

BANTU PHILOSOPHY

by

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(Translated into English from « La Philosophie Bantoue »,
the French Version by Dr A. Rubbens of Fr. Tempels' original
work. The Revd. Colin King, M.A. Translator.)

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IMPRIMATUR

† VICTOR PETRUS KEUPPENS

Vic. Ap. de Lulua

Luauo-Kamina, 30-5-1952

used to denote the Bantu basic concept of the ultimate nature of being, as we should call it. The Dutch version uses two words, "kracht" and "sterkte", both alone and in combination with "levens", but both are rendered by the French "force".

Another relates to many references to Africans in the book. My general rule has been to speak of "Africans" whenever I could not with assured accuracy speak of "Bantu". On p. 146, where I had no option but to use "Black Race", I italicised it. I dislike the terms "native(s)", "primitive..."; and, still more, "savages". The last is employed (in italics) only in a context which shows that Fr. Tempels' dislike of the term is as great as my own. For the rest, I hardly imagine that any reader of this translation will think that either Fr. Tempels or I entertain the least derogatory thought in respect of people (or peoples) not of the "White race". It is my hope that this translation will assist many to find, in the stimulating thought of Fr. Tempels' work, a key to a fuller understanding of African peoples and a deeper grasp of the truth that the true philosophy is that which both accepts and rejects all philosophies; but, in regard to peoples, rejects none: accepting all as they are and as they will become.

PREFACE

My excellent friend, the Revd. Father Placide Tempels, has asked me for a short preface. I cannot do better than to reproduce the following passage from a letter which I received from him when I had just ended my short colonial career.

"It is a curious fact that it was many challenging statements and casts of thought in your "Elements of Negro Customary Law" that obliged me to *concretize* and *synthetize* my own thought.

"I felt baffled, not because the Elements which you treat are false, but because, raising so profoundly the real question at issue and examining it, they wander round the point a little until the last moment and do not drive the nail right home.

"When you wrote to me "What then do you regard as the African way of synthesizing ideas?" you were feeling the lacuna or imperfection in your own conceptions, your own discoveries. Without this lacu-

na I should certainly never have sought to develop this synthesis as I have."

"Tribal law, primitive philosophy and an applied catechism will become, I believe, a trio of inseparables."

Already, he wrote to me, certain Missionaries were using with the greatest success principles of life drawn from Bantu ways of thinking.

It would be false modesty on our part not to see that ethnology, ethnological principles, ethnological jurisprudence and the religious instruction of patriarchal peoples will derive a new and a fresh orientation by reason of the Revd. Fr. Tempels' work.

Up to the present, ethnographers have denied all abstract thought to tribal peoples. The civilized Christian European was exalted, the savage and pagan primitive man was denigrated. Out of this concept a theory of colonisation was born which now threatens to fail everywhere.

A true estimate of indigenous peoples can now take the place of the misunderstanding and fanaticism of the ethnology of the past and of the former attitude of aversion entertained with regard to them.

That is why this present work by the Revd. Fr. Tempels is destined to achieve so much good. It will mark a new epoch in the history of colonisation. Europe will only enhance its prestige by admitting, in the light of Fr. Tempels' thought, its former ethnological mistakes.

Since the Greeks, all classical European philosophy

has revealed a static outlook. But older peoples, tribal peoples as I call them — since, whether they are patrilineal or matrilineal, they are all patriarchal — have preserved a mental outlook not purely static. We have behind us two thousand years of too static thought. Prof. Maréchal, some years ago, ended his study of Kant as follows: "The future metaphysics will be either dynamic or it will not be at all."

We await a neo-Thomism, with Mercier, Maritain and many others who are seeking a modern Thomism. Without a system of thought, philosophical and personal, attaining that exactly, no objectivity in ethnography is possible.

It is precisely from this standpoint that the Rev. Fr. Tempels' work throws such remarkable light on ethnography today and will so remarkably illumine colonial practice and missionary evangelization tomorrow.

We are in with him on the ground floor of modern thought.

Brussels, 20th July, 1945.

E. Possoz.

CHAPTER I

IN SEARCH OF A BANTU PHILOSOPHY

1. *Life and death determine human behaviour.*

It has been often remarked that an European who has given up, during his life, all practice of the Christian religion, quickly returns to a Christian viewpoint when suffering or pain raise the problem of the preservation and survival or the loss and destruction of his being. Many sceptics turn, in their last moments, to seek in the ancient Christian teaching of the West, the *practical answer* to the problem of redemption or destruction. Suffering and death are ever the two great apostles who lead many wanderers in Europe at their last moments to our traditional Christian wisdom.

In the same way among our Bantu we see the *évolués*¹, the "civilized", even the Christians, return to their former ways of behaviour whenever they

1. *Évolués* : I preserve this term untranslated for lack of a suitable English equivalent. It signifies those who have passed out of the traditional ways of life and thought of their own ethnic group and have taken over those of the West. (C.K.)

are overtaken by moral lassitude, danger or suffering. They do so because their ancestors left them *their practical solution* of the great problem of humanity, the problem of life and death, of salvation or destruction. The Bantu, only converted or civilized superficially, return at the instance of a determining force to the behaviour atavistically dictated to them.

Among the Bantu and, indeed, among all primitive peoples, life and death are the great apostles of fidelity to a magical view of life and of recourse to traditional magical practices.

2. *All human behaviour depends upon a system of principles.*

If the modern over-civilized European is unable to be entirely emancipated from the attitudes of his ancestors, it is because his reactions are founded upon a complete philosophical system, influenced by Christianity; upon a clear, complete, positive intellectual conception of the universe, of man, of life and death, and of the survival of a spiritual principle called the soul. This view of the visible and invisible world is too deeply ingrained in the spirit of Western culture not to rise up again irresistibly when the great crises of life occur.

It is very possible, both with the individual and with the tribal or culture group, that the mysteries of life and death, survival and destruction, together with fear arising from all these mysteries, became the

psychological agent that gave birth to certain behaviour patterns and to certain redemptive practices. It would, however, scarcely be scientific to retain, as the sole ground of human behaviour, the influence of environment and of psychological factors (emotion, fantasy, or childish imagination). We do not study the attitudes of a few individuals. We compare two conceptions of life—the Christian on the one hand and the magical on the other—which have perpetuated themselves through time and in space: two conceptions which, in the course of centuries, whole peoples and entire cultures have embraced.

The persistence of these attitudes through centuries of simultaneous evolution can only be satisfactorily explained by the presence of a corpus of logically co-ordinated intellectual concepts, a "Lore". Behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, a logical system of thought, a complete positive philosophy of the universe, of man and of the things which surround him, of existence, life, death and of the life beyond.

