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IDEOLOGY IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

by

Kyalo Mativo

I

As an act of good will we start off with a grant of general amnesty to the question whether or not there is such a thing as African Philosophy. In its stead a conspectus of the specific elements that go into the making of it should suffice here to pave the way for a detailed analysis of what may or may not be regarded as constituting African Philosophy.

In the rank and file of the exponents of African Philosophy we come beard to beard with Janheinz Jahn who takes African Literature, and therefore Language, as the point of departure. He puts African Philosophy into four categories: 1) "Muntu", which includes human beings - both living and dead - the concept of God and everything else that is "endowed with intelligence." 2) "Kintu", covering "forces which cannot act for themselves" without the conscious action of a "Muntu" on them. Such are plants, animals, minerals, tools and other creatures. 3) "Hantu", the category of space and time. 4) "Kuntu", a model concept where beauty, laughter, sorrow, etc., reside.¹

Now when examined closely, it is found that there is one "force" in all these four categories: ntu. This "is the universal force as such" which cannot be found "apart from its manifestations: Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu...ntu is Being itself.... ntu is that force in which Being and beings coalesce." And to prove his exciting discovery he takes an illustration from Amos Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard* where "Kuntu" can be observed in action: "... we knew 'Laugh' personally on that night, because as every one of them stopped laughing at us 'laugh' did not stop for two hours!" Notice that the process by which we have arrived at the discovery of African Philosophy - at least this version of it - has been pure linguistic deduction. Later we shall see how this approach to philosophy came about and why. For now it is enough to point out that linguistic analysis of modes of thinking is one of the many European schools of Philosophy. Meanwhile we turn to another way of looking at African Philosophy as presented by yet another African Philosopher, John Mbiti, an accomplished African scholar, a pious Christian and a practised pastor.

Mbiti divides the African concept of time into two main periods:² the Sasa, the "now" period and the Zamani, the "past" period. These two periods do not correspond to the English "present" and "past" because they have within them all the tenses

relating to the "future", the "present" and the "past". Furthermore the two periods overlap in contradictions to the unholy finality of the English tenses. Thus for example Sasa has to its credit seven tenses, three of which belong to the Zamani period. Similarly the Zamani period carries five tenses with the same three belonging to the Sasa. In considering the whole span of man (African) life the specific concept of time becomes the general concept of history itself. And since the two periods possess their "present", "past" and "future", Pastor Mbiti comes to the inevitable conclusion that the African time proceeds from Sasa (the "now" period) to Zamani, (the "past"). From here it is one step *backwards* to the corollary: "In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving 'forward' toward a future climax."³ Although Mbiti has in mind his Western comrades in the Christian doctrine of Hell and Heaven, the social implications of his Philosophy need no interpretation. He himself faithful to his profession, minces no words in this respect; cheerfully he bears the burden of stating the obvious, not with a flare of holy defiance: "Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in Sasa and the Zamani."⁴ (emphasis added).

The static character of the African can only escape attention of the uninitiated. The 'noble savage' is, and will always remain what he has always been, which is necessary if he has to spare the profanity of the ideas of 'progress'. In point of fact "African peoples have no 'belief in progress', the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor 'build castles in the air'.⁵ This could as well be the best 'educated' man the West has ever produced in recent Africa (he is rumoured to possess a chain of academic degrees all at a high calibre of excellence). We have heard it said of such a man "this man is a genius" by those whose ideology the "genius" is the delivery vehicle. But, at the risk of treading on what President Kaunda once called 'the sensitive corn' of bourgeois ideologues one calls to mind what Lenin said of similar situation: "The bourgeoisie demands reactionary ideas from its professors."⁶ We should have more to say by and by about these ideological propositions based on 'studying' Africans in their 'natural habitat'. To round off the philosophical systems of African Philosophy we are served with another approach which claims to differ fundamentally from the preceding two. Its main prophet is Professor Mazisi Kunene, also said to be 'well-educated' but 'rebellious' academically speaking.

Professor Kunene's views on the essence of "African thought and Literature"⁷ are derived from the communal structure of African societies. The special case of the Zulu throws light on this essence: the social structure demands and receives from

the individual,

- 1) Heroism and self-sacrifice "on behalf of the community." Hence the Heroic epic,
- 2) 'functional' as opposed to 'abstract' thinking, the latter being a property of Western societies, and as such 'alien' to the African mind; and
- 3) a friendly attitude towards other people even those not belonging to your community: "Since the African translates external realities into terms of his immediate relations within his social group, he does not generally consider the world outside his immediate experience to be composed of hostile (abstract or mythological) forces."⁸

This character of the African (Zulu) people amounts to what he calls "the eternal laws of society"⁹ which literature reaffirms and petrifies for ever and ever. And unlike the European or American abstract concepts of such things as infinity, the universe and space and time, Kunene's Africa, like Mbiti's, brings these matters down to earth. On infinity, for example he says, "There could be no infinity as an abstraction, but a series of concrete existence stretching to no end."¹⁰ The structure of the Universe presents no problems to Kunene's African: this is easily depicted symbolically by a circle: "The concept of the circle contained in it the idea of the family, of time division of periods of existence, of the very shape and form of the universe. Even the circular structure of his (the African's) house emphasized this philosophy."¹¹ This philosophy is treated with full honours at some length in an interview Prof. Kunene granted *Ufahamu* recently,¹² and it is there we can take a close look at what it has to offer.

A summary "replay" of the interview runs as follows:

Q: What is Philosophy in general?

A: It's difficult to say, especially in a foreign language like English, because "it depends upon the point of view."*(p.5). It could be a useless reflection of life; it could be a reflection of the meaning of life as well, or a body of beliefs in the form of mythologies.

Q: Whence Philosophy?

A: Essentially and originally from Africa, especially from Egypt: "The Greeks derived a lot of their Philosophy from Egypt where they were taught by the Egyptian people who were African." (p.5).

Q: Is there such a thing as African Philosophy?

A: In as much as "we're talking of the emphasis that exists in

* Unless otherwise indicated all the page numbers given here refer to *Ufahamu*, vol. VII, no. 2, (1977) UCLA.

