

Consciência Coletiva - forma de vida  
maneira de viver

unidade mente e corpo

tempo não-linear → aqui e agora + passado  
imortal  
ancestral

parentesco o comunil. é parte da <sup>persona</sup> ~~da~~ <sup>personal</sup>

parte do ritmo natural do organismo - um com o  
organismo

Determinismo do povo (tribe)

relacionado a uma disposição espiritual / ou  
longueiro white

Whiteness - processo, processo

### SKETCH 1

## African Philosophy

### Foundations for Black Psychology

values, customs, attitudes + comportamentos

Black Americans derive their most fundamental self-definition from several cultural and philosophical premises which we share with most West African "tribes."<sup>1</sup> In exploring the character of these premises, which are basic conceptions of the nature of man and his relation to other men and his environment, we hope to establish a foundation upon which a Black psychology can be constructed. Thus, it will be contended that Black psychology is something more than the psychology of the so-called underprivileged peoples, more than the experience of living in ghettos, and more than the genocidal atrocity of being forced into the dehumanizing condition of slavery. It is more than the "darker dimension" of general psychology. Its unique status is derived not from the negative aspects of being Black in white America, but rather from the positive features of basic African philosophy, which dictate the values, customs, attitudes, and behavior of Africans in Africa and the New World.

The notion of common experience or common ethos seems almost fictional if one accepts uncritically the research finding of many so-called Africanists who argue that the territory of the western region of Africa held and still does hold within its boundaries many different "tribes," each having its own language, religion, and customs. However, one must note the orientation of these many Africanists whose incidental whiteness colors much of what they have to say. One must, therefore, be conscious of the inherent social dialectic. That is to say, while most foreign students of Africa have maintained that the western "tribes" have little shared experience because each has a distinct language and religion and many unique customs, they have overlooked "the similarities of the forest for the differences between

auto-definição  
fundamental  
rel. de humana  
4 em humanos  
o ambiente  
premissas sobre  
a natureza do  
ser humano

noção de  
pp. comum  
e ethos comum

dialetico  
social hereditario

diferentes  
tribos

the trees." In this view, it is suggested that the overemphasis given tribal differences by white investigators is the anthropological or scientific version of the imperialist strategy of "divide and conquer." Hence, it is likely that many white ethnographers are predisposed by conscious or unconscious racist assumptions to focus upon superficial differences and, therefore, are blinded to underlying similarities in the experiential communality of African peoples. Fortunately, however, this anthropological analog of the "divide and conquer" strategy has been redressed by Black and even by a few white scholars.<sup>2</sup> These scholars maintain that "tribal" differences in Africa were minor compared to the binding quality of their communality. This author suggests that what supported this regional communality was a set of guiding beliefs—an ethos. Closer examination of the region indicates that this ethos determined two operational orders. The first is the notion that the people were part of the natural rhythm of nature; they were one with nature. The second order is the notion of the survival of one's people—that is, the "tribe." Hence, the African experience defines man's place or role in nature's scheme.

Mixed  
branco  
dividido  
conquistar  
cultura  
experiential  
comunidade  
do povo africano  
Ethos  
municípios  
lorentos dos  
dos tribos  
2 ordens

However, unlike a written constitution the ethos is more akin to a spiritual disposition and probably could best be described as collective consciousness. Although the ethos cannot be scientifically/empirically examined with current methodology, it is believed that one way to understand the essential and pervasive nature of the African/Black ethos is to explore and understand African philosophy.<sup>3</sup> It follows that insofar as the African/Black ethos is distinct from that of the prevailing white ethos upon which traditional psychology is founded, a Black psychology based upon the Black ethos must also be uniquely different from white psychology. It is this principle that allows African philosophy to take its place as the foundation for Black psychology.

ethos e  
consciência  
coletiva  
espiritual  
pg  
Black

### Religion and Philosophy

John Mbiti<sup>4</sup> defines African philosophy as "the understanding, attitude of mind, logic, and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act, or speak in different situations of life." What is central to Brother Mbiti's definition is

comunitário  
(ao judaísmo)

the "spiritual disposition," the "collective consciousness,"—in a word—the ethos. It should be made very explicit that ethos can be considered the operational definition of African philosophy. More specifically, this "collective consciousness" can be described as a vital attitude. That is to say, a kind of faith in a transcendental force and a sense of vital solidarity.