Without excluding other factors (divine and human) we must postulate, seek and discover a logical system of human thought as the ultimate foundation of any logical and universal system of human behaviour.

No live code of behaviour is possible unless the meaning of life is sensed. There can be no will to determine life unless the ends of life are conceived.

No one can pursue the way to redemption who has no philosophy of salvation.

In the matter of the religion of primitive peoples, modern science seems to have concluded quite definitely, by the light of the methods of historical criticism, that present beliefs of primitive and semi-primitive peoples had their origin in simple notions which have degenerated today into complex conceptions; and in precise, exact principles that have evolved towards imprecision and inexactness. It is today generally admitted that, among primitive peoples, it is the most primitive of all who have maintained the most pure form of the concept of the Supreme Being, Creator and Disposer of the Universe.

The faith of really primitive peoples in the Supreme Being lies at the root of all the religious conceptions current among semi-primitives: animism, dynamism, fetichism and magic.

Need we, then, be astonished that we find among the Bantu, and more generally among all primitive peoples, as the foundation upon which their intellectual conception of the universe rests, certain basic principles and even a system of philosophy—though it is relatively simple and primitive—derived from a logically coherent ontology?

Many roads seem to lead to the discovery of such an ontological system. A profound knowledge of the language, a penetrating study of their ethnology, a critical investigation of their laws, or again, the adaptation of religious teaching to primitive thinking: all these can reveal it to us.

It is also possible—and this is obviously the shortest way—to trace directly the thought of the Bantu on the deepest matters, to penetrate it and to analyse it. Has Bantu philosophy been studied and developed as such? If not, it is high time that each scholar should start to seek out and define the fundamental thought underlying Bantu ontology, the one and only key that allows native thought to be penetrated.

We need not expect the first African who comes along, especially the young ones, to be able to give us a systematic exposition of his ontological system. None the less, this ontology exists; and it penetrates and informs all the thought of these primitives; it dominates and orientates all their behaviour.

It is our task to trace out the elements of this thought, to classify them and to systematise them according to the ordered systems and intellectual disciplines of the Western world.

Anyone who claims that primitive peoples possess no system of thought, excludes them thereby from the category of men. Those who do so, contradict themselves fatally elsewhere. To give one example only, we find it in R. Allier, who, in his "Psychology of Conversion" writes, (p. 138) "If you ask the Ba-Souto, says Mr. Dieterlen, the why and the wherefore of these customs, they cannot tell you. They do not indulge in reflective thought. They have no theories and no doctrines. The only thing that matters, they think, is the carrying out of certain traditional acts, preserving contact with the past and with the dead." But two pages further on we read, "What is it which

causes this opposition of the chiefs to be irresistible? It is the fear of breaking the mystic bond which, through the chiefs, is established with the ancestors and the fear of the disasters which that may entail." What is this "mystic bond" or what is this "ancestral influence" if not the elements of a system of thought? Is it a simple instinct or an irrational fear and no more? Would it not be more reasonable and more scientific to look for whatever *ideas* sustain this reaction to the "mystic bond"? Perhaps, after that, we may be able to do without the omnibus word "mystic".

3. *The reasons for seeking the intellectual instrument, the fundamental philosophical concepts and principles of the Bantu*¹.

Any one who wishes to study primitive people or *évolués* must give up all idea of attaining valid scientific conclusions so long as he has not been able to understand their metaphysic. To declare on *a priori* grounds that primitive peoples have no ideas on the nature of beings, that they have no ontology and that they are completely lacking in logic, is simply to turn one's back on reality. Every day we are able to note

1. See my Translator's Foreword on the use of the names "African" and "Bantu" *passim*. (C.K.)

that primitive peoples are by no means just children afflicted with a bizarre imagination. It is as Men that we have learned to know them in their homes. Folklore alone and superficial descriptions of strange customs cannot enable us to discover and understand primitive man. Ethnology, linguistics, psycho-analysis, jurisprudence, sociology and the study of religions are able to yield definitive results only after the philosophy and the ontology of a primitive people have been thoroughly studied and written up. If, in fact, primitive peoples have a concrete conception of being and of the universe, this "ontology" of theirs will give a special character, a local colour, to their beliefs and religious practices, to their mores, to their language, to their institutions and customs, to their psychological reactions and, more generally, to their whole behaviour. It is even more true, I venture to think, that the Bantu, like primitive people in general, live more than we do by Ideas and by following their own ideas.

So much must be said for the benefit of those who wish to "study" the Bantu and primitive peoples generally.

Nevertheless, a better understanding of the realm of Bantu thought is just as indispensable for all who are called upon to live among native people. It therefore concerns all colonials, especially those whose duty is to hold administrative or judicial office among African people; all those who are concerning themselves with a felicitous development of tribal law; in short, it concerns all who wish to civilize,

educate and raise the Bantu. But, if it concerns all colonizers with good will, it concerns most particularly missionaries.

If one has not penetrated into the depths of the personality as such, if one does not know on what basis their acts come about, it is not possible to understand the Bantu. One is entering into no spiritual contact with them. One cannot make oneself intelligible to them, especially in dealing with the great spiritual realities. On the contrary, one runs the risk, while believing that one is "civilizing" the individual, of in fact corrupting him, working to increase the numbers of the deracinated¹ and to become the architect of revolts.

We find ourselves at a loss when confronted by native law and customs. It is impossible to distinguish what is commendable from what is pernicious for lack of any criterion to enable us to keep not only some good things in native custom, but all that is good therein, cutting out all that is evil. Indeed, there is a reason for safeguarding, for protecting with every care, for purifying and refining everything that is worthy of respect in native custom, in order to make a link, or, if the metaphor be preferred, a bridgehead, by means of which natives can attain without hin-

1. *Deracinated* : Fr. *déracinés*, those who have been torn away from their ethnic roots ; and who, belonging nowhere, are very liable as a result of their insecurity to all kinds of unstable behaviour. (C.K.)

drance all that we have to offer them in respect of stable, deep, true civilization. Only if we set out from the true, the good and the stable in native custom shall we be able to lead our Africans in the direction of a true Bantu civilization.

The fact is that those in high positions do not know to which patron saint to turn for guidance in directing the Bantu, who are growing ever more and more unstable politically. They realize their own impotence to give sound directions worthy of acceptance to ensure the evolution and civilization of the Bantu. All this seems to me to be due to the fact that we have taken no account of Bantu ontology ; that we have not as yet succeeded in reproducing syntheses of their thought ; and that in consequence we are not fit to judge them upon their ideas.