- different regions (p.6), ..., yes, you can approach it that way," (p.7) with the proviso that you look at it as "a fundamental layer of belief which is African." (p.7).
- Q: What is the essential character of African Philosophy which makes it so superior to the European?
- A: That's a beautiful question, and the answer to it is quite simple: Here's an example: "Africans would not be surprised if you told them that there are people in Mars or other planets." (p.10).
- Q: What is African world view?
- A: That question cannot be answered without defining the world "as a function, as a physical function." (p.14)
- Q: Can African Philosophy be represented properly?
- A: Not until you unlearn what you have learnt from European education.
- Q: Is African Philosophy scientific?
- A: (*Ufahamu*): There is no such thing as scientific Philosophy only "analytical philosophy". (p.20).
(KUNENE): Yes indeed..., at least it sounds like functional Philosophy. There can be no harm in defining African Philosophy as Scientific as long as we confine it to a mere description of that which "relates to the evolution of our society," and this means "we would not have to dismantle our own ideologies but reinstate them." (p.21).
- Q: And talking of ideologies, what are our own ideologies?
- A: This question can be answered only by defining the function of African ideologies. "Our own ideologies describe, *par excellence*, our own society, our own relations..." You see, "the function of African Philosophy... is concerned very much with the function of the society." (p.21). For example festivals are symbolic responses to the demands of African Philosophy "that there should be periodic changes, (p.21) just as much as "technology responds to ideologies of different societies" which "use it and mold it according to their own belief, history and culture." (p.21). African Philosophy should serve a similar purpose, it can solve problems of development in Africa because "many of the problems of development in the African continent are as a result of lack of understanding of what the African people want or what they want to do with that particular form of technology." (p.21).
- Q: What is African Philosophy's attitude towards the concept 'modern'?
- A: "Whether a time is modern depends on the society that says it is."
- Q: How does African Philosophy view space and time?
- A: Now here we go: "In the first place, what creates time," (p.21) or better still "what is the function of time?" The function of time is primarily to describe the differences between the periods, periods when things happen...

It describes the differences in the periods of action." (p.22) The African time has no commercial value as is the case in the Western society. The African sees space-time relationship "as a continual reality to which there is a relationship with the earth." Space "is an extension of the earth." (p.22) The African uses "the same words" to describe the universe as he does in describing the earth.

- Q: Is that not the same thing Pastor J. Mbiti means when he writes that "Space and time are closely linked, and often the same word is used for both."¹³
- A: Yes, but with a different conclusion. He implies for example that we Africans "don't really distinguish the past -- time is continuous for us -- we don't distinguish the past -- the future and the past are all for us part of the present. I think this is a completely false claim." (p.21). Rather, the African implication is, "you are here in the past, you are here in the future." (p.22).
- Q: How about the African philosophical view of motion?
- A: This is also functional. It is a description of growth....., of rebirth and the permanence of people.
- Q: There seems to be a mysterious quality in a movement such as dance, not so?
- A: Yes that is so. This motion or rather movement has mysterious healing quality. For example, a sick person is cured by inducing movement in him, that is, "by making him dance in a normal setting," which is a way of telling him, "you are normal like us." (p.23). The "internal force" so generated is what "society may refer to as mysterious." (p.23). The cure comes from "a re-establishment of the balance in the human situation." (p.23). This is the functional value of the concept of motion in African Philosophy. "Movement as done in dance therefore becomes symbolic of the person's relationship with society." (p.23).
- Q: And finally Professor Kunene, how does African Philosophy relate to the finality of human life?
- A: The living and the dead are united. The living are "an extension of our ancestors, of those that have come before." Children are therefore very important. "In the African society you start off by just saying 'let's have children' for the people must be reborn again(sic)." (p.24).

This replay is not a reproduction of Prof. Kunene's interview; it is rather a synthesis of the main ideas of his African Philosophy which recommend themselves to an exposé of a few words. But it must be admitted at first that not all that Prof. Kunene says is unfounded, in spite of the temptation to make that conclusion. He says for example that the African view of the universe is that space is always expanding. This view is current in present day science. In fact it has been scientifically established that the universe *is* indeed expanding in keeping with the theory that in the beginning was a "BANG"

followed by an endless flight of celestial bodies some of which light is just now reaching us. And the concept of the shape of the universe which Prof. Kunene's Africans liken to a circle not differ fundamentally from those based on mathematical calculations which ascribe to the universe all kinds of shapes, spherical, saddle-shaped and the like.

Furthermore some of Prof. Kunene's statements concern African societies in general are worth pondering. For example he is quite right when speaking of the European Philosophy to that it is founded on the European economic, political and cultural background, and that this is equally true of African Philosophy. He is also on the right track when he points out in the interview, that one cannot understand the African people from Western accounts, or from any accounts for that matter, are divorced from the actual lives of the people.

But the main emphasis of Prof. Kunene's African Philosophy, as well as that of Pastor Mbiti and Herr Jahn, is on the isolated nature of African societies, their stagnant character and their impervious quality vis-a-vis change. For Herr Jahn "Muntu" is the prime mover of things, but He/It always moves the same things in the same way as required by the independent non-changing essence of "Kintu", the category of the movable "forces". With Mbiti, African societies, having no sense of future, are not interested in progress, and are quite satisfied to sit down and wait for time. Prof. Kunene goes further in his efforts to differ from this approach to African Philosophy and makes a complete circle ending exactly at the same place as his fellow Africanist philosophers.

One does not have to be a Biologist or a Physicist to know that human life was hardly anywhere to be seen five million years ago, and that two hundred and twenty-five million years that is, at the beginning of what is geologically known as the Mesozoic period, bony fish and amphibians were in existence, not to mention that the earth itself has existed for the last 4.6 billion years. All this is reality that has been there before man, and as such has been independent of his philosophy.

The statement that African Philosophy has a reality belonging to the African people alone is very unfortunate because it reveals how little Prof. Kunene knows about other societies. It also proves that his understanding of Philosophy in general is very limited. It must be pointed out here that when we talk of "African Philosophy", at least as Prof. Kunene has it, we are necessarily referring to the African people's mode of consciousness. This Kunene admits himself albeit unwittingly, when he says that African Philosophy involves "a fundamental layer of belief which is African."

He even manages to leave the African continent for once and sees a similarity between African and Chinese Philosophy, although he seems totally oblivious to the fact that the Chinese have recently exorcized themselves of the confused ideas of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher with a similar philosophical outlook as that of Kunene. Every single human society has undergone similar if not the same beliefs as those Prof. Kunene is boasting about. It follows therefore that the form of consciousness we are witnessing now in Prof. Kunene's Africans is not exclusively theirs, historically speaking. This fact is not a secret to those who keep their minds open and are not caught up with the grandeur of their ancestors. The truth of the matter remains that to each level of social development there corresponds a definite form of social consciousness by virtue of the material relations among people. Only an insecure bourgeois philosopher would dismiss this as 'Marxist rhetoric'. Long before 1917, Lewis H. Morgan, a non-marxist, said, "With one principle of intelligence and one physical form, in virtue of a *common origin*, the results of human experience have been substantially the same in all times and areas *in the same ethnic status*."¹⁴ (emphasis added).

