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Voodoo or I.Q.: An Introduction to African Psychology

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Definition and Rationale

African Psychology is the recognition and practice of a body of knowledge which is fundamentally different in origin, content, and direction than that recognized and practiced by Euro-American psychologists. The differences between African Psychology and Euro-American Psychology reflect the differences between Black people and White people or, in terms of basic culture, between Africans and Europeans.

It is one of those many anomalies of the Euro-American (or White, Western) scientific tradition that, while differences between Blacks and Whites are recognized enough to warrant a systematic study and the formulation of unique public policies concerning for each, these same differences are not recognized enough to preclude measurements with common instruments and to warrant the formulation of distinct disciplinary orientations devoted toward their explanation. This anomaly is due, in part, to the peculiar nature of social and psychological inquiry. Unlike the physical sciences, the behavioral sciences have yet to agree on uniform standards by which behavior can be appropriately judged. Also unlike the physical sciences, the behavioral sciences employ concepts which are derived not from universally agreed-upon criteria, but from the peculiar cultural experience of the scientists themselves.

These are, of course, issues with which the better Euro-American behavioral scientists are quite aware; they are thus often embarrassed by the attempts of some of their colleagues (e.g., Jensen) to liken concepts such as “intelligence” to physical concepts such as “electricity” - with the argument that, since nobody knows what such phenomena “really are,” it is quite appropriate to adopt “operational definitions” which

serve utilitarian ends if not “truth.”

The embarrassment of these better-trained scientists has not yet been articulated in a form which would effectively counter the actions taken, under the name of science, by their less well-endowed colleagues. Part of the reason for this might be attributed to the fact that while the better-trained scientists might find serious fault with the logic and methods of their better known colleagues, they are in basic agreement with some of the utilitarian ends sought. It is this “common agreement concerning ends” which, in sensitive areas such as racial intelligence, has permitted legitimate scientific and philosophical issues to be translated as issues concerning “freedom of speech” or “civil rights.”

Responsible White scientists are, for example, quite familiar with Thomas Kuhn's reminder that every revolution carries with it a concomitant revolution in the scientific enterprise. And many of these scientists would probably recognize that we are now living in the midst of a social revolution characterized by a substantial change in race relations, not only in America but throughout the world.

Such changes in social relationships are invariably accompanied by changes in the mental or conceptual sphere, a point which Marx and Mannheim pointed out long before Kuhn presented it to his scientific colleagues. These changes in the conceptual sphere call into question some of the basic assumptions under which scientists, like all other participants in a given culture, operate.

Some changes, however, are not easily absorbed into the scientific world, a fact which even those only nominally familiar with the history of scientific revolutions are cognizant.

In deference to the probability that most readers are ignorant of scientific history, we can note that just as most 14th century scientists found it difficult to cease viewing the earth as the center of the physical universe, many of today's (behavioral) scientists find it difficult to cease viewing the Caucasian race or European culture as the center of the social universe. It is for this reason that Euro-American psychology adopts, as the conceptual and behavioral standard, the characteristics of a minority (less than 10%) of the world's population. Indeed, if history is to be a judge, it would be a most remarkable occurrence if the participants in Euro-American hegemony would recognize and accept conceptual changes that would undermine their privileged positions vis-à-vis others. This is particularly true for those participants whose very occupations are intimately involved with the maintenance of an established conceptual universe; i.e. educators, scientists, and politicians.

This conceptual universe was once bounded by the issues of “integration vs. segregation.” These conceptual parameters guided most of the scientific thinking and research in the area of race relations; moreover, public policies were adopted within this frame of reference. This frame of reference (or what Kuhn refers to as a “paradigm”) has been all but shattered for most Blacks; indeed, it is questionable whether in fact this ever was the way most Blacks viewed the world. Particularly, if Black scholars (as distinct from Black spokesmen) accurately reflected the thinking of the majority of Black people. The writings of the novelist-essayist James Baldwin are particularly relevant in this connection. Baldwin, over a decade ago, asked a question which struck a deep, responsive chord in the minds of many Blacks but was almost completely baffling to most Whites. His question was: “Who wants to integrate into a burning house?” This question, it should be emphasized, was asked long before the release of the Pentagon papers, the crimes of Watergate and its cover-up, the energy crises and all other

phenomena which, today, make the question perhaps less baffling to Whites. There is an important lesson that can be learned from this example, that is, that Black people see things about White people which White people do not see about themselves. A cynic might observe that this is because Whites spend more time looking at Blacks than they do looking at themselves - an observation which is perhaps less comforting to the scientific community because it is perhaps more relevant to it.