It has repeatedly been said that evangelization and catechetical work should be adapted... Adapted to what ? We can build churches in native architecture, introduce African melodies into the liturgy, use styles of vestments borrowed from Mandarins or Bedouins, but real adaptation consists in the adaptation of our spirit to the spirit of these people. I shall have occasion to recur to this point. I hope in due course to submit for consideration a catechism adapted to primitive mentality¹.

1. "Catechèse Bantoue" : Les Questions Missionnaires : Abbaye de St. André, Bruges, Belgium.

4. *The gulf dividing Africans and Whites will remain and widen so long as we do not meet them in the wholesome aspirations of their own ontology.*¹

Why does not the African change? How is it that the pagan, the uncivilized, is stable, while the *évolué*, the Christian, is not? Because the pagan founds his life upon the traditional groundwork of his theodicy and his ontology, which include his whole mental life in their purview and supply him with a complete solution to the problem of living. On the other hand, the *évolué*, and often the Christian, has never effected a reconciliation between his new way of life and his former native philosophy, which remains intact just below the surface (of his behaviour), though we have rejected it *in toto*, together with the (ensuing) tribal customs that we misunderstand and disapprove. This philosophy was, however, the characteristic feature which made the Bantu the man he was. It

1. "I wish to draw attention to the attitude of mind in which you claim recognition of the full worth of the Black race ("race noire" C.K.). The point of view which you adopt in regard to it evokes my warmest congratulations and I am quite sure that—as so many distinguished persons attest—the fruits of your work will be a notable advance in racial understanding, esteem and sympathy, which, by God's will, should unite the peoples of all countries, regardless of the races to which they belong."

Dom Pierre Céléstin Lou Tseng Tsiang, O.S.B.

belonged to his essential nature. To abandon it amounts to intellectual suicide for him. It should have been our prime task to add new nobility to this Bantu thought.

Need we, then, be surprised that beneath the veneer of "civilization" the "Negro" remains always ready to break through? We are astonished to find one who has spent years among Whites readapt himself easily by the end of a few months to the community life of his place of origin and soon become reabsorbed in it. He has no need to readjust himself because the roots of his thought are unchanged. Nothing and nobody have made him conscious of any inadequacy in his philosophy.

How many fully civilized persons, or true *évolués*, can we count among the natives of the Congo? Of *déracinés* and degenerates the number is legion. Of materialists who have lost their foothold in ancestral tradition without having grasped Western thought and philosophy there are not a few. The majority, however, remain "muntu" under a light coating of *white imitation*. Such a one, for example, was a clerk in the Colony whose house was searched during the February 1944 revolt. A note-book was found with magical formulas scribbled from end to end of it; ...he had copied them in the house of another clerk who had himself transcribed them. In like manner the Elizabethville *évolués* claim, since these revolts, "At last we have found the "magic" way to attain the force of the Whites, while they in future shall have only ours. The Blacks will be henceforth

Whites: the Whites Blacks." These examples show us clearly how the *évolués* persist in "reasoning" according to Bantu thought, according to the principle of the interaction of forces.

Whose fault is that? The fault of the Bantu? Perhaps the time has come to make our general confession; at any rate, it is time at least to open our eyes. All of us, missionaries, magistrates, administrators, all in directive posts or posts which ought to be directive, have failed to reach their "souls", or at any rate to reach them to the profound degree that should have been attained. Even specialists have left the question aside. Whether we state this merely by way of a frank admission, or avow it with contrition, the fact remains. By having failed to explore the ontology of the Bantu, we lack the power to offer them either a spiritual body of teaching that they are capable of assimilating, or an intellectual synthesis that they can understand. By having failed to understand the soul of the Bantu people, we have neglected to make any systematic effort to secure for it a purer and a more dynamic life¹.

It is contended that in condemning the whole gamut of their supposed "childish and savage customs" by the judgment "this is stupid and bad", we

1. Mgr. Van Schingen, Vicar Apostolic of Kwango (Belgian Congo) writes to me: "I say simply that your pages show those to be right who, aware of the difficulty of getting at the soul of the Bantu and of understanding it deeply, have felt constrained to seek a solid basis of support for their technique of adaptation."

have taken our share of the responsibility for having killed "the man" in the Bantu.

We must add, moreover, that it is intellectuals with good will, giving guidance to native society—especially missionaries—who alone can achieve useful work which will contribute to the civilizing of the Bantu. To introduce the Africans to real civilization, much more is necessary than material prosperity, the social welfare that is so much vaunted, and the turning out of ready-made clerks. There must be something more, too, than the teaching of "Kifancais", or English.

In common with so many others, I used to think that we could get rid of Bantu "stupidities" by suitable talks on natural science, hygiene, etc., as if the natural sciences could subvert their traditional lore or their philosophy. We destroy in this way their Natural Sciences, but their fundamental concepts concerning the universe remain unchanged. An example will make this point clear. How many times have we not heard an African accused of being the cause of an illness, even of the death, of some other person simply because he had a dispute with him, or because he had insulted or cursed him? There is the usual palaver. The accused accepts judgment. He pays the

1. It will be shown later that the concrete means by which magic can effectively be fought is not to stifle in the Bantu mind all its native ideas, but to show him that magical practices involve him in contradictions of the healthy principles of his own philosophy.

Fr. "bêtises": Du. "ommozehlleden" (C.K.).

damages claimed from him, usually without much argument and even, sometimes, in spite of the contrary judgment of an European Court. For the Bantu, indeed, the palaver judgments are clear and indisputable. They have a different conception of the relationships between men, of causality and responsibility. What we regard as the illogical lucubrations of "gloomy Niggers"¹, what we condemn as greed, exploitation of the weak, are for them logical deductions from facts as they see them, and become an ontological necessity. If thereafter we wish to convince Africans of the absurdity of their sizing up of the facts by making them see *how* this man came to fall sick and *of what* he died, that is to say by showing them the *physical causes* of the death or of the illness, we are wasting our time. It would be in vain even to give them a course in microbiology to make them see with their own eyes, or even to discover for themselves through the microscope and by chemical reactions what the "cause" of the death was. Even then we should not have settled *their* problem. We should have decided only the physiological or chemical problem connected with it. The true and underlying cause, the *metaphysical cause*, would none the less remain for them in the terms of their thought, their traditional ontological wisdom. We shall see later how far this point of view is the logical one.

1. Fr. "de sombres têtes noires" : Du. "duistere zwarte koppen" (C.K.).

And so the African learns from us to read and write, to calculate and to do accounts. He becomes familiar with our techniques ; but, just like his brother who has stayed in the village, he feels through day to day experience that the lack of comprehension of the Whites prevents the motivations of his conduct from being understood. His vital, elemental, traditional lore is wounded. His respect for us and his confidence in us are in danger of failing under the test.