To imply that African Philosophy has a special essence of its own leads Prof. Kunene to mystical conclusions concerning those elements which make themselves available as this Philosophy's subject matter. Dance, says Prof. Kunene, has a functional value in that it heals the sick by making them regenerate the energy they lost. The term 'modern' has meaning only to those who say they are modern, which is to say, all societies can be considered to be modern in as much as their philosophies have that concept on agenda. The problems of development are to be blamed on the "lack of understanding of what the African people want," that is, on the failure, on the part of the people, to make technology respond to some idealistic philosophical concept. These conclusions are inevitable once philosophy in general has been defined as private property of this or that society.

How do these philosophical notions stand in relation to things as they are, not as they are supposed to be? Take motion. If a philosophy has room for this phenomenon, and there is no doubt that Kunene's African Philosophy does, then the point of departure cannot be the use into which motion is confined, but an examination of the nature of motion itself, that is, as it is independent of man or animal for that matter. And this cannot be done intuitively, if by examination we mean scientific observation. It becomes imperative to employ adequate means for the purpose, and when this happens we shall find ourselves reading not only Greek philosophy of antiquity, but also European scientific and philosophical literature, all the way from Copernicus to Einstein and beyond. We shall then learn that motion is

a 'natural' phenomenon inseparably tied to that of space and time. Space and time exist in motion and motion in space and time.

Einstein's relativity theory has established that motion outside space and time is non-existent, and that the reverse is equally true, space and time have no existence without motion. And what is motion, space and time? No philosophy worth a grain of salt can attempt to answer this question without science, and especially *modern* science, particularly micro physics. Although mankind first has to treat of reality in a speculative general manner before its specific forms could be isolated for analysis, philosophy as an inquiry into the processes of reality came into being "when men who analysed and classified experience began to seek the explanations of nature within nature itself."¹⁵ Every piece of information acquired prior to this was a mixture of mythologies and religious beliefs which were unable to produce ideas about nature and its laws¹⁶ much less explain them.¹⁷ This knowledge was, like all knowledge, necessarily limited, but unlike Prof. Kunene's African Philosophy, unlimited. It was limited "by the circumstances in which it was acquired"¹⁸, as Engela says in reference to the acquisition of knowledge in general.

The Philosophy that eventually resulted in the analysis of different forms of reality took off from Ancient Greece.* And it was not by mere chance that this was the case. One has to look into the very social structure that created the philosophical mind of the Greek variety. Philosophy in general, as already indicated, makes its debut only when human progress, necessarily material, reached a point where consciousness, a function of the progress, seeks to understand natural surroundings. Prior to this, the slow and tedious development of society proceeds outside the consciousness of men, blindly, anarchically but not lawlessly, that is, not without obeying objective laws of reality that exist independent and in spite of our wills. Through this progress a certain amount of knowledge is accumulated, so that "each substantial knowledge gained.... (serves as) a basis for further advancement."¹⁹

* The claim Prof. Kunene makes that European Philosophy originated from Egypt is not substantiated by the History of Philosophy Herodotus, who had no special liking for the Greeks whom he made inferior to the Egyptians, says nothing of the kind. W.T. Stace says bluntly to that claim, "there is not a scrap of evidence for it... the whole character of Greek Philosophy is European." ('A critical History of Greek Philosophy', p.17) Bertrand Russell even denies Egyptian contribution in the field of Mathematics, calling any knowledge of Mathematics that the Egyptians might have possessed "rules of thumb" and declaring, "deductive reasoning from general premises was Greek innovation." (B. Russell, a footnote from *A History of Greek Philosophy*, p.3).

In the 'tribal' society (with apology to Africanists for the use of the offensive word, but there is no substitute for it here) man does not, has no need to differentiate between myth and reality, does not separate his practical activity from the consciousness of it. His consciousness is as animal as social life itself at this stage. It is mere herd-consciousness, and at this point man is only distinguished from sheep by the fact that with him consciousness takes the place of instinct or that his instinct is a conscious one".²⁰ African Philosophy as expounded by Prof. Kunene corresponds to a very low level of social development, and as such not "old" in the sense that it is pregnant with experience, but antiquated and out of tune with the requirements of present day reality in Africa itself.

Philosophy refines its subject-matter much as an oil refinery processes crude oil. In the case of Greek Philosophy the question of primary substance, which arose from the necessity to understand reality, underwent a series of philosophical metamorphoses receiving a modification here a subtraction there, until, with Atomists, it ran into a sleeping monster: motion. Having conceived of empty space as a force which unites and separates atoms, atoms the 'indivisible' particles of matter, matter the primary substance of all reality as philosophically conceived, there was no detour around the concept of motion. And since Greek Philosophy at one point ceased to be a special undertaking of the Greeks and became European Philosophy in general, the concepts which it had already acquired in its formative years, space and time, motion, ethics, aesthetics and the like, were molded further into all sorts of shapes and shades as determined by social relations at various levels in the development of European societies.

When Europe later invaded Africa for economic reasons and found Pastor J. Mbiti's Africans moving back in time while Prof. Kunene's were dancing as required by their 'functional' Philosophy, she introduced into the minds of "educated" Africans these concepts *already refined*, that is as finished goods, philosophical merchandise, manufactured items trade-marked "MADE IN EUROPE". The "educated" Africans then found themselves in a dilemma, on the one hand their special training as "thinkers" demanded of them that they philosophize, write, paint and so on, on the other, the society from which they hailed had not developed to a point where its consciousness could concern itself with refining concepts of motion, space, time, aesthetics, and art-appreciation. As a result of this dilemma "educated" Africans were forced to employ alien terminologies to describe aspects of their society, not realizing they were actually using *foreign* concepts in as much as they were not organic entities of their people. Thus, they landed in a contradiction from which they could only extricate themselves superficially by 1) denouncing

their Western education as irrelevant or harmful, 2) shearing their masters' concepts of their offensive 'abstract' wool and 3) redefining these self-same terms as 'functional' concepts. The product of this process was either a pastor or a mystic, or both.

Which is why it is very questionable whether the concepts that Prof. Kunene claims are African in essence actually belong to them organically. Even if we take his Zulu poems as evidence we would still have to deal with the fact that he translated them himself, in which case the chances are ninety-nine to one that he imparted his own concepts of his consciously educated self. This is not to say that Africans are not capable of 'deep' thoughts. This is a mindless quibble dished around by Africans of all shades, both black and white. The point here is that Philosophy, as a form of consciousness, refine only such concepts as emanate organically from the bowels of the society in question and that certain concepts such as space and time, motion, chance, necessity and others are incorporated into philosophy at definite periods of its development.

In primeval societies man "does not brood over the fact of his own mind,"²¹ he does not, and has no need to draw distinction between his practical and his mental activity, precisely because the economic set-up has not advanced to a level where that distinction becomes necessary. He has not yet begun to transform nature on a large scale, but lives with it in an integral whole. At this level his consciousness is 'tribal' in essence, which is why it is practical and concrete, hence 'functional' philosophy. It is the division between the mental and manual activity as brought about by economic advancement that is responsible for 'abstract' thinking.

