It is a mere prejudice to believe, that the philosophical epoch of humanity begins first among the Greeks in the fifth century BC. This prejudice implies that other ancient people did not engage in speculative thought. Undoubtedly, speculative thought transcends experience, but it always attempts to explain, interpret, and unify it in order to systematize it. Speculative thought, using aphorisms, allusions, metaphors, negative or positive methods, and dialectics, can be oral or written, and it is necessarily connected with the problems of life. Thus philosophy can be defined as "systematic reflective thinking on life" (Yu-fan 1976: 16).

The spirit of Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, African philosophy, European philosophy, and Maya philosophy can differ greatly in their treatment of a subject, but philosophy always deals with human knowledge, and the elevation of the mind. The future philosophy of the world must then take into account the great speculative systems of all humanity.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to gain some acquaintance with the traditions of African philosophy from the remote times to the contemporary era. I am going to try to present the ancient history of African philosophy by bringing into focus the speculative thought of ancient Egypt.

Method

African philosophy as a historical fact must be understood within a historical frame. The origin, evolution, and development of African philosophy follow the streams and currents of African history. The long history of African philosophy has shown connections with other continents, chiefly with Europe, since the Graeco-Roman world. In remote times African philosophy was mainly located in the Nile Valley, that is, in Kemet or ancient Egypt, and in Kush (Napata-Meroe). Philosophy flourished in Egypt from about 3400 BC to 343 sc and in Kush (also known as Nubia or Ethiopia by the Greeks) from about 1000 sc to 625 ac.

The task of the historian of philosophy requires valid methods for clarifying the ideas, concepts, and speculations of the philosophers of the past, and to push their theories to their ultimate conclusion in order to show their effectiveness. But the historian of philosophy is himself to some extent a philosopher, because his work is not only a mere historical investigation, but also a creative one. The historian of philosophy thinks about the ideas and theories of the past. Thus the analytical and critical methods of history undergo mutations to become a productive method of philosophy.
The Question of Ancient Egypt

The question of the ancient Egypt connection with the rest of Black Africa was opened to an intensive discussion involving opposing points of view in 1974 during an international symposium organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held in Cairo and Aswan. Present were more than 20 of the best Egyptologists in the world. All the outstanding scholars and specialists at the Cairo symposium, although they took opposing sides about other items, came, in spite of that, to agreement regarding the following significant points.

First, Egyptian language as revealed in hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic writings, and Coptic, that is, the old Egyptian language in its latest developments, as written in the Greek-Coptic script, and modern African languages, as spoken nowadays in Black Africa, constitute the same linguistic community broken into several parts. Comparative grammar and the method of internal reconstruction allow scholars to reconstruct certain features of the language spoken by the origin A unseparated community, on the basis of corresponding features of the descent languages. The comparative method in historical linguistics is still a valid method for defining change and determining earlier forms of two or more related languages to prove their precise relationship. Technically speaking, no scholar, using the method of internal reconstruction, has proved objectively that the Semitic, Egyptian, and Berber languages are descended from a common ancestor. The so-called "Afro-Asiatic family," or "Chamito-Semitic family," which has gained wide circulation, has no scientific foundation at all. There is no proof of an "Afro-Asiatic historical grammar." One may recall here what Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) called "the prejudice of the prestige of the multitude," that is to say, the supposition that what everyone says must be true. In the human sciences "scientific" circles often make claims not based on any objectively verifiable grounds but rather just on this kind of prejudice.

Second, ancient Egypt was a flourishing ancient kingdom of Northeast Africa, located in the Nile Valley, nowise in "Asia Minor" or in the "Near East." The Egyptian civilization of the Pharaonic period (3400-343 BC) was intrinsically, that is, in its essential nature, an African civilization, on account of its spirit, character, behavior, culture, thought, and deep feeling.

As we know, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), who was not a historian, but a great philosopher, stated in his lectures delivered in the winter of 1830-1 on the philosophical history of the world: "Africa is no historical part of the world: it has no movement or development to exhibit .... Egypt . . . does not belong to the African Spirit" (1956: 99: emphasis mine). This view of the Hegelian philosophy of history has become almost a common opinion and an academic paradigm in Western historiography. A great culture or civilization cannot be produced by
African (Black) people. Moreover, African people have never made any kind of contribution to world history. Even some brilliant African minds still accept as true Hegel's incongruous statement. In modern times the primary document concerning the "question" of the ancient Egyptian connection with the rest of Black Africa was, until the Cairo symposium, Hegel's *Philosophy* of History. Thus, it took one century and 44 years, from Hegel (1830) to the Cairo symposium (1974), to change the paradigm installed by the German philosopher. The Cairo symposium was, then, a turning point in African historiography and philosophy.

Ancient Egyptian Concepts of "Philosophy"

It was said above that philosophy could be defined as systematic reflective thinking on life. There is not a single philosophy that could be excogitated except in relation to life, society, existence, and universe. Even abstract reasoning about the condition or quality of being nothing ("Nothingness") still deals with something in the universe, since the universe is the totality of all that is. Human beings always need to discern what is real, true, right, or lasting. Such insight is wisdom, because understanding what is true, right, or lasting necessarily elevates the mind. This is why "philosophy" was understood by the Greeks as 'love of wisdom," and "philosopher" as "lover of wisdom." To philosophize was not just to speculate about life and reflect on nature, but also to be engaged with love, intense desire, and strong enthusiasm in the investigation of causes underlying reality in order to build up a system of values by which society may live.

Philosophy is more important in its essential function than in its mere methodology as a critical or analytical inquiry into the nature of things. The basic notion of philosophy in ancient Egypt referred precisely to the synthesis of all learning and also to the pursuit of wisdom and moral and spiritual perfection. Philosophy in the ancient times of Pharaonic Egypt was, then, a kind of pedagogy fielding the wise teachings (sebayit) of the old sages, who were scholars, priests, and officials or statesmen at the same time.