It is because of this difference in perception that the conceptual universes and their resultant paradigms differ for White people and Black people. This difference eventually manifests itself in the kinds of questions people ask in the area of racial relations. While many Whites question whether integration or segregation is best for America, many Blacks question whether America is best for Black people. The conceptual paradigm governing the former question is bounded by an “integration vs. segregation” dichotomy whereas the conceptual paradigm governing the latter is bounded by a “liberation vs. control” dichotomy. The differences between the two paradigms is important for any peaceful settlement of the racial issue. The Euro-American “integration vs. segregation” paradigm carries an important common dimension, viz., control by Whites whereas the “liberation vs. control” addresses itself directly to what many Blacks believe is the critical issue: self-control or other-control. The failure of Euro-American psychology to recognize and or appreciate this alternative paradigm is what leads many thinking Black students to dismiss much contemporary research as “irrelevant.”

White scientists, if they are truly interested in science (as distinct from politics) should not assume that just because George Gallup has not asked Blacks whether or not they want to integrate in White society that, therefore, they do; nor should these scientists assume that just because some Black politicians and social scientists promote schemes

such as “compensatory education” or “affirmative action” that, therefore, the majority of Black people believe themselves to be in need of compensation and affirmation. These programs and policies reflect political decisions based on social expediency; they do not necessarily reflect Black public opinion nor, for that matter, sound scientific thinking.

In brief African Psychology recognizes, perhaps more so than Euro-American psychology, that the way in which a question is asked predetermines the range of possible answers. If the question is asked in terms of “integration vs. segregation”, the answer perforce excludes “separation.” If the question is asked in terms of “Which is more important in determining Black intellectual inferiority, genes or environment?”, the answer perforce excludes the possibility that Blacks are not intellectually inferior. If the question is asked “Are Blacks equal in intelligence to Whites?”, the answer perforce excludes the possibility that Blacks are superior in intelligence to Whites.

Because of this recognition that scientific questions are, at the same time, often political and social answers, African Psychology is quite sensitive to problems concerning the history and philosophy of science itself. It thus views itself as not only different from Euro-American psychology, but as superior to it in the same way that philosophy is superior to science in that the latter is valid only if certain assumptions of the former are accepted.

The Content Emphases of African Psychology

So much, then, for the “Why?” of African psychology; let us turn our attention to the “What?” bearing in mind that its content differences are a result of its conceptual or paradigm differences.

Before proceeding with this discussion of content, we should first acknowledge in deference to alternative paradigms the essential radical nature of African Psychology. It is radical not so much in the political sense, but in a scientific and philosophical sense; i.e., it is “radical” because it addresses itself first and foremost to the roots (radicals) of human thought. For, we believe, only when such roots are exposed and examined critically can a solid foundation be constructed for the subsequent investigation of specific psychological phenomena.

Consistent with this content of “root” questions, the first issue which African Psychology attempts to understand is:

1. Which is the Original Race, the Caucasian or the African?

Many Euro-American psychologists, no doubt, would consider this question a theological one at best and irrelevant at worse. Such apparent unconcern with questions of origin is rather peculiar, given the great current concern with the role of genetic factors in human behavior. Clearly, if one is to be consistent with any genetic thesis, one must surely give at least nominal attention to the nature of the first human gene pool for it is from this original gene pool that all contemporary genes were derived. If, then, we are to be concerned about the genetic transmission of human intelligence, we must admit only one of two possibilities: either the White race is evolutionary prior to the Black, in which case whatever intelligence (or lack thereof) Blacks have has been inherited from Whites; or the Black race is evolutionary prior to White, in which case the reverse would be true. (We should perhaps note, again in deference to alternative paradigms, that either position would effectively nullify the conclusions of some modern-day genetic intelligence theorists).

We should perhaps note in this connection that many Euro-American and Euro-American-trained psychologists tend to minimize the significance of this issue of origins. Some adopt a neo-Darwinian perspective and assert that there has been an evolutionary improvement in the species, so that the Caucasian race represents the highest end of the evolutionary scale. This perspective equates technological superiority with intellectual and moral superiority.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah was the first to raise and answer this question of racial origins. African Psychology works on the assumption that the African race evolved prior to the Caucasian race; therefore, the African race is the original source of whatever genetic factors account for contemporary White and Black behavior in the world. African Psychology thus attributes the decline of Black civilizations not to genetic weaknesses but to a spiritual decay which left in its wake, however, a high testimonial to its original intellectual supremacy in the form of stone monuments spread across Africa monuments which reflect a mastery of mathematics, geometry, physics, and all other sciences known to man. The construction of the African pyramids has, to this day, baffled Western scientists to such an extent that the most recent explanation is that they were built, not by the Africans themselves, but by alien space creatures!

