

ACADEMIE ROYALE DES SCIENCES D'OUTRE-MER
Classe des Sciences morales et politiques
Memoire in-8°, Nouvelle Serie, Tome 53, fasc. 4, Bruxelles, 2009

**Expressions of Traditional Wisdom
from Africa and Beyond:
An Exploration in Intercultural Epistemology**

by

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KONINKLIJKE ACADEMIE VOOR OVERZEESSE WETENSCHAPPEN
Klasse voor Morele en Politieke Wetenschappen
Verhandeling in-8°, Nieuwe Reeks, Boek 53, afl. 4, Brussel, 2009

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ISBN 978-90-7565-200-0
D/2009/0149/4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences, the Royal Museum for Central Africa and the Royal Museums of Art and History, for the honour accorded to me as keynote speaker on the occasion of the International Symposium 'Expressions of Traditional Wisdom' held on 28 September 2007 at the *Palais des Academies* in Brussels (Belgium). In particular, I wish to extend my gratitude to the Scientific Committee (and foremost its Africanist member, Mrs Dr Anne Bouttiaux) for initiating and realizing this Symposium; to Professor Christian Sturtewagen, who as President of the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences chaired the opening session; to Mrs Professor Danielle Swinne, the Academy's Permanent Secretary; and to the Academy's secretarial staff. I also wish to acknowledge the inspiration from my colleagues in the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University, Rotterdam; and the continued support from the African Studies Centre (especially the Library Department directed by Jos Damen) for my current research into 'Connections in African knowledge', of which the present study is a product. I am grateful to Professor Rene Devisch for his useful comments on an earlier version. Finally, I wish to thank the participants for their response to this study, particularly Professors Hugo Baetens Beardsmore and Niels Weidtmann.

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS. — Epistemology; Tradition; Phronesis; Africa; Intercultural.

Wisdom is initially defined (*cf.* Aristotle) as creative practical knowledge that allows one to negotiate the contradictions of human life (especially in less rule-governed domains manifesting uncertainty and incompatible multiple truths), thus accepting that human life is social and finite. After indicating (1) the resilience of wisdom as a topic in modern thought and science, an overview follows on wisdom in various periods and regions of the world (2). (3) The dilemma of *expression* of wisdom: while scholarship thrives on specialist explicit language use, wisdom is often secret and risks being destroyed by expression and translation. Section (4) offsets expressions of traditional wisdom against four modes of 'tacit modern unwisdom' (in such fields as corporality, conflict regulation, the concept of mind, and myth). (5) Can wisdom be transmitted interculturally, within and outside an academic context, and by what mechanism of situational oppositional framing is traditional wisdom both an alterized object of study and a site of identification and encounter? (6) Defining the specific difference between scientific and wisdom modes of knowing, in the former's reliance on standard, repetitive, intersubjective *procedures* of knowledge formation embedded in limiting conditions. (7) The four modes of tacit modern unwisdom (*cf.* 4) are then contrasted with African perspectives. (8) Finally, intercultural philosophy is argued to spring from a situation (today's globalization) where Western mainstream philosophy has to give way to a wisdom perspective as defined above.

1. The Resilience of Wisdom as a Topic in Modern Thought and Science [1]*

In the first booming period of Western philosophy, the fourth century BCE, the analytical mind of Aristotle distinguished [2] between *sophia aotpia*, as specialist theoretical knowledge including that of the philosopher, and *phronesis (ppovrjaiQ)*, as creative practical knowledge that allows one to negotiate the pitfalls and contradictions of human life. *Phronesis* deals with sensitivity to life's problems in concrete situations — the wisdom we also find in the widespread genre of 'wisdom texts'. Emphasis here is on those domains of life of which we would say today that they are not tightly rule-governed (WITTGENSTEIN 1967) and thus carry considerable uncertainty, ambivalence and mutually incompatible multiple truths, thus allowing us to accept both the social nature of human life and its finitude. The concept of *phronesis* has been influential throughout the history of Western thought and especially in the twentieth century has been reconsidered from various angles [3].

Throughout, the perspective on finitude has remained important in approaches to wisdom. Already prominent in Plato, it plays a central role in the work of Dilthey, Heidegger and Ricœur [4]. On the psychological side, Taranto, in a synthesis on the preceding decade of wisdom research, concludes — and I find this very illuminating:

[...] that factors relating to wisdom (age, experience, intelligence, knowledge, intuition, common sense, and personality) can be unified theoretically if wisdom is viewed as *the recognition of and response to human limitation* (TARANTO 1989, my italics; also FOWERS 2003).

MEACHAM (1983), emulating Socrates's famous paradox

'I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance' (*Diogenes Laertius*, II, 16),

stresses another dimension of finitude in the context of wisdom: *knowing that one doesn't know*. One and a half decade later, ARDELT (2004) in a review of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm in psychology (with such names as Baltes, Kunzmann, Sternberg and Achenbaum), in an attempt to steer away from the latter's expertise-centred orientation [5], made significant additions to the Taranto position:

[...] I consider compassionate and sympathetic love, which represents the affective dimension of my three-dimensional wisdom model, an integral component of wisdom, and I would predict that wisdom as a personality quality is positively related to forgiveness.

* Numbers in brackets [] refer to the notes at the end.

Also **KRAMER (1990)** spoke of the 'primacy of affect-cognition relations' in the conceptualization of wisdom.

However, another major form of finitude, which so far has been understudied in the context of wisdom, is *the awareness of the finitude of one's own and the other's specific cultural orientation in intercultural situations, hence the awareness of plurality, incompatibility, conflict, and the need to negotiate these within a wider socio-political framework*; we shall come back to this point repeatedly.

In recent decades, there has been considerable philosophical and general-intellectual / academic effort directed at affording wisdom a more central position within philosophy, science, and modern thought in general. This heterogeneous movement can be seen as responding to a number of major developments in the North-Atlantic region and the world at large.

1.1. BEYOND THE ENLIGHTENMENT HERITAGE

The recognition that the project of the Enlightenment, with its firm belief in the liberating and world-innovating force of specialized reason, has been shattered in the wars and genocide of the North-Atlantic region in the twentieth century. These violent conflicts have further intensified, for a considerable part of the world population, a crisis of meaning already brought about by secularization, urbanization, and scientific and technological advancement; from this crisis, time-honoured local and foreign wisdom may offer relief in a new bid for survival through spirituality (**WAAIJMAN 2002**).

1.2. GLOBALIZATION

Globalization, which after the demise of European colonialism and despite subsequent North-Atlantic claims (recently less and less convincing) of global hegemony, yet drove home (partly through such globalizing knowledge strategies as anthropology, intercultural philosophy and (however criticized, *cf.* **SAID 1978**) Orientalism; partly through millions of people's personal experience with intercontinental travel and migration; partly through the quest for transcontinental roots) the irreducible potential of modes of knowing (often designated as 'wisdom') outside the Western mainstream tradition of thought and science.

These modes of knowing are now being recognized:

- Not just for their own intrinsic value in their original geographical context.
- But also because they have been subjected to globalizing reformulations (one conspicuous form of such a globalizing reformulation is the appropriation of ancient 'non-Western' wisdom — especially from South and East Asia, Africa and North America — into the global New Age movement,

where it is blended with selectively appropriated state-of-the-art science and technology).

- And particularly because effective globalization has produced complex problematics concerning the co-existence and conflict of world views, religions, cultures, ethical systems, legal systems, for which North-Atlantic thought and experience (caught in an Aristotelian and Cartesian logic of insurmountable opposition and difference) does not offer ready answers, and which may only be negotiated through a combination of practical wisdom strategies (especially those aiming at the avoidance, reduction and termination of violent conflicts) from various origins. It is worth noting that scholars from all continents have contributed to this exploration [6].

1.3. NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND ANCIENT WISDOM

Globalization has inevitably brought the encounter between the technologies of developed countries and local technologies in other parts of the world, in the agricultural, medical, organisational, and other fields. After hegemonic North-Atlantic ethnocentrism had dominated the development scene for several decades from the middle of the 20th century on, in the most recent decades the awareness has grown that, since any specific technology is part of the culture and world view of its owners, the one-sided hegemonic imposition of technology is as violent as it is ineffective, whereas a combination of imported technology with 'ancient wisdom' often stands a better chance of success — perhaps in terms of the maximizing rationality informing developed technologies but especially in terms of such ecological considerations as have come up in recent decades [7].

Remarkably, traditional wisdom not only may appear to be complementary to modern technology and science — it may also be argued to be based on parallel and similar modes of thought [8]. And apart from highlighting ancient local forms of competent and efficient interaction with the forces of nature, these ancient wisdom traditions must also be recognized as empowering peripheral local communities and reducing their vulnerability and dependence vis-a-vis the encroachment of a global capitalist economy and ideology [9]. However, the more typical effect in a context of globalization is destruction of traditional wisdom, and then outside researchers and local specialists may be exhorted to join hands to preserve and record local ways of knowing that may be unique in the world (**BALICK 2006**).

Meanwhile the following example may bring out the dangers involved in the idea of such complementarity: in the 1930s-40s great excitement was caused by ichthyology identifying the first living Coelacanth (*Latimeria chalumnae*) off the coasts of South Africa and the Comores Islands as a species of jawed fishes virtually unchanged since the Devonian geological period, c. 400 million years ago, and

thought to be extinct for at least 60 million years. However, it turned out that this fish had been commonly known since times immemorial among the modern population of Madagascar. Here, under the name of *combessa* its meat had constituted a despised but cheap relish, while — more recently — the rough scaly skin was used as an abrasive, *e.g.* in repair of bicycle tyres! If international science had been able to make contact with local fish-related practices on Madagascar at an earlier point in time, it would never have considered the Coelacanth extinct. Yet we cannot say that African wisdom here surpassed global science, for whereas the fish was less than common from an African perspective, it is only from the evolutionary perspective evolved in science since the mid-19th century CE that the scientific identification of the Coelacanth was a significant event, even 'the most important scientific feat in modern history' (TEROFAL 1975).

1.4. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WISDOM

In the field of psychology, intensive work over the last few decades on such topics as personality, life span, maturity, aging (in other words, gerontology), moral reasoning, and acceptance/forgiveness of finitude including failure and death (stimulated, in part, by the progressive aging of the population of developed countries) has produced a focus on wisdom that is empirical, comparative, theoretically orientated, and conceptually highly sophisticated. Here, in the consideration of what makes a good life; what a wholesome society and future; what forms of interaction and communication are conducive to well-being and meaning; and what attitudes and skills can be identified and taught towards these goals, an extensive and exciting psychology of wisdom has come up, developing more and more to re-unite intelligence with wisdom [10]. Here there is generous attention for wisdom texts and teachings belonging to literate traditions (including world religions) from all over Eurasia [11]; spirituality; the reception of diffuse, oral wisdom traditions from all continents; the analysis of expertise and expert systems; along with the psychological discipline's habitual methods of conceptualization and theorizing, measurement and both qualitative and quantitative analysis [12].

Especially illuminating are studies in which the world's various regional traditions of wisdom are compared and contrasted [13]. Among the many remarkable findings I cite the following: the interaction of minds facilitates wisdom performance (STAUDINGER & BALTES 1996); and the narrative is a typical context for the production and transmission of wisdom (KENYON 2003) — which reminds us of the closely-knit face-to-face relations and fire-side recreation in small-scale groups, as the typical situation in which traditional wisdom is being enacted in real-life situations in historic settings. Whereas in these studies the emphasis is on the significance of wisdom for the individual, the sociologist SCHLOSS (2000) has offered an approach to wisdom as part of the integrative mechanisms of society at large (PARSONS 1949).

1.5. RECENT APPROACHEMENT OF WISDOM AND PHILOSOPHY

The gradual dissociation of empirical sciences from the domain of proper philosophy, and philosophy's concentration on questions of logical, conceptual and theoretical foundations, made that, in the course of the history of Western thought, we have tended more and more to see philosophy, in practice, as the opposite of the quest for wisdom. Perhaps we should see this as an apt illustration of the question Robert Sternberg (a leading wisdom psychologist) has sought to answer: *Why Smart People Can Be So Foolish* (STERNBERG 2004). Yet the quest for wisdom, and the encounter with the wisdom of others, has continued to inform some of the greatest minds, including de Spinoza, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida [14].

The intellectual developments, as outlined in the previous section, outside the field of proper philosophy have made that 'wisdom', far from remaining an obsolete and antiquarian topic, has become one of the main growth points of a global intellectual culture, and as such constitutes an obvious bedding for modern (or rather, post-modern) scholarship aware of its social and existential responsibilities as well as of its limitations.

It stands to reason that philosophers, in such fields as the history of philosophy, philosophical anthropology, and intercultural philosophy, have risen to this challenge, and have sought to contribute to the growing literature on wisdom by studies investigating the nature and development of the various wisdom traditions in philosophy worldwide [15], seeking to formulate philosophical foundations for wisdom psychology, for the encounter of wisdom traditions with each other and with modern science, for the interaction between cultures (or rather, the situational articulation, dissimulation, and fusion of 'cultural orientations') [16] within today's globalizing space, and for the reconstruction of meaning and practice under post-Enlightenment conditions [17].