Indeed, the verb *rekh* (written with the hieroglyphic signs of "mouth," "placenta," and "papyrus rolled up, tied and sealed") means "to know" or "to be aware of but also "to learn." Human beings know by learning, that is, through experience or conditioning, schooling or study. The word *rekh* (when written with the hieroglyph of a seated man) means "wise man." that is, a learned man, an erudite, a philosopher. Thus the concept *rekhet* (*written* with the hieroglyph for abstract notions) means "knowledge," "science," in the sense of "philosophy," that is, inquiry into the nature of things (*khet*) based on accurate knowledge (*rekhet*) and good (*nefer*) judgment (*upi*). The word *upi* means "to judge," "to discern," that is, "to dissect." The cognate word *upet* means "specification." "judgment," and upset means "specify," that is, give the details of something.
In the Egyptian language "wisdom" and "prudence" are expressed by the same word: sat (the hieroglyphic determinative is very characteristic; it is of a man with hand to mouth). Indeed, to be wise (sai) is to be prudent (sai); it is to be almost "silent," that is, sagacious in handling matters, and exercising good judgment. Wisdom and prudence imply knowledge (rekhet) and the awareness of the principles of moral conduct and sociable behavior. The wise man (rekh or sai) grasps in his mind with clarity and certainty what is known distinctively to him.

The wise man or woman, of course, loves truth (mast). He or she is shrewd, marked by a keen awareness and a penetrating intelligence, because he or she has received formal instruction. In the Egyptian language, the word seba (written with the symbol of a "star") means, "to teach," suggesting methodological teaching and an arduous learning process, such as at school. To teach (seba) is to open tile door (seba) to the mind of the pupil (seba) in order to bring in light, as from a star (seba). Egyptian concepts concerning the topic under consideration are precise:

Seba: "to teach"
at seba: "school," literally "house of teaching." (A famous school director was Kemhu, who lived during the 13th Dynasty, 1782-1650 BC. His statue from Abydos is now in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo.)

seba, also sebaty: "pupil"
sebayit: "written teaching," "instruction," "wisdom," also "pedagogy," that is, theta of bringing pupils from darkness to light in intellectual and spiritual life

rep-heseb: "correct method"

This last methodological concept, rep-heseb, occurs in the very title of a scientific text, the so-called "Rhind Mathematical Papyrus," copied by the scribe and teacher Ahmes in about 1650 ac from writings dating from about 200 years earlier (see Gillings 1972).

From the concepts clearly defined above, it is obvious that Egyptian thinking created the terminology for the formulation of a system of abstract thought by using a graphic and concrete symbolism. Egyptian thinking was graphic and abstract at the same time. Pictures were used as symbols of thought. The tangible signs, pictures, and symbols were related to ideas and meanings. They were, in fact, semiotic structures. The Egyptians did develop a kind of semiology by studying the relationship between signs and pictures, using material objects to represent something invisible or abstract. This is not to say that the Egyptian philosophers thought "in" graphic and concrete terms. They made use of graphic and concrete forms to think abstractions. This may seem quaint for the modern mind, because of the alphabetical system of writing. In fact, semiotic structures in hieroglyphic signs were a fine equipment for precise abstract thinking. And the earliest abstract terms for expressing transcendental ideas known in the history of philosophy appear among the Egyptians of the Pyramid Age, that is, during the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BC). One is referring to ideas, such as the goodness of God (nefer netcher), moral obligation, and high ideals of social equity (maat). Notable also are the ideas of
human kingship (nesyt) and of the concept of the Supreme Principle, or God (Ra), symbolized by
the sun.

The First Definition of a "Philosopher" in World History

The ancient Egyptians meant by *rekh* or sai a "wise human being" or "philosopher." It was not
just a question of words. Two thousand years ago in ancient Egypt, without a doubt, the
"inscription of Antef" gave the first clear and distinct statement conveying the fundamental
meaning of a "philosopher." This is a demonstrable fact. The German Egyptologist Hellmut
Brunner translates the "inscription of Antef," which gives the definition of a "philosopher," as
follows:

[He is the one] whose heart is informed about these things which would be otherwise ignored,
the one who is clear-sighted when he is deep into a problem, the one who is moderate in his
actions. who penetrates ancient writings, whose advice is [sought] to unravel complications,
who is really wise, who instructed his own heart, who stays awake at night as he looks for the
right paths, who surpasses what he accomplished yesterday, who is wiser than a sage, who
brought himself to wisdom, who asks for advice and sees to it that he is asked advice.
(Inscription of Antef, 12th Dynasty. 1991-1782 ac)

The heart *ib*, also Katy, in the Egyptian language was conceived as the seat of thoughts and
emotions. The word for heart also meant "mind," "understanding," and "intelligence." Reason,
emotion, spirit, mind, and body were not conceived as separate antithetical entities. Matter and
spirit were not opposites in conflict. Thus, in their inquiries philosophers can draw on all the
resources of their being, including reason and feeling. In this way they can expect to achieve
fulfillment.

The reference to being deep into a problem indicates that philosophical thinking is a critical
undertaking. Philosophy is not concerned with what is apparent, obvious, shallow, or
insignificant. Thinking deep means dealing with substantial issues. And what a philosopher does
in life, he must do within reasonable limits, not at all being subject to radical or extreme views. A
philosopher champions moderate views or judgments, as he or she loves truth (maat).

A great philosophical and scientific tradition existed in ancient Egypt. The philosopher was
regarded as one who could penetrate ancient writings and avail himself of the instructions
available therein. These works constituted a philosophical tradition, that is, a set of teachings
(*sebayit*) viewed as a coherent body of precedents influencing the present. The history of
philosophy was thus already a system of philosophy. Imhotep, Hor-Djed-Ef, Kagemni, and
Ptah-Hotep in the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BC) built the first philosophical tradition in world
history. Their wisdom or philosophy did them credit, because a thousand years after they had
passed away they were still remembered with reverence:
Books of wisdom (i.e. philosophy) were their pyramids,
And the pen was their child...
Is there anyone here like Hor-Djed-El?