While African Psychology accepts as a “given” that the original race was African and not European, it does attempt to validate this hypothesis on grounds other than assumption or authority. Why these other sources of validation are necessary for African Psychology and not Euro-American psychology says more about the dynamics of racism in the Western world than it does about anything else. So ingrained is this racism in America’s educational institutions that many geography books, even today, separate

Egypt from Africa in order to foster the idea that the Egyptian civilization was built by non-Africans. Hollywood has played a major role in insuring the perception of Africans as uncivilized.

Because of the way in which the mass media and educational institutions have attempted to present the world as White, African Psychology recognizes its need to validate some of its own assumptions to the extent it is possible to validate assumptions with empirical research. This validation is done not so much to convince Whites (a task which we have recognized as virtually impossible) as to convince Blacks, particularly those Blacks who receive their education in White institutions. Indeed, this particular educational constituency is very important in the eyes of African Psychology, for it is precisely this group of people who often come to be recognized by established White institutions as “leaders” of other Black people. Such people become “spokesmen” even though (or perhaps because) they lack the most essential educational ingredient of all: knowledge of self. The importance of this element of knowledge is discussed in later paragraphs.

The point we wish to make in this context is that however much we might deplore it, it is still a fact that many Black people in American will continue to be educated by Whites and, this being the case, it is only natural for such people to develop a conception of self as inferior to Whites. This negative self-conception extends itself to other Blacks and, as a result, such people are more likely to be influenced by what Whites have to say about them than by what their own people have to say. Indeed, such a tendency is frequently associated with “success” and “intelligence” in American society.

Because of this, African Psychology recognizes the necessity of supporting its assumptions by referring to research published within the Euro-American tradition.

Thus, in support of our assumption that the original race was African, not European, we call attention to the research of Professor Louis Leakey, a British anthropologist. Shortly after Leakey's death a few years ago, his son, Dr. Richard Leakey, made an archeological finding which completely revolutionized scientific thinking concerning the origin of man. He found remnants of early man in East Africa dating back some three million years.

While Black Muslim scholars know that this date is wrong in an absolute sense (the origins of man date back much, much farther than this), Leakey's finding is correct. It clearly establishes the biological priority of the African relative to the European.

Moreover, we know from the science of biology that it is biologically impossible for Whites to produce offspring of color, whereas it is quite possible for Blacks to produce White offspring. Thus, as far as African Psychology is concerned, there is no question as to the fact that the original race was African.

2. What is the Mystery of Melanin?

If, then, the first man on earth was dark as opposed to light, then one of the substantive content questions African Psychology must concern itself with is the role of the skin-color producing substance called melanin.

Although the word “melanin” comes from the Greek word, “melanos”, meaning “Black,” in biological science it is used to designate a pigment whose natural color in human ranges from pale yellow over reddish brown to almost Black.

Melanin is synthesized and dispersed by specialized cells which are called melanocytes. Melanocytes synthesize melanin through a series of bio-chemical reactions

beginning with the consumption of the amino acid, phenylalanine. Each subsequent biochemical reaction in the chain is controlled by a specific enzyme. If all the essential enzymes are present, the pigment melanin is produced in considerable quantity. When this occurs, an individual has skin which is dark in color, hair which is Black, and eyes which are brown. If any of the enzymes are relatively inactive, the pigment production is correspondingly curtailed and the individual manifests a pale skin color, hair which is light or blond, and eyes which are blue. The occurrence defines a state of depigmentation; i.e., the genetic inability to produce sufficient amounts of melanin. It is worth noting, however, that all human organisms produce some degree of melanin; variation occurs with regard to the specific level of melanin activity which takes place within the cytoplasm of the melanocyte.

Melanin and The Central Nervous system

A major portion of the empirical research conducted in African Psychology involves a systematic examination of the relationship between melanocytes and the nerve cells of the central nervous system. We know, for example, that both are embryologically derived from a single neuroblast in the neural crest of the developing human fetus. This fact leads us to systematically investigate the patterns of neural interdependence that neurons of the brain, neurons of the spinal cord, and melanocytes manifest on human metabolic processes and nervous system functioning. We know that man's central nervous system performs a critical information-processing role which is essential for optimal neurological and metabolic functioning. Damage to the central nervous system can potentially impair the nervous activity which is essential to human sensitivity and consciousness.

