It is done by using the major philosophical tools that al-Fārābī (tenth century) discusses in his book *Harmony of the Two Sages: Plato the Divine and Aristotle*: philosophy would be a hollow word if the expressions "insofar as" and "in a certain respect" disappeared. Let us apply "insofar as" to our subject. Insofar as the world relates to beings that begin and end one day, it is seen as coming into existence, and insofar as it relates to a first cause outside time, it is seen as eternal.

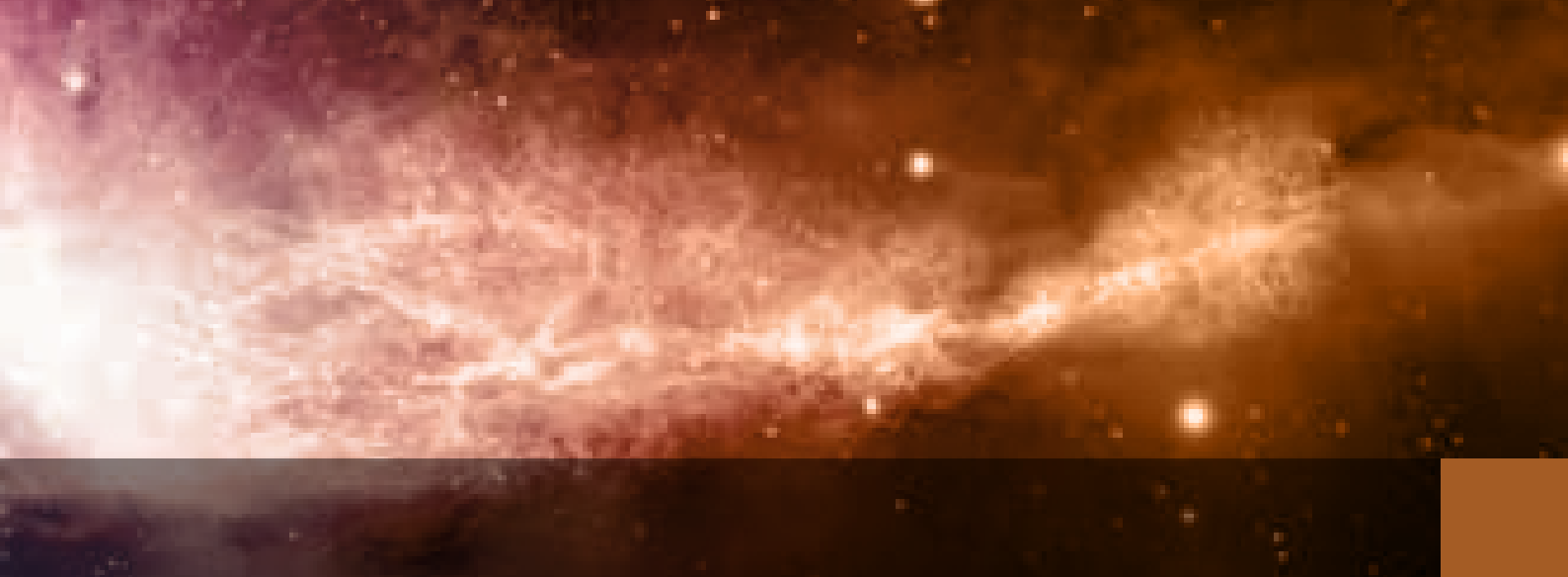
Averroes pays great attention to syntax: epistemic usage consists of recognizing in the Koranic verses that speak of the heavens, the earth and animals, indications justifying the necessity of physical and metaphysical knowledge as Aristotle developed it. Averroes therefore succeeds in countering the creationist theologians to establish, not so much the eternity of matter – the eternity of matter and not of the world – as the entirely dialectical possibility of this eternity. Thus criticizing the theologians who imagine a creation from nothing, Averroes emphasizes that nowhere in the Koran does it say that God is with nothingness, creating the world from nothing: "For it is not stated in the Law that God was existing with absolutely nothing else: a text to this effect is nowhere to be found".⁵³ On the other hand, many verses indicate that something already existed before the formation of the world: "He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was on the water".⁵⁴ The use of the past tense in this passage emphasizes that "there was a being before this present being".⁵⁵

⁵² Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*, p. 174.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁴ *Hūd* 11:7.

⁵⁵ Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*, p. 135.



Similarly, for Averroes there are three types of method involved in knowledge: the demonstrative method, the dialectical, and the rhetorical. He believes that there is even a Koranic injunction to recognize these three types of method. The verse quoted to match the three forms of Aristotelian argument – demonstration, dialectics and rhetoric – with the methods resulting from the Koran is the following: “Invite men unto the way of the Lord, by wisdom and mild exhortation, and dispute with them in the most condescending manner.”⁵⁶ The “wisdom” referred to here corresponds to demonstration, “dispute” to dialectics, and “mild exhortation” to rhetoric. Of the three syllogistic arts of demonstration, dialectics and rhetoric, it is the last that, through its elliptical character, is most appropriate for the majority, and the Koran is often received as a shortcut of reasoning. The long chains of reason are absent, and ellipsis is frequent.

The word “wisdom” is strategic for Averroes. It comes into the title of the work from which the extract presented here is taken: *The Book of the Decisive Treatise, determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*. This word “wisdom” is applied to the work of God as well as to the work of humans. It is therefore consensual. For Averroes, it is not a matter, as is often said, of reconciling “revelation” and “philosophy”. This is the theme of his later Latin readers, who accused him, according to a serious misinterpretation, of having promoted the theory of a dual truth: the truth of faith and the truth of reason. Nothing could be more foreign to Averroes, who developed the idea of a monopsychism, a single intellect in which persons participate according to their effort.

⁵⁶ *Al-Nahl* [The bee] 16:125.

TEXT *THE DECISIVE TREATISE, AVERROES*

“

Concerning the question whether the world is pre-eternal or came into existence, the disagreement between the Ash'arite dialectical theologians and the ancient philosophers is in my view almost resolvable into a disagreement about naming, especially in the case of certain of the ancients. For they agree that there are three classes of beings: two extremes and one intermediate between the extremes. They agree also about naming the extremes, but they disagree about the intermediate class.

(1) One extreme is a being that is brought into existence from something other than itself and by something that is, by an efficient cause and from some matter; and it, that is, its existence, is preceded by time. This is the status of bodies whose generation is apprehended by sense; for example, the generation of water, air, earth, animals, plants, and so on. All alike, ancients and Ash'arites, agree in naming this class of beings 'originated'.

(2) The opposite extreme to this is a being that is not made from or by anything and not preceded by time; and here too all members of both parties agree in naming it 'pre-eternal'. This being is apprehended by demonstration; it is God, Blessed and Exalted, who is the Maker, Giver of being, and Sustainer of the universe; may He be praised and His Power exalted!

(3) The class of being that is between these two extremes is that which is not made from anything and not preceded by time, but which is brought into existence by something, that is, by an agent. This is the world as a whole. Now they all agree on the presence of these three characters in the world. For the dialectical theologians admit that time does not precede it, or rather this is a necessary consequence for them since time according to them is something that accompanies motion and bodies. They also agree with the agents in the view that the future time is infinite and likewise future being. They only disagree about past time and past being; the dialectical theologians hold that it is infinite (this is the doctrine of Plato and his followers), while Aristotle and his school hold that it is infinite, as is the case with future time.

Thus it is clear that (3) this last bears a resemblance both to (1) the being that is really generated and to (2) the pre-eternal Being. So those who are more impressed with its resemblance to the pre-eternal than its resemblance to the originated name it 'pre-eternal', while those who are more impressed with its resemblance to the originated name it 'originated'. But in truth it is neither really originated nor really pre-eternal since the really originated is necessarily perishable and the really pre-eternal has no cause. Some – Plato and his followers – name it 'originated and coeval with time', because time according to them is finite in the past.

Thus the doctrines about the world are not so very far apart from each other that some of them should be judged as constituting unbelief and others not. For this to happen, opinions must be divergent in the extreme, that is, contraries such as the dialectical theologians suppose to exist on this question; that is [they hold] that the names 'pre-eternity' and 'coming into existence' as applied to the world as a whole are contraries. But it is now clear from what we have said that this is not the case.

”

Averroes: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy, translated by George F. Hourani, Cambridge, © Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007, pp. 55–56.

COMMENTARY

In this text, Averroes semantically defuses a question on which theology sought to argue to the point of declaring some faithful and others infidels according to the methodological conception adopted by Averroes. For him, there are two dialectics: one that is a preparation for knowledge and consists of sharpening the mind on all types of question that can give rise to opposing propositions, and one that is conducted purely with a view to argument.

For Averroes, while knowledge has to be measured against the perfect syllogism of demonstration, the rudimentary reasoning, rhetoric and poetics used by the majority nonetheless have to be taken into account because meaning is formed essentially in the delivery. “When something of these interpretations is expressed to anyone unfit to receive them – especially demonstrative interpretations because of their remoteness from common knowledge – both he who expresses it and he to whom it is expressed are led into unbelief”.⁵⁷ Infidelity is the result of a mismatch between the method employed and the audience concerned. For example, for the majority of believers it is difficult to hear that God is incorporeal or that his attributes are either inherent to or reside in his essence. Speaking of apparent meaning and hidden meaning in no way means that there is intrinsically the apparent and the hidden. This distinction only has value in the delivery: the apparent meaning is the one that everyone, whatever their level of knowledge, understands, while the hidden meaning is the one that “the learned in philosophy” can understand. There is therefore no single way of understanding the sacred text because of the diversity of the audiences to which it is addressed. Those who seek argument, however, and have no notion of distinctions of method fuel social division: “because they did not know which are the methods common to everyone, through whose doors the Law has summoned all people ...; they supposed that there was only one method. Thus they mistook the aim of the Legislator, and both were themselves in error and led others into error”⁵⁸.

QUESTIONS

1

Based on your knowledge of Averroes, what distinguishes “a sage” from “a philosopher”?

2

The way things are named can avoid conflicts between those who believe in the creation of the world and those who believe that it is eternal. On the basis of this text by Averroes, indicate how.

3

In other cultures, such as the African and South American cultures, philosophers have imagined other cosmologies. Compare and contrast the differences.

4

Does the Koranic text imply a specific view of the world or does it leave things open to interpretation?

⁵⁷ Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*, p. 181.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–84.

II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

1 THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

INTRODUCTION

In the ninth century, the second after the *Hejira*, the figure of al-Kindī emerged in philosophy, inaugurating a new way of thinking. Born around the year 800, he enjoyed the protection of three ‘Abbāsīd caliphs: al-Ma’mūn, al-Mu’tassim and Wātiq. Al-Ma’mūn, founder of the House of Wisdom, *Bayt al-Hikma* (founded in 832), entrusted the direction of the teams of translators working in the house to him, while al-Mu’tassim, to whom he dedicated his *Treatise on First Philosophy*, appointed him tutor to his son. Of the 242 epistles (*rasā’il*) he wrote, a little less than one third have come down to us.

Al-Kindī was therefore a contemporary of the extraordinary translation movement in Baghdad in the ninth century. Since the time of Alexander, Persian culture had been in contact with Greek culture “either in a diffuse way in general thinking or in a more refined manner at the level of science and teaching”,⁵⁹ “therefore at that time there was a gradual, mounting accumulation of non-Arab knowledge that was also profane knowledge”.⁶⁰

Al-Kindī’s name is associated with the beginnings of *falsafa*, that mode of philosophical thought inherited from Greek thought. The philosopher al-Kindī very quickly understood what was at stake in translating Greek works into Arabic and enriching with a new form of knowledge and argumentation the disciplines already developed by the Arabs, such as grammar, jurisprudence and theology. The House of Wisdom was for him the appropriate laboratory for this.

In this text, al-Kindī defends the idea of continuity in the search for the truth. This search had to involve knowledge of what the Ancients, especially the Greeks, had said; not in order to repeat it, but to set it forth and then, if appropriate, supplement it “in idiomatic language and contemporary fashion”; in other words, by placing it in the context of acquired knowledge. For al-Kindī it was a question of placing Arab-Muslim thought in what might be called the tradition of humanity, in the etymological meaning of the word “tradition”, that is, a transmission. For him, philosophy is “of the human arts, the highest in rank and the noblest in degree”⁶¹ because of its orientation towards “knowledge of things as they really are”.

Those who opposed the introduction of Greek knowledge into the Arab-Muslim world were being inconsistent because “to give a reason or demonstration” against doing so was an aspect of “possess[ing] knowledge of things as they really are”. These words were innovatory in several respects and inaugurated the philosophical approach by justifying it.

The dialectical approach, consisting of balancing, weighing and weighing up arguments, is used in order to identify the principles on the basis of which knowledge can be engendered. This dialectical exercise forms the

⁵⁹ Jean Jolivet, “La pensée philosophique dans ses rapports avec l’Islam jusqu’à Avicenne” [Philosophical thought in its relations with Islam until Avicenna], in *L’Islam, la philosophie et les sciences*, p. 37.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “On First Philosophy”, in Peter Adamson and Peter E. Portmann, *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 10.



basis of the science of principles and is the illustration of reason at work using the principle of the excluded middle and the principle of non-contradiction. This method is not put in place in the abstract: there is a context that explains it and this context is polemical. Some believed that, with the revelation, Muslims had everything they needed: thought about society, a language, a founding text. As an argument against philosophy, which they considered a profane science, they advanced the idea that all the sciences that Muslims needed had been developed between the seventh and ninth centuries: grammar in order to understand the Koran, the Uṣūl ad-dīn (the foundations of religion) in order to understand religious directives, and the Uṣūl al-fiqh (foundations of law) in order to understand and respect legal directives. Why, therefore, take an interest in foreign thought that had come from the Greeks? “What place would be left for philosophy? How, at this moment of its inception, was it to be situated in the face of this body of knowledge that was strongly formed and highly valued through its religious foundation?”⁶²

Al-Kindī responded that the sciences are not distinct from the manner in which they are expounded. These sciences are not dogmas imposed upon us. They are inherent in the manner in which they are expounded. Presenting an argument is not tantamount to using a method distinct from the content; it is a way of contributing to knowledge acquisition. This cannot be done anarchically, but is subject to a method, a rational order.

⁶² Jolivet, *L'Islam, la philosophie et les sciences*, p. 39.

TEXT “ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY”, AL KINDĪ

“

There is for the student of truth nothing more important than the truth, nor is the truth demeaned or diminished by the one who states or conveys it; no one is demeaned by the truth, rather all are ennobled by it.

Thus it is fitting for us – since we strive towards the fulfilment of our species, for in this the truth lies – to adhere in this book of ours to the customary procedures that we use for all topics: to supply completely what the ancients said about this, according to the most direct methods and the procedures easiest for those engaged in this pursuit, and to complete what they did not discuss comprehensively, in idiomatic language and contemporary fashion, to the best of our ability – despite the affliction that besets us so as to prevent a satisfactory discussion that might untie the knots of recondite and ambiguous topics.

[We must] be on our guard against the pernicious interpretations of many in our own time who have made a name for themselves with speculation, people who are far away from the truth although they crown themselves with its laurels. They have no right to do this, because they have a narrow grasp of the ways of truth, and lack the understanding which is the rightful possession of those who are sublime in their insight and who exert themselves for the common benefit of everyone, including them [i.e. the critics of these philosophers].

A filthy envy abides in their bestial souls, which shields the vision of their thought from the light of truth with dark veils. They have set down those who have the human virtues, which they themselves fall short of attaining – being in the regions furthest removed from them [these virtues] – as insolent, cheating enemies. They defend the fraudulent positions in which they have undeservedly been installed, in order to achieve supremacy and traffic in religion, although they have no religion themselves. For whoever traffics in something sells it, and whoever sells something no longer has it. Thus one who traffics in religion does not have religion anymore. It is right to divest someone of religion if he resists the acquisition of the knowledge of things as they really are, and calls it unbelief.

By knowing the things in their true nature, one knows divinity, oneness, virtue, and, in general everything beneficial and how to obtain it, and how to stay away from, and protect oneself against, all harm. The way to acquire all these is what the true prophets brought from God, great be His praise. For the true prophets (may

God’s blessings be upon them) brought the assurances that God alone is divine, and made [us] adhere to the virtues that are pleasing to Him, whilst forsaking the vices that are essentially opposed to the virtues and preferring the latter [to the former].

Therefore it is necessary to take hold of this possession that is precious to those who have the truth, and that we strive to obtain it with the utmost effort. We have already stated the reason for this, and now we add the following: it is absolutely necessary to acquire it [this precious possession], even according to its opponents. For they have to say either that it is necessary to acquire it or not. If they say it is necessary, it is necessary also for them to strive for it. If they say it is not necessary, it is yet necessary for them to supply the reason for this, and to give a demonstration of this. But to give a reason or demonstration, one needs to possess knowledge of things as they really are. Therefore according to them [the opponents themselves] it is necessary to strive for this possession, and it is incumbent upon them to take hold of it.

”

Al-Kindī, “On First Philosophy”, in Peter Adamson and Peter E. Portmann,
The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī,
Karachi, © Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 12–13.

COMMENTARY

This text seeks to distinguish the argued discourse of philosophers from the inspired discourse of prophets. The discourse of visionaries and prophets is a sudden upsurge in the world, a break, as the coming of a religion shows, but the philosopher does not proceed in that way, but rather develops over time and according to reasons what appears to the visionary, and especially the prophet, all at once.

That is why philosophers set out to search for the truth. They want to acquire it, but do not possess it immediately, and have to exchange ephemeral dispositions for lasting possessions in order to stabilize the knowledge and virtue that Aristotle had already qualified as “possessions”. Philosophy is a noble art because it is an art concerned with causes, particularly that of lasting things, and this stable being is truth. Hence the orientation of philosophy towards the search for the first cause, the prime mover that will be revealed to have a particular stability: the eternity of the One true first.

One has to know what one wants to refute, so one has to study it steadfastly. It was therefore important to allow the Greek-Arabic translation movement to develop, not in order to agree with what was translated, but in order to share a certain amount of thought content subjected to analysis, refutation, addition and argument.

Acquiring the truth wherever it comes from becomes a major task, but one made difficult by the forms of authority and power that appropriate the truth in an exclusive form. There are people who have “crowned themselves with laurels” although they are “far away from the truth”. They have “fraudulent positions”. Al-Kindī was aiming at theologians who refused to allow metaphysics to monopolize religious discourse. Philosophers speak of the One, of the Lord, as much as do “true prophets”: “For the true prophets (may God’s blessings be upon them) brought the assurances that God alone is divine, and made [us] adhere to the virtues that are pleasing to Him”.⁶³ Philosophy is “knowledge of things as they really are”.

QUESTIONS

1

How does al-Kindī trace a path for knowledge between theology and philosophy?

2

How does al-Kindī evaluate the prophetic legacy and the legacy of Greek philosophy?

3

What place does the search for truth have in this text?

How does al-Kindī link the questions of knowledge and those of truth?

4

How can this text be read in the light of contemporary issues?

⁶³ Al-Kindī, *On first philosophy*, p. 13.

II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

2 KNOWLEDGE OF SELF, KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS

INTRODUCTION

Ibn Sina, (Latin name Avicenna) (980–1037) was a Persian philosopher born in Afshana who wrote almost all his philosophical works in Arabic, with the exception of *The Book of Scientific Knowledge*. He grew up in Bukhara where, by the age of 18, he had mastered the fields of knowledge of his time. He is one of the few medieval philosophers about whom we possess part of an autobiography dictated to one of his disciples. Thanks to his medical knowledge he very soon joined the court of the Sultan of Bukhara, whom he cured of an illness and whose library he browsed and read in its entirety. Doctor, vizier and philosopher, he had a turbulent life that mirrored the political instability of the cities of Central Asia, where the Turks were making regular incursions to destabilize the local sultans who were under the authority of the moribund ‘Abbāsid power in Baghdad. Avicenna wrote *The Book of Healing (al-Shifā’)*, a comprehensive survey including metaphysics, logic, physics and the life sciences. He then spent years writing *The Canon of Medicine*, an imposing work on the medical sciences that was consulted in the West until the sixteenth century. His repeated reading of Aristotle’s metaphysics led him to discover a crucial distinction that went on to enrich the whole of European philosophy: the distinction between essence and existence, between what a thing is and the fact that it is. There was one notable exception: God, whose essence encompasses existence because, being “impenetrable”, as the Koran says, (*al-Ṣamad*), nothing can be added to his essence. Existence is added to all other essences by accident, if necessary. We also owe a theory of the distinction between “thing” and “existing” to Avicenna. The thing (*ash-shai’*) is everything to which an utterance refers and may also refer to something that is not, such as chimeras. Everything that we think about and speak about is “thing” but is not necessarily a being outside of us. These metaphysical distinctions were taken up and discussed in Latin in medieval philosophy and in the philosophies born of the Renaissance.

A philosopher of the concept and of knowledge, Avicenna gave the notion of the universal its full dignity, distinguishing the universal, such as “man”, which refers to several individuals, from the universal that does not refer to existing things but has a conceptual dignity, such as empty concepts – the squared circle, for example. Lastly, there is the universal that happens only to refer to an individual of the world, such as “sun”, “Earth”, what are now known in mathematics as “a set comprising a single element”.

Any reader of Descartes, who knows that to think is above all to doubt, will immediately be familiar with the text by Avicenna presented here. In his *Treatise on the Soul*, Avicenna contemplates a thought experiment, that of a flying man. “Let us imagine that a man is created and created adult in an instant but his sight is veiled from directly observing the things of the external world. Let us imagine that he is created as though floating in air or in a void. ... Let us suppose now that this man asks himself whether he can assert the existence of his individual essence: there is no doubt that he will assert that he exists”, state without being able [to know] that



the parts of his body exist. Thus, in the eleventh century, Avicenna established the autonomy of thought of which the soul is capable.

There is a power of thinking other than the rational power of the soul to which we have just referred. Avicenna called it the imagining power, such as the prophetic power. It implies a creative imagination, an imagination independent of the senses that receives divine illuminations directly. It is capable of immediate knowledge and of performing miracles.

It may be asked, however, why humankind needs prophets. Avicenna's idea is that humans are political beings but since they are diverse, the formation of society is difficult. The existence of humankind therefore depends on the existence of individual humans who have leadership capacity. Out of concern for this problem, divine providence sends a prophet to humans so that they can take charge of their salvation in the two worlds. The prophet is someone who, after receiving the revelation (*al-wahy*), is able to convey to humans the message (*al-risāla*) that will lead them to the salvation "of the intelligible world through science and to the salvation of the sensible world through political direction".

The particular disposition to believe that some people have prophetic powers still has to be clarified. For Avicenna, the prophet is situated at the highest level of human powers, having not only this indubitable capacity of thought that Avicenna establishes for all humans through the story of the flying man, but also a capacity to receive illumination through an imagination that is neither subservient to the senses nor subject to them, and which by looking intently towards the intellect manages to perceive hidden things or to picture them through symbols. The prophet can then see a spectre (*shabah*) or imagine that this spectre is uttering speech "composed of audible words that are conserved and recited". Although ordinary humans find it difficult to reach this state of holiness, they may have a vague idea of it through analogy, since what comes to them when they are sleeping comes to the prophets when they are awake. "Something akin to fainting befalls them". They become absent to perceptible things, as "a sleeper imagines the symbol of what he has dreamed". Avicenna therefore sees the dream as a power of vision and regards prophets as dreamers awake to the knowledge inspired by the sensible and intelligible world.



“

Let us imagine that a man is created and created adult in an instant but his sight is veiled from directly observing the things of the external world. Let us imagine that he is created as though floating in air or in a void but without the air supporting him in such a way that he would have to feel it, and the limbs of his body are stretched out and away from one another, so they do not come into contact or touch. Let us suppose now that this man asks himself whether he can assert the existence of his individual essence: there is no doubt that he will assert that he exists, and yet he will not assert the existence of any of his exterior parts or his internal organs, nor of his brain or the vital spirits it contains, nor that of anything external to him. No, what he will be asserting is the existence of his self without asserting that it has length, breadth or depth.

Let us suppose even that it were possible for him in such a state to imagine a hand or some other extremity, he would not imagine it as a part of himself or as a necessary condition of his essence. Now, what can be asserted as existing is not the same as what cannot be so asserted and that of which one is certain is not the same as that of which one is not certain. Therefore, as the essence whose existence he asserts is his own, in the sense that it is he himself, and is independent of this body and these extremities the existence of which he does not assert, if he disregards that which is not him, our man will be able to see for himself that the being of the soul is not the same as the being of the body. He will moreover know that he does not need a body in order to perceive his soul and to know that it exists.

”

B. Morichère (ed.), Avicenne, « De l'âme », I, 1 in *Philosophes et philosophie, des origines à Leibniz* [Philosophers and Philosophies. From the Origins to Leibniz], translation by Alain de Libera, Paris, Nathan, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 212–13.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

COMMENTARY

The conceptual power of this text lies in the thought experiment it offers us. Avicenna's method is scientific: it involves building a model or simulation in order to understand a phenomenon of which we are not fully aware: the autonomous existence of thought in relation to the body. There is therefore a specific type of soul whose role is to think and reflect upon itself and which owes nothing to the body. Only a thought experiment enables it to be touched upon; in other words, in everyday life, we fail to ignore the union of soul and body, a union that is perceptible but does not have the degree of reality that thought, as autonomous existence, has.

In his *Metaphysical Meditations*, Descartes considers this truth of autonomous thought to be the firm and constant principle upon which all valid knowledge of science is built.

To those who think, upon reading this text, that Avicenna neglects the body, it must be replied that he was a doctor and knew that the body was the object of all our immediate care because, in the union of soul and body, it is the body that is most fragile, most vulnerable. The soul, because of its immateriality, is immortal. Deriving, as he does, the immortality of the soul from its immateriality is a way of proving rationally, and not on the basis of faith alone, the perpetuity of the soul.

QUESTIONS

1

Avicenna uses a thought experiment.

What is the philosophical contribution of this method?

2

How is there a notion of modernity brought forth in this text?

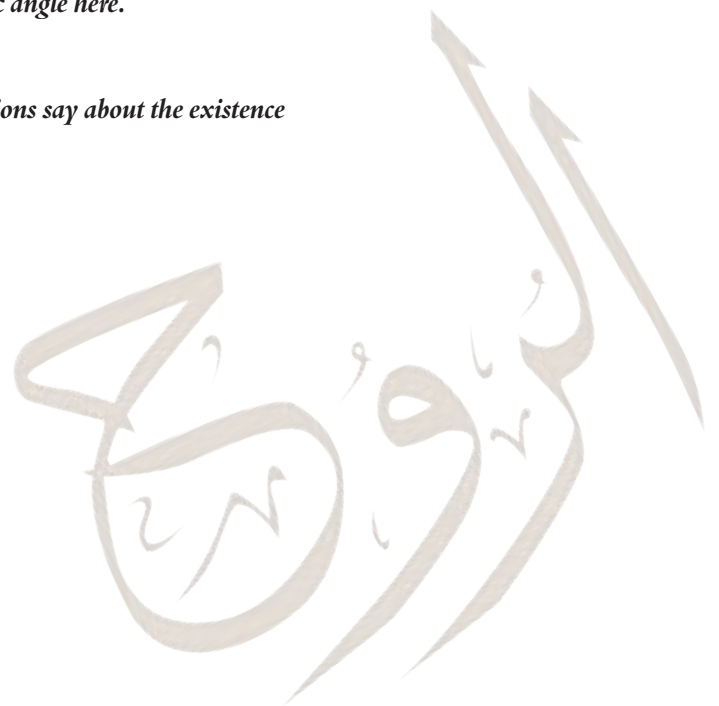
3

The links between soul and body are seen from a specific angle here.

Describe them.

4

Compare this text with what other philosophical traditions say about the existence of the self or of thought.



II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

3 PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

Arab-Muslim civilization is well known for its love of tales. Everyone has heard of *The Thousand and One Nights*. This anonymous set of tales includes some extraordinary stories that came from Persia in the form of fragments, anonymous tales in which it is not animals that speak, as they do in the *Kalila and Dimna* of Ibn Muqaffa', but characters with princely or royal functions. This is what al-Nadīm had to say about the genesis of these tales, stories told at parties: "The first to compose extraordinary stories, to write them up in the form of books in which they sometimes made animals speak and that they kept in libraries were the ancient Persians. This genre then aroused the passion of the Parths, who were the third dynasty of kings of Persia. The movement grew and intensified with the Sassanids. Translated by the Arabs into their own language, these texts aroused the interest of the masters of style and eloquence, who polished them and also embroidered them, producing works of similar inspiration".⁶⁴ This says everything about the journey of this text, a journey of seduction, transformation and embellishment. It is the very type of a transmitted text. The striking paradox in both cases – *Kalila and Dimna* and *The Thousand and One Nights* – is that they have become the emblem of Arab culture, having acquired over time a specificity that assumes the anonymous basis of their initial development.

The tales of Arabia are part of this tradition. The text presented here gives an account of a form of practical knowledge: how to act to one's advantage with the consent of another person. There is guile and dissimulation. The tale shows how consent can be a trap. The fantastical aspect comes from the setting somewhere between the human order and the order of demons, djinns, subterranean beings generally feared by people and about which there are great superstitions. This fantastical aspect provides enough distance to talk of the trap of consent and the types of guile that arise between people.



⁶⁴ Al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, quoted by André Miquel, preface of the Pléiade French translation of *Mille et une nuits*, tome, 1, Paris, Gallimard, 2005, p. XVI.

TEXT THE BARGAIN BETWEEN TWO PEASANTS - A DJINN AND A MAN

“

They say that a peasant made a bargain with a djinn, who was also a peasant. They sowed corn, planted sugarcane and worked hard until harvest time. The man then asked his associate, 'How do you want us to divide the harvest?' The djinn replied that he would leave it to him to choose and the man suggested: 'As you djinns live underground, I suggest that everything under the soil belongs to you. I'll reap everything above the surface ...' The djinn accepted because it was a forceful argument. Once each had taken his share, however, the djinn realized that the roots were bad. He was forced to acknowledge that his partner had tricked him. But he couldn't say anything because he'd accepted the bargain. He decided that next time his friend would not get the better of him.

The winter passed, the partners again discussed what they would plant this time and they decided that it would be onions. The djinn asked that, this time, it would be he who would harvest everything above the surface, while the man would have the right to what was under the ground. The peasant accepted immediately, pretending to make a sacrifice for his friend the djinn. When harvest time came, however, all the djinn found above the soil were worthless green leaves, while the peasant dug up the onions, which were the valuable part of the crop. The djinn realized that he had been tricked again and so decided to break the agreement he'd made with the man some time before, but without breaking the bonds of affection between them.

For he who has beaten you not once, but twice, is likely to beat you many times more.

”

Eric Navé and Abubaker Bagader (trans.), *Contes populaires d'Arabie* [Popular Arabian tales], Paris, Imago, 2012, p. 178.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

COMMENTARY

This tale contains several lessons. First, it illustrates the role of experience in learning. Experience that is not accompanied by reflection is not instructive. It may be repeated at the expense of those who have not learned from it. It is true that there are variants, but they have a single structure that only reflection will reveal. In all practical knowledge it is therefore essential to distinguish between the example – which is always unique – and the experience that may be repeated. Practical knowledge requires people to link particular circumstances with general principles. It also involves freedom of consent: to what extent is consent free and informed?

QUESTIONS

1

How does the extraordinary aspect of the tale elucidate ordinary human situations?

2

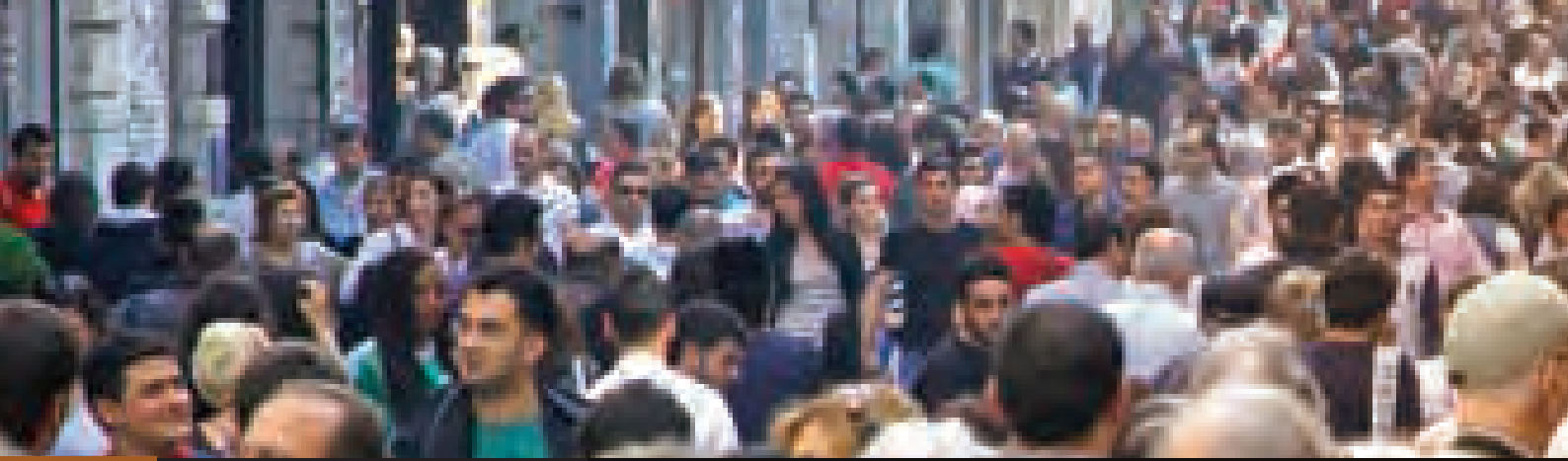
Practical knowledge is knowledge related to action. How does this involve our freedom?

3

What role does experience play in knowledge?

4

What are the limitations of the tale in the development of valid knowledge?



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

1 CIVILIZATION AND HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

That there is a significant epistemic break between medieval Arab philosophy and the studies undertaken by Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) is commonly agreed. This great historian nonetheless owes much to the Arab philosophers, particularly the Andalusian philosophers such as Ibn Bājja (Avempace, eleventh century), Ibn Tufayl (Abubakr, twelfth century) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, twelfth century). Ibn Khaldūn was a sophisticated reader of the commentaries on Aristotle's logic written by philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd. These philosophers had broadened Aristotle's logic to the fringes of rhetoric and poetics: the art of persuasion, on the one hand, and the art of image making, on the other, are considered full logical arts. Ibn Khaldūn was also familiar with commentaries of Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics* not having reached the Arabs.

Two examples will give an idea of this emerging knowledge.

The first example is the historical understanding of the prophet's migration to Medina. For Ibn Khaldūn this migration was an obligation only for the people of Mecca, who had to help the prophet, and was not mandatory for the nomadic Arabs in general. It was, moreover, restricted in time: "After the conquest, when the Muslims had become numerous and strong ... emigration was no longer necessary", he tells us. The example therefore takes into account a form of evolution of the history of the early years of Islam without any construction of legend or hagiography: the epic of the migration is itself an object of history. The historical contingencies, and with them the power relationships, are what constitutes history: "History is a discipline ... both the learned and the ignorant are able to understand". Religion speaks of the salvation of the ignorant; Ibn Khaldūn speaks of history as a new tribunal before which the power of elites is tempered.

The second example shows how the first dynasties were constructed in the history of Islam. The first four caliphs succeeded each other without being either brothers or sons: only authority of a religious order determined their succession. With Mu'āwiya and the founding of the Umayyad dynasty the reign of family clans began as religious authority declined.

These two examples, the migration to Medina and the advent of the first dynasty, show how Ibn Khaldūn included in the understanding of a phenomenon situated in time and space considerations of a history of society.

Other phenomena specific to the new science revolve around these two examples and show us how rhetoric and politics overlap. We have seen that Ibn Khaldūn was aware of the circulation of signs. He provides a grammar of this circulation to show how people relate to political power. In doing so he transfers what is usually related to a form of ahistorical transcendence to the scope of history. Here one can refer to an order of discourse in Michel Foucault's sense. How, for example, did the expression "commander of the faithful" become customary? No religious justification should be sought for such a title, only a pragmatic one. Ibn Khaldūn begins by saying that the first caliph after the prophet, Abu Bakr, was called "representative of the



Messenger of God”. Then the second caliph, Umar, was called “representative of the representative of the Messenger of God”. “However, they considered the title somewhat cumbersome. It was long and had a succession of genitives. [With successive caliphs,] that [style] would become longer and longer and end up as a tongue twister, and [the title] would no longer be distinct and recognizable because of the great number of dependent genitives. Therefore, they tried to replace the title by some other one appropriate to a [caliph]”.⁶⁵

As, moreover, the man who commanded the armies was called “*amīr*” and this was the function of “Umar, and it happened that “one of the men around Muhammad addressed ‘Umar as “Commander of the Faithful”. ... People liked this form of address and approved it. Thus, they called ‘Umar by this title. ... The caliphs who succeeded him inherited the title as a characteristic which no other person shared with them”.⁶⁶ It can be seen how political power introduced into history a necessary secularization: there was a shift from the transcendence evoked by the relationship with the messenger of God to a pure military reality, which was the basis of political power. This example also forms the basis of the recognition by the governed of their leader and shows how legitimacy of power later passed through the name.

The oath of allegiance, which was at the heart of this legitimation, was also taken within a circulation of signs that sealed its secularization. The declaration of allegiance indicated above all the contractual commitment of people to their prince, and the confirmation of this commitment consisted of “putting their hands in his”, on the model of what happens when there is a contract of sale: buyer and seller shake hands to show their agreement. Ibn Khaldūn recalls this commercial meaning contained in the word “*bai’a*” from “*bā’a*” or “sell”. The commitment then became an oath and began to be referred to as an oath of allegiance: “The caliphs used to exact an oath when the contract was made and collected the declarations (of loyalty) from all Muslims”.⁶⁷ Some obtained them by compulsion, going against the opinion of jurists such as the Imam Mālik, who incurred the displeasure of the caliph al-Mansūr (762). Ibn Khaldūn goes on to describe the grammar of the oath of allegiance and records how the over-egalitarian handshake between the parties gave way to “the royal Persian custom of greeting kings by kissing the earth in front of them, or their hand, their foot, or the lower hem of their garment”.⁶⁸ This commitment then acquired the force of customary law. From the contract between two merchants to the oath of allegiance to the ruler, here we have the whole grammar of the relationship between governor and governed which echoes the caliph’s title “Commander of the Faithful”.

⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, p. 299.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

TEXT *THE MUQADDIMAH OR PROLEGOMENA, IBN KHALDŪN*

“

(The subject) is in a way an independent science. (This science) has its own peculiar object, that is, human civilization and social organization. It also has its own peculiar problems, that is, explaining the conditions that attach themselves to the essence of civilization, one after the other. Thus, the situation is the same with this science as it is with any other science, whether it be a conventional or an intellectual one.

It should be known that the discussion of this topic is something new, extraordinary, and highly useful. Penetrating research has shown the way to it. It does not belong to rhetoric, one of the logical disciplines (represented in Aristotle's *Organon*), the subject of which is convincing words by means of which the mass is inclined to accept a particular opinion or not to accept it. It is also not politics, because politics is concerned with the administration of home or city in accordance with ethical and philosophical requirements, for the purpose of directing the mass toward a behaviour that will result in the preservation and permanence of the (human) species.

The subject here is different from that of these two disciplines which, however, are often similar to it. In a way, it is an entirely original science. In fact, I have not come across a discussion along these lines by anyone. I do not know if this is because people have been unaware of it, but there is no reason to suspect them (of having been unaware of it). Perhaps they have written exhaustively on this topic, and their work did not reach us.

There are many sciences. There have been numerous sages among the nations of mankind. The knowledge that has not come down to us is larger than the knowledge that has. Where are the sciences of the Persians that 'Umar ordered wiped out at the time of the conquest! Where are the sciences of the Chaldaeans, the Syrians, and the Babylonians, and the scholarly products and results that were theirs! Where are the sciences of the Copts, their predecessors! The sciences of only one nation, the Greek, have come down to us, because they were translated through al-Māmūn's efforts. (His efforts in this direction) were successful, because he had many translators at his disposal and spent much money in this connection. Of the sciences of others, nothing has come to our attention.

The accidents involved in every manifestation of nature and intellect deserve study. Any topic that is understandable and real requires its own special science. In this connection, scholars seem to have been interested (mainly) in the results (of the individual sciences). As far as the subject under discussion is concerned, the result, as we have seen, is just historical information. Although the problems it raises are important, both essentially and specifically, (exclusive concern for it) leads to one result only: the mere verification of historical information. This is not much. Therefore, scholars might have avoided the subject. God knows better. 'And you were given but little knowledge.' [Koran, (The Night Journey) 17:85].

”

Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, New York, Bollingen Foundation, © Princeton University Press, 1958, p. 8.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Page numbers refer to the electronic edition available at: http://asadullahali.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/ibn_khaldun-al_muqaddimah.pdf.

COMMENTARY

Ibn Khaldūn's innovation was to put together the concepts of politics and rhetoric in order to develop a new subject of study, *al-'umrān*, in other words, urbanity. He thought about both the art of persuasion (rhetoric) and the art that mobilizes voluntary actions (politics: *al-af'āl al-irādiyya*). This conjunction of two distinct arts, one a matter of logic, the other of politics, had not escaped the logicians mentioned earlier, but they had not systematized the connections so far as to arrive at a new subject of study: civility, urbanity and their deployment in history called "civilization".

