

Renewal and Ascension

WIM VAN DENDUNGEN



Renewal and Ascension

in the

Pyramid Texts of Unas

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a commentary

by

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

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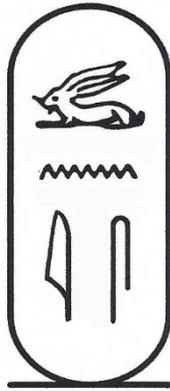
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Preface

The *Pyramid Texts* entered my life in 1988. I had just begun reading the *Sefer Zohar*, introduced to me by a friend who also suggested I study the vast corpus of ‘spells’ written on the walls and gables of the tombs of the Heliopolitan kings of the Old Kingdom. The *earliest* of these *Pyramid Texts*, those adorning the tomb of the last king of the Vth Dynasty, king Unas, Unis, or Wenis, were found by Maspero in 1881. The tomb of Unas had been sealed ca. 2348 BCE, and so these texts had remained unaltered for over 4200 years ! Some authors, adhering to the Western Tradition, claim they contained the elements of Alexandrian Hermetism and Western Hermeticism and conjecture these texts had impacted Mediterranean spirituality as a whole, particularly Judeo-Christianity. Can any of these assertions be corroborated ?

Most egyptologists study the ‘spells’ in the context of their interest in the royal funerary ritual. The pristine nature of the *Pyramid Texts* fascinated me, for is hermeneutics not used sacred texts to have their historical horizon, *in casu* their many redactions through time, each layer adding changes and reinterpretations of crucial passages ? The differences between the ‘canonical’ translations of Mercer (1952, 1956), Piankoff (1968), Faulkner (1969), and Allen (2005) made my head spin. Between 1983 and 1985, I had studied Middle Egyptian in the *Department of Oriental Studies* at Ghent University (Herman De Meulenaere) and decided, in 2001, to call upon my Middle Egyptian and use the hieroglyphs of the texts provided by Sethe (1935 – 1962). Given the ongoing study of Old Egyptian (Allen, 2013, 2017), the translation of the text had to be revisited several times to realize that no ‘final’ translation exists.

On the one hand, the tendency of some egyptologists to understand the *Pyramid Texts* as the product of a primitive or barbarous mind unable to communicate in the way reason understands seemed exaggerated to me. Also, their fixation on the funerary context (although evident) appeared to me to contradict the many ‘*this-life*’ associations possible when bracketing the funerary interpretation (were the ‘sayings’ not copied from a papyrus source used in other rituals besides the royal burial ?). On the other hand, when reading the texts, a ‘key’ to ‘enter’ their sense seemed for a long time missing, leading to unstable and, at times, incoherent translations and interpretations.

In 1983, after having studied the genetic epistemology of Piaget and having seen it applied in the context of pre-Socratic philosophy (Thales, Heraclitus, Anaximenes, Anaximander). It dawned to me that (a) the Kemetic mind was *ante-rational*, functioning in the earliest modes of cognition, namely mythical, pre-rational, and proto-rational thought, and (b) this *archaic mind* palimpsestically placed these strands on top of each another. This permitted myth to impact the incipient conceptual space of psychomorph pre-concepts and concrete concepts, apprehensions always embedded in a given context (non-abstract abductive reasoning). Adding two transpersonal layers to the nominal fivefold (*In Togetherness*, 2018) completed this model of human cognition, identifying seven modes of cognition : mythical, pre-rational, proto-rational (or ante-rationality), formal, critical (or rationality), creative, and nondual (or meta-rationality). Applying the typical features of each mode in the context of hermeneutics gives more insight into the Egyptian mind, particularly its difficulty with abstractions and universals. Reading the texts contextually and investigating how the ante-rationality at hand works does clarify sense.

The distinction between two different salvic schemes, one lunar and the other solar, is another pivotal hermeneutical scheme facilitating a sensible approach to the soteriology of Kemet. Lunar salvation, rooted in the predynastic tradition, offered commoners a perspective beyond the tomb. At death, they entered the Duat and, in the *Hall of the Two Truths*, sought to become ‘justified’ and gain access to the heaven of Osiris, the *Field of Reeds* (*sekhet-iaru*), also called *Field of Offerings* or *Field of Peace*. Solar salvation was the king’s privilege, for, in the Old Kingdom, he alone was believed to possess a spiritual principle of transformation (*Ba*). He alone was the ‘son of Re,’ the sole god on Earth, and so headed to the heaven of Re, not the sky of Osiris. He was not judged, but himself a judge ! However, as at death, even the king had to enter the Duat, he first had, as he had done during life in his *Sed Festival*, to transform into a Living Osiris and be wholly *renewed* (rejuvenation, regeneration). Only after this had happened could he leave the Duat and *ascend* in/on the horizon (*akhet*), transforming into a radiant, capable spirit (*Akh* – , G25) accompanying Re in his ‘Bark of Millions of Years.’ These two phases, *renewal*, and *ascension*, played a crucial role in Egyptian spirituality for more than three millennia and indeed influenced every culture coming into contact with it.

The third crucial factor of Kemetic spirituality is the importance of pre-existence ; the primordial realm transcending the created order. The latter, ruled by the eternal recurrence of the solar cycle (*neheh*), is embedded in this omnipresent Nun, this dark, undifferentiated, limitless space *before* creation, and its everlastingness (*djedet*). Paradoxically, the ‘Golden Age’ of the ‘first time’ (*zep tepi*) of Atum, i.e., the creative principle (or *ba* – , G29) of Nun, is here too. To renew, the divine king

entered this ‘Golden Age’ and scooped up the limitless creative energy available there. This ‘return’ to the ‘Golden Age’ is the fundamental myth of the ‘eternal return’ found in most spiritualities. The ‘Golden Age’ is the timeless realm to which (in the Old Kingdom) only the king, later, in the Middle Kingdom, every deceased and, in the New Kingdom, the *Ba* of Re, returned to renew. It was also the fundamental principle of magic (*heka*). Going back to this ‘Golden Age’ was to return to the moment of creation itself, when Atum self-created and split in so many gods and goddesses (his Ennead). It is to travel back to the moment of absolute power, the beginning of creation *outside* creation itself. This ritual harvesting of the primordial energy of Atum and the distinction between an immanent creation and a transcendent creator undoubtedly influenced Mediterranean spirituality as a whole.

Translating hieroglyphs is an unending task. Moreover, I am not an egyptologist but a student of philosophy. Our knowledge grows, so future language specialists may discover new grammatical rules and alternative semantics. Given the great antiquity of these texts, this can hardly be avoided. However, as the oldest *corpus* of religious texts in the world, the *Pyramid Texts* open pre-Hellenic perspectives not to be ignored if Europacentric, ethnocentric and/or Hellenocentric approaches are to be circumvented. May, by advancing the distinctions made, the ante-rationality of Ancient Egyptian culture be firmer grasped, so Kemet more clearly appears on the horizon of Western philosophy, religion, science, and art.

Wim van den Dungen
August 2019
Brasschaat

Introduction

‘Along with the Sumerians, the Egyptians deliver our earliest –though by no means primitive– evidence of human thought. It is thus appropriate to characterize Egyptian thought *as the beginning of philosophy*. As far back as the third millennium B.C., the Egyptians were concerned with questions that return in later European philosophy and that remain unanswered even today – questions about being and nonbeing, about the meaning of death, about the nature of the cosmos and man, about the essence of time, about the basis of human society and the legitimation of power.’⁽¹⁾

Reading Hieroglyphs

The rediscovery of Egypt at the close of the 18th century (cf. Bonaparte’s expedition of 1798), and the subsequent ‘cracking of the code’ by Champollion (1790 – 1832) in his *Précis du système hiéroglyphique des anciens égyptiens par M. Champollion le jeune* (1824), heralded the end of the ‘allegoric interpretation’ of the signs by pre-Napoleonic egyptology. From the Renaissance onwards, decipherment entailed explaining them allegorical, metaphorical, analogical, and esoteric. ‘From antiquity down to the end of the eighteenth century, there was a dominant, ideal picture of a Hermetic-Hellenistic Egypt that had its influence on nearly all educated people ; the Renaissance, with its strong Egyptian component, was a rebirth of late antiquity, not of the classical period.’⁽²⁾

(1) Hornung, E. : *Idea into Image*, Timken – Princeton, 1992, p.13, my italics.