Our research has discerned a high, positive correlation between specific levels of

sensory acuity and states of pigmentation. An examination of neuro-physiological, neuro-chemical, and neuro-humoral data reveals this correlation quite clearly. Relationships have been found to exist between melanin and the cerebellum; between melanin and the red nucleus; and between melanin and the reticular formation. Our research has not yet been able to define the precise nature of these relationships, but we are led to believe (in concurrence with Professor Welsing of Howard University) that melanin refines the central nervous system and, in so doing, produces a highly sensitized sensory-motor network.

It is interesting to note in this context that Parkinson's disease, a hereditary disease of the central nervous system, is associated with loss of melanin-pigment by the cells of the substantia nigra. It is for this reason that it is a disease which is largely confined to Whites. Lesions to the substantia nigra (literally, "Black substance") produce the complex motor syndrome (Paralysis agitans and akinesia) commonly seen in Parkinson's disease. The substantia nigra is located in the mid-brain (mesencephalon) near the cerebellum; it forms part of the cerebral peduncles near the red nucleus. Research has suggested the substantia nigra has a critical relationship with the reticular formation in the sense that it provides "starter" impulses which facilitate phasic muscular contractions. The muscular contractions are important for postural adjustment and the rapid and exact movement of specific muscle groups.

Other evidence of the importance of melanin in preventing central nervous system disorders is found in research concerning the hereditary disease known as phenylketonuria or PKU. This disease, again more common among Whites than Blacks, is characterized by purposeless movements such as pill-rolling movements of the hand and irregular tic-like motions.

The occurrence of PKU is caused by the absence or ineffective performance of an enzyme called phenylalanase. This enzyme, when present in humans, catalyzes the amino acid phenylalanine and forms one of the raw materials out of which melanin is formed. When phenylalanase is absent, the phenylalanine is converted instead to phenylpyruvic acid, which is excreted in the urine. This mis-conversion process also results in certain mental defects which are associated with the PKU disease (hereditary idiocy).

Thus, we are convinced that the absence of melanin is directly associated with the mal-functioning of the central nervous system. However, we are also convinced that the presence of melanin is directly associated with the proper functioning of the central nervous system. It must be admitted, however, that the bio-chemical processes involved in this latter relationship are quite complex and poorly understood. (It is always easier to explain what is “wrong” than what is “right” since science tends to focus on deviations from normality as opposed to normality itself).

In any case, we can attempt to explain this “normal” functioning by noting that, under normal conditions, the amino acid tyrosine is formed from the enzymatic action of phenylalanase on phenylalanine. The enzyme tyrosinase then catalyzes tyrosine to produce dopamine. Dopamine is oxidized into norepinephrine and norepinephrine is converted into epinephrine. Finally, epinephrine (or adrenaline) is converted into melanin.

Norepinephrine and epinephrine are under the control of the autonomic nervous system. The adrenal medulla secretes these in response to conditions of emotion or changes in the discharge of neurons in the automatic nervous system. Part of the autonomic nervous system (the sympathetic) accelerates the activity of all essential vital

organs through the secretion of norepinephrine.

From these facts, we conclude that there is a positive correlation between the intensity of emotional arousal and the urinary excretion of epinephrine and norepinephrine.

Implicit in this conclusion is the belief that emotional arousal is a positive trait; this might be strange to most Euro-Americans, inasmuch as emotional arousal tends to have a negative connotation in the Western psychological tradition. In fact, this difference of attitudes is one of the basic features differentiating African Psychology from Euro-American psychology. We believe, in short, that non-Whites are indeed “more emotional” than Whites and, not only is this positive in its own right, it is directly related to that phenomenon we call “intelligence.” In fact, the “mystery” of melanin, as we see it, relates directly to the fact that while we have a fairly good idea of the bio-chemical properties of melanin and how these are related to nervous system functioning, we do not yet know the specifics of this in relationship to human intelligence. We do, however, have our hunches, and these are articulated in more detail below.

3. What is the Nature of Black Intelligence?

From our research into melanin, we are led to believe that it is the concept of sensitivity which is of fundamental importance to human intelligence. A related concept, consciousness, is also considered important in our consideration of human intelligence.

Consideration of these two concepts, sensitivity and consciousness, underscores the fact that African Psychology adopts a different philosophical base than contemporary Euro-American Psychology. Our ontological position asserts that there is more to the world than meets our material eyes (which are always limited by the present state of

technology). In this sense, we agree with those modern physicists who recognize a non-material or spiritual reality underlying all observed material phenomena. Whether one prefers to call this non-material reality “energy”, “spirit”, “mana” or any other term is of little significance; what is important is the recognition that it does exist. We believe that any psychology worthy of its name must incorporate this reality into its philosophical premises, if not content domain. African Psychology, of course, does both and, for this reason, the concepts of sensitivity and consciousness are of paramount importance.