Consciência  
coletiva/ethos  
ate trece intas  
Amio me relan  
sistema filosófico  
expresso pelo

Examination of pre-slavery Africa suggests that there were hundreds of African peoples, or tribes, who some would suggest, each had its own philosophical system. More sophisticated scholarship indicates that West Africans, in general, shared one overriding philosophical system. It was through religion, however, that this philosophical system was expressed. In this sense religion and philosophy are the same phenomenon. Hence, to understand the essence of these peoples' existence, one must examine their religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics, and morals—keeping in mind that underlying the differences in detail is a general philosophical system which prevailed in Africa. Religion, however, is the more observable phenomenon and, as such, it permeated every aspect of the African's life. It was, in a very real sense, not something for the betterment of the individual, but rather something for the community of which the individual was an integral part. For the traditional African, to be human was to belong to the whole community.<sup>5</sup> Curiously enough, many African languages did not have a word for religion as such because religion was such an integral part of man's existence that it and he were inseparable. Religion accompanied the individual from conception to long after his physical death.

me humano e  
pertenc a comunidade  
meo separação  
pessoal  
mas há ismitas  
sogrados  
tradições  
queijos  
tradição oral  
linch!

As most scholars of African religion will attest, one of the greatest difficulties in studying African religion and philosophy is that there are no sacred scriptures of that society. However, these beliefs and/or traditions were handed down from father to son for generation upon generation. As such, and in accordance with the prevailing oral tradition, the beliefs were corporate and the acts were communal. Traditional religion in Africa was not proselytized. The people were their religion. Thus, individuals could not "preach" their religion to "others."

As was noted above, religion was the observable phenomenon and, for the most part, tribes were seemingly different by observation. For instance, the Dogon conception of the universe is based, on the one hand, on the principle of vibrations of mat-

Corporate - common, cooperatives  
Communal - público, conjunto, comunal

conceito  
Dogon do  
universo.

ter, and on the other hand, on a general movement of the universe as a whole.<sup>6</sup> For the Dogon proliferation of life was directed by a perpetual alternation of opposites: right-left, high-low, odd-even, male-female,—all reflecting twin beings, living images of the fundamental principle of twinning in creation, were each equipped with two spiritual principles of opposites. Each of them was a pair. This notion of man's unity with the universe is reflected in the Dogon belief that "man is the seed of the universe."<sup>7</sup> Hence, the organization of the earth's system is reproduced in every individual.

Other tribes were not without their beliefs of man's existence and connection with the earth. The Fon of Dahomey believed that at the beginning of the present world there were the twins, Mawu-Lisa-Mawy, the female, and Lisa, the organization of the world."<sup>8</sup> The Mende, also of West Africa, believed that each parent gave to their offspring some aspect of the child's unified constitution. For instance, the Mende believed that the physical part of an individual is provided by the father through the semen he puts into the mother. The child's spirit (Ngafa) is contributed by its mother. Contrary to the Mende, the Ashanti believed that the human being is formed from the blood (Mogya) of the mother and the spirit (Ntoro) of the father.<sup>9</sup> Both peoples nevertheless believed that the initial separateness of the spirit and the physical body and blood unite as one in making a new human being. In this sense each tribe had its own religious system, and for one to have propagated his religion would have involved propagating the entire life of the people concerned. However, the basic substance of each tribal life system was not different.

Traditional Africans made no distinction between the act and the belief. "What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience."<sup>10</sup> Action and belief in traditional West African society were not separated. They belonged to a single whole. Accordingly, traditional beliefs made no concrete distinction between the spiritual and the physical. Note that the Mende perceived physical and spiritual components as uniting to make the human.

The concept of life after death is found in all African societies. However, belief in the continuation of life after death did not represent a hope for the future or possibly for a better life

twinn - adequa, cosar...  
 principio espiritual do opostos  
 univ. e a unidade do universo.  
 estes verbos sobre inicio universo - 1 humanos  
 religiao e a proprio modo dos povos  
 nao ha distincoes entre uniao e ato  
 fisico e espiritual  
 uniao no ser humano  
 conceito de vida apos a morte

when one died. For the African, once dead, there was neither Heaven to be hoped for, nor Hell to be feared. Again, this reflects the idea of vital force.

The whole of one's existence was an ontological religious phenomenon. The African was a deeply religious being, living in a religious universe.<sup>11</sup> For him to live was to be involved in, to be part of, a religious drama. As noted, traditional African religion was a religious ontology. As such, the ontology was characteristically very anthropocentric—everything was seen in terms of its relation to man.