5. *Do these fundamental notions and first principles really belong to philosophy ?*

In recent decades, the foundation of primitive religion has been successively accepted as consisting in ancestor worship, animism, cosmic mythology, totemism, magic, until finally it was discovered that primitive peoples originally had a faith in, and a worship of, the Supreme Being, the creative Spirit.

All schools of thought have described and studied African behaviour in the light of their respective systems. It is striking that these studies have so often had vague ideas of, approached near to, or even touched upon, the fundamental concept of Bantu ontology. Yet we find scarcely any systematic study of this ontology. No well founded definitions, even, have been laid down ; in particular, no universally accepted definitions of animism, totemism, dynamism and magic. What has been lacking in European in-

vestigation, vocabulary, or understanding? In my opinion, none of these conceptions of primitive thought has been sufficiently exposed to its roots, studied and defined from the point of view of the primitive peoples concerned. How often we find alleged definitions which confine themselves to superficial descriptions of the external aspects of native customs¹.

Why is it that the universal "munganga" (whatever may be the local vernacular variants of the term) is denoted in different authors by such divergent names as sorcerer, fetisher, necromancer, medicine man, magician, etc.? An exact definition is still to be sought. But the African: in what terms does he think of this personage? That is the definition which we have to look for.

Admitting that Africans are "animists", in the sense that they locate a "soul" in all beings; or that we may hold them to be "dynamists" in the sense that they recognise a "mana", an universal force, animating all the beings of the universe, even so we must ask the Bantu themselves the questions, "How can these souls, or this force, be *able*, as you say, to act upon beings? How does this interaction with beings *take place*? How can the "bwanga" (magical medicine, amulet, talisman) heal a man, as you say it

1. A short time after the Liberation, a colleague brought me from Europe a copy of Westernmann: "The African Today and Tomorrow", 2nd Edition, Essen. I had the very agreeable surprise of finding in it the fundamental principles of my theory of forces.

does? How can the mfwisti, the muloji, the caster of spells, kill you, even at a distance? How can a dead man be reborn? What do you understand by this rebirth? How can the initiation ceremony turn a simple human being into a munganga, a magician healer, or, as we make him to appear later on, a master of forces? Who initiates, the man or the spirit? How does the initiate acquire "knowledge" and "power"? Why does a malediction have a destructive effect? How is it acquired? Why is it that our catachumens on the eve of baptism come to us and say: "No doubt our magical cures are potent, but we wish to forswear recourse to them"?

Such questions go beyond the usual superficial descriptions of native customs. They are not, however, fated to remain for ever unanswered. The answer to them is the one that all Bantu will make without exception. What has been called magic, animism, ancestor-worship, or dynamism—in short, all the customs of the Bantu—depend upon a single principle, knowledge of the Immost Nature of beings, that is to say, upon their Ontological Principle. For is it not by means of this philosophical term that we must express *their knowledge of being*, of the existence of things?

5. *Can we give Bantu thought a "philosophical system"?*

It is universally admitted that humanity evolves.

The Bantu among whom we are living are not completely primitive people. They have evolved. It is certain that their religion, especially, has done so. Their customs, habits, behaviour must also have developed.

It has been claimed that the origin of primitive religion is to be found in ancestor-worship, animism, totemism, or magic. According to the most recent historical research it seems to be established that the worship of the Supreme Being is at least as old as, if not older than, magic. Must we, then, conclude that the Bantu have been successively monotheists, then animists, and after that totemists? That they have, on each occasion, *changed* their religion? Must one admit that the changes in religion have been the result of revolutions? Is it not more likely that these modifications of religious conceptions have been the result of a progressive evolution from primitive religious days? This question does not seem to admit of dispute: what took place was evolution, not revolution.

Here is the best proof of this thesis. Bantu of the present day have maintained their faith in what were originally theistic elements of their religion, yet we see them today at one and the same time ancestor-worshippers, animists, dynamists, totemists and believers in magic. But more: anyone today can easily verify for himself that our living Bantu say, speaking of ancestor-worship, animism, etc. "all that is willed by God, the Supreme Being, and it has all been given to help us men."

After that can one claim any longer that with each change in religious practices the Bantu changed their mental outlook, modifying their system of thought and their conceptions of the world? And if, on the contrary, we find these different practices in being side by side, are we then to venture to say that the Bantu have attained to six or seven parallel philosophical systems? We must do nothing of the sort, but reasonably allow that these different manifestations of faith are linked to one single concept, to one and the same idea of the universe, to one and the same metaphysical principle.

All these religious practices—as elsewhere their juristic conceptions and the political organisation of their society—constitute but one logical whole in the thought of the Bantu. These different realities they explain and justify in relation to their philosophy, a single system and unique to them, their Bantu ontology.

It is not our aim to trace the origins or development of Bantu thought. Neither is it our present business to pass judgment upon the intrinsic worth of their philosophy. Let us for the present refrain from all such judgments, keeping only to ethnology. Let us try above all to *understand* Bantu philosophy, to know what their beliefs are and what is their rational interpretation of the nature of visible and invisible things. These views may be held to be sound or erroneous: in either case we should admit that their ideas on the nature of the universe are essentially

metaphysical knowledge, which constitutes them an ontology.

Before we set about teaching these Africans our system of philosophical thought, let us try to master theirs. Without philosophical insight, ethnology is mere folklore... we can no longer be content with vague terms like "the mysterious forces in beings", "certain beliefs", "undefinable influences", or "a certain conception of man and nature". Such definitions, void of all content, have precisely no scientific significance.

We do not claim, of course, that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognize themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, "You understand us: you now know us completely: you 'know' in the way we 'know'".

More than that, if we can adapt our teaching of true religion to what is worthy of respect in their ontology, we shall hear, in the same way in which it was given to me, such testimony as was given to me. "Now you deceive yourself no longer, you speak as our fathers speak, it always seemed to us that we must be right." They were feeling, I have no doubt, that my instruction, while rejecting the false conclusions of their philosophy, was adapting itself wonderfully to some "soul of truth" in their own fundamental concepts.

7. Last introductory remarks.

This present introduction was written only after the completion of my systematic study of Bantu ontology and after my synthesis of their philosophy and its application to our own religious doctrines and catechetical instruction.

It replies to the arguments and criticisms of my colleagues who have been kind enough to interest themselves in these studies and in my exposition of Bantu ontology. It is the result of discussions that have often been very lively. Thanks to their criticisms, I have been able to elaborate this so as to meet certain objections which, though leading to no fruitful issue, would, without this introduction, inevitably arise in the minds of many readers. In developing this preliminary thesis, I have sought to prepare and ease the way for what follows. I confidently hope to be able to convince my readers that real philosophy can be found among indigenous peoples and that it should be sought among them. Many people have already written to me "That is exactly what I have always thought"¹.