It must be reiterated here without apology and as a matter of grave importance: the division between mental activity makes its debut at a definite phase of a people's development, and with it the differentiation of the society into 'thinkers' and 'non-thinkers'. The form of consciousness (philosophy) which has hitherto expressed the essence of the communal structure of the people changes accordingly. "From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice,..... from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc."²² (Emphasis in the original). In the course of the development of this "pure" consciousness, Philosophy for example, new ideas and concepts come into being, such as ideas of motion, space and time, chance and necessity, whose conditions for existence were absent in the earlier stages of the people's social organization. So that if and when these

new concepts are applied on the circumstances of the earlier social stages, they would find no room for them because they are foreign, external and therefore despotic to the reality of the people whose essential features they seek to 'explain'. They can only exist by purifying them of their "purity", by stripping them of their 'abstract' character and replenishing them with 'functional' sacrament. On these crotchets they may limp, crawl or fall, but stand?

It is therefore the onset of the separation of manual from mental labour which ushers the categorization of philosophy as a theoretical undertaking by the class that is spared the 'indignity' of physical work. Prior to this, theory is indistinguishable from practice and "consciousness (philosophy) is practical rather than theoretical."²³ Concepts like motion, change, time, space are not separate entities from practical life; rather they form one whole totality. They are not analysed in fragments but "accepted as self-evident truths,"²⁴ which is not to say that they cannot be described. Description for them exists, but the words for that description, as for the 'concepts', are usually the same, even Prof. Kunene and Pastor Mbiti have themselves said as much. The only difference is that the reason behind this fact seems to elude them. And the reason is simply that these notions are for the 'tribal' society as yet not products of their heads but of the sweat of their heads. And this condition corresponds to a very low level of social organization.

II

"The great basic question of all philosophy," writes Engels, "especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being."²⁵ The subject matter of that question was the position of spirit in relation to nature, that is, whether spirit is primary or secondary to nature. When the question was put to the philosophers it transformed itself into this: "Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of the real world?"²⁶ With Plato, ideas had to correspond to reality, but then he made those ideas reality itself by abstracting from real things the idea of the things. Well now, when confronted with the same question, later European philosophers split up into two camps: those who gave nature first place came to be known as materialists while the spiritual philosophers embraced idealism.

The philosophical battle is fought on two fronts: on the one hand there is struggle between idealism and materialism, and on the other there is a war going on between mechanical and

dialectical materialism. And this came about through a process of differentiation of world outlook as determined by the material basis of the philosophers, and the level of development of the societies in which philosophy found expression. Heraclitus enunciated a world enclosing everything, not contingent upon outside forces, not created by gods or man one that has always existed. This is analogous to a substance which embraces the basis for scientific explanation of the world from itself. With Descartes, this substance becomes self-creative power, in defiance of the European Middle Ages notion of God as the creator of all things. This was the seed from which the materialist doctrines of the 17th and 18th centuries grew.

Because of Copernicus' heliocentric system, philosophers armed themselves with the scientific means for examining the processes at work in nature. The concepts of infinity, causality, chance, necessity and such other philosophical problems, could now be examined and explained with a measure of exactitude. With the development of technology, it also became possible to reveal their true nature by showing how they work objectively. It is necessary to emphasize this point because African philosophers fail to grasp the interaction between philosophy and science. No philosophy has a right to keep people in an underdeveloped state by praising ancient modes of thinking. The absolute quality of things as assumed by primeval societies is no longer on the agenda in the age of supersonic jets and cruise missiles.

Take the search for the primary substance out of which all things are made, which took the ancient Greek philosophers centuries of 'fruitless' mental labour. When the matter reached 17th century Europe, Spinoza conceived of it as an inactive substance, Leibnitz introduced some sort of self-propelling force into it but remained within the confines of predetermination. Locke insisted that all that can be conceived by man's senses can also be registered and confirmed experimentally by science; but with Berkeley, the category of substance is discarded altogether and in its place man's sensations and the absolute cause of things ascribed to God. Nevertheless, the concept of universal reason receives a 'black eye' (naturally, it was white) when Hegel maintains that the substance encloses everything in itself in a dialectical way, uniting subject, (man) with object, (nature). With him substance is the beginning and the end. But not every philosopher understood 'subject' and 'object' in that sense. 'Subject' for Descartes, constitutes 'reason' by means of which alone truth could be attained, and the highest means for this was mathematics: *je pense, donc je suis*. With Kant, it is cognition of the world within the perception capability of man, leaving his "thing-in-itself" incomprehensible. Such

'things' as time and space, are for Kant, products of individual minds, so that everybody carries in his head his own time and space, as a tortoise carries its shell. With Fichte it is Absolute Self, once again.

An inquiry which began as a philosopher's 'innocent' pet subject centuries earlier now assumes the criminal features of the relationship between objective material reality and the subjective sensuous self. The philosophical approaches to this theme define and describe the school to which a philosophy belongs: subject-object approach belongs to idealism, i.e., to that school of philosophy which takes a subjective outlook to reality; object-subject approach belongs to materialism, to the philosophy which regards objective reality as the point of departure. But this too, has its own differences. What is common in the various types of materialism is that, with them the relationship between object and subject, or better still, object-subject relation, is an expression of identity of thinking and being, that is to say, the correspondence of ideas to reality.

There is of course a difference between mechanical and dialectical materialism, but it is a tedious subject to address in detail here. However, the essence of mechanical materialism is to regard things as finished products, it is a philosophy of finality of reality. It investigates things in their stability, as given and fixed in a form of perfection. This way of thinking was inevitable given the level of scientific development in Europe in the 17th century. The Newtonian system of nature, for example, assigned to particles definite absolute patterns of behaviour, leaving no room for criss-crossings and interactions between them as conditions of their actions changed.

Dialectical materialism on the other hand examines processes of change in things, and therefore in reality itself. For it nothing is final, every stage is an ephemeral but necessary stage for further development of the thing. Unlike Prof. Kunene's 'eternal laws of society' every law is applicable to a reality only under the conditions of that reality; with changed conditions, also changed reality, hence changed laws. Dialectics is the science of the most general laws of reality, general, because the conditions under which processes take place differ according to the peculiarities and novelties pertaining to the place and time in which reality is to be found. And there are different kinds of dialectics, that is of the laws of objective reality: dialectics of nature, dialectics of the development of the mind and dialectics of the human society, to give a few examples. The laws of objective reality, as they operate in each and every one of these categories differ in their application. The application of these laws in human society is known as Historical materialism, in contrast to Dialectical materialism, the

general category.