### Notion of Unity

The anthropocentric ontology was a complete unity, which nothing could break or destroy. Everything was functionally connected; to completely destroy one of the five categories would cause the destruction of the whole of existence, including the Creator. God was viewed as the originator and sustainer of man. The spirits explained man's destiny. Man was the center of the ontology. The animals, plants, and natural phenomena constituted the environment in which man lived. In addition to the five categories, there existed a force, a power, or energy which permeated the whole universe. In this kind of natural order (i.e., unity), God was the source and ultimate controller of the energy, but the spirits also had access to it. A few human beings—the Shaman (i.e., medicine men, priests, and rainmakers)—possessed the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate, and use, to a limited degree, this powerful energy. For the Dogon the social order was projected in the individual. An indivisible cell that on the one hand is a microcosm of the whole, and on the other hand has a circumscribed function. Not only was a person the product of his institutions, he also was their motive power. Lacking, however, any special power in himself, he was the representative of the whole. The individual affected the cosmic order, which he also displayed.<sup>12</sup> As stated earlier, a prevailing belief (Dogon) was that the organization (unity) of the earth's system was reproduced in every individual. This notion of the unity of things was so ingrained that the Mende, for instance, had developed a sense of collective responsibility. Also ingrained in this notion of unity is a particular conception of time.

idea de grupo vital  
 uniao existencia  
 plus  
 espirito  
 Dogon  
 ordem social  
 Responsabil  
 coletiva

*chiefly - principalmente*  
*backward - para tras*

### Concept of Time

African philosophy concerned itself with two dimensions of time—the past and the present; and this conception of time helped to explain the general life system of traditional Africans.<sup>13</sup> The direction of one's life system was from the present dimension backward to the past dimension. For the people, time itself was simply a composition of past events. Very little concern was given to time in and of itself. Time existed for Africans, but the concept was (is) very elastic. It encompassed events that had already occurred, those that are taking place, and those that would occur immediately.<sup>14</sup> What had no possibility of occurring immediately or had not taken place fell into the category of "no time."<sup>15</sup> Time was reckoned by phenomena. "Actual time" was what (events) was present or past and, because time essentially moved backward rather than forward, the traditional African set his mind not on future things but chiefly on what had taken place. Thus, the West African's understanding of things—that is, the individual, the tribe (community), and the five characters of the universe—was governed or dominated by these two dimensions (past and present) of time.

In order for the West African to make sense, or make real, time, it had to be experienced; and the way in which one experienced time was partly through the life of the individual and partly through the life of the tribe which went back many generations. Because time was reckoned by phenomena, "instead of numerical calendars, there were what one would call phenomenon calendars, in which the events or phenomena which constituted time were reckoned or considered in their relation with one another as they take place."<sup>16</sup> The Mandingo, for instance, had (have) a distinct "seasonal" calendar which reflected the changing of the seasons. Hence, the phenomenal changes of the environment constituted time. For most Africans, time was meaningful at the point of the event and not at the mathematical moment. Thus, in traditional life, any period of time was reckoned according to its significant events having been experienced.

Recognizing the associations and connotations that the English words past, present, and future have, Brother Mbiti uses two Swahili words (Sasa and Zamani) to represent present and past. Sasa has the sense of immediacy, nearness, nowness.<sup>17</sup> It

*urgencia, proximill*

*2 dimensoes*  
*pasado e presente*

*conceito*  
*relativo*  
*tempo em fenomeno*  
*tempo de momentos*  
*para tras*

*tempo em que*  
*na experiencia*  
*parte pelo D*  
*parte pelo H*  
*geracoes*

*tempo i*  
*significativo*  
*pelo evento*  
*em pelo momento*  
*Sasa (presente)*  
*Zamani (passado)*

### African Philosophy

*overlaps - sobrepõe*  
*encompasses - cerca rodeia circunda*

is the period of immediate concern for the people because that is where or when they exist. For Africans, it is the period of personal recollections of events and phenomena. The Sasa period is not mathematically or numerically constant. Each member of the tribe has his own and, hence, the older the person, the longer his Sasa period. Each tribe (society, nation), therefore, also has its own Sasa period.

The Zamani period is not limited to what Europeans call the past. It overlaps and often encompasses the Sasa, making the two inseparable.

The Sasa feels or disappears into the Zamani. However, before events become incorporated into the Zamani, they have to be realized or actualized within the Sasa dimension. Thus, events (people) move backward from the Sasa dimension to the Zamani dimension. In a sense, Zamani is the graveyard of time.<sup>18</sup> Where the Sasa dimension binds together all created things, all is embraced within the Zamani.

Everything has its center of gravity in the Zamani period, with nothing ever ending. West African peoples expect human history to continue forever, because it too is part of the natural rhythm moving from Sasa to Zamani. The Mende apparently have a belief in rebirth or reincarnation. Children are sometimes named after a particular ancestor, especially when there is distinct resemblance. This behavior inevitably demonstrates that the Mende, like other West African peoples, have a notion that the life cycle is renewable. Human life is part of the rhythm of nature, and just as the days, months, seasons, and years have no end, there is a definite continuity in the rhythm of birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed (living dead), and entry into the company of the spirits. Life is an ontological rhythm, and abnormality or the unusual is what disrupts the ontological harmony.