In order to determine the contours of the new science, Ibn Khaldūn places rhetoric and politics side-by-side, as we have seen. Knowledge of civilization shares with rhetoric a concern for the circulation of signs that influence human behaviour. The other art with which knowledge of civilization has an affinity but with which it is not to be confused is the art of politics. As the art of organizing life in the community, the art of politics is involved in the new body of knowledge that Ibn Khaldūn calls for but, as the art of politics had for long been confined to the history of dynasties and not to the history of all forms of community life, on its own it was not enough to give an account of the knowledge that takes into account change in societies. For this reason, Ibn Khaldūn believed a new subject of study had to be promoted: "civilization". The historical method that he used supplanted the theological knowledge prevailing at the time. It was no longer a matter of relating human phenomena to the divine breath, but of following their genesis in history and measuring their decline. Generation and corruption, the terms used to discuss phenomena referred to as "physical", were transposed from this scientific field to the field of history.

Ibn Khaldūn does not confine himself either to field studies or to speculation; thus he avoids sterile theorizing and national histories. His approach is to seek connections and to relate things to each other, applying the principle that no art is limited to itself: poetry, history, theology, philosophy, geography are pooled to produce a study of something called "civilization".

QUESTIONS

1

What strategy did Ibn Khaldūn adopt in order to devise an historical method?

2

What are the links between politics and civility, and between politics and civilization?

3

What is implied by the Koranic reference at the end of the text?

4

How does the method devised by Ibn Khaldūn allow living together to be better understood?



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

2 THE POWER OF THE HYBRIDIZATION OF CULTURES: INDIA, PERSIA, THE ARAB WORLD

INTRODUCTION

We are used to assessing the legacy of Greek philosophy in Arab-Muslim philosophy. Less work has been done to acknowledge the intellectual exchange between India and Ancient Persia, on the one hand, and the Arab world on the other. In the eighth century, in the early years of the 'Abbāsid empire, Ibn al-Muqaffa' (died 756) gave us the opportunity to do so. Ibn al-Muqaffa' was a fine scholar who not only reconstructed tales developed in the third century in a Brahmin environment, but also added to them. The text of *Kalila and Dimna*, the first surviving manuscripts of which date only to the thirteenth century, has had mixed fortunes. From India, where in the sixth century it was copied by a Persian doctor called Barzouyeh sent by Khosrau, to the Abbāsid empire of the eighth century, where it was reconstituted by Ibn al-Muqaffa', everything suggests that additions were made to the text, not only by the doctor and the scholar, but also through contributions from several others whose trace has been lost but who contributed to the transmission of the text between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. The first manuscripts available to us date only from this late period.

What is it exactly? It is a collection of fables, the principal characters of which are animals and the events of which are presented as material for the wisdom of kings, in which government of self and government of others are indissolubly linked in the framework of what is known as "the mirror for princes".

The starting point of politics is knowledge of human nature with a view to introducing reforms to the defective human soul. The various writings on the mirror for princes begin by studying human nature and more particularly the human passions: in *Kalila and Dimna*, Ibn al-Muqaffa' deals with rivalry, mistrust and glory behind animal masks. In these fables he stresses the animal nature of humans, their aggressive impulses, their search for the useful and flight from the harmful. Many fables also stress the positive role of the passions in political action, so long as the prince knows how to turn them to their advantage. This is true of the balance between hope and fear: the prince must inspire both passions but above all balance them so that superstition does not result from excessive fear nor laziness from excessive hope. It is on the basis of the transposition to the anthropological order of the religious theme of hope in and fear of God that politics was able to gain in autonomy and the stylistic genre of the mirror for princes became established.

The prince, for his part, has to set an example, in other words, be capable of governing himself in order to govern others, "practice what he commands others"⁷⁰ and be sufficiently brave, "himself able to fight".⁷¹ The arts of governing thus have several purposes and orientations: they are different ways of governing, and the

⁷⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Plato's Laws*, op. cit. p. 88.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*



same is true of the government of souls, of a province, and of the home and family. There is an immanence of all these forms of governing within the community. There is continuity from government of self, which can be termed “moral”, to government of society (political), by way of government of the family.

The fables of *Kalila and Dimna* were copied by order of the Sassanid King Khosrau. The doctor sent to India was to gain the trust of Brahmins in order to gain access to this book. It contained themes of esoteric wisdom that opened only to those who made the effort. It was also important as a breviary for princes. The prince is reflected in the little book that gives him guidance and advice for governing.

Each of the 14 fables is preceded by a question put by the prince to the philosopher. It is not, as in the Platonic tradition, a question of making the philosopher a king, but rather of instituting a dialogue between the two, giving the philosopher the role of adviser, not one who gives advice on the organization of daily affairs, but one who sheds light on the general principles that encourage good government.

The question of the hegemony of political power is ubiquitous. The essence of the wisdom derived from the mirror for princes is not to abuse it. How can the prince be made to understand that it is in his interest to limit his power? If it were said directly, it would not be accepted. Hence the device of speech from the mouths of animals. Domination is first related to the human tendency to assert superiority. It was obvious to many authors (Ibn al-Muqaffa', al-Jāhiz, al-Mawardī, al-Ghazālī) that human nature is defective. Al-Fārābī notes of despotism “that there may be a need for it when the citizens are not good persons with fine natural dispositions; and that despotism is only blameable when the ruler is naturally disposed to be despotic and uses despotism to satisfy his appetites, not because he needs to do so for the sake of the citizens”.⁷²

⁷² Ibid., p. 24.

TEXT 1 THE MIRROR FOR PRINCES: AN APPRENTICESHIP THROUGH FABLES ACCORDING TO IBN AL-MUQAFFA'

“

In this manner the book was finished and divided into 14 chapters, each of which formed a whole and contained a question with its answer, thus providing anyone who examined it the opportunity to behave well. The 14 chapters together formed a single book entitled *Kalila and Dimna*. In it, Bidpai made tame wild beasts and birds speak: thus, superficially, the book was an entertainment for great and ordinary people alike but essentially an exercise in intelligence for the elite. Bidpai put into it all the principles men need in order to direct themselves and regulate the conduct of their families and friends, all the directives needed for the life of this world and the next; he exalted the beauty of obedience to kings, and rejected the idea that coldness towards them could be good for men. He gave the book two meanings, one profound, the other apparent, in accordance with the plan adopted in other books of philosophy: the stories of animals formed the recreational part, the author's commentary the philosophical and didactic substance. At the beginning of the book he was starting to compose, Bidpai placed a chapter in which he told the story of two friends and how their affection, so strong up to that time, was destroyed by the machinations of a treacherous companion; and the philosopher dictated to his disciple, in accordance with the instructions the king had given, a work that was entertaining and philosophical by turns. 'Because wisdom must be isolated', Bidpai said. 'If wisdom is associated with the language of storytellers, the wisdom will be corrupted and the art of the narrator will go unnoticed.' Bidpai and his disciple continued to give all their attention to what the king had asked for: in the end they conceived the idea of placing words in the mouths of two wild animals; the pleasant and entertaining part of the book was told by other animals, while the philosophical part was conveyed by the commentary the two men placed in the mouths of the two beasts. Wise men concentrated on the philosophical maxims of the book, paying no attention to the entertaining role played by the animals. They knew what was intended for them in the book, that the maxims were its primary purpose. As for the generality of readers, their taste for it came from their admiration for the conversation of the two wild animals. Without suspecting that there was anything more, they enjoyed the book and failed to understand the deep meanings of the dialogues; they had no idea of their purpose. In the first chapter, the philosopher's sole intention was to show how friendship and affection between brothers should, in order to remain strong, beware of calumny and of people who stir up hostility between two friends: may the reader learn from this.

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Ibn Al-Muqaffa', *Le livre de Kalila et Dimna* [Kalila and Dimna], translation by André Miquel, Paris, Klincksieck, 1957, pp. 47–48. Translation into English by UNESCO.

TEXT 2 EXAMPLE OF A FABLE ACCORDING TO IBN AL-MUQAFFA': THE MAN, THE DRAGON, THE SNAKE AND THE TWO RATS

“

A man who had been driven by fear to take refuge in a well, hung there clinging to two bushes that were growing in the shaft. His feet had found something to rest on so he looked round: there were four vipers that raised their heads out of their holes. Then he looked at the bottom of the shaft where he saw a dragon opening its mouth in his direction. Raising his eyes to the two bushes, he saw two rats, one white, the other black, who were busy gnawing away at the roots. While in this position he reflected upon how to extricate himself from this situation, he saw close by him a shelf on which there was a little honey. He tasted it and found in it such sweetness that he forgot to think about his situation. He forgot the four serpents on which his feet were resting and that could separately or all together attack him at any moment. He forgot the two rats busily gnawing away at the bushes. He forgot that, once they had finished their work, he would plunge into the mouth of the dragon and perish. And this distraction, this insouciance, ended only with death.

I compared the well to the world, full of misfortunes, evils, dangers and places of perdition; the four serpents to the four humours on which the life of the man rested: as soon as one of them became heated, it was like a viper's venom or a mortal poison. I then compared the two bushes to life, the two rats to day and night: like those two rodents, day and night worked relentlessly to ruin the principles that safeguarded existence. As for the dragon, it represented certain death, while the honey was the meagre share of delight within man's reach, distracting him from himself, diverting him from thinking of the means of his deliverance and leading him away from the path of salvation.

In this way I came to be satisfied with my lot, and to do everything I could with a view to my future life; on this subject I hoped to find in the past examples that would show me the right path and in which I could find guidance and succour. This was how I lived. A day came when I returned from India to my country, after copying a good number of Hindu books, including this one.

”

Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Le livre de Kalila et Dimna* [Kalila and Dimna],
translation by André Miquel, Paris, Klincksieck, 1957, pp. 47–48.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

The gain recorded by the theme of domination in these fables is the investment of the anthropological field to explain the reign of princes. It is not a matter of taking refuge behind the illusions of a golden age or of settling into some form of messianism. By describing how power is born and dies, authors like Ibn al-Muqaffa' show the conditions of its exercise. The point of view is more pragmatic than directed towards the principles of the foundations of power with regard to its legitimacy. This is particularly clear in the preface of Ali Ibn ash-Shāh al-Fārīsī, who added to the text of Ibn al-Muqaffa' a long reflection on Alexander's domination of part of India, how he had saved the Hindus from servitude, and how the new king, Dabschelim, was going to connect again with the cycle of injustice. The philosopher Bidpai, who had become the king's counsellor urged him to change his attitude: that was done through the narrative of the fables and their teaching.

Domination is in fact not an end in itself. The question that often arises in the work of our authors is this: what does political power do with domination? Around this question turns the sphere of government of self – called “pastoral government”, government of souls – and that of the government of others. Politicians need to understand the geography of the soul, the arrangement of the human faculties, the relationship between the rational powers and the irrational powers of the human soul, but they also need to know themselves: the prince must reflect upon his actions as in a mirror of thought. One of the issues at stake is countering the power of the courtiers who hide his ills from him as well as those of the society he governs. Nothing should form a screen between the prince and his people. The prince's counsellors are his agents, not obstacles to his action. The medical paradigm is ubiquitous in these texts: there is first the doctor Barzouyeh who leaves to search for the precious text, then more generally there is the theme of the hidden tumour that, once it has appeared, becomes hideous and incurable. The patient has to be diagnosed and then persuaded to change his way of life. This work has to be done individually, hence the importance of prudence, a virtue exercised only according to circumstances, since what is appropriate for a particular man and a particular community is not universally appropriate, “This faculty is not acquired through cognizance of the universals of the art or through exhausting all of them, but through lengthy experience of individual instances”.⁷³ The question of friends who are mirrors in which one sees good modes of conduct and on the basis of which one polishes one's character is constantly underlined.

QUESTIONS

1

The fable is a specific philosophical form. What are its characteristics?

2

How is the fable of Ibn al-Muqaffa' adapted to the hybridization of cultures?

3

Government of self and government of others intersect in Ibn al-Muqaffa'. Describe how.

4

Other philosophical traditions have used fables. Compare the different styles.

⁷³ Al-Fārābī, *The Book of Religion*, p. 106.

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

3 LAW AND LAWS

INTRODUCTION

In this text, the hypothetical-deductive method of al-Fārābī clearly demonstrates the approach of a philosopher who does not intend to speak of a particular culture or history but rather of the sequence of concepts: if, as a result of the multiple accidents of life, a first ruler has not regulated everything, what happens to the law and its creation and continuity? From this possible situation al-Fārābī deduces intelligibility from an actual fact: understanding the fact of law on the basis of the requirements of its concept; more exactly, on the basis of the genealogy of law. Thus “the first ruler” discussed in the text is never the first from a factual viewpoint, but the first in a thought experiment, one characterized by the idea that the first is the one who establishes the virtuous way of life in the souls of citizens. Al-Fārābī’s first ruler is the first through action, not the first in time: “the first virtuous royal profession consists of knowledge of all the actions that procure the establishment of virtuous ways of life and habits in communities and nations,” he says a little later in *The Book of Religion*. In this way, al-Fārābī constructs a model of the community that is not ideal in the sense of something that is sought but in the sense of a discursive simulation that will function as a standard of measurement for the actual community: it is “the other community” of which Léo Strauss speaks; and “the other community” is situated halfway between “this world” and “the other world”, insofar as it is still an earthly community, but also a community that does not exist in fact, but only in “discourse”.⁷⁴ Unlike the ideal, the standard of measurement does not require reality to comply with it. It simply offers a measurement, not a constraint. In *The Book of Religion* al-Fārābī is closer to the Plato of *Laws* (739c) talking of the “first community”, than to the Plato of *The Republic* speaking of the “good community”. The city of the *Laws* is related to its cause, Zeus, as much as to its excellence as a city whose cause is divine: “A questioner asked a question about the cause of the institution of laws, ‘cause’ here meaning the efficient cause and their efficient cause being he who instituted them. A respondent replied that it was Zeus who had instituted them, Zeus being for the Greeks the father of humanity where cause ends”.⁷⁵ Al-Fārābī constructs his model on the basis of a fusion of several of Plato’s dialogues: *The Republic* provides a perfect city in discourse; the *Timaeus* gives us the “divine and natural beings possessing intelligence and known according to this science” of the city; while the *Laws* gives us “the virtuous way of life adopted by the people of this city”.⁷⁶ *The Book of Religion* combines these three themes. Faithful to the Greek philosophical tradition, al-Fārābī considers “divine” to mean “excellent”. Divine government is therefore transcendent only insofar as excellence supposes a form of transcendence, but there is no verticality linked with this transcendence.

⁷⁴ Léo Strauss, “Le Platon d’Al Fārābī”, in *Philosophie*, Paris, Minit, 2000, p. 81.

⁷⁵ Al-Fārābī, *Compendium des Lois de Platon*, translated by Stéphane Diebler, § 4, Seuil, 2007, p. 140.

⁷⁶ Al-Fārābī, *La philosophie de Platon, ses parties*, op.cit., §33 et 34, p. 61.

TEXT THE LEGISLATOR, THE JURIST AND THE JUDGE, ACCORDING TO AL-FĀRĀBĪ

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It may happen accidentally that the first ruler does not determine all of the actions and give an exhaustive account of them, but determines most of them; and with some of those he does determine, it may happen that he does not give an exhaustive account of all their stipulations. On the contrary, for diverse reasons that occur, many actions such as to be determined may remain without determination: death may overtake him and carry him away before he has covered all of them; necessary occupations, such as wars and other things, may keep him from it; or it may be that he only determines actions for each incident and each occurrence he observes or is asked about, at which time he determines, legislates, and establishes a tradition regarding what ought to be done for that kind of incident. Since not everything that can occur does occur in his time or in his country, many things remain that could occur in another time or in another country, each needing a specifically determined action, and he will have legislated nothing about them. Or else he devotes himself to those actions he presumes or knows to be fundamental, from which someone else can extrapolate the remaining ones: he legislates about the manner and amount of what ought to be done with these and leaves the rest, knowing that it will be possible for someone else to extrapolate them by adopting his intention and following in his footsteps. Or he decides to begin with legislating and determining the actions that are of the greatest efficacy, use, value, and benefit, so that the city will cohere and its affairs will be linked and organized: he legislates about those things alone and leaves the rest for a moment of leisure or so that someone else – a contemporary or a successor – can extrapolate them by following in his footsteps.

If, after his death, someone succeeds him who is like him in all respects, then the successor will be the one who determines what the first did not determine. And not only this, but it is also up to him to alter much of what the first had legislated and to determine it in another way, when he knows that this is best for his time – not because the first erred, but because the first made a determination according to what was best for his time and this one makes a determination according to what is best subsequent to the time of the first, this being the kind of thing the first would alter also, were he to observe it. It is the same if the second is followed by a third who is like the second in all respects, and the third by a fourth: it is up to the one who comes after to determine, on his own, what he does not find determined and to alter what his predecessor determined; for, were his predecessor still here, he too would alter what the one who came after altered.

Now if one of those righteous leaders who are really kings should pass away and not be succeeded by one who is like him in all respects, it will be necessary – concerning everything done in the cities under the rulership of the predecessor – for the successor to follow in the footsteps of the predecessor with respect to what he determines; he should not do anything differently nor make any alteration, but should let everything the predecessor determined remain the way it was and look into anything that needs to be given a determination and was not declared by the predecessor, inferring and extrapolating it from the things the first determined by declaring them.

Thus, the art of jurisprudence would then be requisite. It enables a human being to make a sound determination of each thing the lawgiver did not declare specifically by extrapolating it or inferring it from the things he determined by declaring them and to verify that on the basis of the lawgiver's purpose in the religion he legislated with respect to the nation for which it was legislated. Now this verification is not possible unless his belief in the opinions of that religion is correct and he possesses the virtues that are virtues in that religion. Whoever is like that is a jurist.

”

Al-Fārābī, The book of religion, in *Al-Fārābī, The Political Writings: "Selected Aphorisms" and other Texts*, translation by Charles E. Butterworth, Ithaca, © Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 98–100.

COMMENTARY

In this text, law is conceived of in its continuity. What happens when a legislator dies? His successor imitates him, not according to the principle of authority, but according to the principle of pertinence: he does what “the first ruler” would have done in the same circumstance. He knows that it is on the basis of his context that he will enact laws. Law therefore supposes that there will be both continuity with the first laws and also adaptation to the time and place to which it applies. But innovation in the laws will be exceptional because the rulers who succeed one another must have the capacity to establish a legal order as the first did. If a ruler does not have this capacity, he should not stray from what has been established and should turn to the work of interpreting the law, which, in the Muslim tradition, makes no distinction between judge and lawyer: it is from the study of texts and cases that law is pronounced. Not only does the judge who states the law consult a mufti who is versed in case-law and disputes, but he himself simply follows the “*shari*” law that the legislator has laid down. In Platonic vein, al-Fārābī, considers the art of interpretation to be a restricted art, like the art of medicine. In *The Republic*, Plato stresses the extent to which these two arts develop only when the community has exhibited a few recognized diseases. But the necessary remedy nonetheless supposes the existence of a thorough art of the interpretation of legislation, an art for which al-Fārābī requires that the lawyer/judge “must be cognizant of the laws legislated by the first ruler for a certain moment and then replaced with others he retained so that in his own time the jurist follows in the traces of the latter one, not the former. The jurist must further be cognizant of the language spoken by the first ruler; of the customary ways in which the people of his time used their language”.⁷⁷ To such recommendations should be added complete knowledge of logic, the meanings of terms, the use of metaphor, and complete anthropological knowledge of the manners and customs of the people to which the laws that he is interpreting are applied. The judge is therefore a man well versed in what today are called “the human and social sciences”. Law is not connected only with Koranic exegesis, but also with the history of people in a particular place at a particular time.

QUESTIONS

1

Describe the work of the “first ruler”. Why does al-Fārābī use a thought experiment and not an historical experiment?

2

Interpretation of the law is a stage subsequent to legislation. Explain this situation.

3

What are the issues involved in the continuity of law? Can law be independent of politics?

4

How is this text topical today?

⁷⁷ Al-Fārābī, *The Book of Religion*, p. 100.

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

4 GRAMMAR OF EMANCIPATION AND PLURALITY OF LANGUAGES

INTRODUCTION



Ali Abdel Razek (1888–1966) had a traditional education and the title Sheikh of Al-Azhar, a master of the great mosque of Al-Azhar in Cairo. As soon as his book, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power* was published in 1925, it caused tremendous controversy. His father was close to the founders of the *al-Nahḍa* movement, the profound questioning of Egyptian society that sought emancipation of the people and demanded rights. The book was almost contemporary with the abolition of the caliphate (1924), that moribund institution responsible for the inertia and subjection of the Arab peoples. The Ottoman Empire broke up. The colonial powers were at the gates or already within the walls.

On the political level, Abdel Razek sought in his book to show that political legitimacy could not be based on religious law. People had always invented and sought to invent the means of their political survival. In 1925, Abdel Razek tried to show that a distinction had to be drawn between reference and usage: the fact that the Koran referred to political power did not mean that it justified or used it. The same was true of slavery: mentioning slaves in the Koran, referring to them, did not amount to justifying the commodification of human beings. Abdel Razek's main thesis is this: with the exception of the prophet, "God does not confer knowledge of the final cause or of truth upon anyone in particular, whatever their status, nor upon any institution, whatever its authority," as Mustapha Safouan very forcefully puts it in his book *Pourquoi le monde Arabe n'est pas libre* [Why the Arab world is not free].⁷⁸ In this sense, the prophet can have no real "successor" or caliph. This is what Ibn Khaldūn had said in his time (see above). Political power makes God in its own image according to a "transcendent ventriloquism that makes people believe that something said on Earth has come from Heaven", as Lichtenberg, an eighteenth-

⁷⁸ Moustapha Safouan, *Pourquoi le monde arabe n'est pas libre. Politique de l'écriture et terrorisme religieux* [Why the Arab World is not free: The Politics of Writing and Religious Terrorism], Paris, Denoël, 2008.



century German philosopher, put it so well. Not only does the State monopolize the use of violence and make legal use of it, but it uses religion as the basis of its legitimacy. The text presented here is eloquent on this point. The people follow and accept this dual confiscation of violence and religion. People agree to be magnetized by an individual who is able to control them through a subtle dose of corruption and repression. When Islam was transformed into a religion of conquest, it was used as the basis of domination by the State of every aspect of life. In the schools of the Arab world, the mother tongue is not taught: “it is often thought and said that Arabic is a single language, but the distance between classical Arabic and Egyptian Arabic, and between the Arabic of the Gulf States and of North Africa, is the same as the distance between Latin and the Romance languages – Italian, Spanish and French”.⁷⁹

Mustapha Safouan did not hesitate to translate Shakespeare’s *Othello* into Egyptian colloquial Arabic so that people could “read the great writers in the language they learn in the cradle”.⁸⁰ For him, a language is not the subject of any idealization, it is above all a practice that fluctuates with the marks of time. That is why translation should not aim to comply with any linguistic ideal but above all to communicate. It is true that in every language there is an implicit mode of thought, but that mode of thought should not in any way be an object of worship: “the more a language is venerated, the more control its preconceptions will have over the mind, and the more difficult it will be to question them”.⁸¹ Safouan links language and law: these two practices are mirrors of society. He dwells at length on the American example in order to emphasize that the power of the United States comes primarily from the democratic experiment laid down in the documents of the Constitution, written in a language that everyone understands. Such comparative analysis of institutions and level of languages shows how much is still lacking in Arab countries.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 79.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 100.



TEXT *ISLAM AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL POWER, ALI ABDEL RAZEK*

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Thus we can see that the title of caliph (the successor and vice-regent of the prophet), together with the circumstances in which it was employed – circumstances which we have described only in part – were among the sources of the misconception, propagated among the ranks of Muslims, that the caliphate was a religious function. This led the people (wrongly) to ascribe the rank of the prophet himself to whomever it was who held power over Muslims.

Thus, did the erroneous view gain ground, from the early days of Islam, that the caliphate was a religious office and that the caliph was the author, by delegation, of religious law.

It was in the interest of the rulers to propagate this fiction among the people. They did so with a view to protecting their throne and suppressing their opponents in the name of religion. They were relentless in inculcating this belief among the masses through numerous means – the belief, namely, that obedience to rulers is tantamount to obedience to God; and rebellion against them, a rebellion against God. However, they were not contented even with this. They could not acknowledge what Abu Bakr had acknowledged, nor did they share his aversion. They turned the ruler into a representative of God on earth, His shadow, extending over His creatures: ‘There is no God but He, glory to Him, far above their polytheism!’ (Koran, (*Repentance*) IX:31).

Thereafter the institution of the ‘caliphate’ was included in the religious sciences. It was given the same status as the articles of faith. It was studied by Muslims in the same breath as the attributes of God and inculcated in the same manner as the profession of the faith, that is: ‘There is no other god beside God, and Mohammed is His messenger’.

Such is the crime committed by despots and such are the consequences of their rule. In the name of religion they have misled the Muslims, veiled the roads to truth from their eyes and blocked the light of knowledge. In the name of religion they have usurped ownership over the Muslims. They have demeaned them and forbidden them to reflect on questions to do with politics. They have fooled them in the name of religion and set up obstacles, of all sorts, to intellectual activity. They have done all this to the point of depriving them of any frame of reference outside religion, even in purely political affairs, and in matters to do strictly with government.

These despots have likewise thwarted an understanding of religion and imprisoned Muslims within the mental boundaries set by them. They have prohibited all scientific thought liable to encroach on the domain reserved for the caliphate.

The sum effect of all this has been to kill the vital impulses of intellectual inquiry among Muslims. The impulse towards political reflection and investigation of caliphs as well as the institution of the caliphate has been effectively paralyzed.

In truth, this institution which Muslims generally know as the caliphate has nothing to do with religion. It has no more to do with it than the lust for power and the exercise of intimidation that has been associated with this institution. The caliphate is not among the tenets of the faith – no more so than the judiciary or some other governmental function or State position. These exist by dint of nothing else but political fiat, with which religion has nothing to do whatsoever, which it wants neither to know nor to ignore; which it neither advocates nor repudiates. It is a matter which religion has left to humankind, for people to organize in accordance with the principles of reason, the experience of nations and the rules of politics.

What holds true in this case applies equally to the setting up of Islamic armies, the construction of towns and fortifications, the organization of government – all matters which are of no interest to religion, but pertain rather to reason and experience, to rules of engagement in battle, to the art of building and the opinions of experts.

There is not a single principle of the faith that forbids Muslims to cooperate with other nations in the total enterprise of the social and political sciences. There is no principle that prevents them from dismantling this obsolete system, a system which has demeaned and subjugated them, crushing them in its iron grip. Nothing

stops them from building their State and their system of government on the basis of past constructions of human reason, of systems whose sturdiness has stood the test of time, which the experience of nations has shown to be effective.

”

Ali Abdel Razek, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power*, edited by Abdou Filali-Ansary and translated by Maryam Loutfi, Edinburgh, © The Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations and Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp. 116–18.⁸²

COMMENTARY

In this text Ali Abdel Razek questions the religious justification of political power. None of the founding texts of Islam, be it the Koran or the “*ḥadīth*” (prophetic tradition), provides such a justification. The aim of this questioning was to free subject peoples from a dictatorial power garbed in religious clothing that over the centuries had taken advantage of the illiteracy of the peoples and the division between elite and masses to establish a domination that benefited only the caliph’s family and court.

The strength of the text, which gave rise to refutations and objections by those who had an interest in conserving religious power as political power, lies in its use of the most traditional knowledge – Koranic verses and sayings of the prophet (“*sunna*”) – to wage war against the subjection of the peoples. This text therefore shows that the fight for freedom does not need a reference outside Islam. It is also a way of saying that no people, whatever its religious tradition, can renounce what defines it: the desire for freedom. The book conducts an historical investigation that shows how political power has always confiscated freedom from peoples without giving them any emancipation in return. “The issue of the caliphate is not only passed over in the Koran, it is equally ignored in the *sunna*. This is borne out by the fact that the religious scholars were unable to provide even a single *ḥadīth* in support of their case on this issue”.⁸³ The charges levelled against the author included the following: the belief that “*shari*” is only spiritual legislation, that the first caliphs were lay people, that the conquest of political power by the prophet came at an uncertain time, as is the case of every political action of whatever kind.

QUESTIONS

- 1 ***What type of political reform did Ali Abdel Razek envisage?***
- 2 ***The caliphate: is it a spiritual power or political power?***
- 3 ***According to Ali Abdel Razek, did the caliphate organize the servitude of the peoples?***
- 4 ***Is Islam a political religion?***

⁸² See a commentary on Ali Abdel Razek’s thesis written by Mohammed Tahar Ben Achour pp. 32-33 of the Comments of the original Arabic version.

⁸³ Ali Abdel Razek, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power*, edited by Abdou Filali-Ansary and translated by Maryam Loutfi, Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

IV GENDER EQUALITY

1 EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

Mansour Fahmy defended a thesis in Paris on the condition of women in Islam and when he returned to Egypt. "I was born a Muslim, spent my youth surrounded by Muslims, then came to Paris and, having acquired, under the direction of Professor Lévy-Bruhl, the methods necessary for exact research, I undertook my work with the single concern of arriving at the truth".⁸⁴ In 1913 he was pilloried because he had written a thesis with Professor Lévy-Bruhl in Paris, and managed to return to his post at the university only in 1919 thanks to the revolution. Tackling the question of women head on, Fahmy was part of the great current born in Egypt in the late nineteenth century known as *al-Nahḍa*, literally "Renaissance". After Napoleon's arrival in Egypt in 1798, there were many voyages: explorers going in one direction, students going to Europe, and particularly France, in the other. The idea of progress that was so strong in the nineteenth century crossed borders and took the form of an "*Iṣṭah*" in the Arab countries, in other words a search for perfectibility or improvement. The supporters of the Arab Renaissance wished to connect with modernity, to make modernity part of the shared heritage of humanity, rather than the distinctive form of European society. It was not so much religion that was contested as the superstitious form through which it remained alive. The emancipation of women became meaningful in this context and necessarily took place through education, schooling.

Kassem Amin (1865–1908) had written a book in Arabic on the emancipation of women. Adopting a sociological approach, Mansour Fahmy did not hesitate to consider the prophet of Islam fully a man who took political decisions.

⁸⁴ Mansour Fahmy, *La condition de la femme dans l'Islam* [The condition of women in Islam] (1913), Paris, Allia, 2002, p. 16.



This is still highly topical because Fahmy sets aside the analyses based on timelessness and an Islam that would always be the same, while the societies concerned by this religion are in history and constantly changing. Some, like Bernard Lewis, refer to an etymology in which to ensnare the peoples who have known Islam. In his book *The Political Language of Islam*,⁸⁵ Lewis says that Islam does not have a word for “freedom” in its own language, Arabic. Against this religious fate, the *al-Nahḍa* reformers tried to introduce the necessary freedom in the lives of peoples.

⁸⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

TEXT *THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN ISLAM, MANSOUR FAHMY*

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In the chaos of all the traditions, the critic can disentangle a gentle, enthusiastic and humane voice that was necessary to the development that was to take place in Arabia. For the faithful theologian, this is the voice of God, the echo of which must sound in the infinity of eternity. For the sociologist, it is the speech of a man who reasons under the influence of his environment and devises lofty formulas according to the customs of his time; it is the skilful attitude of a reformer; it is the talent of an apostle, it is Mohammed.

But where are we to find the good and holy voice of the man concerned to organize Arab society? Neither the Koran with its commentaries nor all the traditions are able without severe criticism, to give us this voice that stifles the historic errors accumulated over the history of Mohammedanism.

And yet it is there that, once this criticism has been made, we can find a message emanating from common sense, a truth that can dictate human nature; a law required by social necessities, an enthusiasm for order, justice and beauty; it is there that the clear voice of an Arab genius, a Mohammed, can be heard. There, too, will be the last refuge of those who wish to cling to dogmas that, through their rigidity in the midst of changes required by evolution, can shelter the conception of the divine immutability for which believers are searching.

The day [will come] when Islamic compilations, thus far brought together in a single corpus, split completely into two parts: one tiny, that will be conserved, representing the dogmas that will be used for the requirements of metaphysical natures and the desires of pious souls, and the other testimony to the customs that will probably be entirely obliterated when progress and new institutions quietly eclipse them.

In the far-off days when the only institutions have been buried, sociologists and artists will find in their remains materials their talents will be able to turn to advantage. The institutions that once prevailed in the Muslim countries, such as the law of retribution, will have been forgotten. Other institutions that have dominated minds will be dominated in their turn by thought and submitted to human analysis.

This is how I see the question of women being tackled after long being untouchable because of the traditional and centuries-old remnants still attached to it. In Egypt, in the Caucasus, in the Indies, Turkey and advanced North Africa, everyone is aware of the significance of the question; it is discussed; steps are taken towards emancipation, and religion retreats in the face of these trends to return to its place in the domains of poetry and metaphysics. In the novelty of its youth a religion is like a tree that casts more and more shade about it as it grows. The religion of Mohammed sheltered a whole multitude of different customs and social manifestations that found a means of living a life associated with its life; the God of Mohammed was taken into the most minute details of people's lives! The purpose of my research has been precisely to disentangle from all the historical phenomena the share of each of the social elements. Conquests, slavery, classes, polygamy, tyrannical governments, all played their part in the decline of women.

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Mansour Fahmy, *La condition de la femme dans l'Islam* (1913),
Paris, Editions Allia, 2002, 2014, pp. 126–27.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

This text gives voice to history in multiple forms. It indicates that history does not speak in one voice: theological, doctrinal, religious, etc. It situates the emancipation of women in a general emancipation that concerns the whole of humanity. Mansour Fahmy uses the critical sense and common sense to denounce the forms of servitude accumulated through history that were expressed in the seclusion of women and the archaic model of female domination. The text distinguishes between different faces of the prophet: he is an apostle of change but the effects of his revolution in customs led to the servitude of women as a result of male domination that enshrined the social model of the first Muslim community. The anthropologist Françoise Hériter points out that the discrimination women experience is universal. It is not specific to Islam but in Muslim societies it takes the forms that Mansour Fahmy describes, in particular through the practice of polygamy and the rules of inheritance.

This text also stresses the close link between emancipation and secularization. Secularization does not mean the retreat of religion but its entry into history. Women's participation in public space is an element of such secularization. It is both a sign of the evolution of societies and the marker by which women gain autonomy.

QUESTIONS

1

In order to promote the emancipation of women Mansour Fahmy uses a specific historical method. Describe it.

2

What role does Mansour Fahmy see in the prophet of Islam in the condition of women?

3

The Renaissance, al-Nahda, was a reform movement that developed in Egypt in the late nineteenth century. Can analogies be drawn with the democratic awakening in the Arab countries since 2011?

4

Based on your knowledge of other philosophical traditions, sketch the bridges between this text and those traditions.



IV GENDER EQUALITY

2 GENDER EQUALITY, ACCORDING TO TAHTAWI

INTRODUCTION

After the centuries of decline following the high-point of Arab-Islamic civilization, the modern Arab renaissance found embodiment in a mission dispatched in 1826 by the governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, to France. Shaikh Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār suggested that his student, Rifā’a Rāf’i aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī, be put in charge of that mission and act as its imam. Ṭaḥṭāwī, however, was not content to remain in the role of preacher. A passionate interest in science and the arts led him and other members of the mission to translate a variety of books from French into Arabic; these totalled more than 2,000 volumes on various scientific and artistic subjects. When he set off, Sheikh al-‘Aṭṭār asked Ṭaḥṭāwī to record his observations on European civilization, culture and science during the mission and his book, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ barīz* [A Profile of Paris] gives his account of these.

In the third chapter of the introduction, Ṭaḥṭāwī speaks about France in relation to other countries, and the characteristics and traits of the French. It was this that prompted Muhammad Ali to send missions to France rather than elsewhere. He speaks at length about European and world geography and concludes with the reason for the choice of France as the destination for 40 students because of its healthy climate, good-natured people and lower cost of living than London, as well as the religious tolerance of the French, who permit the worship of all religions. According to Ṭaḥṭāwī, the French believe that all religions command virtue and prohibit vice.

TEXT A PROFILE OF PARIS, TAHTAWI

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The dominant traits of the French character include keeping one's word, faithfulness, loyalty and sincerity. ... They set great store by gallantry, in praise of which a Frenchman once said, 'Gallantry is a collective name for all the virtues.' In common with others, the French consider ingratitude to be shameful and believe that gratitude is a duty. I presume that all nations think the same. ... Another trait is that of spending money on personal pleasures, diabolical passions, entertainment and diversions. In this respect, they are the most profligate spendthrifts. The men here are slaves to and under the thumbs of the women, regardless of whether or not the woman is beautiful. A Frenchman once said, 'Among savages, women are destined for slaughter; in oriental countries, they are just like furniture; but among the French, they are treated like spoilt children.' ... The French do not think ill of their women at all, despite their frequent lapses. ... If a Frenchman finds out that his wife has committed adultery, he will renounce her completely and separate from her for the rest of his life. ... Their unpleasant traits of character include the lack of virtue of many of the women, as mentioned above, and lack of jealousy among the men in matters where Muslims would be jealous. ... A French wit once remarked, 'Do not infer that she is chaste, rather that she is experienced.' ... It is as if French women were living proof of the words of the sage: 'Do not be deceived by a woman and do not trust in money, however much there is.' It has also been said, 'Women are Satan's snares.' ... French women are of surpassing beauty and charm; they are polite and agreeable company. They are always beautifully turned out. They mingle with men in the parks and it may happen that a man and a woman – whether from the upper classes or otherwise – become acquainted there, particularly on Sundays, which is the Christian day of rest, and on Sunday nights at the balls and dance halls. ... The men are caught in the middle. They are the women's slaves, denying themselves and placing their lovers on a pedestal. As for the horses, they pull carriages day and night along the cobbled streets of Paris. And if the carriage has been hired by a beautiful woman, the coachman will exhaust his horses to bring her to her destination as quickly as possible. Horses in this city are constantly tormented.

It is the custom of French women to fasten a corset around themselves from abdomen to chest to make their figures at all times straight and upright. They have many wiles. One of their habits which one cannot but find pleasing is that they do not let down their hair, as is the custom of Arab women, but gather it up on top of their heads and hold it in place with a comb or the like at all times. On hot days, it is their custom to uncover certain parts of their bodies and expose themselves from head to just above the breast. Some things might even be revealed which the people of this country consider shameful. However, they never expose any part of their legs, which are always covered by stockings, particularly when going out into the street ...

In general, women sit first and no man will sit down until all the women are seated. If a woman enters a salon and there is no empty seat, a man will rise and offer her his. However, a woman will not give up her seat to another woman. Women are always more greatly revered in society than men. Thus, when a man enters a friend's home, he must greet the lady of the house first before greeting his friend. No matter how exalted a man's rank, it is always below that of his wife or the ladies of the house.

”

رفاعة رافع الطهطاوي، تخلص الإبريز في تلخيص باريز، كلمات عربية للترجمة والنشر، 2011

Translation into English by UNESCO.

COMMENTARY

Clearly, the meeting between East and West in the early nineteenth century was not a forceful, violent clash. Indeed, the text indicates that it was an amicable one, based on an understanding of the other's customs and traditions, the search for points of similarity and effort to explain points of difference. This is in the spirit of Arab-Islamic civilization, which accepted diversity and difference when it sat upon the very throne of civilization for a period that stretched from the eighth century CE until its collapse in Andalusia in the late fifteenth century CE.

Human qualities and virtues are the same among all peoples. Nevertheless, peoples do sometimes differ – for example, regarding views on women. In France, women enjoy a great deal of respect and considerably more freedom than women in the East do. However, that has not stopped advancements being made in the position of women in the Arab and Islamic world. Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908) published *Taḥrīr al-mar'a* [Women's Liberation] in 1899 and *al-Mar'a al-jadīda* [The New Woman] in 1900. In the latter, he affirmed his earlier views on women, underpinning these with secular ideas and western examples in response to the vehement reactions to his first book.

He had been preceded by Zaynab Fawwāz (1846–1914) from Lebanon, who called for human rights for women within the framework of Islamic tradition and law. She was, perhaps, conscious of her Arab kinship but was most definitely aware of her Muslim identity. In her published works, she did not go against the views of the Egyptian political establishment or of the Ottoman Empire in general. Her call was a continuation of Ṭaḥṭāwī's appeals for girls' and boys' education, when he was a member of the education planning committee in 1836. However, it was not until 1873 that a girls' school was established in Egypt.

It was then the turn of Injī Aflāṭūn (1924–1989). She was an Egyptian whose first book, *Thamānūn milyon imra'a ma'anā* [Eighty million women are with us] was published in 1948, with a foreword by the then President of Cairo University, Ṭāhā Hussein. In that book, she put forward her ideas on the negative, destructive impact of imperialism on the world, particularly the Arab world. Her second book, *Naḥnu an-nisa' al-miṣriyāt* [We, the Egyptian Women], was published in 1949 and examined the deteriorating social and political situation of Egyptian women in the light of the deteriorating political situation in Egypt in general. She linked the general decline in Egyptian politics and the faltering democracy with the situation of Egyptian women as a crucial part of the make-up of society.

In modern times, a contemporary women's movement has emerged in the Arab world. Fatima Mernissi was born in Fes, Morocco, in 1940. Transferring from scientific research to literature and the novel, her works are imbued with ideas from the scientific research which formed her and are an important addition to the social sciences, history and anthropology. Her novels are courageous in their support of women's rights and open up horizons of understanding between East and West. Perhaps she learned from Averroes



who, in his own age, came to the conclusion that progress was being held back because more than half of Muslim society at that time were women, who did not work and were imprisoned behind the veil. Fatima Mernissi adopted this idea as a driving force for her own intellectual and literary output.

The ideas of Nawal El-Saadawi, born in Egypt in 1931, are characterized by the capacity to criticize inherited political and religious assumptions. This has exposed her to many forms of harassment. In 2001, there was an attempt to divorce her forcibly from her husband, while in 2004 the Azhar issued a ruling to impound her novel, *Suqūṭ al-imām* [The Fall of the Imam]. However, this has not stopped her from carrying on her intellectual enterprise and, courageously, she has not hesitated to criticize the political, religious and social ideas inherited from the ancient slave-owning order.

