Alternative ways of knowing - doing justice to non-western intellectual traditions in a postmodern era

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Abstract

Western domination of the modern world included the imposition of a rational-empirical mode of knowing, grounded in a dualistic epistemology, which has its roots in the 'Enlightenment'. Alternative understandings of the world, and ways of knowing it, have been repressed or ridiculed. Apart from 'deconstructive' postmodern theorising, another style of postmodernism has emerged in the tradition of the Romantic movement, sometimes referred to as 'affirmative' postmodernism. This encompasses an alternative, 'participatory' epistemology. This article uses the Enlightenment-Romanticism dialectic to suggest a way of breaking the still-enduring 'chains of thought' of Enlightenment modernity and to make a case for a wider recognition of ways of knowing enshrined in non-western intellectual traditions.

The West versus the Rest?

Nekwhevha (2000, p. 41), in an article titled 'Educational Transformation and the African Renaissance in a Globalising World', seeks to challenge Western cultural hegemony by arguing for the construction of "authentic African epistemological paradigms". It is not the intention of this article to counter the substance of Nekwhevha's argument, but it must be asked whether efforts such as those of Nekwhevha might be better placed in a wider context. Western cultural hegemony has operated to the detriment of peoples outside of Africa also. The epistemological issue raised by Nekwhevha has ramifications which cannot be treated adequately in an approach that limits them to the confrontation between resurgent African tradition and the Western cultural imperialism by which it has hitherto been suppressed. Peat (1996), for example, as part of a project that is similar in many ways to Nekwhevha's, focuses particularly on epistemological questions in advocating the legitimacy of the Native American understanding of the world.

It would be misguided to assimilate African and Native American cultures to each other in an essentialistic category of 'non-western' or, even worse, 'pre-modern'. But, while recognising the uniqueness that does exist, we should not neglect the commonality to be found in a shared divergence from Western modernity. It may be that the alternative epistemological principles that Nekwhevha calls Africans to develop or uphold, are part of a common humanity. That humanity was not only denied and degraded by the economic, political and military oppression of colonialism, but also by 'chains of thought' that accompanied that overt domination. The present article focuses particularly on the way in which a rational and empirical way of knowing, situated within the framework of an observer-world dualism, has served as a tightly regulative filter in restricting what may be known and what may be regarded as valid knowledge.

It is a commonplace of critiques of modern thought to complain of the dualism of its divorce of subject from object in its epistemology. Opposition to modernist epistemology is to be found in papers on African epistemology, for example by Kaphagawani and Malherbe (1998). The dehumanising effects of its dualism, in the divorce of subject from object in its epistemology, have attracted particular attention. This dehumanising tendency of modern thought goes back at least as far as the link between a dualistic epistemology and a mechanistic model of the world in the philosophy of Descartes. The pervasive effects of that mechanistic character in modern thought can be found in phrases like 'the machinery of the human body' or 'the mechanism of mind'. Cartesian thought was fundamental to the Enlightenment and to the development of modern science, but it was allied with other elements in what became, in the phrase of Gamble (1981), 'the Western Ideology'. Epistemological dualism, materialism and mechanistic thought, which had roots extending centuries further back than Descartes in the history of the medieval West, had long been developing in a mutually reinforcing symbiosis with European culture in general (Ihde, 1983; Moodie, 2000). This came to full material expression in developments that engendered a revolution that was wider than what is conveyed by the phrase 'the Industrial Revolution'. It "gave unprecedented wealth and power to a few Western states" by opening up "a great technological and material gap between the West and other states" (Gamble, 1981, pp. 4-5). The ways of knowing of Enlightenment modernism were harnessed to powerful effect in the development of modern science and in its related technology. These were instrumental in the process in which the domination of the rest of the world was accomplished. But in itself the hegemony of the rational-empirical epistemological mode was also to have a

continuing oppressive influence on the ways of knowing of the societies that were dominated.