(2) Hornung, E. : *The Secret Lore of Egypt and its Impact on the West*, Cornell University Press – Ithaca, 2001, p.199.

The Late Hellenistic ‘reading’ of the hieroglyphs proved to be wrong. The greatest stumbling block in discovering the *phonetics* of hieroglyphs was the general confusion about the script at the end of its historical use (Philae in 394 CE). Diodorus Siculus (90 – 30 BCE), Chaeremon of Alexandria (10 CE), and Horapollo, an Egyptian of the fifth century CE, all affirmed hieroglyphs were not phonetical but *allegorical*. The Egyptian priests of the Late Period (664 – 30 BCE)^(*) had initiated this confusion by introducing secret, esoteric and cryptographic inscriptions devoid of the usual hieroglyphic text. Indeed, in the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1938 – 1759 BCE) and even before, when in ornamental dedications, the figures and emblems of the gods had been used allegorically, usually accompanied by transcriptions of the so-called ‘cryptic text’ in standard hieroglyphs.⁽¹⁾ The introduction of *extra* hieroglyphs into the writing system, swelling the number of signs, made a text in basic Middle Egyptian unreadable to someone trained in Middle Egyptian only. These native priests, anxious to safeguard their ‘mysteries’ against Ptolemaic Hellenism, also used *cryptic variants* of normal hieroglyphs. As a result, the number of signs exploded (from the standard 700 to over 6000), and some texts became increasingly unreadable and accessible only to a limited number of dwindling priests. They alone detained the hermeneutical ‘keys’ enabling one to read this symbolical, cryptic script. So, when Europe, inspired by the *ad fontes* principle, turned to its ‘past’ (Late Antiquity), it viewed *all* hieroglyphs as allegorical.

(1) Wilkinson, R.H. : *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, Thames & Hudson – London, 2000, p.46.

(*) all dates related to Ancient Egypt are based on the chronology given by Hornung, E. : *History of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell University Press – New York, 1999. This is not the ‘final’ timeline but an excellent approximation.

Although the learned and worthy Jesuit antiquarian Athanasius Kircher (1602 – 1680) attracted derision and proposed nonsensical allegorical translations (*Lingua Aegyptical restituta*, 1643), he did stimulate matters Egyptian. However, even Thomas Young (1773 – 1829), author of the undulatory theory of light, who had assigned the correct phonetical values to five hieroglyphic signs, still maintained these alphabetical signs were written together with allegorical signs, which, according to him, still formed the bulk. Champollion, who had an excellent knowledge of Coptic (the last stage of Egyptian), proved the assumption of the allegorists wrong. Assisted by the so-called *Rosetta Stone* he showed that Egyptian (as in any other language) assigned phonetical values to signs, forming, as in Hebrew and Arabic, *consonantal structures*. He also discovered some were pictures merely indicating the *category* of the prior words, the so-called ‘determinatives,’ aiding in punctuation.

After Champollion died in 1832, the lead in egyptology passed to Germany (Richard Lepsius, 1810 – 1884). This Berlin school shaped Egyptian philology for the 19th and 20th centuries, in particular scholars such as Adolf Erman (1854 – 1937), Kurt Sethe (1869 – 1934), who, together with Francis Griffith (1862 – 1934), Battiscombe Gunn (1883 – 1950) and Alan Gardiner (1879 – 1963) in England, laid the systematic basis for the study of the Egyptian language in all its phases. Later, Jacob Polotsky (1905 – 1991) established the ‘standard theory’ of Egyptian grammar. Recently, James Peter Allen (°1945) revisited the language and reorganized the verbal forms of Early Egyptian, the language of the Old Kingdom (ca. 2670 – ca. 2198 BCE). These efforts made the historical record finally available to scholars of other disciplines. Still, they did not take away the difficulty of understanding the texts in their proper contexts.

Four long-standing prejudices have to be overcome :

(1) *monotheist prejudice* : the three religions ‘of the book’ (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have collectively demonized Pharaoh (the Great Crocodile who claimed to be a god) and are also partly responsible for the ‘sapiential’ and ‘magical’ aura surrounding things Egyptian. Strict monotheism denies God a second. By and large, the apologetic narrative is intended to show the superiority of monotheism over ‘polytheism’ and ‘magic.’ In *1 Kings*, we read : ‘Solomon was wiser than the wise men of the East or the wise men of Egypt.’ (4:30), whereas *Exodus* affirms that : ‘... the king called for his wise men and magicians, and by their magic, they did the same thing.’ (7:11). In *Matthew* (2:13-15), we learn how as a child Jesus escaped to Egypt (to the Alexandria of Philo Judaeus). No doubt that in the early dynasties, polytheism existed, but with Re, Amun, and Ptah, the New Kingdom (ca. 1539 – 1075 BCE) embraced henotheism.⁽¹⁾ Amun was one, hidden and millions.

(2) *Hermetical prejudice* : as soon as Ionian and Carian mercenaries, serving in the army of king Psammetichus I (664 – 610 BCE), were followed by ordinary travelers, the Greeks discovered Egypt and were impressed by its culture. These Ionian Greeks were hungry for knowledge and got influenced by Egyptian thought⁽²⁾ and sapiential teachings.⁽³⁾

(1) van den Dungen, W. : *On Henotheism*, 2004, at : sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/henotheism.htm

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Hermes the Egyptian*, 2002 and 2003, at : maat.sofiatopia.org/hermes1.htm and */hermes2.htm.

Fowden, G. : *The Egyptian Hermes*, Princeton University Press – Princeton, 1993.

(3) van den Dungen, W. : *The Scales of the Balance of Wisdom in Ancient Egyptian Sapiential Literature*, 2003, at : maat.sofiatopia.org/saa2.htm

The first observant visitors who wrote about Egypt were Hecataeus of Miletus (ca. 510 BCE) and Herodotus of Halicarnassus (ca. 484 – 430 BCE). A lot of what they wrote contained a kernel of truth, but this was presented in a distorted and exaggerated format. Herodotus was obsessed with the idea that the Hellenes derived from Egypt ! With the establishment of Greek supremacy under the Ptolemies, traditional Egyptian lore was withdrawn into the hands of the priesthood, who, to convey their special(ized) spiritual knowledge, over-emphasized the profound wisdom and ritualism of their ancestors and made the hieroglyphic signary explode (over 6000 signs cover the walls of Graeco-Roman temples). Egyptian Antiquity was recast by Hellenism (the same had happened to the Jewish people after the Babylonian Exile). Around 150 BCE, this confrontation between Egyptian religion (in its Late Period) and Greek culture produced *Alexandrian Hermetism*, a kind of Alexandrian ‘lodge’ or communal wisdom-teaching, cast in a religious format with adjacent magical practices. These Hermetics were small fish in the emergence of the vast network of cultural interactions that had opened up since Alexander the Great and the advent of the Ptolemaic Empire. Hermetism was most likely an elitist Alexandrian ‘gnostic’ lodge, composed of intellectual Greeks, Jews, and native Egyptians, pursuing the teaching of Hermes or Thoth. From the time of Julius Caesar, we possess longer accounts regarding Egypt and its language, such as in the *General History* of Diodorus Siculus, who visited Egypt briefly ca. 59 BCE. Also, the *Geographica* of Strabo of Pontus, who accompanied the prefect Gallus on an expedition as far as the First Cataract (ca. 24 – 25 CE), the *Historia Naturalis* of Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 CE), and the *Geography* of astrologer-astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus about 150 CE.