Is there another like Imhotep?
They are gone and forgotten,
But their names through their writings cause them to be remembered.
(Papyrus Beatty IV, Version)

Imhotep was grand vizier to King Djoser (2668-2649 Be), 3rd Dynasty. He was also high priest at Heliopolis, the main city of the Sun-God, Ra. He designed, as chief architect, the step-pyramid at Saqqara, which is the first construction in hewn stone in world history. Hor-Djed-El was a royal prince, son of Khufu (2589-2566 BC), 4th Dynasty. He was connected with the greatest pyramid of Giza.

Women too were involved in the intellectual, scientific, and philosophical tradition. Lady Peseshet was the first woman doctor of medicine in world history. She lived during the 4th Dynasty or the early 5th Dynasty (2584 or 2465 BC). Her titles indeed included imyt-r swnwwt, that is, "the lady director of lady physicians." She was also a funerary priestess.

On the ancient Egyptian model, philosophers are not just critical analysts, scholarly minds able to read ancient texts. They must also be prepared to ask for advice and look for the right paths. In addition, they must surpass their own performance by conducting the investigation of causes underlying reality always in a detailed and accurate manner. But beyond this, the philosopher must betake himself to wisdom, that is, to what is true, right, and useful to the community. Thus, for ancient Egypt, philosophy implies the critical building of knowledge, intellectual penetration, and profundity, but also, and perhaps above all, modesty and moderation, humility, and an endless desire for perfection. This is wisdom and still a valid conception of philosophy today.

Hieroglyphic Signs and Philosophy

Plotinus (205-70 AD), Egyptian-born Roman philosopher and writer who founded Neoplatonism, wrote during the third century AD that the "Egyptian sages showed their consummate science by using symbolic signs .... Thus, each hieroglyph constituted a sort of science of wisdom." On this showing, Plotinus considered hieroglyphs to be a writing system that recorded real things and ideas without confusion. Apparently, hieroglyphs have no hidden and impenetrable mysteries. What hieroglyphs disclose is of unique interest in the intellectual history of humanity. There are more than 800 hieroglyphic signs; they describe all the classes and categories of beings and things held by creation. Hieroglyphs are the complete and systematized conceptualization of all that is; they are an all-embracing knowledge of reality. Egyptian hieroglyphs express the
universe, as it is known and as it exists; they mean, refer to, the totality of things. It is because of the universe that there are hieroglyphs. In a sense, all things are hieroglyphs, and hieroglyphs are all things. This is why it was impossible for the Egyptians to conceive the idea of non-existence in the sense of the absence of the existent. Since the universe is beauty, abundance, plentitude, diversity, harmony, and unity, hieroglyphs reproduce by drawings all these manifestations of the universe.

Everything is in hieroglyphs, such as, in random order, man and his occupations, woman and her activities, deities, mammals, birds, amphibious animals, reptiles, fish, insects, plants, trees, sky, earth, mountains, water, buildings, ships, domestic and funerary furniture, temple furniture and sacred emblems, crowns, dress, staves, warfare, hunting, butchery, agriculture, crafts and professions, rope, fiber, baskets, bags, vessels of stone, earthenware, cakes, writing, games, music, geometrical figures, etc. Hieroglyphs, being about reality in all its diversity, also feature abstract concepts, such as spirituality, consciousness, love, sexuality, happiness, beauty, ugliness, rites, eloquence, loyalty, sovereignty, joy, life, power, birth, death, immortality, motion, wind, knowledge, silence, wisdom, flame, light, day, night, darkness, fear, alteration, smell, perfume, truth, justice, etc.

The hieroglyphic script is a most complete semiotic system - complete, that is, systematic, and comprehending everything in the universe. Studying the Egyptian hieroglyphic script is like being in communication with all that exists. The discipline of Egyptology involves the learning of the Egyptian system of writing. Egyptian hieroglyphic writing is found everywhere: on temple walls and columns, tombs, sacred monuments, and so forth. Painted inscriptions do exist, illustrating the aesthetic sensibilities of the Egyptian scribes. Egyptian writing reached its full development around 3200 BC, and thereafter remained fundamentally unchanged for a period of 3,000 years.

The universal human need for communication and self-expression was graphically crystallized in the Egyptian script, which sought to represent the form of the universe itself. This is impressive from both a semantical and a philosophical standpoint. Africans, at all events, must study the Egyptian language and script.

The Dynamic Character of Egyptian Thinking on "Existence"

Verbs expressing existence are not static but dynamic in Egyptian philosophy. They are basically verbs of movement, stressing duration and referring to moments of time. Verbs like "to exist," "to be," "to be stable, enduring," and "to become" were dominant in Egyptian speculation about life and the existence of the universe.

*The verb wnn (unen): "to exist," "to be"*
The verb wnn (unen), written with the hieroglyphic sign of the long-eared desert hare, means "to exist." "to be." This verb expresses being or existence in a fullblooded sense. Originally, it meant perhaps "to move," "to run." To be a true being, something always has to be moving or running. Therefore, non-being is not.

This means that existence excludes illusion, delusion, and mere sense impression. Existence is the prodigious dynamic of all being. The synthesis of rest (hotep) and movement (shemet) is the entirety of being, and it is unalterable and indestructible like the divine life. The concept of "existence" is closely related to that of "eternity," that is, the manner of being of that which may be called the perfect (nefer), that is, the god Ra. Ra is the highest being, imperishable, eternal, possessing full reality, that is, power, beauty, truth, perfection, and goodness.

