

JUTA

Fourth edition

# Rethinking *our* world



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& Jane Smith

## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Introduction .....	v
1    Thinking clearly and learning from experience: the beginning of our new world .....	1
2    Asking questions: challenging what the world tells us.....	20
3    How in the world can we give our lives meaning?.....	40
4    What of an African world?.....	50
5    Can we change our world?.....	63
6    Rethinking a woman's world.....	79
7    Who in the world am I? .....	91
8    Is there a world that speaks to us?.....	101
9    Where in the world are we going?.....	113
Conclusion.....	123
Bibliography.....	124
Recommended reading .....	127
Index .....	131

## Introduction

Philosophy, by its very nature, asks difficult and subversive questions.

Philosophy does not allow us to rest contentedly in life, nor does it allow us to 'go with the flow', to passively accept what society tells us and wants us to believe.

Philosophy is averse to any form of mediocrity and compromise. It wants us to rethink, recreate, transform.

The world's revolutionaries have all been philosophers: Moses, Karl Marx, Jesus, Mohammed, Socrates, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela.

The world's great thinkers have been philosophers: Plato, Augustine, Albert Einstein, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida.

The world's feminists have been philosophers: Mary Wollstonecraft, Liz Sanger, the Pankhursts, Germaine Greer, Mary Daly, Ama Ata Aidoo, Maria Nzomo, Neuma Aguiar.

Philosophy begins when human beings start questioning their world. No society encourages people to become philosophers and to question what is going on around them. Questioning and debate in our contemporary, globalised society has sunk to the level of TV chat shows, idiotic radio phone-ins and the mindless drivel of Twitter. Even newspapers and news websites gloss over important, serious issues. The internet is also proving to be a disappointment, although there are a few websites run by people who try to encourage critical and in-depth reasoning.

Philosophy is available to everybody. It does not give us a simple creed to follow or a message of comfort, but it has the power to emancipate us from destructive illusions. It also has the power to make us creators of new worlds. And, as we shall see, all the philosophies we discuss in this book have had an impact — to a greater or lesser extent — on the theory and practice of education.

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## Thinking clearly and learning from experience: the beginning of our new world

What did you do today? What did you do yesterday? What do you plan to do tomorrow? What about next week? And next month?

Are you looking forward to tomorrow? Do you hope it's going to be better than yesterday? Or was today fine for you?

Wanting to have a better tomorrow has caused a lot of people to do many things: change their jobs, get divorced, have another child, get rid of the government, start wars, end wars, write peace treaties, form new governments.

The following is a quotation from a document written by a group of men and women who wanted a better tomorrow:

We, the people of South Africa,  
Recognise the injustices of our past;  
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;  
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and  
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.  
We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to –  
Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;  
...  
May God protect our people.

(Republic of South Africa, 1996)

This document was written nearly two decades ago, in 1996. It is the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

- ▶ Freedom involves the expression of the whole of human experience, including negative emotions such as pain, fear, etc.
- ▶ Freedom means not having someone else, or society, 'messing with your head'.

Of course, freedom means many other things too.

### **What do words mean?**

Look at the words you wrote down on page 2 as the most important from the excerpt of the Constitution, and ask yourself: What do these words actually mean? Use a dictionary if you need to, but try to give the words some real, concrete expressions.

Perhaps you chose the phrase 'human rights'. First of all, do you agree that this phrase is used often these days? We frequently hear the media talking about human rights violations and human rights groups, and saying that certain things are basic human rights.

Look at the first word in this phrase: 'human'. What is a human? The definition of a human is, in our opinion, a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, which means 'thinking man'. Humans are characterised by having minds. We believe that the mind is more than just the brain, although the mind necessarily involves the brain. But, to us, 'mind' means the indefinable interconnection between:

- ▶ thinking
- ▶ all the emotions
- ▶ consciousness
- ▶ the subconscious
- ▶ the five senses: sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste
- ▶ memory
- ▶ intuition, or the sixth sense.

Not everybody would agree with our statement that a human is a being with an indefinable mind. Perhaps you disagree, too. Perhaps you believe that it is the material, highly evolved brain that makes us human – that, and nothing else.

We think that being human is also about being connected to other humans, although we have problems with the glib way in which *ubuntu* is presented today. We think that to be human means to have the freedom to live somewhere between the extremes of excessive individualism (the mistake of Western culture) and excessive communalism (the mistake of African culture). These extremes are not desirable: the first leads to aggression and competitiveness, and the second leads to passivity and hopelessness.

Another way of answering the question 'What does the word "human" mean?' is to respond by saying what it is not. A human being is not:

- ▶ - an animal
- ▶ a divine being (eg an angel or an elf)

- Activity
- ▶ a machine
  - ▶ a plant
  - ▶ an object
  - ▶ a thing.

As you can see, trying to answer the question 'What is a human?' is not easy.

In the space below, write down your own description of what a human is. If you disagree with our views, say so. Try to say why you disagree.

Now look at the next word in the expression 'human rights': the word 'rights'. This expression is at the core of the new South African Constitution, so we all need to have some idea of what we mean when we use it.

When we went to a dictionary for a definition of this word, we found something very interesting: the English word 'right' has an enormous number of meanings. This is significant, because a word that means many things can easily be distorted or misused.

The dictionary definition most suited to our purposes is:

**right:** a legal, moral title or claim to the possession of property or authority, the enjoyment of certain privileges

(Collins English Dictionary, 2010)

In other words, we could say that a 'human right' means 'something that a human being can claim as his or hers according to an accepted standard of morality'.

Activity

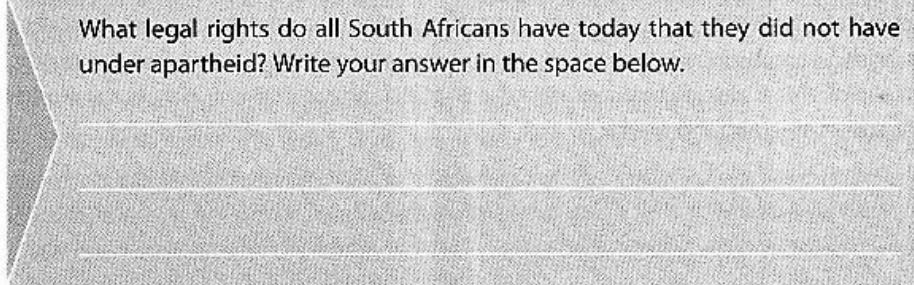
Is your first language English? If not, write down the nearest equivalent your language has to the English word 'right'. Then describe what that word means in your language.

Some concrete examples of a human right, as defined in the English language, are:

- ▶ the right to non-discrimination at work and in the public sphere
- ▶ the right to vote

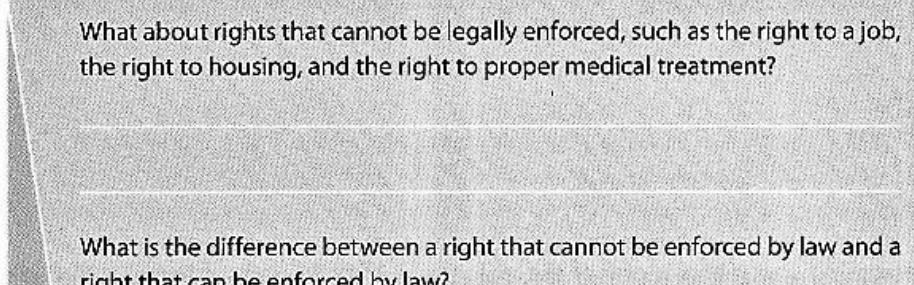
- ▶ the right to own property
- ▶ the right to privacy
- ▶ the right to a fair hearing in a court of law
- ▶ the right to wages in return for work
- ▶ the right to choose one's religious beliefs
- ▶ the right not to have any religious beliefs
- ▶ the right to one's political views.

What legal rights do all South Africans have today that they did not have under apartheid? Write your answer in the space below.