Since the Renaissance, Egyptian culture was identified with Hellenistic adaptations, particularly with Alexandrian Hermetism and its division in ‘learned’ and ‘vulgar’ or *philosophical* versus *technical* Hermetica. Hermetism was partly assimilated by Islam (through Harran and Sufism)⁽¹⁾ and, in the West, became part of the *Oriente Lumen*, which, in the 12th century, animated Christian Cistercian spirituality (cf. Bernardus of Clairvaux, William of St.Thierry, and others) and alchemy. Late Hellenistic Hermetism facilitated the invention of a fantastic and initiatic Egypt, tailored to Western and Christian tastes. Since the Renaissance, this European-styled Egypt or *egyptomania* became part of the Western Tradition, encompassing Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Theosophy, and all sorts of magical cults stretching far into the 20th century. These no longer represent Hermetism but Hermeticism⁽²⁾ ;

(3) *Hellenocentric prejudice* : although the *ad fontes* principle of the Renaissance claimed to focus on the Classical Period, it was indeed a return to Late Antiquity. Most classical philologists had (and have) a preference for the Greek way of thinking. They were (are) thus unable to understand the (ante-rational) patterns of thought of the Ancient Egyptians (cf. *infra*). They were not equipped to study human cognition (epistemology),⁽³⁾ nor could they gain from studies on the neurological conditions of cognition, with its human, mammalian, and reptilian levels.⁽⁴⁾

(1) van Bladel, K. : *The Arabic Hermes*, Oxford University Press – Oxford, 2009.

(2) Quispel, G. : *De Hermetische Gnosis in de loop der eeuwen*, Tirion – Baarn, 1992.

(3) van den Dungen, W. : *Regulae*, Taurus – Brasschaat, 2016.

(4) van den Dungen, W. : *A Philosophy of the Mind and its Brain*, 2009, at : neuro.sofiatopia.org/brainmind_philo.htm

MacLean, P. : *The Triune Brain in Evolution*, Plenum Press – New York, 1990.

These inadequacies still thrive in closed, phobic, and ‘modernist’ egyptological academic circles today. They are responsible for an *intellectual misconception* of Ancient Egyptian civilization, born out of lingering Europacentrism (called ‘Humanism’) and atheist positivism blind to the essence : the role of the divine king and the existence of the pantheon. Because of this, the influence of Egyptian thought on Greek philosophy and culture and Christianity, in which it got partly integrated, has not yet been fully noticed and explored. Although the ‘out of Africa’ hypothesis is indeed too extreme, the co-formative influence of Egyptian civilization on the formation of Judaism, Graeco-Roman culture, and Early Christianity is unmistakable.⁽¹⁾

(4) *Atheist prejudice* : in contemporary Western centers of higher learning, materialism, and atheism, the former’s adjacent probable is, although built on outdated objectivistic epistemologies, nevertheless fashionable. Because everything is deemed material, i.e., aggregates of physical particles, waves, fields, and their natural forces, traditional concepts as ‘spirit,’ ‘soul,’ ‘mind’ and ‘consciousness’ (and their adjacent cultures) are reduced to epiphenomena of physical processes (physicalism). The mind is not processed or computed by the brain but produced by it. Religion is not the expression of the Divine,⁽²⁾ but a superstructure enabling the higher

(1) Bernal, M. : *Black Athena*, Rutgers University Press – New Jersey, 1987.
Lefkowitz, M. : *Not Out of Africa : How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*, Basic Books – New York, 1996.

Lefkowitz, M. & MacLean, R. : *Black Athena Revisited*, University of North Carolina Press – Chapel Hill, 1996.

Bernal, M. : *Black Athena Writes Back*, Duke University Press – London, 2001.

James, G.G.M. : *Stolen Legacy*, Africa World Press – Trenton, 1992.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Does the Divine exist ? Prolegomena to a possible Religious Philosophy*, 2005, at : sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/divine.htm.

classes to oppress the workers (Marxism), the projection of a fear (Feuerbach), or sublimation of instinctual drives (Freud). Hence, both the Divine and the afterlife are rejected as primitive visions. It resulted from a lack of knowledge of the underlying physical causes. Matter and the physical universe have no purpose (cf. *telos, causa finalis*). Evolution is thus random, and intelligent design is rejected. Mathematicians have called this the replacement of the ‘miracle of God’ by the ‘miracle of numbers,’ for the calculated probability of evolution being random is extremely small (cf. the weak anthropic principle in cosmology).⁽¹⁾

In egyptology, atheist prejudice spells disaster. No other civilization of Antiquity was more occupied with the Divine and the afterlife than the Egyptians. Indeed, there is nothing more compelling and present in Kemetic studies than religion, ritual, magic, and what happens after death (cf. mummification). So in terms of method, atheism works as a *blocking device*, especially if faith in the Divine is considered silly, and that of the ‘primitive’ Ancient Egyptians even more so. The critical attitude, not dogmatic nor skeptic, does not *a priori* deny the possible existence of the Divine, albeit as gods and goddesses. It accepts the possibility but does not fill it in beforehand. This openness to *what may be* remains opposed to the fashionable show-down of the ‘muddled’ religiosity of the Ancient Egyptians. Atheists are skeptics, i.e., dogmatic thinkers in disguise. *Affirming* what is *not* supposed to exist, they often (by reversal) position themselves as closed and dogmatic.

(1) Pennock, R.T. : *Intelligent Design Creationism and its Critiques*, MIT – Cambridge, 2001.

Towards a Critical Anthropology

‘The foremost Egyptologist of our time, John Romer, has made the observation that everyone brings their own interpretation of ancient Egypt with them. He had worked with archaeologists from three different nations, America, England, and Germany, and each had a different Egypt. Like the elephant and the seven blind men, *Egypt is too enormous for a single point of view.*’⁽¹⁾ Indeed, ‘What we call history is a pale reconstruction of the actual events of the past. We make models of what we think happened, and frequently we confuse our models with reality. The fact is that our models, particularly those concerning the remote past, are no more accurate than a *papier-mâché* model of a jet engine. We have the rough outlines but lack insight into the essentials. This statement becomes truer the farther back we go in time.’⁽²⁾ However, ‘No other civilization, modern or ancient, has successfully maintained a coherent and as evenly sustained a cultural identity as the peoples of ancient Egypt. Even China is three thousand years younger.’⁽³⁾ This brings us to the question of the radical tension between, on the one hand, an *evolutionary* and *normative* (idealist) perspective on culture (from Plato to Tylor) and, on the other hand, the empiricism and positivism of the descriptive realist, leading to *cultural relativism* (from Hume, Boas, Benedict, Herskovits to Rorty). Can *critical anthropology* bridge this divide?

(1) Wheeler, R.L. : *Walk like an Egyptian*, Wildside Press – New Jersey, 2002, p.26, my italics.

(2) Feuerstein, G., Kak, S. & Frawley, D. : *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization*, Quest – Madras, 1995, p.3.

(3) Wheeler, R.L. : *Op.cit.*, 2002, p.26.

The Greeks have been credited for accomplishing the transition from myth to *logos*, from ante-rationality to formal reason. By doing so, human activity could be divorced from any association with the natural realm (*physis*). Especially the Sophists defined a clear distinction between this natural order and the law (*nomos*). Morality was no longer embedded in a ‘sacred’ mythical context determining it but merely defined by humans. This anthropocentrism (cf. Protagoras) made Sophist education (*paideia*) independent of a transcendent standard. It was seen by some (like Plato) as contributing to individualism, relativism, caprice, and uncertainty. For what then is the right action leading to virtue (*aretè*), the self-accomplishment of man thanks to knowing what is right? How can this be realized *without* a transcendent principle holding in all cases? For Plato, philosophy allowed one to ascend to this absolute truth and know by remembering (*anamnesis*) the ‘essence’ (*eidos*) of things. As in Ionian thought, this transcendent truth was also situated in nature. Now the latter is divided into two different ontological strata (*chorismos*) : Becoming (immanent) versus Being (transcendent), the former considered a pale, shadowy reflection of the latter. Genuine *paideia* is not a training in sophistry, but *a turn of mind towards this true nature of things*, a liberation from the realm of shadows (*Republic*, Book VII). Philosophy is the highest form of this education. It leads to knowing what constitutes this transcendent realm of being, namely the Ideas organized around the supreme Idea, namely the Idea of the Good (*agathon*). He surmounts the relativism of anthropocentrism by making man again subservient to a transcendent, cosmic order, namely that of the realm of Being. Educating man to actualize the Idea of the Good is the core of Plato’s message. Philosophy is *paideia*, gaining awareness of the Ideas as the essence of reality, the ultimate fulfillment of human nature ; attaining virtue. Without

the transcendent standard given by the Ideas, nothing can be gained except individualism undermining any attempt to devise an objective definition of virtue and so of goodness.