It would appear as if the dividing line between wisdom traditions worldwide, and the Western philosophical tradition, lies specifically in Kant's 'Copernican revolution' — in his critical writings, where direct and certain knowledge of the world 'as it is' came to be supplanted by the realization that reality as such is unknowable unless through the deceptively distorting appearances of representation, so that, in OOSTERLING'S (1996) apt expression, we are *Moved by Appearance*. The dominant trends of subsequent Western thought, especially on the European continent, have largely been elaborations of the Kantian position. It is therefore that Mortimer Adler, editor-in-chief of the collection *The Great Ideas* (1952-1992), rejected modern philosophy from Hume and Kant onwards, and instead advocated a return to Aristotle. While Adler pretends that this is a move inspired by wisdom, it might have been wiser to try and find, in the history of ideas (in interdependence with political economy and the history of formal organizations, the state, absolute monarchy, citizenship, classes, art and

belles-lettres), an answer to the question as to what specific socio-political and ideological constellation brought Kant (thinking beyond Hume) to his remarkable departure, which has had an incomparable impact upon the history of modern thought. However, there is some simplification in the idea of such a revolution. For Kant, not all knowledge is of the shaky nature of appearance and representation; for the *transcendental* categories which make thought and knowledge possible in the first place (space, number, causation, etc.) are said to be given *a priori*, and these tools could arguably be claimed to be on the side of the wisdom with which we confront the practical problems of human life — they are what allows even a Lower Palaeolithic [18] hunter to fabricate his spear, take aim and kill his prey. The transcendental is one of Kant's central concepts, and its incisive and innovative analysis as such as executed by the leading Dutch philosopher **DUINTJER** (1966), reveals that here layers of knowledge, intuition and mysticism may be mined that are in continuity with, rather than in revolutionary denial, the great wisdom traditions of Western thought, and that, after Kant, found their greatest expression in Heidegger.

In fact, a wisdom orientation could be argued to be implied in all of Continental philosophy, whereas Analytical philosophy, with its exclusive concentration on specific procedures by which the truth claims of a statement may be substantiated, are more in line with procedural, repetitive approaches to the construction of knowledge. In other words:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Continental Philosophy} \\ \\ \text{Analytical Philosophy} \end{array} = \frac{\text{expressions of traditional wisdom}}{\text{academic philosophy}}$$

as if what we are dealing with here are two complementary modes of knowing which kaleidoscopically, or rather fractally, reproduce and proliferate at whatever level we approach them.

All of the above drives home the message of the topicality of traditional wisdom as an object of modern scholarship. The initiators and organizers of the International Symposium 'Expressions of Traditional Wisdom' (Brussels, 28 Sept. 2007) may therefore be congratulated on the relevance of their choice.

Meanwhile, the word wisdom is often used vainly in academic texts today, to denote, not time-honoured modes of knowing complementary to scientific knowledge, but rather, within a given North-Atlantic / globalizing discipline (e.g. physics, law, econometrics) the obsolescent conventional approach of an earlier vintage. Thus, an experimental physicist may chide the 'conventional' or 'traditional' wisdom' of measuring the interaction of particular particles by means of a specific experimental set-up — thus referring to intradisciplinary practices of global physics that may only be one or two decades old, and that have nothing to do with 'expressions of traditional wisdom' as understood in the context of our symposium.

While such usage of the word 'wisdom' is still transparent and neutral (although irrelevant in the present context), an extensive inspection of the enormous literature referring to wisdom also shows a usage that is far from neutral, but rather appropriative, distortive and ethnocentrically implying that the perspective from the North Atlantic is the only permissible one. This occurs when the term 'wisdom' is perfunctorily and alterizingly used in order to designate representations and practices which originate from outside the Western tradition and which deviate from common-sense views of a North-Atlantic moderately educated middle class; these practices are indicated in sweeping stereotyped terms. The use of the word 'wisdom' in such cases merely serves to smother, under a cloak of a politically correct term suggestive of respect, the implicit rejection of these alien traits. The internet, in its tendency to identity-biased nutshell formulations of dubious reliability and authority, is the typical site for such usage. Modern organizational management may develop into another such site (**SMALL** 2004). In these specific cases, the phrase 'expressions of traditional wisdom' refers to a quality that we ourselves imply to lack, and by that reference we are constructing ourselves by contrast with some stereotyped other. Thus, we emphatically claim not to have wisdom by ourselves, but we reserve wisdom (euphemistically, again) as an attribute of that which we are not and do not wish to be. Such contrastive wisdom constructing, by negation, our own self-image then is likely to turn out as: knowledge that is obsolete, local, essentially invalid and incapable of generalization. It is typically the kind of knowledge non-specialists in African affairs, and non-Africans, attribute to Africans, *in a deceptive bid at contrastive self-construction as more rational, universalist and objective non-Africans*. Understandably, therefore, that among champions of secular, democratic modernity 'wisdom' may become a pejorative term implying retarded divisiveness (**JACOBY** 1994)

2. In Search of Traditional Wisdom

Without touching on all these recent growth points in the study of traditional wisdom, but also without falling into the hegemonic alterization implied in the type of wisdom discourse with which I concluded the previous section, the above-mentioned international symposium has led to an impressive inventory of 'expressions of traditional wisdom' from all continents of the world, and spanning several millennia up to the present day. When we consider the contributions to this symposium, we are struck by their authors' expert scholarship and original vision, but also by the sheer heterogeneity of these attempts to deal with expressions of traditional wisdom. Apparently here lies a major conceptual and definitional problem.

The term wisdom has often been used as a respectful evocation of the cultural achievements of the ancestors, be they Ancient Italians, Africans, or Ancient Egyptians from the Egyptophile, Afrocentric perspective and the New Age perspective [19].

As in the Graeco-Roman classics, in the context of Asian philosophy and ethics the term wisdom tends to stand for a mystical world view that combines cosmology, theology and ethical teachings [20].

A prominent place in the global wisdom literature is occupied by so-called wisdom texts from Ancient Mesopotamia [21], Ancient Egypt [22], and the Bible [23]. Here a senior person, well defined in time and place, ethnic and linguistic belonging, gender, age, and world view, dishes out life lessons and magical instructions, against the background of the dominant local world view. But the genre is not limited to the Ancient Near East, as several contributions in the above-mentioned symposium brought out for Asia and the Americas.

Next to Graeco-Roman classics, the Bible was North-Atlantic scholars' principal frame of reference until well into the nineteenth century CE, and I suspect that, with the Egyptians (often metonymically designated by a conventionalized external term for their head of state, Tharaoh'[24]) being presented as unrivalled in magic powers and as Ancient Israel's ultimate others, the combination of respect and alienness in conferring the notion of wisdom may have something to do with the images of Moses and Solomon, founder and greatest king of the Israelite nation respectively, both of whom were said to excel in 'all the wisdom of Egypt'. In the key passage on Solomon, wisdom appears as Hebrew *TOpn khokmah*, as in over a hundred other places in the Old Testament; in Acts 7: 22 wisdom appears as *sophia* σοφία, as in twenty-five other places in the New Testament. It would take us too far to attempt an extensive semantic analysis of these words here; a few remarks must suffice. The Acts reference to Moses has a suggestion of magical, technical and social, rather than sacred knowledge: the

verse deals with what Moses learned as an Egyptian prince, and how this made him an Egyptian aristocrat competent in words and deeds [25]:

[21] τοῦ πατρὸς: ἐκτεθέντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀνείλατο αὐτὸν ἡ θυγάτηρ [22] Φαραὼ καὶ ἀνεθρέψατο αὐτὸν ἑαυτῇ εἰς υἷόν. καὶ ἐπαιδεύθη Μωϋσῆς πάση σοφίᾳ Αἰγυπτίων, ἧν δὲ δυνατὸς ἐν λόγοις καὶ ἔργοις αὐτοῦ.

[21] When he was thrown out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and reared him as her own son. [22] Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was mighty in his words and works.

The I Kings reference to Solomon combines exalted sacred and magical knowledge, social virtue, proverbs and songs, and knowledge of non-human visible world; such wisdom is explicitly declared to have a supernatural provenance and in the preceding verse is paralleled with תְּבוּנָה *tebwnah*, a word commonly translated as 'understanding' and also used dozens of times in the Old Testament [26]:

ט וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים חֵכְמָה לְשִׁלְמֹה וְתְבוּנָה, הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד, וְרַחֲב לֵב-כַּחֲלוֹ, אֲשֶׁר עַל-שֵׁפֶת הַיָּם.

9 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore.

י וַתֵּרֶב חֵכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה, מִחֵכְמַת כָּל-בְּנֵי-קָדָם, וּמִכָּל, חֵכְמַת מִצְרַיִם.

10 And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

יא וַיְחֻכֵם, מִכָּל-הָאָדָם, מֵאִיתָן הָאֶזְרָחִי וְהִימָן וְכַלְכַּל וְדַרְדַּע, בְּנֵי מַחֹל; וַיְהִי-שְׁמוֹ בְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם, סְבִיב.

11 For he was wiser than all men: than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the nations round about.

יב וַיְדַבֵּר; שְׁלֹשָׁת אֲלָפִים מְשָׁל; וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ, חֲמֵשָׁה וְאַלְף.

12 And he spoke three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five.

יג וַיְדַבֵּר, עַל-הָעֵצִים, מִן-הָאֲרֹז אֲשֶׁר בְּלְבָנוֹן, וְעַד הָאֲזוֹב אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא בְקִיר; וַיְדַבֵּר עַל-הַבְּהֵמָה וְעַל-הָעוֹף, וְעַל-הַרְמֵשׁ וְעַל-הַדְּגָיִם.

13 And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

יד וַיָּבֹאוּ, מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים, לְשִׁמְעַ, אֶת חֵכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה-מֵאֵת כָּל-מְלָכֵי הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת-חֵכְמָתוֹ. {ס}

14 And there came of all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

The conventional translations into modern European tongues have frozen the multidimensional semantic dynamics of the underlying Hebrew and Greek biblical expressions, wrongly suggesting a narrow uniformity and unidimensionality of meaning which, due to the immense influence of biblical texts in European cultural history, have greatly informed the way in which we conceptualize 'wisdom' today. The phrase *wisdom of Egypt* was adopted as title for several schol-

arly works setting out Ancient Egyptian science, theology and practical wisdom (PETRIE 1940, BROWN 1923, WEST 1987).

The fact that the Ancient Near East (including Egypt) recognized divinities whose special province was wisdom, gave rise to scholarly studies concentrating on such divine figures, in which the term 'wisdom' was no longer an obvious scholarly imposition but could pass as a translation of a native concept (ARTHUR 1984).

In classical studies dealing with Graeco-Roman Antiquity the term 'wisdom' [27] is often used to pinpoint the transition:

- From a diffusely mystical world view that was admitted to be highly indebted to 'the Orient' (*i.e.* Ancient Egypt, Syro-Palestine, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Persia and Scythia — the latter two especially transmitting to Greece the shamanistic trends that were to be hotly discussed in classics in the second half of the twentieth century CE);
- To Greek contrastively rational philosophy and science, the latter often being presented as an original, local Greek achievement [28].

Wisdom then typically marks the intermediate phase, of the Seven Sages, Hesiod, the Pre-Socratics. The connection between the Pre-Socratic philosophers and traditional wisdom, especially in the form of Orphic and Eleusinian mystery cults and shamanism, has been studied intensively for the last fifty years and is now generally acknowledged; MACLENNAN (2006) offered a useful summary (although he wrongly attributed a North-Asian, instead of Central-Asian, origin to shamanism):

It is now well established that ancient Greek philosophy had roots in the shamanic practices common to many cultures [...]. The Greeks learned these techniques from the "Scythians" when they colonized the north shore of the Black Sea in the seventh century BCE and from the Thracians and Persian Magi, who also knew north-Asiatic shamanism [...]. These practices are reflected in the stories of Orpheus, who exhibits many of the features of a "great shaman" [...]; of Aristaeus [...] whose soul could leave his body in trance and accompany Apollo as his raven: of Abaris [...], the healer-sage (*iatromantis*) who traveled on a magic arrow (a typical shamanic wand), which he later gave to Pythagoras; and of the semi-historical Epimenides [...] who purified Athens [...] and was also known for leaving his body while in a trance state [...]. They all exemplify many of the characteristics of shamanic practice [...], and were closely associated with Hyperborean Apollo [...]. Evidence of shamanic practice is also apparent in ancient biographies of historical figures, such as the pre-Socratic philosophers Pythagoras [...] who descended into the underworld and claimed to have the soul of Hermotimus, an ancient shaman, and whose followers venerated the *Orphica* and sometimes wrote under the name "Orpheus" [...]; Parmenides [...], whose poem, with its progress from the illusory world of duality to The One, has many of the hallmarks of a shamanic journey [...]; Empedocles [...], a magical healer who boasted that he could control the weather and retrieve souls from Hades [...]; and other less well-known figures. They all combined "the still undifferentiated functions of magician and naturalist, poet and philosopher, preacher, healer, and public counselor" [29].