The word “consciousness” means “with knowledge” and to the extent that intelligence is related to knowledge, the concepts are fundamentally related.

The type of knowledge with which African Psychology is concerned is not, however, that type commonly associated with traditional psychology. It is more closely associated with an Eastern esoteric tradition which recognizes self-knowledge as the ultimate source of all knowledge. Thus, our epistemological position also differs from Western, Euro-American psychology. That is, our position recognizes the supremacy of internal (or self) knowledge, as opposed to external knowledge. While there are a few Western trained scholars who agree with us in this regard (notably Michael Polanyi), the dominant thrust of Western Psychology has been the acceptance of an epistemological position which accepts external sources as the only sources of valid knowledge. This position is incorporated in the very foundations of positivist, empirical psychology.

This, of course, does not mean that African Psychology dismisses empirical research: indeed, our research into the melanin issue stands in sharp contradiction to such a stance. What it does mean, however, is that external, empirical types of knowledge represent only one source and, insofar as the discipline of psychology is concerned, a relatively insignificant one. It is insignificant in the sense that it does not contribute to

the acquisition of self-knowledge and that, we feel, is most important.

In accord with Eastern esoteric tradition African Psychology recognizes the total field of (self) knowledge as consisting of 360 degrees. Complete knowledge of self expresses all 360 degrees and is frequently referred to as “wisdom”. There are in all societies and at all times various institutions which have been established to guide students in their search for self-knowledge. These are not, of course, “schools” in the sense that most Americans recognize them; i.e., they are not publicly supported, nor do they provide training in the various disciplines which are characteristic of established universities. Most of these institutions (variously referred to as lodges, temples, orders, etc.) are designed to “raise the level of consciousness” of their students to 32 degrees or more. The pursuit of such degrees may occupy a person's entire lifetime, but the type of knowledge acquired is considered well worth the effort.

It is important to recognize that “intelligence,” as measured by “degrees of consciousness” or self-knowledge, is completely independent of success in public schools or occupational ranking. Thus, it is not surprising to find a highly “intelligent” (as we define it) person having less than a high school diploma and perhaps working at a very low-status occupation. This is not surprising to those familiar with Eastern intellectual traditions because it is recognized that money, status, and prestige (whose traits are usually associated with intelligence in this country) have little to do with intelligence, as conceived outside of the Western world.

The correlates one should thus look for in regard to intelligence are not the material ones, but the spiritual ones: happiness, peace of mind, good health, longevity, humor, etc.

There is one aspect of the Euro-American psychological tradition which relates to the Eastern and African conception of intelligence. This aspect involves a field of psychological inquiry which has only recently been granted scientific legitimacy. Generically, this field is known as parapsychology.

Because of the peculiar position of Black people in American (genetically Eastern and socially Western), it is the area of parapsychology which we find the most useful in bridging the East-West gap and, at the same time, providing an additional empirical orientation in African psychological research.

The field of parapsychology is related to the African conception of intelligence in the following sense: As self-knowledge (consciousness) approaches 360 degrees, the individual becomes better equipped to manifest those mental abilities associated with parapsychology. These abilities can be classified in two general categories: “mind over matter” or psychokinesis, and “mind-reading” or precognition. (clairvoyance, or “seeing into the future,” is a derivative of these.)

African Psychology, if called upon to provide an operational definition of “intelligence” or “consciousness”, would cite as representative the manifestation of these psychic abilities. Of course Eastern psychological traditions have long recognized these abilities, but only recently have they begun to be accepted in the West. (Interestingly enough, this acceptance has been more at the hands of physicists and other “hard scientists” than it has of psychologists.)

To the extent that consciousness and sensitivity are related to the presence of melanin, and these, in turn, to the development of psychic abilities, African Psychology expects that intelligence (as we define it) is directly related to the presence of melanin. It

is this hypothesis which is currently being investigated in our laboratories, both in America and in other parts of the world.

It might be useful for us to mention some of the reasons which led us to the formulation of this hypothesis relating melanin to psychic abilities. The most significant of these is derived from anthropological research in sub-Saharan Africa where the largest number of high-melanin possessing people are found. This research has documented, for over a century, the para-normal powers possessed by a large number of Africans. These powers have been frequently referred to as voodoo and/or witchcraft; but, stripped of such (largely pejorative) labeling, the observed phenomena represents nothing more than the manifestation of psychokineses and precognition. Not all Africans possess this ability, of course; one might suspect that they are distributed in a Gaussian fashion, as are other human traits, but the evidence certainly seems overwhelming that such abilities are more characteristic of African people than they are of other people on earth. While one might suggest that geographical, cultural, or religious factors account for this, our own position suggests that the dominant factor is genetic and related to the presence of melanin. Thus, one of the major content areas of African Psychology concerns this relationship between melanin and psychic ability, the latter conceived to be the essential material manifestation of human intelligence.