This Platonic view will impact the Hellenistic world and, via the Romans influence the Renaissance, merely returning to Late Hellenism. In this way, the Platonic *paideia* will become a foundational concept of modern civil society. Cicero gave us its Latin equivalent : *cultura animi philosophia est* ('philosophy is the culture of the soul'). The activity of cultivating something, namely the mind and its functions, refers to how a human ought to educate himself to become an excellent, prosperous, and civilized member of society. Hence, 'culture' is a *normative* concept, allowing one to *value* human activity (axiology). Culture with capital 'C' was the culture-ideal of Antiquity.

While during the Middle Ages, this ideal concept of culture did not change, in the 16th and 17th centuries, it became the foundational concept defining 'civilization.' This modernization of the concept of culture by a civil society emerging from the ruins of the feudal world, implied a *reconstruction* of the history of humanity, understood as the process of a natural advance caused by human effort and skill. When these merchants and craftsmen (formerly part of the lowest social stratum of feudal society) became the top social class, the *bourgeoisie*, i.e., a society of traders, the concept 'civil society' became common (cf. Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* of 1767 and Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* of 1776). A few decades later, Hegel defined '*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*' decisively (cf. *Philosophie des Rechts*, 1821, §§ 182-256). The emergence of this civil society facilitated the development of the economy by

eliminating all links with non-economical factors ; the economy began to dominate all aspects of human life.

In the feudal society, history was viewed as a process led by Divine Providence directed to a final goal (*eschaton*). This notion was profaned by the sobriety of the bourgeoisie, proposing a natural advancement instead of an eschatological one. It implied a *desacralization of nature* by science and the *mechanization of the worldview*. The era in which civil society developed this profane view on nature and society is dubbed ‘the Enlightenment.’ In France, this led to a universal history of the human spirit. In Scotland, to an interest in the natural history of civil society, while in Germany a ‘*Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit*’ was at hand. These approaches advanced a new concept of culture, one defined as the *reconstruction of the history of humanity*.

An objective definition of culture was formulated by Herder (1744 – 1803), who identified ‘culture’ (*Kultur*) as education (*Bildung*), as the process of humanization, cultivation, and civilization, and finally, as a certain phase of this process. In his approach, culture equals ‘*Aufklärung*.’ The normative and descriptive meanings of ‘culture’ are not separated. Tylor (1832 – 1917) will shift emphasis from culture as individual education to the development of humanity as a whole : ‘Culture or Civilization, in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.’⁽¹⁾

(1) Tylor, E.B. : *Primitive Culture*, 1871, I.1.

Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) intends to shape a 'science of culture' based on the idea of evolution, rooted in what was discovered by prehistory, geology, and biology (i.e., by 'positive' sciences). He sought to develop a 'natural history of civil society.' He rejected the Catholic idea man was created civilized by God (the Edenic state) and then degenerated (the Fall). Instead, degenerationism is replaced by *developmentalism*. Man is an evolving primate who brought about modern civilization based on his powers in a continuous process of education and improvement of his ideas and tools. Just as Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871), Tylor's *Primitive Culture* rejects Christian orthodoxy and attacks a 'theology of history' by positive, scientific facts. For him, anthropology is an empirical study of the cultural history of humanity, aiming to identify the laws expressing the constant causes of this process. He is primarily interested in the relationship between 'savage to civilized life' (I.21). He seeks to identify the 'connexion between modern culture and the condition of the rudest savage' (I.159). His approach is based on three presuppositions : (a) the mental and so cultural unity of humanity, (b) the ability to compare contemporary 'primitive' societies with the cultures of prehistory, and (c) the presence of 'survivals' of early cultural phases in modern societies. These vestiges of past views surviving in later generations as superstitions need eradication to speed up the age of reason.

As empiricist and positivist, Tylor does not reflect on the limitations of knowledge and, in tune with the tradition of the 18th century, only uses the word 'culture' in the singular. Culture has a normative, evaluating function. While he accepts the cultural achievements of the 'lower races' and stresses the continuity between them and the civil society, he does not deem all cultures of the same worth, and, as a

representative of the ‘enlightened’ English bourgeoisie, is convinced of the superiority of Western civilization, for ‘... the general tenor of the evidence goes far to justify the view that on the whole civilised man is not only wiser and more capable than the savage, but also better and happier, and that the barbarian stands between’ (I.31). So, anthropology is a science of reform, discovering the traces of the primitive, the religious ‘survivals’ of animism. It is an investigation into the ‘relation of primitive to modern civilization’ (I.529), unmasking these survivals of the past, thereby furthering the rationality of civil society. Thus, the ‘idealist’ heritage of the Platonic *paideia* is still interested in developing consciousness, intellect, knowledge, and religion.

Moreover, this normative evolutionism interpreted its data in Europacentric terms and organized it in terms of its civil ideal of culture ; it is ethnocentric. While empiricist and positivist, there is no reflection on the conditions of knowledge itself. While far more ‘empiricist’ than Plato, Tylor does retain the notion of the superiority of the bourgeoisie and its ‘instrumental’ and ‘strategic’ rationality rooted in the Industrial Revolution.

In the first half of the 20th century, a radical empiricist reaction against speculative philosophies of evolutionists like Tylor develops. Is one able to reconstruct the complete history of human culture ? Probably not. However, suppose one does try to formulate generalizations regarding human culture (its dynamics and laws). In that case, the first thing needed is more facts, at best unimpeded by premature theoretical connotations. Anthropologists and sociologists become conscious that the evolutionists were Europacentric, turning Western civilization into a universal standard. The need to study other cultures without prejudices and with great

openness and tolerance becomes essential. This empiricist orientation will bring the practice of participant observation to the fore. For the first time, the word ‘culture’ becomes plural, pointing to the end of Tylor’s universal evolutionary process. The stern opposition against this ‘idealist’ evolutionary view is strongly present in American anthropology. In the empiricist and relativist anthropology of Franz Boas (1858 – 1942), one is conscious of the cultural and historical determinants of human thought, behaviors, and even perception. Indeed, the relation between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ world differs from culture to culture, implying a pluralist and particularist approach, a ‘historical particularism’ opposing the historical universalism of the 19th century. Boas does not trust generalizations, and he emphasizes the role of objective descriptions of other cultures. His extreme empiricist stance deters him from erecting a synthetic picture. ‘Boasian nominalism’ (Lévy-Strauss), not unlike Hume’s rejection of indirect synthetic propositions,⁽¹⁾ leads to the self-destruction of its empiricism. Scientific generalizations of other cultures are impossible ; they are but reflections of one’s own. Because we participate in our own culture, we do not feel its limitations. So the only general conclusion possible is to affirm *the relative value of all forms of culture*. The pressure of tradition and the power culture holds over human beings leads to the thesis of the total culture-dependence of the individual. ‘Absolute systems of phenomena as complex as those of culture are impossible. They will always be reflections of our own culture.’⁽²⁾

(1) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of Lemmas*, Taurus – Brasschaat, 2016, pp.97-101.

(2) Boas, F. : *Race, Language, Culture*, Macmillan – New York, 1940, p.311.

So while for Tylor, ‘culture’ was the process of man’s enlightenment and advance thanks to rationality and creativity, American anthropology will define culture as *that which binds* the individual to the tradition and the irrational. Suppose Tylor, in his Platonizing approach, understood culture as a means to self-liberate humanity (with Western civilization at the apex). In that case, Boas identifies the historical particularism of each culture and *man’s bondage to his many cultures*. What was once a notion freeing man from the blind weight of tradition became a burden, ‘and that burden was seen as functional to the continuing daily existence of individuals in any culture and at every level of civilization.’⁽¹⁾ For Boas’ pupil, Ruth Benedict (1887 – 1948) cultural relativism is the next step. In *Patterns of Culture* (1934), studying the cultures of the Zuñi, Dobu, and Kwakiutl, she deems every culture to be a unique totality of which the whole is more than the sum of the parts. This *configuratio* is motivated and carried by a dominating style, pattern, or genius. Nobody observes the world ‘with pristine eyes’⁽²⁾ As the purposes and values of a particular culture are multiple and incomparable, a call for tolerance regarding the differences in systems of value is justified. Benedict pleads for recognizing the relativity of what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ behavior of individuals in a given culture and the recognition of the relativity of cultures as a whole. An absolute definition of morality will handicap our approach to ethical problems. Likewise, we should not identify our local, nominal situation with the inevitable necessities of existence when dealing with human society.