"To exist" as duration is also a dynamic process referring to any point of time. This is why one and the same sentence can be understood in a past, present or future sense, according to the particular context and the intention of the text. For example, the sentence wnn pt wnn. t hr. i (unen pet unen. etj kher. i) means:

"The sky existed when you were with me" (Past)
"The sky exists, and you are with me" (Present)
"So long as heaven shall exist, you shall exist with me" (Future)

(Urkunden des aegyptischen Altertums, IV, 348, 9)

Existence, whether absolute or relative to some situation, is always a dynamic process. The name given to the resurrected god Osiris (Usire) was Wnn-4r (Unennefer) meaning "He who is continually happy," or "He whose life was regenerated." Here, the verb wnn (unen) "to exist," "to be." evokes the immortality of Osiris, who died and was reborn. The main goal of human life (ankh) was to come to exist as a good (nefer) divine being in order to become Osiris, that is, immortal and eternal. The distinction between "being" and "non-being" was only a "semantical" distinction. It had no ontological significance in Egyptian philosophy.

The verb d d (djed) "to be stable," "enduring"

Columns in the temple stand: that is, they are stable (died). But standing is viewed as the result of a rising. The "standing" of the columns in a temple is not a static image, because the mind is always thinking of the firmness and stability of the columns as a process. Indeed, movement is conceived to be carried from the earth to the sky through columns. This means that humanity, by building civilization and spirituality on earth, must reach up to the world of Truth (maat) and eternity (diet). The "being" of a column as it stands (djed) in its stability (djet) is, in fact, analogous to the cosmos itself. So, indeed, is the entire temple. The hardness of a column is a revealing reality because truth (maat) constitutes the real (maa) being of the column.
By the art of the sculptor, a statue (tut) is not something "static," as it is perceived to be in Western thought. A statue is a living image (tut ankh), a real (maa) becoming. Indeed, to carve (se-ankh) is to make life (ankh) itself as a real thing. A statue comes to be a power: it is the localized existence of the power (ka) of someone. King Tut-ankh-Amon and his golden statues are all of them "living (ankh) images (tut) of Amon," "an imaged life of Amon." Everything described as durative (djed) is, in fact, a dynamic expression of life, and a manifestation of truth itself. Beauty (nefer) is not just an aesthetic category, but also the manifestation of a transcendental force.

The pillar (died) projected eternal life because it was a symbol of Osiris. As a matter of fact, the Nile was but the source and visible symbol of that fertility of which Osiris was the exemplification.

The verb hpr (kheper) "to become"

The notions "learn" (rekh), "ignore" (khem), and "love" (mer) imply continuity, but "know," "not know," and "wish" are regarded in Egyptian grammar as definitive occurrences resulting from "having learnt," "failed to learn," "conceived a wish." Thus, as in some examples noted above, basically the same grammatical form is used to express the continuity of a contemporaneous occurrence and the pastness of a past occurrence.

Actually, at the beginning of the 12th Dynasty (1991-1782 BC) the two verbs wnn (unen) ("be") and kheper ("become") were used with a past reference and also with a future or prospective reference. The following clause is an example of the first usage: iret kheperu neb mery. ef kheper im. ef ("the making (iret) of all changes (kheperu neb) in which (im. ef) one may wish (mery. ef) to be involved (kheper)") (Urk, V. 4).

We must then devote special attention to this verb kheper not only because it occurs very frequently in the Egyptian texts, but also because the grammatical points discussed above are concentrated in this verb. The verb kheper expresses being or existence in all its possibilities. It thus means both "becoming" and "effecting." Included also in the meaning of the verb are the ideas of cause and effect. It is in this sense of the verb that the creator says to himself, "I exist, and in me possibilities become existents" (kheperi kheper kheperu). The existent exists because of the existence of the creator. The existence (kheperu) of the creator manifests (kheper) itself as "becoming" and "effecting."

There is no genesis, but co-genesis, in the sense that the existent exists by the simple fact of its inner nature. Coming into being by itself (kheper. ef dies. ef), the existent brings out, at the same time, the entirety of existence. The one and the many are interlaced by the same dynamic power of the existent. One implication of this is that "matter" and "spirit" are two aspects of the same reality. Try to deal with "matter" without "spirit," and what you have is incomplete, because "matter" and "spirit" do not just lie side by side. They are inextricably connected together.
As an intransitive verb, *kheper* means "come into being," "change into," "occur," "happen," "be effective," also "go by," "be past," always with the idea of continuity. *Kheper* also means, as noted earlier, "to exist," "to be." As a transitive verb it means "bring out."

The dynamic character of *kheper* is generally clear. Its connotation contains the unity of being, becoming, and effecting. Within it, the gap between becoming and being is closed by virtue of "effecting." In the universe everything is full of power (ka) and effectiveness (*kheper*). The ka is the dynamic essence of each existence or being in the universe.

We can understand now the dynamic character of the ancient Egyptian conception of the world. Things do not have the fixity and inflexibility that we believe they have. Things are changeable and in motion on the earth, in the sky, under water, etc. The earth and the sky themselves move.

**The Egyptian Conception of the Universe**

Because of the dynamic nature of its thinking on "existence" and the universal semiology of the hieroglyphs, Egyptian philosophy was of a solar and cosmic orientation. The material sun was known as Ra, that is, the "sun-god." Many deities were associated in some way with the sun-god Ra, such as Ra-Atum, the creator; Khepri, a winged beetle or scarab rising in the east; Horus, the son of Ra; Hor-akhty, the Horus of the two Horizons; Amon-Ra, the god Amon of Thebes solarized.