QUESTIONS

1

Can we infer from the text that morality is relative between nations?

2

What are the traits which Ṭahṭāwī believes are common to all nations?

3

What is your assessment of Ṭahṭāwī's receptivity to French culture in 1828?

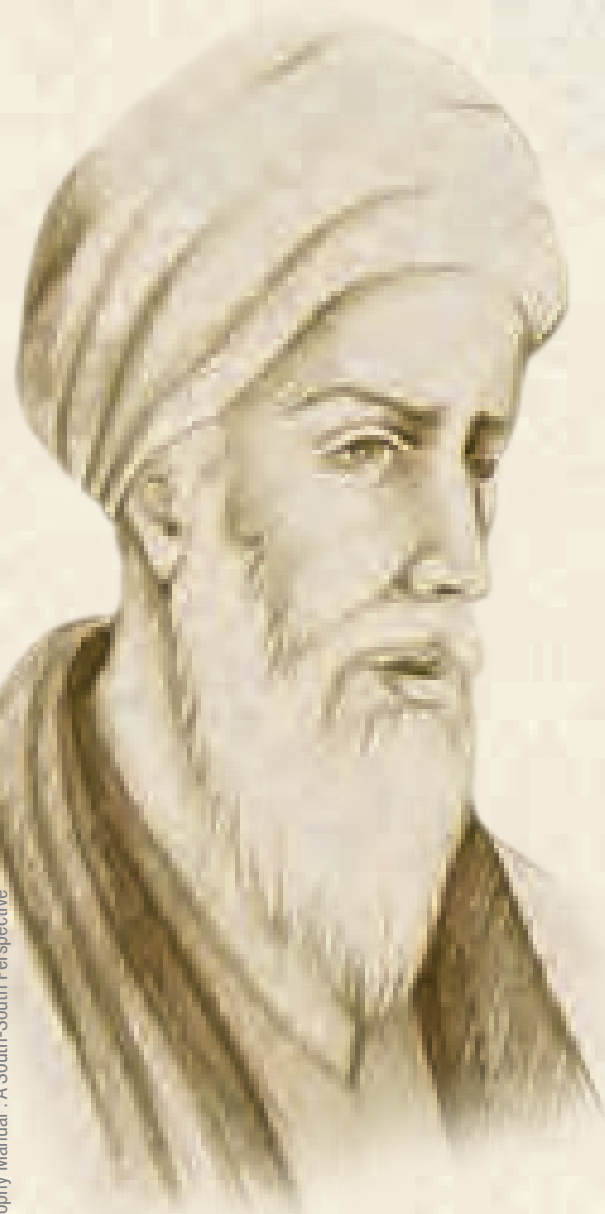
4

Do you think that borrowing from western civilization is of benefit to the East? Why?

V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

1 THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

INTRODUCTION



Abū Bakr Ibn Bāija (1077–1138) was an Andalusian philosopher who influenced Ibn Tufayl (Abu Bakr) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) a great deal. He believed the vocation of humankind was essentially intellectual. People then became light, joining the prophets, saints, martyrs and blessed ones. In the text presented here, Ibn Bāija expands on the different meanings of the word “*tadbīr*”, translated here into English as “rule”. This word denotes a concept that means ordering of actions with a view to a particular end. It was first translated into French by Salomon Monk in the nineteenth century as “system”. The recent (2010) translation into French chooses the term “conduct”, which is more expressive. It is the “*tadbīr*” that makes it possible to understand that one can say that God orders the universe (*mudabbir al-alām*), but also that one can speak of an organization of the community (*tadbīr al-mudun*), as Plato did, or even of the ordering/organization of a house. The primary and etymological meaning of “economy” is indeed this: “household management”.

It is true that it is in a homonymic sense that one can talk of the rule of God and the rule of humankind. It is, however, the notion of organization with a view to an end that is essential here, and for this organization, the parallel between God and the universe, on the one hand, and humankind and the community on the other, makes it possible to stress the need to devise a way of living together. God has instituted things according to a certain order; it is up to people to do the same for their community, within the limits of their capacities, of course.

Ibn Bāija, a reader of Plato, drew the major lesson that a virtuous community is distinguished by the absence of medicine and case-law. The law governs human actions when and because virtue has, as it were, deserted them.



Through the scope given to the word “rule”, Ibn Bājjā constructs a model that goes from the local (the house) to the total (the universe). It is true that rule is not said in the same way, but each time it is a matter of giving form to things with a view to an end. God does so in his way for the universe, but humans, who do not rule the universe, do rule its effects: they may act through their crafts, as the text indicates, with a view to an end, and deploy their faculties in order to obtain what is desired.

The extension of the meaning of the word “rule” is an invitation to link the different fields of human action while respecting their differences, and not to forget the unifying force of the structure that is given to things. It is through that structure that justice can begin to be deployed, because justice requires form and excludes chaos. It is for humans to conduct that “rule”. While humans do not rule the universe, they take care of the effects on which they can act. This “ecological” concern long before the term had been coined is one way of showing that all human organization presupposes a cosmic humility that recognizes that humankind is not an empire within an empire, nor a master and possessor of creatures.

TEXT *THE RULE OF THE SOLITARY, IBN BĀJJA*

“

The expression 'rule' in the language of the Arabs is used in several senses, which have been enumerated by their philologists. It commonly indicates in general the organization of actions with reference to ends proposed. Hence they do not use it when a man does a single action in which he proposes some end or other. If a man thinks of it as a single action he does not employ the word 'rule', whereas if he thinks of it as manifold and takes it as admitting of organization, this organization is called rule. Hence they say of the Deity that He is the Ruler of the universe. This is sometimes potential and sometimes actual. The expression 'rule' most commonly indicates potential rule. It is clear that when rule exists in things potentially, it does so in a thought, for this is characteristic of thought and is not possible except through it. Hence it can only be for man. When 'ruler' is applied to a thing it only resembles rule, and the word is a metaphor.

Sometimes 'rule' is applied to bringing this organization into existence, in so far as it is created. This is commonest and most apparent in the actions of men, less so in the case of dumb animals. When rule is spoken of in this sense it is spoken of in general and in particular. Used generally, it is applied to all man's actions, of whatever quality they are. This means it is applied to the weak as well as to the strong, though most commonly to the strong. Hence it is applied to the organization of military affairs, but not usually to the art of shoe-making or weaving. While it is applied in this way it may have another general and special sense. It is used in a general sense for all the actions comprised under the arts called strong, as I have sketched in the political science. In the special sense it is applied to the rule of cities. Among the things to which the term 'rule' is applied, there is an order of precedence in respect of honour and perfection. The noblest of such things is the rule of cities and the rule of the home. It is rarely applied in the latter case unless the rule of the home with indulgence and strictness is meant. Rule of war and so on fall under these two categories. God's rule of the world is rule in another sense, far removed from the nearest of the kindred meanings. It is absolute rule, and is the noblest, for one does not speak of rule except in cases where a similarity is thought to exist with God's creation of the universe.

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Ibn Bājjā, *The Rule of the Solitary*, translation by Douglas Morton Dunlop, London, © *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1945, pp. 61–81.



COMMENTARY

Acting with a view to an end is a distinctive element of beings that have a will. There is the divine will that rules the universe according to a providence of which we have no knowledge and there is rule at the human level which is broken down into the fields of economics, politics and technical action. Rule at the human level is the field in which people deploy their freedom. It is the general meaning of the word "rule". Thus for Ibn Bājjā, freedom may be defined as a power of action over things, a way of giving oneself in the external world an image of one's will through one's action. The text excludes any form of psychologism: the individual is in harmony with his action and it is through that that he fulfils his nature. The examples taken from crafts, such as weaving, recall the importance of craftsmanship in ancient and medieval societies: through his rule, man tames matter and thus sharpens his psychological faculties. To know oneself is to know one's possibilities for action and one's power to act on a material that one transforms in order to organize one's life, in order to rule oneself.

QUESTIONS

1

How does Ibn Bājjā construct an analytical model of the community and the cosmos on the basis of the concept of "rule"?

2

How can the solitude of the thinker be reconciled with his/her involvement in the rule of the community?

3

Humans are craftsmen. Can God also be said to be a craftsman? If he is the creator, can he also be a craftsman?

4

How does the notion of rule account for both local issues and universal issues? How can this text be adapted to contemporary questions regarding protection of the environment?

تدبير المسو حمر

V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

2 NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, CARE

INTRODUCTION

The name of Ibn Tufayl (twelfth century) is associated with a single work that many generations of pupils and students have studied: *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*, living son of the awakened. What is it exactly? It is a philosophical tale in which Ibn Tufayl constructs the fiction of a child found on an island and brought up by an animal. The stages of his development are therefore described according to nature alone.

This tale is one of the sources of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Defoe having read Ockley's English translation (1708).

It was translated into Hebrew and became the subject of a commentary by Moïse de Narbonne in the fourteenth century, and in 1671 was translated by Edward Pococke of Oxford with the title *philosophus autodidactus*. English, Dutch, French and Russian translations followed.

On this island, a child is gathered up by a doe that has responded to his cry of distress, thinking she has found her fawn, which has just died. Hayy will be her adoptive child. The starting-point of the fiction is the cry of distress, the inaugural moment when the child needs assistance and succour.

During the first period, Ibn Tufayl describes the symbiosis between the child and the animals different from him. But very quickly, by dint of observation, something strikes him: unlike the other animals, he has no natural defences: horns, fangs, hooves, and so on: "he himself was naked and defenceless, slow and weak, in respect of them".⁸⁶ The recognition of a deficit in his instinct upsets him. His education therefore begins negatively through a recognition of what he lacks.

This recognition is accompanied by another impotence: the impossibility of bringing the doe back to life. When she dies, he does everything he can to try to help her, calling her with the cry to which she used to respond, in vain, noting the lack of movement, and then gradually the lack of warmth. Understanding this situation leads him to examination, which in this case is dissection, particularly of the heart, which he soon understands is the main organ: the one responsible for the cessation of movement. Note that dissection is only undertaken with a view to care. When describing the dissection, the doctor in Ibn Tufayl speaks of it with a cardinal principle of care: above all, do not harm: "he was afraid on the other side lest his undertaking should be worse than the disease, and prove prejudicial",⁸⁷ so he tries to remember if any of the animals he has observed in this state has come back to life. The negative reply leads him to do the dissection: one that can only be beneficial.

Education begins with a loss and a lack: loss of the doe/adoptive mother, and lack of an instinct that is so much more effective in the other animals.

⁸⁶ Ibn Tufayl, *The Improvement of Human Reason exhibited in the Life of Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*, English translation by Simon Ockley, London, Oxford University, 1708, p. 21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.



The negative education continues with the examination of the inert body: “the whole body seemed to him a very inconsiderable thing, and worth nothing in respect of that being which he believed had once inhabited and had now left it”.⁸⁸ There is a transfer of affect from the inert body to the being that had now left it, that he did not know and that the body had not surrendered. Compared to the being that has left, the body is like an instrument. Ibn Tufayl connects two concepts that are in theory separate: the organic body and the natural instrument or technique: “but that the body was to it only as an instrument or tool, like his cudgel which he had made for himself, with which he used to fight with the wild beasts”.⁸⁹ Medicine is at the heart of this connection: it takes care of our organic body using tools that have come from natural bodies or human artefacts. By sharpening natural instruments like wood or iron in order to dissect, the idea comes to him that, although he lacks an animal defence such as that of instinct, he has a power to make natural weapons: the hand. It is the hand that compensates for the lack of the instinct. Not only does it enable him to make up for this deficit, it actually makes him more powerful than many animals. The hand is a natural form that gives a human form to natural instruments: this is the birth of technology. The discovery is important: the more we develop natural instruments, the easier it becomes to develop more efficient ones, both in quantity and quality. There is a direct analogy with ideas: one initial idea is enough. The more one reflects upon that idea, at first crude like an unworked natural instrument, the more it is refined and makes it possible to develop other ideas.



⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

TEXT *THE IMPROVEMENT OF HUMAN REASON EXHIBITED IN THE LIFE OF HAYY IBN YAQZÂN,⁹⁰ IBN TUFAYL*

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And first he considered the several kinds of those things which were fit to eat; and found that there were three sorts, viz., either such plants as were not yet come to their full growth, nor had attained to perfection, such as are several sorts of green herbs which are fit to eat: Or secondly, the fruits of trees which were fully ripe, and had seed fit for the production of more of the same kind (and such were the kinds of fruits that were newly gathered and dry): Or lastly, living creatures, both fish and flesh. Now he knew very well that all these things were created by that necessarily self-existent Being, in approaching to whom he was assured that his happiness did consist, and in desiring to resemble him. Now the eating of these things must needs hinder their attaining to their perfection, and deprive them of that end for which they were designed; and this would be an opposition to the working of the Supreme Agent, and such an opposition would hinder that nearness and conformity to him which he so much desired. Upon this, he thought it the best way to abstain from eating altogether, if possible; but when he saw that this would not do, and that such an abstinence tended to the dissolution of his own body, which was a so much greater opposition to the Agent than the former, by how much he was of a more excellent nature than those things, whose destruction was the cause of his preservation: Of two evils he resolved to choose the less, and do that which contained in it the least opposition to the Creator; and resolved to partake of any of these sorts, if those he had most mind to were not at hand, in such quantity as he should conclude upon hereafter; and if it so happened that he had them all at hand, then he would consider with himself, and choose that, in the partaking of which there would be the least opposition to the work of the Creator: Such as the pulp of those fruits which were fully ripe, and had seeds in them fit to produce others of the like kind, always taking care to preserve the seeds, and neither cut them, nor spoil them, nor throw them in such places as were not fit for plants to grow in, as smooth stones, salt earth, and the like. And if such pulpy fruits, as apples, pears, plums, etc., could not easily be come at, he would then take such as had nothing in them fit to eat but only the seed, as almonds and chestnuts, or such green herbs as were young and tender; always observing this rule that, let him take of which sort he would, he still chose those that there was greatest plenty of, and which increased fastest, but so as to pull up nothing by the roots, nor spoil the seed: And if none of these things could be had, he would then take some living creature, or eat eggs; but when he took any animal, he chose that sort of which there was the greatest plenty, so as not to totally destroy any species.

These were the rules which he prescribed to himself as to the kinds of his provision; as to the quantity, his rule was to eat no more than just what would satisfy his hunger; and as for the time of his meals, he designed, when he was once satisfied, not to eat any more till he found some disability in himself which hindered his exercise in the Second Conformity, (of which we are now going to speak); and as for those things which necessity required of him towards the conservation of his animal spirit, in regard of defending it from external injuries, he was not much troubled about them, for he was clothed with skins, and had a house sufficient to secure him from those inconveniences from without, which was enough for him; and he thought it superfluous to take any further care about those things; and as for his diet, he observed those rules which he had prescribed to himself, namely, those which we have just now set down.

”

Ibn Tufayl, *The Improvement of Human Reason exhibited in the Life of Hayy Ibn Yaqzân*, English translation by Simon Ockley, London, Oxford University, 1708, pp. 50–51.

⁹⁰ The original Arabic title of the book is Hayy ibn Yaqzân that can be literally translated as “Alive, Son of Awake”.

COMMENTARY

From knowledge of the heavenly bodies and of the necessary Being flow a set of human behaviours that we now qualify as ecological. Should he, as he did when he was young, conform with the action of animals or model himself on the heavenly bodies or again contemplate the necessary Being? In order to reply, one has to say that only the third action – contemplation of the necessary Being – gives continuous joy, that the first is an obstacle to the third and that the second retains the imprint of a self that has not been totally absorbed in what is its own: the intelligible essence in which he himself no longer matters. The ecological implications of this intuitive behaviour are enormous: since the first contemplation aims only to maintain his animal body, it must be reduced to what is strictly necessary. What should our behaviour be towards plants and animals? Let us look at our text: “choose that, in the partaking of which there would be the least opposition to the work of the Creator: Such as the pulp of those fruits which were fully ripe, and had seeds in them fit to produce others of the like kind, always taking care to preserve the seeds, and neither cut them, nor spoil them, nor throw them in such places as were not fit for plants to grow in”.⁹¹

The work of this Creator is that everything goes towards its purpose, its perfection: growing and developing. The ideal would be not to eat at all, but here we come up against the limitations of our body. In the second case, imitation of the heavenly bodies results in “turning himself round so often that he was dizzy”,⁹² so that sensible objects vanish and the imagination weakens.

As for the third contemplation: knowledge of the divine is divine by virtue of the identity of form between the knower and the known. The difficulty is to obtain an intuition without mixing it with something of oneself: “he endeavoured to disappear from himself, and be wholly taken up in the Vision of that True Being”.⁹³ One arrives at the shine of mirrors in which there is no rust.

QUESTIONS

1

How does Ibn Tufayl see the osmosis between people and their environment?

2

How are human freedom and autonomy coordinated for the protection of the environment?

3

How does Ibn Tufayl see the connections between the necessary and the superfluous in the management of humankind's means of subsistence?

4

Taking contemporary environmental problems as a starting-point, how can Ibn Tufayl's text be brought up to date?

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁹² Ibid., p. 52.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 54.



VI ARTS AND CREATION

1 LOGIC AND AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

Al-Fārābī is known as the “Second Teacher”, Aristotle being the “First”. He worked a great deal on logic and on commentaries of Aristotle’s works on logic. He distinguished himself through a strong thesis of a logic broadened to the operations of rhetoric and poetics. For al-Fārābī, logic is not confined to the sciences of reasoning, definition and demonstration. It continues to be manifest in the operations of rhetorical persuasion and image-making – poetry, painting and sculpture in particular. While demonstrative reasoning requires consent, poetic “reasoning” is primarily directed towards action: it is a matter of pursuing or fleeing something strongly imagined, strongly “suggested”, as our text puts it.

According to Aristotelian precepts, the poetic utterance is an imitative utterance. But what is it imitative of? “Imitation” should not be understood as a correspondence between reality and copy. The more distant it is from the reality “imitated”, the more successful the imitation is. Whence the idea developed by al-Fārābī of imitation. The example of the mirror in which the imitated reality is reflected clearly indicates that poetics supposes an indefinite set of cross-references that make the reference inscrutable. The artist, who from Antiquity to the Middle Ages was not distinguished from the craftsman, is successful in his work to the extent to which he enables his art to be seen or heard only as art and not as a copy of any reality. It is the care taken to compose and produce that indicates artistic ability. The craftsman is different in nature from the material on which he works. But the difference is also great between the material and what it represents.

Between reasoning and composition, the imitative utterance is deployed with a view to both knowledge and pleasure: all the more pleasure will be derived from an artistic composition if it is “imitation of imitation”, thus a composition in the strong sense of the term, and if it makes us think, if through it we pursue reasoning. Art does not reproduce, it typifies, it brings out compositions that are all the more singular and original for not being the image of any singularity.

VI ARTS AND CREATION

2 ART AND SUBVERSION: AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

Abū al-Faraj al-Asfahānī, who was born in the late ninth century, wrote a compendium of texts gathered together under the title “book of songs” (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*). It is an encyclopaedia that sets out all the knowledge accumulated, not only since the coming of Islam, but also since the pre-Islamic era, when knowledge was essentially poetic. Al-Asfahānī applies to these two types of knowledge the traditional method that consists of going back to the source of the knowledge, and relating the knowledge to the quasi-sensorial elements of its dissemination. It is a matter of tracing the chain of transmission, honouring the journey and displacement. Al-Asfahānī employs the traditional method used to collect prophetic sayings. It is “based on the transmission of a linguistic message”.⁹⁴ In his great work, al-Asfahānī gives us a legacy of the classical culture of the tenth century according to this method that makes the chain of transmission the constituent act of meaning. It is according to this method that al-Asfahānī restores to us a multifaceted world: “embracing in a single panorama the world of Ptolemy, duly appropriated by conquest, exploration and conversions; calling up the development of the world from Eden to the construction of the great mosque of Samarra, by way of Solomon, Aristotle, the revelation of the Koran, the gesture of ‘Uqba Ibn Nāfi’, and the system of al-Fārābī, which provides vast perspectives to all minds inclined towards ‘wisdom’, ḥikma, adorned with ‘literature’, adab, encyclopaedism, mushāraka, or simply enamoured of reason”.⁹⁵

Poetry is a way of life for the Arab people. “It should be known that poetry was the archive of the Arabs, containing their sciences, their history, and their wisdom.”⁹⁶

In the text presented here, we see the subversive character of art in the form of the caliph’s participation in the trance. During the trance, despotic power, the subservient women and courtier poet cease to exist. Under the spell of musical poetry, the trance becomes the real power.

Discussing al-Asfahānī in his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn writes: “he dealt with the whole of the history, poetry, genealogy, battle days, and ruling dynasties of the Arabs. The basis for the work were one hundred songs which the singers had selected for ar-Rashīd”.⁹⁷ This is a way of saying that art can be used to store the history of a people through a mnemonic technique: song.

⁹⁴ Jacques Berque, *Musiques sur le fleuve, Les plus belles pages du Kitāb al-Aghānī* [Music on the river, the most beautiful pages of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*], Albin Michel, 1995, p. 33.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 792.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 750.

TEXT *BOOK OF SONGS, AL-ASFĀHĀNĪ*

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The caliph Yazīd bin ‘Abd al-Malik (died 724) said one day to Ma‘bad, ‘Oh, Abū ‘Abbad, I should like to inform you of what our relations should be. If you hear me say something that is untrue, do not hesitate to correct me: I give you leave to do so.’

‘Commander of the Faithful, God has placed you in a situation of being corrected only through distraction, disobeyed only through extravagance.’

‘The quality that I find in your style, I do not find in that of Ibn Surayj. In yours I find firmness and in his softness and decadence.’

‘By He who bestowed His lieutenancy upon the Commander of the Faithful, accepted him for His worshippers, made him so safe for the community of His prophet ... if only in your parallel between Ibn Surayj and myself. However, if the Emir wishes to tell me whether or not that diminishes me in his eyes ...’

‘No, by God! But I place the musical trance (*ṭarab*) above all things in the world.’

‘My lord, if Ibn Surayj has a predilection for the light (*khafīf*) mode and I for the deeply serious (*kāmil tamm*), if he goes to the West and I to the East, where could we meet?’

‘Could you imitate Ibn Surayj in the languorous (*raqīq*) style?’

‘Of course,’ and Ma‘bad improvised a light air:

‘Is there no longer a people, oh, God? Bani Sahm’s sister has given birth . . ./’ And he sang the four remaining lines.

‘Good God, master! Wonderful!’ cried Yazīd. ‘Again. My mother and my father be your ransom!’

The artist played. The trance eased the caliph so much that he jumped up, saying to his concubines: ‘Copy me!’ and began to whirl in the palace, and the concubines with him, singing:

‘Oh, house, make me spin! May the cooing take me! Oh, if some time ago you broke with me for good/ ... Oh, don’t come back to me! Oh, God have mercy on me./ Do you remember my vow?/’

He continued to spin, as children do, and the women with him, until he fell unconscious to the floor and the women on top of him, also in a faint. The servants rushed to pick him up and the women on top of him, to carry him away as he came to himself again, or almost. ...

”

Al-Asfahānī, Kitāb al-Aghānī in Musiques sur le fleuve, Les plus belles pages du Kitāb al-Aghānī, translation by Jacques Berque, Albin Michel, 1995, pp. 172–73. Translation into English by UNESCO.

COMMENTARY

The author presents the suggestive and subversive power of musical poetry in the form of a conversation that blends aesthetic pleasure with conviviality. The weight of power gives way to artistic lightness. The *ṭarab* is a musical form that generates joy or sadness. In this passage, for the time of a trance, it places the women and the caliph on an equal footing. The rapture of the trance is a way of breaking down the barriers of power. Jacques Berque, translator of the book of songs, emphasizes that, “the trance is what disturbs the utilitarian, the regulated, the constant, the obligatory. ... One evening after the flood on the banks of the Tigris, a prince orders a lutenist to play. The inflections of a pure voice mingle with the cries of late birds, with the melancholy rush of the river in the background, harbinger of death and fertility”.⁹⁸

QUESTIONS

1

On the basis of this text, how can art be subversive?

2

Political power and artistic power: how can they be distinguished from each other?

3

Can art be a means of knowing the history of a people?

4

Compare the artistic power described in this text with the artistic power discussed in other philosophical traditions.



⁹⁸ Jacques Berque, *Musiques sur le fleuve, Les plus belles pages du Kitāb al-Aghānī*, introduction, p. 46.



A South-South Perspective



ASIA-PACIFIC



Coordinated by
Rainier Ibana



INTRODUCTION

This collection of philosophical texts from some of the living traditions of the Asia-Pacific Region is meant to address the themes specified by UNESCO within the context of a “South-south philosophical dialogue.” The ways of thinking that emerge from these texts are characterized by receptivity, mindfulness, and inexhaustibility that can be compared to the empty bowls that are mentioned twice in this collection: the first is as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s alms bowl that symbolizes his sense of lightness and contentment as a Buddhist monk in Thailand and the second is as Korean and Japanese folk-art that celebrate their common service to humanity despite their differences in expressions of beauty.

RECEPTIVITY

The depth of bowls illustrates the vast cosmological visions of at least three Asian traditions: the mysterious Dao as the source of the universe’s “myriad other things,” the Rig Veda’s primordial darkness where Love arose to generate other beings and the emancipated Buddhists’ experience of emptiness.

Although there are subtle differences in the interpretations of emptiness among Asian philosophical traditions, they are not to be misconstrued in terms of nihilism but as positive dispositions of receptivity towards the world. The Daoist depictions of space, the Hindu meditations on nothingness and the Buddhist descriptions of emptiness share a tendency to foreground the expansiveness of the universe and the human being’s humble place in it. Human actions that spring from these contemplative attitudes, however, are actually quite effective because of the clarity of perceptions that come with it and the calculated responses to life’s adversities that swing with the forces of nature instead of directly contending with them⁹⁹. This is exemplified in the Daodejing’s description of the sage-leaders’ “soft power” when it says that

“There is nothing softer and weaker than water,
And yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things. ...
He who takes upon himself the country’s misfortunes
becomes the king of the Empire” (78.1 and 78.3).¹⁰⁰

Although inspired by the philosophical traditions of the Indian continent, Mahatma Gandhi’s so-called “soul force” that rallied the multitudes to perform nonviolent acts of resistance against powerful governments is aligned with the moral ascendancy brought about by such a self-effacing form of governance.

This disposition is cultivated through spiritual exercises that attune the mind to the world’s grandeur and sharpens insights about the life-forms and objects that dwell in it. Chuangzi illustrates this idea in the story of a woodcarver who cleared his mind from trifles as preparation for carving a bell-stand that people thought were made by spiritual beings:

“After five days (of fasting the mind) I had forgotten praise or criticism.
After seven days I had forgotten my body and my limbs. ...
Then I went to the forest to see the trees in their own natural state.

⁹⁹ Maria Popova, “Be Like Water: The Philosophy and Origin of Bruce Lee’s Famous Metaphor for Resilience.” Cited from <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/05/29/like-water-bruce-lee-artist-of-life/>, accessed on 14 December 2013.

¹⁰⁰ A copy of this text is available online at http://leocharre.com/wp-content/uploads/tao_te_ching_translated_by_wing_tsit_chan.html#4, accessed on 4 December 2013.



When the right tree appeared before my eyes, the bell-stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt. All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin. ... What happened? My own collected thought encountered the hidden potential in the wood; from this live encounter came the work which you ascribe to the spirits.”¹⁰¹

Fasting, and the attentiveness that goes with it, liberates the person from unnecessary distractions and focuses the will towards the task at hand. These meditative exercises are not mere intellectual practices but are also meant to improve the quality of human relationships.

MINDFULNESS

Almost all the texts in this collection invite readers to shift their attention from the narrowness of inordinate desires, “the first seed of the mind,” towards life’s broader horizons such as “the highest heaven” or “the world of what is really happening.” Emancipation from the bondage of desires is engendered not by running away from them nor by controlling the passions but by becoming aware of their larger contexts. Hence, in Therigatha, the Verses of the Elder Nuns, a womanizer is rebuked from being obsessed with the beautiful eyes of a consecrated woman by awakening him to the reality of decaying bodies and by admonishing him about the spiritual liberation of the female monk who even plucked his desired object, her own enticing eyes, as an offering for his enlightenment.

Such shocking stories are highlighted to illumine the mundane affairs of daily life. Self-referential “Love Poems,” for example, are discarded in favour of the actual experience of being with the beloved and misconceptions about other persons are suspended in order to genuinely meet them in the concrete. Roque Ferriols tells us that leading students to enter this “world of insight” is precisely the task of philosophy teachers. He exercises the minds of his students by advising them to shift their attention from the world of concepts towards their lived experiences: from their idea of friends towards their living friends, from their ideas about parents towards their life with parents.

Gautama Buddha, the teacher par excellence who taught that religious doctrines must be accepted or rejected on the basis of his disciples’ own knowledge,¹⁰² reminded his students until the end of his life that they must spend their time clearing their minds.¹⁰³ Thich Nhat Hanh, a contemporary advocate of mindfulness, illustrates that “When I am mindful, I enjoy more my tea ... I am fully present in the here and now, not carried away by my fear, my projects, the past and the future. I am here available to life.”

INEXHAUSTIBILITY

In the Daodejing, Lao Zi reconciles the functional applications of contemplative practices and their inexhaustibility when he explained that “The Tao is empty (like a bowl), it may be used but its capacity is never exhausted” (4.1).¹⁰⁴

This idea is evident in all the texts compiled in this collection. Although the “Creation Hymn” of the Rig Veda and the First Chapter of the Daodejing are subsumed under UNESCO’s cross-cutting theme of Cosmology, they also have epistemological, ethical and aesthetic dimensions. Ferriols’ text on teaching

¹⁰¹ Available online at <http://www.watershedonline.ca/community/personal/cwwoodcarvr.html>, accessed on 5 December 2013.

¹⁰² Kalama Sutta, available online at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html>, accessed on 6 December 2013.

¹⁰³ *The Story of the Buddha*, New Delhi, Hemkunt Press, 1978, p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ Available online at http://leocharre.com/wp-content/uploads/tao_te_ching_translated_by_wing_tsit_chan.html#4, accessed on 6 December 2013.

philosophy has metaphysical undertones and ethical implications while the Verses of the Elder Nuns have obvious applications to gender relations, ethics and aesthetics even if they are categorized in this collection under the heading of Epistemology. The texts on “Individual ethics” and “Confucian Ren Ethics” also have epistemological presuppositions aside from their moral lessons. The text on “Daoist Governance, Humility and Soft Power” and Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj are not only about problems of governance but also metaethical challenges that are set within cosmological contexts. Aside from its relevance to gender issues, the value of “Gender Perspective and YinYang Dynamics” can be more appreciated within its epistemological and cosmological dimensions while an interpretation of Rumi’s romantic “Love Poems,” will be incomplete if its metaphysical and religious aspirations are not taken into account. Even the Interview with Thich Nhat Hanh about ecological issues and the aesthetic interpretation of Chuangzi’s “Fasting of the Mind” have cosmological and epistemological presuppositions while the “Rock and Pillar Edicts of Emperor Asoka” were issued from religious and political platforms that extend his domain beyond human subjects. Finally, Soetsu’s aesthetics of folk arts transverse the regional boundaries specified by the “South-south philosophical dialogue” as it shows how works of art can be understood, appreciated and be of service to humanity regardless of their differences and specifications. It suggests that the term “global south” refers to a socially constructed identity that cannot be confined to geographical locations. Even someone who hails from the north, west or east can take a southern perspective.

The complexity of these texts should inspire readers to also reflect on the profundity of their own experiences through the multidimensional perspectives of Asian philosophical traditions.



Swatow ware (China), Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

POSTSCRIPT

These texts are intended to invite students to learn more about sagacious ways of being in the world and solicitous forms of living with fellow human beings. They serve as intellectual and moral exercises that broaden the horizons of human concerns, illumine and discover the depths of the spiritual life and pay attention to the complexity of human relationships. They initiate students to actually do Philosophy in a particular way and not merely to inform them about the discipline of Philosophy in the Asia-Pacific region which, in this day and age of the internet, can be easily downloaded, read and copied to other digital formats.

The choice of texts for this collection has the primary interest of helping readers to experience philosophy. Other texts were unfortunately not included because of thematic, spatial and time constraints. Committee members had to write some of the introductions and commentaries in order to broaden the geographical representation of the primary texts especially when specialists were not able to promptly respond to the call for contributions or when the relevance of the submitted texts were too limited in scope to particular cultural circles. Aside from these practical considerations, the selection of these texts was primarily guided by UNESCO's oft-quoted line from the Preamble of its Constitution: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."



I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

1 THE MYSTERY OF BEING

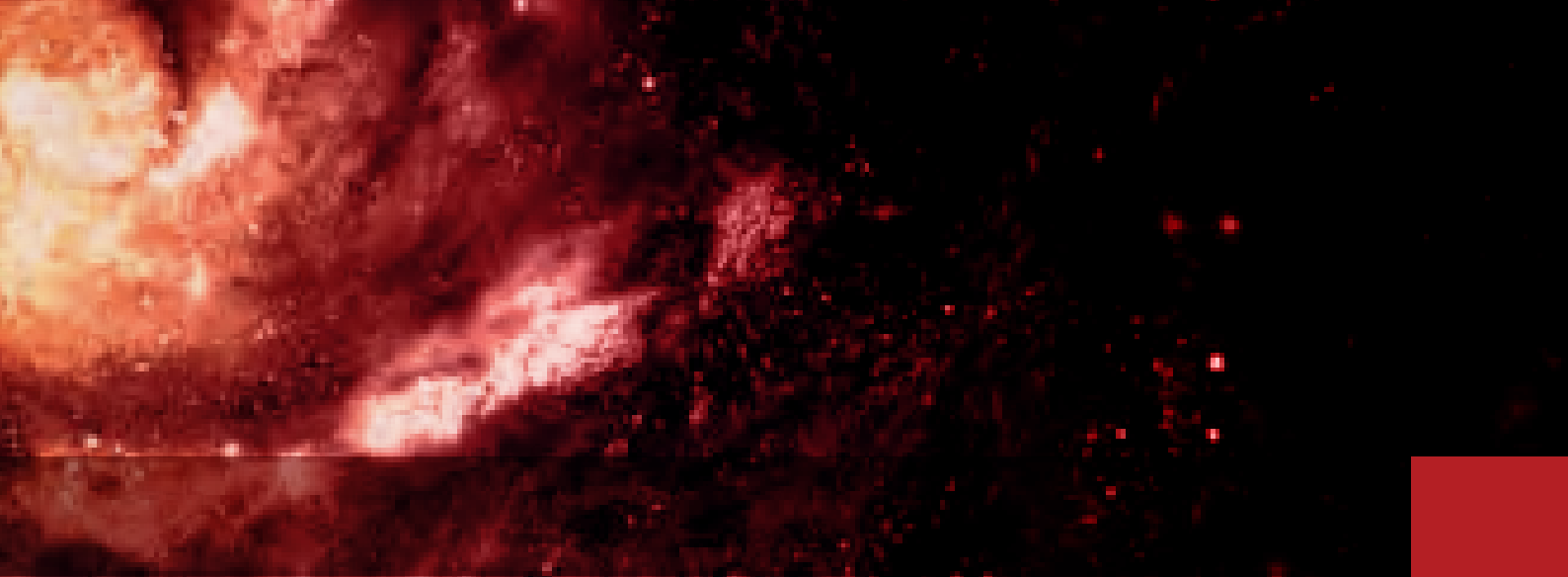
INTRODUCTION

There has always been an intellectual quest about the origin of the universe: how things came to be. Such attempts were couched in myths and narratives and they were also called cosmogonic hymns or myths of creation. These myths tell us how the cosmos or part of it came to be or how it all began. There are many types of such myths: for example, 1) Creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo sui*); 2) Creation out of chaos (or Ur-material). This chaotic situation is described as water, a monster, a snake or demon; 3) Creation out of a cosmic egg; 4) Creation out of cosmic parents; 5) Creation by emanation.

Indian religious history offers a rich variety of myths and hymns related to creation. There is already a publication on this theme: *300 Creation Myths of India* by Martin Pfeifer. In particular the authors of the Vedas were interested in this question of origin and organization of the universe. Several hymns in the Vedas speculate on the creation of the world. The hymn of *Rigveda X*, 129 offers one such reflection on the question of origin of the universe.

In fact this hymn is not a creation hymn proper, but one that merely reports the wonder of the author about the existing situation, the relation between the existing world and its non-existence. The being (*sat*) came out of non-being (*asat*). There are different views held on this question of origin. Aruni, the earliest teacher in the Upanishads, holds the opposite view, i. e., Being was at the beginning (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6,2,1–2). The followers of the Vedanta school teach that everything is a product, only an unfolding of the One, Brahman, but it has no real existence. The teacher of Samkhya School says that being comes from being. The poet of this hymn suggests a middle way.

According to this poet of the *Rigveda* at the beginning there was neither being nor non-being, neither death nor life. There existed only one, a life-energy, which breathed, the seed of the world, which was born through the power of the “heat” of asceticism (*tapas*). From this life-energy came the desire (*kama*), the creative urge, the first seed of the “spirit”, or consciousness, that is, the seed of the world.



However the final answer to the origin remains in darkness. The question about the ultimate cause of creation where the almighty God had a hand in it or not remains open. The poet says further: the gods themselves could not have caused it, since they themselves are part of the creation. But the important elements of this narrative are: 1) the existence of a spiritual seed of the world; 2) the self-fecundation or non-sexual reproduction; 3) *tapas* (heat) and *kama* (love) are the driving powers of creation.

This hymn is a deep insight into the mystery of being, not the result of logical thinking. So this mystical experience could not be formulated into a system or in some known categories, but through a variety of symbols. The symbol of water comes first: it covers all, supports all, is visible and invisible; it is the condition of life, the fertilizing milieu. Darkness and emptiness are also symbols of the first moment. It is said that desire, love, and fervor were the forces that brought about reality out of something.

The hymn consists of three parts. *The first part* (verses 1–2) describes through negative sayings only the earliest period of the absolute nothing, which continues till the first one comes to life. *The second part* (Verses 3–4) sketches a history of the development of the first living one. It must have come to life from a seed, which appears as the core of an egg. In order that the seed of the egg can develop itself into a breathing reality, it needs the brooding heat. This brooding heat itself must have come from desire, and the desire from thinking. Thinking is something existing, which breaks out from non-existence. The order of its development is as follows: non-existence-existence- thinking-desire-ardour-seed-breathing being. *The third part* (Verses 5–7) raises the question about the how of this origin, which no one, perhaps not even the personal highest God, can answer. This new situation of the insecurity about the modalities of the origin reflects in their naming: being-born, germination, development or emanation. What is significant to note is that the origin of the first concrete living being is derived from the abstract principles: thinking, longing, ardour, without the help of a personal godhead.

अ॒र्वाग्दे॒वा अ॒स्य वि॒सर्ज॑ने॒नाथा॒ को वे॒द॒ यत् आब॑भू॒व को वे॒द॒ यत् आब॑भू॒व

“

Part I

At first was neither Being nor Nonbeing.
There was not air nor yet sky beyond.
What was its wrapping? Where? In whose protection?
Was water there, unfathomable and deep? (1)
There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;
Of night or day there was not any sign.
The One breathed without breath by its own impulse.
Other than that was nothing else at all. (2)

Part II

Darkness was there, all wrapped around by darkness,
And all was water indiscriminate. Then
That which was hidden by the Void, that One, emerging,
Stirring through power of ardour, came to be. (3)
In the beginning Love arose,
Which was the primal germ cell of the mind.
The seers searching in their hearts with wisdom,
Discovered the connection of Being in Nonbeing. (4)

Part III

A crosswise line cut Being from Nonbeing
What was described above it, what below?
Bearers of seed there were and mighty forces,
Thrust from below and forward move above. (5)
Who really knows? Who can presume to tell it?
Whence was it born? Whence issued this creation?
Even the Gods came after its emergence.
Then who can tell from whence it came to be? (6)
That out of which creation has arisen,
Whether it held it firm or it did not,
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He surely knows- or maybe He does not!

”

Raimon Panikar, *Vedic Experience Mantamanjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern and Contemporary Celebrations*,
Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, © Fundació Vivarium Raimon Panikkar, 1994, p. 58.

COMMENTARY

Two significant reflections are striking in this hymn, which need to be highlighted. One is the intuition of the Vedic seer that the process is initiated by the power of love (*kama*). It is not simply a longing directed to the other or towards oneself. It is an act by which existence comes into being. As Panikkar formulates it, “Without love there is no being, but love does not happen without the ardor or *tapas*. It is fervor, *tapas*, that makes the being be; they are not separable.”¹⁰⁵

This first principle of creative and procreative force (*kama*) is said to lead the Supreme Being out of the closed circle of existence. It is said in another hymn (*Atharvaveda* XIX, 52, 1) that desire is the dynamism inherent in the whole of creation and without *kama* it is not possible to achieve anything whatsoever. “In the beginning was Desire, the first seed of mind.”

The second insight is the way the hymn concludes with an enigma, an uncertainty. Panikkar explains further this enigma as follows: “To say that we do not know does not mean agnosticism. But the problem is beyond the subject and object of knowledge itself. Only he who is beyond and above everything may know – or he may not, for how may there be any assurance concerning it?”¹⁰⁶ It is this cosmic openness of this interrogation that allows the universe to emerge and to exist. The mystery of being remains all the time unfolding which cannot be described in words nor can the human mind grasp it. It is this vibrant mystery that sustains the universe.