(1) Stocking, G. : *Race, Culture & Evolution*, Free Press – New York, 1968, p.227.

(2) Benedict, R. : *Patterns of Culture*, Mentor – New York, p.18.

Melvin Herskovits (1895 – 1936), another member of the school of Boas, defined the term ‘enculturation.’ In their education, each individual becomes part of the culture in which they are born learns to acquire dominant cognitive and behavioral patterns. This enculturation is *conditioning*, causing one’s behavior to be mediated by that culture. Hence, the way individuals perceive and judge differs from culture to culture. Based on this relationship between individual and culture, he defines cultural relativism. ‘This principle (of cultural relativism) is, briefly stated, as follows : Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation.’⁽¹⁾

Cultural relativism implies that there are no universal judgments of value. Cultures can and should only be judged from and by themselves. Hence, ethnocentrism is impossible, and other cultures deserve tolerance, leading to a peaceful co-existence of the cultures of humanity, fostering a global society. For Herskovits, cultural relativism is foremost an ethical relativism, for moral values are all culturally bound. Hence, there are no universal moral principles, only those that hold in the context of a given cultural setting. *Ethical ethnocentrism*, imposing the values of a dominant society on another culture (cf. the colonial West), is to be rejected.

Instead of liberating itself from tradition, cultural relativism proved civil society to be *determined by its history* and led to *historical relativism*, the autodestruction of historical consciousness itself.

(1) Herskovits, M. : *Man and His Works*, Knopf – New York, 1967, p.63.

The ‘idealism’ of Tylor does not involve a rejection of the importance of sense data, as in traditional rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza), for he embraced the ‘optimist’ positivism of August Comte (1798 – 1857), accepting an *unproblematic* relationship between what is observed and the language in which this observation is cast (the factual propositions).

Two problems ensue (1) Tylor’s limited set of referential sciences backing his ‘science of culture’ and (2) the fact the study of prehistory, biology, and geology stood in its infancy. Positivism had not yet entered its more mature phase, one in which relativism and skepticism raised their heads. While for Comte, factual, ‘positive’ science assists in rationalizing the history of the human comprehensively, Max Weber (1864 – 1920) denied the possibility to identify the *value* or *sense* of the rationalizations made by societies. His ‘valueless’ sociology postpones articulating any proposition involving these (no axiology). Only then is it possible, according to Weber, to maintain a sense of *objectivity* in sociological inquiries. However, does this position in itself not imply value ?

In Tylor’s evolutionary anthropology, the set of data gotten from science, making it possible to articulate (by induction) the *universal* characteristics of the *process* of culture, and then deduce ‘ideal’ constructions, used to *evaluate* the degree of culture of a society, are *not* critically investigated. Culture is *singular* and involves a ‘*Bildung*’ ranging from primitive to barbaric and ending in civilized, with European civilization at the forefront. His *ethnocentric* anthropological idealism is unaware of its own colonial and Europacentric preconceptions and projects on the data it wants to find. When some phenomenon exists beyond the periphery of the ‘ideal’ context of European values, it is deemed a

‘survival’ of animism to be eliminated. This ethnocentrism then acts as a method to ‘purge’ outdated *survivals*, thereby aiding in establishing and maintaining the European bourgeoisie and its instrumental and strategic rationality of the *homo economicus*, keeping it ‘pure’ from irrationality. It also serves as justification for its colonialism and brutal eradication of native cultures deemed ‘primitive’ and *thus* in dire need of (colonial) reeducation and civilization (in European terms) ...

The ‘realism’ of the members of the school of Boas is empiricism avoiding the problem of inductive reasoning (for logically, one cannot jump from a *limited* set of data to a *general* proposition) and turns to an *empirical particularism* rejecting any attempt to investigate a culture ‘with pristine eyes’ (Benedict). This particularism reminds of David Hume, who rejected *indirect* synthetic propositions and so was left with propositions informing us about *what is only directly observable*, a procedure eventually leading to skepticism, for if only the particular, the contextual, the immediate is of interest, no totalizing universals regarding the world and man can be rationally established. So although these anthropologists embrace a refined and particularised form of empiricism, they do not accept a generalizing realism in the study of cultural processes. As a result, *radical* relativism ensues, skeptical about any attempt to escape the horizon of the anthropologist’s culture! The ‘absoluteness’ and ‘radical’ nature of this relativism is, however, self-defeating. If everything is relative, then the proposition affirming this cannot escape being relative itself, thereby overturning absolute relativism.

This logical fallacy can be clearly identified in Herskovits’ *all-encompassing* impact of culture on the individual.

Cultural determinism is controversial, for, besides culture, there are *other* determinants of human behavior : biological, economic, psychological, social, artistic (creative), and spiritual factors. Moreover, why would an individual be unable to transcend their own culture ? If so, then anthropology would be tautological, for the anthropologists would be able to do nothing more than projecting the values of their own culture upon other cultures. It would make any *genuine* communication between members of different cultures *a priori* impossible, a position defeated by the fact cultures have been interacting since the beginning of the Neolithic (10,000 BCE), and precisely thanks to this, flourished.

Suppose anthropology wants to be possible and honestly inform. In that case, it must be possible to, to a significant degree, free oneself from one's cultural conditioning. If a science of man is within reach, then it must be possible to, in a relative way, 'bracket' parts of the cultural context of the scientists. If not, anthropology and the other sciences are impossible (cf. the Humean skepticism disturbing Kant's sleep). As cultural conditioning cannot be eliminated from the rational mind, uncertainty, incompleteness, and noise *to a certain degree* always infect any conceptual, empirico-formal proposition. Science is not equipped to establish absolute objectivity, for its discursive, conceptual mode of cognition remains (inter)subjectively connotated. Science is the humble pursuit of conceptual, conventional truth (or valid empirico-formal propositions), aware of the fragility of our theories regarding the tenacity of the facts.

Finally, cultural relativism silently accepts that because certain propositions are generated within the horizon of a given culture, they must be *a priori* valid within this context *only*. However, the validity of a

proposition does not depend on its *genesis* but on the validating theory of truth. The latter does not necessarily rely on the culture in which it appears but can be valued using logical and epistemological necessities. As these define the possibility and advance of knowledge itself (cf. Kant's transcendental '*Factum Rationis*'), they escape the context of the culture of the epistemologists. The latter reflectively discover them in what scientists have been doing and do in their *actual research* (testing and experimenting, regulated by the idea of correspondence) and their *actual discourse* (inventing, brain-storming, arguments, theorizing, and publicizing, regulated by the idea of consensus).

Herskovits intends to identify the *limitations* of our capacity to articulate judgments. While pointing to the perimeter of our ability to know is part of a critical stance (cf. Kant), his panoptic approach to cultural relativism is not. For if true, it is pointless, for only valid for members of Western culture. Moreover, claiming the thesis is *universally* valid invalidates it, for it denies what it posits, namely the cultural dependency of propositions, i.e., the *particularism* of all possible knowledge. Suppose the all-encompassing impact of our cultural conditioning is dismissed, and some universal propositions are accepted. In that case, the *radical* nature of cultural relativism is overturned, and, thanks to deconditioning and de-automatisation (Deikman), significant parts of our cultural horizon may be transcended. Instead of denying any form of universal knowledge, one embraces the fact certain propositions are indeed universally valid.

In the critical tradition, these touch upon the three fundamental questions already posed by Kant : 'What can I know ?' (epistemology), 'What ought I to do ?' (ethics), and 'What may I hope ?' (aesthetics).