In addition to overt Western domination, a more insidious process of disparagement served, and continues to serve, to suppress ways of understanding the world that fail to meet the criteria of the dominant 'Enlightenment' worldview. This is illustrated by the exasperated response of an African member of a class of theological students to statements of white classmates in a discussion of aspects of African culture: "Anything that you cannot understand you call superstition!" (Moodie, 1999). What is noteworthy about this example is that the complaint came from a mature and highly able student, a person fully conversant with the modern worldview. What is more, he was directing his comment to people who were in a 'business' supposedly least touched by Enlightenment views. His comment obviously relates to more than just the epistemological issues referred to in the title of this article, but it is closely bound up with those issues. These will be pursued in more detail in this article, not specifically in relation to Africa, but in the broader context that has been referred to already. Indeed, the traditional culture of Europe was also subjected to the suppression to which we have referred: the term, *old wives' tales*, lingers on in modern English as a testimony to the undermining of traditional European culture in the course of the transformation to modernity. The disparagement of the traditional remedies of the 'wise old woman' of rural European society and, implicitly, the ways of knowing that lie behind them, can be related to the African student's complaint regarding the use of the word 'superstition'. This leads us on to reflect on the way that the Enlightenment paradigm has functioned in Europe as well as the rest of the world. The case of Charles Darwin is particularly interesting in this regard, especially in view of his pivotal role in the development of modern-Western thought.

Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Other

Harpur (2002) describes the ambivalence of the young Darwin's intellectual position. He set out on his journey aboard the *Beagle* as a budding scientist, holding the rationalist view of the world that 19th Century modernity had received from the Enlightenment. In that view, the world was like a clockwork mechanism, set in motion by a transcendent God and left to run without further interference. As his career progressed, Darwin's view of religion was to follow a course common to that of many 19th Century Western intellectuals. But, although Darwin was to experience considerable anguish in consequence

of his intellectual ambivalence, this was not connected with his relinquishment of conventional religious faith. Rather, his anguish flowed from the conflicting tendencies, within his own psyche, of the Enlightenment and Romanticism in the development of modern thought. The Romantic Movement, which emerged in reaction against the Enlightenment worldview and rationalism in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, represents the other major factor in Darwin's original ambivalence. In his youth Darwin was imaginative and a lover of poetry. His own record of his "first encounter with tropical Nature is nothing if not Romantic", as Harpur (2002, p. 93) comments. But his journal reflects his rigorous understanding of his task: it is that of a 19th Century scientist. His vocation is not, like the Romantic poets and artists, to lay himself open to Nature imaginatively, but instead to describe it objectively and factually. Harpur describes how the Enlightenment model of the world came to prevail in Darwin's mind, but at a price that he bitterly bemoaned: the loss of appreciation for the literature and poetry he had so loved in his youth.

There is something of a leap to be made from literature, poetry and imagination to an alternative epistemology, although not as big as some might think. But, before pursuing the connection, the significance of the example of Darwin must be pressed further. The internal conflict within Darwin's view of the world is a microcosm of wider conflicts, within the West between the Enlightenment and Romantic understandings and, more generally, between non-western and Western (that is, Enlightenment-dominated) understandings of the world. Marcus Borg, who regards himself as a postmodern theologian, identifies the Enlightenment worldview as the 'great divide' in Western intellectual history that separates the modern period from all that went before it. For it gave birth to "the modern worldview with its understanding of reality as material and 'self-contained', operating in accord with 'natural laws' of cause and effect." (Borg, 1995, p. 45).