Philosophy broke up into two world views: philosophy according to Dialectical and Historical materialism and philosophy of Idealism. Historically under Idealism, there developed several sub-standard branches which extended into all kinds of philosophical utterances when the European bourgeois class entered their present state of decadence. We have in mind a system like that of one Martin Heidegger, who takes language as his starting point for a philosophical investigation. From language he derives "the true substance" of a philosophy, much the same way one squeezes the udders of a cow to extract milk, or, breaks the veins of a bull to drink the blood, leaving the animal unharmed for future purposes. Herr Janheinz Jahn's 'ntu' belongs here. Whether or not he is a disciple of Herr Heidegger, and carries the latter's *Was ist das-die Philosophie?* on his trips to Africa, is immaterial. The fact here is that the existentialist message of this philosophy is unmistakable, which is only natural given that Herr Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre are the two acknowledged exponents of this philosophy of decaying and confused bourgeois life.

The danger of existentialist* outlook in relation to 'African philosophy' is that by 'squeezing' the real substance from African languages, like squeezing poison from the fangs of a puff-adder, you are likely to get bitten, then it does not matter anymore what becomes of your 'ntu'.

How did the two schools of philosophy relate to science now that they had parted company for ever? The philosophical question about the primary substance constituting all things ceased to be purely philosophical once Robert Boyle introduced his chemical corpuscles into the scene. The atom continued to be regarded as the smallest particle until 1815 when the London doctor William Prout declared that it could be split up into smaller parts.

Between 1903-12, Rutherford made a thorough study of the structure of the atoms of various substances by bombarding them with particles of radioactive material. With alpha-particles,

* Existentialism has as its pivot the mystical notion that Being is unknowable, and since, according to Existentialism, the task of philosophy is the knowledge of Being, philosophy is indefinable. In essence we are back at the Kantian "thing-in-itself", which Hegel criticized long ago and science has shown practically to be a falsehood. The logic of Existentialism is that social life cannot be changed basically (for how can you change something that is unknowable?), and that social progress does not alter what society already is.

the strongest of the three 'rays', he found that when a sheet of a thin gold foil was placed in their way, most of them went through it, a few were deflected from a straight line and some were actually pushed back, as a ball rebounds from a solid body. The 'solid' rock that repelled and deflected Rutherford's alpha-particles, was the nucleus of the atom.

With this discovery, the next question was naturally, what was the nucleus made of? Since the number of negative charged particles (electrons) equals the total positive charge in the nucleus, as Prout had demonstrated, it followed logically that the weight of the nuclei of other atoms of various elements should be identical to that of the nucleus of the atom of hydrogen, the simplest atom, with one positive charge balanced by a negative one. The trouble was that some nuclei weighed more than they were worth, so to speak. This discrepancy led Rutherford to wonder where the difference lay.

To cut a long story short, from here it was only a matter of time before another citizen of the nucleus was discovered. This was done in 1932 by another Englishman, James Chadwick, when he proved that there existed in the nucleus a flux of neutral particles with the same mass as that of the protons. These chargeless particles were named 'neutrons' on that account, and the two particles in the nucleus were given the common name 'nucleons' because they were found to behave in a queer manner, namely: they could transform into one another, that is, under appropriate conditions a neutron could become a proton and a proton a neutron. In the process, two more particles are born precisely in the following way: when a neutron turns into a proton under 'natural' radioactive conditions, an electron and a "neutrino", and when a proton transmutes into a neutron by means of 'artificial' radioactivity, a "positron" and a neutrino are released.

But what are the philosophical implications of these scientific advances so far? In the first place, it must be noticed that under definite conditions, definite entities are produced and last as long as those conditions prevail; changed conditions lead inevitably to different entities pertaining only to those conditions. "Photons" for example, (another kind of micro-particles) can exist *only* at the speed of light. Secondly, the formation of atoms is a historical process which necessarily describes the development of the universe itself. The combination of nuclei and electrons to produce different atoms of various substances, required time to be accomplished if appropriate proportions for the formation of elements were to be achieved, and it is these proportions that are referred to as 'properties' of substances. This operation is nothing more than the unity of time and space, since the *time* it took electrons and nucleons to

form into definite proportions allowed the consequent fusion that is, the atoms formed in the process, to occupy a definite *space*. Here then time and space can be explained scientifically from the reality of nature itself as opposed to the intuition of Prof. Kunene's "African Philosophy".

Thirdly, the metaphysical search for the 'final' substance of which reality is made has so far met a resolute scientific rebuff. Present day science does not offer a single 'elementary' substance that can be considered the last in the line of 'elementariness', and it is not likely to do so in the future. Any attempt to 'break up' elementary particles leads only to the formation of lighter particles. The 'splitting' does not take place in the normal sense of the word; only an interaction giving off other particles whose mass may even be larger than the 'parent' particles. This notwithstanding, the philosophy of Idealism still insists on the finality of nature. Even Einstein after establishing that all that exists does so only in reference to a definite framework; that such concepts as length, mass, energy, space, time and motion, have meaning only within the confines of their reference, according to his special theory of relativity of 1905, and that absolute change of motion and mass, just like their existence, does not exist as postulated by the general theory of relativity (1915), as he well remarks, "his whole life's work has been devoted to *eliminating relative qualities* from Physics in order to reach at *a firm absolute foundation*."²⁷ (emphasis added)

Today, the search for absolute elementary particles continues. And this in itself is a good thing, (for what would such a nice thing like science be doing in a place like this? and some direct hits have been achieved. For example, the so-called 'quarks'* associated with Murray Gell-Mann and George Zweig, both of California Institute of Technology, came into being in 1963, and as recently as 1974 another claim of the discovery of the particles 'J' or 'Psi' was made at the Brookhaven National Laboratory and at the Stanford Linear Accelerators Centre.²⁸ But for some reason the "quarks" are considered to have the last word, "The quarks may be the last in a long series of progressively finer structures. They seem to be *truly elementary*" (emphasis added). But the fact that the "quarks" have never been isolated from any member of the Hadron family ('Hadrons' and 'Leptons' are the two groups of elementary particles comprising all the known atomic particles) to which they are supposed

* The name 'quark' was adopted by Murray Gell-Mann from James Joyce's "Finnegan's Wake" :

"Three quarks for Master Mark.

"Sure he hasn't got much of a bark.

"And sure any he has it's all beside the mark."

to belong, and that the nucleon (proton or neutron) decomposes only into other familiar particles, goes to show that "no entity at all ever consists of elementary particles;"³⁰ every level of elementariness is at the same time a complex one, a nodal point from which various qualitative forms of existence arise when the conditions for them are present. That is precisely what philosophy according to Dialectical and Historical Materialism teaches.