### Death and Immortality

In many African tribes, a person was not considered a full human being until he had gone through the whole rhythmic process of physical birth, naming ceremony, puberty, initiation rites (sometimes in the form of ceremonial rebirth), and finally

*graveyard - cemiterio*

*Code um. time*  
*sun prepms*  
*Sasa*

*Sasa e Zamani*  
*indispensáveis*

*made alaba*

*ails as wide*  
*removível*

obeyed - obedecer - cumprir  
durst - cloro, obvia certo  
insure - segund.  
lotion - firme, modo costume, uso

marriage and procreation. Then, and only then, was one fully "born"—a complete person. Similarly, death initiated the systematic rhythmic process through which the person gradually was removed from the Sasa to the Zamani period. Hence, death and immortality have especial significance in West African traditions. After physical death, as long as a person was remembered and recognized (by name) by relatives and friends who knew him (i.e., remembered his personality, character, and words and incidents of his life), he would continue to exist in the Sasa period. When, however, the last person who knew him also died, then the former passed out of the horizon of the Sasa period and, in effect, became completely dead. He no longer had any claims to family ties. He entered the Zamani period; that is, he became a member in the company of spirits.

The departed person who was remembered (recognized) by name was what Brother Mbiti calls the living-dead. He was considered to be in a state of personal immortality. The Mende believed that a person survives after death and that his surviving personality goes to the land of the dead.<sup>19</sup> Those in personal immortality were treated symbolically like the living. The cycle of an individual ancestor, the Mende believed, lasted as long as the dead person was remembered in prayers and sacrifices.<sup>20</sup> Hence, they were respected, given food and drink in the form of libations, and listened to and obeyed.

Being remembered (recognized) and respected while in personal immortality was important for the traditional African, a fact which helps one to understand the religious significance and importance of marriage and procreation in West African societies. Procreation was the surest way to insure that one would not be cut off from personal immortality. In a kind of multiplicative fashion, polygamy reinforced one's insurance.

Inevitably, as stated earlier, there was a point when there were no longer any descendants alive who could recognize and give respect to the (living-dead) person. At that point, the process of dying was completed. However, he did not vanish out of existence. He then entered into the state of collective immortality. Now in the company of the spirits, he had at last entered the Zamani period. From this point on, the departed became nameless spirits who had no personal communication or ties with human families.

uma "pessoa completa" superstitiosa.

morte fisica  
destrucao de  
pessoas  
histo. no  
soze

"morte - vida"  
morte kll  
pessoal

religiao  
mohinomo  
mohiatpa  
poligamia

morte completa  
lcm record(s)  
mortalidade

morte

entao pl  
compartilho  
espirito

ontologia  
infinito

parentes  
liga o sistema  
de vida pessoal

unopius

Wigio  
similior  
dos tribos

branco  
compartilho  
sobreminho  
do tribo e  
parentes

conhecimento  
do genealogia

conced - esculpir, gravar.

In terms of the ontology, entrance into the company of the spirits is man's final destiny. Paradoxically, death lies "in front" of the individual; it is a "future" event of sorts. But, when one dies, one enters the state of personal immortality and gradually "goes back" into the Zamani period. It should be emphasized that the African ontology was endless; such a view of man's destiny should not be construed to mean the end. Nothing ever ends.

**Kinship: Collective Unity**

Before concluding this brief and cursory review of African philosophy, a few words should be devoted to West African kinship, especially because kinship tied together the personal life system. Before they had carved up and colonized West Africa, Europeans had no idea where one tribe ended and another tribe began. The number of people that constituted, what might be considered a tribe, varied greatly. Depending upon the enumerator or ethnographer, many tribes were classified as unique and distinctly separate or simply as one.

Studies of African religious beliefs and practices demonstrate that among the many so-called distinct tribes there were more similarities (commonalities) than differences.<sup>21</sup> This author contends that all tribes shared basic beliefs—in the "survival of the tribe" and in the fact that the tribe was an integral and indispensable part of nature. Belief in tribal survival, was reflected in and sustained by a deep sense of kinship—probably one of the strongest cohesive devices in traditional life. Kinship controlled all relationships in the community.<sup>22</sup> It included animals, plants, and non-living objects. In effect, kinship bound together the entire life system of the tribe.