¹ Many colonials living in contact with Africans have assured me that I have set out nothing new, but merely set out systematically what they had grasped vaguely from their practical knowledge of Africans.

The problem of Bantu ontology, the problem whether it exists or not, is thus open to discussion. It is legitimate now to enter upon the task of setting out their philosophy, which is perhaps that common to all primitive peoples, to all clan societies¹.

1. Prof. Melville J. Herskovits, of the Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A., writes : "I am interested that so many of the ideas that Father Tempels exposes as coming from the Belgian Congo are so close to those that I have found among the Sudanese peoples of the Guinea coasts area. They are also the same ideas that we have found in such areas as Haiti and Brazil and Surinam in the New World."

Jean Capart, the Egyptologist, has written : "I have spoken about the Bantu philosophy to those associated with me and read to them Fr. Tempels' little book. I have promised myself a rereading of it and of the "Elements of Negro Customary Law" (by E. Pussot) for I have an idea, through my first contact with them, that I shall find in them the key to many Egyptian problems. It is often a mistake to begin the study of ancient civilizations by relating them to our own, and by seeking to measure them by unsuitable standards. The concept of LIFE alone allows the Egyptian religion to be assessed at its full worth; and the removal from it of the parasitical excrescences which arouse unfavourable impressions and give rise to harsh judgments."

CHAPTER II

BANTU ONTOLOGY

1. *The terminology used.*

Before beginning to set out the philosophy of the Bantu, we must justify the use of the terms which we shall employ. By so doing we shall forestall certain objections.

Since we are going to treat philosophy, we should use the philosophical terminology accessible to the European reader. As the thought of the Bantu is foreign to ours, we shall call theirs provisionally "the philosophy of magic", though our terminology will not, perhaps, fully cover their thought. Our terms can furnish only an approximation to concepts and principles foreign to us.

Even if we were to employ a literal translation of Bantu terms, we should have to explain to the uninitiated reader the exact force of these native expressions.

We shall, therefore, use English terminology, specifying on every occasion the limitations or extensions by which the received meaning of the terms should

be qualified in order to express the Bantu concept exactly.

If our terminology, in spite of this precaution, seems inadequate to the reader, we invite him to suggest an alternative, so that with the benefit of his collaboration, we can approach more nearly to perfection.

The present study, after all, claims to be no more than an *hypothesis*, a first attempt at the systematic development of what Bantu philosophy is. It is necessary to distinguish two quite distinct elements in it:

1) the analysis of Bantu philosophy as I see it;

2) the terminology in which I have tried to make it accessible to the European reader.

Therefore, even if this terminology should appear inadequate, it should not be concluded that the object of the study itself, an analysis of Bantu thought, is thereby vitiated. I ask the reader to bend his best attention to the essential problem, *the study of Bantu thought*, rather than to boggle over the minor question of terminology.

2. Method.

What is the best way in which to set out a systematic exposition of Bantu philosophy while justifying the objectivity of our hypothesis? We have, in fact,

to show the cohesion of our theoretical proposals, while at the same time proving that they are sound, and that they apply to the actualities of Bantu life.

We could begin by a comparative study of the languages, modes of behaviour, institutions and customs of the Bantu; we could analyse them and separate their fundamental ideas; finally we could construct from these elements a system of Bantu thought.

This, as a matter of fact, is the method that I followed myself. But it is the long, tedious way of groping and searching, of conceiving an idea and soon afterwards rejecting it; in which apparent gleams of light lead only back into darkness. It is a story without end, or one which only at long last results in precise, well-defined ideas fitting into a logical system.

This long way, moreover, is not always available to the European reader. It presupposes a long residence among a primitive people, through which, very slowly and without their becoming conscious of it, intimate human contact is established. One lives their life with them, sharing their difficulties, their feasts, their games, their hunting, their palavers. Speaking their language, one learns more by listening to their intercourse one with another than by pursuing systematic investigations. In the end, without knowing how, one attains the ability to think like the Bantu and to look upon life as they do. One is recognised by them as one of themselves, as genuinely Bantu, by reason of one's having come to understand their wis-

dom. This kind of understanding proves to be far more a matter of experience and of intuition than of study.

For the rest, I have found out only too well that even when one has got to earth with a problem by a study of relevant customs, words and institutions, one easily comes a fatal cropper by falling into argument concerning its details. Customs have, in fact, besides their fundamental significance, a significance which they derive as local colour. Examples which one would cite are always being rejected on grounds such as: "with us this custom is different", or "in our part of the country people express themselves differently".

It therefore seems to me preferable first to present as briefly as possible my complete formulation of Bantu philosophy. After this systematic theoretical exposition, examples from native ways of expressing themselves, or of behaviour which support my theses, will find their place. If the applications of this view of Bantu philosophy yield a satisfactory explanation of observed facts, we may find therein a proof of the validity, even of the exactitude, of our assumptions.

It is true that those who have read my thesis in its early stages have immediately set out certain objections, either against the theories advanced in themselves, or against the terminology used, but always because they were looking at it from the European point of view. Studying with them subsequently innumerable instances of its practical exemplification in

behaviour, I have generally brought the objectors to admit that Bantu philosophy must be something like what I have set it out to be. As for the terminology used, which is generally upsetting at first sight, it has as a rule been conceded to me that it is difficult to find in the philosophical vocabulary of European language terms which cover Bantu thought better.

It seems to me that neither the imperfections of terminology, nor the lacunae which still remain in my suggested synthesis of Bantu philosophy, ought to cause me to hold up publication of the fruits of my investigations and of the conclusions which result from them. May what I now publish result in other scholars being stirred to pursue their own enquiries, so that by collaboration definitive results may be obtained.

I therefore invite the reader of this study to put out of his mind while reading it both his western philosophical thought and any judgments which he may have already made concerning Bantu and primitive peoples. I ask him to abandon received ideas and to apply his mind to getting hold of the significance of what is here said, trying to grasp Bantu thought from within and not allowing himself to be diverted into criticism of my way of setting it out or of my choice of terms. I ask him even to reserve judgment concerning the evaluation to be put upon the theory and, before he pronounces judgment upon it, to have patience to consider the proofs and applications of it which will ultimately be given. After that he may

propound his criticisms and attack either the theory itself or the way in which it is set out.

Let us do as the Africans do. When they hold a palaver it is a rule that whoever is arguing a case should suffer an interruption. Even when he stops speaking, the judge will say to him, "Have you finished speaking?"; and only after that gives the floor to the opposing side.