**Activity**

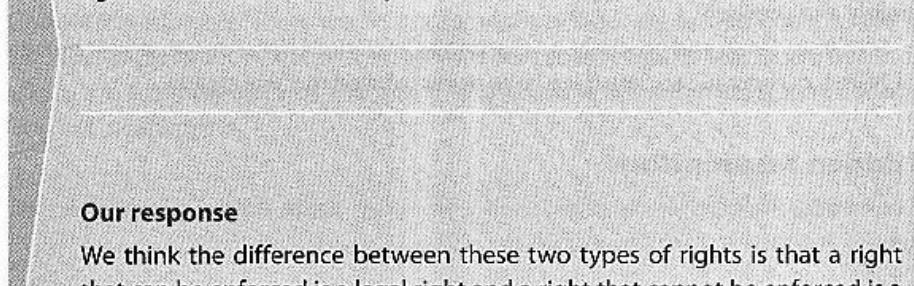
What about rights that cannot be legally enforced, such as the right to a job, the right to housing, and the right to proper medical treatment?



**Question**

**Our response**

We think the difference between these two types of rights is that a right that can be enforced is a legal right and a right that cannot be enforced is a moral right. A good example of a moral right that has never been enforced anywhere in the world is our right to be treated as humans and not objects or machines in the pursuit of political, economic or military goals.



## Philosophy and language: why words are important

'What is the meaning of a word?' is a question that does not get asked very often, and yet, all of us use words all the time. We have conversations with each other, we talk on the phone, we go to lectures, listen to teachers, read newspapers. The mass media is full of opinions, views, ideas, news commentary, talk shows and phone-ins.

The meaning of words is important in philosophy. Even if we cannot define exactly what we mean by a word – and we often cannot – we need to be as precise as we can. This includes consciously being aware that we may well be using words that cannot be defined clearly. If we do not take the trouble to do this, we risk living in a language community (of whatever language) that eventually becomes meaningless. We think this is already happening in the English language community, in the worlds of advertising and the media.

### Activity

The next time you see an advertisement, or listen to one on the radio, look or listen carefully and then ask yourself: what did the advertiser actually say to me?

In the space below, write down what you saw or heard and then try to explain its message.

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Analysing statements is one of the major tasks of philosophy: it helps us to think clearly and precisely.

Thinking clearly and precisely is regarded as important because we cannot be free or have a democratic society if we have never learned to think clearly.

## Hidden assumptions

Look at the excerpt we discussed earlier, from the South African Constitution, on page 1. It contains the following words:

May God protect our people.

What does this tell us about the people who wrote the Constitution? It tells us that these people believe in God and that – and this is important – they assume we believe in God too. In other words, the words of the South African Constitution contain a **hidden assumption**.

A hidden assumption is something we should watch out for in any message we receive, whether written or spoken. Hidden assumptions are dangerous and manipulative. Advertisements contain hidden assumptions and so does much media reporting.

### **A philosophical question: the existence of God**

We would like to point out to the writers of the Constitution that not everybody believes in a God who can 'protect' human beings. Every year, large numbers of people are killed as a result of natural disasters (eg earthquakes, volcanos, floods and drought). This in itself makes the concept of a benign God questionable.

Furthermore, there are other problems with using the word 'God':

- ▶ People who use the word 'God' are often very vague about what God is really like. They tend to use feel-good words to describe God, such as 'love', 'creator', 'spiritual', 'Father in Heaven'. Also, different people describe God in different ways. Christians describe God using one set of words, Muslims use another set of words and Hindus say there are many gods.
- ▶ Nobody can show us God. If a person says something like: 'It's cold outside today', we can check whether he or she is speaking the truth – we can open the door and go outside. There are lots of examples of this. If I say, 'John is getting married to Mary on Saturday,' and it is the first you have heard of it, all you've got to do is contact John or Mary and see what they say. Even complicated facts can be checked. If a scientist working on the US space programme tells us on TV that there are simple forms of life on the planet Mars, we can read newspapers and scientific articles to check whether other scientists agree with him or her. Maybe the space programme even has photographs taken on Mars of plants and fungi on rocks.

The point is that we cannot see God with our eyes, hear God with our ears or touch God with our fingers. There are no photographs of God. We cannot check to see if God exists. We cannot experience God with our senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste). It is for these reasons that some philosophers claim that statements about God are meaningless.

What is your response to our comments about God? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

**Question**

### Just supposing ...

One day you hear on the radio that scientists have invented a spaceship that can take human beings to all parts of space, way beyond the Milky Way, our own galaxy. For the first time ever, if we want to, we can book trips on this spaceship and go all around the universe.

This sounds exciting, and you book your ticket. The spaceship leaves and takes you all over the universe. You see stars, black holes and huge clouds of swirling dust and planets. But you don't see God. You ask the spaceship commander about this and he says, 'Yes, well, I travel all over the universe every day, and I've never seen God. That's because he doesn't exist.'

### Question

What is your response to the spaceship commander's reply?

On the other hand, philosophers have identified a number of arguments in support of the existence of God. These arguments include:

1. the argument from design
2. the argument from religious experience
3. the argument from morality.

As you will see from our comments below, the first argument has been conclusively refuted, the second argument is problematic and the third argument is invalid.

### The argument from design

This argument invites us to examine the world and universe around us, a world and universe full of the most amazing creatures, all of which are extremely complex.

The classic exponent of this point of view was William Paley, a British philosopher and clergyman who lived from 1743 to 1805. Paley's most famous work is *Natural Theology*, published in 1802. Although this work is now over 200 years old, the argument in it continues to be used today, and is not without force.

The argument goes as follows. Suppose one day, while you are out walking, you see a watch lying on the ground. You pick it up and open up the back. Inside, you see its complex cog-like mechanism, all parts of which work together to tell the time. This tells you that the watch was **designed by an intelligent being to serve a purpose** (in this case, telling the time).

Nature, said Paley, is just like the watch. He used the example of the human eye. The eye has a lens, a pupil and a retina. It can focus and, obviously, its purpose is to enable us to see. Therefore, the eye, like the watch, **must have had an intelligent designer.** The real point of Paley's argument is that the eye, like all things in nature, is governed by a complex mechanism that works for some purpose, and such a complex mechanism that works so well simply could not have come about by chance.

This argument was refuted conclusively by Charles Darwin in 1859, when he offered the world the theory of evolution in his work *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection.*

The mistake Paley had made was to assume that natural objects such as the eye can only occur by either chance or design. In fact, Darwin showed us that this either/or choice is false. All natural objects have evolved gradually, over millions of years. What Darwin realised was that, given enough time, natural selection would bring about very slow, very gradual changes in the norm for any given breeding population. His theory of evolution has been confirmed, since 1859, by the work of geologists, who know that the earth has been in existence for three and a half billion years, and the work of geneticists, who know that DNA copies itself, with only rare errors.

The point in telling you all this is not to debate biology, but to point out that the argument from design and its subsequent refutation are all based on **empiricism.** We discuss empiricism below. Paley was mistaken, it turns out, but he did invite us to **look at nature.** Darwin, and his modern exponents (Richard Dawkins and Daniel Bennett), all rely on empiricism as their method of argument. They tell us to put speculation to one side and to look at and investigate the real, physical world, and real things in the real world.

### **The argument from religious experience**

The word 'experience' tells us that this argument, again, is an empirical argument. Today, and despite the impact of science, this is probably one of the more convincing of all the classic arguments for theism. It is also a very simple argument – it simply states that many people have experiences of God (eg visions, receiving answers to prayer, periods of elation) and that the sheer multitude of these experiences strongly suggest that God does, in fact, exist.

The problems with this argument are as follows:

1. Only some people have these 'God experiences'. Even if these people are in the majority, If God is present everywhere and is the creator of all human beings, surely He would ensure that all people everywhere experience Him?
2. The nature of these experiences seems to be shaped by culture, including religious culture. Roman Catholics see and hear Mary, Protestants see and hear Jesus, Moslems experience the presence of Mohammed, Hindus see visions of Krishna, and Buddhists experience what they call pure consciousness.

3. The nature of these experiences seems similar to intense experiences brought about as a result of listening to music, writing poetry or even experiences brought about as a result of tragedy and suffering.