In the beginning the sun-god as Atum or Ra-Atum had appeared from primeval waters known as Nun by his own power of self-development. Note that "spirit" is thought of here as a self-development of "matter." The sun-god begat Shu, the wind, and Tejnut, the first woman. Of these two were born Geb, the earth-god, and Nut, the goddess of the sky, whose children were the two brothers Osiris and Seth, and the sisters Isis and Nephthys. Osiris and Isis will give birth to Horus, the dynastic divine falcon. The Pharaoh himself assumed the title "Son of Ra" (Sa-Ra) from the 5th Dynasty (2498-2345 ac) onward. Maat, the goddess of Truth or Righteousness, was a daughter of Ra (Sat-Ra). The conception of Truth and Right occupied a prominent place in thought about Aton, a solar deity. Hathor, the goddess of beauty, love, dance, and music, was the "eye of Ra." The pyramid was the chief symbol of the sun-god Ra. It was believed to help the Pharaoh in his transition from the earthly to the celestial realm.

In the philosophy of the ancient Egyptians these elements of myth and cosmogony contain their basic ideas about the world.

TIF modern European mind conceives of "chaos" and "cosmos" as antithetical concepts. Chaos is defined as a disorderly mass, a jumble that existed before the ordered universe, the cosmos. On the other hand, for the Egyptian mind, there is no such thing as chaos in this sense. In the beginning there was primordial space and time, the Nun, from which the sun-god Ra emerged by his own energy to start the existence of all beings. Nun, the primeval flood or water, was a god, existing before the sky came forth (*kheper*), before the earth came forth, before humans came
forth, before the multitude of gods were born, and before death came forth (Pyramid Texts, §§ 1466-8).

The sun-god's life-giving power brought forth (kheper) all in existence, and his creative power continues to bring forth (kheper) life and force even in "inanimate" things. This life-giving power of Ra is the constant source of life and sustenance. Ra is present on earth as a beneficent power; the Pharaoh, son of Ra, expresses his own consciousness of the god's presence by performing rituals in the temple.

In Egyptian philosophy, therefore, Nun is the primordial element that existed prior to creation and Ra the source of life and rationality. These cosmological concepts are original with the ancient Egyptians.

The Universe as an Endless Boundary

The word djeru (drw) means: "boundary," "limit," "end." The "universe" is self-contained, that is to say, it is its own boundary. The "universe" is, then, endless because it has no boundaries; it is its own limit. This is why the word djeru (djer) means also "the all," "the universe." The expression ne6-er-djer means "Lord of All," that is, Lord of the universe, an endless boundary.

The Universe as an Endless Totality

Being without a boundary within itself, the "universe" (tem) is complete (tem), that is, entire and all-comprehending (tem). Because the "universe" is all-comprehending, it is a totality. The expression neb tem also means "Lord of All," that is, Lord of the universe, the totality of all that is. The "Creator of All" is named kema tem, that is, he who created (kema) everything, entire, complete, and sound.

Being total (tem), the universe has, in fact, no limit, except its own totality. The boundary (djer) of the universe is its totality (tem). All is then djer or tem, also djer and tem. Constituting the whole, the universe is entire, but its entirety is limited by the universe itself; that is, the universe is an endless totality.

Egyptian Logic

Logic designates a specific branch of philosophy that deals with the study of the principles of reasoning. The quality or condition of being rational - that is, having or exercising the ability to reason - is rationality. In the history of Western philosophy, rationality has often been blended with philosophy itself, so that philosophy and rationality have become merged into one, namely, rationalism. Much Western philosophy, from Aristotle (384-322 ac) to Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), is deeply rooted in the notion that reason, rather than emotion, sense experience,
authority, or spiritual experience, provides the only valid basis for action, and is the prime source of knowledge and spiritual truth. Other civilizations are usually judged by the criteria of this Western rationalistic attitude.

If, as Descartes (1596-1650) remarked, good sense or reason is equally distributed among all human beings, it is then unjustified to believe that some groups of the human race are deficient in logic or point-device reasoning. The so-called "native" or "primitive mind" is but a racist prejudice, based on the belief that a particular human population or race is superior to others.

When Egyptian mathematics, for example, are not smattered or studied superficially, one can find that Egyptian mathematicians dealt rationally with the problems. Indeed, the Egyptians made use of logic as a tool of precision in constructing and developing their mathematics. In geometry - that is, the mathematics of the properties, measurement, and relationships of points, lines, angles, surfaces, and solids or three-dimensional figures - all the problems were arranged in a clear and consistent manner. There is always a logical coherence among the parts of a problem. The basic structure of a problem always consisted of the following parts:

1 tep: The Given Problem. This is the precise enunciation of the problem to be solved, with elucidatory examples.

2 mi died en. Ek: Literally, "if one says to you that." This is the stage of definition, where everything is made clear and distinct, and all the relevant terms are explicitly and precisely defined. The expression mi djed means "according to that which is said," that is, the process of reasoning is to be addressed to a precisely formulated problem. 'peter or pety. Literally, this means "What?" In Egyptian grammar ptr (peter) stands at the beginning of questions with the function of eliciting a logical predicate (Gardiner 1957: 406, §497). A question is an expression of inquiry that invites a reply or solution. At this stage, then, the student is directly required to ponder and analyze (ptr (peter)) the problem under examination.

4 iret mi kheper: Correct Procedure. This is the stage of demonstration, that is, the mental process of showing something to be true by reasoning and computation from initial data. The process of calculating is based on a careful set of mathematical formulas.

rekhet. ef pw: The Solution. This is knowledge (rekhet) found, and grasped in the mind with clarity or certainty. The solution is regarded as true beyond doubt. The student has shown the requisite know-how, that is, the knowledge and skill required to do something correctly. The solution is evident, thanks to the demonstration by a dependable logical procedure.

6 seshemet, seshmet: Examination of the Proof. This is the review of the whole body of evidence or premises and rules that determine the validity of a solution. Such an examination of a logical proof always leads to a further conceptual generalization. Thus the ancient Egyptians had the technique of forming concepts inductively.