The kinship system stretched laterally (horizontally) in every direction as well as vertically. Hence, each member of the tribe was related not only to the tribal ancestors (both living-dead and spirits) but also to all those still unborn. In addition, each was a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, cousin or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or some relation to everybody else. Africans still have many kinship terms which define the precise relationship binding any two people. Knowledge of one's tribal genealogy, vertical and horizontal, was

genealogia estudo dos grupos, parentesco  
dnc - dener, relacionar a

Being: Searching for Origins

extremely important. It imparted a sense of sacred obligation to extend the genealogical line. Through genealogies, persons (individuals) in the Sasa period were firmly linked to those who had entered the Zamani period.

This link manifested itself in the living as well. "In traditional life, the individual did not and could not exist alone."<sup>23</sup> The individual owed his very existence to other members of the "tribe." Not only those who conceived and nourished him but also those long dead and still unborn. The individual did not exist unless he was corporate or communal; he was simply an integral part of the collective unity. Africans believed that the community (tribe) made, created, or produced the individual; thus, the existence of the community was not imagined to be dependent on individual ingression.

Unlike Western philosophical systems, the African philosophical tradition does not place heavy emphasis on the "individual." Indeed one might say that in a sense it does not allow for individuals. It recognizes that "only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being."<sup>24</sup> Only through others does one learn his duties and responsibilities toward himself and others. Most initiation rites were designed to instill a sense of corporate responsibility and collective destiny. Thus, when one member of the tribe suffered, the entire tribe suffered; when one member of the tribe rejoiced, all of his kinsmen—living, dead, and still unborn—rejoiced with him. When one man got married, he was not alone, nor did his wife "belong" to him alone. Even the children were considered to be from unions which belonged to the collective body.

Whatever experiences or circumstances that happened to the individual, happened to the corporate body, the tribe, and whatever happened to the tribe, happened to the individual. A concept the Ashanti share with all other Akan peoples is that "the dead, the living, and those still to be born of the 'tribe' are all members of one family." A cardinal point in understanding the traditional African's view of himself, his self-concept is that he believes: "I am because we are; and because we are, therefore, I am."<sup>25</sup>

Relaciona  
do complexo  
tribe  
parte integral  
do mundo  
coletivo.

atribuis de  
mundo  
tribe!

tribe

confronto à  
experiencia

Experiential Communalilty : Cultural Configuration

Any basic cultural anthropology text will give one a general feeling about why and how man began to live in groups. (However, what is not discussed in most texts is the interaction between man—in the group—and man's particular environment. The notion of particular environment is an important one for this presentation because it determines the common elements of the group's living experiences. For instance, primitive people living in the Sahara Desert respond differently to their environment than inhabitants of the frigid zones or polar regions.<sup>26</sup> And those living in the tropic regions of the Congo would respond still another way to the elements in their environment. A more pointed example is provided by the differences between people living in post-industrial and pre-industrial environments. Plainly, it can be said that the uniqueness of one's environment determines the parameters of one's experience.

Experiential communalilty is defined here as the sharing of a particular experience by a group of people. Ultimately it helps to determine how the people will be, and concurrently, what ethos, or set of guiding beliefs, a people will follow. These guiding beliefs, in turn, dictate the creation and adoption of the values and customs, which in the final analysis determine what social behavior a people will express in common—their cultural configuration. Thus experiential communalilty is important in determining society's fundamental principles—its beliefs about the nature of man and what kind of society man should create for himself.

The peoples of Africa have traditionally lived in units or clusters commonly referred to as "tribes." For centuries West Africa has characteristically consisted of rolling stretches of tall grassy plains with intermittent bush country and scattered tropical rain forest.<sup>27</sup> Within this region, the traditional peoples (tribes) were closely related to each other, yet they still maintained their distinctness. Each tribe had its own distinct language, which was related to the languages of all the other tribes in the region. African languages have been classified as being of the Sudanic family<sup>28</sup> and the Niger-Congo stock.<sup>29</sup> The closely related Bantu languages, the most well-known of the Niger-Congo group, were spoken mostly from the west coast to most of central

ambiente particular

ambiente e  
experiencia

comumil de  
experiencia  
valores, costumes

determina principios  
sociais

grassy - savanna de topin

and southern Africa.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, just as there was a common geographical flavor to the region, so, too, did its inhabitants develop and maintain common behaviors.<sup>31</sup>

The physical nature of the experiential communality is important mainly in that the more unique or distinct it is, the higher the probability that the physical boundaries hinder the influx of neighboring cultural elements. Likewise, it also allows for the development and protective maintenance of indigenous cultural elements. Just as important, however, is the interaction of communal man with his unique environment. The quintessence of this phenomenon is that it results in a set of guiding beliefs, which dictate the values and customs the people adopt. Ultimately, this set (or sets) of values determines man's social behavior.