The notion of the postmodern that flows from this focus on the worldview of modernity differs from the understanding of postmodernism, as concerned with text, in the work of Derrida. Although the two are not mutually exclusive, it offers a more immediately useful way of interpreting non-western intellectual traditions. But, along with the materialism of the modern worldview identified by Borg, there are other, related features of the intellectual tradition deriving from the Enlightenment, which must be included in a critical re-evaluation of other traditions vis-à-vis modernity. This is particularly so if we are to engage in any attempt to understand non-western intellectual traditions in a way that does them justice. Amongst these other features of Enlightenment modernism are its rational and empirical mode of

knowing the world, the related subject-object dichotomy of its epistemological dualism, and the atomism by which it views the world as composed of solid bodies existing within a 'container' of empty three-dimensional space. In particular, the contrast between the rational-empirical, dualistic epistemological mode and the ways of knowing characteristic of non-western traditions, is central to the argument of this article. The materialism and associated atomism of Enlightenment modernism, which relate to the substance of the world that is known in modern thought, are inextricably bound up with the epistemological mode by which it is known. But the link between the epistemological and ontological aspects of modern thought demand more space than can be given here, though, and so will merely be alluded to.

The Enlightenment took its name from the supposed distinction between the modern age and the darkness of primitive and superstitious Medieval European society. The disparagement of the Middle Ages by one Enlightenment intellectual, as 'a thousand years without a bath' (Fremantle, 1954) illustrates this nicely. But that same disparagement was soon generalised beyond the West's own past, to other societies. In the self-congratulatory climate of a triumphalist West, ways of knowing outside of the Enlightenment epistemological paradigm, and their associated ontological understandings, all unmistakeably 'other' in relation to the atomistic materialism of the Enlightenment, could only be written off as 'mumbo-jumbo' or 'superstition'. Indeed, within the West, the alternative, Romantic tradition suffered something of the same suppression that is evident in the life of Darwin, although it has repeatedly broken through into Western consciousness (Harpur, 2002). There are those who argue that this resurgence of Romanticism offers an alternative postmodernism that complements and goes beyond the negative task of 'deconstructive' postmodernism (see e.g. Tarnas, 1996). While 'deconstructive' postmodernism identifies the flaws and inconsistencies of modern thought, there has been an outburst of affirmative or 'constructive' postmodernisms (Griffin, ed. 1990; Rosenau, 1992; Steyn, 1994; Harvey, 1997). These have been rather lacking in theorists to compare with the likes of Derrida and Foucault, being primarily social rather than intellectual phenomena. Much of this variegated and heterogeneous movement incorporates a florid, often eccentric, spirituality but this serves as a sign that modernity has been tried and found wanting: the corollary to the rejection of modern materialism is a recrudescence of the spiritual. But there *are* theorists of an alternative postmodernism: Bortoft (1996), Tarnas (1996), Edelglas et al (1997) and Harpur (2002) are examples of authors who all approach this topic from particular perspectives of their own. But, despite differences in their

starting points, all converge on the epistemological question in looking to what may be termed a participatory epistemology - one which eschews the dualistic and closely limited rational-empirical way of knowing of Enlightenment modernism. Before dealing further with the epistemological debate within the Western tradition, though, we must consider the relation of other traditions to the West. In this regard it is necessary to recognise that the postmodern reaction against modernity within the West is not necessarily seen in a positive light from the perspective of those opposed to modern Western domination of the world. The British Muslim scholar Ziauddin Sardar provides a scathingly critical review of Western postmodernism and what it means for non-western peoples, especially with regard to their intellectual traditions.

'Postmodernism and the Other'

In his *'Postmodernism and the Other'* Sardar (1998) brings three major charges against the postmodernism of the West. These can be summarised as follows:

Firstly, in accordance with its own view of things, especially as propounded by Baudrillard, its pluralism is not in fact a valid engagement with the plurality of human cultural life but is focused merely on the representations of the 'other' which it has constructed for itself. Secondly, it is using its hold on the global economy to drown the traditions of other societies, apart from commodified, synthetic appropriations of those cultures, by the aggressive imposition of its consumerist ethos. And thirdly, it gratuitously generalises its own crisis of meaning to all other cultures, thus removing the ground from which to resist the domination of the West.