This hymn is one of the oldest attempts of the ancient Indian philosophical speculation on the origin of the universe, which reached its climax in the Upanishads. But in the theistic Vedic cosmogony there is first of all a God, Prajapati, the Lord of procreation, who desired to beget. Thus he became “heated” as in the heat of love and out of this heat first came the water or brought forth an egg and brooded over it and procreated with it. Historically seen this scheme must have been the earlier concept vis-à-vis the impersonal abstract way of thinking in this hymn in discussion.

QUESTIONS



Love is said to be the first principle of everything that exists. Does it evoke any intercultural echo from other philosophical traditions without denying the uniqueness of each tradition?



There is always a human urge to know further, to come closer to the other (thus to get away from loneliness). How do we account for this desire or longing? If we do not find an answer, does it lead to despair? Do we understand everything before we love someone?



Have we ever wondered at the mysteries that are at work in each one of us? Can we examine some of the mysteries that were evoked by this text?

¹⁰⁵ Raimon Panikar, *Vedic Experience Mantamanjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern and Contemporary Celebrations*, Delhi, Montilal Banarsidass, 1994, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

2 BEING AND NON-BEING, NOTHINGNESS AND FULLNESS

INTRODUCTION

Lao zi (literally “Old Master”) is traditionally believed to be an older contemporary of Confucius who authored the text *Daodejing*, which means “*The Classic of Dao and De*”. Most contemporary scholars, however, regard the classic as a composite work and the author a mythical character. Originally the text was undivided consisting of eighty-one chapters but later was divided into two books. Book I, from chapter one to chapter thirty-seven is the *Dao*, while Book II, from chapter thirty-eight to chapter eighty-one, is the *De*. This present form may have been done during the third or second century BCE. Another version of the text was discovered, the *Mawangdui* version – named after the place of discovery, more firmly dated to the middle of the second century BCE. The content though similar, the order of the Books is reversed – *Dedaojing*. This does not mean that the second part of the text deals only with the *De* but simply that chapter thirty-eight now mentions the *De*. The *De* will be the emphasis of the philosopher Zhungzi.

Dao and *De* are two important concepts in Daoism. *Dao* is what makes beings be, while *De* is what makes a being what it is. The two cannot be separated just as existence, the act of existing, and essence, or what makes a being what it is, are inseparable.

In Daoism, *Dao*, literally meaning the way, takes on a metaphysical meaning different from the moral way of Confucianism. The Way is the way of all beings, not just the way human beings ought to be, although the Daoist Way includes and prescribes that.

In Chapter 1, we have a cosmological as well as ontological description of the *Dao*. The eternal *Dao* is nameless precisely because it is the origin of all beings. What can be named is a definite and limited being and at best can be the cause, material and efficient, of another being but not the origin of all beings. The origin and cause of *all* beings can only be a non-being, the *Dao*, a non-definite being, an empty no-thing. And yet its function is to make all beings be, thus the “Mother” of all beings. The essence of the *Dao* is an empty no-thing but its function is to make all beings be. Essence and function, non-being and being, however are one; they belong to the same *Dao*. Because its essence is emptiness, it makes all beings be. Nothingness in Daoism does not mean lack but fullness, a fullness that is deep and profound, that cannot be circumscribed and definite, thus mysterious and subtle. The way *Dao* makes all beings be is so subtle, so spontaneous we cannot see it but only perceive its outcome. And only then can we give names to the outcomes.

TEXT *THE DAODEJING*, CHAPTER 1

“ The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao,
The name that can be named is not the eternal name,
The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things,
Therefore let there always be non-being so we may see their subtlety,
And let there always be being so we may see their outsome.
The two are the same
But after they are produced, they have different names.
They both may be called deep and profound.
Deeper and more profound,
The door of all subtleties!

”

Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*,
Princeton, © 1963, Princeton University Press, p. 139.

COMMENTARY

We have in the first chapter of *the Daodejing* the fusion of the cosmological, ontological and ethical.

Cosmological: It tells us how all beings come to be: from the emptiness of the nameless Dao.

Ontological: If there are beings, then they have something in common, the act of being, and this can only be in one Being, which cannot be a being, but the empty- fullness of being.

Ethical: If we, human beings, are one with the *Dao*, then we must follow the *Dao*, act naturally according to our nature and be one with all. Other translations of Chapter 1 of the *Daodejing* would say “Always eliminate desire in order to observe its mysteries; always have desires in order to observe its manifestations.”

QUESTIONS



Why is it important to know where everything comes from?



Compare the numeral system that starts with Zero and the numeral system that starts with “1”.



Discuss the possible relationships between the way of nature and the way of man.

II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

1 WHAT IS PHILOSOPHIZING ABOUT?

INTRODUCTION

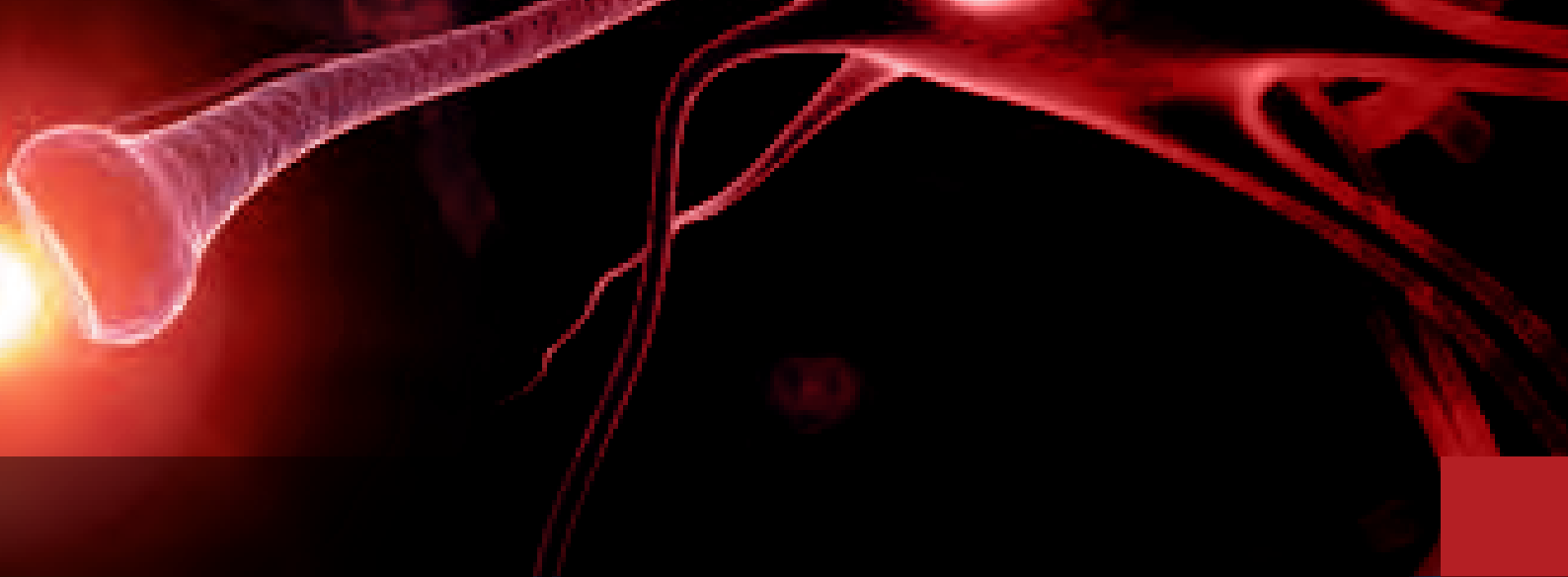
Roque J. Ferriols, S.J. was born in Manila on August 16, 1924 and joined the Society of Jesus in 1941. He studied theology and philosophy in the United States where he earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Fordham University with a dissertation on “The ‘Psychic Entity’ in Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*”. He pioneered the teaching of philosophy in the Filipino language and wrote textbooks in the Philosophy of the Human Person, Ancient Greek Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion. The following is an excerpt from his keynote address to the “International Conference on Teaching Philosophy in Asian Contexts” sponsored by Missio-Aachen at the Ateneo de Manila University in February 2004.

TEXT “TEACHING PHILOSOPHY”, Roque J. Ferriols

“ How can philosophy be taught? By teaching you mean creating a surrounding, creating an environment, creating a climate, where insight is possible. If the teacher can create some surrounding, some environment where the students entering the environment are enabled to see things they could not see before, that man is a teacher. So, it takes a certain amount of courage to be a teacher because one has to take the lives of his students into his own hands and tell them, ‘If you do this, enter into this surrounding, into this climate, then you will be able to see things.’ The students might see things that this teacher has not seen himself. So the teacher must have the courage to learn from his students, to trust his students that they can really look and that they can really see. However, many students want to be taught according to the first definition of teaching: that they are taught what to do every step of the way, what to think every step of the way. A teacher has to destroy that expectation and help the student to enter into the world of insight.

How does one do it? I have a little exercise. I say, ‘Some of you move in the world of concepts, of pure ideas.’ Think of a unicorn or think of a talking frog. Think of a friend, but don’t think of him as your friend. Instead, think of him as the idea of a friend. Think of your father and mother, but do not think of your father and mother as they are, but think of them as ideas. So you have a world of ideas, a world where you have an idea of a talking frog, an idea of a unicorn, an idea of a friend, an idea of a father and mother. And then you ask, ‘Is it really happening?’ ‘Is it reality?’ Then the talking frog and the unicorn disappear. What appears, what remains is not your idea of a friend, but your living friend, not an idea of your father and mother, but your living father and your living mother.

How did that happen? Did you add an idea so that what used to be pure ideas became living realities? You did not add an idea. What did you do? Perhaps you do not know. If you ask me what you did, I could not give a standard answer. I do not know it either.



But I know one thing: You did a certain movement of your mind, a certain movement of your heart, that from a world of pure ideas, you stepped into the world of what was really happening.

”

© Roque Ferriols, Conference on “Teaching Philosophy in Asian Contexts”, edition by Rainier Ibana, Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University, 2004.

COMMENTARY

Coming to grips with reality is easier said than done. Preconceptions inevitably influence the way humans perceive others and shape the manner by which they conduct their daily lives. Many social conflicts could have been mitigated or even averted if the participants merely shifted their attention from their prejudices and biases towards a more open-ended encounter with the issues at hand. Harboring narrow self-interests also stand on the way towards a more realistic resolution of conflicts that arise from suspicions that competing parties are out to optimize their share of burdens and responsibilities at the expense of others instead of addressing the resolution of shared problems.

It is therefore important to show students that it is possible to temporarily suspend judgments and to allow reality to eventually reveal itself by simply shifting the so-called “intentionality of consciousness,”¹⁰⁷ from the world of ideas towards the world of experience. In his dissertation on Aurobindo, Ferriols wrote that “the entire validity of philosophy derives from experience; the conclusions of philosophy look to experience for their validation; one experience can completely destroy a laboriously constructed system of concepts.”¹⁰⁸ He often cites Chuang Zi’s story of the “Duke Hwan and the Wheelwright” who claimed that the lives lived by wise men are more important than their writings and that the most important things in life cannot be said.¹⁰⁹ The fool, as a popular Chinese adage puts it, looks at the finger instead of the moon being pointed at by his teacher. An insightful understanding of reality requires a synoptic vision and a profound humility before the grandeur of that which is really real.

QUESTIONS



1 Describe your ideal girlfriend or ideal boyfriend. Then ask the question: does she or he exist? What happened to your ideas when you asked the question of existence?

2 Provide an example of a “superstition” and show how it can or cannot be related to experience.

¹⁰⁷ The term “intentionality of consciousness” is being borrowed from the phenomenological movement. Roque Ferriols also taught a course on Dietrich von Hildebrand who was his teacher at Fordham University. Hildebrand studied under Edmund Husserl, the founder of Phenomenology.

¹⁰⁸ Roque Ferriols, S. J., *The “Psychic Entity” in Aurobindo’s The Life Divine*, Quezon City : Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1966, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ Available online at http://www.mensetmanus.net/inspiration/fifteen_minutes_a_day/wheelwright.shtml.

II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

2 THE DECONSTRUCTION OF DESIRE

INTRODUCTION

The *Therigatha*, often translated as Verses of the Elder Nuns (Pāli: *theri* elder (feminine) + *gatha* verse), is a Buddhist scripture, a collection of short poems supposedly recited by early members of the Buddhist sangha in India around 600 BCE. In the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism, the *Therigatha* is classified as part of the Khuddaka Nikaya, the collection of short books in the Sutta Pitaka.

The *Therigatha*, the ninth book of the Khuddaka Nikaya, consists of 73 poems–522 stanzas in all – in which the early nuns (*bhikkhunis*) recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship.¹¹⁰ Their stories are told with often heart-breaking honesty and beauty, revealing the deeply human side of these extraordinary women, and thus serve as inspiring reminders of our own potential to follow in their footsteps.

The verses of the *Therigatha* also serve as a powerful curative to any mistaken notion that the Buddha's teachings are somehow only applicable to – and effective for – men. The outstanding heroism and nobility of these pioneering women has served for over two and one-half millennia as an inspiration for all those who have endeavored to practice the Buddha's teachings since – whether monk, nun, layman, or laywoman. Arahantship is open to all who – like these exemplary women – are willing to put forth the effort.¹¹¹

This tragic encounter reflects a confrontation of conflicting visions of the human body and ultimately that of a good life. The vision of the body of the womanizer is a familiar one of seeing “beauty” in the human form. Although he could be criticized for approaching an ordained woman (*Bhikkhuni*) inappropriately, his desire for her is “perfectly” common in any human society. If he were to use the same words to convince a daughter of a householder, it would be odd for him to be so criticized. However, it is interesting to note that the ground for her rejection of his sexual proposal is an epistemic one. In other words, the *Bhikkhuni*'s response was not a condemnation of his explicit and inappropriate advances on moral ground. She asked him, “What is it that you see?” “What is it that gives you pleasure?” These questions were meant for the womanizer's self-questioning. She was trying to awaken him to his mindful senses, of questioning what is the “it” that he desires so strongly. She was questioning his “conception” (*sannakhandha*) of her body as enticing “form” (*rupakhandha*), which gives rise to his pleasant “feelings” (*vedanakhandha*.) She was re-directing his conception of her as an enticing body to his “self-awareness” (*vinnanakhandha*), so that he could re-direct his “volition” (*samkharakhandha*). She, as a subject of mindfulness, was trying to awaken him, whose desire was objectifying her into his “object of desire.” Had she been successful, he could have turned around his conception of her as his

¹¹⁰ The arahantship, coming from the Pali word *arahati* meaning “worthy”, is the last rank of wisdom in the practice of Buddhism.

¹¹¹ Available online at <http://www.vipassana.com/canon/khuddaka/therigatha/>.

“object of desire” into a mindful self-awareness that her body is merely a temporary aggregate of different and continually changing elements. His intentionality towards her could have been transformed.

She tried to further convince him by giving an example of her own self who has come to discard sexual desire. She gave him an analogy of the human body as a “picture” which has been constructed out of different components. Once the components are analysed into their “true” nature and put into “piles”, the “beauty” of the human body, and the “desire” generated thereof, should also be deconstructed. However, it is obvious that the womanizer did not understand the import of her questions. His answer, that it was her beautiful eyes that gave rise to his burning desire, indicates that he did not get the point of her questions. The reference of her questions is meant to be the potential mindful awareness of the womanizer himself. He took her questions to mean only the world of “object,” namely, the beautiful parts of her body which are especially enticing for him. Thus, his answer was “Your eyes.” This conversation turns out to be an “epistemic” mismatch.

One of the most powerful, dramatic and violent portrayal of the confrontation of the body as object of desire and as subject of mindfulness is the story of Bhikkhuni Supa-kumpawanika, whose great beauty proved too enticing for a womanizer she encountered in a grove. In the Therigatha, a rich source for the study of the human body, we have the following story of their encounter.

TEXT VERSES OF THE ELDER NUNS

“ “ Bhikkhuni Supa was heading toward a grove when she was stopped by a womanizer. She initiated a protest saying, ‘What did I wrong you? Why are you standing in my way? A man should not touch an ordained woman.’ The womanizer responded, ‘You are still young and beautiful. What use can ordination be for you? You should take off your robe and let’s have fun in the midst of this forest full of flowers.’ ... ‘You are like a golden doll created by an artist, you are like a fairy wandering in a heavenly garden. You would be beautiful in a fine robe from Gasi. If the two of us would live together in the forest, I would submit myself to your power. Oh! Your eyes are those of the dear. The love of my life is no match for that of yours. If you were to follow my words, you will have happiness. Come, come share my home with me. You will be living in a palace, constantly served by waiting ladies. ... A coveted lotus growing above water, if not used by anyone would be a waste. You, a virgin, your coveted organ never put to use, would likewise, be a mournful waste.’ Bhikkhuni Supa then asked, ‘A body is full of corpse which will be discarded in the cemetery. It will decay with nothing of substance. What is it that you see? What is it that gives you pleasure? Pray tell.’ The womanizer said, ‘Your eyes are like those of the doe. They are like those of the magical bird roaming in the mountain. Seeing your eyes, my love is burning

for you.’ Bhikkhuni Supa responded in the following, ‘You desire me, who is a daughter of the Lord Buddha. Your desire is wrong. It is like searching the moon for a toy, or wishing to jump to the top of Mt. Sumeru. ... My sexual desire has been discarded in a burning pit, dropped in poison, all gone. I do not know sexual desire anymore. Mine has been up-rooted with the noble wisdom. ... A picture made with rattan or wood, decorated by an artist, held together with string or nails, made to look like dancing, I have seen. Once the string and nails are taken out, put into piles, that picture has been deconstructed into various components, does the picture still deserve the name? What would be the use for people to put importance into that picture? The body is like that picture. ...’ Suddenly, Bhukkhuni Supa plucked out her eyes and handed them to the womanizer, telling him, ‘Take them, I give them to you.’ The sexual excitement in the eyes of the womanizer was suddenly gone. He profusely apologized to her, offered her blessing, and vowed that this kind of offence would not happen again.

”

Robert Wilkinson (Editor), “The Buddhist Body: From Object of Desire to Subject of Mindfulness” in *New Essays in Comparative Aesthetics*, translation by © Suwanna Satha-Anand, New Castle, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 63–66.

COMMENTARY

Dans In Buddhism, the perception of the human body as site of desire is based on an epistemic confusion. This perception is based on a fixating act of the mind, kindled by sexual desire, to create a “constructed” reality, which serves as object for the satisfaction of desire. This constructed reality needs to be analysed or deconstructed into different components. In Buddhist scriptures, other than a “doll” or a “picture,” numerous other images are invoked to highlight the less than desirable nature of the human body. In the *Therigatha*, the body is often depicted as something of bad smell, decaying, and dirty. It is compared to a bag of skin filled with corpse, dirty substances flowing out through the openings. It is a place for the worms, a carcass for the birds, a corpse with bones tied together with tendons, filled with saliva, tears and excrements, etc.¹¹² It is important to note that, on the one hand, this Buddhist text uses an analogy of something which is merely a “substitute” of the human form, namely, a doll, and a picture. Neither of these substitutes carries any ontological truth on their own. On the other hand, the text lists the “anatomical” components of the physical body, namely the bones, the tendons, the saliva, the tear, the excrements. At another level, the text also makes reference to some form of cultural practice of discarding the body out in the open area for vultures and other birds. These three strategies of depicting the human body, one denying any ontological truth, another pointing out the physical components, and the third indicating a disheartening burial practice, all serve as powerful reminder of the fragility, impermanence, and disgust of the human body. These strategies, together with the meditation on corpse,¹¹³ bring into sharp focus the Buddhist position of the body, a usual site of desire which needs to be deconstructed so that spiritual detachment could be achieved. These “unpleasant” dimensions of the human body are brought into sharp focus in order to remind the practitioners of the “true” nature of the human body, which ultimately speaking, is part and parcel of the on-going process of change.

Although these depictions in themselves do not imply gender differentiation, works by feminist scholars have pointed to gender perspectives on the way the body is described in connection with the experience of liberation. By comparing how the human body is discussed by the Bhikkhus and the Bhikkhunis (male and female monks) in the *Theragatha* and *Therigatha* respectively, Karthryn R. Blackstone points out that the Bhikkhus oftentimes project the image of dirty and decaying body onto a female body, while the Bhikkhunis internalize the image

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 19, 86, 87. (Verses 33, 468, 469, 470, 472).

¹¹³ The meditation on corpse focuses the mind on the various stages of decomposing body in order to remind the practitioner of the “true” nature of his/her own body. This is one radical method of developing a psychological detachment, a mindful subject.

of dirty and decaying body onto their own.¹¹⁴ Reflections on impermanence and impurity of the body are said to apply equally to monks and nuns. If there is any real difference between the sexes in this matter, it is that monks are frequently said to regard the female body as dangerously desirable; this sentiment is part of the misogyny which, unfortunately, is to be found in certain range of Buddhist literature. Nuns, on the contrary, are not said to have reflected, at least overtly, on the corresponding attractiveness of men.¹¹⁵ It is tempting to offer patriarchal explanation of this. One could say that for women, the struggle for liberation is located within her own sexuality that is her own body. In the *Therigatha*, a Bhikkhuni told of her past as being “intoxicated” with her own complexion, beautiful form, servants, wealth and youth. She admitted to holding contempt for other (less beautiful, less endowed?) women. She depicted herself as a seducer of foolish men, standing at the gate of a brothel, comparing herself with a hunter waiting for bait. Then she juxtaposed the image of that beautiful and enticing youth with the image of a female monk in yellow robe with a shaven head, sitting under a tree, in meditative state, free from anxiety.¹¹⁶ These contrasting images of a beautiful hunter waiting for a bait,¹¹⁷ and that of a liberated female monk, indicates a transformation of seeing the self (as depicted through the one woman in two images of female body) as object of desire to a subject of mindfulness, free from anxiety.

QUESTIONS



1 Do you blame the womanizer for his advances to the nun in the story? Give your reasons.

2 Do you think it is a kind of wisdom to deconstruct “beauty?” Why?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES



1 Search photos of a beauty queen or a movie star in her/his prime of life, and then juxtapose these pictures with those of ageing people. Discuss the changing nature of the human body.

2 Form small groups of 4 to 5 and then discuss if and when you start to feel sympathy for the nun and/or for the womanizer and why. After half an hour, ask a representative from each group to report the contents and emotions of the group to the whole class. At the end, generate discussion about the intellectual and emotional responses from the students.

¹¹⁴ See an interesting comparison of the two texts regarding the depiction of the human body in Kathryn R. Blackstone, *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therigatha*. Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1998, Chapter III, pp. 59–81.

¹¹⁵ Steven Collins, op. cit., p. 191. See footnote 10 for further reference and comment by Collins.

¹¹⁶ *Therigatha*, op. cit., pp. 25–26. (Verse 73).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26 (Verses 75–76).



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

1 INDIVIDUAL ETHICS: PROPERTIES AND LIGHTNESS OF BODY AND MIND

INTRODUCTION

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) born of a Chinese family in Suratthanee Province, Southern Thailand. He was ordained as a monk at 20 and took a name that means “monk who serves the Buddha.” By tradition most Thai males become monks for at least a short time as a rite of passage. In 1932, Buddhadasa founded Suan Mokh (Garden of Liberation) a monastery in the forest about 300 miles southeast of Bangkok. Over the several decades, Suan Mokh has become a popular center for meditation and Buddhist studies for Thais and foreigners. His numerous books based on his sermons and writings have been translated into many languages.

As a critic of superstitious beliefs, materialism and militarism, Buddhadasa has re-vitalized Buddhism which is followed by some 95 percent of the Thai population. Buddhadasa’s teachings and re-interpretation of Buddhism have provided rational, universalist, interreligious possibilities for the traditionally conservative Thai Buddhist culture.

This small book *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokh* is an autobiographical account of the first ten years of his trials in establishing his forest monastery. It is written in a very beautiful Thai prose, easy to read and deep in spiritual implications. The excerpt on possessions here is from the English translation.

TEXT *THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF SUAN MOKH, BUDDHADASA BHIKKHU*

“ About possessions or properties, they are also another subject of study. When I first came to stay at Suan Mokh, my sole possessions were an alms bowl with a brass lid which could double as a drinking utensil, a small pail for fetching well water, necessary robes and a coconut-oil lamp made from a drinking glass and used for everyday lighting in front of the Buddha image. I could go out anywhere any time, without closing the door or locking it and without telling anybody, because I was alone. I could come back any time, without having to worry about anything. There was nothing to oversee or look after; nothing and nobody were under my responsibility. I felt myself as very small and free like a bird. My thinking was smooth; I could even think of nothing. There was only the lightness of the mind, which was hard to describe but was always pleasant, and never boring, like a drink of very fresh water. Since the day I was born, I have never felt so much lightness – like my body did not exist at all – as when I came to study in that way.

The contentment that I felt in my undergoing, as such, was great enough to suppress my worry for the future. I was confident that I could find happiness or satisfaction for myself without having to deal with anybody or



ask for anybody's favor. I even went so far as to think that I could live alone in this world, or stay alone without contacting anybody, much like those yogis who live in the Himalayas. ...

Non-attachment occurs not only because there is nothing to attach to but also because we do not attach to whatever we possess. Was it then possible to possess a few things, just enough for doing good to greater humanity, but without burdening myself with attachment? This was the question I tried to answer.

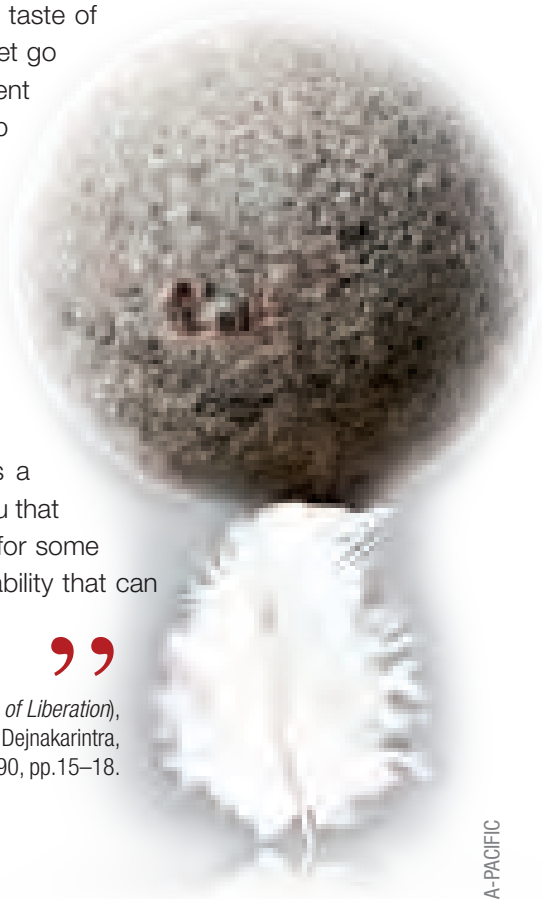
As these challenging thoughts came to my mind, the courage for and fun in taking on the responsibility of something binding spontaneously arose. One feeling suggested that I not give up the new-found happiness, but the other tried to compromise this so that I would not lose any of the two. Finally I could have both of them. This was because I had initially experienced the taste of total dispossession, which gave me important knowledge; I knew how to let go of those possessions which were newly added to the old list. It was different from when I did not know how to give up things, but only knew how to grasp at them.

But the fact still remains that staying alone without getting involved in benefaction for others brings more happiness. However, we human beings probably have a naturally inherent debt: for instance, we have become what we are nowadays because of our selfless ancestors' sacrifice. Therefore, it is natural that some of us are courageous enough to sacrifice their own interest in order to benefit others.

But how can we be good Samaritans without suffering too much loss is a problem that we must try to solve. I can give an answer here by assuring you that there is no other way than going out to live alone without any possession for some time. This will finally help you to find the solution and to gain spiritual capability that can successfully overcome very difficult problems. ...

”

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokh (Garden of Liberation)*, translation from the Thai by Mongkol Dejnakarindra, Bangkok, © Dhammadana Foundation, 1990, pp.15–18.



COMMENTARY

In contemporary life, the question of ownership looms large. We (almost) are what we own, as the saying goes. We have to “acquire” to survive and to succeed. The dominant mark of success is wealth or ownership of the largest quality and quantity of possessions. On the contrary, Buddhadasa here invites us to take a reverse journey. He experiments with “owning” (almost) nothing and experience the joy of “lightness of the heart.” He even contemplates living alone without having anything for the rest of his life. His sense of indebtedness to the sacrifice of ancestors and his compassion for other human beings brings him to reflect on what is the proper balance between the desire to live completely alone, and the desire to help others. Finally he finds his balance. What is interesting here is that he suggests we all experiment with owning less and less, perhaps near the point of owning nothing at all, as a condition for helping us find our own balance. The key word is “joy of lightness” when owning nothing. That joy is an experiential testimony which sheds light on our self-reflection of “how much” we need to own to have a good life. Do we all need to become a billionaire to feel successful and secure? This small passage from Buddhadasa offers us a good “retreat point” to ponder on the big question of possessions and a good life.

QUESTIONS

1

In this world of capitalist dominance, do you think it is sensible at all to try to own fewer rather than more possessions? Give reasons.

2

What do you think are the best and worst consequences of owning as few things as possible?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

Make a drawing representing the progression experienced and proposed by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu before reaching the “proper balance between the desire to live completely alone and the desire to help others”. Discuss the opportunity and possibility of undertaking such an experiment in your society.

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

2 CONFUCIAN REN ETHICS: THE RELATIONAL PERSON AND FAMILY FEELING

INTRODUCTION

Confucian philosophy has, in a significant way, influenced the development of the Chinese way of thinking and living. Some scholars even claim that Confucianism is responsible for China's recent impressive economic growth.

The teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE), the founder of Confucianism, were collected by some of his disciples in the *Analects* wherein personal cultivation and a harmonious society are emphasized as its main doctrines. It advocates that the only way for human beings to achieve *ren* (humanity) is to cultivate themselves in their relationships with others and by fulfilling their family and social responsibilities.

Ren 仁 is the Confucian ideal of human living. The character *ren* is composed of two Chinese characters: “person 人” and the “number two 二”. 𠤎 A Confucian person is therefore a relational person since *ren* has to be achieved and established through human relations. As Confucian scholar and American philosopher Herbert Fingarette succinctly states: “For Confucius, unless there are at least two human beings, there can be no human beings.”¹¹⁸

The Confucian way (*dao*) is the way of becoming *ren*. It is not a particular virtue (as it is conventionally translated: benevolence, goodness), but a broad and comprehensive character trait that includes all the particular virtues. It embodies the consummation of human cultivation. Thus, *ren* can be translated as “humanity,” “humanheartedness,” “manhood-at-its-best,” or “authoritative person or conduct”. The last translation indicates the method of Confucian teaching – teaching through modelling. In a Confucian society, the consummate person is authoritative since he or she serves as a model for the family/community/society. They are called *junzi* usually translated as “gentleman.” It could be translated also as “exemplary person”. For example, a father should be *junzi* or exemplary person for his son, the ruler should be the exemplary person for his ministers, and so on.

Confucius believes that cultivating *ren* (humanity) is rooted in family relationships. Family feeling – *xiao* 孝 plays the central role in the Confucian doctrine of becoming *ren*. The character *xiao* 孝 is constituted by “elder 老” and “youngster 子.” In an ancient Chinese dictionary, *xiao* is “the one who is serving his/her parents well.”¹¹⁹ Comparing the character *lao* (elder) 𠤎 and *xiao* 𠤎, the “walking stick” that supports the elder is replaced by a child – the younger generation.

¹¹⁹ Xu Shen, *Shuowei jiezi*, Shanghai, Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1981, p. 398.

¹¹⁸ Herbert Fingarette, “The Music of Humanity in the Conversations of Confucius,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 10, 1983, p. 217.

Although xiao is conventionally translated as filial piety, it connotes the following meanings: family reverence; family responsibility; family feeling – everything that one brings to exercise filial responsibility and deference – genuine concern, careful attendance and a joyful heart in serving one’s family.

Confucian teaching is a teaching through modelling and emulation. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese character for “education” is called *jiao* 教 which is constructed by the radical *xiao* and the radical “branch 支.” It is defined by the same ancient dictionary as “that which those above disseminate and those below emulate.”¹²⁰ It is the image of the elder (father) holding a branch to rectify the child (younger generation). The character *jiao* (education) underscores not only the centrality of family in education, but also the modeling role the father plays. The educational structure could be described this way: one achieves *ren* through emulating the elder since the elder, the exemplary person, teaches *ren* through genuine family feeling and family deference. As it is advocated in the first chapter of the *Classic of Xiao*: “*Xiao* is the root of excellence/virtue (*de*) and whence education (*jiao*) itself is born.”¹²¹

TEXTE *ANALECTS*, CONFUCIUS

“ “ It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of *xiao* 孝 (family reverence) and *di* 弟 (fraternal deference) to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on initiating rebellion. *Junzi* 君子 (exemplary persons) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the *dao* 道 (way) will grow therefrom. As for family reverence and fraternal deference, it is, I suspect, the root of *ren* 仁 (consummate conduct).

”

Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont (translators), *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, New York, Ballantine Books, © Random House, 1998, p. 71.

COMMENTARY

This paragraph includes all the above important Confucian conceptions that have been briefly discussed: xiao, ren, junzi and dao.

“It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of family reverence (*xiao* 孝) and fraternal deference (*di* 弟) to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on initiating.” These two sentences indicate the importance and significance of family as a value in the Chinese/Confucian tradition. More exactly, family value – *xiao* (family reverence) and *di* (fraternal deference), are actually the foundation of Confucian ethics. Cultivating *xiao* is essential in establishing the proper social and political order. Classical Confucianism is a family-centered role-based ethical system. Confucius sees family relations – father–son; elder brother–younger brother; husband–wife – established by genuine family feeling as the metaphor for developing a prosperous and harmonious community/society. It is believed that if we build up family feeling with the internalization of *xiao* and *di*, we will naturally transfer the same feeling to our big family – our nation, literally, a national family (*guojia* 國家).

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 127.

¹²¹ *Xiaojing* 孝經, cited in *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of The Xiaojing*, translation by Henry Rosemont Jr. and Roger Ames, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, p. 105.

Therefore, we can view the Confucian way (*dao*) and its social and political strategy as “governing through family feeling.” It is expressed in the following sentences: “*Junzi* 君子 (exemplary persons) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the *dao* 道 (way) will grow therefrom. As for family reverence and fraternal deference, it is, I suspect, the root of *ren* 仁 (consummate conduct).” A person who practices self-cultivation through the way (*dao*) of *ren* which is rooted in *xiao* (family reverence) will become a *junzi* (the exemplary person) and thus achieve his authority to regulate his family, then order the bigger community, rule the big state, and then bring peace to the world. Furthermore, “governing through *xiao*” entails spreading the way of *xiao*.

It connotes the expression of loyalty (*zhong* 忠). But loyalty is not “blind obedience.” One who has fully internalized loyalty is not afraid to remonstrate with a parent or ruler who has fallen away from the Confucian *dao*. The sincere manifestation of *xiao* is in the manner and countenance of Confucian practitioners and in the willingness to correct without fear of violating the above trust. They are the crucial basis for “governing through *xiao*.” The ideals *ren* and *xiao* resonate with contemporary social and political realities. *Xiao* is not only the fundamental basis of family, but also of a larger community. *Xiao* – in all its aspects (care, loyalty, reverence, and remonstrance) – is vital to a humane society. It naturally extends beyond one’s immediate family obligations to the society at large – just as one would never allow one’s parents or children to go hungry, one carries that feeling to the poor and the hungry in one’s midst. The promise of love and security is extended to all.

QUESTIONS



1 *Why is ren translated as “authoritative conduct/person”?*

2 *Can emphasizing family values diminish individual freedom?*

3 *What are Confucius’s assumptions in promoting “family reverence”? Are these assumptions valid?*

4 *How can we extend xiao beyond the immediate family?*



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

3 DAOIST GOVERNANCE, HUMILITY AND SOFT POWER

INTRODUCTION

The Daodejing, the book attributed to Lao Zi (ca. 600–470), emphasizes a mysterious, inexhaustibly ongoing productive origin of the world, the unnamable *dao* of the cosmos. The mysterious *dao* produces the wholeness of the world and it operates as a continuous, harmonious mutually dependent and correlated process. Unlike classical Confucian thinking which emphasizes the relational human being in its social and political context, classical Daoist thinkers offer a different perspective to look at this relational human being in its natural and cosmological contexts. The natural world is not only the cooperator and co-creator that constructs a harmonious universe, but also offers wisdom for human beings to establish a harmonious and organic community.

Daoist ethics generally dissipates the hierarchy between the human world and its environment, and instead recognizes the universe as an inseparable wholeness. The spontaneous natural ecological system could serve as a model for human beings to rethink and reconstruct the harmonious and genuine relationship with their environment. The mysterious power of the *dao* lies in its giving birth to all the things in the cosmos and in nurturing them and perfecting them according to their nature without any coercive action.

The concept “self doing” (*ziran*) is essential to understand the Daoist philosophy – letting things be themselves. It expresses the idea of respecting each kind of thing and of every being’s nature, its own uniqueness and distinctive contribution to a harmonious world. Daoism suggests that everything in this world follows its natural way to complete its own strength. Maintaining nature means maintaining the uniqueness of every being which is essential for an organic and harmonious sustainable development. The natural tendency of an individual for its own self-development is also its unique contribution to its social and natural environments. Guided by this philosophy, the ideal way of governing is by cherishing everyone’s inborn capacity and never manipulating it. Therefore, the Daoist sage, the one who follows the virtue of the mysterious *dao* will receive the same mysterious power of the *dao* and governs the world in a natural and harmonious way. The central concept of the *Daodejing*’s political thinking, therefore, is *wuwei* (no coercive actions) and the sage leader follows the nature of things. This characteristic virtue is well expressed by the water metaphor in Chapter 66:



TEXT *THE DAODEJING*, CHAPTER 66

“ The Yang-tze and the ocean; how are they able to be kings of the hundred streams? Because they excel at being low – this is how they are able to be kings of the hundred streams. And so: Wishing to be high above the people, you must put yourself at the bottom. Wishing to be out in front of the people, you must put yourself in the last place. And so, the Wise Person stands above, but the people are not weighed down; He stands out in front, but the people are not harmed. And so the world delights in praising him, and does not tire. Because of his not contending No one in the world can contend with him.

”

© Michael LaFague, *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching: A Translation and Commentary*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992.



COMMENTARY

The conventional understanding of the human being's role in this world is that it dominates the world and it has been believed by generations upon generations. The Daoists, however, emphasize the humble and nurturing role of the leader, the governor of the world – in its relationship with other human beings, the community, society, the cultural world, along with the natural environment and its resources.

A water-like behaviour does not strive to “get on top or to the fore,” to control, to be superior to others. Instead it puts oneself in a humble position, cherishing and respecting all the uniqueness of others with a mother-like nurturing quality. If human beings could adopt this Daoist perspective, then the ambitious attitude to strive to be the master of the universe, even abusing the natural world, will be adjusted according to a healthy and harmonious perspective in relation to the human being's actual position in the universe.

Furthermore, the *Daodejing* suggests that the true power of the ruler lies in its water-like “lowness” – putting himself or herself behind and lower than the ruled. The soft power of water is in its humble and lowly quality which makes it so powerful – this is the power of the master of the world – the power of viewing everything to be equal and unique according to its own kind.

Softness and weakness accompany life towards its fullness of energy. Hardness and stiff power are signs of death. Daoists appreciate and emphasize in the soft power of water the need for humans to rethink and reconstruct their relationships with all kinds of “others” who share the planet with us. The Daoist perspective suggests a humble and organic way to look at the art of governing.

The Chinese pictographic characters of water (*shui*) look like these:



QUESTIONS

1

What does water's quality of “being low” say about the ideal leader in Daoism?

2

How can we understand the concept wuwei (no coercive action)?

3

What does one do when one makes oneself like water?

4

What are the examples of “soft power” from your own experience?



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

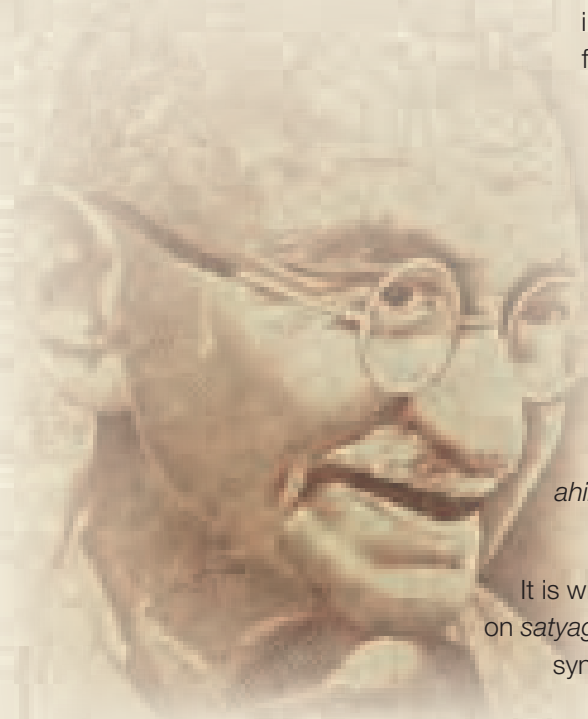
4 SOUL-FORCE, SELF-CONTROL AND PASSIVE RESISTANCE IN POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

Hind Swaraj or *Indian Home Rule*, the booklet written by Gandhi is generally recognized as his only systematic theoretical work. Less than 100 pages long, and comprised of twenty short chapters, *Hind Swaraj* is cast in the form of a dialogue between Gandhi, who is called “The Editor”, and his debater, known as “The Reader.” Gandhi wrote it in ten days between November 13 and 22, 1909 on his voyage from London to Durban where he lived in those days. It is generally accepted that the immediate context of writing the booklet was Gandhi’s encounter with the Indian anarchists in England and their cult of violence. Gandhi believed that violence was the inevitable result of the values that underpin modern civilization as pursuit of self-interest is placed at the centre of our existence. He seeks to counter this by promoting an alternative world view comprising of three unchanging and everlasting principles namely: 1) Real *swaraj* i.e., self-rule or self-control. 2) The way to it being *satyagraha*: that is, soul-force or love-force. 3) *Swadeshi* (home economy) in its entirety. For Gandhi each one of us has the *dharmic* or cosmic responsibility to pursue truth (*sat*) and it takes precedence over the granting or withholding of political loyalty. In particular, *dharma* requires selfless action performed without attachment to rewards (*anasaktiyoga*), and courage – spiritual, physical and psychological – demonstrates selflessness.