As noted earlier, close examination of the African ethos suggests two operational orders: survival of the tribe and oneness with nature. Being that this is the case, it is safe to say that this ethos is probably the focal point of Black Psychology and the subject of which this research is based. Such research is devoted to offering evidence pointing to the continuing of a functioning African ethos.

### African Reality and Psychological Assumptions

Black psychology is more than general psychology's "darker" dimension. African (Black) psychology is rooted in the nature of Black culture which is based on particular indigenous (originally indigenous to Africa) philosophical assumptions. To make Black psychology the dreaded darker dimension of general psychology would amount to distorting African reality so that it would fit Western psychological theories and/or assumptions. For example, a study of the history of general psychology reveals that the controversial mind-body problem stems from the set early Greek myths known as the Orphic Mysteries. One myth recounts how Dionysus was killed by the evil Titans and Zeus saved Dionysus' heart and killed the Titans. Zeus then created man from the "evil" Titan ashes and Dionysus' heart. Hence, man has a dual nature: He is both evil and divine. However, the assumptions arising from these early myths caused a problem. There had to be an evaluation of what was "good" and what was

*dread - terror*  
*Aspects & components in common*

*determines do components solid*

*What is the point of Black P.*

*noting negro negro*  
*components philosophy*  
*indigenous*

*dimensão negro*  
*temida*

*mitos gregos*  
*bone & mal*

*twin - adique, cosa, combiner*

"bad." Assuming a dichotomy of the mind and the body, the early philosophers suggested that the body was the "bad" and the mind was the "good"—beliefs accepted unquestionably during the early period of general psychology's emergence as a "science." Not surprisingly, psychology chose the mind (good) as the domain of its inquiry.

The African concept of man is fundamentally different. Dogon, Mende, and Ashanti all assume man's dual nature but do not attempt to divide "mind" from "body" or refer to or imply an inherent good or evil in either aspect of the duality. The propositions of "the notion of unity," "one with nature," and "survival of the people" deny possibility of such an artificial and arbitrary dichotomy. What is seemingly dualistic is the concept of "twinness." However, as stated earlier, the twin components unite to make the unified man. For Africans, who believed that man, like the universe, is a complicated, integrated, unified whole, concerns such as the mind-body controversy would never arise and theoretical developments and/or analysis based solely on the explication of the "mind" or the "body" as separate entities would be useless.

Although the mind-body is a single example, it is believed sufficient to demonstrate how philosophical assumptions determined the scientific investigation of psychology. Certainly particular people cannot be meaningfully investigated and understood if their philosophical assumptions are not taken into account.

### Toward Black Psychology

This brings us closer to Black psychology's evolution from African philosophy. The remaining question is how does one know or how can one "prove" that Africans living in the Western world, and in contemporary times, still have or maintain an African philosophical definition. Black psychology's development is contingent first upon analysis of the linkages between distinct experiential periods in the lives of Africans, and second upon the demonstration of the particular ways in which African philosophy, interacting with alien (particularly Euro-American) philosophies, has determined contemporary African (Black) people's perception of reality.

*loose & unite*

*concepts Africans & human*

*components*  
*James*  
*united*

*concepts philosophy*  
*mystical*  
*philosophy*

*myths*  
*central*  
*20th*  
*contemporary*

retained - consensus, presence, grounds, reality  
 Being: Searching for Origins  
 feature - tools, characteristics, aspects, parts + importance

### On the Question of Proof

History is an endeavor toward better understanding, and, consequently, a thing movement. To limit oneself to describing science as it is, will always be to betray it.<sup>32</sup>

For Black psychology—and the many other social science areas which attempt to “Blackenize” themselves in order to “explain” contemporary African peoples—the question of proof centers around more than determining whether a particular cultural element (e.g., an artifact) has been retained. The focus must be on the philosophical-psychological linkages between Africans and African-Americans (or Americanized Africans).

To determine whether—and to what extent—the African orientation has persisted, one must ask “How could it have been maintained?” “What mechanism or circumstances allowed it to be maintained?” An orientation stemming from a particular indigenous African philosophy could only be maintained when its cultural carriers were isolated (and/or insulated) from alien cultural interaction and if their behavioral expression of the orientation did not openly conflict with the cultural-behavioral elements of the “host” society. If the circumstances of the transplantation of New World Blacks met one or both of these conditions, then it is highly probable that the African orientation was retained. This writer maintains that a factor that often facilitated the retention of the African orientation was the particular region's physical features. And the slaves' accessibility to Western indoctrination was probably directly related to the degree of the retention of the African orientation. The rigidly enforced isolation of Blacks allowed New World Africans to retain their definition (orientation). Thus, the oppressive system of slavery indirectly encouraged the retention, rather than the destruction, of the African philosophical orientation.