7 gemi. ek nefer: Literally, "You have found good." This is the concluding stage. To be able to do something, and find it correctly done, means that it was done as it should be done. To find
(gemi) is to obtain by intellectual effort, and bring oneself to a mental awareness of what is correct, precise, perfect (nefer). To arrive at a logical conclusion and find that the conclusion withstands critical scrutiny is an achievement in the art of deduction. The adverb nefer ("well") implies that the solution is convincing, so that a contradiction is impossible. The concluding observations are mainly confirmatory. Nevertheless, the rigor of the entire process is evident in the method, and the result is objectively known in all truth.

The Being and Essence of the Cosmos and of Humans

How did the cosmos come to be? What is the fundamental nature of a human being? These philosophical questions deal with the being and essence of the cosmos and of humans. It is, then, of importance to turn our attention now to ancient Egyptian thinking concerning these questions. The Egyptians conceived the origin of the universe and all things in it as an evolution, but also as a physical emanation of the divine power.

Genesis or "Creation" as an Evolution

The Nile and the sun are the two phenomena that dominated the Egyptian intellectual and spiritual life from the earliest times. However, long before the Nile and the sun came into existence, there was, in Egyptian cosmogony, the primeval Nun, an ethereal substance that existed before all else. It was from this original substance that Ra-Atum originated. Nun is a dense and opaque substance, neither transparent nor translucent, impenetrable by light. But, with the appearance in it of Ra-Atum, there comes light and spirit. Ra-Atum has within itself a force, a power of nature. Thanks to this power of nature, gods and goddesses, heaven and earth, animals and human beings gradually will come into existence. There is no God standing at the beginning as a conscious and moral personality, and as creator of heaven and earth.

Nun itself is an uncreated fluid or substance ("primeval water"). But the world and all things in it are brought into being out of Nun. The created comes gradually from the uncreated. Contrary to the usual supposition, here "spirit" comes out of "matter." Nun, a physical substance, and Ra-Atum, an intellectual and spiritual force, are different, with opposite properties, but complementary to each other. Nun can be described as being, and Ra-Atum as movement. The complementarity of "matter" and "spirit" clearly illustrates the unity of opposites in various processes within the universe. Nevertheless, there is an epistemological problem of the greatest difficulty.

As noted above, the historical development of the universe, in ancient Egyptian cosmogony, goes back to Nun as the original "matter" and Ra-Atum as the first "form" from which other forms are made or developed. This is an evolution, that is to say, a natural process in which something changes into a different more complex or better form. In the present case what we have is a process of cosmic evolution, and the fundamental elements may be grouped as follows:
1. Nun, the primordial "waters" existing prior to the emergence of the creator-god: Huh, the boundless stretches of primordial formlessness; Kuk, darkness, and Amon, "the hidden," representing the intangibility and imperceptibility of precreation existence.

2. Ra-Atum, the self-emanating creator-god from Nun. In the Book of Genesis (Old Testament) the creator-god existed alongside chaos. The earth was chaos, waste, and void (weha' arets hayetha thohu wabohu, in Hebrew). By contrast, Atum was alone in Nun: Alum was Ra in his very first appearance, a king in full glory (kha), one who existed before Shu had even lifted heaven from earth. Alum means "everything," and it means also "nothing." Atum is what is finished, completed, and perfected. It means both all-inclusiveness and emptiness.

3. Geb and Nut, earth and sky. These represent the created things of this world, whether divine, cosmic, human, animal, vegetal, or mineral.

*Genesis or "Creation" as a Physical Emanation from the Divine Power*

The qualities of the creator-gods (Alum, Ra, Ptah) are: might (6au), radiance (hedjut), prosperity (udjau), victory (nakhtu), wealth (useru), plenty (asha), sanctity (djoseru), readiness (aperu), creativity (iri), intelligence (ib), adornment (djeba), and stability (djedet). These qualities appear also with the ka, "spirit." at royal birth (Brugsch 1968: 996ff.). Because of all these qualities, the creator-god is able to bring a new being into existence by the act of naming it. The name is a thing of individuality and power; the act of uttering a new name is an act of creation.

In the text *Memphite Philosophy* (a mutilated stela now in the British Museum, London, no. 797, formerly no. 135), we find clearly articulated a broad philosophical system about the nature of the universe, emphasizing the divine word that brought forth the world. Creation is explained strictly in physical terms. Creation is an act of thought (hatiu) which came into the heart (i6) of a god and the commanding utterance (udjet-medu) which brought that thought into reality. This creation by thought and utterance is like a physical emanation from God himself.

The divine word is treasured in ancient Egypt because of its sensible nature and its enormous power. The divine word is clearly the ever-active divine power proceeding out of the mouth of the divinity. The divine word appeared in Egypt as a corporeal emanation from the creator-god:

> It was he who made every work, every handicraft, which the hands make, the going of the feet, the movement of every limb, according to his command, through the thought of the heart that came forth from the tongue. (British Museum. stela no. 797, trans. James H. Breasted, 1912)

A pair of related attributes of the creator-god, which were themselves personified as deities, were Hu, "authoritative utterance," or the commanding speech which brings a situation into being, and Sia, "perception," the cognitive reception of an object, idea, or situation. Perception in
this dynamic sense and authoritative utterance were together the ongoing creative principles of the universe which involved the heart (ib), which conceived thoughts (hatiu), and the tongue (nes), which produced the command (udjet-medu).