In ways that BERNAL'S *Black Athena I* (1987) brought out most convincingly and impressively, the stark contrast between exalted Greek science and lowly barbarian 'traditional wisdom' has especially served in order to construct European racialist superiority in the nineteenth and twentieth century CE, which had made continuity with the ancient Greeks the basis of its identity. In deviation from such geopolitical delusions, the historical facts show how greatly the Greeks were indebted to West Asia and Egypt, and how well they were aware of this state of affairs, despite some anti-oriental othering (as for instance in Herodotus) in the aftermath of the Persian wars.

Thus, philosophy in the Western tradition was engendered in the Pre-Socratic 'wisdom' context. Also in Plato the movement towards insights that are both true and wise in the conventional sense is still very marked (RHODES 2003, STERN 1997). I have already referred to how Aristotle brought us his distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge; his contributions to both forms of knowledge (*e.g.* to poetics as the practical art of writing, and to rhetorics as the practical art of making things appear true before an audience) have constituted firm pillars of Western thought. Stoic philosophy, in turn, reverted to a wisdom-centred stance (with, for instance, Plutarch (PATTERSON 1991) and Cicero as prolific dispensers of *phronesis* texts), and so did Neo-Platonism, with Plotinus and Iamblichus as main exponents.

In Africa, which is the continent of my principal expertise, expressions of traditional wisdom (beside the attention for proverbs, riddles and other oral genres) [30] were recorded by such anthropologists as GRIAULE (1948) and TURNER (1967a,b), highlighting the lessons of the Malian village philosopher Ogotomelli and the Zambian village diviner Muchona, respectively [31]. More in general, the African philosopher ODERA ORUKA (1990b) identified a genre of African knowledge production which he has termed 'sage philosophy' or 'sagacity' — *wisdom*, in other words — and to whose documentation all over Africa he has contributed [32].

In the Africanist anthropological literature the word wisdom is used in a number of different ways. WEBNER (1989), writing on divination among the Tswapong people of modern Botswana, used the word wisdom in the sense of the diviner's skilful, subtle evocation and symbolic redress of the contradictions in the life of his client and the latter's kin, based on a dextrous manipulation of symbols and rhetoric, and of sacred material objects multifariously alluding to such contradictions. Werbner was much influenced by FERNANDEZ'S work (1982) on the Bwiti cult in Gabon, which has a similar orientation and is at the same time (more even than Werbner's work) an example of the way in which modern ethnographers have sought to bring out and explain in great detail the poetics and dramatics of rituals of expression and catharsis. Here wisdom turns out to be, far from a static attribute of people in certain roles of authority and responsibility, on the contrary a dynamic product of symbolic and communicative work, which generates social resilience and resourcefulness by enhancing meaning and belonging.

FERNANDEZ (2000) again suggested a link between wisdom and peripherally: under today's cultural globalization and North-Atlantic hegemony, cultural attitudes and world views may well be considered wise because they are not part of the dominant mainstream culture, so (but this is my own excessively liberal paraphrase) in a nostalgic way constitute a harmless defiance of the structural, ideological violence which the dominant culture is exerting. It is in this way that cultures distant in time and place may be held to produce expressions of traditional wisdom: as forms of nostalgic but important cultural criticism. Such usage of the word wisdom is also found in several other authors [33]. The authority and healing generating connotations of alienness, although seldom discussed explicitly (**DE BOECK** 1993, **COLSON** 1966), are recurrent and widely distributed, from alien healers in rural Central Africa; to diviners in East, Southern and West Africa, Madagascar and the Comores Islands representing a geomantic divination system deriving from Abbasid Mesopotamia end of the late first millennium CE (where it came to be known as *'ilm al-raml* 'sand science'), and cognate to China under the Shang dynasty, where it was known as *yifing*; to astrologers and wonderworkers from the eastern periphery of the Roman empire coming to work in Hellenistic Greece and later at the Roman heartland (**MOMIGLIANO** 1975). I have sometimes used a similar argument to try and explain why foreign forms of ritual and divination would command such great respect and attraction in the regions where they have been introduced: coming from afar, and hallowed by their unmistakable alienness, they represent the fascinating, immense, and potentially destructive power of the ultimate other; however, below we shall see how it is more attractive to seek the explanation not in foreignness, but in the diffuse internalization of proto-scientific repetitive, standard procedures as the hallmark of truth in knowledge.

Our initial overview of approaches to traditional wisdom has brought up a number of interesting and promising ideas and perspectives. Let us now try to penetrate a little deeper into this fascinating but difficult matter.

3. The Dilemma of Expression in Wisdom

It is important to stress that the above-mentioned international symposium was about *expressions* of traditional wisdom, and not about traditional wisdom as such. Given our own reliance on method in the production of our academic scholarship, traditional wisdom can only come within the orbit of our investigations if it does not remain implicit, *not* a totally unrevealed secret, *not* a totally tacit assumption, but if it is laid down, in whatever oblique and distorted form, in an expression that has some material manifestation: for instance in the sound waves carrying the spoken words of our living informants; or the clay tablets, bamboo leaves, papyrus sheets, or knotted *quipus* of the texts at our disposal; or the stone reliefs, rock paintings or masquerades that may express traditional wisdom iconographically. Our subject matter in the aforementioned symposium was well defined in so far as, without such *expressions*, we would scarcely be able to make scholarly pronouncements on traditional wisdom.

Thanks to the generosity of the organizing institutions, this symposium could meet in a splendid palatial hall in Brussels as the heart of the new Europe. Since this is the former abode of Prince William of Orange, descendant of the sixteenth-century founder of the Dutch state of which I am a citizen, our proverbial Dutch arrogance is discretely reminded of the fact that our Father of the Nation was merely a senior official at the Brussels court. No striking expressions of traditional wisdom are attributed to him, and his nickname, 'the Taciturn', suggests that he was alive to the traditional wisdom that 'speech is silver but silence is golden' - later somehow paraphrased in Wittgenstein's

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann darüber muss man schweigen (**WITTGENSTEIN** 1964, section 115, §7).

Here we must acknowledge the problematic status of 'expression'. Many wisdom traditions, from all parts of the world and from all documented periods, have *restricted, veiled, or downright prohibited expression*, and have tended to organize themselves around the secret — even if in itself meaningless and void — that binds and unites the initiated happy few (**DE IONG** 2007). As far as the history of Western specialist thought is concerned, ever since the pre-Socratics, many philosophers have realized that language (even though allowing us to name, organize and lend meaning to the world) at the same time *obscures* Being, smothering it under a deceptive layer of enunciation that may well be the opposite of wisdom. The Chinese counterpart of this insight is in the famous second line of the opening chapter of *Dao De Djing* Jiffjg:

£ «TEL # S £ *rning ke mingfei chng min* 'naming that fixes the reference is not true naming' [34].

Thus we meet one particular awareness of finitude as the organizing principle of wisdom: *the finitude of language*, both in its limited capacity to express essentials of life and the world, and in the multiplicity of human languages, which makes for grossly imperfect transmissions from one language to the other.

Perhaps my best, wisest option would be simply to stop here. And I would be inclined to do just that, if the scholarship in whose collective pursuit we are in the context of the aforementioned symposium were coterminous with traditional wisdom — but there are indications that it is *not*. The interplay between modern scholarship and traditional wisdom is complex and paradoxical, as my entire argument goes to show.

4. 'Tacit Modern Unwisdom'.

Further aspects of the meaning and heuristic uses of the phrase 'expressions of traditional wisdom?' may also be captured, somewhat flippantly, if we take the multiple opposite of 'expressions of traditional wisdom', which would be something like *'tacit* (taken for granted — as opposed to explicitly expressed and argued) *modern* (as opposed to traditional) *unwisdom* (as opposed to wisdom)'. It is not difficult to give a few examples (albeit, admittedly subjective, even tendentious) of such tacit modern unwisdom. I will quickly pass over such obviously spurious modern myths as that of the market and of commodification or commoditization (according to which all is merchandise), and that of rational maximizing, especially as far as the attainment of material goals is concerned [35]; and the myth of North-Atlantic cultural superiority and independent origin — recently exposed in the *Black Athena* debate and its aftermath [36]. Let me merely outline four examples of 'tacit modern unwisdom', which in a later section will be contrasted, one by one, with African traditional wisdom:

- The immensely alienating myth of *the human body as basically an industrial product* [37], *i.e.*
 - Uniform and standardized (hence advertisements' emphasis on young, healthy and perfect);
 - Modular in its composition, so that body parts may be modified, overhauled and replaced at will;
 - Saturated (ever since the times of de la Mettrie ([1747], 1999) with the imagery of the machine, so that the same language ('check-up', 'engine', 'plumbing') may be used for our body and our motor vehicle (which is said to have its own 'body')).
- The myth of the fundamental closeness of the human person:
 - Who thus is depicted as in the first place an individual, rather than a member of a group;
 - Whose mind, by an inveterate axiom of modernist science, is to be considered a closed system impervious to other minds except, indirectly, through conscious reflection upon sense impressions (including those produced by speech) that may be taken to express the movements of other minds (DENNETT 1991).
- The myth (going back to Aristotle [38], as far as Western tradition is concerned) of *the excluded third and of logical consistency*. In many ways this allows us to respond adequately and pragmatically in our interaction with the non-human world (which therefore can be argued to display, most of the time, and at the meso-level [39] of our conscious human interaction with it,

a structure similar to that of our binary logic. Yet we cannot close our eyes to the fact that, in the interaction between human individuals and between human groups, the same logic incessantly creates intransigent positions of recognized and emphasized difference which cannot come to an agreement since both sides, by their own logic, are justified to consider themselves right, yet their respective truths are mutually incompatible and in conflict. The main conflicts in our globalizing world of today (*e.g.* those between North-Atlantic military capitalism on the one hand, and militant Islam on the other hand, as rival paths through modernity; those between economic short-term maximizing globalism and a future-orientated ecological responsibility; those between consumption on the one hand, and integrity and global solidarity on the other hand) remind us of the potentially paralyzing and destructive implication of such consistency. In Western thought it is only recently that such poststructuralist concepts as *differance* and *differend* [40] and the elaboration of ternary and multi-value logics have created a context where we can think beyond binary logic.

— Typically but paradoxically, again, in this discussion of 'Tacit modern unwisdom' we have taken the word *myth* itself in the modernist sense of: 'widely held collective representation that yet constitutes an untruth'. Usually such a use of the word 'myth' carries the implication that specific modern science is available to explode that myth, which implies (contentiously) that in all situations modern science is the source and the touchstone of truth.

These are some of the themes of tacit, modern unwisdom against which we can begin to appreciate the wisdom of earlier times and different continents. We will come back to these points below, when we reconsider them in the light of African expressions of traditional wisdom.

5. On the Possibility of an Intercultural Transmission of Wisdom, within and outside an Academic Context

If the West can be argued to have its share of modern unwisdom, the intercultural transmission of foreign wisdom becomes all the more desirable. But is such transmission at all possible?

One of the most important problems of the scholarly study of expressions of traditional wisdom turns out to be: *can we understand and represent these expressions in such a way that their original, local meaning is optimally preserved also in the new, globalising context into which these traditional expressions are mediated through our scholarship?* [41] This touches on the central question of all intercultural knowledge production and representation, and it does not have a simple answer.

The standard anthropological position is affirmative but patently naive, and could be rendered as follows: *if only we apply the proper procedural methods (long-term immersion in a local community aided by language mastery, more or less formal interviews, apprenticeships towards the competent assumption and discharge of local roles, and specific field methods of recording, analysis, host participation and feedback) we are bound to end up with an ethnographic representation that is both reliable (i.e. repetitively reproducible by other researchers) and valid (i.e. adequately representing the original).*

We note that this anthropological approach implies a procedural and repetitive conception of the production of intercultural knowledge — shortly we will come back to this conception of knowledge and contrast it with the wisdom mode of wisdom. Anthropological naivety lies in a number of points (VAN BINSBERGEN 2003). In the first place, from Kant onwards modern philosophy is predicated on the insight that direct knowledge of essence is an illusion, and that all representation is inevitably appropriative and distortive. To this we may add QUINE'S (1960, 1970) related principle of the indeterminacy of translation, which particularly applies to anthropologists' and philologists' attempts at intercultural knowledge construction through various forms of translation. Moreover, the ethnographer's commitment to the local society, its collective representations and existential predicaments, is (even if subjectively conceptualized by that ethnographer as an existential encounter) largely optional and instrumental, and not supported by such early childhood socialization as makes for inescapability on the part of the local actors themselves — instead, the ethnographer brings very different mind sets and gut reactions of his/her own to the field; therefore the local actors' life world largely remains that of others, and their wisdom remains largely irrelevant to the ethnographer. Finally, the ethno-

grapher's understanding is expressed in theoretically underpinned analytical terms, to be processed and ultimately published in a specialist technical language which, even if in principle accessible to the local actors, is utterly alienating and distancing.