3. *Bantu behaviour : it is centred in a single value : vital force*¹.

Certain words are constantly being used by Africans. They are those which express their supreme values ; and they recur like variations upon a *leitmotif* present in their language, their thought, and in all their acts and deeds.

This suprem value is *life, force, to live strongly, or vital force*.

The Bantu say, in respect of a number of strange practices in which we see neither rime nor reason, that their purpose is to acquire *life, strength or vital force, to live strongly*, that they are to make life

1. See note on Terminology, p. 8. The French terms are *la force, vivre fort, force vitale*. Despite precedents, I am still affronted by the phrase "vital force"; but if the reader, equally jarred, is driven in his search for an alternative to ponder the whole context of the concept involved in Fr. Tempel's book, he may in the end conclude that his time has not been ill-spent. (C.K.)

stronger, or to assure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity.

Used negatively, the same idea is expressed when the Bantu say : we act thus to be protected from misfortune, or from a diminution of life or of being, or in order to protect ourselves from those influences which annihilate or diminish us.

Force, the potent life, vital energy are the object of prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead, as well as of all that is usually called magic, sorcery or magical remedies. The Bantu will tell you that they go to a diviner to learn the words of life, so that he can teach them the way of making life stronger. In every Bantu language it is easy to recognize the words or phrases denoting a *force*, which is not used in an exclusively bodily sense, but in the sense of the integrity of our whole being.

The *bwanga* (which has been translated "magical remedy") ought not, they say, to be applied to the wound or sick limb. It does not necessarily possess local therapeutic effects, but it strengthens, it increases the vital force.

In calling upon God, the spirits, or the ancestral spirits, the heathen ask above all, "give me force". If one urges them to abandon magical practices, as being contrary to the will of God and therefore evil, one will get the reply, "wherein are they wicked?" What we brand as magic is, in their eyes, nothing but setting to work natural forces placed at the disposal of man by God to strengthen man's vital energy.

When they try to get away from metaphors and

periphrases, the Bantu speak of God himself as "the Strong One", he who possesses Force in himself. He is also the source of the Force of every creature. God is the "Dijina dikatampe": the great name, because he is the great Force, the "mukomo", as our Baluba have it, the one who is stronger than all others¹.

The spirits of the first ancestors, highly exalted in the superhuman world, possess extraordinary force inasmuch as they are the founders of the human race and propagators of the divine inheritance of vital human strength. The other dead are esteemed only to the extent to which they increase and perpetuate their vital force in their progeny.

In the minds of Bantu, all beings in the universe possess vital force of their own: human, animal, vegetable, or inanimate. Each being has been endowed by God with a certain force, capable of strengthening the vital energy of the strongest being of all creation: man.

Supreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is, to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force: the worst misfortune and, in very truth, the only misfortune, is, he thinks, the diminution of this power.

Every illness, wound or disappointment, all suffering, depression, or fatigue, every injustice and every failure: all these are held to be, and are spoken of by the Bantu as, a diminution of vital force.

Illness and death do not have their source in our own vital power, but result from some external agent

1. Fr. "Le Puissant" (C.K.).

who weakens us through his greater force. It is only by fortifying our vital energy, through the use of magical recipes, that we acquire resistance to malevolent external forces.

We need not be surprised that the Bantu allude to this vital force in their greetings one to another, using such forms of address as: "You are strong", or "you have life in you", "you have life strongly in you"; and that they express sympathy in such phrases as "your vital force is lowered", "your vital energy has been sapped". A similar idea is found in the form of sympathy, "wafwa ko!" which we translate "you are dying"; and by reason of our mistranslation, we are quite unable to understand the Bantu and find them given to ridiculous exaggeration when they continually say that they are "dead" of hunger or of fatigue, or that the least obstacle or illness is "killing" them. In their own minds they are simply indicating a diminution of vital force, in which sense their expression is reasonable and sensible enough. In their languages, too, are words like "kufwa" and "fukwididi-la", indicating the progressing stages of loss of force, of vitality, and the superlative of which signifies total paralysis of the power to live. It is quite erroneous for us to translate these words by "to die" and "to die entirely".

This explains what has, indeed, been true, that the thing which most inhibits pagans from conversion to Christianity and from giving up magical rites is the fear of attenuating this vital energy through ceasing

to have recourse to the natural powers which sustain it.

In 1936 I gave my Normal Class students at LukonzoIwa (Lake Moët) as an essay subject, "Obstacles to conversion among pagan peoples". To my astonishment, so far from setting out a list of practices, all of them declared that the great obstacle could be summed up in a conviction that to abandon the customs appointed by their ancestors would lead to death. The objection, therefore, was rather a matter of principle than of practice, their fear being grounded in the "truths" of Bantu ontology.

These various aspects of Bantu behaviour already enable us to see that the key to Bantu thought is the idea of vital force, of which the source is God¹.

1. The Revd. Sister Carmela, of the Sœurs Missionnaires de Notre Dame d'Afrique supplies important confirmation from Bunia, in Ituri (Belgian Congo) : "... Here the African never speaks of "vital force". When anyone speaks to him about it, he replies, "Yes, it is exactly like that with us", and he smiles with satisfaction. And they say one to another, "She knows us".

But among them the facts are such that everyone knows them and nobody needs to talk about them. For example, they say, we never speak of the "force of life" because with us life and force are one and the same thing. If one is less strong, one does not speak of life. Neither does one say that life "is becoming stronger", one feels it; one has an impression of it.

And, if favourable external conditions make you stronger, it will be said that you have power...

Evidently vital force is to the African mind the great and important thing.

They have also some small idea of being, but as some quite higher thing. For example, a woman reflecting upon injustice on the part of a stronger party : "God is". She does not say "God lives!" Since our Africans are unable to obtain justice they say, "God is!"

Vital force is the reality which, though invisible, is supreme in man. Man can renew his vital force by tapping the strength of other creatures.

4. *Bantu ontology.*

a) The general notion of being¹.

We have seen that the Bantu soul hankers after life and force. The fundamental notion under which being is conceived lies within the category of forces.

Metaphysics studies this reality, existing in everything and in every being in the universe. It is in virtue of this reality that all beings have something in common, so that the definition of this reality may be applied to all existent forms of being.

To arrive at this reality common to all beings, or rather, which is identical in all beings, it is necessary to eliminate all forms of reality which belong to one category only among beings.

The Bahema, Alur, Walenda all have the same philosophy as the Bantu. The forms of religion change, yes; but the basis of it is exactly the same.