III

The ideological content of philosophy in general should be obvious by now. Prof. Kunene admits it himself when he says in his interview: "I think that many of the problems of development in the African continent are a result of lack of understanding of what the African people want" soon after his assertion "that technology responds to the ideologies of different societies." The argument he is advancing here is that "our philosophy is not unscientific and academic" contrary to those who say "that it belongs to the past as against a foreign philosophy that belongs to the present and so the modern." In fact, says Prof. Kunene, all that the African people need to do is to know "what they want to do with that (which?) particular form of technology." The message here is clear: "the problems of development in the African continent" are to be blamed on the "lack of understanding" on the part of the African people themselves, that is, on their failure to make "that particular form of technology" respond to the ideology content of Prof. Kunene's African philosophy, the nucleus of its "functional" quality.

By the logic of that philosophical exposition alone, it follows, does it not, that a philosophy whose technological response takes the form of cruise missiles, back-fire bombers and laser beams to rule the world, or combine-harvesters, tractors and other agricultural machines to grow food, that philosophy is necessarily superior to any whose social "function" is confined to "functional" concepts of a dubious character. Even if it were to be argued that Africans do not need cruise missiles, back-fire bombers, etc., what about food? Hence the philosophical posture that "our philosophy is not unscientific" finds itself betrayed by the very premise on which it rests, to wit: the "emphasis" that "technology responds to ideologies of different societies", since a superior technology would vindictively prove that the ideology from which it springs is of a superior nature.

But of course here the retort is always, 'it depends on the society that says its technology is superior.' If one form of technology can produce enough food for a people and defend

them against outside invasion as compared to another which can not even ward off occasional raids by racist regimes, for example, Botswana and Mozambique vis-a-vis Ian Smith's 'Rhodesia', that is the end of "it depends" argument. By the word "scientific" Prof. Kunene understands 'the function of the society', 'periodic change', birth, death, symbolism, mysticism and various other products of a "functional philosophy". Yes indeed the machine is the decisive factor whether a society is modern or not, and if the African people had enough of them, we would neither have Ian Smith and Vorster in Southern Africa today, nor would it be possible for four million white people to oppress over twenty million Africans for three hundred years.

On December 16th 1838, the Boer commando of only 500 men and 57 wagons led by Andries Pretorius massacred 3,000 Zulu soldiers at Ncome river, and in February 1887, the British annexed the Zulu kingdom and split it up into 13 powerless principalities. All that was accomplished with the maxim gun, not with "beliefs, way of life, the human make-up of the society." True, the Zulu people flexed their own muscles too, as for instance, when Dingane, the traditional chief of the Zulu, wiped out 70 Boers led by Piet Retief, whom the chief had invited on February 6th 1838 on the pretext of negotiating a land concession; or again on 22nd January 1879, when Chief Cetshwayo's impi attacked and killed 1400 British invaders, who had camped at Isandhlawana under Lord Chelmsford. If the African people could perform such brilliant military acts with only spears and assegais, how much more could they do today with F16's, 'tomcats', MiGs, T54 tanks, 'Leopards', AK47 automatic rifles and other military products of the *modern* technology? For that is the full meaning of the word *modern*.

The past teems not only with philosophies that advocate technological backwardness, but also with those who advocate the opposite. And it does not follow at all that, because we live in the twentieth century, all philosophies that are being dished out all over the world are modern. The fault lies in dumping all European philosophy in one band-wagon as 'abstract' in contradistinction to the 'concreteness' of the 'African philosophy'. The question is not which philosophy belongs to which nation, continent or even century, but rather which philosophy covers the laws of objective reality in the most general way; the rest belongs to the museum of human history, whether African or European. In this way, the European philosophy of Idealism, the Kantian "transcendental idealism", which Prof. Kunene rightly finds repugnant, is not any more so than the "African functional philosophy" he is advocating. Both are distortions of reality, one naive and 'innocent', the other limited by its metaphysical confines.

And then history does not offer a single example where

technology was a function of ideology of a people initially. It is true that an ideological outlook may have a bearing on designs of machines, construction of buildings, cities, etc., for example, the new American space shuttle, "the Enterprise" whose ideological basis is the opening up of a new channel for private profiteering as well as the expansion of military and spying techniques. But this effect of ideology on technology is possible only when technology has long been in existence. Technology is the consequence of self-expansion of capital, i.e., the necessity to do away with human labour as much as possible in order to maximize profits and minimize costs.* Ideology, on the other hand, is an ideal grasp of an economic structure of a people in an epoch. Therefore technology and ideology belong together: labour, human labour. Their relationship to one another is a reciprocal one. With the advance of technology, new ideas come into being to put this technology into use, and with these ideas various designs are introduced in the technological sphere.

It cannot be argued, therefore, that the cause of African underdevelopment is the failure to understand "what the African people want, or what they want to do with that particular form of technology." Ironically this is the line that the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune*, the two "front-line" mouthpieces of the American business community, have always espoused, which for them is quite understandable. That particular mode of thinking amounts to this: 1) all the facilities for development stay at the disposal of the African people, it is just the question of knowing "what to do with that particular form of technology." 2) The conditions for that development are under the full control of the Africans. 3) The geographical location of the African continent and the availability of natural subsistence have played no role in the social reality of Africa today.

Now all this is fallacy, pure and simple. Take 1 and 2. The facilities for development, such as capital in the form of machines, money, training institutions, industrial construction and production structures, etc., and the social conditions to facilitate any development, such as African ownership *not* 'control' of these facilities, genuine political and economic independence and non-antagonistic social relations within the African societies themselves, all these necessary factors are lacking in the African continent today. Every one of them is

* This refers specifically to the historical development of capital. It should not be construed to mean that social development and technology are necessarily antagonistic, which is an absurd notion. Prof. Kunene's pillory of European "abstract" philosophy ends up there.

subject to external and internal manipulation.*

Now take 3. Nature has played the role of a spoiling mother on Africa. The bounty of the African continent, of what Prof. Kunene speaks, has had a tragic economic effect on the African societies, providing them with an apparently endless source of food and warmth, and thereby making no demands on them to appropriate it to themselves. No wonder they sat down and "waited for time" as Mbiti would be more than glad to say. In contrast, the scanty resources of temperate zones forced man to strain himself in order to survive at all, and that meant adding human labour to the pittance of nature; the result was industrial development. Thus everything turns into its opposite: the natural richness of the African continent leads to its poverty, and the poverty of the European countries ends up in their prosperity. Marx's formulation of this tragedy is irresistible here:

*A too prodigious nature 'holds man by the hand like a child on leading reins,' it prevents him from developing without making his development a necessity of nature. The homeland of capital is not in tropical climates, amid rich vegetation but in the temperate zone.*³¹

"The problems of development in the African continent find their explanation in the total sum of those three factors, not in the "lack of understanding of what the African people want." It goes without saying, therefore, that the basis for the solution of these problems lies in the process of liberation now under way in Africa; any philosophy, whether African or not, whose effect is to hinder that process, deserves to die.