The word *sat* etymologically is much more than truth; it is employed in the sense of reality, goodness or praiseworthy action, sacrifice, penance, gift. Whatever offering or gift is made, whatever rite is observed, without faith, is called *asat*. Since only truth is existing and real it must be the ultimate objective of our life. The path to achieve truth is *ahimsa* (nonviolence). *Ahimsa* is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer.

It is within these philosophical underpinnings that we must understand his views on *satyagraha*. In the following text he uses “passive resistance” and *satyagraha* as synonymous. He makes it clear at a later date that the doctrine of *satyagraha* and passive resistance are different as the latter condones the use of violence.



TEXT *INDIAN HOME RULE OR HIND SWARAJ, MOHANDAS GANDHI*

“

Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law. I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self. ... No man can claim that he is absolutely in the right or that a particular thing is wrong because he thinks so, but it is wrong for him so long as that is his deliberate judgment. It is, therefore, meet (sic) that he should not do that which he knows to be wrong, and suffer the consequence whatever it may be. This is the key to the use of soul-force. ...

The real meaning of the statement that we are a law-abiding nation is that we are passive resisters. When we do not like certain laws, we do not break the heads of law-givers but we suffer and do not submit to the laws. ...

Even the Government does not expect any such things from us. They do not say: 'You must do such and such a thing.' but they say: 'If you do not do it, we will punish you.' We are sunk so low, that we fancy that it is our duty and our religion to do what the law lays down. If man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man's tyranny will enslave him. This is the key to self-rule or home-rule.

It is a superstition and ungodly thing to believe that an act of a majority binds a minority. Many examples can be given in which acts of majorities will be found to have been wrong and those of minorities to have been right. ... Wherein is courage required in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon, or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior: he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend, or he who controls the death of others? ...

Passive resistance is an all-sided sword, it can be used any how; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood it produces far-reaching results. It never rusts and cannot be stolen. ... The sword of passive resistance does not require a scabbard. ...

After a great deal of experience it seems to me that those who want to become passive resisters for the service of the country have to observe perfect chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth, and cultivate fearlessness.

Passive resistance has been described in the course of our discussion as truth-force. Truth, therefore, has necessarily to be followed and that at any cost.”

”

Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Indian Home Rule or Hind Swaraj*,
Ahmedabad, © Navajivan Publishing House, 1938, pp. 55–59.

COMMENTARY

In the course of his analysis Gandhi reverses the classical Hindu phrase “God is Truth” into “Truth is God” and supports a relativist and subjective conception of truth. This is akin to Jaina philosophy which considers nature of reality through non-absolutism (*Anekantavada*). The notion of absolute and relative truth is central to Gandhian thought. He compares absolute truth to a diamond, which cannot be seen in its entirety but has many visible facets – thus corresponding to relative truth. It is due to this that no one individual or group is the repository of the truth and all of us are in the process of moving toward ultimate truth.

The acid test of relevance of works and views of a great man is definitely the application of them in prevailing conditions of time and space. Is *satyagraha* relevant today? There is no simple “yes” or “no” answer to this question. *Satyagraha* is a perfect weapon of conflict resolution as it provides a means for discussion, negotiation and settlement. However, it is one thing to protest against an external power or a dictatorial regime but quite another to go against a government that has been duly elected by the people. Also, considering the kind of personal probity he expected, especially that of chastity and non-possession, questions have been raised about the relevance of his methods.

A very significant aspect of the text is the principle that politics must have a moral foundation.

QUESTIONS



Can ends and means be separated?



Can ends justify the means?

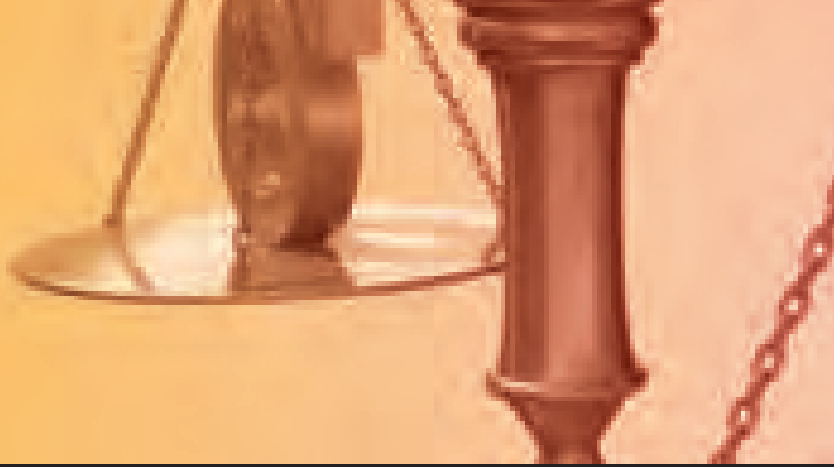
PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES



A film on non-violent protests can be shown to raise questions about the strength and courage that people have shown in the past to protest against injustice.



Form several groups and react on what you consider to be instances of violence in day-to-day life. Also, what are the ways to resolve the causes of such violence? Using specific case studies relevant to the place of teaching debate on whether non-violence and satyagraha would work.



IV GENDER EQUALITY

1 GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND YINYANG DYNAMICS

INTRODUCTION

Huangdi Neijing (黃帝內經) known as *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*, has been considered as the oldest and greatest medical classic texts in China for two millennia. The date and author of this text are debatable. It is the work of various unknown authors who wrote around 200 C.E. The text consists of two parts of eighty-one chapters each. The first text, the *Suwen*, known as “Basic Questions,” establishes a theoretical framework for Chinese medicine; the second text, *Lingshu* is known as the “Spiritual Axis,” which deals with medical physiology, anatomy and acupuncture. *Huangdi Neijing* lays out not just the conceptual foundations for Chinese medicine but also provides the most systematic early account of *yinyang* as both a method of understanding nature and as a strategy for living well. As a treatise on the *yinyang* theory and practice, it illustrates the distinctive connection between pre-*qin* philosophical thought and various practical techniques. Around the third century BCE, China experienced a particular shift from a mystical–religious worldview towards naturalistic explanations of the cosmos and the place of human life in it. The emergence of *yinyang* thinking and terminology at that time is intimately connected with this shift, as *yinyang* became an important conceptual tool to facilitate this transition. The *Huangdi Neijing* states simply, “a good practitioner differentiates between *yin* and *yang* when observing the complexion and feeling the pulse.” This view is different from earlier beliefs that illness was either a curse from the ancestors or some kind of punishment. Since then for thousands years *yinyang* became an effective and multifarious tool for understanding the human body as an expression of cosmic generation and its dynamism. Not unlike all phenomena in nature and all things under heaven that can be characterized according to either the *yang* or *yin*, the man/male/muscularity as *yang* and woman/female/femininity as *yin* are also identified with this *yinyang* matrix.

Although the text presented here does not explicitly consider the traditional understanding of gender differences, it does supply a basis for understanding the differences between men and women in social roles and gender expectations.



TEXT *THE YELLOW EMPEROR'S INNER CLASSIC*

“

The Yellow Emperor claims that yinyang is the Dao of heaven and earth, the net of the ten thousand things, the parent of transformations, the origin of life and death, and the residence of spirit and insight. To heal illness one must seek this root. The energy of clear yang accumulates above to form heaven; the energy of turbid yin accumulates below to form the earth. Yin stands for stillness while yang stands for movement; yang generates while yin transforms; yang evaporates while yin restores; yang activates energy while yin shapes things. These interactions of yin and yang are responsible for diseases that befall those who are defiant to them as well as those who conform to them.

Water represents yin; fire represents yang; yang corresponds to energy (qi氣), yin corresponds to tastes.

Hence it is said: heaven and earth are above and below ten thousand things; yin and yang are the blood and energy of men and women; the left and right are the path of yin and yang ; water and fire are the images of yin and yang; yin and yang are the source of the beginning of myriad things. Therefore it is said: yin is active within as guarded by yang; yang is active outside as sent by yin ...


Those who are effective in using the needle for acupuncture follow yin in order to draw out yang. And they follow yang in order to draw out yin. They use the right hand in order to treat illness of the left side, using the left hand in order to treat illness of the right side; they know themselves in order to know others; know the surface in order to know the roots ...

As for yinyang, it has a name but no form, thus if you count it, it can be ten; if you separate it, it can be a hundred; if you disperse it, it can be a thousand; and if you extrapolate from it, it can be ten-thousand.

”

Yingan Zhang 張隱庵 (ed.), *Huangdi Neijing Commentaries*, 黃帝內經素問集注,
translation into English by © Robin Wang,
Beijing, Xueyuan Press 學苑出版社, 2002.

COMMENTARY

The concept of *yinyang* lies at the heart of Chinese thought and culture. The relationship between these two opposing yet mutually dependent forces is symbolized in the familiar black and white symbol  that has become a popular icon across the world. The real significance of *yinyang*, however, is more complex and subtle. The *yin* and *yang* distinction may account for the differentiation between women and men but the physiological and biological differences between men and women cannot be taken as some sort of essentialist dualism but rather as a dynamic interplay of two complementary and cosmic forces, such as sun/moon, water/fire and left/right. The passages above illustrate a few important points. First, the female and male as the cosmological pattern of yin and yang are themselves embodied in a dynamic complementarity. The health of the human body, like all other forms of wholeness, for example, depends on the proper harmony and balance of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* or *yang* has its distinctive role to play without which the other ceases to exist, indeed, without which the whole cosmos ceases to exist. Although human beings are gendered as either male or female, both males and females possess a particular synthesis of *yang* and yin. No female being is exclusively *yin*, and no male is exclusively *yang*. Within the strongest moment of *yang*, one finds a small circle of *yin*, and within the strongest moment of *yin*, one finds a small circle of *yang*. If we imagine a line drawn from the center of the circle to its periphery to represent the configuration of a particular object, event, or moment in time, then everything is shown to be constituted by both *yin* and *yang*, dark and light.



Secondly, we learn that male/female, man/woman, muscularity/ femininity or yin/yang are not fixed entities or fixed essence, but rather a dynamic process of unfolding multidimensional relationships that are constantly changing. Like the yinyang symbol that illustrates change, everything participates in a universal ebb and flow, returning to their opposites, and back again. The same element can be yin/female in a certain relation but yang/male in another; and one can talk about *yin*/female within yang/male, or *yang*/male within *yin*/female. Male and female dance according to the cyclical alternation of *yin* and *yang*. In the same manner that day and night are interdependent, reciprocal, and intertwined, the *yinyang* symbol represents the waxing and waning of yin and yang; suggesting a gradual and quantitative cyclical change. *Yin* and *yang* are eternally oscillating between each other, explaining the enormous diversity of circumstances in life. At any given point, yin-dark or yang-bright is in the process of change. This difference is implicit in any state of being – there are no fixed points or frozen moments.

Third, while we can think about the *yinyang* symbol as two teardrop-shaped particles, namely yin-dark and yang-bright, when they are brought together, they form a circle. Now the emergent properties of a circle are different from either of its two constituents. If the circle were a hoop, it could rotate or roll but neither of the two parts, by themselves, can do these. The regularity of the emergent whole is more than the sum of its parts. The symbol not only emphasizes the wholeness of the universe, but also shows the element of “thirdness” involved in *yinyang* thought. The yinyang interaction itself, like the female/male interaction, goes beyond being merely complementary and mutually supporting. *Yin* and *yang*, like female/woman and male/man together fashion a new existent, which is not simply half bright circle and half dark circle. *Yinyang* ultimately generates new things to emerge, exist, and endure.

QUESTIONS



1 *Can you list some examples to show how yin and yang manifest themselves in nature, in social systems such as families, business and political organizations, and in your own life?*

2 *Does yin and yang have relevance and meaning in the modern world of information and communication technologies?*

3 *Illustrate, by means of examples, how the devaluation of the yin (feminine) leads to a weakening of an entity as a whole and of the yang (masculine) itself, and vice versa.*



IV GENDER EQUALITY

2 GENDER EQUALITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

INTRODUCTION

Jalaluddin Rumi belongs to the mystical tradition of Persian Sufi poets who aspired to achieve union with God through poems, dances and music. He was born at Balkh (Afghanistan) on the 6th of Rabi-al-awwal in the year 604 A.H. (30 September 1207). The following story from “The Hundred Tales of Wisdom” was one of the narratives used in Sufi schools “to help develop insights beyond ordinary perceptions.”¹²² Its doctrines put premium on actual experiences in lieu of human conceptions and beliefs. Rumi’s teachings led to the development of the dances of the swirling dervishes which was declared by UNESCO as an Intangible Heritage of Mankind in 2005.

TEXT RUMI’S LOVE POEM

“

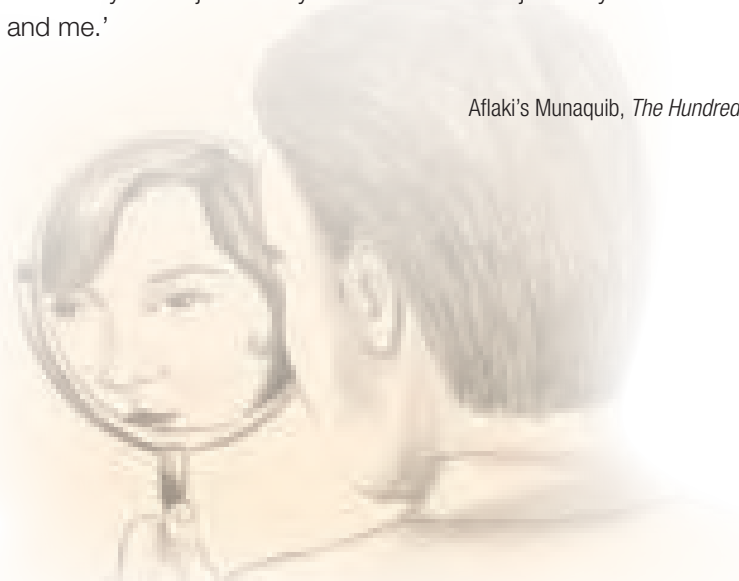
A lover visiting his beloved brought out the poems which he had written to her, and read them at length. The verses dealt with what he thought of her, and how he felt about her attraction and beauty. The lady said to him:

‘Here you are, with me and able to perceive my qualities directly; but you insist upon expressing emotions which represent yourself, not me.

I am not your object: it is you who are the object of your own affections. It is you who stand between yourself and me.’

”

Aflaki’s Munaquib, *The Hundred Tales of Wisdom*, translated from the Persian by Idries Shah, London, © Octagon Press, 1992, p. 156.



¹²² Review of Jans van Gelder, in *Psychology Today* printed at the back cover page of the book by Idries Shah, *The Hundred Tales of Wisdom*, New Delhi, Rupa and Co., 2007.



COMMENTARY

It is ironic that in the actual presence of the lady, the poet is still hiding himself behind his poems about her. His poetic prowess becomes an entrapment of his own self. His claim of love for her only betrays his love for himself. When he cannot open himself to her presence, in her presence, how could it be “love?”

The lady’s responses to the poet – that she is not his “object”, that it is he who stands between himself and her – can be understood as a forceful reiteration of her subjectivity. She is a subject who is hoping and waiting for an intersubjective “dance of mutual recognition.” He could have talked to her, instead of reading his poems at her. He could have seen her and appreciated her beauty, instead of showing off his poetic skills about her beauty. She is calling out for an interhuman recognition.

It might not do justice to Rumi, the great Persian poet, to use this poem to illustrate a point about gender equality. One issue which seems missing in most discussions of gender equality is the crucial importance of actually “seeing” a woman as a seat of her own subjectivity. The whole fabric of male-centered language has spun a web of meanings which designate, envelop, and entrap the “real” presence of human existence. Women are “the other” who are described, or in this case, made poetic, by the male imagination. The linguistic fabrication has conjured up a world where women are the “object” of perception, desires, and suppression. Any concept of gender equality needs to be grounded in real experiences of the male, who needs to “transcend” his conceptual fabrication. The presence of the female as her own subjectivity needs to intervene, and to inscribe a real and living presence in the actual experiences of the male. Perhaps only then, the very idea of “gender equality” would begin to make sense. Viewed in this way, Rumi’s poem is an enlightening introduction to gender equality.

QUESTIONS

1

Do you agree with the commentary that an understanding of gender equality needs a crucial basis in recognizing the subjectivity of women? Give your reasons.

2

Why do you think when we love, we tend to need an “object” instead of needing another “subject”?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

1

Write your reflections about the responses of the lady to the poet. What parts of your reflections belong to you and which parts are about the text itself?

2

In small groups share your ideas about love, language and gender equality.

V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

1 ALTRUISM AND COMPASSION TOWARD NONHUMANS, ACCORDING TO KING ASHOKA

INTRODUCTION

King Ashoka (about 273/272–236/235 BCE), who was the third ruler of the Maurya dynasty that governed India during about 324–187 BCE, had spread the message of the Buddha in various parts of Asia. Ashoka's precepts were inscribed in several "rock and pillar" edicts that are located in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. Ashoka called himself "Devanampiyadasi" (beloved of the Gods) in these edicts. Besides other lofty ideas, love and compassion towards the other forms of life find a prominent place in the Ashokan edicts. These are quoted in the text below.



Detail of Ashoka pillar, India



TEXT THE ROCK AND PILLAR EDICTS OF KING ASHOKA



Rock Edicts (RE)

RE 1. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, has caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here in my domain no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice.

RE 2. Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's domain, and among the people beyond the borders, King Piyadasi made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals.

RE 3. Respect for mother and father is good, generosity to friends, acquaintances, relatives, Brahmans and ascetics is good, not killing living beings is good, moderation in spending and moderation in saving is good.

Pillar Edicts (PE)

PE 2. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Dhamma is good, but what constitutes Dhamma? (It includes) little evil, much good, kindness, generosity, truthfulness and purity. I have given the gift of sight in various ways. To two-footed and four-footed beings, to birds and aquatic animals, I have given various things including the gift of life.

PE 5. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Twenty-six years after my coronation various animals were declared to be protected – parrots, mainas, //aruna//, ruddy geese, wild ducks, //nandimukhas, gelatas//, bats, queen ants, terrapins, boneless fish, //vedareyaka//, //gangapuputaka//, //sankiya// fish, tortoises, porcupines, squirrels, deer, bulls, //okapinda//, wild asses, wild pigeons, domestic pigeons and all four-footed creatures that are neither useful nor edible.

Those nanny goats, ewes and sows which are with young or giving milk to their young are protected, and so are young ones less than six months old. Cocks are not to be caponized, husks hiding living beings are not to be burnt and forests are not to be burnt either without reason or to kill creatures. One animal is not to be fed to another. On the three *Caturmāsī*¹²³, the three days of Tisa and during the fourteenth and fifteenth of the *Uposatha*¹²⁴, fish are protected and not to be sold. During these days animals are not to be killed in the elephant reserves or the fish reserves either. On the eighth of every fortnight, on the fourteenth and fifteenth,

¹²³ *Cāturmāsī*: Full moon days of *Phālguna* (~February–March), *āshādhā* (~June–July) and *Kārttika* (~October–November).

¹²⁴ *Uposatha*: A day of observance for self-purification in Buddhism. Several uposatha days are observed in a year.

on *Tisa*, *Punarvasu*¹²⁵, the three *Caturmasis* and other auspicious days, bulls are not to be castrated, billy goats, rams, boars and other animals that are usually castrated are not to be. On *Tisa*, *Punarvasu*, *Caturmasis* and the fortnight of *Caturmasis*, horses and bullocks are not to be branded.

”

S. Dhammika (translator), *The Edicts of King Ashoka*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, © Buddhist Publication Society, 1993.

COMMENTARY

Ashoka not only believed in his precept of altruism and compassion towards nonhumans, but also tried to convince his subjects about the virtue of non-violence, not only to fellow humans, but also to the other creatures. His *dhamma*, therefore, went beyond the human domain to embrace the other creatures who also share the biosphere with us. This is suggested in PE 5, where after declaring several animals as protected from killing, he also announced the amnesty of many prisoners during this period, thereby indicating that life in any form, whether human or animal, was precious to him. Further, he declared that all four-footed creatures that were neither useful nor edible were not to be killed. This suggests that Ashokan altruism was not motivated merely by the anthropocentric use value of a creature, but went beyond to accord intrinsic value to them.

QUESTIONS



What does our attitude towards animals say about our humanity?



Is kindness to animals good because a king said so or did the king say that we should be kind to animals because it is good to do so?



Are we kind to animals because they are similar to us or do they have their own intrinsic values independent of their being similar to us?

¹²⁵ Tisa (Tisya) and Punarvasu days: Days in a month when the moon is in these constellations.

V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

2 MINDFULNESS AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, ACCORDING TO THICH NHAT HANH

INTRODUCTION

Thich Nhat Hanh considers himself an “engaged Buddhist” due to his commitments as a peace activist. Born in Central Vietnam on October 11, 1926, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk sixteen years later and founded several Buddhist centers. He taught comparative religion at Columbia and Princeton Universities in 1961 and came back to Vietnam in 1963 to join his compatriots in the campaign to stop the war in Vietnam. In 1966, he accepted an invitation from the Fellowship of Reconciliation to describe the aspirations of the Vietnamese people. He now lives in the Plum Village Monastery in the Dordogne region in Southern France but travels internationally to give retreats and talks about “mindfulness” in various places. In the following excerpt from an interview by Jo Confino for the Guardian Professional Network on 20 February 2012, he described the contribution of the practice of “mindfulness” towards a possible solution to the current problems about the environment.



TEXT “BEYOND ENVIRONMENT: FALLING BACK IN LOVE WITH MOTHER EARTH”, THICH NHAT HANH

“ “ The practice of mindfulness helps us to touch Mother Earth inside of the body and this practice can help heal people. So the healing of the people should go together with the healing of the Earth.”

“When I am mindful, I enjoy more my tea. ...” “I am fully present in the here and now, not carried away by my sorrow, my fear, my projects, the past and the future. I am here available to life.

” ”

Jo Confino, *Beyond environment: falling back in love with Mother Earth*, London, © Guardian News & Media Ltd, guardian.co.uk, 20 February 2012.

COMMENTARY

Climate scientists agree that the climate change has anthropogenic origins. Being mindful of our daily activities and their consequences to the environment can go a long way in the reversal, mitigation of and adaptation to global warming. Thich Nhat Hanh’s insight that “the healing of the people should go together with the healing of the Earth” asserts that at the bottom of the current ecological crisis is our attitude towards ourselves and our environment. Mindfulness, therefore, is not a matter of thinking about ourselves and our surroundings but of our actual awareness of our relationships among ourselves and others, especially our surroundings. It is no wonder that one of the key concepts of his notion of mindfulness is “The Interdependence of Things” – a description of how our lives are intertwined with one another.¹²⁶ The most intimate experience of mindfulness is the immersion and participation of our embodied existence with the environment. The simple act of enjoying a cup of tea can be attributed to our receptivity to the many other elements that made such an experience possible – the earth, water and sunlight that nourished the tea leaves and the workers who carefully picked, packed and made the leaves available for us.

QUESTIONS



How is the practice of meditation related to the life of mindfulness?



How can I be mindful of the effects of my daily life on the ecological system?



How can I help sequester carbon dioxides from the environment?



How can I reduce my level of consumption?



How can I save the cost of my energy consumption?

¹²⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, translated from the French by Albert and Jean Low with an introduction by Philip Kapleau, New York, Garden City, 1974, pp. 37–38.

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES



Compute the daily energy consumption of your household.



Are you a net consumer or a net producer of nature's resources?



How can you balance your consumption and your production levels in favour of the natural world?



VI ARTS AND CREATION

1 MIND TRANQUILITY AND AESTHETICS EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu, 369–286 BCE.) is one of the important Daoist philosophers. His work has been continuously and widely used to interpret art activities by later generations.

Two terms have been discussed in numerous ways by artists and art theorists through the history. They are *qi* and *xin*. The Chinese practice of self-cultivation emphasizes “cultivating one self’s flood-like *qi* to be with the *qi* of the cosmos.” *Qi* is the life force, and is at the heart of Chinese cosmology. Consequently, *qi* becomes the primary principle for art creativity in China. One can never over-emphasize the importance of *qi* in any form of Chinese art. Xie He, from the 6th century in his painting theory *Guhua Pinlu* (“Ancient Painters’ Classified Record”), describes six principles of landscape painting. He places *qiyun shengdong* (“animation through *qi* consonance”) at the beginning. Jing Hao (10th century), one of the pioneer artists of the Chinese landscape painting, continued this tradition and determined that successful landscape painting was based on six essentials: *qi* 氣 (spirit, energy, life breath), *yun* (resonance and elegance), *si* 思 (ideas), *jing* 景 (scenery, [here referring to “nature”]), *bi* 筆 (brush work), and *mo* 墨 (ink wash). Jing’s goal was to make the internal nature (breath, resonance, ideas) harmonize with the external nature (scenery, and brush and ink – the tools for artistic creation). The process can be approximately described in the following way: through the artist’s contemplation of the natural world, the cultivated *qi* will find a way to resonate with the *qi* of the universe; then the artist rationalizes the process and expresses the harmony with *bi* (brush work) and *mo* (ink wash). This is not a one-way movement: to achieve and appreciate the resonance of *qi* requires mutual openness, reciprocity and co-creativity between the artist and the natural world.

This interaction and co-creativity actively involve *xin* (mind or heart and mind), *xin* refers to the artist’s inner condition in art creativity. The ideal condition of cultivating *qi* is well demonstrated in Zhuangzi’s most frequently quoted concept *xinzhai* (“fasting of the mind”). In one of the “Inner Chapters” from the *Book of Zhuangzi*, Zhuangzi describes the state of *xinzhai* by inventing a dialogue between Confucius and his favourite student Yanhui. Indeed, Zhuangzi is a philosopher full of humour; in this passage, Confucius, the first Confucian teacher, is portrayed as a Daoist master.



TEXT “LIVING IN THE HUMAN WORLD”, ZHUANGZI

“

(Confucius is advising his favorite student, Yan Hui):

‘Fast!’ Confucius said, ‘I will tell you: how can it be easy to do things while you have a mind? If it is easy, it won’t fit the will of the bright heaven.’

Yan Hui said: ‘My family is poor. I haven’t drunk wine and eaten meat for months. Can this be considered as fasting?’

Confucius replied, ‘This kind of fasting is the fasting before sacrifice, but not the fasting of the mind.’

Yan Hui asked, ‘Then, may you please let me know what the fasting of the mind is?’

Confucius said: ‘Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ear, but listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your qi (energy)! The function of ear is listening. The function of mind is to correspond with things. Qi, the vital energy, is empty and is waiting on all things. Only the way gathers in emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.’

‘When I didn’t hear your teaching (of the fasting of the mind), I was certain that I was Hui;’ Yan Hui said, ‘Now that I have heard of your teaching (of the fasting of the mind), there is no such a person as Hui. Can this be called emptiness?’

‘Exactly.’ said Confucius.

”

Zhuangzi, “Living in the human world,” in *The Inner Chapters*,
English translation by © Jinli He.

COMMENTARY

This passage was compiled around the third century BCE. Two terms are crucial for understanding Zhuangzi's message here – *emptiness* and *fasting of the mind*. The text views *emptiness* as where “the way gathers” and as that which is achieved through *fasting of the mind*.

In the Chinese context, *emptiness* cannot be interpreted appropriately without *qi*. The Chinese word for emptiness in this passage is *xu* 虛; The more frequently used Chinese word for *emptiness* is *kong*. However, in *Erya*, the oldest extant Chinese dictionary (dated from around the 3rd century BCE), the definition of *xu* is *kong*. One of the meanings of *kong* and *xu* is the sky (*tian*). In classical Chinese, *tian* is always involved in this human world in various forms. *Kong* and *xu* is the emptiness filled with liveness – *qi*.

It is worth noting here that *kong* was borrowed by earlier Buddhist scholars to translate the Buddhist concept *sunyata*. However, the difference between the Daoist *emptiness* and the Buddhist emptiness is crucial. In the Daoist context, the ultimate reality is not something that we aim to see through our religious practice; rather, it is more a fact that welcomes us to participate in the “great transformation” (*dahua*). In a word, the Chinese counterpart of *sunyata* actually more emphasizes “the things and events in between.” Just like a Han text says: “Through the movement and repose (of their interaction) come all things between heaven and earth.” Hence, in the Chinese cultural context, the emptiness of the cosmos is not only the origin of the potential and inexhaustible life force, but also the place where all the ongoing co-creative activities take place – it is not a “void.” This understanding is demonstrated well in one of the main art forms in Chinese art history – landscape painting. Landscape painting is called *shanshuihua* in Chinese; the literal translation is “mountain and water painting.” Landscape painting functions as a way of visualizing the nature and oneself, as well as a way of visualizing the *qi* of oneself with nature. The mechanics of visualization of Chinese landscape painting reflects in their artistic visual language and structure. Spatial composition became very important in expressing this idea. “Space” in Chinese is *kongjian* 空間, which literally means “between emptiness” or “within emptiness”. Sky and water more often were suggested by “empty space” in the painting to arouse the idea of *qi* and *kong* – *the emptiness that fills with liveness*.

To achieve the ideal aesthetic effect crucially involves the heart-mind condition of the artist. Cultivating one's mind in “mountain and forest” was essential for practicing Chinese art and self-cultivation. It requires *xinzhai* (fasting of the mind).

Fasting of the mind and emptiness is far familiar to Ch'an Buddhist ears. Indeed, Ch'an is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit *dhyana* (meditation). There is still a fine distinction here: while the Daoist emphasizes emptiness is the *fasting of the mind*, the Buddhist stresses emptiness is no mind. The Daoist has a positive attitude to be with *the Great one*. The Buddhist's *no mind* aims to be enlightened to see through the ultimate reality and release oneself from the great transformation.

The beauty of *fasting of the mind* suggests a spiritual transformation that frees oneself from the conventional and limited condition to enjoy and appreciate this life and a world full of ephemeral and phenomenal experiences. The artists were seeing things with the *fasting of the mind* and in the light of the principle of *emptiness* rather than with the eyes, since only the mind could perceive the underlying principles of things – the *emptiness* that is full of life force-*qi*. *Kong-emptiness*, the ultimate mystery, not only expresses the Chinese cosmology but also the aesthetics and the mechanics of visualization. It requires the tranquil mind condition to embrace all the transformation and movements in *emptiness*.

QUESTIONS



1 *What is the relationship between fasting of the mind and emptiness?*



2 *Why is fasting of the mind so important for art creation?*



3 *Does Zhuangzi's fasting of the mind have both epistemological and aesthetic meanings?*

VI ARTS AND CREATION

2 THE PACIFIC POWER OF BEAUTY, ACCORDING TO YANAGI SŌETSU

INTRODUCTION

Yanagi Sōetsu (or Yanagi Muneyoshi, 1889–1961) was a Japanese religious philosopher and the leader of the *Mingei* (art of the people) movement. Yanagi’s father was a major general in the navy, and he grew up amidst the flair of aristocratic society. He studied Western philosophy at the Imperial University of Tokyo, and was an active member of the Shirakaba (white birch) art movement in the 1910s. In 1914, Yanagi encountered, and was very impressed with, Korean folk pottery from the Yi dynasty, which prompted him to “discover” the value of folk crafts from Korea, Japan, and other parts of the world. His interest in East Asian philosophy increased at the same time, and he immersed himself in the study of Buddhism, especially the Japanese Zen and Pure Land schools. In 1926, in collaboration with Bernard Leach (1887–1979), Hamada Shōji (1894–1978), and others, Yanagi announced the idea of starting a national collection of folk arts and introduced the concept of *Mingei*. In 1936, with a help of private supporters, Yanagi opened the Japan Folkcraft Museum in Tokyo, with collections encompassing the crafts from Japan, Korea, China, England, and other countries. The collection attests to the remarkable variety of crafts around the world, and the simple, understated beauty that is common to all of them. Yanagi wrote extensively on subjects pertaining to the intersections between art, aesthetics, and religion. The English version of Yanagi’s selected writings, *The Unknown Craftsman*, was compiled by Leach and published in 1972. In the following excerpt, Yanagi develops an original pacifism based on the belief that the sense of beauty is common to all of us across cultures; he explores the possibility of resolving oppositions between north and south, east and west, in the realm of beauty.



TEXT *THE UNKNOWN CRAFTSMAN, YANAGI SŌETSU*



East and West

There is another matter that may lie within the realm of beauty. It is a truism to say that most men desire peace and loathe war; it is equally a truism to note that peace is not easily attained. Is it enough to say that war is a punishment for sin, a punishment that winner and loser share alike? More immediate, perhaps, is that the fact that man tries to solve his differences by political means, always taking into first consideration the advantage that might accrue to his own country. Under such circumstances, is not war inevitable?

I believe, however, that it is possible for man [sic] to break through national barriers, and I believe further that it is in the realm of beauty that he may most easily accomplish this. True, even in the world of art, disputes arise out of opposing theories and principles; nevertheless, a beautiful object is undeniably beautiful and by its universal appeal has the power – at least temporarily – to make people forget their selfish nationalism. It is one of the virtues of beauty that it has this power: to make one forget one's self and so put an end to strife.

Happily, each nation has in its own art an expression of its particular perception of beauty. By looking at the art of all peoples, by loving and respecting it, the nations of the world can, I believe, achieve mutual spiritual harmony. We ought, in fact, to be grateful that there are beautiful objects capable of breaking down the barriers between east and west and between north and south. Peace is broken when there is dualism and opposition; but as we know, there is a world beyond this opposition where dualism is eliminated, and there must be a connecting road. I do not suggest that east and west should be made monochromatic; they should remain polychromatic but without falling into polychromatic feuds. This realm of harmony is man's true abode; but seeking it only in either east or west is inadequate and a most unfortunate decision for him to make.

One day, a Zen abbot saw a disciple about to leave the temple.

Abbot: 'Where are you going?'

Disciple: 'I am going to my home in the west.'

Abbot: 'I want to invite you to the house in the east. Will you come?'

Disciple: 'I am afraid I cannot.'

Abbot: 'In that case, your abode is not yet fixed.'

A man of the west, the abbot is saying, may do well to make the west his home, but so long as he is bound to it, he will not be able to find his true home even in the west. West as opposed to East is only a dualistic West, not the West where one's spirit may abide in peace.

A final Buddhist anecdote I should like to cite here concerns Hui-neng (638–713) the sixth Zen patriarch whom we encountered earlier. While still a young man, before being accepted as a disciple, he was subjected to an examination by the Zen master, Hung-jen (601–674). The questions and answers are as follows:

Hung-jen: 'What did you come for?'

Hui-neng: 'I came to learn Buddhism.'

Hung-jen: 'Where did you come from?'

Hui-neng: 'I came from the south.'

Hung-jen: 'Men of the south are all like apes – they cannot understand Buddhism. Go away at once.'

Hui-neng: 'There may be a north and a south on land, but there can be neither in Buddhahood.'

He was immediately accepted. North and south, he was saying, east and west: they are two and yet not two. I believe that if we can ever accept this, we can hope for no greater beatitude. The discipline of aesthetics finds its chief reason for existence in putting forth this fundamental truth.

”

Yanagi Sōetsu, *The Unknown Craftsman*, compiled by Leach, New York, © Kodansha USA, 1972, pp. 156–57.

COMMENTARY

1. The Buddhist idea of beauty. In the earlier part of the essay, Yanagi tries to articulate the appeal of folk art in terms of Buddhist ideas. He presupposes that the goal of Buddhist practice is to achieve Enlightenment, which is the state of being free from all duality. A Korean bowl from the Yi dynasty (1392–1910) created by an anonymous potter would exemplify true beauty in a way that is beyond the dualism of beautiful and ugly (□□□). The anonymous potters were completely indifferent to creating a “beautiful” piece; they were probably poor and uneducated, and produced bowls to support their daily needs without any self-consciousness. They belonged to a tradition of craft-making, and they placed their trust in the tradition that their output would be pleasant and enjoyable to those people who use it. Self-consciousness is also dualism, as it creates a division between subject and object, self and other. The potter lived in a world where identity or self-consciousness was not important, and the appeal of crafts rests upon this unpretentiousness. Yanagi uses the example of Japanese “artists” who consciously tried to imitate Korean folk pottery; he remarks that the artists failed to reproduce the *hakeme* pattern created by the casual use of brush, whereas “Korean craftsmen, not consciously seeking to create any particular effect, have succeeded.”

2. Art transcends borders. The appeal of folk art is universal. Daily-use stoneware from fourteenth century England, seventeenth century Korea, and nineteenth century Okinawa is presented in a variety of forms, colors, and styles, but different pieces share the common function of serving people’s daily needs, and a true beauty that is beyond the dualism of beautiful and ugly. There is no north and south or east and west in Buddhahood or in the world of *Mingei*. Yanagi’s contribution should also be noted for his acknowledgment of marginalized traditions: in the case of Japanese craft, he was a pioneer in introducing the crafts of marginalized Okinawa islands and Ainu (indigenous people of northern Japan) to become part of mainstream culture.

3. Unity in variety. Yanagi’s view of universality is not a monistic unity, but a unity in variety. He writes that “east and west should not be made monochromatic, but should remain polychromatic without falling into polychromatic feuds.” *Mingei* resists uniformity and celebrates variety. Each piece of handmade craft bears marks of tradition and personal touch. In the examples of Okinawa and Ainu crafts, being included in the mainstream does not mean being subsumed into the majority and losing their originality, otherwise the inclusiveness would turn into a colonization of local traditions. Similarly, when Yanagi says that there is no north and south or east and west in Buddhahood, he does not mean they should be uniform: “they are two and yet not two.”

Yanagi’s original theory of Buddhist aesthetics has met with some criticism. First, as he admits, there is no branch of learning called Buddhist aesthetics, and his own interpretation of Buddhist concepts may be contested. The idea of *Mingei* has been criticized for inadvertently advancing “cultural nationalism” or even “aesthetic colonialism” Second, Yanagi’s conception of “craftsman” may be artificial. He was born into a privileged family and never experienced the hard workdays of real craftspeople. Although he criticized commercialism, he idealized the condition of the working class and did not reflect on the reality of exploitation. Third, the *Mingei* movement has contributed to making the traditional craft a modern tourist attraction, and by exhibiting his collection at the museum, the objects have moved out of the reach of ordinary people.

Whereas these criticisms are well reasoned, we should also note that they are relevant to nationalism and economical imbalance – self versus other, rich versus poor, commercialism versus idealism—such dualism and opposition are inevitable in our process of logical thinking, and these are precisely the things that Yanagi tried to transcend by way of aesthetics, quietly appreciating the true beauty of folk art.

QUESTIONS

1

Think of something (an object, a place, a person, a piece of music, etc.) that represents true beauty for you. Do you think its beauty can be appreciated by people from other cultures?

2

Think of true beauty that is beyond the dualism of beautiful and ugly; can you illustrate an example of something that may not be beautiful in the conventional sense but is nonetheless beautiful?

3

Yanagi speaks of the true beauty inherent in the products of anonymous craftspeople: those who create a number of products with the same design. How are their products different from industrial products, and from a piece created by an acknowledged artist?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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A South-South Perspective

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Coordinated by
Enrique Dussel



INTRODUCTION

Latin American philosophy in the sense of “love of wisdom” (*philo-sophia*) is many centuries old, as the great city cultures of the Americas (in Mesoamerica from northern Mexico to the Incas in Peru) had “sages” who cultivated “wisdom” (*sophia*) that society considered as a profession different from all others. For instance, the Aztecs had *tlamatinime*, while the Incas had *amautas*.¹²⁷ Their astronomical and philosophical cosmology featured many “heavens” – as in Chinese thought and the work of Aristotle himself – and underworlds that were precisely defined with ontological, ethical and political meanings. The system of governance held that the State was based on astronomical divinities. This reached its peak with the Toltecs (and their classic period in Mexico from 300 to 700 in the city of Teotihuacan, with over 100,000 inhabitants), and was maintained by the Aztecs and Mayans across many kingdoms. Tlacaélel (1398–1480) and Nezahualcóyotl (1402–1472) were examples of political philosophers who were also exemplary leaders and mystics.

This first philosophical era, as with the Pre-Socratics in Greece, faced the violent conquest that ushered in Modernity for Europe and the beginning and formation of the World System in 1492. The main ethical and political topics of the modern world in terms of the humanity of native Americans – which was denied in acts that led to colonialism – were discussed for a century (100 years before Descartes). The second issue was the legitimacy of oppressing other peoples, kingdoms, cultures and civilizations. In 1550 in Valladolid, in front of the Emperor Carlos V, Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas strongly argued over the just nature of this colonial conquest, and this conclusion was philosophically accepted by all of Europe virtually until today. The Caribbean is the place where Europe has discovered a previously unsuspected otherness, which is an important condition for the emergence of philosophical thought.

For three centuries (from the sixteenth to the eighteenth), dozens of universities (including renowned ones such as Salamanca, Coimbra and Oxford) and university colleges taught modern scholastic philosophy that was not a mere imitation of the European model but that often discussed astronomical, physical, ethical or political problems resulting from a dialogue with native cultures.

The Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) heralded a profound renewal that was not a mere imitation of the European philosophical movement. This philosophy in the hands of the children of the Spaniards (*criollos*), mestizos, Indians and African Americans formed the political philosophy that would justify the war of Independence against Spain, Portugal and even France (which would last from 1804 in Haiti, and until the final liberation of Mexico or Brazil in 1821). Political philosophy was thus the theoretical weapon of patriots in anticolonial wars, and was mainly inspired by Spanish thinking such as the school of democratic Suarism, which held that political power lay with the people and was granted to the king through a secondary contract.

Following the emancipatory stage, the mainly political philosophy divided into two schools. The conservative school looked towards the past and reclaimed the colonial era, while affirming republican and national self-determination in the face of new powers (such as England, France and the United States). The liberal school was more influenced by French and North American philosophy, and its democratic ideals tended to reject the indigenous and Hispanic colonial past to look north, in an attempt

¹²⁷ On these topics, see Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Mendieta, Carmen Bohórquez, *El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y latino (1300–2000)*, Siglo XXI, Mexico, 2011, p. 1–111; Carlos Beorlegui, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano*, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, 2004, p. 885; Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, Otavio Bueno, *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, UK, Blackwell, 2010, p. 555. All three works have extensive and up-to-date bibliographies.



to imitate the technical civilizations of United States/Great Britain and French Revolutionary politics.

By the mid-nineteenth century, positivist thinking, influenced by the philosophy of Augusto Comte, emerged as a major force that attempted to justify the insertion of Latin American civilization within the ideology of the Enlightenment and the Industrial age. This philosophy had the merit of having driven a process of free public education that improved the schooling of the masses.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, philosophy returned to universities from which it had been absent since the early nineteenth century. A spiritualist and vitalist movement, inspired by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, and then from 1930 by Martin Heidegger and phenomenology, then established antipositivist university philosophy. Anarchist worker movements and the influence of European socialism found fertile ground in Latin America, and this gave rise to a Marxist tradition initiated by Juan Bautista Justo in Argentina and José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru.

Between the two world wars (1919–1945), a broad nationalist movement laid the foundations for existential and even existentialist philosophy (from Martin Heidegger to Jean-Paul Sartre) which supported the emergence of popular movements.

The post-war period saw attention turn to epistemological, linguistic and analytical thinking that would become particularly relevant to military dictatorships (1964–1984).

Philosophies linked to popular movements from the post-populist era (following the hegemonic populism of the 1940 crisis until the fall of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954) remained relevant 10 years later, inspired by Dependency Theory, and would return in the early 1980s.

From 1970, the school of Latin American philosophy history (which originated in the 1940s with Leopoldo Zea, Arturo Ardao and Francisco Romero) would grow to give rise to Latin American Liberation Philosophy, which tied in with the 1990s political philosophies linked to political movements such as the Cuban Revolution (since 1959), Salvador Allende's democratic socialism in Chile (1970), Nicaraguan Sandinismo (1979), Mexican Zapatismo (1994), Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution (1999) and lastly the presence of Evo Morales in Bolivia (indigenous president following 500 years of profound colonial and cultural domination). All of these movements are resulting in considerable philosophical output, not only in the political sphere but also in ethics, aesthetics and epistemology in general, as well as in economic (from renewed Marxism), anthropological, social and ecological philosophy.

In addition, there is also a creative philosophical movement arising from various gender positions, mainly feminist ones, that is critical of discrimination on the basis of race, social class, old age, marginal movements and native indigenous cultures.

This movement is producing a far-reaching Latin American philosophical renewal that is critical of Eurocentrism and that underlies a spirit of epistemological decolonization that is spreading to all social sciences within the continent's culture.



I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

This section provides some examples of the cosmologies of native Latin American peoples. The idea is to present the wisdom of the main historic thinkers, schools and communities. We will describe the main concepts of Náhuatl, Andean and Maya-Quiché philosophies. We thus place the beginning of Latin American philosophy in the fourteenth century (from 1300), with the Incan *amautas* and the Aztec *tlamatinime*. These native philosophies are the symbolic legacy of the Latin American region, and represent its deepest cultural roots.

1 I NÁHUATL PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

The Náhuatl-speaking peoples of central Mexico had a long history of development. This included several golden ages including the Teotihuacan (fourth to seventh century CE), Tolteca (eighth to twelfth century CE) and lastly the Aztec or Mexica period that lasted until the Spanish conquest. It should be pointed out that ancient cultural echoes survive among modern-day Amerindian peoples.

Throughout their cultural development, the Nahuas created large urban centres and used complex calendar calculations, books, codices, *amoxcalli* (libraries) and schools – all based around a well-documented social, political and economic organization.

Some accounts demonstrate their religious thinking, world view and statements that could be described as philosophical. These are attributed to the sages (*tlamatinime*), some of whom have well-known biographies including Nezahualcóyotl, Tecayahuatzin, Tlaltecatzin and many more. Access to these documents in the archives and libraries of Mexico, the United States and several European countries has made it possible to research and reveal what can be considered Náhuatl philosophy.

The Mexican philosopher, Miguel León Portilla writes in his book *Filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus Fuentes*:¹²⁸

“This metaphor-based culture and philosophy did not intend to explain away mystery completely, but rather made humans feel that beauty was perhaps the only reality. The thinking and tendency was to put wise head on human shoulders, in order to inspire them to capture songs and beauty. In their pursuit of beauty, the Náhuatls glimpsed that, even for one moment, beautifying that which breaks, tears and dies might place *truth* in their hearts and in the world.

It appears that this was the soul of Náhuatl philosophical thinking. This may be an essentially valid notion for a tormented world such as our own. ‘Flower and song’ is the path for humankind who, aware of their own limitations, will not be silenced on what can give meaning to their lives.

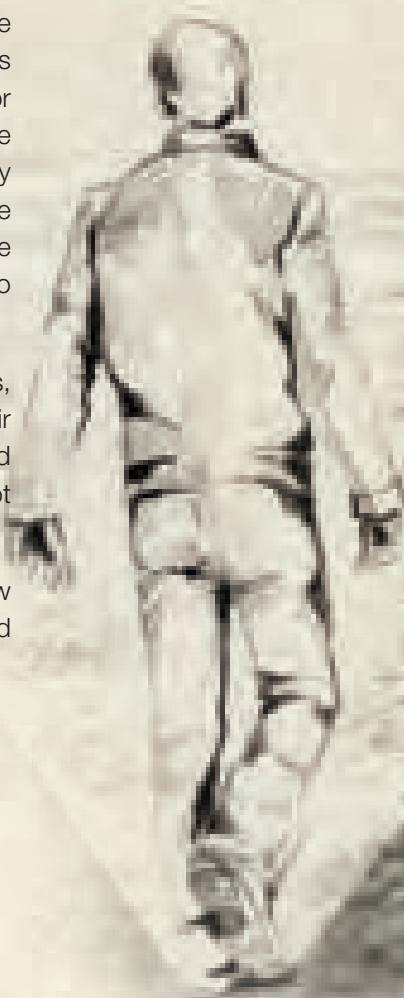
¹²⁸ Miguel León Portilla, *Filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes*, Mexico, UNAM, 2006, pp. 322–23.



It was on this basis that the *tlamatinime* saw their world and shaped the culture accordingly. Using early techniques, they used their minds to scale the heights of mathematical thinking in order to contemplate the ‘journeys of the stars through the paths in the sky’, as well as the summits of philosophical thinking that enabled them to see and understand their lives with flowers and songs. However, their very nature as enamoured captives of stars and beauty was the main reason for their downfall during the Conquest. It was as if the mysterious dialectic of a changing world had turned against them. The culture of metaphor and numbers was destroyed with weapons of steel and fire. It vanished like a dream: ‘their quetzal feathers were torn, and the jade was broken’. Only memory remained – the memory of a beautiful, divine and truthful world, where beauty had to escape to its place of origin, the world ‘that is beyond us’ where sages were cast out, codices burned and statues and temples reduced to piles of rubble.

Even amidst this disaster from the outside world, the humanity of the Nahuas, with their ‘wise faces and strong hearts’, remained great until the end. In their last appearance before Cortés and the first 12 friars, the *tlamatinime* expressed their reasons and, faced with the image of their culture destroyed, did not hesitate in declaring ‘if our gods are dead as you claim, then let us also die’.

The *tlamatinime* thus loved their own culture, lived in their own world and knew how to die therein. This is the final teaching from a people who discovered flowers and song as the path to thought.”





TEXT *CANTARES MEXICANOS*



This anonymous composition questioning what can give meaning to human actions on earth comes from *Cantares Mexicanos* [Mexican Songs]:

‘What were you seeking?
Where is your heart?
If you give your heart to each and every thing,
you lead it nowhere; you destroy your heart.
Can anything be found on earth?’

In a deeper exploration of how to find something truly valuable on earth, other songs from the same collection openly pose the question of the purpose of human actions:

‘Where are we going?
We came only to be born.
Our home is beyond:
In the home of the dead.
I suffer: Happiness and good fortune never come my way.
Have I come here to struggle in vain?
This is not the place to accomplish things.
Certainly nothing grows green here:
Misfortune opens its blossoms.’

Alongside the conviction that everything will have to die, there is the doubt about what might lie beyond:

‘Do flowers go to the region of the dead?
In the Beyond, are we dead or do we still live?
Where is the source of light, since that which gives life hides itself?’

Those asking the questions were not satisfied with the answers provided by beliefs in force at the time. They therefore have doubts and accept that there is a problem. They want clarity about the destination of life and the importance of toiling on earth. Humankind’s destination after death appears as uncertain, despite religious doctrine. Thinking of the various levels in the world, a Nahua sage wonders:

‘Where shall I go?
Oh, where shall I go?
The path of the god of duality.
Is your home in the place of the dead?
In the heavens?
Or only here on earth
is the abode of the dead?’

Such statements and questions are accompanied by other even more radical enquiries:

‘Does man possess any truth?
If not, our song is no longer true.
Is anything stable and lasting?
What reaches its aim?’



Cantares Mexicanos II, volume 1, edited by Miguel León Portilla,
National Autonomous University of Mexico, Fideicomiso Teixidor, 2011.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

Studying surviving Náhuatl documents reveals the main themes of the thinking developed by the *tlamatinime* (Nahua sages). First, there is their world view, which is part of a cyclical concept of cosmic ages that begin and end, appearing in an upward spiral of improved development. Second, there is their religious thinking on divinity, what is good and bad, freedom and the beyond.

One of the main manuscripts to include texts with this kind of questioning is entitled *Cantares Mexicanos*, which is a collection of many ancient traditional texts kept in the National Library of Mexico, as well as the many collections of the *Huehuetlahtolli Testimonios de la antigua palabra* (which are mainly moralistic and contain questions on the meaning of human existence). The themes of earthly destinies, divine worship and the mysteries of death are also presented in various forms in codices or books with paintings and glyphs.

Far from being an expression of archaic thought, these texts remain relevant to human beings throughout time. The study of accounts of such philosophies is therefore the subject of considerable interest among an increasingly wide circle of scholars. This makes it possible to access the thinking patterns of humans who lived in isolation for millennia. It helps us to discover and assess similarities and differences with those who, at the same time in other places, have attempted to provide an outlet for existential anxieties and concerns by seeking what a Náhuatl text calls “the light that appears to be hidden”.

QUESTIONS

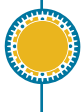


Which philosophical elements do you recognize in Aztec writings?



What do you think can the philosophies of the world's native peoples teach you today?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY



In a team, search online or in your library for more information on the philosophies of your region's native peoples and discuss their main messages on the meaning of life, politics and ethics.

1 COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

2 ANDEAN PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION



When the Spanish arrived, the *Tahuantinsuyo* extended northwards as far as the river Ancashmayo (present-day Colombia and Ecuador), southwards to the Maule river (Chile) and eastwards until Tucumán (Argentina). Given the existence of a social group that developed its own civilization, it is relevant to ask: Did these people think? Did they have an integrated concept of god, the world and humankind? How and where can we find out the answers?

The chronicle, which is an informative literary genre on the experiences of subjugated peoples, included the story of the *quipucamayocs* and enabled the collective soul of this conquered people to be recorded in Spanish.

The concepts of god (*Wiracocha*), world (*pacha*) and humankind (*runa*) are the themes of this summary of Andean or Incan thought. The information is from the sixteenth-century chroniclers, and each concept is addressed first through myth, then poetry and then lastly in reflective comments. This means that Incan thought was not exclusively mythical, but rather that it contained abstract principles of a rational nature.



TEXT : THE *TICCI WIRACOCHA* POEM

We will now examine the famous *Ticci Wiracocha* poem, of which the Quechua version was included in the chronicle of Joan Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui. The parts of the poem that refer to *Wiracocha* are as follows :

“

Ah *Wiracocha*, with power over all existence!
Over all emerging light
The maker
Creator of the world,
Creator of man,
Of the world above,
Of the world below,
Of the wide ocean,
All-powerful lord,
Of the universe
Modeller.
Power over all existence

Ah Uiracochanticçicapac
vilca ulcaapu
hinantima
Pachacamac
Runavallpac
hananpachap
hurinpachap
cochamantarayacpa
apoticcicapac
hinantima
lluttacticci
capac

”

As seen in the passage, the work is precisely summarized as a finished product delivered on time and fulfilling its objective purpose. In contrast, other sections reveal the indefinable, unplaceable and impossible nature of approaching and seeing *Wiracocha*, with the following questions :

“

Who are you?
Where are you?
Could I not see you?
What is your argument?
Speak now!

Pincanque
Maycanmicanque
mana
choricayquiman
ymactan ñinqui
rimayñi

”

The *Ticci Wiracocha* poem mentions the Incan world view in the following questions :

“

In the world above
Or in the world below
Or somewhere in the world
Does your powerful throne reside?

hananpichum
hurimpichum
quinraynimpichum
capacosnoyqui

”

This is then reiterated later :

“

Truly from above,
Truly from below,
Lord,
Of the universe
Modeller.

ananchiccha
hurinchiccha
apo,
hinantima
lluctacticci

”

Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti, *Relación de Antigüedades de este Reino del Perú*, [analytical table of contents and glossary] by Carlos Aranibar, Lima, Edición Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995, p. 429. Translation into English by UNESCO.

COMMENTARY

1. *Wiracocha* (or power and control over everything). *Wiracocha* – which is always present in mythology, the poem or the Christianized version – has a specific characteristic: it exists in time. In other words, it develops in time and is not finished, fixed or known, but rather becomes richer and more meaningful by acting in time. What is interesting and original in the mythical version is the double creation: first in darkness then in light, corresponding to water (the first) as a primordial element and fire (the second) as a creation of the stars.

In the famous *Ticci Wiracocha* poem, of which the Quechua version was included in the chronicle of Joan Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui, the work is precisely summarized as a finished product delivered on time and fulfilling its objective purpose: “Ah *Wiracocha*, with power over all existence! Over all emerging light, The maker, Creator of the world, Creator of man, Of the world above (*hananpachap*), Of the world below (*hurinpachap*), Of the wide ocean, All-powerful lord (*apoticcicapac*), Of the universe (*hinantima*), Modeller (*lluttacticci*). Power over all existence (*capac*).”

In contrast, other sections reveal the indefinable, unplaceable and impossible nature of approaching and seeing *Wiracocha*, with the questions: “Who are you? Where are you? Could I not see you? What is your argument? Speak now!”

The poem’s intrinsic ambiguity, which outlines the very concept of *Wiracocha* as an entity recognized through its power but that cannot be precisely or definitely defined, explains the variations among chroniclers attempting to research enough to enclose it in a precise and concrete definition in accordance with scholastic conceptual demands. In contrast, circumspect indigenous thinking does not limit *Wiracocha* to one definition. Seen as a defining concept, it seems to be bipolar in nature: with a known and well-defined face that encompasses all creation as current existence (past-present), and another unknown and unknowable side that hints at all its powers and possibilities (future). Past actions have potential to be enhanced, and this ability to rectify and refine

creation refers to the most important aspect of “power and control over all existence” – in what is essentially an ontological explanation.

2. *Pacha* (world). The mythical version adds details on the ordering of the world carried out by *Pacha Yachachi* or *Tecsi Viracocha* and two children *Tocapo Viracocha* – maker, in which all things are included – and *Ymai mama Viracocha*, with power and control over all things.

As well as wondering about the location of the powerful throne of *Wiracocha*, the myth passages present a cognitive system of animal and plant life, as well as their geographical habitat.

The Inca world view divides the universe into four lands: the land above (*Hanan Pacha*); the land below (*Hurin Pacha*); heavenly land (*Hinan Pacha*) and the invisible land (*Ucu Pacha*) of the bowels of the earth (*Ticci muyup chaupi ucum* – centre of the earth).

The *Hurin Pacha* has a centre or navel where one horizontal and one vertical line cross to form the four main areas of the earth. The division into four lands (*Tahuantinsuyo*) therefore means that the four areas of the world emanate from Cuzco.

The kind of knowledge that they trusted was experimental or empirical. All the signs suggest that *Tahuantinsuyo* had a level of knowledge that surpassed the possibilities of oral transmission. Indeed, the chronicles abound with references to wise Amerindians, or *amautas*, who told the Spanish their stories using *quipus* (cord with knotted strings of various colours) as memory aids. These were a system for accumulating and transmitting knowledge and experiences, but their complexity meant they were eventually replaced by writing. Guamán Poma de Ayala used *quipus* to establish that there were four generations: *Pacarimoc Runa*, people of the dawn, appearing and being born; *Variruna*, primitive people who began to work the land; *Purunruna*, nomadic country people; and *Aucaruna*, warrior people who began to populate the uplands and build defence fortresses on inaccessible cliffs and hills. He says that these periods lasted for almost 5,300 years and ended with the Inca conquest of the territories.

3. *Runa* (humankind). The most important ideas about humankind – *runa* – in Inca culture refer to the double creation: first in darkness that the divinity considered flawed and therefore eliminated. This led to the creation of a second type of man “in light”. The fact that the Supreme Being can alter creation will mark and represent the essential concept of human kind in terms of “being able to improve every deed”. This essential concept is expressed in the form of an upward path for humans to travel. In order to communicate with *Wiracocha*, humans must “be able to see”, “be able to know”, “know how to point out” and “know how to think”. Naturally, this refers to the fact that the greatest human achievement lies in thinking or reasoning. Behavioural rules, or the moral code, had specific connotations in terms of condemning drunkenness, murder, theft, laziness, adultery, forced or unnatural sexual relations and so on. This shows that strict legislation was responsible for controlling these human behaviours.

This definition of humankind, as well as the comments on *Wiracocha* and the view of the universe and the world adequately prove that the *Tahuantinsuyo* had a coherent thought structure based on experience, knowledge and reflection.

QUESTIONS

1

Did you find it difficult to understand the text on Andean Philosophy? Which were the most obscure aspects?

2

Do you think it is an original, genuine and authentic way of thinking that is worthy of further study?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

As a team, discuss what discipline would cover this text and whether its message is relevant for modern life.



I COSMOLOGY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

3 MAYA-QUICHÉ PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

Mayan thinking was expressed in the symbolic language of myths, and was religious, in the sense that supernatural beings were part of the explanations for the world and humankind. Cosmogonic myths contain the most important concepts relating to these matters. The most complete myths have reached us thanks to the fact that, during colonial times, they were rewritten in a Mayan language but using the Latin alphabet learned from Spanish friars. There are about 28 Mayan languages, that are spoken to this day across the vast Mayan territory (southern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and parts of Honduras and El Salvador). A mid-sixteenth century Mayan book is an extraordinary Quiché work considered the masterpiece of indigenous literature: *Popol Vuh. Ancient stories of the Quiché*. This work contains such a well-structured cosmogonic myth that it has been the basis for understanding other ideas on origins in books written in other Mayan languages and in hieroglyphic inscriptions. Below is an excerpt from the text that presents the Mayan idea of humankind:





TEXT *POPOL VUH*¹²⁹

“

Here then is the beginning of how man was made and what was sought out for the nourishment of the flesh of man. The Progenitors, the Creators and Formators, who are called Tepeu and Gucumatz thus declared: ‘The time has come for the dawn, for the work to be finished and for those who must sustain and nourish us to appear, the enlightened sons, the civilised vassals: let man appear, humanity, on the face of the earth’. Thus they spoke. From Paxil and Cayalá, as they are called, came the yellow corncobs and the white corncobs. ... And this was how they found food and that is what entered the flesh of created man, of formed man: it was their blood, from it the blood of man was made, and their flesh was made of yellow corn and white corn. ... And as they had the appearance of men, they were men; they talked, conversed, saw and heard, walked, grasped things; they were good and handsome men, and their figure was the figure of a man. ... They were endowed with intelligence; they saw and instantly they could see far, they succeeded in seeing, they succeeded in knowing all that there is in the world. ... Great was their wisdom; their sight reached to the forests, the rocks, the lakes, the seas, the mountains, and the valleys. In truth, they were admirable men. ... Then the Creator and the Maker asked them: ‘What do you think of your condition? Do you not see? Do you not hear? Are not your speech and manner of walking good? Look, then! Contemplate the world’. ... And immediately they [the four first men] began to see all that was in the world. Then they gave thanks to the Creator and the Maker: ‘We really give you thanks, two and three times! We have been created, we have been given a mouth and a face, we speak, we hear, we think, and walk; we feel perfectly, and we know what is far and what is near. We also see the large and the small in the sky and on earth. We give you thanks, then, for having created us, oh, Creator and Maker! for having given us being’ they said, giving thanks. ... But the Creator and the Maker did not hear this with pleasure. ‘It is not good what our creatures, our works say; they know all, the large and the small,’ they said. And so the Forefathers held counsel again. ‘What shall we do with them now? Let their sight reach only to that which is near; let them see only a little of the face of the earth! It is not good what they say. Perchance, are they not by nature simple creatures of our making? Must they also be gods? And if they do not reproduce and multiply when it will dawn, when the sun rises? And what if they do not multiply?’ So they spoke. ‘Let us check a little their desires, because it is not good what we see. Must they perchance be the equals of ourselves, their Makers, who can, see afar, who know all and see all?’ ... Thus they spoke, and immediately they changed the nature of their works, of their creatures. Then the Heart of Heaven blew mist into their eyes, which clouded their sight as when a mirror is breathed upon. Their eyes were covered and they could see only what was close; only that was clear to them. In this way the wisdom and all the knowledge of the four men were destroyed. In this way were created and formed our grandfathers, our fathers, by the Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth. Then their wives had being, and their women were made.”

”

Adrián Recinos, *Popol Vuh : Las antiguas historias del Quiché* [*Popol Vuh. Ancient stories of the Quiché*], Guatemala, Editorial Piedra Santa, 2007.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

¹²⁹ *Popol Vuh* literally means “Book of Mat” and has been translated in various ways such as “Book of the Community” or “Book of the People”.



COMMENTARY

The extract highlights the idea that human beings are defined by their intelligence, awareness of themselves, the world and the holy, and their ability to speak and listen: inter-human communication is at the heart of man. Being formed from corn, following several failed attempts by the gods to use other materials such as mud, these men did respond to the purpose of creation: to worship and feed the gods. This shows that, for the Mayans, it is not the spirit that gives life to matter, as in Judeo-Christian thinking, but rather matter that shapes the spirit. These primitive men “could see everything”, so sight symbolizes knowledge of all existence. However, as only gods should have absolute knowledge, that of men was then restricted. This clearly demonstrates the Quiché idea that humans “could see only what was close, only that was clear to them”, as they are creatures of the gods and depend on them. Human nature is superior to that of other world beings (as it enables them to recognize and worship the gods), but it is dependent and limited because, if man possessed absolute knowledge, then he would have no need: he would not procreate or worship the gods, but rather would be self-sufficient. Yet humans can, through their own actions, develop knowledge: wisdom is not given but acquired; humans form themselves (as stated later in the *Popol Vuh*). The wise person fulfills the human condition, with its ultimate purpose of maintaining and worshipping the gods. In addition, the initial state of perfection is presexual, as human beings are originally male (which is logical in a patriarchal people). The limitation bestowed by the gods generates sexual differentiation to compensate for dependency. This is why women appear only as a complement to man for multiplying. The underlying idea here is that sexual duality stems from relativity, absence and the need to survive. Sexual differentiation is explained as a need for thou, the other, to be and survive. Man needs to transcend himself through his children and lean on superior beings to relieve his insufficiency and achieve a full life. This means that if man were self-sufficient, there would be no gods. However, gods are also dependent: they need humans to survive as they are fed by them (mainly in the form of blood). In this sense, the myth reveals that, for the Mayans, the existence of the entire cosmos depends on human actions.

QUESTION



The book Popol Vuh deals with the origin of the world and the life of humans. Can you present a book of your region that describes how life and the world emerged?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY



Once you have found some books like the Popol Vuh in your region, try to compare them and see how they are similar and different.



II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

The discussion on the “authentic” nature of Latin American philosophy occurred mainly in the 20th century between two of the region’s most important philosophers: the Peruvian Augusto Salazar Bondy and the Mexican Leopoldo Zea. The latter was the founder, defender and promoter of the passion for Latin American studies, and created a broad and rigorous research community. The most important epistemological question in this dialogical context becomes an enquiry into the possibility of an authentic philosophy that can reflect the most profound aspirations and the most significant processes of Latin American reality. Is a truly original Latin American philosophy really possible? What are the conditions for a dependent region to produce its own “philosophical” discourse in a colonial world? What does it mean to philosophize from the periphery of the modern world? The main reflection on philosophical work in Latin America is one of the main epistemological concerns in terms of this region *creating knowledge* that can make a contribution to universal thinking.

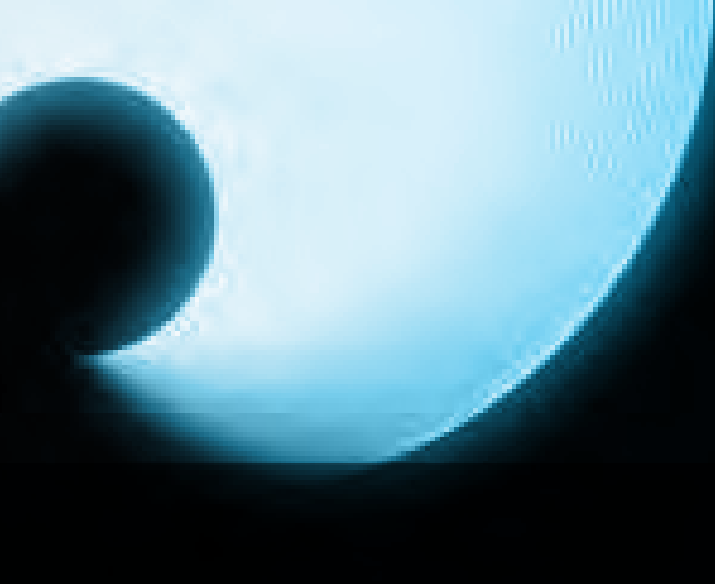
1 | THE CAUSES OF PHILOSOPHICAL INAUTHENTICITY, ACCORDING TO AUGUSTO SALAZAR BONDY

INTRODUCTION

Augusto Salazar Bondy (1925–1974) was a Peruvian philosopher born in Lima on 8 December 1925. He studied philosophy at the Faculty of Arts of the National University of San Marcos. In 1950, he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts with his thesis “Knowledge, nature and God in the thinking of Hipólito Unanue”. In 1953, he received his philosophy PhD with the thesis “Essay on the distinction between the unreal being and the real being”, which clearly showed his academic ability and interest in researching deeply philosophical matters. Between 1954 and 1955, he began his career as acting senior lecturer at San Marcos. In 1968, he published *Is there a philosophy in our America?*¹³⁰ and *Culture and domination*¹³¹ – texts that openly showed his philosophically critical position towards national and Latin American reality (which was an attitude that had been brewing since he was very young). The many topics researched by Salazar Bondy included domination and alienation, which enabled him to make a diagnosis of Latin America in the 1960s and early 1970s and take part in any cultural movement seeking political, economic and philosophical liberation for developing countries. He died in Lima on 6 February 1974.

¹³⁰ Augusto Salazar Bondy, *Existe una filosofía de nuestra América ?*, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1968.

¹³¹ Augusto Salazar Bondy, *La cultura de la dominación*, Lima, Moncloa, 1968.



TEXT *BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS*, AUGUSTO SALAZAR BONDY

“

We see that there is a group of Peruvians that can or feel they can only live fully outside their nation. This is the well-known phenomenon of the distance that physically and spiritually separates intellectuals, distinguished professionals, men with considerable economic resources from the country. This phenomenon has a deep anthropological significance: the alienation of one part of the national community. Unfortunately, however, this is not the only alienation. In many ways, the middle classes, groups making up the urban majority, the petits bourgeois and skilled workers also suffer from alienation due to mystification and inauthenticity. Indeed, they are the main consumers of myths and are taken in by illusions about the country and their own existence. They are dedicated defenders of what is ‘genuinely Peruvian’, the ‘tradition’ and ‘*criollismo*’, or all forms of a life devoid of substance. They do not know what they are and are unaware of what they could be. They suffer alienation from their true potential to be a creative, vigorous and free people. Then there are the urban proletariat, the peasant servants and all discriminated and disadvantaged groups that suffer the most radical and painful alienation: exclusion from basic standards of humanity and deprivation of the freedom to determine their own individuality and the awareness of their own value as people.

”

Augusto Salazar Bondy, *Entre Escila y Caribdis*.
Lima, National Institute of Culture of Peru, 1973.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

The theme of alienation comes under philosophical anthropology, which means that alienation cannot be discussed without first reflecting on human nature. We can define a human being as a free being located in a historical context containing social circumstances that influence his/her being. Despite this, humans have the scope to make decisions. This means they can also be defined as beings-in-progress that are being made until they die.

As humans are beings in the world, they may be conditioned by factors in the world that may involve reducing the loss of being. These modes of existence would make humans alienated, strangers to themselves and separate from their own being. Alienation is synonymous with the inability to decide freely. This can happen through violence, such as that imposed on Peru by the Spanish invasion, or by more subtle means such as economic, social and cultural control.

The characteristics of the alienated being include *inauthenticity*, which happens when a person's actions are not coherent with his/her own principles. There is a mismatch between the ideas and practice, between what they say and what they do. This is seen in the daily use of lies and false promises. This way of being is not only alienated but also masks reality. The country has a widespread separation between the reality and what we think or say. Another characteristic is *imitation*, which means the lack of original thought and therefore action, such as the separation between one's culture and the actions carried out daily. This is how it is possible to be part of a community with an ancient culture without valuing the culture and its developments (but rather praising and imitating other cultures). Another element is mystification, which is when people accept and officialize as valuable facts, people, ideas or institutions that are not related to them. They define as valuable something that does not possess that quality.

Augusto Salazar Bondy was optimistic about humans being able to become de-alienated and fully free, as their flexibility makes them able to act in ways that go beyond their situation of inauthenticity. Although this liberation can vanish in an instant, humans can recover it in a way that shows the dialectic of human history and the struggle between domination and liberation.

QUESTIONS

1

What are the characteristics of an alienated person according to Augusto Salazar Bondy?

2

How do you think can people overcome alienation? What are the characteristics of people who have overcome alienation?

3

Which television programmes form an alienated awareness among students? Which television programmes seek to form a critical awareness among students? Identify and discuss the programmes.

II EPISTEMOLOGY AND MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE

2 THE AUTHENTICITY OF LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY, ACCORDING TO LEOPOLDO ZEA

INTRODUCTION

Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004) was one of the most important Mexican philosophers of the twentieth century and our times. Reviewing and analysing his work is a rite of passage in philosophical reflection in Mexico and Latin America. Zea's philosophy represents and expresses a way of analysing human beings' socio-historical reality in time. Links are made here between philosophizing, philosophy and philosopher and society, and the context and the world at the time.

Leopoldo Zea, before *América como conciencia* [America as Consciousness],¹³² published an article in 1942: "En torno a una filosofía Americana" [On American Philosophy]. It is a proposal that reflects on the relationship between philosophizing, philosophy, history and society in Latin America and the world. Zea conceives of the relationship between philosophy, history and society as being where there is a way of philosophizing from our own philosophical perspective, that which arises from concrete circumstances and the motive for finding the right answer. Zea provides a concept of what he understands by philosophy and how this developed in Latin America. This proposal is in keeping with the work of philosophers in America and, in addition, in Mexico.

America as Consciousness is a pioneering foundation-text of philosophizing and philosophy in America. According to the author, in his early days of philosophizing, the philosophical community often wondered about the possibility of an authentic philosophy in America. These were questions raised about the consequences of this aim: to produce American philosophy. On the one hand, scholars and defenders of the universalist view of philosophy criticized this particularist stance by arguing that philosophy is universal, eternal, valid for all humans and therefore could not be enclosed or the expression of humanity as a whole reduced to that of one small group of people. Zea, on the other hand, aimed to use the historical perspective to seek and generate an American (Latin American) philosophy, a history of ideas and a philosophy of history.

Zea considered that Latin American thinkers usually tried to philosophize by following the flow of Western philosophical universalism. As a result, any attempt to produce "American philosophy" would fail by definition, as philosophy claims to be universal, bearing in mind that the American is the start and end point for something broader: universality. However, it is vital to bear in mind here that it depends on the method and starting point used.

Zea wonders if there is in fact an authentic philosophy in America. If there is, it is vital to clarify what is "authentic philosophy" and "authentic philosophizing". For Zea, philosophy is thought, observation, presentation and solutions in relation to problems dictated by *one's own* circumstance.

This is because the philosopher and thinker observes his/her historical and social reality in context, tries to explain and analyses the issues therein and seeks to find answers, solve them or put forward possible solutions. Zea felt that "the great philosophers, as shown through the history of philosophy, have simply set out to philosophize, nothing more". The Greeks, German, French and others never worried whether what they were doing was philosophy; they simply attempted to resolve the problems of their circumstances – in other words, they philosophized.

¹³² Leopoldo Zea, *América como conciencia*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1953, pp. 83–84.



TEXT *AMERICA AS CONSCIOUSNESS, LEOPOLDO ZEA*



“ America, as with all peoples, will become conscious of its reality through a dialectical movement confronting Europe’s opinions on being with those that America deduces from facing them from within. On the one side is what Europe wants it to be, and on the other is what it is in reality. ... Referring to becoming conscious gives an apparently abstract meaning to the word consciousness. However, this is not the case as this word refers to a series of concrete facts, a fully alive reality, such as human existence in its most authentic sense – human coexistence. To exist is to coexist, or live with others. Consciousness, which is innately human, makes coexistence possible ... Being or becoming conscious is ongoing for humans: a never-ending task that is never fully achieved. By becoming conscious, each one of us as human beings shall try to be complicit with. ... This is a bitter and painful struggle in which humans injure and are hurt. The injuries inflicted and received in this struggle give humans (in a way that could never be possible for other entities on their own) consciousness of their own being. This human consciousness is seen in history through a series of affirmations and negations that Hegel and his follower Karl Marx have called dialectic.

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Leopoldo Zea, *América como conciencia*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1953, pp. 83–84.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

According to Zea, rather than philosophizing or producing philosophy, Latin Americans have been concerned with following (imitating?) European thought and philosophy. Rather than philosophers, this therefore makes them presenters of issues and currents of European philosophy and thought. This is a problem, as they are not concerned with philosophizing or producing philosophy that is historically situated in their reality.

In this light, Zea feels that what Latin American philosophers do cannot be called “philosophy” but does not rule out the possibility that there are philosophers among them. He points out, however, that the criticism of the work of Latin American thinkers and philosophers in their attempt to imitate European philosophers is that they are reduced to producing a “poor copy” of European philosophy.

Philosophy, any philosophy, is not and cannot be a “calque” or “copy” of imported philosophies. It is not possible because any philosophy is no more or less than a response to concrete historical circumstances. The assimilation and “instrumentation” of Western philosophical tradition, in dialectical correspondence with our own and adapting it to our own circumstances, is what makes our philosophizing and philosophy possible. In other words, the genuine philosophizing by Latin American philosophers and thinkers is authentic in terms of its issues, topics and historicity.

It is thus the capacity to adapt and radically assimilate philosophical topics and issues that makes an original and authentic Latin American form of philosophy and philosophical thought.

Two relevant philosophical currents described in *América como conciencia* are: the problem of dependency, and the feeling of inferiority in the Americas. According to the author, these are precisely the issues that must be overcome to move towards an authentic Latin American philosophy. More specifically, this means recognizing what is authentic and original in this philosophy.

In other words, it is only when people become conscious of their dependent condition that their consciousness engages in the dialectical process of philosophical thinking that *assimilates*, *conserves* and *accommodates* to form our own way of philosophizing. This is the Hegelian dialectical movement of assimilation, which is negation and accommodation at the same time. This refers to being something fully, to avoid having to repeat it. Assimilating what one is to avoid having to be that again can only be achieved through historical understanding.

Zea's *American consciousness* is an understanding of our status as former colonies, and accommodating the dependent consciousness will enable Latin Americans to bring to universal culture a different perspective on reality itself, and an authentic and original philosophy with no claims of superiority or inferiority. This will simply be philosophizing and producing philosophy and nothing more.

Zea proposes practising philosophy in a way that analyses the problems of our circumstances and seeks a way of resolving them. This requires a practical and action-based philosophy. This in turn demands a philosophy that relates to its own historical and social reality, as a way of responding to the urgent situations in a practical way. The idea is to become conscious of historical circumstances in order to raise problems to the level of concepts and philosophical categories. In some ways, this is what "philosophy of praxis" has come to mean.

QUESTIONS

1

In order to be authentic, why must philosophy start from a profound reflection on one's own circumstances?

2

What has prevented Latin America from having its own philosophy?

3

What does Zea mean by American consciousness?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY


As a team, try to talk about what are the most urgent situations of your historical circumstances as a people, nation or regional community – in order to construct your own philosophical proposition. Produce a written essay (drafted by everyone) to answer the following questions: What would be the main topics that you would approach philosophically? How could they be communicated to the world and your community? And, what differences would there be with the traditional doctrines of European philosophy?



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

The impact of the European *invasion*, the so-called discovery and subsequent conquest of the Americas (the Amerindian continent) was one of terrifying destruction. This would have repercussions on the very consciousness of Latin-Germanic Europe, leading to the phenomenon known as Modernity. This refers to the beginning of modern philosophy, which is usually associated with Descartes. Here, however, another meaning is suggested. *Modern philosophy began at the end of the fifteenth century with the philosophical justification of the invasion of the Americas (beginning with the Caribbean)*. The idea is to shift the time (from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century) and *place* (from Amsterdam and northern Europe to tropical Latin America). The philosophy practised in the Americas since the 1492 invasion will therefore have always been a different modern yet *colonial* philosophy. This peripheral status, and the critical dialogue between indigenous sources and European ideas, would give rise to thoughts and experiences aiming to make a truly free and autonomous life for the entire region as part of a real and full emancipation project.

Latin American political thought has been characterized by original theoretical propositions capable of reflecting on its own historical background as part of a critical and open dialogue with dominant Western traditions. One of the defining issues of the region's philosophy is the construction of an independent and sovereign reality for the countries of the subcontinent, within which a union based on solidarity and fraternity among various peoples is the prerequisite for achieving the utopia of a free Latin America. The practical and political consciousness of this "liberating union", which arose from the most disadvantaged sectors and groups, is the very expression of this theoretical and critical perspective, and is the authentic starting point for a different future for Latin America.



Priest at his desk with an Indian companion, painting by Constantino Brumidi for the United States Federal Government, 1876, United States Capitol.



1 THE ORIGIN OF THE DISCOURSE OF THE NATURE OF INDIANS

INTRODUCTION

Bartolomé de las Casas was born in Seville in 1484 and died in 1566. He was a prolific writer and his work is a staunch defence of human equality and freedom as characterized by the American Indian.

The philosophical proposal of las Casas comes under political philosophy, as his texts seek to answer the questions: What are the limits of royal power? What do all subjects have in common? Which law should prevail? His replies are based on reflections that are anthropological (*Apologética Historia Sumaria*¹³³), historical (*Historia de Indias*¹³⁴) and legal (*De Regia Potestate*¹³⁵).

Las Casas was influenced by many philosophical schools, including the following figures: Aristotle, Cicero, Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Maior and Almain.

His thinking is most famous for the time he argued with Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550–1551 in Valladolid about the validity of the war against the American Indians.

Las Casas was a human rights pioneer, thanks to his insistence on dignity (*allodality*), freedom and equality for Indians in the context of political coexistence.



¹³³ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Obras completas*, volume 6, Madrid, Alianza, 2007.

¹³⁴ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Obras completas*, volume 5, Madrid, Alianza, 2007.

¹³⁵ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Obras completas*, volume 12, Madrid, Alianza, 1992.



TEXT 1 *APOLOGY, BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS*

“

First, I shall refute Sepúlveda’s opinion claiming that war against the Indians is justified because they are barbarous, uncivilized, unteachable and lacking civil government.

As a result of the points we have proved and made clear, the distinction the Philosopher [Aristotle] makes between the two above-mentioned kinds of barbarian is evident. For those he deals with in the first book of the Politics, and whom we have just discussed, are barbarians without qualification, in the proper and strict sense of the word, that is, dull witted and lacking in the reasoning powers necessary for self-government. They are without laws, without king, etc. For this reason they are by nature unfitted for rule.

However, Aristotle admits, and proves, that the barbarians he deals with in the third book of the same work have a lawful, just, and natural government. Even though they lack the art and use of writing, they are not



New world discovery by Christopher Columbus, Magasin Pittoresque, Paris, 1844.

wanting in the capacity and skill to rule and govern themselves, both publicly and privately. Thus they have kingdoms, communities, and cities that they govern wisely according to their laws and customs. From these statements we have no choice but to conclude that the rulers of such nations enjoy the use of reason and that their people and the inhabitants of their provinces do not lack peace and justice. Otherwise they could not be established or preserved as political entities for long. This is made clear by the Philosopher and Augustine. ...