In this light it is understandable that a non-anthropologist like the philosopher Niels Weidtmann (2007) in the aforementioned symposium articulated the thesis (but I am not sure whether he himself totally agrees with it) that, for instance, African wisdom cannot be represented in Western discourse; we will come back to this.

What ethnographers can do, and have done (for instance in the excellent work by Turner, Fernandez, Werbner, Devisch, as cited in the present argument), is: rendering explicit, and rebuilding or remodelling in specialist globalizing scholarly discourse, what the formal components of wisdom texts (both written and oral) and the accompanying social and ritual dramatics are, and through what communicative and performative mechanism the practical knowledge they contain is communicated to their original intended audience. Such dissections of other people's wisdom may still speak to us in some poetic sense, but they no longer speak to us fully as the wisdom they originally constituted. Philosophers and scholars of textuality and performance may even be more skilful at such analytical exercises than anthropologists, and may go about it with more uninhibited cleverness, because their armchair approaches have (with few exceptions) been performed upon isolated texts that have already been cut and dried to begin with — they were seldom forced to discharge their professional duties while at the same time intensively engaging with real foreign local actors, speaking in real time in concrete and confusing foreign situations that are logistically demanding and in which the researcher finds himself deeply involved.

The saving grace of both ethnography and text-based, philological approaches to expressions of traditional wisdom lies in the fact that their attempt towards intercultural knowledge production is never just othering and distancing and nothing more — it also hints at an existential interpersonal encounter in which streaks of understanding and identification light up, in the recognition of the fact that the local actors have a body and a mind very similar to that of the researcher, and in the recognition of their struggle with common dilemmas of the human condition (illness, death, competition and conflict, love and loyalty, meaning and consolation). The physical closeness and the *couleur locale* of fieldwork are conducive to a sense of adoption and transcultural intersubjective fusion; but, given the subtle, millennia-old tradition of cultivated textual sensitivity pervading the humanities, fieldworkers can by no means claim the monopoly on such encounters. The egyptologist reading an Old Kingdom wisdom text such as the *Precepts of Ptah-Hotep, i.e.* Tsw n md.t nfr.t pth-htp — J ^ j§) | ^ ^ ° | ^ ^=;[42] or the sinologist reading the great T'ang Jif^] poet Li Bai (701-762 CE), will have the

same sense of communicative fusion in which wisdom resides and makes itself deeply felt. My own experience, as a mere amateur reader of such texts, is that something of this quality may survive highly deficient language mastery (but anthropologists' language mastery in the field is usually deficient, or worse, anyway), and even the intermediary of translation. The fieldwork situation, just like the text, turns out to be not just a vehicle for specialist knowledge production along professional lines (which would appear to be destructive for the transmission of wisdom), but also (as a non-professional incentive without which most of us would have long given up our scholarship) a vehicle for amazed but affirmative human encounter, which makes light with cultural, linguistic and somatic difference, and highlights the common humanity we share — a position of wisdom in itself, as well as one conducive to the transfer of wisdom. The same argument could be given for intercultural transmission of beauty. The problems of intercultural contact and knowledge production are not fundamentally different from those at the interpersonal individual level.

What is involved is the transmission of specific meanings and insights from sender to receiver, but beyond that, and more importantly, the very facts of such transmission and of the ensuring partial fusion in themselves (regardless of the specific contents being transmitted), which liberate the receiver of his or her articulated boundedness as an individual.

At this point we become aware of a mechanism of *situational, oppositional framing* attending specialist intercultural knowledge production. As a scholar, equipped with intersubjective disciplinary methods and commitments, the specialist has no option but to retreat into a frame of conceptual and analytical othering, where the traditional expression of wisdom is objectified, and thus virtually destroyed, into a mere target for North-Atlantic / globalizing scientific discourse. This can only be destructive: for it denies that the exchange of wisdom is a communicative undertaking, and therefore requires a common cosmological frame of reference (however implicit and inarticulate), recognition of a shared basis of valuation however diffuse, recognition among both sender and recipient of each other's shared humanity, recognition also of each other's potential familiarity and competence in the problematic at hand, and agreement as to a shared medium of communication (which could be as basic as a shrug of the shoulders or a wink, or as elaborate as an actual spoken *lingua franca*). Only when these requirements are met can the sender's pronouncements move the receiver to an affirmation inspiring emulation, to a re-arrangement of the receiver's view of self and world. All these requirements are left unfulfilled if, in the intercultural encounter with expressions of traditional wisdom, the receiver emphatically identifies as a North-Atlantic / globalizing scholar detachedly applying his/her specialist tools. Then the situation is dominated by the need to produce and to use specialist alienating language, which can never coincide with the original wisdom utterance but thrives on its difference vis-a-vis that utterance. The alienating frame is in the first place a language frame. However, to the

extent to which the academic specialist coming to the intercultural wisdom encounter (whether in the field or in text) manages to avoid such framing, and to reduce, or at least defer, the imposition of appropriative and alienating scientific language, to the extent to which all language use on the part of the receiver is deferred, or at least an inclusive, fussily accommodating language format is chosen, *e.g.* that of poetry or dance or song, or silence, to that extent the trans-cultural, potentially universal implications and applicabilities of the sender's wisdom may come across to the receiver, as an existential message quite comparable to the sender's conscious intentions, and equally comparable to what passes between close kin and between friends in a monocultural setting. It is not the intercultural nature of the wisdom exchange, but the scholarly framing, that to my mind is responsible for the (partial) truth articulated by Weidtmann: that traditional wisdom cannot be represented in Western scientific discourse; but let us not forget that there are other forms of discourse, and that much of life, on both sides of the cultural boundaries we tend to construct, is non-discursive.

I could go one step further, and claim that the situational, oppositional framing identified here — the dynamic field of tension between identification/fusion and dissociation/confrontation, which incessantly oscillates back and forth, tending to dissociation/confrontation especially if the situation is dominated by specialist language use and its classifications — is a fundamental mechanism in all intercultural knowledge production, and the source of many problems that have cropped up in this field [43]. Although public thought and geopolitics of the 20th century CE have persuaded us to reify cultures as firm givens of the human existence, they are yet intangible, ephemeral, and situational construct — social facts (**DURKHEIM** 1897), no doubt, yet (because competence in a culture is learned, because people can be competent in more than one culture, because they often situationally toggle between cultures, etc.) facts at a different ontological level from the facts that make our bodies occupy space, makes them perceptible to other human and animal bodies, bring them into being, sustain them through life, cause them to die. We cannot live without specific cultural programming, and part of it is so deeply ingrained that we cannot trade it for the specific programming from another culture, yet we can take a relative view of cultural difference and have encounters, learn wisdom lessons, dispense and receive knowledge across the ever so relative, intangible and situational (hence often merely illusory of non-existent) boundaries that separate cultures. Knowledge, in some post-Gettier [44] reformulation of the time-honoured definition as 'justified true belief, is inherently culture-bound, because justification, truth and belief are meaningless without a specific cultural embeddedness. Culture is just a machine for the production of local self-evidence, of local truths. But here the same framing mechanism is at work, for we may also opt out of the specialist analytical frame, and instead consider knowledge in a more diffuse, intuitive, and essentializing metaphysical way, as 'an individual orientation (of cognition,

emotion and/or motivation) that seeks to coincide with Being'. As the leading intercultural philosopher **MALL** (1995) has aptly stated,

no language can claim to be the mother-tongue of Being, yet, to the extent to which we do not allow ourselves to be carried away by our own language use, we are not necessarily exiled from Being, and therefore we are granted considerable knowledge within our own cultural framework. Nor are we necessarily deaf to those expressions of knowledge (*i.e.* wisdom) in which others testify to their endeavour to coincide with Being, and this may well include *linguistic and cultural others* — after all, in the face of Being their otherness may appear as superficial and situational; it is oscillatingly complemented by a sameness that would be liberating if only to the extent to which it does not threaten our own, and the other's, construction of self-identity...

The less we speak, in technical academic terms, of interculturality, and of the situations to which this term refers, the more we seem to be invited to achieve intercultural knowledge and to partake of intercultural wisdom. But this paradoxical lesson could only be learned by thinking the scholarly endeavour through, in a critical and scholarly way. In the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, scholarship is a Wittgensteinian ladder (**WITGENSTEIN** 1964) we may cast away once it has brought us, as an indispensable tool, to within reach of where we were heading.

6. Towards an Epistemological Perspective

In the preceding section 5 I have approached the encounter between global scholarship and expressions of traditional wisdom, from the question as to the intercultural transmission of such wisdom. I will now develop a complementary perspective, notably an epistemological argument that allows us to articulate more clearly what the specific nature of traditional wisdom is as a form of knowledge — thus going beyond the Aristotelian *sophia/phronesis* distinction of our opening section.

In section 4 I gave four examples of 'tacit modern unwisdom'. They can maintain themselves as self-evidently true collective representations in North-Atlantic society today, by virtue of the place science has acquired as the central legitimating and truth-producing instance in the modern world, having replaced in this respect religion, magic, and other traditional world views (FOUCAULT 1966, 1969). When, exposing them as dubious collective representations (as 'myths' in the modernist, pejorative sense; see section 7.4 below) and nothing more, we try to take a distance from them, but we can only do so in the hope of an alternative viewpoint that affords us greater relevance and a closer approximation of the essence of Being — in other words, a viewpoint illuminated by *traditional wisdom*.

Such hope testifies to the fact that, as modern scholars, we are divided within ourselves, and given to an amazing nostalgia. Although there was a wide range of disciplines and disciplinary paradigms among participants to the aforementioned international symposium, nearly all of us subscribed to the canons of modern scholarship: objectivity, rationality, and universalism (HARDING 1997, VAN BINSBERGEN 2007). The point of universalism may surprise and arouse those among us — the majority — who are emphatically specialists, not in worldwide intercultural comparison, but in specific geographical regions, historical periods, and subject matters: Ancient Mesopotamian proto-science, African traditional world views as expressed in proverbs, Chinese Taoism up to the T'ang dynasty, the Central American peasant world view today, etc. Such specialities are the backbone of scholarship in that they are sufficiently focused to afford the researcher a combination of a delimited field of study, in which extraordinary expertise and profundity of insight can be achieved. If I yet apply the concept of universalism to such particularizing scholarly endeavours, it is for the very reason that it has brought our variegated company of specialists together in an international symposium: for, however much our subject matters may differ, however much the languages, scripts, literatures, field situations that each of us employs in the pursuit of his/her speciality, yet our concepts, methods, goals, modes of scholarly expression and argument remain recognizable,

and communicable, within the universalizing, and globalizing, academic context — we can speak to each other and find that, across the boundaries of our disciplinary and regional specialities, we have a lot to say to each other, and much to share. Our looking at expressions of traditional wisdom in the aforementioned international symposium was in itself an invitation to universalism in the sense I used that term above.

Why then is such an endeavour a sign of being divided in ourselves? Because, however we may choose to define the concept in detail, *traditional wisdom* necessarily constitutes a mode of knowing that differs from the knowledge that is our joint scholarly pursuit. No traditional wisdom could ever be produced by our scholarly methods (all we can do with our scholarly methods is try and represent, document, and analyse, such traditional wisdom). If yet such a traditional mode of knowing fascinates us enough to spend years of our lives trying to come near it, then there must be an unmistakably nostalgic element — as if we recognize that that traditional mode of knowing has a claim to continued relevance and understanding which are far from supplanted by today's science. Calling a mode of knowing 'wisdom' means that we take it seriously as an aspect of the human endeavour to understand the world and human life and meet their practicalities, as complementary to modern science rather than superseded and exposed by modern science. We use the scientific mode of knowing to represent, and bring to intercultural recognition, a different mode of knowing.

What does that difference reside in? Having characterized the scientific mode of knowing as objective, rational and universal, we are tempted to define traditional wisdom as *subjective, a-rational* (not to say irrational), *and particularizing*.

From wherever in the world, these expressions of traditional wisdom constitute (written or oral) texts whose main point is to instruct the audience on *the practical dilemmas of human life*, hence contradiction, tautology and ambiguity are as common, in this genre, as in most other oral and written genres of all parts of the world and all periods except specialist academic prose; the characteristic 'a-logical' is not totally inapplicable here. However, the important thing is that what is presented in these wisdom texts is unmistakably meant to be more than just subjective, particularizing and personal — to have a wider, more general applicability beyond the speaker's own life experience and specific situation; the lessons are implied to be worth giving, and taking, because they are claimed to capture something of the human condition in general. So, we are, with such wisdom texts, rather closer to scientific knowledge than is suggested by the inverted formula 'subjective, a-rational, and, in its practicality, particularizing' [45].