1. "The chief value of your book consists, I think, in your demonstration of the difference which exists between Africans and Whites in the way in which they conceive of being. That is a fine discovery indeed, the fruit of your penetrating and patient analysis, which deserves all praise. It constitutes a contribution of which we must take full account in order the better to enter into African thought and the better to understand them. On this point your work seems to me to be impressive beyond any possibility of contradiction." Achille, Card. Lienhart.

We pay attention to the elements only, but to all the elements which are common to all beings. Such elements are, e.g. the origin, the growth, the changes, the destruction, or the achievement of the beings, passive and active causality, and particularly the nature of the being as such supporting those universal phenomena. These elements constitute the object of metaphysical knowledge, that is to say, of knowledge embracing all the physical or the real.

Metaphysics does not treat of the abstract or the unreal: these are but its notions, its definitions, its laws, which are abstract and general, as the notions, definitions and laws of every science always are.

Christian thought in the West, having adopted the terminology of Greek philosophy and perhaps under its influence, has defined this reality common to all beings, or, as one should perhaps say, being as such: "the reality that is", "anything that exists", "what is". Its metaphysics has most generally been based upon a fundamentally *static* conception of being.

Herein is to be seen the fundamental difference between Western thought and that of the Bantu and other primitive people. (I compare only systems which have inspired widespread "civilizations").

We can conceive the transcendental notion of "being" by separating it from its attribute, "Force", but the Bantu cannot. "Force" in his thought is a necessary element in "being", and the concept "force" is inseparable from the definition of "being". There is no idea among Bantu of "being" divorced from the

idea of "force". Without the element "force", "being" cannot be conceived.

We hold a *static* conception of "being", they a *dynamic*.

What has been said above should be accepted as the basis of Bantu ontology: in particular, the concept "force" is bound to the concept "being" even in the most abstract thinking upon the notion of being.

At least it must be said that the Bantu have a double concept concerning being, a concept which can be expressed: "being is that which has force".

But I think we must go further. Our statement of Bantu philosophy should press as closely as possible its distinctive characteristics. It seems to me that we shall not attain this precision by formulating the notion of being in Bantu thought as "being is that which possesses force".

I believe that we should most faithfully render the Bantu thought in European language by saying that Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: *Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force*¹.

1. It can rightly be said that the Bantu regard being as exclusively or essentially a "principle of activity". This term is borrowed from our scientific and therefore more philosophical terminology. One must on that account be careful not to understand it in relation to our static concepts of being, but in accordance with Bantu thought wherein this same principle is regarded as realising itself more or less in itself.

When we think in terms of the concept "being", they use the concept "force". Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. When we say that "beings" are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that "forces" differ in their essence or nature. They hold that there is the divine force, celestial or terrestrial forces, human forces, animal forces, vegetable and even material or mineral forces.

The reader will be able to form his own opinion at the end of this study as to the validity, the exact worth of this hypothesis: *in contradistinction to our definition of being as "that which is", or "the thing insofar as it is", the Bantu definition reads, "that which is force", or "the thing insofar as it is force", or "an existent force".* We must insist once again that "force" is not for Bantu a necessary, irreducible attribute of being: no, the notion "force" takes for them the place of the notion "being" in our philosophy. Just as we have, so have they a transcendental, elemental, simple concept: with them "force", with us "being".

It is because all being is force and exists only in that it is force, that the category "force" includes of necessity all "beings": God, men living and departed, animals, plants, minerals. Since being is force, all these beings appear to the Bantu as forces. This universal concept is hardly used by the Bantu, but they are susceptible to philosophical abstractions though they express them in concrete terms only. They give a name to each thing, but the inner life of

these things presents itself to their minds as such specific forces and not at all as static reality¹.

It would be a misuse of words to call the Bantu "dynamists" or "energists", as if the universe were animated by some universal force, a sort of unique magical power encompassing all existence, as certain authors seem to believe, judging from their treatment of "mana", "bwanga", or "kanga". Such is an European presentation of a primitive philosophy that is but imperfectly understood. The Bantu make a clear distinction and understand an essential difference between different beings, that is to say, different forces. Among the different kinds of forces they have come to recognize, just as we do, unity, individuality but individuality clearly understood as meaning individuality of forces².

That is why it seems to me necessary to reject as foreign to Bantu philosophy the dualism of good and evil as two forces; and also what has been called "common being" or "community of nature", when these terms are so used as to eliminate the individuality of forces.

In the category of visible beings the Bantu distin-

1. A missionary to the Ubangi (Belgian Congo) writes to me: "My researches in linguistics confirm in my mind how universally African your study is. Among the Ngbaka the "substantive" indicates a thing less as "that" than as "thus". We contemplate the "being" of the thing, they its "force". It is the extent, more or less, to which a thing is vital force that constitutes for them the "being" of the thing."

2. The Du. reads, "units or individuals standing by themselves, each of them being a force apart." (C.K.)

guish that which is perceived by the senses and the "thing in itself". By the "thing in itself" they indicate its individual inner nature, or, more precisely, the *force* of the thing. They are expressing themselves in figurative language when they say "in every thing there is another thing; in every man a little man". But one would grossly deceive oneself in wishing to attribute to this piece of imagery any exact verbal expression of the Bantu notion of being. Their allegory merely brings into relief the distinction they make between the contingent, the visible phenomenon of being or of force, and the intrinsic visible nature of that force.

When "we" differentiate in man the soul and the body, as is done in certain Western writings, we are at a loss to explain where "the man" has gone after these two components have been separated out. If, from our European outlook, we wish to seek Bantu terms adequate to express this manner of speaking, we are up against very great difficulties, especially if we are proposing to speak about the soul of man. Unless under European influence, the Bantu do not thus express themselves. They distinguish in man body, shadow and breath. This breath is the assumed manifestation, the evident sign of life, though it is mortal and in no way corresponds with what we understand by the soul, especially the soul as subsisting after death, when the body with its shadow and its breath will have disappeared. What lives on after death is not called by the Bantu by a term indicating part of a man. I have always heard their elders speak

of "the man himself", "himself", *aye mwine*"; or it is "the little man" who was formerly hidden behind the perceptible manifestation of the man; or the "muntu", which, at death, has left the living.

It seems to me incorrect to translate this word "muntu" by "the man". The "muntu" certainly possesses a visible body, but this body is *not* the "muntu". A Bantu one day explained to one of my colleagues that the "muntu" is rather what you call in English the "person" and not what you connote by "the man". "Muntu" signifies, then, vital force, endowed with intelligence and will. This interpretation gives a logical meaning to the statement which I one day received from a Bantu: "God is a great muntu" ("Vidye i muntu mukatampe"). This meant "God is the great Person"; that is to say, *The great, powerful and reasonable living force.*

The "bintu" are rather what we call *things*; but according to Bantu philosophy they are beings, that is to say *forces not endowed with reason, not living.*

- b) All force can be strengthened or enfeebled. That is to say, all being can become stronger or weaker.