The world is first an idea conceived in the "heart," i.e. mind, of the divinity. All things first existed in the thought of the god, and then assumed objective reality by the utterance of the "tongue." The utterance of the thought in the form of a divine "let it be done" brought forth the world. This Egyptian conception of creation by thought and word was stated many centuries before the Logos doctrine of the New Testament, which has it that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

*The Egyptian Conception of Immortality*

According to the Egyptian conception of the origin of the universe (by evolution or divine emanation), everything is in eternal movement: gods and goddesses, human beings, nature, and the world. The totality of existence is kheper, that is, transformation and becoming through time and space. All sources of being and life (ankh) are in God, the only true one (maat). Egyptian thought made the greatest achievements in the fields of philosophy (wisdom) and science, i.e. astronomy, medicine, architecture. But spirituality ("religion") and morals were not neglected. In all these fields the Egyptians sought truth and certainty through rational inquiry. They combined the capacity for logical reasoning with deep psychological understanding.

Harmony, and self-control, movement, life, deep emotion, power: this is the Egyptian way. Human beings were conceived as being ennobled with spiritual entities such as ka, "spiritual essence," ba, "the soul," i.e. the power to make the dead a "mighty one," and akh, a spiritual equipment for greatness. The idea of a life beyond the grave - that is, the belief in the immortality of the soul and the resuscitation of the body - was first explicitly expressed among the ancient Egyptians. It is evident that the Egyptians had developed a psychology of the dead for the first time in human history. Mortuary priests and priestesses knew from a study of manuals the right rituals and procedures for reconstituting, one by one, the faculties of the dead, so that they will be able to live again in the hereafter. For the Egyptians, death was a kind of process of self-consciousness in which humans attain an identification with the gods whose reaction is summed up as "One of us comes to us" (*Pyramid Texts*, pyramid of Mer-en-Ra, 6th Dynasty).

The celestial and mortuary teachings on the Kingdom of the dead and teachings on moral values in the affairs of living human beings were never separated in ancient Egypt. This is why the earliest chapter in the moral development of human society is to be found in Egypt, "a chapter marking perhaps the most important fundamental step in the evolution of civilization" (Breasted 1972: 165-6).
The Metaphysical Problem of "Evil"

In the beginning, the creation was neferu, that is, "perfection," "beauty," and "goodness." The ka or spirit of the universe was nothing but good. How then can it become evil?

When an individual being, god or goddess, human being, animal, or tree, comes into existence, a certain ku ("soul," "spirit," "essence") is inherent in him or her or it. This ka makes a being what he, she, or it is and constitutes his, her, or its nature or personality. Hence, "human nature" is simply the ka of humanity that is inherent in each individual. The ka was thought to be a person's god, sometimes godhead in general, and sometimes a specific god (netcher; Coptic nute, nuti). The ka is, then, the divine force within humans that governs their behavior. How then can it be evil?

Egyptian women and men were beings possessed of value in themselves. Eternal life was the great goal. Spiritual and mental vigor was very deep. How then can there be evil?

A remarkable text gives four good things the supreme God did in order to silence evil:

1. The creator made Wind, i.e. life equally available to all humans.
2. Water being a crucial factor in the formation of the Nile Valley, an assurance of equal access to water meant basic equality of opportunity.
3. All humans are created equal ("I made every human like his or her fellow"). This means that the creator had not intended that humans do evil.
4. The final good deed of the supreme God was to call human attention to the kingdom of the dead, the region of eternal life and to the god-worship and rituals that must be performed in order to attain that immortality.

In full, the verse on the third good deed of the supreme God runs as follows:

I made every human like his fellow.
I did not command that they might do evil,
But it was their hearts that violated what I had said.
That is (the third) of the deeds.

(Adriaan de Buck, CofinTexts, VII, 1130: 461–5)

It is clear that humans are the flock of God. He made heaven and earth so as to satisfy their desires and wishes. He made the breath of life for their nostrils. Humans are God's image fashioned out of the divine body. Plants and animals, fowl and fish, were made in order to nourish human beings, How then can there be evil?

Evil comes from humans themselves. Their own hearts (haty, "heart," hatiu, "thoughts," fb, "heart," "mind," "understanding," "intelligence," "will") have devised wrong. Social inequality is
no part of God's plan. Equality is a divine dispensation, but wrongdoing is a human act. Human beings must bear the responsibility for the latter alone.

Evil is not a divine principle in the world. The origin of evil is to be found within the nature of human beings themselves. Human nature (ka) is good, but the first thing in life is consciousness (ib). The mind (ib) can have various activities, such as thinking and feeling, but to think and feel well depends on consciousness. In human beings the principle of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom belongs to consciousness. Human beings can distinguish between what is right and wrong, thanks to their consciousness. They are capable of having commiseration, forgiveness, and also of being ashamed of wrongdoing. The flame of a candle depends on how the candle has received the rich tallow that gives light. The flame is the ka, but the tallow that really gives light is the human mind and its consciousness (ib). For all these reasons, education (seba) is very necessary.

Maat, the Keystone of Egyptian Philosophy

Ancient Egyptian society lasted almost 35 centuries. During this long span of time, there was no social discrimination between men and women, no human servitude or slavery, no detention in jails, and no capital punishment. This was possible because of Maat, the keystone of the Egyptian philosophy.

Symbolism of Maat

The goddess Maat, wearing a tall ostrich feather upon her head as her symbol, was called the daughter of Ra, or the eye of Ra. She was also known as lady of the heavens, queen of the earth, mistress of the underworld, and mistress of all gods. Ritual scenes depict Egyptian kings presenting a statuette of Maat to the gods as a supreme gift.

Maat as the Embodiment of Perfect Virtue

Maat basically means "the real," "reality," that is, that which is genuine and authentic as opposed to artificial or spurious. Maat is reality as a whole, that is, the totality of all things possessing actuality, existence, or essence. Maat is that which exists objectively. In fact, Maat is that which has necessary and not just contingent existence. This is why Maat is everywhere and pervades all creation (er-djer). It means also that Maat is pertinent to all the spheres of reality, the divine or sacred, the cosmic, the physical, the political, and the familial. In short, Maat is an exhaustive and comprehensive concept.