Thus, the very cause of the collapse of the West's universalising modernism is turned into the new means of maintaining Western domination. For, if truth is not a possibility, the consequence is a denial of the truth of non-Western cultures along with that of the modern West. Thus, at its moment of bankruptcy, Western culture pulls down all other cultures also, by universalising the emptiness that it has discovered in its own structures of meaning. And what is posited at the theoretical level is actualised in the lives of those other societies by the overwhelming power of the Western controlled global economy and media.

In addition to this analysis of the oppressive influence of postmodernism outside of the West, Sardar goes on to demonstrate the sufficiency of non-western intellectual traditions to deal with the challenges that have shaken modern Western thought. Amongst other points, he shows how Indian philosophical logic did not fall into the straitjacket of binary-oppositional logic which Western thought had inherited from Aristotle. In contrast to dualistic Western logic, which uses sequential techniques of quantification and negation, Indian logic depends on a geometrical system of demonstrating relationships of similarity and convergence:

> Instead of a universe seen through an either/or duality, the Indian system sees the world through a four-fold logic (X is neither A, nor non-A, nor both A and non-A, nor neither A nor non-A). ...[It] achieves a precise and unambiguous formulation of universal statements in terms of its technical language without recourse to quantification over unspecified universal domains. (Sardar, 1998, p.42)

Sardar's concludes his discussion of Indian logic by stating that:

> ... non-western cultures are not only aware of the diversity of realities but they have also developed criteria for the validation of different realities. The universe is not as meaningless as postmodernism would have us believe. (p.42)

This reference to the capacity of non-western cultures to 'validate different realities' is directed at the heart of what he sees as postmodernism's self-congratulatory pluralism with regard to multiple realities, which is allied with its easy nihilism. Sardar argues that the apprehension of the multiple nature of reality is used illegitimately in postmodern theory. He cites the different senses of 'reality' in Islamic philosophical thought, from reality *per se*, through rationally constructed reality, socially constructed reality and still other senses, to absolute reality as that reality which is known only to God. He concludes:

> The point is that postmodernism is not what 'inevitably happens' when people discover that there are many realities and many ways of knowing ... Muslim and other non-Western people have always known this. (Sardar, 1998, p.41)

Sardar also draws attention to the way in which Chinese and other non-western systems of thought incorporated similar understandings to those of chaos theory, which are current in the postmodern West. To this could be added the example of 'fuzzy logic' (Kosko, 1993), which has gone part of the way to providing a postmodern treatment of logic to match that of classical Indian and other Eastern philosophy.

Apart from these examples, whether of multilateral logic, recognition of multiple realities, or chaos theory, there are other aspects to non-western intellectual traditions in addition to those that Sardar cites. Most significant, for this article, is the epistemological issue. As has been noted already, the dualistic subject-object way of knowing the world, and the rational-empirical mode by which it operates, was taken in modernity and especially by modern science as constituting the essential canon for the determination of valid knowledge. The first major challenge to this in mainstream Western discourse occurred in the 'New Physics'. More recently, in the social sciences, a questioning of crude dualism became evident in the participant-observation and ethnographic approaches that have become well-established research methods. But the participatory epistemology that has emerged from within the alternative Western tradition of Romanticism, and which is more radically opposed to 'Enlightenment' dualism than these methods, has found its place within the broad body of affirmative postmodernisms. The Romantic and affirmative postmodern tradition, within which this alternative epistemology has emerged, is paralleled in this by non-western traditions.