Note that the second and third points combined suggest that these experiences originate in the human mind – a mind that is always, to some degree, shaped by the prevailing culture.

That said, the argument from religious experience, unlike the argument from design, has **not** been conclusively refuted by either atheistic philosophy or science. Furthermore, it is an empirical argument because it points to what people do and do not experience.

### The argument from morality

This argument is based on empirical observation (ie that all human beings have morals), and proceeds on the basis of **formal logical reasoning** (see the section entitled *Logical symbolism and argument*, on page 14).

The argument can be set out, step by step, like this:

Morality exists.

Morality consists of a set of commands.

Any command comes from a commander.

Therefore:

There is a commander who commanded moral precepts.

Moral commands are absolutely authoritative.

Therefore:

The commander of these commands is absolutely authoritative.

Therefore:

This commander is God.

In fact, this argument is invalid. Note that much of its refutation is empirical in nature:

1. **Morality exists.** This statement contains an unacknowledged assumption – that there is one version of morality that holds true for all human beings. This is simply not true. Yes, all human beings have moral codes, but these codes differ significantly from one group of people to another. A concrete empirical example of such a difference is the moral code of Hinduism and the moral code of Jewish people. Hindu people believe that eating beef is taboo. Jewish people believe that eating pork is taboo. Furthermore, even within one group of people (eg Americans), people's moral values differ markedly. A concrete empirical example of this is the different views people have about abortion and homosexuality.

2. **Morality consists of a set of commands.** This is only partly true. Morality also involves emotions, people in relationships, life circumstances and the responses of the individual person to moral commands.
3. **Any command must have a commander.** Again, this statement contains an unacknowledged assumption, this being that a command must come from one single person. This is simply not true. A brief look at different societies shows us that commands are often issued by groups of people (eg a company's board of directors or a parliament). In the case of moral commands, it is a very complex and diverse group of people known as 'society' that issues these commands. South Africa is a very good example of a country that, in the last couple of decades, has markedly altered its moral code because it has changed its government.
4. And so the statement **There is a commander who commanded moral precepts** is equally false.
5. **Moral commands are absolutely authoritative.** Again, this is simply not true. Even killing another human being may, in certain circumstances, be permissible in many if not most human societies (eg in self-defence, or when trying to save someone else). South Africa's own legislation is an example of this. If you want to, you can find many real-life examples where courts in South Africa accepted that a defendant acted in self-defence.
6. And so, finally, the two closing conclusions of this argument can simply be disregarded as invalid:

Therefore:

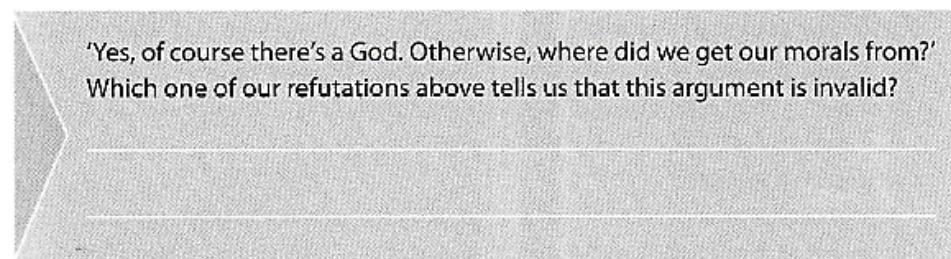
The commander of these commands is absolutely authoritative.

Therefore:

This commander is God.

Although you are unlikely to come across this argument stated so formally in everyday life, you are likely to encounter a simplified version of it when people say things like: 'Yes, of course there's a God. Otherwise, where did we get our morals from?'

'Yes, of course there's a God. Otherwise, where did we get our morals from?'  
Which one of our refutations above tells us that this argument is invalid?



Question

### Our response

The answer is the refutation of the argument from morality. Morals come from people and from groups of people. If God was the author of any moral code, why would He generate so many different and conflicting moral codes? The existence of these different moral codes is a fact that we can check for ourselves.

We would also say that this refutation strongly argues against God as being the author of any moral code.

If you are interested in finding out more about the arguments for and against the existence of God, we suggest you go to the following websites:

- ▶ [www.philosophyofreligion.info](http://www.philosophyofreligion.info)
- ▶ [www.scienceandreligiontoday.com](http://www.scienceandreligiontoday.com)
- ▶ [www.religionandnature.com](http://www.religionandnature.com)

### Linguistic analysis

Look at the following set of statements:

- ▶ One and one equals two.
- ▶ A physical object cannot be round and triangular at the same time.
- ▶ Either it is raining or it is not raining.
- ▶ No bachelor is married.
- ▶ A woman is either pregnant or not pregnant.

All these statements **must be true**. We do not have to check whether they are true.

Statements that must be true (or false) are said to be true (or false) by definition.

Statements that must be true fall into two categories, namely:

- ▶ mathematical statements
- ▶ statements that contain the word 'is' or the words 'is not'.

### Philosophers at work

The philosophy that concentrates on trying to find the exact meaning of words is known as linguistic analysis. Linguistic analysis was a movement in early 20th-century philosophy. It was based on the thinking of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell.

Linguistic analysis claims that almost all philosophical problems can be dispensed with once their underlying linguistic basis is exposed. In other words, linguistic analysis claims that if we fail to solve a problem no matter how hard

we try, then we are dealing with a false problem or, more likely, we are dealing with a meaningless set of words.

The most popular exponents of linguistic analysis as a means of arriving at truth were two British philosophers, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and A.J. Ayer (1910–1989). In their work, Russell and Ayer focused on three things: logic, linguistic meaning and verifiable facts. They attempted to find out how and why we know a statement is true, false or meaningless. They also attempted to 'get to the bottom of reality' by closely analysing how language worked and by closely analysing what a 'fact' is.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, another philosopher, started out as a supporter of linguistic analysis but later moved away from this position, largely as a result of his experiences in World War I.

Today, in the discipline of philosophy of education, linguistic analysis influences the work of Yusef Waghid, who, at the time of publication of this book, was working at the University of Stellenbosch. Yusef Waghid focuses on our need to define what we mean by 'education', and he points out that education suffers when too many people bring their own interpretations and agendas to education.

### **Does it work?**

#### **What linguistic analysis can help us to do**

Linguistic analysis can help us to:

1. think more clearly
2. be precise in what we mean
3. spot hidden assumptions in arguments
4. be aware of manipulation and dishonesty in all forms of propaganda, including the mass media.

#### **Where linguistic analysis cannot help us**

Linguistic analysis cannot help us with:

1. moral problems
2. life choices
3. facing our own mortality
4. seeing the people we love suffer
5. our own suffering.

### Quick summary

Linguistic analysis is concerned with the question: 'What is the meaning of this word or sentence?' or, more precisely: 'What is the meaning of these symbols?'

### Activity

Virtually all of us have a problem in our life that upsets us and which we cannot seem to solve. What is the biggest problem in your life right now?

Write this problem out as clearly as you can and make a point of being precise about what you mean.

Now write down why this problem is upsetting you so much. Again, be as clear and precise as you can.

You may find, after doing this, that you feel a bit better about this problem. If you do not, look at the words you have written. Are all these words clear and precise?

### Logical symbolism and argument

The philosophical movement that focused on linguistic analysis also focused on logic. The aim was to get to what we might call the 'bare bones' of truth. For example the following **must be true**:

All humans are mortal.  
Vuyo is a human.  
Therefore, Vuyo is mortal.

Logic formalises such deductions with rules precise enough to programme a computer to decide if an argument is valid.

**The aim of logic, in philosophy, is to arrive at the basic structure of truth.** This process is facilitated by representing objects and relationships symbolically.