I submit that what distinguishes scientific knowledge from the knowledge of wisdom text, is primarily a matter of *procedure*. The truth of a scientific statement resides in the explicit, intersubjective procedure (method, in other words)

through which that knowledge has been produced. This applied to the work of all participants in the aforementioned international symposium (however much they may, as humanities scholars, define their method as literary and intuitive rather than as rational, objective and universalizing; and regardless of how much contempt or helplessness they may feel vis-a-vis the natural sciences). But the same emphasis on intersubjective procedure as the decisive basis for valid knowledge production is found, outside today's globalizing scientific tradition, in the arts of the diviner and the healer, the astrologer, the metallurgist, the navigator, etc. These trades are now found all over the world. The oldest texts at our disposal documenting these trades derive from the Ancient Near East over four thousand years ago. They are expressions, not so much of traditional wisdom, but of proto-science. The hallmark of such procedures is that *knowledge appears as the necessary implication attending an intersubjectively (professionally, often) recognized limiting condition whose occurrence is implied to be not unique but repetitive, so that a standard rule can be established:*

if the lobe of the liver turns out to be darkened, then... (Ancient Mesopotamia)
 if the goddess Aphrodite [the planet Venus] and the god Ares [the planet Mars] are in conjunction in the heavens, then... (Ancient Greece)

if the chick's intestine turns out to have black spots, then... (Guinea-Bissau, author's fieldnotes, 1983)

if the patient displays a insuppressible urge to dance to the singing tune peculiar to Sidi Mhammad but remains indifferent to the tunes of other local saints, then... (Tunisia, author's fieldnotes, 1968)

if the throw of the *hakata* divination tablets brings up the tablets *Kwame* and *Shilume* face up |&j ^ j, but the tablets *Lingwana* and *Ntakwala* face down then... (Botswana, author's fieldnotes, 1989)

Although such expressions are likely to be informed by a traditional world view, they cannot be *reduced* to such a world view; they properly belong to a different mode of knowledge production — one that leads directly to today's science. By contrast, the expressions of traditional wisdom typically lack the reliance on standardized, hence repeatable and generally available intersubjective (*e.g.* professional) conditional procedures to underpin their truth claims. The underpinning of expressions of traditional wisdom lies in human (especially ancestral) or divine authority, fed by revelation, a past charter, or diffuse, life-long experience. Such underpinning cannot be summoned, at will, repetitively, and instantly, in every specific situation as is the case for the limiting conditions underlying (proto-)science. As a result, the *expression of traditional wisdom* is of the nature of a belief, or an exhortation, not of an empirical statement. Expressions of traditional wisdom tend to be concerned with the construction of a coherent world view which endows everyday life and religious ritual with meaning. It is in this respect that expressions of traditional wisdom often are statements of myth — but here myth does not mean 'collective representation

constituting untruth', but on the contrary, 'collective representation which, although in narrative format, is implied (and sometimes explicitly claimed) to convey ultimate truth and meaning'. Thus, expressions of traditional wisdom are central statements of symbols, and they revolve on the construction and transmission of notions of continuity, connectedness, life force, and on the explanation and justification of illness, death and evil.

I take it that this emphasis on human or divine authority, rather than on abstract and repeatable intersubjective procedure, also suffices to illuminate the otherwise problematic term 'traditional', thus steering away from other less desirable usages of that term: *e.g.* 'traditional' as a euphemism for the distinction between that which belongs to the North-Atlantic/Western region and that which does not — which, given the crucial indebtedness of the West to the Ancient Near East and Africa, is unhelpful; or 'traditional' as necessarily confined to that which is handed down by intergenerational cultural transmission — which does not apply to Mesopotamian, Egyptian and biblical wisdom texts, nor to many other situations where we would yet like to be able to speak of 'traditional wisdom'.

What is the format of our encounter with such expressions of traditional wisdom? Scholarship consists in the production of texts, and therefore our scholarly encounter with expressions of traditional wisdom usually takes a written textual format — the scholar introduces and describes the expression of tradition wisdom in question, and meditates, in discursive academic prose, on the scope, relevance, meaning and shortcomings of such expressions of traditional wisdom, in the light of current, North-Atlantic scientific or otherwise dominant world view. Written textual strategies of disclosure, representation, hermeneutics and global re-circulation in an academic format, such as make up modern humanities scholarship, also prevail when we deal with 'wisdom texts' from a provenance that is remote in time or space, or both. Such scholarly strategies take a particular, highly specialized (and contested) form in archaeology [46], when, instead of being written, the expressions of traditional wisdom appear also, or exclusively, in an iconographic format and (especially when all accompanying contemporary commentary is lacking) need to be interpreted by analogies and other comparative models derived from contexts that either have such contemporary commentary or that are open to direct research in real time, through the medium of interviews and participation in fieldwork.

The tantalizing attraction of such iconographic reconstruction of traditional wisdom on the basis of primary images lies in the following paradox:

- On the one hand one is confronted, over vast expanses of space and time, with recurrent patterns to which one would like to attribute a convergent meaning (for instance, the mytheme of the separation of heaven and earth in many myths from all over the world after the Upper Palaeolithic; or the proliferation of patterns — such as dots, granulation/speckledness, spirals, undulations — suggestive of 'entoptic' or psychedelic, trance-related phenomena and their imagery) [47];

- But on the other hand, how do we find an intersubjective scientific method that protects us from wishful thinking, from the amateurish habit (from the early anthropologist James **FRAZER** (1911-15, 1918, 1968) to today's New Age) of lumping phenomena from patently incomparable and historically unrelated provenances, and from the similarities that derive, not from historical interrelatedness springing from cultural transfer and a shared cultural origin, but from simply the parallel effects engendered by the identical make-up of the minds of Anatomically Modern Humans [48] whenever and wherever during the 200,000 years of their existence, of which the first 120,000 years exclusively in the African continent?

Such iconographic interpretation is still based on texts (albeit pictorial ones) that have a tangible and lasting material record. However, the great majority of expressions of traditional wisdom, ever since the emergence of humankind [49], have been not written but oral, and the main way to capture these directly — at least, presently — is through personal fieldwork, in which one engages profoundly and for a prolonged period with the community owning and managing such traditional wisdom, so that both in formal research settings and in more informal personal participation in everyday and ritual life, the expressions of myths, world views, moral codes and practical ethics may be picked up, understood, committed to writing in a modern language, and committed to academic or popularizing global circulation.

From the late 1960s, it is particularly in such fieldwork encounters that I have personally engaged with, learned, and internalized expressions of traditional wisdom in Africa:

- Initially primarily as an academic ethnographer and ethnohistorian;
- Then, from 1990 on, also and increasingly as someone who has taken a critical distance from the appropriating and distancing ethnographic stance inherent in mainstream global (but essentially North-Atlantic) anthropology, and who instead has committed himself to local expressions of traditional wisdom as a certified and practising diviner-spirit medium-healer in the Southern African *sangoma* tradition (**VAN BINSBERGEN** 1991, 2003), in other words as someone who (both in Africa and worldwide) extends existential counselling and pastoral work on the basis of African wisdom principles;
- Finally, from the late 1990s, as an intercultural philosopher calling to question the foundations and the politics of intercultural knowledge construction, particularly where expressions of traditional wisdom are concerned; it was at this stage that I complemented my radical criticism of anthropology with an equally radical (self-)criticism of the adoptive strategy of 'going native' — for the latter is inherently problematic as a form of intercultural appropriation and as a movement that obscures, rather than illuminates, the problems of rationality, representation, instrumentality, hegemony, existential encounter and identity, in intercultural knowledge formation.

This personal development in the course of my career has put me in a position from which I can appreciate the way in which modern scholars both dissect, and feel strangely attracted to, traditional expressions of wisdom, and in which I have realized that the 'nostalgia' implied in such attraction, is in fact an epistemological critique of the hegemonic and totalizing pretensions of modern science. It is also a recognition of the fact that much of what 'other cultures', outside the North-Atlantic, have achieved in the way of expressions of traditional wisdom, must not be ignored or slighted as invalid or obsolete. On the contrary, it deserves to be acknowledged as genuine knowledge in its own right, as essential elements in the global knowledge heritage of humankind, based on an epistemology of its own, capable of solving some of the dilemmas of the human condition as well as, or better than, dominant global North-Atlantic science.

This is claiming far more than I can substantiate in the present study. All I can do here is offer some brief illustrations of what I mean. Let me therefore conclude by briefly discussing four forms of African traditional wisdom which I find particularly convincing as complements or alternatives to modern science, and capable of being reformulated in a global format, and globally circulated.

7. Four Examples of Viable African Traditional Wisdom with Potentially Global Applicability

I refer to my four examples of 'tacit modern unwisdom' set out in section 4 above, and contrast them with African traditional wisdom.

7.1. THE HUMAN BODY

Much traditional wisdom in Africa is concentrated on the human body [50], whose life cycle and fertility are celebrated. Thus death may become the highest, and with all its sense of bereavement yet essentially festive, culmination of life; and puberty rites (especially female ones) appear as a vital resource of meaning spilling over to the other fields of the entire culture.

Symbolic parallelism between the body and the land, and between the body and the structure of socio-political organization, makes macrocosmic phenomena understandable at a human scale. Frequently the body is marked and covered with substances derived from other bodies, from surrounding nature, and from humans' local artefact production — yet the celebration of the undressed, and of the cleaned and cleansed body is an implicit articulation of purity and trans-moral innocence in the face of the continuity of life force (locally often conceptualized as the ancestors, or the spirits of the wilds).

The movement of the body in space and time confirms dance and music as the most obvious way of situating the individual in its social and cosmological position, and of re-finding that position after illness, crisis and bereavement. Orifices are points of transformation between the cosmological, the social and the individual, articulating life as a constant flow of life force in and out the human individual, and between individuals, *e.g.* in a sexual context. Especially healing practices reconstitute the connections between world view, social organization, and body; they not only redress and restore, but effectively *create* the human individual. Most importantly, it is the body that situates individuals in a chain of continuity across generations, whose perpetuation is implied to be the true meaning of life.

The African traditional wisdom of the body, expressed and mobilized in every ritual and every act of therapy, contrasts forcefully and convincingly with the alienating body practices of the North-Atlantic region today, as evoked in section 4 above; as well as with the time-honoured bodily conceptions and practices (often far more restrictive and rigid than their African counterparts) of the world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) which have

become increasingly dominant in the Old World for the past three millennia. In African systems of corporality we find a wisdom which not only has remained vitally important to African people today, but which has also proved to be capable of reformulation into a global format, and of being globally transmitted in the form of African-inspired musical practices, dancing, healing, and sexual practices; ever renewed and increasingly amalgamated with globalizing practices from elsewhere, African corporeal wisdom continues to conquer the world.

7.2. CONFLICT REGULATION

African local-level practices of conflict regulation constitute an important expression of traditional wisdom, to be shared with the wider world. The relatively old and exhausted state of many African soils and ecosystems has been an important factor in the vulnerable and ephemeral nature that has been a recurrent feature of African state systems both in the past millennia and today, well after the end of colonial rule. Therefore, the grand logic of formal organization (elsewhere the hub of political and economic expansion and innovation in the last few millennia and especially since the 19th century CE) has often remained an imported dream in Africa — repeatedly turned nightmare in postcolonial-state contexts. But on the basis of such principles as the complementarity of oppositions, and the awareness of sharing a fundamental humanity in the face of which *total* social exclusion of particular individuals and groups is literally unthinkable, African small-scale communities have managed to persist and to renew themselves by virtue of a particularly effective mode of conflict management.

African local-level traditions of conflict resolution are typically based on the recognition of plural truth, of plural positions of integrity, and the symbolically creative invention of real or pretended common grounds that would allow the parties involved to yield and be reconciled — for if two opponents are both right then there can be no logical road to reconciliation except via the ternary logic of sleight-of-hand. These mechanisms have, however, turned out to be surprisingly ineffective at the national and international level (although post-apartheid South Africa may yet prove us wrong on this point), and as a result Africa has stood out, during the last half century, as a place of state collapse, civil war and genocide. Yet great African statesmen of the last few decades, such as Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Kofi Annan, seem to have been able to effectively transmit some of this traditional wisdom of conflict regulation to a level beyond the local community.

A closer, comparative and theoretical study [51] of these African modes of conflict regulation as forms of traditional wisdom may help to reformulate them into a globally receptive format, which may also prove more effective at the national and international level in Africa.

In the discussion during the aforementioned symposium, Niels Weidtmann stressed, rightly, that these African modes of conflict regulation do *not* spring from any exceptionally powerful sense of community in African societies — on the contrary, such a sense is often surprisingly weak. I totally agree, having stressed in various publications on the Nkoya people of Zambia how their villages are really communities of strangers, people who were not bom together and who will not die together, but whose lives are temporarily intermeshing in the context of a particular small village and/or kin group, whilst each individual is personally and uniquely involved in a life-long merry-go-round of rural and rural-urban geographical mobility, marrying, divorcing, and serially exploiting a whole range of potential kin alliances in the process.

Other Africanist studies, for instance those from the Manchester School context (VAN BINSBERGEN 2007a and extensive references cited there), show that such a set-up is not peculiar to the Nkoya people but has a much wider African applicability. Given the loose and vulnerable sense of community in many African contexts, conflict resolution, just like marriage, *rather than being predicated on an already existing sense of community*, is an attempt to actively *create* community in the first place, because it articulates people into complementary opposing groups, and formulates an idiom in terms of which their opposition can be negotiated with minimum social and symbolic destructiveness. Conflict regulation can do this, not by virtue of any fixed, well-defined and well-sanctioned politico-legal system of clearly allocated individual and collective rights, prerogatives and obligations, but precisely by virtue of the inchoate nature (MITCHELL 1971, VAN VELSEN 1971) of African socio-political organization, in other words by virtue of the existence of a complex web of conflicting ties which each potentially lay a total claim on the groups and individuals involved (GLUCKMAN 1955, 1965; COLSON 1960).