Inspired by Newton, Kant (1724 – 1804) tried to answer the first question by looking for synthetic propositions *a priori*.⁽¹⁾ Contemporary criticism is no longer foundational and deterministic but nominalist and probabilist. It accepts the distinction between *a priori* ‘statute law’ (theory) and *a posteriori* ‘case law’ (application). The former is *universal* (*a priori* principles and norms of knowledge), the latter *particular* (*a posteriori* maxims of concrete action in a given research context).⁽²⁾

Critical epistemology identifies the universal conditions or rules of the possibility of knowledge and its expansion. These rules of the language game ‘science’ are principles, norms, and maxims scientists have been using and use all the time. Without which knowledge itself cannot be thought. Likewise, ethics and aesthetics are ruled by *transcendental principles*, which cannot be denied for use in the denial itself. It overturns *radical* cultural relativism, but not relativism itself. It remains the case that culture co-defines knowledge, but this does not preclude the possibility of transcending cultural conditioning *to a certain degree*. So when the extremes of both positions are left, both the universalism of Tylor as the particularism of Boas may integrate. Criticism, probing truth, beauty, and goodness, discloses the *normative rules* making science, art, and morality possible. Principles cannot be rejected without using them. Norms have to be accepted to avoid epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics to turn dogmatic, reducing or eliminating the known, as in ontological idealism, or doing so with the knower, as in ontological realism.

(1) Synthetic propositions *a priori* convey facts valid all the time and everywhere. Newton built his ‘complete,’ ‘consistent,’ and ‘deterministic’ world with them.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of Lemmas*, 2016, pp.102-110.

A criticism of the evolutionary, universalist, and the relativist, particularist view on anthropology unmask these perspectives as the two opposite extremes of the ‘essential tension’⁽¹⁾ between idealism and realism. Between, on the one hand, an emphasis on an ‘ideal’ at the expense of reality (mentalism, spiritualism) and, on the other hand, stress on the ‘real’ at the cost of ideality, mentality, and sentience (materialism, physicalism, instrumentalism).⁽²⁾ A critical middle ground provides the demarcations between universal (*a priori*) and particular (*a posteriori*), between valid and invalid scientific empirico-formal propositions of fact, between science (testable and arguable) and metaphysics (untestable, arguable speculation about what exists) and between immanent (the totality of existence) and transcendent metaphysics (the infinity of existence). These assist critical anthropology. Neither Europacentric nor ethnocentric nor relativistic to the point of despair and powerlessness, it is an approach to culture avoiding the prejudices of ethnocentrism, positivism, materialism, and idealism. It does not exalt European civilization, nor deems all cultures to be equal, thereby eliminating the possibility of valuing them⁽³⁾ or considering the process of human civilization. A model of the ‘ideal culture’ becomes within reach. It is probably never realized by any ‘actual culture .’ it serves as a regulative ideal to be approached, perhaps even always ...

(1) Kuhn, T.S. : *The Essential Tension*, Chicago University Press – Chicago, 1977.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of Lemmas*, 2016, pp.51-170, and also *Critico-synthesis* (2006) at : sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/criticosynthesis.htm

(3) based on their measure of productivity, ecological adaptation, internal integration, adaptation to human nature and measure of rationality – Lemaire, T. : *Over de waarde van kulturen*, Ambo – Baarn, 1976 ; other criteria may be added, like the measure of beauty or the measure of the spirituality of a culture.

A Critical Approach to Ancient Egypt

Egyptology, emerging in the 19th century, got caught in the tension between a Europacentric and a relativistic view on Ancient Egyptian civilization. Embracing one extreme, some early egyptologists, influenced by the ethnocentrism of Tylor and C°, deemed Kemet ‘primitive’ and its literary works a confused and unintelligible amalgam, proving the lack of rationality and the cultivation of irrationalism. On the other side of the argument, we find cultural relativists who plunge into the particularism of the empirical data and reject any universalization of what happened in Dynastic Egypt between 3000 and 30 BCE. ‘The difference between the image of Egypt informing premodern and modern Egyptology rests first on the rejection of the biblical, Greek, Latin, and other testimonies on ancient Egyptian culture, whose value as sources was greatly diminished by the discovery of an abundance of Egyptian testimonies, and second on an *interpretative abstinence* that had already distinguished the antiquarianism of the sixteenth to eighteenth century and was elevated to a principle by the positivism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.’⁽¹⁾ As understanding the Egyptian language took more time than expected, generalizing propositions about Ancient Egyptian culture were often found prejudiced. In the second half of the 19th century, a history of the development of the Ancient Egyptian mind was deemed impossible (Burckhardt, 1868). In this early stage of egyptology, Egypt remained alien and remote. This situation lasted until a more empirical approach overcame Europacentrism, bringing along new problems.

(1) Assmann, J. : *The Mind of Egypt*, Holt - New York, 2002, p.432-433, my italics.

‘... modern egyptology is essentially nothing other than the triumph of antiquarianism over the image of Egypt that had been operative for so long in the cultural memory of the west. The fascination with hieroglyphics, the “deistic” quest for a natural religion – both were now jettisoned as a huge misunderstanding.’⁽¹⁾

In the last decades, technological advances, digitalization, new linguistic insights, epistemological studies, new translations, and detailed archaeological research enabled Egyptologists to grasp Ancient Egypt less tentatively. However, a complete, detailed picture is still lacking and will probably ever be. However, presently, more can be known about the Old Kingdom than about the Archaic Greeks ! A more coherent picture emerged thanks to the efforts of scholars like Lichtheim, Allen, Assmann, Hornung, Morenz, Sauneron, and others. ‘Where our poets chart the possible and impossible, and scientists chase the dream of the exact, of certainties, the historian faces the task of assessing *the most probable*. (...) Our datings for the late Middle Kingdom depend not on grouping names of kings alone but more solidly on a vast bank of data, such as typologies of coffins, analyses of alloys in metals, studies of handwriting, and study of archaeological finds in stratigraphic sections on excavation. Taken together, these widely varying source materials provide support of a “most probable” timeline. The reader needs only to remember that a single discovery tomorrow could drastically change the entire carefully elaborated construction we have made of ancient time.’⁽¹⁾

(1) Assmann, J. : *The Mind of Egypt*, 2002, p.432-433.

(2) Quirke, S. : *The Cult of Ra*, Thames & Hudson – London, 2001, p.12, my italics.

Both Europacentrist evolutionists, as those embracing radical relativism, rooted their outlook on sense-data in *positivism*. At the start of the 20th century, this became logical positivism, accepting science as a ‘privileged’ language game, enabling establishing objectivity by eliminating all subjective factors (cf. Carnap). Accepting Newtonian determinism is over (only probabilism prevails) and understanding why even perception is co-determined by theoretical connotations. Contemporary forms of empiricism and realism are often still uncritical, i.e., maintaining some direct contact with ‘reality-as-it-is’ is possible (Popper), and this while critical investigation precludes it. Without fully embracing the critical answer, empiricism is self-defeating and risks falling into a particularism shunning generalism. In Ancient Egypt, this is further complicated by the fact that this was a truly religious society. Since Marx, Feuerbach, Comte, Tylor, and Freud, the presence of religion became problematic, a ‘survival’ of earlier, ‘irrationalist’ stages of civilization, one to be eradicated if the rationality of civil society is to reach its ultimate expression (sic)! ‘The religious literature cannot be understood without some sympathy for the outlook of its authors. But this is what modern scholars have found most difficult. (...) The rationalistic and slightly contemptuous objectivity of the traditional Orientalist can no longer be upheld in this field.’⁽¹⁾ Especially any form of contempt should be eradicated from the mind of the historian of Ancient Egypt. Interpreting the fact of Kemet’s overall concern with religion and the afterlife as a sign of its retarded culture conflicts with an open, critical perspective.

(1) Clark, R.T.R. : *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, Thames & Hudson – London, 1959, pp.12-13.

The Genetico-Cognitive Model

The ‘Copernican Revolution’⁽¹⁾ refers to the shift in philosophical attention away from theocentric metaphysics to issues related to human knowledge. In the system of the world of Copernicus, the Earth revolves around the Sun, while before him, the opposite was held to be true. The traditional supremacy of the object of knowledge was left behind ; the reflecting, active subject now became central. Epistemology precedes ontology. Modernism, ending Medieval philosophy, was ushered in by René Descartes (1596 – 1650) and climaxed as the *Critique of Pure Reason* of Kant (1724 – 1804). This leads to criticism, the normative and strict nominalist effort to demarcate valid from invalid propositions, distinguishing between science and metaphysics based on a rational theory of knowledge, explaining how knowledge and its progress are possible.⁽²⁾ The ‘epistemological turn’ of the last century resulted in ‘propounding a philosophical theory of what knowledge is and then requiring all other philosophical and scientific claims to be formulated in accordance with the principle and terminology of that theory.’⁽³⁾ We first need to know *what we can know*. Criticism is the radical appreciation of this question : ‘What can I know ?’ (Kant).