To take the example above:

- ▶ We could use  $h$  for the set of humans,  $m$  for the set of mortal creatures and  $V$  for Vuyo.
- ▶ We use the symbolic expression  $x \in y$  to say that object  $x$  is a member of category  $y$ .
- ▶ Thus, we represent 'Vuyo is a human' by  $V \in h$ .
- ▶ We use the quantifier  $\lambda$  to indicate that all objects satisfy some condition. For example: 'All humans are mortal' can be written as:  $\lambda x \in h \rightarrow x \in m$ . This reads that every  $x$  that has the property of being human must also have the property of being mortal.
- ▶ Then we restate the syllogism as follows:  $\lambda x \in h \rightarrow x \in m$ ; and  $V \in h$  therefore  $V \in m$ . This reads that anything that is of the category  $x$  where  $x$  is a human,  $h$ , is also of the category mortal,  $m$ . Vuyo ( $V$ ) is of the category  $x$ , which therefore means that Vuyo is mortal.

Any statement that is true or false by definition can be expressed in the form of symbolic logic.

### **What is a fact?**

So far, we have concentrated on language and how we need to analyse the words and symbols that make up our language community. However, we do not just live in the world of language or the world of logic. We also live in the world of facts. This is the world of our everyday experience, the world we see around us. Examples of everyday statements of facts are:

- ▶ It is sunny today and rather hot.
- ▶ Mary came to work early today.
- ▶ Harry is taking an examination tomorrow, and he wants to pass.
- ▶ Sipho lives in Mamelodi.

These facts can be checked directly. We feel the heat and see the glare of the sun. We can see Mary sitting in her office. We heard Harry tell John about wanting to pass the exam. We have visited Sipho at his house in Mamelodi.

We rely on our senses to tell us things (we feel the heat, see the glare, and hear Harry talking to John). We believe what our senses tell us and we believe that the people around us hear, see and feel the same things we do. We use our senses to tell us facts. We do this so naturally that we are not even aware of doing it.

Think, for a moment, about the following questions:

- ▶ How do you know where you live?
- ▶ How do you know what is for supper?
- ▶ How do you know what your spouse or friend looks like?

- How do you know, right now, that you are reading this book?

In everyday life, we use our senses and our experience to establish facts, to check facts. This is the most reliable form of knowledge and information we have.

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### Quick summary

The method of inquiry in philosophy that argues that experience gained through the traditional five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) gives us our most reliable form of information, is referred to as empiricism.

Empiricism simply means 'experience-ism'. Modern science is based on the empirical belief that what is true is confirmed or disproved by sense experience. Empiricism has its origins in British and American philosophy.

Empiricism is concerned with establishing the truth by means of scientific testing. In other words, empiricism tests – or checks – to see whether what is claimed to be true is confirmed by the way we experience the world through our senses.

Therefore, one question empiricists ask is: 'How do I know if something is true?' Their answer is: 'I only know something is true if I have experienced it through my senses.' Their other answer is: 'I only know if something is true if I can test it scientifically.'

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### Activity

One of the following statements is not a fact we can check in any way. Which one is it, and why?

1. The book I am reading is published in South Africa.
2. Africa is the world's poorest continent.
3. Bertrand Russell was a famous philosopher.
4. Beauty is all around us.
5. It gets dark at about 6 pm in winter in Johannesburg.

**Doing the shopping one day, you suddenly see a friend on the other side of the shopping mall. You wave and call out. The other person turns towards you and you see, suddenly, that it is someone else.**

**What made you think this person was your friend?**

**As a child, you put a stick in a pond and the part of the stick that was in the water looked as if it was bending. But when you took the stick out of the water, it was still straight.**

**What made the stick look bent? Do you know why this happens?**

**In the Middle Ages, people thought that the world was flat. When Columbus set sail for America, some of his sailors were frightened that the ship would fall off the edge of the world. Today, we all know that the world is round.**

**Why do we no longer believe that the world is flat?**

**Suppose someone tells you that your friend, Lesibe, is a thief. You get angry and tell the person that Lesibe is a decent person you have known for years. You notice, some days after this, that some money is missing from your bag. You remember that the previous day you had lunch with Lesibe and left your bag with him to look after when you went to the bathroom.**

**Would this make you believe that Lesibe is, after all, a thief?**

**Question**

All the above scenarios and questions involve finding out, or trying to find out, whether something is true or false.

### ***Just supposing ...***

Just suppose you are travelling home alone one night. You've had a hard day at work and you've just had a couple of drinks at the pub. You're feeling absolutely bombed out and a bit drunk. Then, as you pass a piece of empty veld, you notice a saucer-shaped object, brightly lit, stationed on the ground. You stop the car immediately and peer at the object. No doubt about it – it's a flying saucer. You feel terribly frightened and drive off quickly. The next day, you pass the same spot and the veld is empty.

### **Question**

Did you see a flying saucer the previous night or did you not?

Suppose, later on that day, you read in the newspaper that other people had seen flying saucers in the same place recently and that teams of scientists from NASA and from Russia are coming to investigate and speak to people about it.

Now do you think you saw a flying saucer the previous night?

Empiricists claim that experience is the only reality there is. All our knowledge is based on our own experience and other people's experiences. People who promote empiricism tend to be critical of the claims of religion and the claims of ideologies such as Marxism.

### ***Does it work?***

#### ***What empiricism can help us to do***

Empiricism can help us:

1. understand how our physical world operates
2. test the truth of certain claims

3. refute what is false
4. respect the natural laws of the universe
5. learn from experience.

***What the failings of empiricism are***

1. It places too much emphasis on science.
2. It ignores human values.
3. It views human beings as machines.
4. It tends to ignore anything that cannot be explained scientifically.
5. It confines truth to that which can be experienced through the senses.

**Empiricism in a nutshell**

Empiricism has its origins in British and American philosophy. Empiricism claims that our most reliable form of knowledge comes from direct experience through the senses.

Empiricism claims that science gives us the most reliable form of truth.

If we ignore empiricism, we will fail to learn from our experiences and, in the process, make ourselves vulnerable to anything that is false. This could have serious consequences. Imagine defying the law of gravity and jumping off a ten-storey building. Experience tells us that if we jump off a building we will fall to the ground like a stone. Ignoring this fact would certainly lead to severe injury, if not death.

**Philosophers at work**

Linguistic analysis, logical symbolism and empiricism together formed the school of British philosophy known as logical empiricism (often called logical positivism). Logical positivism thrived during the first half of the 20th century, particularly in Britain and the United States. Today, empiricism is still very much a force in philosophy, but logic less so.

A contemporary philosopher of education who is influenced by empiricism is Harvey Siegel. At the time of publication of this book, he was teaching at the University of Miami in America. Siegel believes that education's prime purpose is to empower the learner to be rational – to base his or her ideas on firm, empirical evidence that can be tested.

## Asking questions: challenging what the world tells us

Turn on the news and listen for a moment. It can be any news – local South African news, CNN, Sky, or any other network. Or see if you can find a phone-in show on the radio and listen to what people say. Listen to what the presenter says. Or look at a newspaper, any newspaper.

Within about five minutes, you will almost certainly hear or read someone else's opinion on some issue, or his or her view of what needs to be done to solve some problem. It may be a problem you have thought about yourself. Maybe you have your own views on the problem.

### Question

Do you think we as human beings are solving our problems? Or is the world getting worse?

### Question

What do you think causes:

- ▶ crime
- ▶ violence
- ▶ HIV/AIDS
- ▶ war
- ▶ poverty?

Perhaps you answered 'I do not know' to the questions above. If so, you are an unusual person. We say this because most people – certainly most adults – believe they have answers to just about everything. You may well have heard people say things such as:

- ▶ 'If they bring back the death penalty, most crime would stop.'
  - ▶ 'Poverty only happens when people do not want to work.'
  - ▶ 'HIV/AIDS is just a scare story.'
  - ▶ 'The UN peacekeeping forces can prevent war.'
  - ▶ 'Violence is caused by guns. If the government banned guns, violence will stop.'
- Politicians are always telling us they have solutions. The world over, politicians promise that if they get voted into power, they will solve just about everybody's problems. Think back to the last election campaign. Who was going to solve what? Did the party that came into power solve any of your problems?