We say of a man that he grows, develops, acquires knowledge, exercises his intelligence and his will; and that in so doing he increases them. We do not hold that by these acquisitions and by this development he has become more a man; at least, not in the

sense that his human *nature* no longer remains what it was. One either has human nature or one hasn't. It is not a thing that is increased or diminished. Development operates in a man's qualities or in his faculties.

Bantu ontology—or, to be more exact, the Bantu theory of forces—is radically opposed to any such conception. When a Bantu says "I am becoming stronger", he is thinking of something quite different from what we mean when we say that our powers are increasing. Remember that, for the Bantu, being is force and force being. When he says that a force is increasing, or that a being is reinforced, his thought must be expressed in our language and according to our mental outlook as "his being has grown as such", his nature has been made stronger, increased, made greater. What Catholic theology teaches concerning, in particular, the supernatural realities of grace, that it is a supernal reinforcement of our being, that it is able to grow and to be strengthened in itself, is an idea similar to what the Bantu accept in the natural order as true of all being, of all force.

This is the sense in which it seems that we should understand the expressions which have been quoted to show that the behaviour of the Bantu is centred on the idea of vital energy: "to be strong", "to reinforce your life", "you are powerful", "be strong"; or again, "your vital force is declining, has been affected".

It is in this sense also that we must understand

Fraser, when he writes in the "Golden Bough", "The soul like the body can be fat or thin, great or small"; or again, "the diminution of the shadow is considered to be the index of a parallel enfeeblement in the vital energy of its owner"¹.

The same idea again is envisaged by M. E. Possoz when he writes in his "Elements of Negro Customary Law": "For the African, existence is a thing of variable intensity"; and further on when he mentions "the diminution or the reinforcement of being".

We must speak next of the existence of things or of forces. The origin, the subsistence or annihilation of beings or of forces, is expressly and exclusively attributed to God. The term "to create" in its proper connotation of "to evoke from not being" is found in its full signification in Bantu terminology (Kupanga in Kiluba). It is in this sense that the Bantu see, in the phenomenon of conception, a direct intervention of God in creating life.

Those who think that, according to the Bantu, one being can entirely annihilate another, to the point that he ceases to exist, conceive a false idea. Doubtless one force that is greater than another can paralyse it, diminish it, or even cause its operation totally to cease, but for all that the force does not cease to exist. Existence which comes from God cannot be taken from a creature by any created force.

¹. The references are to pp. 179 and 191 of the abridged 1 vol. edition' (C.K.)

we have provisionally termed them. In fact, even inferior beings, such as inanimate beings and minerals, are forces which by reason of their nature have been put at the disposal of men, of living human forces, or of men's vital forces.

The white man, a new phenomenon in the Bantu world, could be conceived only according to pre-existing categories of Bantu thought. He was therefore incorporated into the universe of forces, in the position therein which was congruent with the logic of Bantu ontology. The technological skill of the white man impressed the Bantu. The white man seemed to be the master of great natural forces. It had, therefore, to be admitted that the white man was an elder, a superior human force, surpassing the vital force of all Africans. The vital force of the white man is such that against it the "manga", or the application of active natural forces at the disposition of Africans, was without effect.

f) The General Laws of Vital Causality.

After what we have said upon the question of "force-beings"¹ grouped in respect of their natures, of intensity of life class by class, and of the precedence according to primogeniture, it will be now clear that, among clan peoples, the universe of forces is

1. F. "étes-forces".

organically constructed in what we can call an ontological hierarchy. The interaction of forces and the exercise of vital influences occurs, in fact, according to determined laws. The Bantu universe is not a chaotic tangle of unordered forces blindly struggling with one another. Nor must we believe that this *theory of forces* is the incoherent product of a savage imagination, or that the action of the same force can be now propitious and now pernicious, without a determining power to justify the fact. Doubtless there are force influences acting in this unforeseeable manner, but this assertion does not allow the conclusion that action occurs in a manner scientifically unpredictable, in a totally irrational mode. When a motor-car breaks down, one can say that this event was not determined in advance by what constitutes the essential nature of a motor-car, but we do not on that account believe ourselves obliged to deny the correctness and validity of the laws of mechanics. On the contrary, the breakdown itself can be explained only by adequate application of these very laws. The same is true of the laws of the interaction of forces. There are possible and necessary actions, other influences are metaphysically impossible by reason of the nature of the forces in question. The possible causal factors in life can be formulated in certain metaphysical, universal, immutable and stable laws.

These laws can, I think, be set out as follows:

- I. Man (living or deceased) can directly reinforce or diminish the being of another man.

Such vital influence is possible from man to man : it is indeed necessarily effective as between the progenitor, a superior vital force—and his progeny—an inferior force. This interaction does not occur only when the recipient object is endowed, in respect of the endowing subject, with a superior force, which he may achieve of himself, or by some vital external influence, or (especially) by the action of God.

II. The vital human force can directly influence inferior force-beings (animal, vegetable, or mineral) in their being itself.

III. A rational being (spirit, manes, or living) can act indirectly upon another rational being by communicating his vital influence to an inferior force (animal, vegetable, or mineral) through the intermediacy of which it influences the rational being. This influence will also have the character of a necessarily effective action, save only when the object is inherently the stronger force, or is reinforced by the influence of some third party, or preserves himself by recourse to inferior forces exceeding those which his enemy is employing.

Note : Certain authors claim that inanimate beings, stones, rocks, or plants and trees are called by the

Bantu "bwanga", as exercising their vital influence on all that comes near them. If this were authenticated, it would open the question : "do lower forces act by themselves upon higher forces?" Some authors say that they do. For my part, I have never met any African who would accept this hypothesis. *A priori*, such an occurrence would seem to me to contradict the general principles of the theory of forces. In Bantu metaphysic the lower force is excluded from exercising by its own initiative any vital action upon a higher force. Besides, in giving their examples, these authors ought to recognize that often a living influence has been at work, for example, that of the manes. Likewise certain natural phenomena, rocks, waterfalls, big trees, can be considered—and are considered by the Bantu—as manifestations of divine power ; they can also be the sign, the manifestation, the habitat of a spirit. It seems to me that such should be the explanation of the apparent influences of lower forces on the higher force of man. Those lower beings do not exercise their influence of themselves, but through the vital energy of a higher force acting as cause. Such an explanation accords in all cases with Bantu metaphysic. Such manifestations belong to the third law enunciated above.