From the fact that the Indians are barbarians it does not necessarily follow that they are incapable of government and have to be ruled by others, except to be taught about the Catholic faith and to be admitted to the holy sacraments.

”

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Obras Completas* [Complete Works], vol. 9, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2007. Translation into English by UNESCO.



TEXT 2 “ON ROYAL POWER”, BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

“

I.1. Since the beginnings of the human race, all men, lands and things were free and allodial, in other words they were free and not subjected to servitude thanks to natural and human law.

In terms of human beings, this is demonstrated because they are born free as a result of their rational nature. As everyone has the same nature, God does not make one the other’s servant, but rather grants the same free will to all. The reason for this, according to Saint Thomas, is that rational nature ‘per se’ is ordered by its own purpose, and man is not ordered to another because freedom is a right inherent in man by necessity and ‘per se’ (as a result of rational nature and therefore of natural law).

I.2. Slavery, on the other hand, is something accidental that happens to men by chance and luck. Now, all things accommodate their kind according to what they are ‘per se’ and not ‘per accidens’, because that which is ‘per accidens’ is beyond the essence of the species and we call ‘per accidens’ what is alien to the natural tendency.

We must pass judgement on things by attending to what is ‘per se’ and not ‘per accidens’, according to Thomas. Slavery therefore does not have a natural but rather an accidental (or imposed or declared) cause. This clearly shows that if slavery is not proved, we must rule in favour of freedom, according to liberty and as a result.

”

Bartolomé de Las Casas, “De Regia Potestate” in *Obras Completas* [Complete Works], vol. 12, edited by Paulino Castañedo Delgado, Madrid : Alianza Editorial, 1992. Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

The text *Apología* brings together the arguments used by Las Casas against Ginés de Sepúlveda in the Valladolid debate. The Sevillian wished to discredit the theory of the just war against American Indians. Sepúlveda – who never went to the Americas – claimed that the Crown’s presence in the New World was necessary because the Indians were barbarians: uncivilized people who could not govern themselves. Sepúlveda understood barbarism in its strict sense of basic men incapable of political life and without laws.

Las Casas was opposed to this and argued that barbarism in the true sense is very rare. He said the Indians were barbaric by accident, in a broad sense of deprivation in terms of language, culture and faith. Given that these deprivations were accidental, they do not affect rational nature.

He therefore acknowledges that Indians are capable of self-government, laws and virtues. Their kingdoms were legitimate as those based on laws were conducive to peace. Once again, nature seems to be the ultimate argument, the only rate of exchange for intercultural movement.

The presence of the Crown is then only justified for Evangelism, but not for political or economic dominance.

De Regia Potestate features the author’s mature thinking as the arguments are not limited to the case of the Indians, but rather have universal validity. The text demonstrates the natural freedom of men who are not owned by anyone thanks to their dignity and because they are allodial, which means they have no price and cannot be bought or sold. In this sense, Las Casas declares that all rational beings (or all men) are free by nature and under natural law. The author believes that rationality prevents one man from being subordinate to another.

Freedom is natural to men as reason orders the self and not others. This relies on the rational nature that places us above all other animals in the world.

Slavery is therefore understood as an accidental historical circumstance: not one directly related to man’s rational nature but to historical eventualities such as debts and war. We must therefore presume the essential freedom of all men if there are no circumstances to explain the slavery of a subject. The author therefore prioritizes equality of men above historical vicissitudes.

Las Casas suggests that we act in favour of and in accordance with freedom. This would be the principle of political organization at the basis of his proposal.

QUESTIONS

1

What was Ginés de Sepúlveda defendin?

2

What arguments did Bartolomé de las Casas raise against the theories of Sepúlveda?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY



With your course mates, try to represent the roles of Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in a scene. At the end of the performance, think about what was involved in the historical dynamic you represented. Discuss the following with other classmates: Did Europeans “discover” America ?

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

2 | FIRST DECOLONIAL HERMENEUTICS

INTRODUCTION

The legacy of Guamán Poma de Ayala was the first decolonial political treatise in the history of the modern/colonial world, or the global order heralded by the European invasion (by the Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and English) of the continent they called America.

Guamán Poma de Ayala was born in around 1540, which was about eight years after Francisco Pizarro entered the *Tawantinsuyu* territories (the Inca world divided into four *suyus* – the family, economic and educational unit similar to the Greek *oikos*). His birth was also eight years before *Tawantinsuyu* came under Spanish control as the Viceroyalty of Peru. The Spanish monarchical State and the Roman Apostolical Church created their own respective civil and religious government institutions. They thus began in Peru what had been carried out in Mexico-Tenochtitlan and the Yucatán Peninsula: a new style of colonialism related to the Roman colonies that came before them in what then became known as “Europe”.

Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno [New Chronicle and Good Government] has two parts: the new chronicle is necessary for establishing a good government. This is what Guamán Poma de Ayala proposed to Phillip III. It is a chronicle and visual political treatise accompanied by descriptions. The chosen images are essential for understanding the vision of space based on the *Tawantinsuyu* experience rather than the cartography familiar in Europe at that time. The chronicle opens with *El Pontifical Mundo* [Papal World] showing a world divided in two, with the Peruvian Indies above and Castille below. In the same vein, Guamán Poma de Ayala describes the cities of Peru. This collection of images is preceded by the *Mapamundi*, which is a map that seems to be a European map but that is actually based on *Tawantinsuyu*, with the Incan and Spanish coats of arms in the centre.

Three images throughout the text describe the transformation of the social role. The first one is that of the astrologer, *amauta* or sage walking along with a *quipu* (writing and accounting system of Andean civilizations).

Another more pragmatic social role before the Hispanic invasion was the *Quipucamayoc* – a type of accountant and notary. As part of the colonization process, *Quipucamayoc* became the *Quilcaycamayoc*, or “town Clerk”. Writing using the alphabet transformed the social role, and quipus and the alphabet existed side by side.

Alongside the transformation of *Quipucamayoc* into *Quilcaycamayoc*, there was also the change from *Amauta* to author. Guamán Poma de Ayala described the Andean sage before the conquest, often translated as “philosopher”. However, “philosopher” is a social role that involves writing, whereas the *Amauta* organizes his thinking using *quipus*. Just as the *Quipucamayoc* became *Quilcaycamayoc*, so the *Amauta* became author. Towards the end of his work, Guamán Poma de Ayala describes himself as an author, which is going in the opposite direction to the *Amauta*.



TEXT 1 *FIRST NEW CHRONICLE AND GOOD GOVERNMENT, GUAMÁN POMA DE AYALA*

“

This chronicle is very useful and beneficial; it will improve the life of Christians and pagans, help the Indians confess, improve their lives, correct their errors, idolatries and help the priests know how to take the confessions of the Indians. It will help the encomenderos or grantees of Indians, district officials, priests, curates of Indian parishes, miner, major caciques, lesser Indian chiefs, common Indians, Spaniards and common people.

It is useful for the judicial process of residencies or judicial process and the general inspections of the tributary Indians and the general inspection of the Holy Mother Church, to learn new things, curb the souls and consciences of Christians. God warns us in the Divine Scriptures through the words of the Holy Prophet Jeremiah that we should do penitence and change to the Christian life; the prophet King David tells us in the psalm, 'Domine Deus salutis meae' [Lord God of my salvation, Psalms 87:88] where he puts fear in us [about] abandonment by God, severe punishments that he will send us every day. The precursor Saint John the Baptist brought the warnings, whipping and punishments of God so that we would be curbed and reformed in this world.

”

Guamán Poma de Ayala, *Primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*,
Mexico, Siglo XXI Editores, 1980.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

Guamán Poma de Ayala himself moved from oral narrative and quipus to the basic elements of book composition introduced by the Castilians and their language. Guamán Poma de Ayala probably learned through imitation, in other words by reading books brought by the Spanish and following the book format. Indeed, this is indicated in the foreword. He also took from Christians the emphasis on moral behaviour, and this is precisely what Guamán Poma highlights in the first paragraph. By doing so, he appropriates Christian moral principles to demonstrate the immorality of Christians and Castilians themselves. He proposes some moral principles for all inhabitants of the Peruvian Indies, and towards the end of the Chronicle uses this as the basis to propose a “good government” for political organization based on these morals.

The second paragraph shows the strategy to appropriate Christian principles to propose a non-Christian vision of history and social organization. This is an early exercise in “border epistemology”, which does not arise from scholastic speculation but rather the simple necessity for justice and survival. “Border epistemology” involves thinking from the Andean (Quechua-Aymara) experience that came up against and was disconnected from the supposed imperial superiority of Castilian Christians.



TEXT 2 “THE AUTHOR WALKS”, GUAMÁN POMA DE AYALA

“

Author Don Phelipe Guaman Poma de Ayala had finished walking through the world at the age of eighty years. And he agreed to return to his village where he had houses, crops and fields, and where he was the main *señor*, head and administrator, protector, lieutenant general and magistrate of the said province of the Andamarcas, Soras and Lucanas Indians through his Majesty and Prince of this kingdom.

He went to the village of San Cristóbal de Suntunto and Santiago de Chipao where there was an Indian in charge of 10 Indians and the head *curaca*. ... And he found there all Indians absent as they had so much work. Besides this, he found in his house and land Pedro Colla Quispe, Esteban Ata Pillo, and in his crops Chinchay Cocha and other Indians on the orders of don Diego Suyca, tributary Indian.

... The author and the others and the Indians who were tired of so much work and bad luck in their village and province began to weep. Saddened by the author’s arrival at don Diego *Suyca* and don Cristóbal de León and the other main tributary Indians and this magistrate, notary and lieutenants and Spaniards who steal from the Indians. Also to all the priests of those doctrines that strip the poor.

The author was very weary and poor, without a grain of corn or any other thing, having walked so many years throughout the world serving God, his Majesty and his Holiness and Viceroy, great lords, dukes and counts, marquises and the royal council of his Majesty of Castille and from this kingdom to serve the royal Crown, enjoyment, increase and multiplication of his Majesty’s poor Indians.

”

Guamán Poma de Ayala, “Camina el autor”, *Primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, Mexico, Siglo XXI Editores, 1980. Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

One genre in the colonial period of the West Indies (Castilian dominions in the New World) was the merit and service record. These were mainly used by Castilians to describe their service to the king and their merits when hoping that the king would reward or compensate them for it.

Guamán Poma was playing this card. In his twilight years, he told us that he decided to return to his territory where he had a house and crops, and he was prince. It is truly as prince of his dominions and not as an Indian that Guamán Poma de Ayala addresses the king. Prince or not, the political strategy is worthy of attention, as throughout the work Guamán Poma turns the Castilian vision of the “Indians” on its head. He does this not only by declaring his lineage but also revealing Castilian ignorance of Andean civilization, its long history and the dignity of *Tawantinsuyu* people.

Lastly, the text that goes with the section “Camina el autor” provides biographical elements, denouncing Castilian exploitation, as well as Indians themselves serving Castilians for their own benefit by exploiting their Indian brothers. In the final paragraph, he emphasizes his poverty and the years of his life he chose to dedicate to serving his majesty.

QUESTIONS



What is meant by the modern/colonial world? What does “modernity” mean and what does “colonialism” mean? What is the relationship between the two terms?



How do you explain the meaning of Guamán Poma de Ayala’s Papal World and Mapamundi in the context of the modern/colonial concept of the world?



How do you explain the meaning of the transformation from Quipucamayoc into Quilcaycamayoc in the context of the modern/colonial concept of the world?



How do you explain the meaning of the transformation from Amauta to Author in the context of the modern/colonial concept of the world?



What does it mean for you that Guamán Poma’s work is considered, from a decolonial knowledge perspective, as the first decolonial political treatise of the modern/colonial world?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY



In groups, make a mural about what life may have been like in a colonial, conquered and exploited world. Do you think that such exploitation still exists today? Give examples and arguments.

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

3 GUARANÍ REDUCTIONS IN PARAGUAY (1610–1768)

INTRODUCTION

In the region of the Paraná and Paraguay rivers, known as Río de la Plata and Paraguay, sixteenth-century explorers did not find any gold or silver. Their attention then turned to the indigenous workforce for their private use. In order to completely distance themselves from this system of concealed captivity, the Jesuits established another relationship with the Guaranís. They practised the system of mission by “reduction”. Although the word now evokes concentration camps, these Reductions were Indian villages formed from people who were living spread out and vulnerable to becoming the slaves of conquistadors and Spanish/Portuguese settlers who were congregated or “reduced” into large populations of political and human life. The system was certainly colonial, but it was based on a philosophy of equality and equity, respect for the indigenous language (which was maintained and strengthened), and the Guaranís’ own economic system (based on reciprocity and gifts) rather than a market system. The system of *yopói* (open hands for each other) thus continued. The system continued throughout the period (1610–1768), and the reason given by another Jesuit, Josep Manuel Peramàs, in 1793, was that the economy proposed by Plato was comparable with the economy of the Reductions.



Door of the church of the Jesuit-Guarani mission of San Ignacio Mini, in Misiones, northeastern Argentina, by Pablo D. Flores^a.

^a Licence Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic : <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/legalcode>.



TEXT *PLATÓN AND THE GUARANÍES*, JOSEP MANUEL PERAMÀS

“

Among the Guarani, there were some things that were common, some not. To each was given a certain extent of land, quite large indeed, in which the heads of households planted for himself and for his people Indian wheat [maize] (this was for them their staple crop, as they do not appreciate our wheat) and several other species of vegetables of various kinds, as well as edible roots which to some they call *mandi'o* [cassava] and to other *manduvi* [peanuts]. Sweet potatoes are also in the land, that is, tubers of hearty pulp and pleasant taste, which they call *jety*. They also grew cotton and indigenous fruits that everyone wanted. All this was owned by the settlers and called *avamba'é*, i.e. every Indian private thing. The common oxen were lent in turn to the heads of families to plow their own fields. The private land was not always the same, because when the first, already exhausted, had lost its force, they chose another which was assigned to each chieftain and his people, the corresponding part.

In addition to private farms, there were at least two other common fields: one where they cultivated grains and legumes, other cotton: the product of these fields, which was stored in a barn, was a public fund for food and clothing of the pupils and sick, for the children and the widows for whose attention they had a special house, bigger than the others. Each day the sick received cooked meat with mazamorra and wheat bread from the house of the parish priest.

On certain days of the year, the people worked for the community in the respective common lands, since everyone, even the mayor and the authorities, according to the Ancient Roman custom, were dedicated to things of the field, which certainly would have approved too Thomas More that illustrious man, who wanted all who got together in that their republic or Utopia to be farmers.

In this way all families were almost identical and had the same property, unless some had cultivated his field with more effort drawing more benefits from it. Certainly this introduced a small inequality, but then it served as a stimulus, in this way the most abundant neighbor's field stimulates to another neighbor to not surrender to leisure and laziness. Moreover, among the Guarani there were no beggars, for being unable to work, he was fed by the community, but if he could work, he was forced to work. Moreover, other Indians, specially designated, took care of cattle, very abundant in each of the villages; others took care of the horses for public use; others pastured sheep and others engaged in other tasks.

Being separated in barns the mentioned products, what remained of public goods were destined to public charges.

”

Josep Manuel Peramàs, *Platón y los guaraníes.*,
Asunción, CEPAG, 2004, p. 57–62.
Transation into English by © Ignacio Telesca



COMMENTARY

The community of shared goods and life in these Paraguayan villages was not inspired by Plato's *Republic* or in Thomas Moore's *Utopia*. They were more the continuation of Guaraní society in a well-managed colonial context, which benefited from a series of European technologies such as iron tools and livestock. In 1639, the Jesuit Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, founder of many villages or Reductions in the mid-seventeenth century stated that "They compliantly help each other. They do not buy or sell, because they help each other freely and without interest. They are generous to visitors and there is no theft. They live in peace and without dispute".

The Reductions did not aim to accumulate goods, although successful production of yerba mate, livestock, cotton textiles and, to a lesser extent, tobacco enabled the Guaranís in the Reductions to have a high standard of living and identify with this new lifestyle that afforded them freedom and some autonomy. It is no surprise that this situation gave rise to jealousy and slander.

No money circulated in the villages, and there were no shops. The considerable surpluses were sold externally, with the profits returning in the form of luxury goods to raise the shared standard of living. They bought silver objects for ceremonial services in the church, sheet music and instruments as the Guaranís were enthusiastic musicians, tools and equipment for agriculture and other items to facilitate the production of art, sculptures and paintings, and the construction of houses and churches. The remains of these villages have been declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

There was a philosophy of life that was a cross between the social tradition of the Guaranís and the Christian religion brought by the Jesuits – with shared ideals of equality, justice and freedom. Rather than the implementation of philosophies from elsewhere, this was more like an emergence of good living (which was even possible in a settlement). This experience is what Voltaire referred to as the triumph of humanity.

QUESTIONS

1

These Guaraní villages in Paraguay were considered a utopia. In what sense were they a utopia? Were they the exception in the colonial world in which they found themselves?

2

*What were the sources of inspiration and conditions for implementing this economy in colonial times? Was it the economic system of the Guaranís themselves prior to colonial contact? Was it the community ideal of the first Christians as in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. 2, 44–46? Was it some philosophical theory such as Plato's *Republic* or Thomas Moore's *Utopia*?*

3

In your region or country, do you know an indigenous people or peasant society governed by this type of economy – at least in the memory of the elders? In the modern world, is it possible to have reciprocity based on gifts and donations for the exchange of goods?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

If possible, visit a community where a reciprocity economy is practised and contact some community members who remember this practice that may even guide their future.

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

4 INDIGENOUS CULTURAL VALUE, ACCORDING TO FRANCISCO XAVIER CLAVIGERO

INTRODUCTION

Francisco Xavier Clavigero is a key figure for understanding the Enlightenment in Latin America. He was born in Veracruz, “New Spain”, in 1731, and became a member of the Jesuits in 1749, where he learned humanities and worked as a teacher giving classes to young indigenous people using his knowledge of the Náhuatl language (*Mexica peoples*). He was a victim of the Jesuit expulsion from the Spanish Crown’s territories in 1767, after which time he lived in exile in Bologna. There he discovered the theories of the enlightenment Europeans, particularly from those who were then considered renowned researchers: Cornelius de Pauw, George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon and William Robertson. Their works described the supposed barbarism of all America’s indigenous cultures, stating that the American climate generated a kind of permanent immaturity or degeneracy among all its inhabitants (which resulted in their having a superficial culture). Clavigero reacted by writing his far-reaching *Historia Antigua de México* [Ancient History of Mexico],¹³⁶ which he followed up with *Disertaciones* [Dissertations], where he demonstrated the complex civilizations of Mexico’s native peoples, their history and languages. This highlighted the absurdity of the statements made by the enlightened Europeans. He died in Bologna in 1787.



Antique map of the world, circa 1711

¹³⁶ Francisco Xavier Clavigero, *Historia Antigua de México*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1991.



TEXT *ANCIENT HISTORY OF MEXICO, FRANCISCO XAVIER CLAVIGERO*

“

‘What I shall say is based on a serious and prolific study of its history, and close contact with Mexicans over many years. In addition, I recognize nothing in myself that can sway me in favour of or against them. My being a compatriot does not incline me in their favour, and nor does the love of my nation or zealous honour of my nationals (Spaniards) encourage me to condemn them. I shall thus sincerely say the good and bad I have known in them. Their souls are fundamentally like those of other men, and are endowed with the same faculties. Europeans never honoured their reason less than when they doubted the rationality of the Americans. The order that the Spanish saw in Mexico, which was much greater than that found by Phoenicians and Carthaginians in our Spain ... should have been enough to quash any such doubt in human understanding, were it not for certain interests harmful to humanity.’ (pp. 45–46)

‘The Greeks concerned themselves more with enlightening the mind, and the Mexicans with rectifying the heart ... they taught their children religion, modesty and sobriety, as well as the arts.’ (p. 555)

‘All of these classes (born in America) have been slandered and detested by Pauw, who assumes the climate of the New World to be so harmful that it degenerates not only the *criollos* and the Americans born here, but also Europeans who live in these countries ... We will only talk about those who write against Americans (Indians) as these are the most insulted and defenceless.’ (p. 503)

‘The lagoons and swamps of the flood (in Noah’s time) are the source, according to Pauw, of the excessive air humidity, and the humidity causes the environment to be infected ... the infertility of women, the abundant milk in men’s chests, the stupidity of the Americans and another thousand extraordinary phenomena that he, from his office in Berlin, has observed better than those of us who have spent so many years in America. ... These and other similar absurdities are the effect of blind and excessive patriotism, which has made them imagine that their country is somehow superior to all others in the world.’ (p. 455)

‘The Old Continent ... should be, according to the legislation of Pauw, the model for the entire world.’ (p. 508)

‘I, on the other hand, had close contact with the Americans. I spent some years living in a seminary for their instruction. ... My students included some Indians. ... After such great experience and prolific study, through which I believe I can decide with less danger of making a mistake, I protest to Pauw and all of Europe, that the souls of Mexicans are in no way inferior to those of Europeans. They are capable of all sciences, even the most abstract ones, and if their education were seriously dealt with ... Americans would include philosophers, mathematicians and theologians that could compete with the most famous ones of Europe. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to progress in science when life is wretched, subservient and full of continuous strife.’ (p. 518)

‘Our world – the American will respond – that you call new because it was unknown to you three centuries ago, is as old as your world, and our animals are the contemporaries of yours. They are under no obligation to be like your animals, and it is not our fault if our animal species were unknown by your naturalists or hidden by the scarcity of their lights. Therefore, either your ostriches are irregular because they do not look like ours, or at the very least, ours should not be called irregular because they do not look like yours. ... This reason can also be used to eliminate similar discourses originating in the imperfection of ideas or prevention in favour of the Old Continent.’ (p. 484)

”

Francisco Xavier Clavigero, *Historia Antigua de México*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1991.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

The originality of the work of Clavigero lies in the critical nature that underpins it. He is critical of the Enlightenment, Eurocentrism, the colonial situation suffered by indigenous Americans, and he is therefore critical of prevailing modernity. This criticism is made possible by the fact that it comes from a tradition of alternative thinking: American humanism that was developed from the sixteenth century as a counterweight to the diatribes against America on the part of European humanism. In his works, Clavigero claims his research is objective, as it is empirically based on his own experience with Mexican Indians, fluency in their language and knowledge of their history. European scholars working on the American theme did not have the same advantages. In other words, he uses the epistemic principles espoused by the Enlightenment, but to reach radically different conclusions. He states the cause of the discrepancy clearly: the Enlightenment Europeans have “excessive patriotism”, which prompts them to pose as a model for the world. Their arguments are not scientific, but rather the outcome of an ideology of domination. This conclusion was possible because Clavigero was able to place his research in the reality of the American Indian, discovering it as an otherness that could reveal an unknown truth to hegemonic science. This shows the need to formulate a kind of *epistemic decolonization* and to propose new knowledge as-yet ignored by the supposed course of Reason. It also dismantles the anthropological assumption of superior human beings in the European world, by stating that the situation suffered by the American Indians is at the basis of the social (or basically educational) differences in the colonial situation to which they are subjected (and which is implicitly questioned). Similarly, American Indian history is equated with the classical European world, which was a break with the historical philosophy that only recognized as valid that which was based on the Greco-Roman past. The critique thus developed becomes a sort of counter-Enlightenment, or a counter-enlightened Enlightenment that seeks to uphold principles of scientific certainty, the claim to universality and values such as equality but presented from the American *locus enuntiationis* (locus of enunciation). Unlike the European locus, it does not seek to operate as the centre. Clavigero therefore promotes a critique of European reason in which he denounces the Eurocentric prejudice of the Enlightenment (which then becomes the European Enlightenment), and calls for a new universal vision in which voices excluded by such a hegemonic discourse can also be expressed. This shows him to be one of the pioneers of Latin American decolonial thinking.

QUESTIONS



1 *Why do you think Enlightenment Europeans believed that America was unable to generate a complex culture? State their main ideas and give your opinion on them.*



2 *Which arguments did Clavigero use to criticize Enlightenment Europeans? List at least four.*

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY



Ask several members of the community where you live about the characteristics of native American cultures, as well as their contributions to universal culture. Analyse if what they think is similar to what the Enlightenment European thought or to what Clavigero maintained.



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

5 INDEPENDENCE THOUGHT, ACCORDING TO JUAN PABLO VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN

INTRODUCTION

Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán was born on 27 June 1748 in Pampacolca, Arequipa, Peru, and died on 10 February 1798 in London. His main works include *the Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos* [Letter to the American Spaniards], which is considered a forerunner to Latin American liberation ideas that crystallizes the feeling of oppression from that time.

In 1767, Carlos III decreed the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain and the regions conquered by the Empire in the recently discovered Americas. The Spanish regime was thus affirming its absolutist purposes and seeking greater control over its dominions. However, in the New World ideas were already forming that would give rise to the independence of nations in America. As stated earlier, one of the forerunners of the idea of freedom and independence was the Jesuit Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, who during the years of the Jesuit expulsion was banished from the Viceroyalty of Peru. He was undoubtedly a thinker concerned with Latin American emancipation who found his *raison d'être* in the American peoples' fight for independence from the Spanish empire. His thinking reflects the crisis in the American world that no longer finds a rational sense of being in the restrictions imposed by the Spanish conquerors, which suggests a new path in which the independence and freedom of new peoples will signal a fairer world willing to acknowledge its existence. In the author's most well-known work, *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos*, he uses words of ingratitude, injustice, servitude and desolation to summarize the recent past of American peoples. He understands that the ruling and conquering Spain has enjoyed the goods and natural riches produced by the Americans without recognizing the effort and suffering that this work has involved for the inhabitants.



TEXT *LETTER TO THE SPANISH AMERICANS,* JUAN PABLO VISCARDO Y GUZMÁN

“

... What would Spain and her government say, if we should seriously insist upon the execution of this fine system; and why insult us so cruelly in speaking of union and equality? Yes, equality and union, like that of the animals in the fable, in which Spain reserves to herself the part of the lion. Is it only after three centuries, that the possessions of the New World, our country, is our due, and that we ought to hear of the hope of becoming equal to the Spaniards of Europe? And why, and by what title, should we be deprived of this equality? Alas! It is by our blind, our base submission to all the outrages of the government that we have deserved, that it has conceived of us an idea so contemptuous and insulting. Dear brothers and countrymen! if amongst us there be a person who does not know and feel his wrongs more sensibly than I should know how to express them, the ardour which manifests itself in your soul, the great examples of your ancestors and your eager courage, prescribe to you the resolution that alone suits with the honour which you have inherited, which you cherish, and which you value beyond every thing. This resolution, the government of Spain has itself pointed out to us, in constantly considering you as a people distinct from the European Spaniards, and this distinction imposes on you the most ignominious slavery. Let us agree on our part to be a different people; let us renounce the ridiculous system of union and equality with our masters and our tyrants; let us renounce a government, whose excessive distance prevents us from procuring, even in part, the advantages which every man ought to expect from the society to which he is attached; this government, which in place of performing its indispensable duty, in protecting the liberty and safety of our persons and properties, has shown the greatest eagerness to destroy them; and which, in place of endeavouring to make us happy, continues to overwhelm us with all kinds of calamity. Since the rights and duties of government and of the subjects are reciprocal, Spain has been first in transgressing all her duties towards us; she also has first broken those feeble bonds which would have been able to attach and retain us ...

”

Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán, *Carta dirigida a los españoles americanos*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004, pp. 89–90.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

This brief fragment of Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán's thought shows the call to emancipation for American peoples, which makes him a forerunner of American peoples' struggles for self-determination that would come in the nineteenth century.

His writings show that, from the beginning, Spain did not support those who ventured to the newly discovered lands, but rather the Spanish Empire demanded a special tax from then onwards. Spain imposed such strict rules that they hampered the development of the American peoples, such that the latter sold their raw materials at derisory prices and bought products manufactured in Europe at extraordinarily inflated prices. The Iberian Peninsula's monopoly over production prevented the inhabitants of the Americas from developing their own production to benefit their own interests. This perpetuated economic and political dependency that stood in the way of development and the proper management of public affairs.

According to the author, it is therefore not unjust to rebel against the conditions in which Spain treats Americans as second-class citizens, or foreigners who are not part of the Spanish Empire. It should in no way be seen as a betrayal to protest against the Spanish Crown's actions that, far from protecting its subjects, binds them in a state of slavery and servitude that contradicts human nature itself.

This author openly states his position against State absolutism as a form of political and social decadence that goes against the most basic human interests. According to Viscardo y Guzmán, all peoples wish to remain free and protect their own survival interests. Spain's actions go against human reason and well-being, as they foster ignorance and appropriate goods through force. It is thus not unjust to fight for the freedom and independence of a people who have suffered abuse at the hands of their supposed protector (who is more of a tyrant).

He therefore makes a call to action for Americans to defend their freedom and independence, as failure to do so would constitute an undignified and shameful position.


QUESTIONS

1

How did the Spanish treat the inhabitants of the New World, according to the thinking of Juan Pablo Viscardo?

2

Is freedom possible in a system that breeds inequality?



III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

6 | “OUR AMERICA”, ACCORDING TO JOSÉ MARTÍ

INTRODUCTION

José Martí, who was born in Havana on 28 January 1853, is a key figure in the history of Latin American thought and literature. His work has also achieved international recognition in the field of culture. Owing to his commitment to the cause of independence for his Cuban homeland, he had to live much of his life as an émigré. This situation enabled him to deepen his knowledge of what he called “Our America”, as well as to use this direct experience of the Americas (such as his stays in Guatemala and Mexico to discover the indigenous reality) to project a vision of a great emancipated utopia based on an intercultural America that contributes to the balance of humanity and the world. Martí, who died in the struggle for Cuban independence on 19 May 1895, is the great thinker who proposed a fair America where the peoples that make it so culturally diverse live together in solidarity and thus help to balance the world. In this sense, it is crucial for the thinking of Martí that the idea of “homeland” has nothing to do with a sterile provincialism, but rather is the “portion of humanity” that must be cultivated in the interests of humankind balanced by justice in diversity.



TEXT PROLOGUE TO “NIAGARA’S POEM” BY JUAN ANTONIO PÉREZ BONALDE, JOSÉ MARTÍ

“ Contemptible times, these: when the only art that prevails is that of piling one’s own granaries high, sitting on a seat of gold and living all in gold, without perceiving that human nature will never vary and the only result of digging up external gold is to live without gold inside! Contemptible times: when the love and exercise of greatness is a rare and outmoded quality!

How much work did it cost to discover this very thing! Man, who has only recently begun to enjoy the use of reason that from his birth was denied him, has to unmake himself to truly come into his own. It requires a Herculean blow against the obstacles erected against him by his own nature as well as by those who, in evil hour, heap on him those conventional ideas of what he is, by impious counsel and culpable arrogance sustained. There is no more difficult task than this, of distinguishing the acquired, proficient aspects of our existence from the spontaneous and natural; what man brings into the world with him, from the lessons, laws, and ordinances imposed on him by those who came before him. ... Under the pretext of completing the human being, they interrupt him. No sooner is he born that they are already standing beside his cradle with great and strong bindings prepared in their hands, the philosophies, the religions, the passions of their fathers, the political systems. And they tie him and they girdle him, and man is already, for his whole life on earth, a bridled horse. And the earth is now an expanse of masks. We come into life like wax, and fate empties us into premade moulds. Created conventions deform true existence, and true life becomes like a silent current that slips, invisible, beneath the feigned life, not felt by the very one in whom it works its holy deed, ... To assure human free will: to leave to the spirits their own seductive form; to not tarnish virgin dispositions with the imposition of another’s prejudices; to ready them to take what is useful for itself alone, without confusing them nor pushing them along a marked route. This is the only way to populate the Earth with the creative generation that she lacks! All forms of redemption have hitherto been theoretical and formal; it is necessary that they now be effective and essential. Neither is there room for literary originality nor does political freedom subsist as long as spiritual freedom is not assured. Man’s first task is to reconquer himself. Men must be returned to themselves; they must be freed from the ill governance of convention that suffocates or poisons their emotions, accelerates the awakening of their visceral senses, and burdens their mental capacity with a pernicious, foreign, cold, and false sense of wealth. Only the genuine is fruitful. Only what is direct is powerful. Anything else is tantamount to a reheated delicacy. It behoves each man to reconstruct his life: the little that he finds in himself, he reconstructs. He is ungrateful to God and the enemy of man: the one who, claiming to guide the new generations, teaches them a circumscribed and absolute set of doctrines and fills their ears with the barbarous gospel of hatred instead of the sweet speech of love, commits premeditated murder. He who obstructs in any way the free, direct and spontaneous employment of the magnificent faculties of man is guilty of betraying nature!

”

José Martí, “Prólogo al libro ‘El poema del Niágara’ de Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde” in *Obras Completas* [Complete Works], vol. 7, Havana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975, pp. 223–25.
Translation into English by UNESCO.





COMMENTARY

As shown in the selected excerpt from his work, José Martí believed that thinking (and specifically what is considered philosophical thought) must distinguish itself by helping human beings to understand how to be free. This is the basis for triggering a process of transforming their humanity and the world around them. Philosophy thus has a twofold task. First, it must promote the personal improvement of humans by awakening the best of human nature in their soul (especially the strength of love, compassion, solidarity and harmony with nature). Second, philosophy must provide human beings with the means of intervening in the historical world to transform reality. For Martí, this means raising reality to the height of humanity to correspond to the nobility of human dignity. This is why one of Martí's works pronounces that "to think is to serve": serving man's humanity and the dignification of reality. His philosophy is based on solidarity and historical humanism that springs from the contextual conditions of life and aims to transform them so that humankind can live together in a world of balance.

In the face of abstract philosophies enamoured of their concepts and enclosed within their systems, José Martí proposes a philosophy that seeks the connecting thread in two fundamental questions for real human beings: where is life going; and how could and should we influence life. As shown in the passage, this involves a creative and critical attitude that cancels out the trend to imitate others, repeat or continue colonial habits, and instead seeks a direct confrontation with reality itself. This exercise in contextual intelligence then forms the basis for a process of genuine theoretical emancipation.

According to Martí, this orientation of philosophical thought towards reality and history demonstrates that thought that endeavours to achieve authenticity is truly fruitful. Without context or a link to history, philosophy gets lost in its own problems and becomes one of the instruments – denounced by Martí – that, rather than liberating human beings, tie them down or distracts them from the task of reconquering themselves and acting critically in their historical world.

In this sense, José Martí's legacy is a philosophical work that places him among the best of liberating and intercultural thought in Latin America. As such, his work remains highly topical.

QUESTIONS



For José Martí, what does the expression "Our America" mean?



What is the meaning of freedom as conceived by Martí?



Why does Martí say that "man must reconquer himself"?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY



As a team, produce a series of photographs of acts or expressions of creative freedom and expression of free will in your community and show them to your classmates.

III POLITICAL FORMS OF LIVING TOGETHER

7 LIBERTARIAN AWARENESS ACCORDING TO PAULO FREIRE

INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) left us an educational philosophy and a research method based on an anthropology and theory of knowledge, which is essential for teacher-training today. He demonstrated the importance of education in forming a people as subject, the sovereign people, as he was one of the great creators of the popular education paradigm.

Countless experiences of popular and adult education are currently inspired by his pedagogical ideas. His educational philosophy crossed the borders between disciplines, between science and arts and those of Latin America to take root in many different lands.

The original contributions of Paulo Freire to the history of pedagogical ideas include the following: (1) Theorizing about practice in order to transform it. (2) Recognizing the legitimacy of popular knowledge in an era of extreme elitism. (3) Education as the practice of freedom, which is a requirement for democratic life. (4) Science as open to popular needs. (5) Harmonization between the formal and informal in educational practice. (6) Utopia as the true realism of the educator (opposed to all those who deny the possibility of the dream of another world). (7) The inherently political nature of the act of education. (8) Ethics as a central reference point in the quest for the radicalization of democracy.





TEXTE *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED*, PAULO FREIRE

“

As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements.

Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.

An inauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating ‘blah.’ It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.

On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter – action for action’s sake – negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible.

Either dichotomy, by creating inauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought which reinforce the original dichotomy.

Human existence cannot be silent nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming.

Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

But while to say the true word – which is work, which is praxis – is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of a few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently no one can say a true word alone – nor can one say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words. Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.

Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression.

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, then dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.

Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another; nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants.

Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth.

Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind.

”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido*,
Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI Editores, 2008.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

I chose the first two pages of the third chapter of *Pedagogía del oprimido* [Pedagogy of the Oppressed] where Paulo Freire describes “dialogue” as the “essence of education as a practice of freedom”, as I consider this passage to be an essential part of Freire’s philosophical corpus. This book systematizes the anthropological basis for a philosophy of education and a reinterpretation of the relationships between philosophy, education and politics.

The main objective of a liberating education is for men and women to learn how to speak their word, rather than simply repeat the words of others. The word is seen as an instrument through which humans become the subject of their own history. In this 1968 book, written in Chile, Freire names something fundamental in the education process: he calls the act of educating a political act. He brings into existence the political nature of education. In the dedication of the book, by taking a stand for “the oppressed, and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side”, he teaches us that educating implies decisions, commitment and struggle.

If human beings reveal their humanity through word, then it is through dialogue that we meet the other. It is only through authentic communication, reciprocity and equal conditions (established through dialogue) that the individual becomes creator and subject. Education is therefore not a neutral process. Education can produce subjugated subjects or free subjects. Education can be a cultural action for domination or a cultural action for liberation.

The Freirian concept of dialogue is more explicitly expressed in the rest of the book. He sets out the five conditions for dialogue: love, humility, faith, hope and critical thinking. He makes it clear that dialogue can only take place among different equals, rather than adversaries, because dialogue needs equal conditions and reciprocity (which cannot exist between adversaries). What exists between adversaries is conflict.

According to Freire, this dialogue is not a romantic one between oppressors and the oppressed, but rather a dialogue among the oppressed to overcome their oppressed condition. This dialogue is assumed to be part of and supplemented by class organization and the common struggle against the oppressor (hence the conflict).

In Freire, the dialogue of the oppressed (guided by a critical awareness of reality) refers to the overcoming of their conflict with the oppressors in a way that also frees the latter. For Freire, dialogue is not only a meeting of two subjects merely seeking the meaning of things (knowledge), but rather a meeting in praxis (action and reflection) and in commitment (to social transformation). A dialogue is not an exchange of ideas. Dialogue that does not lead to transformative action is merely words.

For Freire, the world cannot be changed without changing people: changing the world involves changing people, as the two processes are inter-related.

QUESTIONS

1

What is the concept of human existence in Paulo Freire? Try to express this in your own words and relate it to a situation that you experience daily.

2

According to the text, what are the main contributions of Paulo Freire to education?

3

Is education just formal? Give arguments.

4

Why are “word” and “dialogue” important for humans? Please answer using your own words and making an effort to see why dialogue and word are a highly valuable dimension for transforming reality.

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

1

Write about 15 lines on if and how you could apply Freirian ideas in your educational context.

2

Carry out team research into the term “oppressed” using the dictionary and an Internet image search engine. Discuss the meaning of the term and the images that appear. Then identify two examples of peoples or persons that are currently oppressed in the world and in your community. Write a manifesto about principles breached by this oppression and would be necessary to restore.

IV GENDER EQUALITY

Latin American feminism has laid the foundations for a radical questioning of all forms of domination previously and currently suffered by the women of this continent. It has done so by demonstrating the main mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization in various areas of daily life (including academia) that are justified by a notion that considers women's difference as an inequality. This can be traced back as far as Aristotle. The theoretical propositions of feminism have attempted an in-depth analysis of the epistemological, ethical, political and social options that could help create a fair world for all women. The starting point is to provide an environment of active participation where women are actors in their own history, and this undoubtedly begins by defending their inalienable right to the free use of their bodies. In a world that remains dominated by a patriarchal paradigm of modern-capitalist control and submission, outsider feminism has shown the main and most urgent demands for women to fully enjoy a decent life in a harmonious environment of respect for plurality and diversity.

1 | THE POETICS OF RESISTANCE, ACCORDING TO GLORIA ANZALDÚA

INTRODUCTION

Gloria Anzaldúa was born 26 September 1942, in Raymondville, Texas, in a ranch settlement named Jesús María, less than twenty-five miles from the U.S.-Mexico Border. She is the author of many books including *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*,¹³⁷ *Friends from the Other side/Amigos del Otro Lado*,¹³⁸ *Interview/Entrevistas*.¹³⁹ While Anzaldúa was not trained as a philosopher, and she never completed her doctoral studies in comparative literature, her work has had an immense impact in a variety of fields: literary theory, Chicano/a studies, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, gay and lesbian studies, Latino/a studies, bilingualism, and philosophy. Her work has also had a global reception and has been taken in global context where two or more cultures meet and clash, giving birth to mestiza consciousness.

¹³⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera : The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

¹³⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Friends from the Other side/Amigos del Otro Lado*, illustrated by Consuela Méndez, San Francisco, Children's Book Press, 1993.

¹³⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interview/Entrevistas*, edited by AnaLouise Keating, New York, Routledge, 2000.



TEXT *BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA : THE NEW MESTIZA*, GLORIA ANZALDÚA



La conciencia de la mestiza : Towards a New Consciousness

Por la mujer de mi raza
hablarà el espíritu.¹⁴⁰

José Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged *una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color-la primera raza síntesis del globo*. He called it a cosmic race, *la raza cósmica*, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world.¹⁴¹ Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands.

Una lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of Borders

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me bablan
simultáneamente

The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza*'s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness.

¹⁴⁰ [Author's note :] This is my own “take off” in José Vasconcelos's idea. José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica : Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana*, México, Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones, 1961.

¹⁴¹ Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica : Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana*.