### **What is scientific thinking?**

Scientific thinking, we believe, is actually an unusual and rare thing. Few of us think scientifically, and this is not because we are not scientists; it is because we want to be certain about things. We like to feel we are educated and knowledgeable. We get onto the 'information superhighway', the internet. We read magazines such as *Time*, books on philosophy, and good newspapers, and we regularly visit news websites, for example [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) and [www.theguardian.com/uk](http://www.theguardian.com/uk). In short, we try to stay informed.

But are we informed? Do we actually know what is going on in the world around us?

In everyday life, we often do not have time to question what we are told. When we were children, we believed what our parents told us, what our religious leaders told us and what our teachers told us. Now that we are adults, we believe what the media tells us.

Has anyone ever told you a lie? How did you find out?

Question

**Question**

Which political party do you vote for? Do you think this party ever tells lies?

**Question**

Which political party would you never vote for? Why?

**Question**

If you work for an employer, what sort of questions are you not 'allowed' to ask?

Developing a questioning attitude is essential in science, and it is possibly one of the main things philosophy teaches us to do.

We have just asked you to think about which political party you voted for. Now try this exercise:

- ▶ Think of the political party you hate the most, and ask yourself: Why do people vote for this party? Ask yourself this question seriously.
- ▶ Go and read a newspaper that you know supports this party. Read it carefully, especially the editorial. Afterwards, stop and think.

Do you have a better idea now of why people support a viewpoint that is so different from your own?

**Activity**

If you like, try religion instead of politics:

- ▶ If you believe in God, try to think of reasons why some people do not believe in God.
- ▶ Talk to someone you know who does not believe in God or who does not take part in any religious activities. Listen to him or her carefully.

Activity

Next time you are telling someone what you think about something or someone, deliberately stop yourself and say something like: 'You know, I could be wrong about this. Forget everything I've just said. I might be talking a load of rubbish. I need to think about this some more.' Try it. See what happens.

Activity

Perhaps you are the sort of person who finds it difficult to talk much, particularly to people who seem very confident or who seem to have all the answers. You may be the sort of person who tends to listen instead.

Next time, give your opinion and speak your mind. See what happens.  
Did anyone try to shut you up? Who?

***Just supposing ...***

***Scenario 1***

You're waiting for the taxi that takes you to work every morning. Somebody new is queuing next to you and asks you what time the taxi will arrive. You tell him, 'Eight

o'clock.' You all wait and wait, but the taxi does not come. Finally, a different taxi arrives half an hour later.

Did you give the person the wrong information?

Question

***Scenario 2***

You see an advertisement on TV for a cut-price computer. It looks really good and you buy one of these computers the next day. You bring it home, but then you cannot get it to work. You phone the shop and they send their computer expert to help you. He takes one look at your computer and says, 'You're going to have problems with this computer. That's why it was cut-price. But I'll do my best.' He fixes your computer and it runs perfectly every day from then on.

Did the computer expert lie to you?

Question

***Scenario 3***

Two friends of yours, Steve and Thandi, have been married for over ten years. They have two children whom they love, and everything is fine – they've got a nice house and good jobs. Someone asks you if they are happily married and you say: 'Yes.' A week later, Thandi phones you up and says she's getting divorced from Steve.

Did you tell the truth when you said these people were happily married?

Question

Activity

Read the above scenarios again carefully. What actually happened in each of them?

Scenarios 1, 2 and 3 are all good examples of people being proved wrong about something. It is not a good feeling to be proved wrong, and most of us try to avoid it. As Robin Dunbar says, we all like certainty (Dunbar, 1995). But we can never be sure we are right about something. We can only be sure when we are wrong about something! Scenario 3 is an example of something that happens a lot. We think we know people and then find out we were wrong about them. We cannot even be certain about little things, like the taxi turning up on time.

What has all this got to do with science and philosophy? Well, this is about developing a questioning attitude and admitting that we could be wrong. Both these attitudes are very much the concern of the method of inquiry in philosophy known as critical rationalism.

## Critical rationalism

### Philosophers at work

The method of enquiry in philosophy that encourages questioning is called critical rationalism. Another name for it is scientific rationalism.

Critical rationalism has a very long history. It goes back to Socrates, who lived from 470 to 399 bc. Socrates encouraged us to challenge existing ideas and beliefs by questioning them. The Athenian authorities executed Socrates because he questioned the religious practices of the day (the worship of the gods).

As a method of inquiry in philosophy, critical rationalism encourages open-mindedness. Another way of saying this is that critical rationalism is anti-dogmatic and anti-authoritarian. It is completely against societies where people cannot speak their minds freely and discuss things openly. Only open societies are democratic. Only open societies can solve problems by exchanging ideas and trying out new ones. Critical rationalism is essential for the future of true democracy.

The whole aim of critical rationalism is to make sure we do not come to believe in an idea that is false. This way, we can find out more about the world we live in and progress in our knowledge.

Critical rationalists emphasise that scientists must be objective. This means that scientists tell other scientists what they think is true and then find out what the other scientists say. Maybe the other scientists have done tests that support their discoveries.

Empiricism and critical rationalism are ‘partners’. Both methods of inquiry in philosophy emphasise the need to search out the truth as honestly as possible. Empiricism focuses on searching for objective truth, and critical rationalism focuses on avoiding falsity.

People who have promoted critical rationalism include:

- ▶ Stephen Hawking (a British scientist)
- ▶ Albert Einstein (a German scientist)
- ▶ Karl Popper (a British philosopher)
- ▶ Godwin Sogolo (an African philosopher)
- ▶ Helen Suzman (a South African politician)
- ▶ Hannah Arendt (a German-American philosopher)
- ▶ Nelson Mandela (a former South African president).

One person who believed that critical rationalism should form the basis of education was the late Carl Sagan, who died in 1996. Sagan, in fact, was a university teacher (he taught astronomy at Cornell University, New York). Like all critical rationalists, Sagan hated any form of authoritarianism. He believed that education’s primary task was to teach people to detect falsity.

Read the following statements:

John: ‘I’ve never been to the Kruger Park. I wonder what it is really like.’

Shirley: ‘I used to believe in God, but I’m not so sure now. I’ve seen too many people suffer.’

Thabo: ‘I vote for the ANC. But I do not agree with all their ideas. I think they need to be more aware of the problems in South Africa today.’

Gerrie: ‘I’m going to the library today to see if I can get a book on gardening. I do not know anything about gardening.’

Hester: ‘I’m an out-and-out Marxist. Marxism has the answers to the world’s problems. It is no good listening to capitalists. They do not know what they’re talking about.’

### Activity

Activity

One of the people above is not a critical rationalist. Which one? Why do you say so?

Question

Have you ever discovered that you were wrong about something? What happened? What did you learn from this experience?

### The problem of values in critical rationalism

How do we find out if our values are good or bad? We can ask this question in another way: How do we find out if our morals are right or wrong?

We often hear people say things such as:

- ▶ ‘It is wrong to steal, no matter how poor you are. Other people’s property should be respected.’
- ▶ ‘Criminals are treated too kindly. They should bring back the death penalty.’
- ▶ ‘I do not believe in abortion. It is murder.’
- ▶ ‘Men and women are equal. I’m glad the Constitution recognises this.’

But how do we find out whether these ideas are right or wrong?

Morals are not the same as science. For example, medical researchers are working hard to find out how to cure HIV/AIDS. They do not have an answer yet, and they might not have one in our lifetime, but they will sooner or later.

On the other hand, it makes no sense at all to say something such as: 'Some people think abortion is wrong. Other people agree with it. We should ask the government to set up a team of scientists to find out who is right here,' or 'Some people want the death penalty brought back. We need to get some scientific research going to find out if the death penalty is good or bad.'

In other words, morals are not objective. People have different ideas about what is right and wrong. However, the puzzling thing is this: there does seem to be a link between morals and truth.

Suppose you heard someone say the following: 'What's all the fuss about murder and rape? It is fine to do these things. Too bad if the victims suffer. That's their problem.'

What would your reaction be to this statement?

### Question

You would probably think: 'This person is sick and needs help.'

The truth about what is morally right or wrong is one of the central problems of philosophy.