In the examples cited from Sardar and others, we see systems of thought in which 'premodern' and 'postmodern' elements co-exist - Chinese, Indian and Arabic philosophy developed in highly sophisticated ways prior to the advent of modernity. In the particular case of Buddhism, the striking parallelism between it and 'deconstructive' postmodernism has been subject to detailed analyses (eg. le Roux, 1996a, 1996b, 1997). Derrida (1989) has similarly noted the striking congruence between his own 'deconstruction' and the 'apophatic theology' of the Eastern Christian tradition – which stands in marked contrast to the Augustinian-Scholastic-modernist course followed by Western thought (Maloney, 1983; Behr-Sigel, 1992, Moodie, 2000). In the light of this 'premodern postmodernism', we need to question the type of scheme outlined by Degenaar (1996) in which premodern, modern and postmodern are presented as clearly distinguishable categories, and in which the modern serves as the necessary link in proceeding from the premodern to the postmodern. Despite his averred postmodernism, the modernist doctrine of progress rears its head in Degenaar's thought, unnoticed. This is an important issue to consider in contrasting a genuinely *post*-modern understanding with a postmodernism that continues major modern assumptions while claiming to challenge the totality and very grounds of modern thought. A valid *post*-modernism might be able to encompass the contributions of non-western intellectual traditions on their own terms, without subjecting them to the gate-keeping function of the modernist principles of the West. Prime amongst these principles is the dualistic, rational-empirical epistemological framework

focused on in this article. On the basis of such principles, Western society continues to arrogate to itself the right to judge what is 'superstitious' or 'mumbo-jumbo' and what is 'scientific', what is invalid, and what is valid in the total field of human knowledge. As Sardar shows, that field is much wider and more venerable than the contribution of parvenu Western modernity - whatever the brilliance of its achievements in the area it has devoted itself to, and whatever the power that those achievements have given it over others. The limitations of those achievements, although unfortunately not of the power they have conferred, may be seen in a wider consideration of ways of knowing.

Alternative ways of knowing

Cheyne and Tarulli (1998) note that in recent years there has been a resurgence of speculation in the human sciences about alternative ways of knowing. They cite various characterizations of these, including that of Bruner who distinguishes narrative and paradigmatic ways of knowing. Cheyne and Tarulli write in the context of psychological discourse and while their focus is narrow, they do raise important broader issues. In particular, they argue that these different ways of knowing are not in fact separable. A comment by Bischoff (1976), that all philosophy is interpreted myth, is of relevance here. We might rephrase this by saying that the rational philosophical mode, like all human thought, takes as its primary data ‘pictures’ or ‘stories’. The imagery of Democritus’ atomic philosophy may not be as imaginatively rich, but it is no less mythical for that. The history of Democritus’ imagery of the 'smallest possible indivisible particle' encourages us to press Bischoff’s thought further: science is, like the philosophy from which it originated, myth interpreted, but the interpretation is then also applied and tested. But, eventually the myths that have been interpreted and applied may be pushed too far (cf. Kuhn, 1970). In the case of the atom this happened in the attempt of physicists to get beyond the ‘indivisible unity’ of the atom. In this case, another picture of reality, as a field, was already available, imagined (in a strong sense of the word) by Michael Faraday, perhaps the greatest scientist of the 19th Century. Thus Cheyne’s and Tarulli’s point may be borne out in a somewhat different sense than they intended: the paradigmatic mode cannot be separated from the narrative mode because it exists in a symbiotic relationship with it.

In the same collection of papers on the 'Ways of Knowing' (Eisner, 1985), in which Bruner uses the terms 'narrative' and 'paradigmatic', a range of articles