(1) Kuhn, T.S. : *The Copernican Revolution*, HUP – Cambridge, 1985.

(2) Oger, E. : *Kennis en Waarheid : Een poging tot confrontatie van de epistemologieën van K. Popper en J. Habermas*, KUL – Leuven, 1976.

van den Dungen, W. : *Kennis*, 1995 : sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/nkennis.htm

van den Dungen, W. : *Criticosynthesis*, 2008 : sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/criticosynthesis.htm

van den Dungen, W. : *Book of Lemmas*, 2016.

van den Dungen, W. : *Regulae*, 2016.

(3) Westphal, K.R. : *Hegel’s Epistemological Realism*, Kluwer Academic Publishers – Dordrecht, 1989, p.101.

Critical epistemology investigates the *possibility* and *development* of conceptual knowledge, considering the ‘fact of reason’, the ‘*Factum Rationis*’ (Kant), as a given. Whether something *precedes* conceptual cognition, or if anything *exceeds* reason, has foremost remained outside focus, except in the East. Since Greek concept-realism,⁽¹⁾ reason and its abstract concepts stand at the forefront. Are there stages of cognitive development earlier than reason, at work before the arrival of a functional formal system of mental operators ? Can it function along with intuition ? While part of the philosophical discourse since Pythagoras and Plato, feeding the creativity of metaphysical speculation about totality and infinity, intuition was ostracized from science, except perhaps in its inventive, heuristic moments (of creative theory-formation).

In the 20th century, it became clear that our cognitive system undergoes several stages of development. Genetical epistemology was born. Conceptual cognition was found to be *preceded* by earlier, less conceptual, but enduring strata ! Children and so-called ‘primitive’ societies evidenced an approach to a reality different from what rationality and its formal schemes proposed. Genetical epistemology tried to define these by characterizing how, in these early stages, cognition operates.

The champion of this line of action was Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980). He studied children worldwide and formulated a new take on cognitive growth. In the same line, Lawrence Kohlberg (1927 – 1987) empirically showed how moral growth is also stage-bound, while Abraham Maslow

(1) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of Lemmas*, 2016, pp.75-82.

(1908 – 1970), investigating the human motivation, came to his hierarchy of needs, comprising a six-tiered model of needs : biological and physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization, and self-realization needs.⁽¹⁾ A meta-model was derived elsewhere.⁽²⁾

In Piaget's theory on cognitive development, two general functional principles (invariants), rooted in biology, are postulated : *organization* and *adaptation*. Organization implies the tendency common to all forms of life to integrate (physical and psychological) structures into higher-order systems. Adaptation (to be divided into assimilation and accommodation) shows how the individual not only modifies cognitive structures in reaction to demands (external) but also uses his structures to incorporate elements of the environment (internal). Organisms tend toward equilibrium with their milieu. Centration, decentration (crisis), and re-equilibration are the fundamental processes forcing the cognitive texture of humans to change and complexity. Mental operators result from the *interiorization* and *centration* of this ongoing cognitive evolution, generating an archaic sense of identity.

(1) Piaget, J. : *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, University of Chicago Press – Chicago, 1949.

Piaget, J. : *Biologie et Connaissance*, Collection Idées – Paris, 1967.

Piaget, J. : *Le Structuralisme*, PUF – Paris, 1970.

Piaget, J. : *The Development of Thought*, Oxford University Press – Oxford, 1978.

Kohlberg, L., *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, Harper & Row – San Francisco, 1981.

Maslow, A.H. : *A Theory of Human Motivation*, 1943, pp.370-396.

Maslow, A.H. : *Critique of Self-Actualization Theory*, in : Hoffman, E., *Future visions : The unpublished papers of Abraham Maslow*, Sage – Thousand Oaks, 1996, pp.26–32.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Het Open Hart*, 2015, p.185.

van den Dungen, W. : *In Togetherness*, 2018.

After prolonged exposure to new types of action –challenging the established original centration and equilibrium– a crisis ensues, and decentration is the outcome. Eventually, because a higher-order equilibrium was found through auto-regulation (*autopoiesis*), a re-equilibration occurs. Over time, different strands, levels, layers, or planes of cognitive texture unfold :

- (1) repeated confrontations with a novel action involve motor functions (original, initial coordination of actions) ;
- (2) action-reflection or the interiorization of this novel action using semiotic factors : this is the first level of permanency, the so-called ‘pre-concepts’ which have no decontextualized use ;
- (3) using these pre-concepts, anticipation, and retro-action happen. Concrete concepts emerge. These are valid insofar as they symbolize the original action, but always concerning the initial context ;
- (4) the final level of permanency : formal concepts rise. They are valid *independent* of the context of the original action and trigger the formation of permanent cognitive (abstract) operators.

In this way, and based on his experimental work with children worldwide, Piaget defined four layers of cognitive growth :

- (1) sensori-motor cognition, from birth until two years of age ;
- (2) pre-operational cognition (2 – 6) ;
- (3) concrete operatoric cognition (7 – 10) ;
- (4) formal-operatoric cognition (10 – 13).

‘One important aspect of cognitive development is the appearance of the *semiotic function*. This refers to the fact that from 2 to 4 years the child begins to develop the ability to make something –a mental symbol, a

word, or an object – stand for or represent something else which is not present.’⁽¹⁾ The first three levels of Piaget correspond with ‘ante-rationality,’ the three stages of cognition *preceding* the advent of rationality (formal and critical cognition). Indeed, formal-operatoric cognition is identical with formal reason, the conceptual cognition used by science and philosophy. Also, when formal cognition reflects upon itself, transcendental or critical thinking emerges, the highest stage of reason.

In *Le Structuralisme* (1970), Piaget defines ‘structure’ as a system of transformations abiding by specific laws and sustaining or enriching itself by a *play* of these transformations, occurring *without external* factors. The auto-structuration of a complete whole is defined as ‘auto-regulation.’ In the individual, the latter is established by biological rhythms, biological and mental regulations, and mental operations. These are theoretically formalized. Piaget refuses to accept that ‘real’ dialectical tensions between physical objects are the ‘true’ foundations of thought and cognition (its possibility, genesis, and progressive development). Contrary to most other types of psychologies and pedagogies attuned to realism and materialism, he never fills in what reality is like and maintains no ontological view on reality-as-such, considered the borderline of both the developing subject and its *objective world, stage after stage*.

Cognitive activity is approached as a *process* that grows in developmental steps, each step calling for a particular cognitive texture on the subject’s side. What reality is, is left open, for every objective

(1) Ginsburg, H. & Opper, S. : *Piaget’s theory of intellectual development*, Prentice-Hall – New Jersey, 1979, my italics.

observation implies an observer bound by the limitations of a given stage of cognitive development, i.e., a subjective epistemic form containing personal, opportunistic, and particularized information. This form works like Kantian categories but without the latter's universal, foundational intent. Neither did Piaget choose a strictly transcendental approach. Conditions existing *before* cognition itself (like in Foucault) are not introduced. The cognitive act is always at the helm.

What Popper called the 'problem-solving' ability of man may be associated with Piaget's 're-equilibration.' In this dynamical and actional anthropology and psychology, Piaget introduced : activity, regulation, crisis, and re-equilibration (auto-regulation).

This psychogenesis shows how knowledge develops a relationship between a thinking subject and the objects around it. This relationship grows and becomes more complex. Stages of cognitive development are defined as employing their typical cognitive events and acquired mental forms. This development is not *a priori* (pre-conditions) or a posteriori (empirical) but constructivist : the construction occurs *while it is in process*. In other words, the system has been, is, and will always be (re) adapting and (re)creating new cognitive structures, causing novel behavior and different environmental responses, which may be interiorized, forming new internal cognitive forms.