Critical rationalism says that the best we can do is to be totally democratic and let everyone say what they think about, for example, abortion or the death penalty. During the late 1990s, some people in South Africa believed that a referendum ought to be held on the death penalty. If more than 50% of the people in South Africa voted for it, then – these people argued – the death penalty should be restored.

### ***Just supposing ...***

Suppose you went into politics and got elected as president. One day, a group of people ask to meet you. They call themselves The Critical Rationalist Party. They tell you that they want to see you make more use of referendums for everything, including economic policy. 'It is time everyone got a say and not just the politicians,' they tell you.

Question

How would you react to this idea of government by referendum? Can you think of any problems that might arise?

Question

Would you argue with your friend? Or would you agree with him and wish you had not signed the petition?

Question

What problem in the world upsets you and makes you angry? What do you think should be done to solve this problem?

Question

How would you answer her?

## The importance of critical rationalism

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### Quick summary

- ▶ Critical rationalists believe we should question what we are told and that we should carefully examine our own ideas.
  - ▶ Critical rationalists ask one simple question: 'Are we sure we are right?' They believe that human beings can solve their problems by thinking clearly and by discussing everything openly.
  - ▶ Critical rationalists focus on one thing: avoiding falsity.
- 

Critical rationalism has much to offer. One of the problems of the modern world is that we tend simply to believe whatever the media tells us. Critical rationalism tells us that we should be far more critical of what the articles in media such as *Time* magazine, *Newsweek*, CNN and Sky News say. The media world is owned by extremely rich, powerful people who may well want us to believe certain things and ignore others. It is probably unwise to rely on just one source for our information.

The same is true of politics. We need to be very careful indeed before trusting what politicians and political parties tell us.

If we believe that the truth is important, critical rationalism will always be part of our lives.

### **Does it work?**

#### *What critical rationalism can help us to do*

Critical rationalism can help us to:

1. question what people in authority tell us
2. be more open to what other people think
3. examine our own opinions more carefully
4. be more tolerant and understanding
5. solve problems.

#### *What critical rationalism cannot help us to do*

Critical rationalism cannot help us to:

1. make quick decisions
2. find the meaning of life
3. deal with people who are dishonest
4. feel secure
5. solve the problem of suffering.

## Types of false argument

One of the most useful tools of critical rationalism is its classification of various types of false argument. The most important are name-calling, false cause-and-effect, falsely representing an opinion, appealing to emotion, and false argument from popularity. We describe each type below. Be on the lookout for these arguments next time you hear or read something in the media or if you are in the middle of a discussion.

- ▶ **Name-calling** is attacking the person and not the opinion he or she has. In philosophy, this is called the fallacy of the *ad hominem* argument.

*Example:* ‘Sipho says the DA are the best party to vote for, because they have sound economic policies. That’s typical of DA supporters: they’re all **greedy capitalists**.’

Sipho may be a greedy capitalist, and many people who support the DA may be greedy capitalists, but that has got nothing to do with whether or not the DA have sound economic policies.

- ▶ **False cause-and-effect** is falsely claiming that an action has, or will have, a certain effect.

*Example 1:* ‘If the government bans guns, *then* we’ll have a lot less violence in South Africa.’

This is a popular false argument that is particularly favoured by the media. In fact, there is no established link, anywhere in the world, between strict gun control and reduced violence. Nobody knows what causes violent crime in a society.

*Example 2:* ‘If the government brings back hanging, *then* there will be fewer murders.’

Again, this is a popular argument and, again, it has no basis. There is no established link between capital punishment and the amount of violent crime in a society. To repeat: nobody knows what causes violent crime.

*Example 3:* ‘If you join our group, *then* you will become a millionaire within six months. Don’t miss this business opportunity!’

This, too, is an argument claiming, falsely, that two things are linked. There are always a number of these ‘business opportunities’ around. There is no established link between joining these schemes and getting rich. In fact, many of these schemes cost money (the joining fee).

- ▶ **Falsely representing an opinion in order to discredit it.** In philosophy, this is known as the ‘straw man argument’.

*Example 1:* ‘People who say there’s no God think it is okay to ignore moral rules.’

This is a false argument put forward by some religious groups to discredit non-believers and atheists. First of all, lots of people who believe in God act immorally. Secondly, many atheists place a high value on moral rules.

*Example 2:* ‘Religion claims that God created the world in seven days.’

This is a false representation of religion put forward by certain secularists and atheists. Today, religion covers an extremely wide range of beliefs and opinions, and relatively few religious groups believe this.

- ▶ **Appeals to emotion (usually, fear)** are probably the easiest type of false argument to spot.

*Example (political):* ‘The people of South Africa have a choice: either vote for our political party or watch the crime rate get worse.’

There is no established link between political policies and violent crime anywhere in the world.

- ▶ **Falsely claiming that because a point of view is popular, it must be true.**

*Example:* ‘Our religion is the fastest growing religion in South Africa today: that’s because we teach the truth.’

The fact that a group or society has lots of members does not mean that its teachings are true. Throughout history, many people have believed things that have turned out to be completely false.

What type of false argument is used in the following statements?

1. Thandi says that abortion is always wrong. Who cares what she thinks? Thandi's a religious fanatic.
2. If you put your life savings into a shares portfolio, your money will be worth double in a year's time.
3. Islam teaches that terrorism is morally acceptable.
4. Our church is a born-again church. The Bible teaches that if you are not born again, you will go to hell. God is giving you this opportunity to join us!
5. Most people in South Africa vote for the ANC. That is because the ANC has the best political policies.

Question

Question

**Our response**

1. Name-calling
2. False cause-and-effect
3. A 'straw man argument'
4. An appeal to emotion (fear of hell)
5. An argument from popularity.

**Critical rationalism**

Critical rationalism encourages us to question everything we are told. Critical rationalism constantly asks: 'How do we know this is true?'

If we ignore critical rationalism, we will almost certainly become very gullible people who can be manipulated by others. We may even end up being guilty or doing real harm to others and ourselves because we fail to question what people in authority tell us.

**The dangers of not questioning authority**

In our own day, there have been three prominent examples of abusive behaviour by people in positions of authority, trust and, supposedly, expertise. These examples come from the **world of science**, the **world of religion** and the **world of finance**.

**The world of science: climategate**

In this case, a number of scientists manipulated and distorted weather data to 'prove' that, in the 20th century, the Earth suddenly started heating up as a result of human activity (carbon emissions). What makes this example particularly shocking is that science, in order to be science, must be based on objective, neutral facts obtained by dispassionate men and women who are keen to discover the truth. As far as climate change is concerned, this has, sadly, not been the case. As a result of this betrayal of trust, both the public and those in government are still ignorant about enormously important issues such as the global climate, rising sea water (if it is rising), the expected frequency of extreme weather phenomena (eg tornadoes), etc.

The sequence of events is as follows:

- ▶ **The 1990s:** Data and articles published in scientific journals (eg *Nature* and *Science*) by supposedly reputable scientists showed that the Earth's atmosphere is heating up at an alarming rate as a result of trapped greenhouse gases.
- ▶ **1995–1998:** The IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) released a series of reports which increasingly emphasised the influence of human activity on climate change and which ended in an endorsement of Mann's hockey stick (Montford

2010: 26–30). This was alarming news, and it formed the background to the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement signed by a number of countries to reduce carbon emission and, hence, the impact of human activity on the global climate.