This inclusiveness makes it an orderly and aesthetically coherent whole: which is why Maat also means the orderliness of the totality of existence. Accordingly, everything in the universe that is real and orderly is the expression or manifestation of Maat.
In particular, when in society human beings conduct themselves in the proper way or perform in the correct way, they are manifesting Maat. Hence these other meanings of Maat, as "truth," "justice," "righteousness," "rightness." Maat is the highest conception of physical and moral law known to the ancient Egyptians. Thus it is that the goddess Maat was the personification of law, order, rule, truth, right, righteousness, canon, justice, straightforwardness, integrity, uprightness, conscientiousness, and perfection. Egyptian civilization was built upon this very inclusive concept, with its great fecundity of meaning. However, to talk Maat is of no use, if it is not practiced. In truth, AUX is a way of life and spirituality.

Maat is more than Ethics or Moral Philosophy

The Pharaonic state was organized according to the political principles of Maat. Because of this, people did not live in what Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) called "the state of nature." In philosophy, ethics designates moral philosophy, that is, the principles of right conduct theorized as a system of moral values. But Maat can be understood as a transcendental moral philosophy, because it is already divine. Maat has nothing to do with what is called in Western philosophy "moral values," "ethics," "imperatives," etc. A Pharaoh was not a "political animal" or a "moral leader," but truly a real (maa) king, a divine leader, and a spiritual king, concerned with the divine principles governing the world. The kings of ancient Egypt upheld the laws of the universe and of human society, which Maat embodied, i.e. cosmic order, truth, justice, harmony, perfection, and spiritual strength.

Maat is, thus, more than "ethics" or "moral values," because the creator god himself lives by Maat. Things change (kheper), both in the world of nature and of human beings, but Maat, underlying and regulating the changes, remains (men) unchanging as long as the creator-god Ra exists. An ancient Egyptian text runs:

O Ra!
Master of truth (Maat)
Living of Truth (Maat)
Rejoicing in Truth (Maat)
Vaunted in Truth (Moat)
Formed of Truth (Maat)
Eternal through Truth (Maat).
Abundance by Truth (Maat)
Powerful by Truth (Maat)
Constant in Truth (Maat)
Rich by Truth (Maat)
Adorned by Truth (Maat)
Shining by Truth (Maat)
Satisfied by Truth (Maat)
United to Truth from his beginning.
(Litany of the god Ra)

The Immanence of Maat in African culture

The honor and awe in which the Egyptians held Maat was tremendous. In fact, Maat is still one of the principal forces in the development of African societies. The fundamental role of Maat is manifested nowadays in the language of various African ethnic groups:

| Ancient Egyptian | : maa, "true"; maa, "true"
|------------------|------------------------|
| Coptic (Egypt)   | : me, mee, mie, me!, mee, "truth," "justice," and also "truthful." "righteous"
| Caffino (Cushitic, Ethiopia) | : moyo. "motive," "reason" (truth and reason are inseparable)
| Kongo (Congo)    | : moyo, "life," "soul." "mind" (same semantic field)
| Ngbaka (Central African Republic) | : ma, magic medicine (in order to know the truth)
| Fang (Equatorial Guinea, South Cameroon, Gabon) | : mye, mie, "pure" (tabe mye. "to be physically and morally pure")
| Mpongwe (Gabon)  | : mya, "to know" the truth (mya re isome, the self Knowledge," which the Delphic oracle also enjoined: gnothi seauton)
| Yoruba (Nigeria) | : mo, "to know" the truth (knowledge)
| Hausa (Nigeria)  | : ma, "in fact." "indeed" (affirmative truth: ni ma na ji, "I in fact heard it")
| Mada (North Cameroon) | : mat, "genie," "goblin" (semantic specialization)
| Nuer (Nilotic, Sudan) | : mat, "total," "sum up," "forces" (ro mat. "to join forces with." Maat is indeed the total of all virtues, all forces as ideals to guide man in his personal and spiritual life).
Conclusion

The serious and careful study of African philosophy from antiquity through the present era will reveal that African philosophy has a very wide scope. All the major issues that have engaged the attention of philosophers in Asia, Europe, America, etc. can be found in African philosophy. They were discussed through many centuries in ancient Egypt, during the great kingdoms of West, Central, and Southern Africa, in modern times and in contemporary times. Any doubt about reason and rationality in Africa was chiefly due to anthropological innuendoes. Philosophy as such was not, and has never been, a mystery to the African mind. The fact is that in human history philosophy has been everywhere a mark of the triumph of the human mind.

The central concept of the Egyptian philosophy is Maat, meaning "levelness, evenness, straightness, correctness," in the sense of regularity and order in the world. Flowing from this is the philosophical use of Maat to mean "uprightness, righteousness, truth, justice." In conformity with Maat, individual rights were fully recognized in ancient Egypt. Maat gave each human being an opportunity to realize himself or herself in this life and to have hope for a future life hereafter.

Since human beings belonged also to society, not to themselves alone, the key word for the wise person was "silence," with the meaning of calm, tranquility, humility. The god Amon himself was "the lord of the silent, the protector of the silent." Since "ignorant and wise are of one piece," the right to self-expression must be used in the spirit of Maat.

The achievements of the ancient Egyptians in art, architecture, and government and their sense of geometric order, social justice, peace, love, and happiness are reflected in the intellectual, scientific, and spiritual heights reached by Egypt, thanks to the philosophy of Maat.

Ancient Egypt did contribute significantly to the continuing philosophy, ethics, or world consciousness of later times by receiving and educating many Greek scholars and philosophers. For example, Plato (427-347 Be) himself records that Thales (624-546 Be), the founder of philosophy, geometry, and astronomy in the Greek world, was educated in Egypt under the priests ("Th. epaideuthe en Aigupto hupo ton hieron": Plato. The Republic X, 600 A. scholium).

References