Only one thing more needs to be said about Prof. Kunene's African philosophy - his aversion to "abstract thinking" which he ascribes summarily to European philosophy, is an expensive fondness. We have already pointed out that there is no such thing as "European philosophy" in the sense of a common approach to philosophy. It is "European" only historically speaking, that is to say, in the sense that it belongs to the European history. But the approaches to philosophy among European peoples differ fundamentally. Dialectical philosophy has absolutely nothing to do with metaphysics. And these two philosophical approaches are to be found in Europe, just as much as anywhere else. Now abstract thinking is not an exclusive property of any of these philosophies, neither is it a negative aspect.

* Examples for this are not hard to find. One need only think of the many institutions and 'aid programmes' in Africa, for example, the so-called 'Institute for Development Studies' in Nairobi, Kenya.

Before a problem can be analysed and studied in detail, it has to be conceived in its totality, in its general set-up. Mathematics is the art of abstract thinking; no equation can be solved unless its solution is contained in a general framework.

Up to a point, the embryo taking shape in the womb of a human female is not a specific baby, but foetus. Even after it has been born it remains for quite some time an abstract thing, a baby in the abstract, it doesn't even have any specific colour. The only thing certain is its sex, which is achieved at some stage in the development of the foetus. The same is true with the process of thinking. The point of departure is always the general, the abstract; the specific, the concrete is only a delineation of the abstract and the general, and it comes ever always after the general has reached a definite stage of development.

A distinction should be made between an analysis of a problem and the conception of it. In the actual analysis, the procedure starts from the particular to the general, but for that to be possible the outlines of the general have to be drawn to define the extent to which the analysis can be carried, and this requires exactly the opposite procedure: from the general to the particular.

The point we wish to make here is that abstract thinking is quite valid and in many cases indispensable. The advance of science would have been impossible without it; and therefore, any indiscriminatory prejudice against it is the best road to philosophical stagnancy. And if Prof. Kunene regards all this as evidence of "foreign philosophy", well and good; after all there are many like that for whom the academic bell tolls every time reference is made to forbidden names like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, etc. To them this is evidence of "dogmaticism" and "left-wing" politics, which explains why we have confined ourselves in this article only to the very necessary references to works of Marx, Engels and the like.

IV

Prof. Kunene's "most fundamental thing" about time being the description of "the differences between periods," makes it necessary for us to point out here that the "most fundamental thing" is to distinguish between 'period' and 'time'. 'Period' is identical to, but not the same as time. A period of time is precisely a 'piece' of time, a section of it, a duration, to use a normal expression. 'Time' covers period, but not 'period' 'time'. Period is discrete time, while time is the unity of this discreteness, an expression of continuity. So then, when you say that time describes "the differences between periods," you

are saying nothing more than that time describes itself in its capacity as a part of itself, which is to say, time describes its identity. It may make an African philosophical sense, but it has no meaning.

"The most fundamental thing" to understand about time-space concepts is their general property of objectivity. Their existence does not depend on human consciousness. The second "most fundamental thing" is that it is impossible to conceive of time and space without change. Since matter exists as a continuous process, as Microphysics has proved beyond a doubt, a process of interaction between different elements, this can only mean one thing: change. And change takes place in time, which as we have seen is a description of a process involving motion. Motion, and this is the third "most fundamental thing" to grasp, therefore cannot be regarded as a separate entity from space-time-change relation. It must be emphasized again and again until the "African philosophy" of mysticism is done away with, that "the basic forms of all being are space and time and being out of time is just as gross an absurdity as being out of space."³² Further, Prof. Kunene's 'function of time' concept does not have anything to do with time, because "the subject at issue is not the *idea of time* but *real time*,"³³ (emphasis in the original).

Concerning the structure of the universe, the importance of Microphysics cannot be exaggerated in this respect. The laws operating in the micro-world (the world of elementary particles), and those governing the reality of macro- and the megaworld (the world perceptible by ordinary senses and instruments, and that of heavenly bodies respectively) have one thing in common: they are objective laws of reality. Their difference is also their similarity; they differ in as much as they operate on qualitatively different levels, but they are the same because they reveal the inner essence of things. Their unity constitutes reality. Thus, those who assert that the micro-world does not develop but only changes fail to realize that time change and development that is undeniable in the macro-world is possible only on the basis of the capacity of the elementary particles to enter into combinations, bonds and associations with each other. It is this capacity that the ordinary world depends on. The world of the elementary particles is in this sense the arsenal of all forms of being.

In considering the properties of the universe, it is impossible to escape from the concept of infinity, and infinity is inconceivable outside time. We begin once again here, with time.

John Mbiti tells us that the African time begins with

Sasa and goes back to Zamani. Is there any scientific truth in this? Well, in 1928 Paul Dirac, who earlier in his student years had given "-2" as the answer to a mathematical problem involving the number of fish three fishermen had had before each in turn divided the fish into three equal shares, tossing back into the sea the one that remained each time, came up with another interesting surprise. The 'spin' quality of the electron, said Dirac, demanded that there exist negative energy and negative mass. That means that electrical forces affecting these negative qualities would force electrons to move in the opposite direction to normal motion. He suggested that electrons had the quality to possess such levels of energy states under certain conditions. Such for example is what is considered to be "empty" space. Dirac considered this to be a continuous endless number of electrons in various levels of negative energy whose total electromagnetic gravitational effect equals zero. Bubbles of water is another example. A bubble is, according to Dirac, a 'hole' in which electrons occupy negative energy states. When a 'normal' electron falls into this 'hole', it 'vanishes' after giving off a quantum of energy, and with it the 'hole'. This actually amounts to self-annihilation of matter.

And when in 1932 Carl Anderson discovered the positron, the positively charged electron with a mass equal to that of a 'normal' electron, Dirac's 'mad' theory appeared to have been confirmed.

On collision the positron and the electron destroy one another emitting two quanta of energy. It has also been discovered that, when very 'hard' gamma rays pass through matter under certain conditions, an amount of radiation quanta vanish and their place is taken by two kinds of particles: electrons and positrons. "The transformation of a gamma-quantum into an electron-positron pair is only possible in the presence of a strong electrical or gravitational field, the first near the atomic nuclei, and the second at the surface of very dense stars."³⁴ (emphasis added), writes K. Gladkov on the subject. And what is more, the existence of particle-anti-particle pair is now being used to explain the nature of the so-called "black-holes" in space, the bodies said to be created from collapsing objects which in the process acquire a gravitational pull so strong that nothing can escape from it, not even light with its 300,000 kilometers per second get away speed*, hence the 'black-

* An adequate velocity is always required for a body to overcome the gravitational effect of its frame of reference. A space-craft launched from the earth, for instance, has to travel at the speed of about 11.2 kilometers a second to be able to escape from the earth's gravitational pull, while the Americans needed only 2.7 km/sec to take off and go away from the moon. 8.0 km/sec is necessary for an earth's artificial satellite.

ness' of the 'black holes'.