- ▶ **1998:** Professor Mann of the Department of Geosciences at the University of Massachusetts published findings (in *Nature* and *Geophysical Research Letters*) that seemed to indicate the situation was far more serious than hitherto suspected. His work included the famous hockey stick graph, published in *Nature*. Mann's graph looked like this:

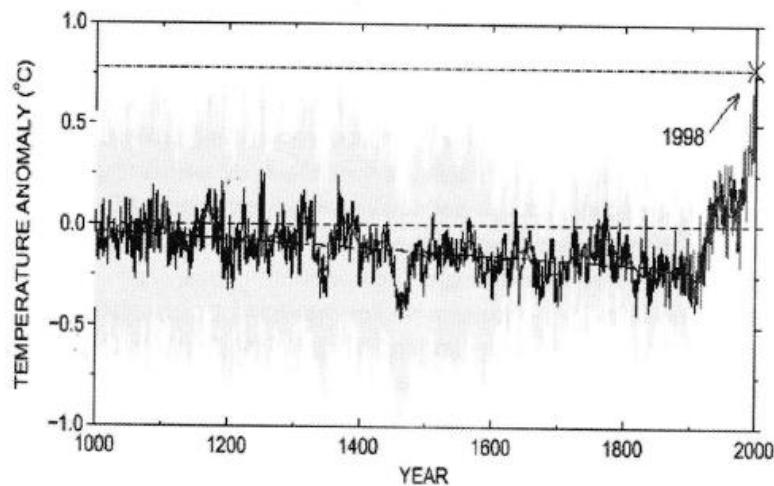


Figure 1: Prof. Mann's hockey stick graph (Montford, 2010: 34)

- ▶ Mann's work became the basis of the international community's attempts to seriously rethink energy consumption patterns. This work was driven by the UN (United Nations) and the IPCC. The frightening message was spread and popularised in Al Gore's documentary 'An inconvenient truth'. There was no reason for non-specialists and non-scientists to disbelieve this message. We **were** (and are) pumping out an awful lot of CO<sub>2</sub>, glaciers **were** melting and sea levels **were** rising.

There were some – very few – scientists (called climate change deniers or sceptics) who doubted this scenario, but their views were regarded as either irresponsible and 'freaky' or, at best, based on specialist and insignificant data. The climate change scenario was regarded as totally valid until about 2004/5, when a few more assertive, dissenting voices were heard. They claimed that, at the very least, climate change could not be as easily quantified as Mann had done. The situation was complex. Other factors, such as sun spots, also came into play. Even so, most educated people – scientists and non-scientists alike – still believed in climate change.

- ▶ **2003:** That the public had been led astray by so-called scientists became even more obvious in 2003 when an independent Canadian researcher, Steve McIntyre, studied Mann's hockey graph and became puzzled by how Mann obtained the calculations used as the basis of the graph. McIntyre referred to calculations and graphs posted on certain internet sites. He wrote to Mann asking for clarity. In November, McIntyre's request was forwarded to the CRU (Climate Research Unit), whose members were expressing concern at Mann's hastily put-together graphs.
- ▶ **January 2004:** The journal *Climate Change* wrote to Phil Jones (head of the unit), the head of the Climate Research Unit, asking him to make Mann's data and computer program available to the general scientific community. **Jones refused.**
- ▶ Just over a year later, in April 2005, McIntyre and his colleague McKittrick, who, by then, had been doing their own research on climate change for some three years, finally presented their paper (in Australia) on Mann's hockey stick graph, a graph that they concluded was seriously flawed and unscientific.
- ▶ **2005–2009:** In the years that followed, both Mann's hockey stick graph and the work of the CRU were increasingly discredited.
- ▶ **November 2009:** An unknown hacker managed to get into the computer database of the CRU (Climate Research Unit) of East Anglia University in the UK. This unit was the 'hub' of climate research, and its international staff included Mann himself, Jones and various other associates, all of whom were extremely influential on world bodies such as the IPCC, and whose work formed the basis of global climate change policies. What did the hacked emails show? Basically, that the CRU was having to juggle statistics in order to 'prove' that the Earth was getting warmer as a result of human-made carbon dioxide emissions. In fact, Mann's article in *Nature* was based on a graph that was **invalid**. Both Mann and Jones **knew and ignored the facts**. And the facts were that **there was no sharp increase in global warming in the late 1990s**.

At the time of the writing of this book (mid-2014), the whole subject of climate change is an issue of controversy and debate, and one that is marred by accusations and counter-accusations in the scientific community itself.

### The paedophilia scandal in the Roman Catholic Church

In this case, Church authorities – note the word 'authorities' – conspired to cover up the fact that hundreds, possibly thousands, of priests in the Roman Catholic Church were psychologically damaged men who routinely corrupted and terrorised children and young men by forcing them to engage in sexual, and particularly homosexual, activities. So keen were they to hide this dreadful truth that archbishops, cardinals, monsignors and bishops did everything in their power to refuse to co-operate with the police, the courts and child protection agencies. This abuse of the trust vested

in them was particularly prevalent in Ireland where, historically, the Roman Catholic Church has wielded both enormous political and religious power.

The sequence of events goes back to just after World War II in Europe:

- ▶ **1947:** Fr Fitzgerald established the Congregation of the Servants of the Paraclete as a place where priests with substance and alcohol abuse problems could receive support and spiritual counselling.
- ▶ **1950s to 1960s:** As leader of the Congregation, Fr Fitzgerald became increasingly troubled by the growing numbers of gay men who came to him seeking help. Worried that some of them might become sexual abusers, he sought the advice of Church authorities, who clearly believed he was worrying unnecessarily. In 1962, Fitzgerald wrote a five-page letter to the Vatican in response to a query on troubled priests.
- ▶ **1962:** The Church published *Crimen Sollicitationis* (a Latin term for 'the crime of soliciting'), signed by the then Pope, John XXIII. It concerned priests who used the confessional to make sexual advances to penitents. The document gave specific instructions on how to apply canon law in such cases. The aim of the document was, in fact, reasonable and fair. It was to make it easier for both the accused and the victim to come forward to the Church, by ensuring total confidentiality. Furthermore, it aimed to ensure that priests would only be defrocked if there was virtually no doubt that they were guilty. In all cases, whether the priest was found guilty or not, the identity of the victim and the accuser would not be revealed. Guilty priests would be quietly disciplined and eventually defrocked. The Vatican stipulated that dioceses were to use *Crimen Sollicitationis* judiciously. There is no reason to believe that *Crimen Sollicitationis* was an attempt to hush up serious crimes. At the same time, it is important to note that the penalties inflicted on those found guilty were Church penalties – there was no suggestion that secular authorities should be approached. *Crimen Sollicitationis* was the Church speaking to the Church.
- ▶ **1980s:** Two priests in America were convicted of sexually abusing minors.
- ▶ **1993:** A Boston priest was sentenced to 18–20 years for serious sexual crimes.
- ▶ **2002:** In January, the *Boston Globe* investigative reporters started a series of articles that expose massive and large-scale paedophilic abuse by priests, as well as complicity in this abuse by the Church hierarchy. Five priests were convicted and sentenced. The articles were published regularly from January 2002 to April 2004.
- ▶ **2002:** In Britain, a priest was jailed for five years for sexual crimes.
- ▶ **2002:** In Canada, the Church paid millions of dollars in compensation for abuse cases dating from the 1980s that were never brought to trial.
- ▶ **2003:** In Australia, nine victims of priestly abuse were given monetary compensation.

- ▶ **2004:** The John Jay Report was published in America. It was commissioned by the Church.
- ▶ **2009:** The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report) and the Murphy Report were published in Ireland. These reports detailed evidence of torture and sexual abuse of minors by priests and monks in Church orphanages from the 1930s to the late 1980s. Reports estimated that as many as 14 500 children may have suffered at hands of the Church.
- ▶ **2010:** Reports of clerical abuse were made public in Germany and Belgium. In June, police raided the headquarters of the Church in Belgium.