that elude a merely dichotomous categorization, are included. These articles deal variously with 'aesthetic', 'scientific', 'interpersonal', 'formal' and 'practical' modes of knowing in addition to two other articles, 'The double-edged mind: intuition and intellect' by Rudolf Arnheim, and 'Spirituality and knowing' by Dwayne Huebner. Arnheim (1985, p.77) reassures readers that "intuition is not a freakish speciality of clairvoyants and artists". He encourages those readers "who feel more assured when they can assign a habitation in the physical world to a mental ability" that they can locate intuition in the right hemisphere of the brain "in quarters as roomy and respectable as those of the intellect in the left brain". With regard to Huebner's article, it is interesting that 'spirituality and knowing' should have been included amongst the other papers. He wrestles valiantly under the disadvantage of not being able to locate the substance of his topic, like Arnheim's, safely in some physical organ. Much of what he writes is inspirational in tone, for example: "Every mode of knowing is participation in the continual creation of the universe", and: "Every mode of knowing witnesses to the transcending possibilities of which human life is part" (Huebner, 1985, p.172). Little is done to substantiate these statements apart from scattered references to Zen Buddhism and transcendental meditation, amongst others. But Huebner (1985, p. 163) does cite Huston Smith's *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (Smith, 1982), which "calls attention to the increasing body of scientific and philosophic literature that questions today's prevailing mind-set". Here he provides a clue for us to follow. Smith is a contributor to Griffin's series on 'Constructive Postmodernism' in a text (Griffin and Smith, 1988) that specifically seeks links with non-western understandings of the world. Smith's approach is similar to that of the physicist Fritjof Capra in looking particularly to Eastern theologico-philosophical thought. Capra's *Tao of Physics* (2000) brings us back to the assertion that the human mind is capable of two kinds of knowledge, or modes of consciousness: the rational and the intuitive. Capra's book commends the intuitive as that mode which non-western, specifically Eastern, thought can offer for the benefit of the West. Capra goes on to refer to 'absolute knowledge' as the product of Eastern mysticism, which arises in 'meditative' or 'mystical' states and transcends not only intellectual thinking but also sense perception. From the perspective of ways of thinking this is similar to the Goethean approach outlined by Bortoft (1996), although Goethe's work did not presume to focus on the mystical apprehension of 'being itself'. As in Goethe, the 'alternate ways of knowing' that are the concern of this article are less lofty but, perhaps, not more prosaic, for they bring together myth, imagination, intuition and spirit. With regard to the history of the West, Harpur (2002) provides a comprehensive review of the alternative to the dominant rational intellectual tradition.

Harpur's account includes the Romantic tradition but ranges more widely still to deal with elements in Western culture beyond the relatively recent and to some degree elitist phenomenon of Romanticism. Harpur refers to the relationship between myth and knowing: demythologization does not bring us to any 'truer' truth. Indeed, he insists that literalisation of myth is an opposite and equally misguided approach. Harpur understands the mythic to differ from the rational in a way that parallels Bruner's distinction between the narrative and the paradigmatic. These functions might be located firmly in right and left sides of the brain in the view of modern psychology, but Harpur argues that in its philosophies of materialism and scientism, modern thought has given itself over to literalistic concretised images. If intuition and rationality are expressed through the brain, they are not limited to it. He cites the quantum physics principle of non-locality, exemplified in the way that 'particles' of light from a common source continue to act in concert with each other no matter how far apart they may travel. He notes the implication that the entire universe is, at its deepest level, a holistic system in which every part is interconnected or 'in communication' with every other part. Harpur refers to the ideas of Paul Davies, another physicist to defect from the modern worldview (Davies, 1990), who suggests that there might be a purposive universal mind that pervades the cosmos as a kind of 'field of fields'. In this hyper-field individual human minds would exist as localised islands of consciousness in the wider ocean of Mind. But Harpur is critical of Davies' understanding of 'Mind' as a rational super-consciousness, and its inevitable literalisation in the imagery of computers. More generally, he particularly warns about potential pitfalls in the postmodern reaction against rationalism:

> Scientism [itself a literalisation] could well be deluged by a tide of belief in the literal reality of the paranormal or the occult. Religious fundamentalism might well rise up, Savonarola-like, and denounce science and technology as the work of the Devil; or else it might form sects that try and flee back to Nature, away from the technocracy of the modern world. Materialism might well be countered by a belief in literal spirits or angels or aliens, wrapped in a vague spiritualistic theosophy. But of course, this is already happening. (Harpur, 2002, p.242)

But the kind of world that is discernible in Harpur's writing is scarcely more congenial to the modern, rationalist mind than the world of literal spirits and vague spiritualistic theosophy. As he himself notes, it is the kind of world that modernity, that is the modern West, so consistently impugned as backward and superstitious in its judgement of other cultures. Although it has been contended in this article that Nekwhevha's case needs to be broadened, it is from the burgeoning field of African philosophy that some of the keenest debate and most cogent arguments on the relation of Western to 'other'

intellectual traditions come. Amongst others this is evident in the work of the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Appiah, some of whose line of reasoning we refer to in the next section.