In such a situation where one may typically belong to more than one conflicting group at the same time, and where more than one party in conflict may have an equally justified claim to truth, honour, compensation, bride-wealth, and other scarce resources, conflict regulation can only be through creative sleight-of-hand, invoking a ternary logic that allows one to have one's cake and eat it at the same time — in other words, the wisdom of negotiation, symbolic rhetoric, and finitude.

7.3. THE ACCESSIBLE INDIVIDUAL MIND

As a third example of African traditional wisdom I would cite African elements of a philosophy of mind, such as articulated by Gyekye and Wiredu, for instance, in their rendering of the ontology of the Akan ethnic and linguistic cluster in West Africa [52]. In the Western philosophical tradition, the philosophy of mind has faced aporias for a number of reasons:

- The heritage of Platonic / early Christian / Cartesian body-mind dualism (critiqued by, for instance, RYLE 1949);
- Well-known pitfalls of the 'other minds' problem [53];
- The Western stress on the concept of the individual, undivided self — conceived not as a socio-cultural construct peculiar to a particular time and place, but as a self-evident given of the human condition in general — as the central cosmological and ontological entity.

The latter claims that it is impossible for minds to communicate directly with one another, leaving only the indirect transmission of mental contents via their expression in material signs (including speech) received through the senses. Such an individualistic and atomistic conception of the mind, whilst a basic tenet underlying most world religions today, leads us into great difficulty, since the actual direct communication between minds (as implied in the ideas of telepathy and precognition) [54] is simply an everyday experience to many people from all cultural orientations and all times. Anthropologists working on African divination and trance have claimed similar phenomena which seem to go against the dominant, 'Sceptical' natural-science paradigms of today. It must be emphasized that there are huge epistemological and methodological difficulties inherent in such claims (OLIVIER DE SARDAN 1988).

On the other hand, contrary to what most modernist Sceptics, and their lay parrots, seem to realize, the theory of *non-locality as an aspect of main-stream quantum mechanics* does provide an excellent theoretical basis for the possibility of such paranormal phenomena [55]. Since such insights, in locally encoded cultural forms, are commonplace in many African contexts but repressed from public circulation (especially among non-specialists) in the post-Enlightenment North-Atlantic region, paranormal phenomena may be argued to constitute a domain where the truth claims of African wisdom are not just valid within the local African space of culturally created self-evidence, but may deserve to be globally mediated as a statement of a transcultural truth, and hence may be superior to current collective representations in the West.

Yet most anthropologists with such experiences hide in psychological rationalizations that make the diviner merely a skilful manipulator of plain sensory information and an articulator of, essentially widely circulating, village rumours. Of course, there is no denying the ordinary psychology of the interpersonal information flow, by virtue of which clients often sensorily transmit information to diviner-healers without the client being aware of this, thus allowing the diviner-healer to spuriously claim paranormal sources of knowledge. However, my own two decades as an African diviner have absolutely convinced me that these normal processes of communication and impression management, coupled with the trance-like techniques of trans-individual sensitivity that one learns as an African wisdom specialist, create fertile grounds also for non-sensory forms of knowledge transmission. Such transmission can hardly be

explained by the publicly dominant, global / North-Atlantic scientific ontology, but is eminently accounted for in the world view of African wisdom.

In the Southern African divinatory idiom, extrasensory production of what appears to be valid knowledge is explained by the (in that cultural context) self-evident intercession of possessing or guiding ancestors. In the Akan version, by contrast, individual minds are, as forms of what is locally called *sunsum*, considered to be semi-autonomously subsumed in a universal World Soul, *okra*, and it is this interconnectedness which eminently accounts for telepathy, precognition and veridical divination. Of course, the idea of the World Soul is not limited to African world views as recorded in historical times. It is found in the literate, specialist traditions of the East [56] and the West [57]. Considerable correspondences between Akan and classical Greek culture have been pointed out (GRAVES 1964), and it is not impossible that one is indebted to the other, or that both partially derive from a common source (ARNAIZ-VILLENA *et al.* 2001). But whereas in the Western tradition the idea of the World Soul has become a specialist and minority idea without vital anchorage in popular collective representations, in West Africa it has been an expression of widely held traditional wisdom as recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries CE.

Meanwhile, there is an important point to be appreciated here, which throws further light on the peculiar rationality of divination and healing as a wisdom practice. True enough, the art of the diviner-healer includes specific technical procedures, which are well-defined, managed and transmitted among the specialist owners of such wisdom. We have seen how these largely seem to be forms of knowledge production based on procedures, guided by the specific conventionalized interpretations of conditions defined by explicit limiting conditions, of the type 'if the lob of the liver turns out to be darkened, then...'. If this were truly the case, such formal procedures would in principle produce (proto-)scientific knowledge, not wisdom; and to the extent to which the implication triggered by the limiting condition (for instance: '...then the king will die') in reality — under the regime of truth construction that informs our present-day science — can only be said to be totally unrelated to the limiting condition, such implications are false and such science can, from our present viewpoint, only be called pseudo-science... [58]

On the other hand, if the diviner-healer's lay client (and often the diviner-healer himself) consciously finds that he believes in the diviner-healer's pronouncements, this is so not only on the basis of the latter's authority (as in wisdom), but also and particularly because of the objective infallibility attributed to the divinatory procedures followed, as patent truth-producing techniques of a repetitive, objectifying, technical nature. We are left with a puzzle, an aporia, for if the material instruments of divination (*e.g.* four tablets, a collection of bones or figurines, the chance traces left by nocturnal visitors from the animal kingdom, the painstakingly calculated chart of the apparent position of planets at a particular place and time) are strictly applied in accordance with the rules,

which formally do not leave any degrees of freedom, they could not — under today's global scientific assumptions — possibly produce veridical divination. Yet they often do, in my extensive experience. My solution is that in fact the procedures are not strictly followed, and cannot be. Every divinatory outcome displays what the divination specialist **WERBNER** (1973) has called 'the superabundance of understanding': there is never just one clue but there are always several, and these are always more or less incompatible and contradictory. For instance, in Southern African four-tablet divination [59], every fall of the four tablets (and with back and front of each tablet being marked as different there are $2^4 = 16$ different falls possible) can be interpreted along nine different dimensions: ancestral, witchcraft, social, health, economic, etc. Moreover, each fall has its specific conventionalized praise text — which is ambiguous and dark, just like the pronouncements of the Delphi oracle in Ancient Greece (FONTENROSE 1978), or those of the *yi jing* J&K ('I Ching') oracle and wisdom text of classical China (LEGGE 1993).

By the same token, a full astrological theme ('horoscope'), analysed with all the possible aspects (in degrees, with each cohort of degrees having its own conventional *benefic* or *malefic* connotations), with very specific meanings and elaborate correspondences — of colour, musical tone, geographical location, gender, mood, moral quality, etc. — very specific to each of the various planets and secondary astrological points, is an array of immense complexity, a bunch of contradictions and incompatible associations from which simply not one unequivocal outcome can ever result, *unless through drastic selection and weighing* i.e. *by sleight-of-hand (even if performed in good faith)*.

As I have stressed in earlier accounts (VAN BINSBERGEN 2003b), the diviner-healer may use this complexity to enter into a trance-like state in which he may be argued to become particularly receptive for extrasensory perception. But even regardless of the possibility of such an extrasensory contribution, the diviner simply engages in *wisdom*: juggling the abundance of clues, many of them mutually contradictory, which the oracular procedures provide in combination with the diviner's background knowledge of the client and of the latter's situation, and pressing all the loose ends into an increasingly coherent complex narrative, which (due to the intensive interaction between diviner and client during the session) the client will increasingly recognize as revealing and relevant. Thus the diviner engages in wisdom as practical knowledge — along lines that are not essentially different from the creative skills (of selective synthesis and massaging over contradictions, and rhetorical persuasiveness) that allow a scholar to produce a convincing and publishable argument. In doing so, the diviner makes intensive use of the multi-interpretability and of the degrees of freedom which the oracular apparatus provides, yet the diviner at the same time derives his own authority from the fact that he can nonetheless let this sleight-of-hand pass as the immutable, unequivocal, authoritative outcome of technical oracular procedures.

The conclusion seems inescapable that the authority attributed to such divination is already predicated upon a proto-scientific wider context, where (even in the eyes of the individual lay client, having somehow adopted the specialists' proto-scientific outlook) it is procedures rather than divine authority that produces truth. But even though the diviner and the client believe that the oracular pronouncements are compellingly determined by the strict application of the intersubjective, standard oracular procedures, *is fact they are not*. From complexity and contradiction, via techniques of negotiation, weighing and selection, to meaningful pronouncement — this is what above we have identified as the path of wisdom, not of science. *What the diviner does, is the production of unique, bricolaged practical wisdom under the disguise of the production of systematic and unassailable knowledge by means of repetitive standard procedures that enhance the authority of his pronouncements*. And this, in fact, is very similar to what the negotiator does in conflict regulation.

7.4. MYTHOLOGY

My final example of expressions of African traditional wisdom derives from a field on which I have concentrated over the last few years, comparative mythology, in a project whose rationale was to establish the empirical basis for my thesis of the fundamental cultural unity of humankind, in particular of Anatomically Modern Humans — a complement therefore to my hyperbolically challenging adage 'cultures do not exist' [60].

Here I will concentrate, not on meaning and content, but on formal processes in the global history of mythology, which spans at least 200,000 years. Myths are expressions of traditional wisdom in the sense that they articulate and support a culture's view of the world and of man; offering aetiological explanation of specific natural phenomena, human institutions, and names; and providing models for emulation and edification in real life.

Many expressions of traditional wisdom are in the format of myth, not in the modernist pejorative sense as collective representation constituting untruth, but as collective representation in narrative format, *tout court* (VAN BINSBERGEN 2003d).

Although Ancient Egypt, one of the earliest, most powerful and enduring civilizations of the ancient world, was located in Africa and displayed many African traits, and although the African continent contained major sites of early Christianity and of medieval Islam, yet prior to the 19th century CE writing remained peripheral to most of African life, and African cultures have excelled in orality including story-telling. Anatomically Modern Humans emerged in Africa c. 200,000 years ago, and only began to trickle to other continents c. 80,000 years ago in the context of the Out-of-Africa Exodus. Genetically and culturally the African continent still contains some identifiable traces of the long

pre-Exodus period. Such traces are also to be found everywhere outside Africa — it is these traces that allowed us to discover the Out-of-Africa Exodus in the first place.

So, before we fall into the trap of hegemonically inventing Africa (MUDIMBE 1988) as the ultimate domain of primordality (Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as Africa has so often appeared in North-Atlantic colonial and postcolonial stereotyping), let us consider the following points which are particularly important for an appreciation of the global importance of the traditional wisdom contained in myths:

- While we must acknowledge the possibility of parallel invention due to the common structure of the mind of Anatomically Modern Humans, and recently the converging effects of cultural globalization, still an important partial explanation of the very many universals and near-universals of human cultures worldwide (WIREDU 1990, 1996; BROWN 1991; ODERA ORUKA 1990a) is the following: these universals may be seen as elements (surprisingly constant and persistent over tens of thousands of years, as if deeply programmed into human culture) of our common cultural heritage long pioneered inside Africa before the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and subsequently spread all over the globe. I have called this heritage 'Pandora's Box', freeing the image from the negative connotations it has had since Hesiod [61] and going back to the original meaning of the Greek name Pandora, 'the All-giving'. Considering the incomparable importance of narrative for creating and perpetuating human groups, and acknowledging articulate language as one of Anatomically Modern Humans' principal distinctive traits, Pandora's Box must have contained a basic mythological repertoire which the Out-of-Africa Exodus caused to spread all over the world, and which painstaking comparative research is now beginning to reconstruct — around such themes as the moon, the trickster, the fire, the rainbow snake, the tree of life, the reptile erroneously announcing death, etc.
- However, much of the development of world mythology took place after the Out-of-Africa Exodus, in the course of tens of millennia of ecological, cultural and cosmological development outside Africa, especially in Asia. Here, as transformations and innovations upon the mythological contents of Pandora's Box, and also linked, in identifiable ways, with the emergence of new modes of production and new linguistic macro-families, some of the major cosmologico-mythological themes emerged, such as (c. 30,000 years ago in western Asia) the cosmogony based on the separation of Land and Water (with the Flood as cataclysmic annihilation of that separation, requiring world order to be restored by a second creation); and the alternative and somewhat later cosmogony revolving on the separation of Heaven and Earth [62], which made possible the idea of the demiurge and other forms of reconnection (tree, mountain, bird, pyramid, ladder, stairway, rainbow,

demiurge, shaman, king, twin) between Heaven and Earth, which have constituted central themes in the theological and iconographic repertoire of civilizations from the Neolithic onwards. Much of the familiar mythological repertoire of Eurasia (faintly echoed in the Americas, more clearly so in recently populated Oceania) emerged in this phase along lines that we are now beginning to make out.