In a constant state of mental nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed; which collectivity does the daughter of a dark-skinned mother listen to?

”

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera : The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 2012, © 1987, 1999, 2007 by Gloria Anzaldúa, pp. 99–100.



COMMENTARY

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* defies categorization or identification. The book is polyglot. It speaks in many tongues: English, Spanish, Chicano, Náhuatl, Spanglish, and Tex-Mex slang. The book belongs to no genre, as it is simultaneously a book of essays, biography, poetry, which is autobiographical, but also tells the story of a people, real and imaginary. It also belongs to no discipline, as it is undisciplined and undisciplinable.

The source of its great intellectual resonance lies precisely in that it is a text without a *topos*, a place, for its epistemic location is *nepantla*, a Náhuatl word that means crossroad, where roads meet and for a moment are one. The book, additionally, reaches across different archives and intellectual traditions, as it is evident in the passage here selected, which performs the function of either a Leibnizian monad or a Borgesian aleph, that is, a text in which the entire work can be seen. For Anzaldúa one of the key functions of the *mestiza* consciousness is the critique of all forms of racism, but specifically the politics of racial purity, which has driven so much of the genocide and killing of the last half a century. At the same time, the critique of racial purism is related to the critique of linguistic hegemony, or what she calls somewhere else “linguistic terrorism.” The two are twined. Racial oppression and extermination is shadowed by linguistic derogation and suppression. Those who are racially discriminated and persecuted are also those who are *deslenguados*, the de-tongued, those whose mouths are literary shut. Linguistic terrorism is accompanied by the unacknowledged appropriation, or outright concealing, occultation, and erasure of the knowledge produced by those who are deemed impure, uncouth, and uncivilized.

In Anzaldúa's work women occupy a unique and privileged place precisely because they are the one's to suffer in their own flesh, more directly, the consequences of racism, linguistic oppression, and epistemic injustice. Those who dwell on the borderland, in the *frontera*, however, are not passive victims. They resist, survive and thrive. Their lives are testimony to the poetics of resistance. The borderland is thus literally a *topos*, as well as an imaginary place, in which both epistemic resistance and epistemic novelty are produced. *Borderlands/La Frontera* should be read as one of the first texts of postcolonial theory, but also of a new form of philosophizing that aims to redress what philosopher Miranda Fricker called *epistemic injustice*. It should also be read as a postcolonial genealogy that aims to rescue and celebrate what Michel Foucault called “subaltern knowledges.” Above all, Anzaldúa invites us to think beyond Manicheanisms or Theodicies of alleged civilizational progress. Her work is suffused by the recognition of psychic and physical suffering, but also the celebration and respect for the ability of individuals, groups and people to resist, overcome and persevere giving rise to different ways of dealing with difference. *Mestiza* consciousness dwells in the in-between of the encounter of cultures, where new cultures and new sensibilities are born. *Mestiza* consciousness does not simply critique; it is above all generative.

QUESTIONS

1

According to Anzaldúa, is there a link between skin colour and self-awareness? Give arguments.

2

Is there a link between skin colour and language? Present arguments.

3

Is the “border” a physical or mental place? Where is the border, according to Anzaldúa?

4

Does the “cosmic race” exist or is it an ideal? Develop.

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

Gloria Anzaldúa combined autobiographical reflections with philosophical, historical, geographical and linguistic musings. Identify in your own nation, culture or region those writers and artists who have used their personal experiences to reflect upon the human condition and the possibility of thinking critically about what oppresses or dehumanizes.

IV GENDER EQUALITY

2 TOWARDS A FEMINIST POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, ACCORDING TO URANIA UNGO

INTRODUCTION

Urania Atenea Ungo Montenegro was born in Panama in 1955. In the philosophy department of the University of Panama, she teaches that “changing lives” requires taking ethical stands on the living conditions of Latin America’s native, black, mestizo and white women. For her, feminism is a rationale that clarifies politics, rather than just a women’s participation movement. She therefore studies the path to feminist political consciousness in the Americas, with a view to analysing female willingness to consider options other than subordinated identities, and to create projects as alternatives to current prevailing forms. Her anti-racism and study of politics are for the purposes of theoretical and practical activism.

According to this practical philosophy, changes must be integral and reach all culture (understood as the bedrock of knowledge, freedom and power relations between people, sexes and social classes).

TEXT *TO CHANGE LIVES: THE POLITICS AND THOUGHT OF FEMINISM IN LATIN AMERICA, URANIA UNGO*

“

Politicizing daily life involves a radical shake-up of what Agnes Heller called the cellar of historical changes, because what characterizes male dominance as a social and historical phenomenon is its plastic capacity to readapt to change, to exist despite everything, to reproduce in what Margarita Pisano has called the romantic-love space and to survive in ways in which women’s victories are swallowed up on the basis of a few world ideas, in which there is some change but what is fundamental does not disappear.

Someone said that there is just one science – History – and that it teaches anyone who can see that the historical process is full of cultural steps forward and backwards. The history of women, like no other, shows that transformations are only permanent when they have become not laws but ideological institutions solidly installed in the awareness of the majorities. Feminism’s task – which remains pending in this new age that is dawning – is to politicize daily life and change lives, to ensure that the changes that are so dear, obvious and fragile to us do not become merely a new change in the leopard’s spots.

In simple terms, this is the key to seeing that, despite everything, feminism (and its thoughts and actions) will not end. Feminism is still the unsubordinated politics of women, because politically it involves the possibility of transforming gender relations, of radical change to private lives and the resulting far-reaching changes in the



world views that underpin consciousness and civilization. Apart from the fact that us feminists cannot afford to have a new ‘period of silence’ as advocated by Julieta Kirkwood when suffragism died out, we have barely begun to build the ‘counter universe’ recommended by Simone de Beauvoir. We are still living in the ‘turning point of history’ described by Alexandra Kollontai and Shakespeare’s sister as dreamt by Virginia Woolf has yet to be born.

”

Urania Ungo, *Para cambiar la vida : política y pensamiento del feminismo en América Latina*, Panama, Institute of Women, University of Panama, 2000.
Translation into English by UNESCO.

COMMENTARY

According to this practical feminist philosophy, change can only happen if we clear away the shadows of misogyny that are seen and shown in culture on a daily basis. As a follower of Agnes Heller, Ungo is a feminist who sees all female political thought as geared towards practical change activities (in the Latin American sphere of influence for her thought).

In order to be comprehensive, lives are always changed through women’s mutual practices and their collective strength when it comes to demanding change in human relations in the eyes of the law and, even more so, in the light of violence in the form of femicide. This is why Urania Ungo sees feminist ethics as inextricably linked to the history of ideas of Latin American feminism, and builds the understanding of this link on the basis of Mexican and Central American feminist practices.

QUESTIONS

1

Can ethics help us through life? What is Urania Ungo’s proposal? Had you thought it was a feminist proposal?

2

Urania Ungo speaks of changes in daily life. Had you considered your daily life as a space for making changes in order to have a more ethical and free personal and collective life?

3

Feminism is a practice that has generated theories. There has been a constant concern for non-prescriptive ethics. Do you think that Urania Ungo contributes something to women living well with women, and women and men living well together?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

Search online for a video that explains what feminism is, where it emerged and its main demands. As a group, describe how women are treated in your community and if women agree with this treatment. Also look up Olympe de Gouges and her most famous work.

V ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

ECO-PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION, ACCORDING TO LEONARDO BOFF

INTRODUCTION

Leonardo Boff was born in Concordia, southern Brazil on 14 December 1938. He was a liberation theologian and philosopher and a key figure in the development of Latin American environmental thinking (thanks to his original Franciscan concepts and his hard work to disseminate environmental issues and proposals to resolve them). His work was based on three sources that are weaved throughout his thinking and life, and that have pedagogical value for our modern society. First, his life experiences in Brazil were as a member of a family of Italian immigrants, with parents who taught him to live with members of indigenous, mulatto and black communities (who were often marginalized by other European immigrants). Boff clearly remembers the virtue of accepting differences and sitting together at school and around the table. This source teaches us the value of non-discrimination and openness to the other. Boff's second source was entering the seminary at the age of 11, where his education was strongly influenced by the Franciscan spirit of fraternity, love of nature, sensitivity towards the poor, and simplicity. Boff's perspective reconnected the religious experience (and more generally the experience of everyday life) with nature. Feeling the trees, birds, water and roots where we live shows us how to overcome the duality between human beings and other beings with whom we share the planet. The third source was his interdisciplinary training integrating the theory and practice of philosophy, theology and science. During his theology doctorate in Munich, he attended classes by Werner Heisenberg, who was one of the founders of quantum physics. At the same time, he was one of the creators of Liberation Theology with Latin American and Spanish priests in 1968. This type of integration makes it possible to link the human with nature and the transcendental, beauty with the pain of hunger and poverty that we face in the global crisis that is bio-cultural as well as environmental. Boff's book *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (English version published in 1995) is a reference point for a holistic and eco-social approach to environmental ethics.



TEXT *ECOLOGY AND LIBERATION: A NEW PARADIGM,* LEONARDO BOFF

““

All modern societies across the world are structured on the axis of economy. But economy in its modern sense has lost its original significance: the administration of the fair and modest means necessary for life and well-being. Rational application of scant income is the central activity of most households in the Third World. That is economy in the true sense of the term. But that is not the kind of economics practiced by the institutional economists, who serve a very different. ... At the end of each year the country has to show that there has been growth over the previous year. This imperative has given rise to the notion of unlimited growth that, like some incubus, has come to dominate society as a whole for some five hundred years. ... We lack a fundamental critique of a model of society that would promote a sustainable kind of ecological development.” (p. 19)

“It is also necessary to plan and introduce an ecologically sustainable form of development adapted to regional ecosystems (for example, the natural resource policy of Chico Mendes, which was appropriate to the Amazonian ecosystem). We do indeed find the ruling metaphor of ‘sustainable development’ in official documents (sustainable development was defined by the UN Brundtland Commission in 1987 as ‘that development which takes into account present needs without compromising the possibility of future generations satisfying their own needs’). In the last analysis, however, it is always development itself that counts, even at the cost of ecological disorder. When a conflict arises between development and ecology, the decision is usually taken in favor of development at the costs of ecology. It would seem that capitalist greed is incompatible with the conservation of nature. ... The pharaonic projects of Henry Ford for rubber exploitation in Amazonia in 1927, and, fifty years later, those of Daniel Ludwig for cellulose and timber in Jari, and, finally, the Volkswagen projects of the 1970s, resulted in vast failures, because they did not take any account whatsoever of the ecological question. All this has been at the expense of two million hectares of forest, in the case of the Jari project; and 144,000 hectares destroyed in the case of Volkswagen in order to feed forty-six thousand head of cattle (an incredible thirty thousand square meters devoted to each head). The gigantic nature of such projects reveals the irrationality of the development model being followed and the need to replace it with a more holistic vision that also takes the ecological aspect into account.” (p. 22)

“A poet of long ago who experienced this mysticism of the ubiquitous Spirit put it very well when he wrote that the Spirit sleeps in stone, dreams in flowers, awakens in animals, knows he is awake in men, and feels awake in women. This is a sympathetic intuition of the cosmic ubiquity of the Spirit, as testified to by so many mystics of various cultures, such as the Sioux Indians of North America, the Bororos of Brazil, and a number of Eastern Zen masters. The Fathers of the Latin and Greek Church of the fourth and fifth centuries, especially Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil and St. Peter Damian, express in various ways the Spiritus ubique diffuses (the universally diffused Spirit). (p. 50)

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Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, New York, © Orbis Books, 1995.



COMMENTARY

As shown in the passage from *Ecology and Liberation*, Leonardo Boff felt that environmental thought was part of an eco-philosophy of liberation with a twofold task. The first part of the task would be a *de-constructive movement to be free of the myth of unlimited development*, in which society must be structured around economic growth. This myth involves oppression of most human beings and an extermination of most beings with whom we share the planet. It also implies a lower standard of living by reducing human existence to a one-dimensional economic phenomenon. Being free of this myth enables a *re-constructive movement to recover the diversity of human and ecological existence* and the original sense of economy. Boff underlines that economics is not the unlimited accumulation of capital, but rather the sensible administration of scant resources. This meaning is closer to the origins of modern ecological sciences, metaphorically called “the economy of nature” by Carlos Linneo in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, eco-nomy and eco-logy share the same Greek root *oikos* (meaning home). One refers to laws (*nomos*) regulating administration, while the other refers to the study (*logia*) of the *oikos* (or home). In the twenty-first century, the planet is our shared home. Boff links together economics and ecology for sensible management.

Boff does not simply use abstract philosophy to interweave economics and ecology on a purely conceptual level, but rather does so mainly through the practice of solidarity, resistance and the protection of the poor and marginalized. For instance, he refers to Francisco Alves “Chico” Mendes, who in 1985 created and implemented the concept of extractive reserves to protect the Amazon rainforest and the rights of rubber-collecting communities to practise sustainable use. Under the leadership of Chico Mendes, Amazonian rubber collectors organized themselves as the Union of Rural Workers of Xapuri to fight against deforestation caused by “pharaonic” projects. The most infamous result of the movement was the murder of Mendes in 1988. In recognition of the value of his life and ideas, in 2007 when Boff was an adviser to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s Brazilian Government, the country’s Ministry for the Environment created the Chico Mendes Institute for the Conservation of Biodiversity (which now manages areas protected by the federal government). Boff supported many grassroots movements associated with churches, professional associations and international organizations demanding a fairer distribution of land ownership and economically and environmentally sustainable practices. Examples include the “Landless Rural Workers’ Movement” (MST) in southern Brazil and “Patagonia without Dams” in southern Chile.

Although the selected examples are from South America, there are similar cases in other world regions, as the development model underlying them has been globalized. In this context, Boff’s eco-philosophy of liberation is relevant to twenty-first century philosophical thinking for at least two reasons. First, it re-establishes the philosophical unity of theoretical and practical knowledge to tackle the global scale from and towards local histories and reality. Second, it places environmental issues at the heart of our century’s challenges, while also maintaining a transcendent sense of the natural world that precedes and succeeds the human species.



We human beings belong to the environment. The environment does not belong to us, but rather we live in community with the other beings sharing life (as stated in the third selected text). Boff's proposed spirituality is rooted in the biophysical world, which is understood and valued by current and ancestral Amerindian, Zen Buddhist and other forms of knowledge. Boff therefore calls for ethics not to be anthropocentric (as is the case in modern society), but rather for it to consider the diversity of all life forms. At the same time, Boff calls for ecological ethics that are not Eurocentric, but rather multi- and inter-cultural. For the young generations of the twenty-first century, this invitation is an opportunity to cultivate ethics in favour of life in all its biological and cultural diversity, as well as a responsibility to forge a fairer society that avoids oppression for most life (human and non-human) forms and encourages a bio-culturally diverse planet.

QUESTIONS

1

What is the meaning of the link between economy and ecology proposed by Boff? What links between economy and ecology are you aware of in your region's ancestral cultures?

2

Do you think that teaching on the environment in your region and other regions includes enough about the diversity of world views and ecological values? Explain your answer using at least three examples.

3

According to Boff's texts, who are the causes of the environmental crisis and who are the main victims? Do you think that Boff's analysis of the cases in the Amazon (in the selections) is relevant for your region? Would you expect to reach similar or different conclusions? Base your reply on an example that details the agents and processes that caused a socio-ecological problem underway in a place or region of your continent and the main (human and non-human) victims.

4

What is the meaning of the notion of spirit for Leonardo Boff?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

1

As a team, design and implement research about the ecological world views of several of your region's sociocultural groups. Produce a presentation on these ancestral and modern world views, as well as each one's implications for ecological ethics.

2

Together with your classmates, supplement the above research by preparing a photographic presentation on: (a) the links between habitats (within and outside cities) and the lifestyles associated with these habitats, and (b) the socio-ecological problems faced by these groups today, including the main causes and victims of the problems. Analyse the implications of: (a) the links between habitats and lifestyle for ecological ethics, and (b) the identification of the causes and victims of socio-ecological problems for social and environmental justice.



VI ARTS AND CREATION

THE SECRET OF COLOUR. GAME OF CREATING AND THINKING, ACCORDING TO JOSÉ VASCONCELOS

INTRODUCTION

José Vasconcelos (1881–1959) was, alongside Antonio Caso, a founder of twentieth-century Mexican philosophy. In 1908, the two intellectuals created the “Youth Atheneum” philosophical-literary group that aimed to re-establish the meaning of philosophy and spirituality in the face of the flat positivism that prevailed during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Vasconcelos took part in the 1910 revolutionary process and is the main intellectual figure of the Mexican Revolution. He was first Rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and Secretary of Public Education (1921–1924), where he promoted cultural development that was unparalleled in the history of Mexico. The main purpose of Vasconcelos was to formulate his own philosophical system. He dedicated many works to this task: *Metaphysics*, *Ethics and Aesthetics*, *Organic Logic* and so forth, although many of his most influential and renowned works were on cultural reflection (such as *The Cosmic Race*¹⁴² and *Memories*¹⁴³).

The core idea of Vasconcelos’ philosophy is that there is a total unity or harmonious “coordination” (as in a symphony) in the rich diversity of the universe. There is therefore no opposition between physical being and spiritual being. Aesthetics is the royal road to the spiritual world; art is the path to “redemption of the material and natural world” (which is not seen as a lesser or despicable being). According to Vasconcelos, aesthetics and beauty are a form of knowledge, life and ultimately of mysticism and meeting with God. This was not only a theoretical matter but above all a task of pedagogical and cultural praxis, a spiritual revolution beyond all positivist religion, purely abstract metaphysics and any merely utilitarian and functional social organization.



¹⁴² José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race / La raza cósmica*, English translation by Didier T. Jaén, USA, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

¹⁴³ José Vasconcelos, *Memorias*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007.



TEXT *AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY*, JOSÉ VASCONCELOS

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All of creation lies in the bosom of God, like the colours of the iris in the white light that captures and contains them; it keeps them invisible until they find the key to their development in drops of dew or the laboratory prism. Apparently, neutral light is the white ray. In reality, it is a recipient of age-old genetic strength. This is the permanent possibility of the miracle of diversification that is the iris. Pregnant light is actually the white ray, and the limpid offspring of colours. With each colour being specific, its existence depends on fixed arrangements of perfectly measured and known energy waves. Only the ignorant or the idle seek essences in colours, like deducing greenery from green and so on using nonsensical verbology that hampers our direct communication with being. Apparently, the colours of the iris are lost when the cloudiness clears, but we recover them whenever the drop of water or prism lets them escape from the white ray that is their home or prison. Also, yes – death uproots souls and delivers them to the spirit where they will experience the mystery of redemption. The difference being that, upon leaving the prison of the body, souls escape the cycle of life and death to begin the new destiny of perdition or salvation. Nature not only works for death but also for life, and if a group of beings such as colours (in ordinary light) find refuge there against permanent dispersion, and guaranteed resurrection repeated whenever they are called on to shine through the prism, why can it not be legitimate to imagine that the soul takes refuge for a time in death, before emerging as the element of origin, the language of creation, and establishing itself for all eternity? For colours, white is not death. Even though white engulfs them, the colours remain concentrated therein, while awaiting new appearances that will enrich the variety of being. The issue of the new appearance of our souls, their texture, light and radiant or of intangible countenance and flesh, is a secondary one. The main point is to collect analogies that make us trust in their immortality. Just as the colours in the prism: not just souls but all of creation is hanging from the original prism in the hands of the Creator. The Great Creator is recreated in his work and is maintained throughout the ages, spread throughout worlds and in the love that covers all creatures and rescues the poor imitations of the Creator in the form of man.

Therefore, if thinking is to draw the attention of the Cosmos by any means, we must conclude that thinking is to follow the interplay of elements in the Cosmos. God created the world in play: there is enjoyment in all of creation. It is not true that the Creator rested on the seventh day; on the last day he enjoyed the result of the building work of the previous days. There is a smile on the divine face. The philosopher of truth should also be clear and jovial. The truth is sometimes terrible: *Dies Irae* (day of wrath) and divine rage do exist, as do praise and holiness. The cause of the former is sin, which means disorders that can sometimes spread to nature itself. Yet the truth is clear and simple, as stated by the scientific method: out of two natural-law hypotheses, the simplest is almost always true, and the most direct and easiest.

”

José Vasconcelos, *Filosofía estética*,
Mexico, Editorial Trillas, 2009.
Translation into English by UNESCO.



COMMENTARY

For Antonio Caso and Samuel Ramos, aesthetics is in some ways a medium; it is above all a means of moral living (either for charity or civility). For Vasconcelos, on the other hand, the aesthetic life is a means in itself, a superior way of life to moral existence. Indeed, it is the superior form of human existence. The purpose of art is not to access moral life but full spiritual life, or the mystic and divine plane of existence. Unlike Caso and Ramos, Vasconcelos sees moral life as a moment prior to the aesthetic life. Morals are simply a discipline for life, the ability to guide life towards certain purposes that are always determined by human interest (even altruism, which is a satisfaction of the interest in another human). In contrast, in the aesthetic life the subject does not act in accordance with human purposes but with higher, superhuman cosmic aims. Life energy, which remains bound on the plane of moral life, is unchained and freed towards purely spiritual possibilities. According to Vasconcelos, aesthetics abandon biased motives to attend to the supreme motive. Far beyond the problems of coexistence and human survival, our philosopher sees aesthetic culture (and all culture) as a higher mission. Rather than just an instrument of human development, he sees it as an achievement of spirituality and the human craving for transcendence: a higher form of living, and a sublime form of knowledge and thought.

Aesthetics is thus at the core of the Vasconcelos philosophical system, and is related to various fundamental issues of philosophy: ethics, metaphysics, gnoseology and – significantly – the philosophy of history and culture. In the introduction to *Ethics*, Vasconcelos tellingly insists on a definition of his philosophical purposes. He states that these are not aimed at constructing a particular, national or regional (Mexican or Iberoamerican) philosophy, but rather at criticizing the false and exclusive modern universalism and at rebuilding (from another geographical and cultural perspective) a new unifying universalism that is as broad and generous as the entire planet and all of human history. This is a perspective through which his philosophical and metaphysical concerns and his political and cultural interventions can be valued. The aesthetic and mystical emotivism of Vasconcelos is not intended as just another option within the historical slideshow of philosophical concepts or as a mere alternative to the prevailing rationalist and intellectualist concepts in modern thinking. Above all, his emotivism has a historical-cultural intention: a way of thinking whose scope and flexibility enables the recovery and re-valuation of other geographically and historically outlying and even marginalized cultural traditions. These are what Vasconcelos aptly named tropical cultures, cultures of the South: the geographical space of the origin – and maybe the end – of humanity's great cultural and spiritual tradition. The aesthetic metaphysics of Vasconcelos can thus be understood by closely linking it with his particular philosophy of history: a cultural, outsider, alternative, aesthetic and spiritual philosophy of history.

QUESTIONS

1

The introduction mentions the musical “symphony” as an example of Vasconcelos’ idea of “harmonious coordination” among all parts of the universe. Can you explain this analogy?

2

In your own words, explain Vasconcelos’ analogy between the light prism and the idea of God.

3

What does the text say about scientific truth? What do you think was Vasconcelos’ idea of science?

4

According to the commentary, what was the ultimate cultural purpose of the philosophy of Vasconcelos?

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

In teams, carry out research into the main forms of aesthetic research in your community. Try to reflect on the meaning and origin of these artistic forms in terms of their function in their reality. The question behind this exercise could be seen as “What is the need for art in our community”?

CONTRIBUTORS

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Abubaker A. Baqader. Professor at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), and researcher in human and social sciences in Saudi Arabia, as well as among Arab academics. His publications focus on Islamic culture, traditional literature and folktales, Saudi youth and globalization (*Par-delà les dunes, anthologie de la littérature saoudienne*;¹⁴⁴ *La jeunesse saoudienne - Identité, mutations, défis, enjeux et perspectives à l'aube du XXI^{ème} siècle*¹⁴⁵). Furthermore, he was deputy minister of culture and information from 2002 to 2005, and represented the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the first meeting of UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Canada, December 2007.

Ali Benmakhlouf. Professor of Arabic philosophy and philosophy of logic at the University of Paris-Est Créteil Val-de-Marne (France). A specialist in logic and the works of Frege, Russell and Whitehead, he also organizes conferences in Morocco as part of the agreement between the International Philosophy College and the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for the Humanities and Islamic Studies. He is also chairman of the Advisory Committee of Professional Conduct and Ethics Institute of Development Research, member of the National Consultative Ethics Committee (CCNE) and of the orientation council at the Diderot Institute, the fund for development of social economy (Covéa) since March 2009.
Contribution to the manual: pp. 70-109; et 114-127.

Betül Çotuksöken. Professor at Maltepe University Faculty of Science and Letters (Turkey) and president of the Department of Philosophy. She graduated from Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Philosophy in 1972. She got her PhD. degree with a thesis on Pierre Abelard's conception of ethics in Istanbul University. She became associate professor in 1988 and full professor in 1996. She worked as a faculty member at the Department of Philosophy of the same university from 1982 until 2000. She is also vice-president of the Philosophical Society of Turkey and of FISP. Her areas of interest are medieval philosophy, philosophy of language, meta-philosophy, the philosophical foundations of human rights and ethics. She is the author of eleven books.

Ayoub Abu-Dayyeh. Part-time university lecturer of philosophy and environmental ethics and part-time teacher of philosophy and theory of knowledge at Cambridge High School in Amman (Jordan). He is president of E-Case Society, engineer and doctor of philosophy. He is the author of many books on the environment, philosophy and contemporary Arab thinkers.
Contribution to the manual: 110-113.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne. Professor of philosophy and French literature at Columbia University, New York (USA). Souleymane Bachir Diagne's teaching interests include history of early modern philosophy, philosophy and Sufism in the Islamic world, African philosophy and literature, twentieth-century French philosophy; and his field of research includes history of logic, history of philosophy, Islamic philosophy, African philosophy and literature. He is the author of many books including *Islam and the Open Society: Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*¹⁴⁶ and *African Art as Philosophy. Senghor, Bergson,*

¹⁴⁴ Abubaker A. Baqader, *Par-delà les dunes, anthologie de la littérature saoudienne*, Paris, L'harmattan, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Abubaker A. Baqader, *La jeunesse saoudienne - Identité, mutations, défis, enjeux et perspectives à l'aube du XXI^e siècle*, Paris, L'harmattan, 2010.

¹⁴⁶ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Islam and the Open Society. Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, Dakar, Codesria 2011, English translation from the original title: *Islam et société ouverte, la fidélité et le mouvement dans la pensée de Muhammad Iqbal*, Paris, Maisonneuve and Larose, 2001.

and the Idea of Negritude.¹⁴⁷ His latest book, *Bergson postcolonial. L'élan vital dans la pensée de Léopold Sédar Senghor et de Mohamed Iqbal*,¹⁴⁸ was awarded the Dagnan-Bouveret prize by the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences for 2011.

Enrique Dussel. Professor of ethics, political philosophy and Latin American studies at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Mexico) and emeritus Professor of this University (2010). Enrique Dussel was also visiting professor for one semester at the Harvard University, Frankfurt University, Notre Dame University, California State University (Los Angeles), Union Theological Seminary (New York), Loyola University (Chicago), Vanderbilt University, Duke University, and others. He is the founder of the movement of Latin American liberation philosophy and the author of more than 60 books and over 450 articles. Contribution to the manual: 180-182; 194; 200; et 224.

Nkolo Foé. Professor-researcher at the University of Yaoundé 1 (Cameroun). He is the author of *Le postmodernisme et le nouvel esprit du capitalisme: sur une philosophie globale d'Empire*.¹⁴⁹ He is fellow at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales of Paris (2008). He is also fellow at the Institut d'Études Avancées of Nantes (2009), invited professor at the Federal University of Curitiba and at the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil) (2010). Contribution to the manual: pp. 16-67.

Raúl Fornet-Betancourt. Director of the Latin America Department of the Institute of Missiology in Aachen (Germany) and honorary professor of this university and the University of Bremen. A Cuban national residing in Germany, his works focus on intercultural philosophy and the theory of dialogue among forms of knowledge. He is director of the international philosophy journal, *Concordia*, and coordinator of UNESCO's North-South Philosophy Dialogue Programme, as well as the International Conferences on Intercultural Philosophy. His publications include *La interculturalidad a prueba* [Interculturalism to the test]¹⁵⁰ and *Tareas y propuestas de la filosofía intercultural* [Tasks and proposals of intercultural philosophy].¹⁵¹ Contribution to the manual: 217-219.

Jinli He. Professor of Chinese culture and philosophy at Trinity University, Texas (USA). Jinli He obtained her PhD degree at Beijing University (2004). She has been visiting scholar at the University of Hawai'i (2005) and Princeton University (2006). She has been working as an assistant professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Trinity University since 2007. Her areas of scholarly interest include Chinese thought, culture and aesthetics. Contribution to the manual: 149-154; et 170-172.

Rainier Ibana. Professor of philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City (Philippines). He was chair of the Philosophy Department of Ateneo de Manila from 1997 until 2005 when he was appointed as a member of the social and human sciences sector of the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines.

¹⁴⁷ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy. Senghor, Bergson, and the Idea of Negritude*, Seagull Books, 2011, English translation of *Léopold Sédar Senghor : l'art africain comme philosophie*, Paris, Riveneuve Éditions, 2007.

¹⁴⁸ Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Bergson postcolonial. L'élan vital dans la pensée de Léopold Sédar Senghor et de Mohamed Iqbal*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Nkolo Foé, *Le postmodernisme et le nouvel esprit du capitalisme : sur une philosophie globale d'Empire*, Dakar, Codesria, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *La interculturalidad a prueba*, Aachen, Mainz, 2006.

¹⁵¹ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Tareas y propuestas de la filosofía intercultural*, Aachen, Mainz, 2009.

He chairs the Environmental Ethics Committee of UNESCO's World Commission of the Ethics of Science and Technology and serves as president of the Asia-Pacific Philosophy Education Network for Democracy. His research interests are in the fields of education and the human brain, philosophy of culture and social transformation.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 130-133; 140-141; et 162-163.

Rozena Maart. Director of the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in Durban (South Africa). Born in District Six, Cape Town, South Africa, she has a Phd in political philosophy and psychoanalysis from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham (UK). At the age of 24 she was nominated for the "Women of the Year" award for her work in the area of violence against women and for founding, along with four women, the first Black feminist organization in the country, Women Against Repression. Rozena Maart is an award-winning fiction writer and in 1992 won "The Journey Prize: Best Short Fiction in Canada". Her work in Philosophy extends to "black consciousness", political philosophy, Jacques Derrida and deconstruction and notions of rights, particularly human rights.

Magali Mendes de Menezes. Doctor of philosophy and professor of philosophy of education at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil). Her research focuses on ethics, feminist philosophy, interculturality and solidarity economy.

Suwanna Satha Anand. Professor of philosophy at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (Thailand). Her teaching and research interests cover the fields of Buddhist and Chinese philosophy, philosophy of women, and religion and social change. Her publications in English and in Thai include 10 books and about 30 research papers and book chapters on Buddhist and Chinese philosophy, women and religion and Thai cultural heritage. Currently she is also the research director of the Humanities Research Forum, Thailand Research Fund. Contribution to the manual: pp. 142-148.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Anand Amaladass. Retired Sanskrit and philosophy teacher from Chennai (India). His area of research includes Indian philosophy, religion and aesthetics and interfaith dialogue. Publications include a book on the Dhvani theory in Indian Aesthetics,¹⁵² and four books (pocket-book series) in German: one on the Vishnu tradition, two on the god of dance, Shiva and the fourth one on the goddess phenomenon with a translation in English of Abhirami Antati. He has published around 100 articles (in English) in books and journals. Contribution to the manual: pp. 134-137.

Mario Magallón Anaya. Tenured researcher at the Research Centre on Latin America and the Caribbean (CIALC) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). He is a primary education teacher with a master's degree in philosophy and a doctorate in Latin American Studies from UNAM. He specializes in Latin American philosophy and the history of ideas in Latin America. Contribution to the manual: pp. 197-199.

Andrés Robert Espíritu Avila. Senior lecturer of introduction to philosophy and education philosophy at Peru's University of Sciences and Humanities. A Peruvian philosopher, he got a philosophy degree from the National University of San Marcos (UNMSM) (Peru), based on the thesis "The concept of alienation according to Augusto Salazar Bondy". He is a member of the research department of the Institute of Sciences and Humanities. Contribution to the manual: pp. 194-196.

¹⁵² Anand Amaladass, *Philosophical implications of Dhvani: experience of symbol language in Indian aesthetics*, Vienna, Indologisches Institut der Universität Wien, 1984.

Francesca Gargallo Celentani. Writer, autonomous feminist and doctor in Latin American studies. She is secretary-general of the “Our America” Society of Cultural Studies, Mexico (SECNA). Contribution to the manual: pp. 228-229.

Mario Teodoro Ramírez Cobián. President of the Philosophical Association of Mexico, director of the Institute of Philosophical Research of the Michoacana University of San Nicolas de Hidalgo (Morelia, Mexico), professor and researcher at this university since 1980. He has a PhD and a master’s degree in philosophy from the UNAM and a degree in philosophy from the Michoacana University of San Nicolas de Hidalgo. He has published more than 100 theoretical essays and more than 150 popularisation books, among which are *La filosofía del quiasmo. Introducción al pensamiento de Maurice Merleau-Ponty*¹⁵³ and *Humanismo para una nueva época. Nuevos ensayos sobre el pensamiento de Luis Villoro*.¹⁵⁴ Contribution to the manual: pp. 234-237.

Manuel B. Dy, Jr. Professor of philosophy for the past forty-five years at the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City (Philippines). He has also served the School of Arts and Sciences as chairperson of the Philosophy Department and director of Chinese Studies Program. He is editor and co-author of several books including the *Mga Babasahin sa Pilosopiyang Moral*¹⁵⁵ and *Philosophy of Man, Selected Readings*.¹⁵⁶ He is founding president of the Ministry of Teaching Foundation and a member of the Technical Committee in Philosophy of the Commission on Higher Education of Philippines. He is consultant of the Department of Education's K to 12 Values Education Curriculum. Contribution to the manual: pp. 138-139.

Moacir Gadotti. Professor at the University of São Paulo (Brazil) and director general of the Paulo Freire Institute. He is a graduate in pedagogy (1967) and philosophy (1971) and has a master’s degree in education philosophy from the Catholic University of São Paulo (1973) and a doctorate in education sciences from the University of Geneva (1977). He has an honorary doctorate from the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro. He has published many works. Contribution to the manual: pp. 220-223.

Mercedes de la Garza. Professor on Maya and Náhuatl culture at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of UNAM since 1973. She obtained a Masters in Mexican history in 1971–1973 and a doctorate in history in 1977–1979. She has been involved in postgraduate courses and diplomas in the Universidad Complutense, El Escorial, University of Toulouse, Pennsylvania State University, King Juan Carlos University and the UNAM, where she was a follower of Miguel León Portilla. Contribution to the manual: pp. 191-193.

¹⁵³ Mario Teodoro Ramírez, *La filosofía del quiasmo. Introducción al pensamiento de Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, San Diego, Fondo de Cultura Economica USA, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Mario Teodoro Ramírez, *Humanismo para una nueva época. Nuevos ensayos sobre el pensamiento de Luis Villoro*, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ Manuel B. Dy, *Mga Babasahin sa Pilosopiyang Moral* [Readings in Moral Philosophy], Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University, 1998.

¹⁵⁶ Manuel B. Dy, *Philosophy of Man, Selected Readings*, Quezon City, Goodwill Trading Co., 2001.

Abhik Gupta. Professor of environmental ethics at Assam University in Dargakona (India). Besides conducting and publishing research on environmental pollution and effects of toxic substances on organisms, Abhik Gupta also writes on human altruism towards non-human organisms, ecocentric philosophies and ideals in indigenous societies, environmental ethics, ethics of science and technology, and on eco-ethical analysis of water and forest policies.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 164-166.

N. Frances Hioki. Research fellow at Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya (Japan). N. Frances Hioki earned her PhD in art and religion from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley (California) with a dissertation on western-inspired early modern Japanese painting. Currently a visiting research fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Hioki is exploring issues of interreligious aesthetics and the reception of Christian iconography in Japanese art.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 173-176.

Carlos Ham Juárez. Coordinator of the College of Latin American Studies of the UNAM Faculty of Philosophy and Arts. He has a doctorate in philosophy from UNAM. His research areas are political philosophy, philosophy of history, metaphysics and the history of ideas.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 214-216.

Miguel León Portilla. Mexican anthropologist and historian, and a top expert in Náhuatl thought and literature. Since 1988, he has been emeritus researcher at the UNAM. He received the Belisario Domínguez Medal in 1995, and since March 1971 has been a faculty member of Mexico's National College. His doctoral thesis on "Náhuatl philosophy studied at its sources" was supervised by a renowned Nahuatlato (and Náhuatl speaker). He also achieved recognition through the translation, interpretation and publication of several collections of Náhuatl works.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 182-185.

Bartomeu Melià. Researcher at the Catholic University in Asunción (Paraguay) where he was a lecturer. He has lived in Paraguay since 1954. He was exiled by the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, from 1976 to 1989. He has reedited the work of Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Arte, Vocabulario, Tesoro y Catecismo de la lengua guaraní (1639–1640)* [Art, vocabulary, treasure and catechism of the Guaraní language].¹⁵⁷ He has published studies on anthropology, linguistics and history. He is currently involved in the Paris Sorbonne LANGAS project for the dissemination of originals, transliteration and translation of Guaraní books from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 208-210.

Eduardo Mendieta. Philosophy lecturer at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (USA). He works on issues of cosmopolitanism, postcolonialism and globalization, with an emphasis on cities and urbanization processes. He also specializes in Latin American philosophy and liberation philosophy in particular.

Contribution to the manual: pp. 224-227.

Walter Mignolo. William H. Wannamaker professor of romance studies and literature at Duke University, as well as director of the Center for Global Studies and the Humanities. He is a semiologist and is known as a key figure in Latin American post-colonialism and founding member of the modernity/coloniality group. His publications include *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*¹⁵⁸ and *The Idea of Latin America*.¹⁵⁹

Contribution to the manual: pp. 204-207.

¹⁵⁷ Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Arte, vocabulario, tesoro y catecismo de la lengua guaraní (1639–1640)*, Asunción, Centro de Estudios Paraguayos "Antonio Guasch" (CEPAG), 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹⁵⁹ Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Kammarna Raman. Associate professor in the Department of Civics and Politics, University of Mumbai (India). Her teaching and research interest includes human rights, political theory and gender and political representation. She is presently working on the use of social media by political parties.
Contribution to the manual: pp. 155-157.

María Luisa Rivara de Tuesta. Emeritus professor at Universidad Nacional Mayor San Marcos (Peru) where she studied. She has a degree in history and philosophy (1963), teaches secondary education specializing in philosophy and social sciences (1964), and has a doctorate in education (1966). She studied philosophy in higher education at the Sorbonne University (Paris) (1966–1967).
Contribution to the manual: pp. 186-190.

Mario Ruiz Sotelo. Full-time lecturer and researcher in the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. He is also a lecturer on a permanent basis in the Faculty of Political Sciences of UNAM. His main areas of interest are the study of Latin American political philosophy and research into the critical thinking of the colonial period of Latin America.
Contribution to the manual: pp. 211-213.

Ricardo Rozzi. Professor at the University of North Texas (UNT, USA) and the University of Magallanes (UMAG, Chile). He is a Chilean ecologist and philosopher who blends the two disciplines as biocultural ethics in a methodological framework that he terms “field environmental philosophy”. His publications include “Integrating Ecological Sciences and Environmental Ethics into Biocultural Conservation in South American Temperate Sub-Antarctic Ecosystems”,¹⁶⁰ and “Biocultural Ethics: From Biocultural Homogenization toward Biocultural Conservation”.¹⁶¹
Contribution to the manual: pp. 230-233.

Valeria López Vela. Member of the National System of Researchers and Coordinator of the Anáhuac México Sur Human Rights Centre (agreement to promote respect for human rights).
Contribution to the manual: pp. 201-203.

Robin R. Wang. Daum Professor at Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles (USA) where she also is professor of philosophy, and director of Asian Pacific Studies. She is the author of *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*¹⁶² and the editor of *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization*.¹⁶³ She has published articles and essays and regularly given presentations in North America, Europe, and Asia. She has also been a consultant for the media, law firms, museums, K-12 educators, and health care professionals.
Contribution to the manual: pp. 158-161.

¹⁶⁰ Ricardo Rozzi, Juan J. Armesto, and Robert Frodeman, “Integrating ecological sciences and environmental ethics into biocultural conservation in South American temperate sub-Antarctic ecosystems” in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 30, 2008.

¹⁶¹ Ricardo Rozzi, “Biocultural Ethics : From biocultural homogenization toward biocultural conservation” in *Linking Ecology and Ethics for a Changing World : Values, Philosophy, and Action*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2014.

¹⁶² Robin Wang, *Yinyang : The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012

¹⁶³ Robin Wang (ed.), *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization*, New York, SUNY Press, 2012.

Through the promotion of South-South intellectual and philosophical dialogue, UNESCO seeks to encourage the development of diverse views by supporting and promoting the philosophical traditions of the metaphorical “South”, traditions which are still little known. What better way to do this than by providing sound educational resources aimed at teaching young people about the diversity of philosophical thought?

This manual, produced with the support of Saudi Arabia, is an innovative and high quality tool for young people in secondary and higher education and in non-formal education. The manual not only allows the discovery of philosophical texts from Africa, the Arab region, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, but also promotes their full understanding through a critical apparatus which enables easily adapted educational use.

As well as being informative, the manual provides a comparative reading of texts with a view to broad and diverse reflection on the key questions which span world philosophy.