Knowing 'other worlds' in other ways

The impact of modernity on non-western traditions is referred to by Kaphagawani and Malherbe (1998, p.212) in relation to African epistemology. As a condition of its relevance it is stated that it "must cope with and assimilate whatever is assimilable from the advancements in science and technology of the West". This view underlines a statement by Gamble (1981), that the power placed by contingent factors in the hands of a few European states has forced all other societies to meet the challenge of the modern West on its terms. Appiah, in his article 'Old gods, new worlds', deals with the confrontation between Western rationalism and traditional views. He quotes from Lecky's *History of the rise and influence of the spirit of rationalism in Europe*, published in 1883:

> If we ask why it is that the world has rejected what was once so universally and intensely believed, why a narrative of an old woman who had been seen riding on a broomstick … is deemed so entirely incredible, most persons would probably be unable to give a very definite answer to the question. It is not always because we have examined the evidence and found it insufficient (cited in Appiah, 1998, p.271).

Appiah then comments:

> When I first came across this passage it struck me at once as wonderfully apt to the situation of African intellectuals today. This paragraph records that the secularization of Lecky's culture – the 'growth of rationalism' – occurred without a proper examination of the evidence.

Appiah follows Lecky's deliberately hyperbolic approach in order to highlight his case regarding modern Western thought. Appiah's concern is the *irrationality* of the European response in the questioning of the 'spiritual' and his hope is that Africans will do better in doing justice to *rationality* than was the case in Europe. He offers two motives for this hope, one moral and one practical. The first, moral reason, is universal: mutual respect is required of all human beings. Appiah directs this particularly at the modern Western concentration on non-cognitive aspects of traditional beliefs, summarily judged to be irrational, in such a way as to under-estimate the role of reason in traditional cultures. Appiah argues that 'non-cognitive' aspects of traditional

beliefs (matters of 'spirit', for example) are in a different category to the purely rational. This does not make them irrational (just as love for another person is not irrational even though it eludes the category of the rational). However, the *a priori* exclusion by Western rationalism of traditional beliefs, including its own, from the realm of the possible *is* irrational.

For all its irrationality, the 'Western ideology' is powerful. That power has a reality quite apart from the material power by which the West dominated the rest of the world. It is for this reason that Sogolo, (1998, p.219) charges that Senghor's 'law of mystical participation' encouraged Western disparagement of African culture. Senghor refers here to knowledge by intuition, in which to know an object requires that it be penetrated 'from the inside' (Shutte, 1998). The vexed nature of the epistemological question raised in this paper is revealed in the comments of Appiah and Sogolo. What is encompassed in Senghor's principle is quite evidently a participatory epistemology. In describing the recognition of a participatory epistemology as a major element in doing justice to non-western intellectual traditions, it is necessary to take Sogolo's complaint seriously. But a recognition of its place in the Western tradition may go some way to meeting Sogolo's concern. That it is situated within the alternative, Romantic tradition of Western intellectual culture, is not unproblematic in terms of its credentials. Indeed any deviation from Enlightenment orthodoxy in matters epistemological (or ontological) brings down immediate and weighty opprobrium on the 'heretics' who dare to pursue a different line. Appiah neatly identifies this problem with reference to the reception of Rupert Sheldrake's *New Science of Life* on its publication in 1981. As Appiah notes, one correspondent in the prestigious journal *Nature* suggested it might usefully be burned. Appiah shows how the reason for the widespread outrage among biologists lay in its failure to conform to 'official ideology', not in scientific objections as such – Sheldrake had deliberately couched his proposal in an experimentally testable form. His central hypothesis was that the forms of living things are grounded in 'morphogenetic fields', the principle of which is very close to Goethe's notion of morphology, which itself is linked with the participatory epistemology that informed his scientific approach (Tarnas, 1996; Bortoft, 1996). Goethe used 'intuition', 'imagination' or a 'meditative' mode (the words are offered as synonyms) to gain an apprehension of the 'morphology' of living species, specifically plants in Goethe's case. The term 'morphology' was coined by Goethe to explain the non-material, non-spatial, information-patterns for the forms of species (Bortoft, 1996). But, although the term passed into 'normal' biological science (in Kuhn's sense of 'normal science'), Goethe's method and the products of his work could not be accommodated by the modern scientific paradigm. As