The root of this process is the *action itself*, the fact its movements are not random but *coordinated*. It is the *form* of this coordination, the order, logic or symbolization of the *pattern* of the movements which stabilizes as a permanent mental operator.

Two main actions are to be distinguished : (1) sensori-motoric actions exist *before* language or any form of representational conceptualization ; (2) operational actions ensue as soon as the actor is conscious of the results and goals of actions and the mechanisms of actions, i.e., the *translation* of action into the forms of conceptualized thought (pre-concepts and concrete concepts). These operations are either concrete (contextual) or formal (without context). The latter formal concept constitutes rational thought.

The last decades have seen the many applications of these crucial insights into the functional, efficient (educative) side of the process of cognition. An example is schema theory at work across linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and artificial intelligence. The schema, frame, scene, or script are mainly *relationships* that amount to a *structure*, generating pictorial, verbal, and behavioral outputs. In cognitive sciences and ethnoscience, they are used as a model for classification and generative grammar (syntax as an evolutionary process). Schemata are also called mental structures and abstract representations of environmental regularities. Events activate them, allowing us to comprehend ourselves and the world around us. So they define a structured set of generalizable characteristics of a particular action. Repetition, crisis, and reformation yield strands of co-relative actions or stages of cognitive development. Cognition starts with the coordination of movements. In Piaget's genetic sequence, four types of schemata emerge :

(1) *sensori-motoric, mythical thought* : a-duality implies only one relationship, namely with *immediate physicality* ; object and subject are not reflexive, and the earliest schemata are restricted to the internal structure of the actions (the coordination) as they exist in the actual

moment. They differentiate between the actions connecting the subjects and the actions relating to the objects. The action-scheme can not be manipulated by thought and is triggered when it effectively materializes ;

(2) *pre-operatoric, pre-rational thought* : object and subject are differentiated and interiorized ; the subject is liberated from its entanglement in the actual situation of the actions ; early psychomorph causality. The subjective is projected upon the objective, and the objective is viewed as the mirror of the subjective. The emergence of pre-concepts and pre-conceptual schemata does not allow for permanency and logical control. The beginning of decentration occurs, and objectification ensues ;

(3) *concrete-operatoric, proto-rational thought* : dual conceptual structure emerges providing insight into the outstanding moments of the operational mental construction :

(a) constructive generalization ;

(b) the ability to understand each step and so the total system and

(c) auto-regulation enabling one to run through the system in two ways, causing *conservation*. These conceptual schemata are ‘concrete’ because they only function in contexts but not yet in formal, abstract spaces ;

(4) *formal-operatoric, rational thought* : these are abstract structures positioned in mental spaces independent of the concrete, local context. Substance-obsessed,⁽¹⁾ the possibility and advance of knowledge are rooted *outside* the cognitive act. There is an insufficient critical insight to opt for nominalism and break through the ontological illusion haunting reason ;

(1) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of Lemmas*, 2016.

Criticism adds another scheme :

(5) *transcendental, critical thought* : abstract, strict nominalist concepts explaining how knowledge and its growth are possible, rooted in the transcendental unity of apperception. This is the critical project rooted in Kant and neo-Kantianism ;

Transpersonal psychology and mysticology⁽¹⁾ add two more schemata :

(6) *creative thought* : the hypothesis of a possible (arguable), conceptual immanent metaphysics and a ‘higher self’ generating creative hyper-concepts encompassing totality ;

(7) *nondual thought* : the possibility of an experiential, non-conceptual, meta-rational, intuitive, gnostic insight into the infinite and ultimate nature of what is ; transcendent metaphysics.

These modes of cognition point to two crucial boundaries: (1) a *lower* threshold is defining the border between ante-rational thought (mythical, pre-rational, and proto-rational) and reason, and (2) a *higher* threshold pointing to the difference between reason (formal and critical) and metaphysics (creative and nondual thought).⁽²⁾

Here is the distinction between reason and intuition, between the best of understanding (*sophia*) and direct, nondual prehension (*gnosis*).

(1) van den Dungen, W. : *In Togetherness*, 2018.

(2) ‘Reason's last step is the recognition that there is an infinite number of things which are beyond it.’ – Pascal, B. : *Pensées* (1670), § 188.

It plays a significant role in distinguishing the transcendent (non-conceptual) from the transpersonal event's immanent (conceptual) side. The former, ineffable and 'beyond conceptualization itself.'⁽¹⁾ is no longer bound to reason. But the latter is also meta-rational, the domain of intuition and immanent metaphysics. Each time a threshold is crossed, the mind's potential has expanded, deepening the subtle complexity of its cognitive texture and enlarging its ability to communicate and grow.

One cannot repress or silence instinct (as depth psychology showed), nor can it be made to rule (as irrationalism proves). Ante-rational cognition is not evacuated with the abstract concept but continues to operate on non-verbal levels of communication. At the other end, creative cognition does not 'crown' reason with apodictic knowledge but, visionary, offers a sense of totality. It is the best understanding possible.

This model of cognition has five conceptual modes : *pre-rationality* (pre-concept), *proto-rationality* (concrete concept), *formal reason* (formal concept), *critical reason* (critical concept), and *creative thought* (creative concept). The far ends of the sevenfold spectrum touch. Myth is a-conceptual, nonduality non-conceptual. Both are non-verbal. Myth is not reflective (a-dual), while nonduality is selfless. The sign of myth has signal and sound. Pre-rationality and proto-rationality develop icons and images while formal, critical, and creative symbols and ideas. Signal and icon are contextual, symbol, and idea abstract.

(1) Friedman, H.L. : Friedman, H.L. : *The Role of Science in Transpersonal Psychology*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal Psychology*, 2015, p.307.

| HUMAN COGNITION : 3 STAGES and 7 MODES | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|---|
| I pre- nominal | ante- rationality | 1. Mythical libidinal ego notion signal / sound physiological and safety / K0 ^(*) | irrational a-dual a-conceptual sensori- motoric |
| | | 2. Pre-rational tribal ego pre-concept icon / image safety and security / K1 | INSTINCT (imaginal) |
| | | 3. Proto-rational imitative ego proto-concept icon / image belongingness / K1 | pre- operational |
| <i>the barrier between ante-rationality and reason to satisfy reason, do not repress instinct</i> | | | |

(*) refers to Kohlberg's 6 moral stages – Kohlberg, L., *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, Harper & Row – San Francisco, 1981.

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|--|---|
| II nominal | rationality | 4. Rational formal ego abstract concept symbol / idea self-esteem K2, 3 & 4 | REASON (rational) operational |
| | | 5. Critical transcendental ego critical concept symbol / idea self-esteem / K5 | |
| <p><i>the barrier between reason and intuition</i> <i>thinking reason, do not reject intuition</i></p> | | | |
| III post- nominal | meta- rationality | 6. Creative higher self creative concept meta-symbol self-actualization / K6 | INTUITION (intuitional) |
| | | 7. Nondual selflessness non-symbolic self-realization | |

Ante-Rationality

Cognitive development is the unfoldment of seven modes of cognition, divided into three major stages (instinct, reason, intuition). Ancient Egyptian thought covers the first stage of cognition, the pre-nominal stage of instinct. Here, three cognitive tools are simultaneously operational : the notion, the pre-concept, and the concept.

1 | Mythical Cognition

the notion

sensori-motoric

First substage :

- (1) adualism and only a virtual consciousness ;
- (2) primitive action testifies the existence of a quasi complete non-differentiation between subject (knower) and object (known) ;
- (3) actions are quasi *uncoordinated*, i.e., random movements are frequent.

The earliest stage of mythical thought is a-dual. The only ‘forms’ are *the material events* in their *immediacy and wholeness*. In mythical thinking, there is only the immediate, and the immediate is all. No complexification of thought is possible. Concepts, conceptual cognition, and strict dualism are absent. The ‘myth of myths,’ the ‘eternal return’ to the primordial state,⁽¹⁾ this replenishing ‘Midnight Mystery’ or *ars obscura* (cf. the Sixth Hour of the *Amduat*)⁽²⁾ is part of the next substage when the subject experiences itself.

(1) Eliade, M. : *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, PUP – Princeton, 2005.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *The Amduat*, 2004, at : maat.sofiatopia.org/amduat.htm