4. What is the Nature of Black Self and Black Personality?

Because self-knowledge is considered an important element of consciousness and intelligence, African Psychology defines it as an important content area, the nature of the self.

Like many other areas related to African peoples and Black behavior, the research

in this area of self-conception is characterized by several important subjective tendencies. First of all, the research about African (Black) people has been and is being produced largely by non-Black peoples. Secondly, the orientation of most of this research has been and is to support the pre-conceived notion that African people are deviant from and hence abnormal to White people. The third tendency, related to the second, is the adoption of a priori assumptions characteristic of Euro-American philosophy as opposed to African philosophy. The fourth and final tendency is the almost total absence of Africa and Africanity in the theories and research on the so-called Negroes' self-concept.

These tendencies have led us to conclude that if one accepts Euro-American assumptions about African reality, the questions and answers about Black people are going to be in a predetermined manner in response to Euro-American reality. Hence, one can see that by the nature of the underlying assumptions characteristic of Euro-American research on the Negro self-concept the answers (results) characteristic of the Negro self-concept literature. (delete or rewrite)

However valuable such an exercise might be, it is not our intent to explain why or how Euro-American researchers have created a pseudo-reality of negative “Negro” self-concept. Our intention is, rather, to suggest some reasons for considering an alternative framework or perspective in understanding African (Black) peoples' conception of themselves.

African Self-Concept: The Extended Self

Having implied throughout this article that African Psychology is rooted in the nature of a Black culture which is fundamentally African (as opposed to European), we contend that a dominant aspect of the Black mentality reflects the polyvalent principle of

the “Oneness of Being.” If one were to epitomize African Psychology, it would be best described as the philosophy of rhythm or harmony.

The behavioral modalities which are characteristic of African lifestyles throughout the “Diaspora” are based on several philosophical assumptions and a conception of “reality” which, when analyzed, reflects a sense of ontological harmony or rhythm. Related to this is an African philosophical orientation which emphasizes the notion of interdependence. This notion conceives of man and all the other elements of the universe as being part of a unified and integrated whole. The African philosophical tradition, in turn, determines two fundamental operation orders or guiding beliefs. The first belief is that man is part of the natural rhythm of nature or one with nature. The second is a conception of the universe as a “vitalistic pneumaticism.” This latter conception means a belief in the sense of “vital solidarity,” or survival of the tribe. Descriptively, it refers to a kind of vital attitude about one's existence or what Westerners term a sense of “common fate.”

In accordance with these two notions the African thinks of experience as an intense complementary rhythmic connection (or synthesis) between the person and reality.

How this relates to African self-conception is as important as it is difficult to express in the English language. First, we must recognize that the philosophical orientation determines both what is “real” and how one defines or validates its reality. In terms of self-conception, the African philosophical tradition, unlike western philosophical systems, does not place emphasis on the “individual” or “individuality.” In fact, one could say that in a sense, it does not allow for “individuals.” It recognizes, rather, that only in terms of one's people does the “individual” become conscious of one's own being.

It is, in fact, only through others that one learns his duties and responsibilities toward himself and the collective self (tribe). Historically, initiation rites were designed to instill this sense of corporate responsibility and collective destiny.

When we examine closely the African philosophical tradition, we recognize that from this tradition an extended definition of self evolved. That is to say, the African self-concept is, by philosophical definition, the “We” instead of the “I.”

Africans thus believe that whatever happens to the “individual” self, the “I”, also happens to the corporate body, the “We”, and vice-versa. The cardinal point, therefore, in understanding the traditional African conception of self, is the belief that “I am because we are; and because we are, therefore, I am.” This belief underscores the extent to which the African feels himself to be part of all other African peoples. Descriptively, this relationship of interdependence can be termed the “extended-self.”

This notion of the “We” (as opposed to the “I”) may become clearer through an ontological analysis of the self. It is generally accepted in the Euro-American psychological tradition that the establishment of self is accomplished by recognizing in others qualities or characteristics similar to one's self and/or denying qualities and characteristics similar to one's self. The “self,” therefore, occurs as the consequence of either of two processes - opposition and/or apposition. The way in which African peoples are extended into themselves, however, is not completely explained by this kind of distinction. What one must distinguish between are the “levels of reality:” the material (lower level) and the spiritual (higher level).