Bortoft notes in presenting Goethe's work and approach, Goethe is accepted as a major literary figure but his science has been disregarded by the mainstream Western tradition, as has his epistemological approach also. It is part of an 'other' tradition within the West, to which justice might still be done in a postmodern era in which 'Enlightenment' presuppositions are called into question. As long as this is not the case, the type of concern raised by Sogolo must continue to be taken seriously.

In conclusion

The discussion of Goethe's work is not a mere digression from our main topic. It is a key (although not necessarily the only one) to a recognition of 'alternative ways of knowing' and specifically the participatory epistemology that has been mentioned in that regard. This is clarified in the discussion of the place in science of 'imaginative participation' by Edelglas et al (1997). Writing from a background in theoretical physics, they demonstrate how modern science, from the time of Galileo, confined its scope to a model based on the investigation of solid bodies. In so doing it excluded a whole range of phenomena from scientific consciousness. At best such phenomena might be regarded as 'subjective', as contrasted with the 'hard', 'objective' nature of the world of discrete, solid bodies. But it must then be asked by what mode the world *can* be adequately known. Edelglas et al point to 'imaginative participation in science'. And, if the world is not to be viewed as a collection of discrete bodies in the container of three-dimensional space, perhaps it may better be understood in terms of 'field' metaphors. In this case the assumption that the human observer is a separate, discrete 'object', but one with a somehow independent vantage-point by which to observe the rest of reality, must also be questioned. The distinct consciousness of the human observer must indeed be recognised but not by cutting it off from the total field of which it is part. This is the basis for the participatory epistemology described by Tarnas.

Tarnas draws from the Romantic reaction against 'Enlightenment' rationalism to overcome the subject-object dichotomy in its approach to understanding the world. In place of this epistemological dualism, Tarnas (1996) outlines his view of participatory epistemology, based on Goethe's work, which is crucial to his postmodern position. In Tarnas's view, this involves a synergistic relationship between human knowers and immanent truth within the world:

> The interpretative and constructive nature of human cognition is fully acknowledged ... (but) ... nature brings forth its *own* order through the human mind when that mind is employing its full complement of faculties - intellectual, volitional, emotional, sensory, imaginative, aesthetic, epiphanic (Tarnas, 1996, p.435).

From an 'affirmative' postmodern standpoint, Tarnas arrives at a similar position to the 'deconstructive' approach of Vattimo (1988), which questions the 'metaphysically privileged position' accorded to 'Man' in the modern Western worldview. But to follow Vattimo also entails questioning the epistemological mode by which the metaphysically privileged observer functions. So too must the materialist construction of a world consisting of solid bodies be questioned, for it is constructed on this same metaphysical and epistemological basis. If this raises the spectre of nihilism then, as Sardar (1998) notes, it must be recalled that non-western intellectual traditions have long managed without these philosophic props of modernity. In their 'premodernity' they in fact had developed resources to deal with challenges in respect of which modern thought would later be tried and found wanting. As Feyerabend (1984) suggests, they should not simply be written off because of their 'incommensurability' with the modern worldview - in this error lies the irrationality of modern rationalism to which Appiah draws our attention.

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