- As these themes proliferated, mainly in Asia, a Back-into-Africa population movement produced what recent genetic research has discovered to be a feed-back migration from Central and West Asia into Africa, from c. **15,000** ago [63], which on its way also had a major impact on Europe. In the process, relatively new Asian narrative themes entered Africa and dominantly installed themselves onto the pre-Exodus mythologies that had continued to transform and innovate there. As a result, sub-Saharan Africa now has the paradoxical combination of relatively new mythologies (largely continuous with those of Eurasia) told by people with relatively ancient genes.

So much for the essentialization and alterization, in the hands of scholars, of the traditional wisdom as expressed in African narratives. The North-Atlantic culture (which in recent centuries has largely informed the scholar's perspective) and the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa turn out to be relatively closely related and to share highly important prehistoric substrates. What appears as nostalgic reminders of what makes the West incomparably different (and often, by implication, allows the inhabitants of the North Atlantic to construct themselves as culturally superior), is in fact part of a worldwide process of cultural history, in which the places of initiative and the flows of cultural indebtedness have shifted, as they will in the future, and in which a common repertoire of meaning and image is being managed by the whole of humankind — in myriad fragmented, transformed and innovated yet more or less continuous, local forms, that were subjected to localizing transformation when travelling beyond their initial cultural bedding, and whose underlying continuity we could scarcely have suspected until, in the most recent times, globalization has created a framework for the recognition of pan-human difference in unity.

8. Situating Intercultural Philosophy from a Wisdom Perspective

Our discussion of traditional wisdom in the context of the multifarious wisdom revival today, promises to deliver a boon we had not bargained for. I have mentioned intercultural philosophy among the globalizing strategies

that have driven home the irreducible potential of modes of knowing (often designated as 'wisdom') outside the Western mainstream tradition;

and I have characterized wisdom as

creative practical knowledge that allows one to negotiate the pitfalls and contradictions of human life (especially in those domains of which we might say today that they are not tightly rule-governed and thus carry considerable uncertainty, ambivalence and incompatible multiple truths), and to accept both the social nature of human life, and its finitude.

It is time to make one final step, and to point out that intercultural philosophy, whatever the pretences implied in its name [64], cannot be philosophy in the accepted contemporary academic sense largely informed by the Kantian tradition. On the contrary, intercultural philosophy has to be some form of *wisdom* — not in the essentialist sense of incomparably wise and eternal truths, but rather in the technical sense of such intimations on the state and nature of Being as are not based on systematic, replicable and objectifying procedures of knowledge formation.

If we agree that a cultural orientation is a machine for the production of self-evident truth which yet is merely a collective representation having no validity outside the collectivity owning and managing that representation, then the encounter between cultural orientations inevitably produces 'considerable uncertainty, ambivalence and incompatible multiple truths', reminding us of the social constructedness of all truth, and of a very special type of finitude, notably the intrinsically finite applicability of cultural truths to only a subset of humanity (in other words, cultural relativism). In such an intercultural situation, the very notion of *knowledge* as 'justified true belief (even if rephrased to accommodate **GETTIER 1963**) becomes impossible, for strictly speaking (*i.e.* in the Kantian philosophical academic tradition) justification, truth and belief can only mean anything *within* one and the same language-based cultural orientation — they mean nothing *between* cultural orientations, where they must lack the self-evident validation they would derive from the context of just one unique cultural orientation. How to negotiate such a situation unless by the time-honoured strategies of wisdom: acceptance of finitude; silence, *i.e.* avoidance of over-insistence on specialist articulate language which (as central encoding of a cultural

orientation) can only articulate difference but not diffuse communality; retreat into bodily practices (from caring for the sick and dying to dancing and drinking) that allow us to celebrate the human body as transcultural common given.

The present argument, and my other attempts at the production of intercultural philosophical texts, bring out the unmistakable fact that I am not a philosopher steeped in, and exclusively identifying with, the mainstream academic philosophical tradition of Western thought. Contrary to my highly distinguished predecessor in the Rotterdam chair of intercultural philosophy, Heinz Kimmerle, I did not spend the first quarter of a century of my academic life in a monocultural reserve of philosophical textuality (in Kimmerle's case the Hegel archive — which afforded him a masterly understanding of modern and post-modern philosophy — but in messy and conceptually naive anthropological fieldwork in African villages, royal courts, and urban slums. The wisdom of intercultural mediation and negotiation which I learned there (partly on the basis of such practical wisdom as I brought from my own society, but mainly on the basis of what wisdom I was privileged to learn from my African hosts) make up, for better or worse, the substance of my intercultural philosophy. Here mainstream philosophy has functioned mainly secondarily, as a major source of inspiration; as a critical touchstone for the well-formedness, plausibility, originality and profundity of whatever I think up as — to some extent — an untutored mind; and occasionally, merely as a strategy of textual embellishment and impression management. This downplaying of mainstream philosophy has been out of personal choice, and *not* because I do not know better or cannot do better — I had extensively engaged with philosophy before I had even read any social science, or had experienced any transcultural exposure to speak of. I deliberately play down mainstream Western philosophy (whilst using it eclectically), because I realize that in the face of the uncertainties and incompatibilities of intercultural situations, academic philosophy (especially in its analytical variant), outside the specialist language-based domain of North-Atlantic specialist thought, has no option but to simply rest its case. Here wisdom reigns supreme, with — in the absence of rules that can be culturally supported by all parties involved — all the unpredictable capriciousness of the divine trickster (so that it often becomes unwisdom — as continental approaches appear so often from an analytical point of view); whereas a painstaking, sustained study of expressions of traditional wisdom worldwide (and the admission that this is what lies at the origin of mainstream academic philosophy, and is still to a considerable extent continuous notably with the continental variant) can help us to come to terms with interculturality as one of the few greatest, and potentially most explosive, challenges of our time.

Here we can also pinpoint more precisely what cultural globalization means: forging the multiplicity of disparate cultural orientations into a more coherent whole so that the various parties involved in a concrete situation (of the type we are used to call 'intercultural') may increasingly tend to apply convergent world

views, recognize convergent rules, and thus produce convergent truths. However, the promise of equality and equal access inherent in such a definition, in practice is usually defeated by hegemonic imposition, of the world view, rules and truth of one of the parties involved. Over the past two centuries, such hegemonic imposition was the privilege of the North-Atlantic region (which allowed the Western mainstream tradition in philosophy to assume universal pretensions), but that condition is changing rapidly, in a bitter and bloody contest over the right to define reality. Here only wisdom, not science nor the logic of the excluded third, can save humankind.

9. Conclusion

Our argument has oscillated between two extreme positions, both of them wrong if taken literally and in isolation, yet in combination suggestive of an ulterior truth. On the one hand, we are tempted to declare that other people's wisdom is largely in the eye of the beholder as equipped with his distinctive cultural orientation; on the other hand, all wisdom seems to flow from a common source, which we, as Anatomically Modern Humans belonging to widely divergent cultural orientations, may each call by different names yet we are equipped to recognize them as, perhaps, closeness to the essence of Being.

Modern intercontinental scholarship is one aspect of such globalization. It is our task to respectfully record, interpret, compare, and recirculate in a globalizing, more or less accessible format with various degrees of specialist scholarly rigour, and thus celebrate both the beauty and wisdom of individual local human cultural products, and the underlying connections that bring us all together.

NOTES

- [1] Quotations of words and sentences from other than modern European languages in this memoir preferably include the original script and its transliteration, not in order to pretend a philological expertise I do not have, but in order to affirm the right of the original expression, in its own local cultural form, to take precedence over the transformative appropriation in a modern North-Atlantic language; and also to drive home the fact (of crucial importance from a point of view of intercultural philosophy) that our scholarly encounter with foreign wisdom is far from transparent and tends to be filtered through multiple layers of translation and interpretation. However, the conventions of modern scholarship are not conducive to consistency where these good intentions are concerned — for instance, I have had to confine myself to conventional English renderings of the names of Ancient Greek, biblical, and Ancient Egyptian proper names.
- [2] *Eth. Nicom.*, 1140a and following.
- [3] Modern treatments of phronesis include GADAMER 1960, MACINTYRE 1981, BERNASCONI 1989, FLYVBJERG 1993, GALLAGHER 1997, NOEL 1999; practical studies of phronesis in a concrete modern setting are HALVERSON 2004, JAMAL 2004. Also *cf.* in the Symposium 'Expressions of Traditional Wisdom' (2007), the stimulating paper by Koutsoumpos & Zhuang.
- [4] *Cf.* HYLAND 1995, DE MUL 1993, HEIDEGGER 1983, RICCEUR 1960.
- [5] *Cf.* Horn & Masunaga 2000. At our Symposium, the expertise aspect of wisdom was articulated by Professor Baetens Beardmore in response to my keynote address, i.e. an earlier version of the present argument.
- [6] *Cf.* TAKAHASHI 2000 (who stressed, for the ancient wisdom literature from western Eurasia, analytical ability, as contrasted for more inclusive and synthetic orientation in South and East Asia — a similar distinction is made by GARCIA & PELECHANO 2004 — and who highlighted the themes of void and co-dependence as central to the Asian tradition). There is no consensus in the literature as to the relation between scientific or intellectual knowledge versus wisdom-related knowledge. COOMARASWAMY 1943 and ARDELT 2000 relied on such a distinction. However, STRIJBOS 1995 saw the two forms of knowledge converge from a system perspective, while BETHE 1968 called science 'a road to wisdom' (thus also MAXWELL 1984; also recent Chinese philosophers have been interested in the transformation of knowledge into wisdom: GUORONG 2002). For a Neo-Thomist approach to the relation between science and wisdom, *cf.* MARITAIN 1940.
- [7] *Cf.* AGARWAL & NARAIN 1997, SEN 1999, SAMOFF *et al.* 2001, BERKES *et al.* 2000, HAVERKORT & HIEMSTRA 1999. Indian scholars have been particularly prominent in exploring these possibilities. Here we are touching on the discussions, during the last quarter of a century, of 'indigenous knowledge systems', which however our present scope does not allow us to go into.
- [8] *Cf.* JIANG 2005, JONES & CULLINEY 1998, CAPRA 1978, ZUKAV 1979.
- [9] *Cf.* QUANCHI 2004.
- [10] BLANCHARD-FIELDS *et al.* 1987, KUNZMANN & BALTES 2003.
- [11] For Islam, *e.g.* CHOUDHURY 2001, LEWIN 2000 (Sufism), and the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr; *cf.* NORTON 2004, MASSIGNON 1922, FAHD 1966, ULLMAN 1972, BAKHTIAR 1991, SHAH 1971, CHITTICK 1989; for Buddhism: LEVITT 1999 (Tibet), EPSTEIN 1985, VOKEY 1999, HUMPHREYS 1987; for a Vedantic perspective, *cf.* ATCHLEY 1993. YANG 2001 studies wisdom concepts in Taiwan, where Taoism and Confucianism have remained important orientations. For references to Judaism and Christianity, see notes below.
- [12] *Cf.* ERIKSON 1963, 1982; STERNBERG 1990; ARDELT 2004; BALTES & FREUND 2003; BALTES *et al.* 1990, 2002; HANNA & OTTENS 1995; KRAMER 2000; MAERCKER *et al.* 1998; MASLOW 1968, 1971; PASUPATHI & STAUDINGER 2001; BROWN 2000. I have considerably benefitted from the extensive bibliography of TROWBRIDGE 2005.
- [13] ASSMANN 1994, TAKAHASHI & BORDIA 2000.
- [14] General: HADOT 1995. Spinoza: DE DUN 1996 — despite de Spinoza's banishment from the Jewish religious community, Hebrew wisdom was an important influence on this philosopher.