Throughout the New World, large numbers of Africans lived, segregated in given areas. Lorenzo Turner<sup>33</sup> notes that “wherever Negroes were in the majority, African cultural elements had a better chance of surviving.” In the United States, the policy of racial segregation must have often aided in keeping alive the African influence. It is proposed here that a comparative historical analysis of such areas as Brazil, Jamaica, Dutch Guinea,

the rural South, and the northern ghetto would reveal a striking and direct correlation between (1) ecological and geographic factors and accessibility of interaction with Westerners and (2) maintenance of the African orientation. Not until the television “explosion” of the early 1950s did the African orientation come fully into contact with Western (Euro-American) styles of behavior and the American way of life.

Expressive behavior and cultural modalities are determined by philosophical definition. One can observe “Africanisms” throughout the New World because the orientation of which a people are allowed to develop or continue to utilize particular cultural elements was not interfered with. Thus, the statement “We are an African people” is valid because, for the most part, New World conditions did not permit the enculturation of the African orientation.

### Considerations for Black Psychology

The experiential communality of African peoples can be subdivided into periods. For Africans living in the Western world, particularly in North America, the breakdown used here is (1) the African experience (prior to 1600), (2) the slavery experience (1600 to 1865), and (3) contemporary Black America (1865 to present).

However, rather than treat a few specific behavioral transitions, the discussion will focus on several major philosophical positions and correlative behavioral modalities. The first is survival of the people. From this philosophical position an extended definition of self evolved. That is to say, the self was by philosophical definition the “we” instead of the “I.” Tribal membership became the most important identity. One's identity was thus rooted in being an Ashanti, or an Ibo rather than the person, Lodagaa Nyakyusi, who just happened to be an Igbera. Thrust into an alien culture, the “we” notion seemingly came under severe attack. Many scholars note, for example, the prevalent practice during slavery (second distinct experiential communality period) of purposely separating members of the same tribe in order to break down the collective reinforcement of a common definition.

However, additional information suggests that in North America the system of slavery was extremely unstructured in its



beginning. Nevertheless, the system eventually came to define itself in terms of Black people. During this same period, the notion of tribe or peoplehood, which is crucial to the "we" notion underwent a particular modification. Clearly, Africans recognized and respected the distinctions of the tribe and understanding that one was an Igbira, or an Ibo, suggested many things. However, the philosophical position within each tribe was the set of guiding beliefs, which prescribed the survival of the tribe as a first order. As the system of American slavery began to define slavery in terms of Africans, tribe was more broadly defined in the minds of the Africans. Hence, one sees Africans no longer giving the Ibo, or Igbira, distinction its former level of importance but rather adopting broader categories. Thus, as slavery was moving closer and closer to its final definition, the slaves themselves were moving closer to the generic terms of African or Black as the final definition of tribe. Thus, the notion of survival of the tribe was not changed or modified during the slavery experience. In fact, one could suggest that the slavery experience allowed the underlying communality of West Africa to surface and define itself as African. Hence, in slavery, the cardinal point, "I am because we are; and because we are, therefore, I am," was not destroyed, but rather strengthened. In contemporary times, one can note the prevalence of benevolent societies and the role of the Negro church as expressing clear concern for the survival of the tribe.

The second philosophical position that has survived the effects of different experiential periods is the idea of man being an integral part of the "natural rhythm of nature," or, one with nature. Clearly, this can be seen within the African experience in terms of the anthropocentric ontology. The expression of this natural rhythm in the initiation rites gave definition to many of the periods within a person's Sasa dimension. This notion of rhythm also was expressed in the "talking drums."

In traditional African society, the living setting was the community itself and the emphasis was placed on living in that community, not in a particular household. Even in contemporary times, the "community" seems to manifest this same perception. One could propose that seeing oneself as an integral part of a community is the contemporary definition of man being an integral part of the natural rhythm of nature.