The “oneness of being” is predicated on Man being an integrated and indispensable part of the universe. Being in the world also means to participate in its

social time. Hence, to be is to be what you are because of your historical part as well as what you anticipate to be your historical future. In recognizing the historical grounding of one's being, one has also to accept the collective and social sense of one's history. The collective "self" is not contained only in his physical presence in finite time. The twin notions of interdependence and oneness of being allow for a conception of self which transcends, through the historical consciousness of one's people, the finiteness of both Newtonian space and time.

Self-awareness is not therefore limited to just the "cognitive" awareness of one's uniqueness, individuality, and historical finiteness (as in the Euro-American tradition). It is the awareness of self as an awareness of one's historical consciousness (collective spirituality) and the sense of "we" being one.

If "we", however, portrays the properties of self as only collectively intersubjective or as only individually unique, we distort the totality of the notion. African self refers both to the grounding of the being which transcends empirical or physical entities and to the discrete entities that are capable of being located in space and having recognizable (and measurable) properties. The self is not only a permanently determined physical entity. That is, it is not reducible, or merely equivalent, to the biological organism. It is important, however, to make this "property" distinction clear for analytical purposes.

The most compelling property, of course, is the ontological grounding of the self in the collective and social sense of history. It is in this sense that the self is portrayed as a "transcendence into extendation." (word is not real) That is, the conception of self transcends and extends into the collective consciousness of one's people. However, self-conception is also related to the physically recognizable properties of the discrete entities.

And this is a critical point for the consideration of “Black American” self-concept.

The physical situation in which Africans - particularly in the Americas - find themselves involves the domination and imposition of a fundamental European system of “reality” on an African people. This situation naturally causes confusion because it denies the most compelling property of the African conception of self. It is this situation which has produced the entity referred to as the “Negro” - a concept referring to the African person who attempts to (or is forced to) deny the philosophical basis of his Africanity, even though he cannot negate the recognizable properties (physiological facts) of it. To be a “Negro” therefore, is to be in a state of confusion. The infliction of the Euro-American philosophical tradition, as it relates to self-conception (i.e., individuality, separateness, etc.) for African peoples causes many to falsely believe that their natural temperament, tendencies, and characteristic spirit were and are “wrong.” Such conclusions have been created and sustained by the Euro-American psychological tradition. The results of such beliefs naturally lead to negative conceptions of self and attitudes of self-hatred. This, in turn, has implications for certain other maladies affecting the Black personality, a content area of which we turn our attention below.

5. What is the Nature of the Black Personality?

Traditional (i.e., Euro-American) theories of personality functioning all adopt, as a norm, those behaviors which are derived from the European lifestyle. The above discussions of intelligence and melanin have already suggested some of the basic normative differences between the Black and White personalities. If these differences exist, and the social milieu systematically rewards those behaviors which are in accord with the society's norms, it is not surprising that a child may respond negatively to his natural tendencies when they are not in accord with the existing social order. A repeated

association of one's natural tendencies with painful or negative stimulation leads to a conditioned inhibition of those tendencies in himself and a rejection of similar tendencies in others. This results in a psychologically unhealthy form of conditioning which most Whites (and many White-educated Blacks) confuse with "success." The most extreme examples are those attempts at physical alteration in which Blacks have tried to alter their appearance by bleaching creams, hair straighteners, etc., to bring their physical appearance into accord with the social norm of physical attractiveness. (Some popular race-intelligence theoreticians have equated such imitative behavior of the holders of power as evidence of the inherent superiority of the White race. Interestingly enough, these same theoreticians do not concern themselves with such "anomalies" as White efforts to produce melanin via sun tanning).

The more subtle yet more insidious form of this conditioned self-rejection is its psychological manifestation, well-documented in the voluminous research on Black self-concept. Low self-esteem is almost a sine qua non of living in an environment of oppression. A major problem with such research, of course, is that it focuses attention on the results of oppression rather than its causes. Attention is also focused more on the effects of low self-esteem rather than the origins of low self-esteem.

Perhaps more important than just differences in orientation, African Psychology differs radically from Euro-American psychology in the assumptions concerning the basic nature of man. In this regard, we unashamedly align ourselves with the majority of the world's population in our rejection of Cartesian duality and our acceptance of man as a divine (spiritual) being. Even though Western observers have rather historically described these assumptions as primitive, heathenistic, superstitious, or pagan, the point remains that, without exception, Black behavior is most clearly understood by Black people as extensions of a spiritual core. An assumption of a spiritual core implies the

existence of an irreducible element in man which has a divine origin, an eternal fate and a moral function.