- LEIBNIZ (1994) was fascinated by Chinese Taoist thought *ilft / iiSE* as mediated by the Jesuit fathers resident in China. The Indian Vedic writings, notably the Upanishads *OTfitt^*, had reputedly great influence on Schopenhauer (*e.g.* JANAWAY 1999, p. 12). Heidegger's great inspiration was the Pre-Socratic 'wisdom' philosopher Parmenides — HEIDEGGER 1982, 1977, *passim*. LEVINAS (1976) was considerably inspired, again, by biblical wisdom. This also applies to DERRIDA (1999, 1996).
- [15] For China: WEIPING 2005; for the European Middle Ages, *cf.* CELANO 1995, HOPKINS 1996 (on Cusanus); European Renaissance: RICE 1958; Early Modern Europe, specifically Hegel-ROSEN 2000.
- [16] *Cf.* VAN BINSBERGEN 2003a, ch. 15: 'Cultures do not exist' (pp. 459-522).
- [17] *Cf.* DE MUL 1993, implicitly on the wisdom relevance of Dilthey; GADAMER 1960; KEKES 1983, 1995; MANHEIMER 1992; CURNOW 1999; GEYER 1989; GODLOVITCH 1981; HARTSHORNE 1987; JACOBS 1989; KUCZYNSKI 2001; MARQUARD 1989; MAXWELL 1984, 2004- NIELSEN 1993; SMITH 1998.
- [18] The oldest attested spears derive from Schoeningen, Germany, as long ago as 400 000 years B. P. (THIEME 1997).
- [19] *Cf.* VAN Os n.d. (general), Vico 1988 [1710] (Ancient Italians), CARRUTHERS 1986 (Afrocentric), WEST 1987 and SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ 1955-1956 (New Age perspective). For Africa, see footnotes below.
- [20] *Cf.* MULLER 1875-1910; YUTANG 1938 (?), 1943, 1986; WILHELM 1931; VON SCHLEGEL 1808; MEHLIG 1987; van Praag (?) 1962.
- [21] *Cf.* TANRET 2007, LAMBERT 1960, FOSTER 1974.
- [22] *Cf.* Cannuyer (Symposium 2007), SIMPSON 1973, LICHTHEIM 1973-1980, LANGE 1925, BRUNNER 1988, GUNDLACH 1996, KAPLONY 1968.
- [23] The Bible books of Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther; and *cf.* ALBRIGHT 1955; NOTH & THOMAS 1955; CAMP 1985; CRENSHAW 1969; LEBRAM 1965; MULLER 1977-78; VONRAD 1971; SARKIO 1994; ROMER*etal.* 1990; TALMON 1963; MURPHY 1981,2002; BROWN 1996; DELL 1994; WHYBRAY 1989; KIRK 1999 (who follows Perdue in the application of Victor Turner's model of the ritual process, to wisdom texts — *cf.* PERDUE & TURNER 1978, CRENSHAW 1995, SCOTT 1971, ACHENBAUM & ORWOLL 1991). For a general theoretical perspective on wisdom literature, *cf.* BROWN 2005.
- [24] The word pharaoh is an Hebrew corruption of the Egyptian *pr ^* 'house', or (by an alternative suggestion) *^ pr wr*, 'Great House, palace' — although the latter expression, if written with the 'shrine' determinative |Q, is reserved not for the palace but for the pre-dynastic national shrine of Upper Egypt (*cf.* GARDINER 1994).
- [25] Electronic text source (slightly edited): Perseus online version at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/> of the Greek edition by Brooke Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort — English translation edited by Rainbow Missions, Inc.
- [26] I Kings, 5: 9-14 or 4: 29-34; electronic text source MAMRE 2005.
- [27] *Cf.* LLOYD 1987; SEDLEY 1998; KERN 1888; BURKERT 1962, 1968, 1987; WEST 1983; RIEDWEG 1995; BERNABE 2002; BETEGH 2001; GRAF 1974; GOTZE 1923; HALLIWELL 2000. SHAPIRO 2000 examined how the use of proverbs enables Herodotus to strike a bridge towards older wisdom traditions in the Aegean, and cited various Greek specialist terms for wisdom expressions: *rcapoiua paroimia*, *Ujro8[Kr] hupotheke*, *dmoipOeyua apofthegma*, and *Yvtbun, gnome*.
- [28] DODDS 1951 initiated a more relative view of the stereotypical juxtaposition of rational Greeks versus irrational barbarians. Also KINGSLEY 1995a,b; MACLENNAN 2006.
- [29] MACLENNAN 2006; his standard sources largely coincide with those already cited, and include: BUTTERWORTH 1966 (1970?); DODDS 1951; ELIADE 1951; KINGSLEY 1994 (?), 1995, 1999.
- [30] Mainstream scholarly approaches to African wisdom include: SCHEUB 1977, 1985; MADU 1996; OPOKU 1975 (?), 1987; BARBER & FARIAS 1989; HORTON & FINNEGAN 1973; FABIAN 1990; KIMMERLE 1997; Wanjohi 1997 (?); DOKE 1947; MVE ONDO 1991; ROGERS 1985; DE VEYRIERES & DE MERITENS 1967; AMEVE 1989; SUMNER 1999; BRYANT 1995; RAZAFINT-SALAMA 1988; Ford 2000 (?), with his collection of African myths; MURITHI 2006 on Southern African ubuntu philosophy (which however is to some extent an invented tradition in the HOBBSBAWM & RANGER 1983 sense, *cf.* VAN BINSBERGEN 2001); and Ntekim-Rex in the Symposium 'Expressions of Traditional Wisdom' (2007).

- [31] GRIAULE 1948, TURNER 1967.
- [32] ODERA ORUKA 1990a,b; PRESBEY 1999; SOME 1998. In an excellent article KIMMERLE 1993 put these efforts in a wider critical perspective, which includes academic African philosophy and points, beyond the 'everyday-life philosophers' that Oruka's sages mainly are, at the esoteric keepers of exalted secret and initiatory knowledge in African; here Kimmerle relied particularly on TCHIAMALENGA NTUMBA 1989.
- [33] *Cf.* MAYBURY-LEWIS 1992; VITEBSKY'S 1995 well-known book on shamanism appeared in the 'Living Wisdom' series. Already in the hands of certain enlightened authors in the (proto-) colonial period, the term wisdom amounted to a respectful evocation of distant otherness (*cf.* BURTON 1865).
- [34] Of the numerous editions of this text I only mention the up-to-date AMES & HALL 2003.
- [35] *Cf.* VAN BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE 2005, BOWLES & GINTIS 1993, CRAMER 2002.
- [36] BERNAL 1987, 1991; LEFKOWITZ & ROGERS 1996; VAN BINSBERGEN 1997.
- [37] SMITH *et al.* 2004, SHARP 2000, MARTIN 2006.
- [38] Metaphysics, IV.4, 1006b and following; IV.7, 1011b.
- [39] I take the meso-level of phenomena to be that of our normal Galilei-Newton world, at the order of magnitude of the human body; 10^0 (= 1) metres. At very much higher and very much lower orders of magnitude (galaxies, elementary particles), the self-evidences of our Galilei-Newton world dissolve, and the paradoxes and wonders of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics replace the (appearance of the) transparent logical structure and the object-subject distinction of the meso-level world, bringing out the restrictive boundary conditions of the latter.
- [40] *Cf.* DERRIDA 1967, 1972; LYOTARD 1983.
- [41] A special case of this question is: is it possible to express and transmit traditional wisdom in a new, state-of-the-art format, *e.g.* through the internet? *Cf.* Ess 2003 and VAN BINSBERGEN 2003b for discussions on this point.
- [42] PTAH-HOTEP 1917, VAN DEN DUNGEN 2002-2004, LICHTHEIM 1973.
- [43] Here I find that a useful and illuminating model is provided by the physico-chemical mechanism of the cell 'membrane', for instance (but that is only one very special case out of myriad such situations) as operating in the context of the human ovum being fertilized by a spermatozoon. Built up out of a tight network of lipid (*i.e.* fat) molecules, the membrane is only one molecule thick, and as long as the molecules are aligned *i.e.* in their hydrophilic state, between them they leave enough room for very small bodies to pass through — the membrane is then essentially porous; however, as soon as one body has been allowed to pierce through this array of molecules, the membrane's condition changes instantly from hydrophilic to hydrophobic, the porous transitions close shut, and the membrane is no longer permeable, although given the right trigger it might return to a permeable state. In the same way I see the interconnectedness, and the dissociation, in interpersonal and intercultural encounter, as two complementary aspects between which the process of intercultural encounter incessantly oscillates: with articulated speech, academic distancing, and encapsulation in a formal organization (the state, a world religion, a voluntary association) as major situational triggers towards dissociation — and on the other hand silence, dance, music, recognition of mutual corporality and finitude, as major situational triggers towards interconnectedness.
- [44] In a path-breaking article, GETTIER (1963) questioned the validity of this definition but it largely survived.
- [45] In his contribution to the aforementioned symposium (2007), Prof. Niels Weidtmann showed a particular interest in the rationality aspect of African expressions of traditional wisdom. He stressed that vocal African writers on traditional wisdom, such as WIREDU (1980) and ODERA ORUKA (1990b), took such rationality to be a general human trait — in line with a long-standing anthropological tradition seeking to vindicate the rationality of Africans, specially during the late colonial period (*cf.* GLUCKMAN 1955, 1967). Such insistence on universal rationality, however, may yet not be Weidtmann's own position, for, as we have seen, he claimed in the third thesis of his contribution that African traditional wisdom cannot be phrased in Western discourse.
- [46] *Cf.* HODDER 1987, HODDER & HUTSON 2003, RENFREW & ZUBROW 1994.
- [47] *Cf.* LEWIS-WILLIAMS & DOWSON 1988.
- [48] The variety of humankind to which all humans on earth have belonged (ever since the extinction of Neanderthals *c.* 25,000 years ago), *i.e.* equipped with articulate speech, symbolism and comparatively advanced tools and weapons made of stone, wood and bone.

- [49] I write *humankind*, and not *Anatomically Modern Humans*, because there is accumulating evidence to suggest that traditional wisdom is older even than the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans — that a certain amount of self-reflexive symbolizing went on among Neanderthals and older human forms from the Middle and even Lower Palaeolithic; cf. BEDNARIK 1990, D'ERRICO *et al.* 2003.
- [50] From the very extensive literature on African corporality I mention: NGUBANE 1977; KUBIK 1977; DEVISCH 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000; RASING 2001; JACOBSON-WIDDING 1991; MAW & PICTON 1992; FERNANDEZ 1990; KIMMERLE 1989; FEDRY 1976; TURNER 1967; DE BOECK 1995.
- [51] Cf. NORBECK 1963, GLUCKMAN 1955, SIMONSE 1992, ASSEFA 1996, NGWANE 1996, VAN BINSBERGEN 2003c.
- [52] Cf. WIREDU & GYEKYE 1992, GYEKYE 1995, WIREDU 1980. The accounts of these two philosophers of the Akan system do not completely match. Cf. MULLER 2002.
- [53] BILGRAMI 1993 and references cited there.
- [54] Philosophical problems of (the claim of the existence of) paranormal phenomena are discussed in, e.g., EISENBUD 1982, BRIER 1974, MUNDLE 1964, GRIM 1990. I discuss these themes in connection with African divinatory practices in VAN BINSBERGEN 2003b. An authoritative synthetic overview of the empirical evidence for paranormal phenomena, in the face of ill-informed and entrenched modern Sceptics movement, is RADIN 1997, with extensive bibliography. Dean Radin holds a PhD in physics; one of his own contributions to this field was that, together with R. D. Nelson, he managed to have an authoritative, mainstream physics journal in which he published a discussion of nearly a thousand cases of consciousness-related anomalies in random physical systems, e.g. computers demonstrably influenced by human thought (RADIN & NELSON 1989).
- [55] Cf. EINSTEIN *et al.* 1931, 1935; BELL 1964; WALKER 1977; BOHM & HILEY 1993.
- [56] The idea of the World Soul is associated with the concept of Atman *Snm* / Brahman *SUT*. Cf. in South Asian Advaita Vedanta *Śāṅkara* philosophy as formulated by Adi Sankara *Śāṅkara* (c. 800 CE).
- [57] In the Western philosophical tradition the idea of the World Soul is associated with such names as Heraclitus (e.g. fragment D. 22, A, 17), Plato (Timaeus 29f), the Stoics, Plotinus, the early St Augustine, the alchemical tradition from Late Antiquity onward, to re-surface with Spinoza, Leibniz, Newton, Lessing, the Theosophical movement around 1900, and (on the borderland between philosophy, the life sciences and New Age) most recently with Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis.
- [58] As today's astrology is justifiably called pseudo-science today, although 3,000 years ago it was in the forefront of (proto-)science. Probably, and hopefully, the paroxysms of today's science (the theory of relativity, quantum mechanisms, and neurobiology) will end up as pseudo-sciences within a few centuries, to be replaced by better science...
- [59] Cf. VAN BINSBERGEN 1995, 1996, 2003a: chs. 5-8.
- [60] VAN BINSBERGEN 2006, 2008; the adage is the title of 2003e.
- [61] Hesiod, *Opera et Dies*, pp. 42-105.
- [62] In the Symposium 'Expressions of Traditional Wisdom' (2007), Hilde Link referred to the stage preceding such separation in the narrative, the tight embrace of heaven and earth, in South Asia and in Ambon, Indonesia. This *mytheme* has extensive further attestations (e.g. in Nigeria, Oceania, and Ancient Greece) which, in the light of the theory presented here, must be considered historically related.
- [63] Cf. HAMMER *et al.* 1998, CRUCIANI 2002, COIA 2005.
- [64] Another such pretence is the existence of a plurality of cultures, between which interaction and even dialogue is supposed to take place as if they were ontologically distinct, and even conscious and articulate, entities. I have confronted this aspect of the term 'intercultural philosophy' (VAN BINSBERGEN 2003e), arguing that instead of the concept of 'cultures' (plural), the term 'cultural orientation' is more suitable to cope with the overlap, the situationality, the optionality, the plural allegiance, and the temporal dynamics of such patterns of collective programming — without denying, however, that part of this programming, especially in infancy — is effected so deeply as to become indelible, resulting in the production of self-evident truth which yet is merely a collective representation having no validity outside the collectivity owning and managing that representation.

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