The oral tradition has clearly been transmitted throughout the three experiential periods. As indicated earlier, beliefs and traditions were handed down from father to son for generations upon generations. This tradition gave tremendous importance to the mind or the memory. Remembering phenomenal events in one's Sasa period was very important, if not crucial. The slavery tradition seemingly allowed this tradition to continue. That is, because oral communication was the only acceptable system—laws prohibited slaves from being taught to read and write—slavery unknowingly permitted the cultural transmission of the African traditional emphasis of oration and its consequent effects on the mind or memory to remain pretty much in tact. Brother Dr. Joseph White<sup>34</sup> suggests that playing the "dozens" as part of the oral tradition is a game used by Black youngsters to teach themselves to keep cool, think fast under pressure, and not say what is really on their minds. Verbal rituals like rapping and playing the dozens could also be viewed as initiation rites or possibly instances where the "power" of the word is used to make the "individual" psychologically feel better. For example, the Avogan and the Lobi Singi<sup>35</sup> are ritualized orations and dance ceremonies where the offended is afforded release of suppressed emotions by ridiculing another. Similarly, the Dogon have a very interesting practice in which certain relations are characterized by exchanges of, often, obscene insults and gestures.<sup>36</sup> Often the language, or name, typifies a special event in the child's life. Hence, because a person acquired names as he associated with different special experiences, one person may have many names. One need only examine the names of Black people to reveal historical tenacity in this orientation—for example, Bojangles, Brown Bomber, Stepin Fetchit, Wilt-the-Stilt, Muddy Waters, Iceberg Slim.

With certain modifications, tribalisms have been transmitted in the form of Africanisms throughout the New World experiential periods. Cooperative effort (tribalism) was expressed in the slavery experience. The "Knights of Wise" symbolized that notion along with the notion of the survival of the tribe. Funerals in contemporary Black America are very symbolic of the custom of reaffirming the bonds of kinship. Distinct motor habits also have been maintained up to the present. For example, photographic analysis of a particular dance in the Ashanti Kwaside rite illustrates a perfect example of the "Charleston." Morality was

taught in traditional times via the use of animal tales. Parables were widely prevalent during slavery—the most notable being the “Brer Fox, Brer Rabbit Tales.” In contemporary times, one simply notes the use of animal names to denote certain qualities. In the Black communities (villages) throughout this country, women and men are referred to as “foxes,” “cows,” “bears,” “buzzards,” “dogs,” and so forth. The style of talking (dramatic pauses, intonation, and the like), are all reminiscent of a people in tune with the natural rhythm of nature—in tune with the oneness of nature.

The concept of time clearly is illustrative. The attitude that time is phenomenal rather than mathematical can be demonstrated to persist throughout the suggested experiential periods. The notion of CPT (colored people's time) has been translated to mean thirty minutes to an hour later than the scheduled meeting time. However, in the minds of Africans (Blacks), time is flexible and the event begins when one gets there. This author thus suggests that a more appropriate enunciation of CPT is “communal potential time,” thereby emphasizing the communal aspect of time.

Black psychology must concern itself with the question of “rhythm.” It must discuss, at some great length, “the oral tradition.” It must unfold the mysteries of the spiritual energy now known as “soul.” It must explain the notion of “extended self” and the “natural” orientation of African peoples to insure the “survival of the tribe.” Briefly, it must examine the elements and dimensions of the experiential communalities of African peoples.

It is my contention, therefore, that Black Psychology must concern itself with the mechanism by which our African definition has been maintained and what value its maintenance has offered Black people. Hence, the task of Black psychology is to offer an understanding of the behavioral definition of African philosophy and to document what, if any, modifications it has undergone during particular experiential periods.

[1972]

## SKETCH 2

### Ancient Egyptian Thought and The Development of African Psychology

An understanding of the relationship between Ancient Egyptian Thought and African/Black Psychology requires first and foremost the recognition that the Ancient African World was a world of symbolism and that much of what is meaningful in African psychology today has gone unrecognized and misunderstood because of our inability to understand the role of symbolism in the African mind—both ancient and modern. Typically for most of us today, symbols and symbolism represent the abbreviated designations which “stand-for” something. Symbolism amounts to a kind of metaphoric device. However, symbolism in the context of this discussion must be thought of as the set of rules and methods for analytically interpreting Ancient African Thought. Through the use of symbols and symbolism the ancients’ intuitive vision approached the world of knowing with an attitude which perceived all the phenomena of nature as symbolic writing, capable of revealing the forces and laws governing the material and spiritual aspects of their universe. In ancient times such usage was in fact the means for transmitting a precise and exact rational, if not suprarational, knowledge which emerged from the intuitive vision. This Schwaller de Lubicz<sup>1</sup> contends was the major aspect of ancient science. Unlike the “stand-for” connotation of the symbolic that is utilized today, the symbolic of ancient African times, and I would say the contemporary African as well, was a symbolism that went beyond the “representational-sequential-analytical” mode to the “transformation-synchronistic-analogic” mode.

Unlike reading where signs stand for the object, the object and the symbol or sign become identical in African Thought. In Ancient Africa, for example, the symbol of an animal was wor-