With such differences in basic assumptions about the nature of man, one will necessarily find wide disparities in the organization of societies and the behaviors which are considered normative for those people. If one follows the history of Black people from West African societies (as a recent referent) through the American slavery experience and neo-slavery experience, one finds, as a thread of continuity, the religious nature of the Black man. The European's intrusion into African society was permitted without resistance largely because the African assumed that he lived in a religious world and that strangers were to be accepted as creatures of a similar divine origin and with high moral intent. The faultiness of this assumption is evidenced by the next four hundred years of the Black man's history following this intrusion. However, even this condition (of slavery) was made meaningful as a religious experience for Blacks. The adaptation of Christianity to the Black religious experience maintained and cultivated the idea of a divine plan at work. The problem continued to be one which assumed the universality of that divinity which, as viewed retrospectively, too frequently permitted a passive adaptation to an alien way of life.

The alien (Euro-American) way of life assumed man to be first and foremost a material being in search of physical gratification. Normative behavior is thus viewed in terms of the maximal gratification of one's material ambitions (variously referred to as achievement motivation, territorial dominance, political power, etc.). The exploitation of people and resources is considered of little consequence, inasmuch as the core of it all is believed to be dispensable material. Thus, one can readily perceive the incompatibility of the victim, assuming that even his exploitation is of a spiritual quality with the oppressor viewing the spiritual as material.

The emphasis on the spiritual core summarize the African psychological perspective on Black personality. All descriptions of the normal functioning Black personality are thus viewed in the context of this core. For example, the recent upsurge in Black homicides, drug usage, mental disorders, and the virtual disintegration of the Black society within the American context can be systematically correlated with the deterioration of the religious function in Black personality. The increased adoption by Blacks of alien assumptions of materialism has resulted in a concomitant adoption of European lifestyles. Such an adopted life style is dysfunctional when it is superficial and contrary to the natural Black lifestyle. This adoption is viewed as superficial because, even though the Black man succeeds in emulating the White lifestyle, it frequently results in neurosis or other forms of implicit self-rejection. The spiritual tendencies of African people are antithetical to the material tendencies of Europeans and acceptance of the one almost invariably requires rejection of the other.

The Black personality which has ostensibly adjusted to Western society is characterized by what Euro-American psychologists would call a “schizoid” adjustment. This means that he lives in two worlds which diametrically differ on many key dimensions. He works to foster an image which will make him acceptable to the material world of the European (e.g., high achievement motivation, emphasis on cognition to the exclusion of affective experience and individualism). On the other hand, he will attempt to maintain at least tenuous ties to his opposite Black origins. The growing failure of such schizoid adjustment is seen in the increase of suicide rates among middle class Blacks as well as the growing incidence of depression and general malcontentment.

African Psychology, in short, does not assume that the similar behaviors of the White majority and Black middle-class have the same origins. Because of this, we

recognize that a renewal of the spiritual core of the Black man is the most effective therapy for his adjustment disorders. This perhaps begins to explain the very high level of success achieved by the followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in resolving those problems of Black people where traditionally-trained psychologists have been utter failures. This has been particularly true of drug addiction and other so-called “incorrigible” conditions.

Finally, after four hundred years, we can begin to understand that the solutions to the problems of the Black man are different from the solutions to the problems of the people of European descent. People of African origin cannot be made citizens of the world by acting in accord with the European model of behavior, despite material inducements to do so. The price is too high, and the ultimate rewards too low.

Conclusion

The five content areas discussed above do not, of course, exhaust the list of various subjects with which African Psychology is concerned. The five which have been discussed do, however, represent the foundations of our inquiry into the psychological nature of the Black man.

We should perhaps mention, in this context, that we are under few illusions concerning the difficulty of the intellectual work ahead of us. Nor do we have any illusions concerning the extent some will go in the attempt to hinder our progress. Indeed, some of us have already been refused academic jobs or fired from them because of our determined efforts to forge a psychology which validates the experience of Black people. If American history is any kind of accurate reflector of what is held in store for us, we should perhaps consider ourselves fortunate that we are not killed or imprisoned

for our work--so bitter is White resistance to independent Black thinking.

Despite expected obstacles (from both Whites and Blacks) we are assured of final success. This is because our work does not represent a reaction against anything so much as it does a response to certain things. It is a response to the call of incarcerated Black men who seek answers to the why's and wherefore's of their miserable condition; it is a response to Black women who fall victim to the politics of population control carried forth in the name of North America. It is a response to these and many other calls emanating from the mouths of Black people. It is, in short, a response to something which few Whites understand--a response to a divine call. Being thus, it is at once divinely inspired, divinely guided, and (hopefully) divinely expressed.

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