The logical conclusion of Dirac's theory is this: there exists a possibility that somewhere in the universe - and that includes the earth, lives anti-matter, that is substances whose elements consist of atoms with nuclei of negative protons and positive electrons (positrons). This assertion has already been made; thus Hawkins has gone on record as saying, "In a black hole matter collapses and is lost forever but new matter is created in its place."³⁵ How founded such allegations are is for our purpose here, of no consequence; objective laws of nature speak for themselves, and their word is always the last.

As far as J. Mbiti's philosophy of backward time goes it need only be pointed out that man is made of particles not anti-particles, as somebody has rightly remarked, and particles as we all know travel forward in time. Sure enough, quantum mechanics allows a measure of reverse movement of time, but it has adequately been proved scientifically that the 'forward' process is much stronger than its reverse. Furthermore, the development of things, change, that is, is a forward movement and because change cannot take place outside time its movement must also go forward. The reverse movement that we see in American films is an illusion, the actual filming is done by people who know only too well that they are growing old, and that is precisely the proof of the forward movement of time. Today, quite a number of anti-particles exist, but science has only succeeded in proving that the universe is made up of identical matter, and that motion, the mode of existence of this matter is what distinguishes its form.

Before we examine how African Philosophy relates to African Literature, we are in a position to revoke the general amnesty we granted to the question whether or not there is such a thing as African philosophy. The question is only a specific formulation of what philosophy is in fact, and we have had to postpone it in the hope that, by showing how it operates in different epochs among different peoples, we shall have spared ourselves the necessity of an arbitrary definition. We have in effect moved from the particular to the general as a matter of analysis.

The definition of philosophy is an abstraction. It cannot unite all possible definitions of philosophy, such as those listed by Theodor Ozierman in his book, *Problems of the History of Philosophy*:

- 1) philosophy as the study of being,
- 2) philosophy as the study of cognition,
- 3) philosophy as the study of all that exists in reality.

- 4) philosophy as the study of that which does not exist in reality,
- 5) philosophy as theory,
- 6) philosophy as 'not theory', but as a 'functional' mental activity,
- 7) philosophy as science in its own right,
- 8) philosophy as not subject to scientific verification, and so on.

The list can be extended to cover things like 'analytic philosophy' and others. It therefore appears that philosophy as such cannot be defined, which is what Prof. Kunene says in his interview, and in a limited sense he is right. To define a thing means not only to summarize the particular characteristics of the thing but also to generalize them; the summary is a generalized summary.

In the special case of philosophy, the elements which go into its making are not always the same at all historical periods among all peoples in an epoch. Differences of philosophical outlook exist, but they are local differences, that is to say, differences in the form of responses to those aspects of the people that pertain to them alone as conditioned by the special circumstances under which they live. This means that, once these special circumstances have been isolated, there remains what we may call a philosophical residue that pervades all philosophies at all times among all peoples. This is what we meant when we said earlier that there is nothing absolutely African in African philosophy. It is a fact that is especially true for things involving social development. When speaking of production, for example, Marx explains that, as social process of development, it undergoes various phases, so that each time we are faced with a definite historical epoch with definite novelties relating to that epoch alone. "But all epochs of production have in common certain features, common forms (*gemeinsame Bestimmungen*). Production in general is an abstraction, but a sensible abstraction, since it actually projects the general, fixes it and thereby saves us the repetition."³⁶

So also with the definition of philosophy. We extract from specific philosophies of different peoples at different times or same epochs, that which is common in them all, the general, and that is unmistakably the world outlook. The traditional formulation of the same thing is "world view" in English, *conception du monde* in French, *concezione del mondo* in Italian, *Mirovozzreniye* in Russian; all expressing in various degrees the German *Weltanschauung*, which incidentally has become almost the standard definition of philosophy in all those languages. It has its own problems - not the word, but the definition³⁷ - but it encompasses most features of philosophy in

general.

It is in this sense we can say, yes, there is such a thing as African philosophy, just as much as we can say, with modifications of course, there is such a thing as African literature. As Christopher Caudwell puts it, "the theory of a man is his world-view, and ultimately informs and guides his every action - is in fact inseparable from it."³⁸ The 'why' of African philosophy and philosophers, just in case the question comes up, finds its answer in Bertrand Russell's words in spite of his aristocratic limitations: "To understand an age or a nation, we must understand its philosophy, and to understand its philosophy we must ourselves be in some degree philosophers."³⁹ But this does not follow that we should advocate a philosophy of subjectivism making our own attitude to life, life itself. This is the poisonous weed of the exponents of African philosophy, the misfortune which befell the epicurean philosophy in which "the spirit of the time, the spiritual nad, satiated with itself, ideally formed in all aspects in itself, was not allowed to recognize any reality which has taken place without it."⁴⁰

The advantage of the definition of philosophy as a world-view is that, since the circumstances under which people live determine their world outlook, philosophy in the final analysis transforms itself into a vehicle for hard-core politics and all its general pedlars acquire the more specialized category of political pimps.

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35. Hawking, S.W. "The Quantum Mechanics of Black Holes", *Scientific American*, Vol. 236, No.1, New York, (Jan 1977), p.39.
36. Marx, K. *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Okonomie*, (Rohentwurf) Dietz Verlag, Berlin, (1974), p.7.
37. The problem of the definition of a thing is itself a special target of ideology. Take for instance the definition of the word "statement" in the theory of sets in Mathematics. There a statement is defined as a construction of words, written or oral, which is either true or false. But it does not follow "that from every statement one can *decide* (emphasis mine) whether it is true or false," clarifies Dieter Haupt in a footnote in his *Mengelehre*, (VEB Fachbuchverlag, Leipzig), p.13, because, one may add, this does not depend on subjective decision but on conditions outside individual mental operation; the truth-content of a statement can only be known when all the conditions affecting it have been consulted. "The question how one can establish the truth-content of a statement does not interest us in our consideration. We take the truth-content as given." That is the attitude Wolfgang Wetzel, Horst Skarabis, Peter Naeve and Herbert Buning take in their *Mathematische Propädeutik für Wirtschaftswissenschaftler*, (Westberlin), p.13. It is an ideological self-defence, and probably the best under the circumstances.
38. Caudwell, Christopher. *The Concept of Freedom*, p.197.
39. Russell, B. *A History of Western Philosophy*, p.xiv.
40. Marx, Karl and Engels, *Erganzungsband, Part I*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin (1973), p.216.

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