### The financial crisis of 2007–2008

In very simple terms, this is what happened:

- ▶ **2001:** The economic upswing in America and the First World, caused by internet commerce, came to an end. The Federal Reserve Bank in America reduced its interest rate to a mere 1% (well below normal lending rates) to encourage people to buy houses (ie take out mortgages) and to stimulate consumer spending (debt-based spending on credit cards). (Note that some social commentators believe that this was done to offset the emotional and psychological damage inflicted on Americans by 9/11.)
- ▶ **2002–2006:** The Federal Reserve Bank's scheme worked. More and more people (including people with low incomes) could afford houses and, in the period 2001–2006, houses were sold easily, which meant that house prices soared, as did credit card spending. This led to inflation (where the prices of goods rise higher than wages). What is more, in their eagerness to sell mortgages, mortgage companies often let people have special deals for the first few years.
- ▶ **2005:** The special mortgage deals negotiated in the years 2002–2006 came to an end, and low-income borrowers start defaulting. Along with inflation, this was the first visible sign that all was not well.
- ▶ **2006:** The banks were forced to increase interest rates to 4% because of the inflation fuelled by US debt levels. The figure of 4% was by no means high, but it meant that the huge mortgages people had taken out in 2001/2 were unaffordable. Middle-income borrowers now started defaulting. More and more people were unable to pay back even the interest on their mortgages.
- ▶ **2007:** As a result of the events in 2005 and 2006, as described above, house prices dropped dramatically in 2007. This means that, even if they sold houses, people could no longer afford to finance their mortgages (bonds), the mortgage companies could not get their money back.
- ▶ **2008:** Unfortunately, the mortgage companies had borrowed from the USA's big banks in order to lend people the money to buy houses. In other words, the mortgage companies had handed on extremely risky debt, which now turned

out to be bad debt. The bad debt included more than just bad mortgage debt. It also included bad debt on cars and credit card debt. Banks were simply unaware of how vulnerable their position was. Because the mortgage companies could not get their money back, they could not pay back the banks they had borrowed from. So the banks had to write these losses off. If this had happened on a small or even medium scale, it might not have mattered. But this was not the case. The bad debts and losses were on a massive scale, and involved all of the USA's financial giants. This meant that bank shareholders lost confidence in the banks. Share prices plummeted. Banks themselves were suddenly short of money.

- ▶ **2008–2010:** Consumer spending dropped significantly, which, in turn, led to relatively high levels of unemployment in developed countries – today, four years later, there are increasing numbers of homeless and destitute people, particularly in the USA but also in the UK and Northern Europe. Although we have focused on the USA, much the same thing happened in the UK and elsewhere in the developed world during the same period.

What went wrong in each of these three cases? What were the main problems?

Question

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three

How in the world can we give our lives  
meaning?

Some years ago, the following graffiti appeared on a wall in London, England:

**WORK EAT SLEEP WORK EAT SLEEP WORK EAT SLEEP. DIE.**

On a wall in Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa, someone asks a question:

**WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE FIFTY, STRESSED AND STILL IN THE RAT RACE?**

What do you think these writers are saying? Do you think the writer of the 'WORK EAT SLEEP DIE' graffiti is a happy person, someone who is enjoying life?

What about the second writer? Do you think this writer is part of the rat race?

Question

If someone gave us a wall to write on and a pot of paint, we think our graffiti would say this:

**DOES LIFE HAVE ANY MEANING?**

**CAN WE CREATE MEANING?**

**CAN WE CREATE OUR OWN LIVES?**

Does life have any meaning for you? What do you think life is about? Do you think life is worth living? Do you know anyone who has committed suicide, or tried to commit suicide?

The Dalai Lama once said:

I believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. From the moment of birth, every human being wants happiness and does not want suffering. Neither social conditioning nor education nor ideology affect this. From the very core of our being, we simply desire contentment. I do not know whether the universe, with its countless galaxies, stars and planets, has a deeper meaning or not, but at the very least, it is clear that we humans who live on this earth face the task of making a happy life for ourselves. Therefore, it is important to discover what will bring about the greatest degree of happiness.

(Dalai Lama, nd)

As a young man, the Dalai Lama knew great trouble and difficulty. The communist Chinese invaded his country, Tibet. Many Tibetan people were killed. He and a few of his followers managed to escape over the border into India. In many of his writings, the Dalai Lama has said that meditation and the interpretation of his dreams enabled him and his few desperate followers to remain calm and evade the Chinese who were after them.

In the West, the American psychologist James Hillman said this:

There is more to human life than theories. Sooner or later something seems to call us onto a particular path. You may remember this 'something' as a moment in childhood when an urge out of nowhere, a fascination, said to you, 'This is what I must do, this is what I've got to have. This is who I am.' The call may not have been this strong, but more like gentle pushings in the stream in which you drifted to a particular spot on the bank. Looking back, you sense that fate had a hand in it.

(Hillman, 1996)

What do we want to do with our lives? How do we want to live our lives? Many years ago, the philosopher Plato said that the whole of philosophy could be summed up in one question: How should we live?

Another way of saying this is: What is the meaning of life?

If you have got children, or you are in contact with them, for instance as a teacher or kindergarten teacher, you could ask them to come up with some ideas about the meaning of life, even if they cannot write yet.

Children often remind adults of the important things in life. In their childlike way, they often comment on the meaning of life.

The method of inquiry in philosophy that asks, 'What is the meaning of life?' is known as existentialism (this means 'existence-ism').

### Philosophers at work

Existentialism is found in all cultures. Modern African philosophers tend to be existentialist philosophers. This may be because of the huge problems African countries are facing. However, today, more and more countries all around the world are facing huge and intractable problems, and there is a growing interest in existentialism in the West.

In philosophy of education, there are two people – Max van Manen and Shaun Gallagher – who can be said to be concerned about the need to bring existentialist concerns into the modern classroom. Briefly, Van Manen emphasises the primacy of the personal relationship in any form of teaching and Gallagher focuses on the need for freedom and space before any true learning can occur.

Since everybody answers the question 'What is the meaning of life?' in his or her own way, all the existentialist philosophers have come up with different answers. One of the most interesting of these philosophers was Michel Foucault (pronounced 'Foo-coe'). Michel Foucault was a French philosopher who died in 1984. He was extremely concerned about the huge influence modern institutions have on human existence. By 'modern institutions', he meant schools, big business, prisons, hospitals (including mental hospitals), the civil service, the police force and, of course, the military and the influential churches such as the Roman Catholic Church. Foucault said that all these institutions distorted life and destroyed the innocence of the human soul.

How do institutions do this?

Foucault said that human beings are essentially free and unformed. But institutions, even 'good' institutions such as schools, force the people in them to conform to sets of rules. In the process, people become uncertain of themselves, afraid and artificial.

And the real problem is that modern life is totally dominated by institutions and by rules and regulations. We do everything 'according to the clock'; we feel we have to fit in, be accepted and 'be like everyone else'.

The question that Foucault poses is: 'Are you yourself?'

How do you feel about your own life? Is there anything in it you would like to change? If so, what?

**Question**

Did you have any dreams as a child that you have now given up? Do you still have dreams about what you would like to be and do?

**Question**

These are some of the things the authors of this book would like to do:

- ▶ grow exotic roses
- ▶ fly a kite
- ▶ own a penthouse flat and a Ferrari sports car
- ▶ get an outrageous hair cut
- ▶ tell our enemies exactly what we think of them
- ▶ shout at the boss
- ▶ sulk and stay in bed all day long
- ▶ climb Mount Kilimanjaro
- ▶ enjoy a meal with good friends
- ▶ travel the world
- ▶ go on a safari trip through Africa to Kenya
- ▶ visit the Great Wall of China
- ▶ set up a model train platform.

**Activity**

What do you think this list says about us?

**Activity**

Draw up your own list and write it in the space below. What does your list say about you, do you think?

**Question**

What is your reaction to Thomas Moore's remarks on 'the spiritual life'? What do you understand by 'the spiritual life'? What do you think is stopping you from being in control of your own life?

The South African performance poet and journalist, Sandile Dikeni, wrote the following poem while contemplating the predicament of his existence. The poem is called 'African Worker's Lullaby'.

Look not at me little one  
throw those deep sunken eyes  
a little far  
to the Rolls Royce and limousine  
rolling and raving on streets of tar  
for my man made ignorance is distant from economics  
I have no use for polemics  
believe me little one

Cry not at me little one  
I am but a poor African

no one listens to me  
raise your little finger of anger  
to mingle with the wild battling waves  
at cool white beaches where the white masters rave believe me little one

Beg me not little one  
beg me not  
I myself have none  
a machine battling for survival  
since the white man's arrival  
with the hunger,  
starvation and frustration  
apparently  
to establish a refreshment station  
can you believe this little one?

Steal not from me little one  
steal not from me  
I can direct you to where there is plenty  
ask for any bus written city  
avoid paying if you can  
pay if you possibly can  
for your destination, little one  
is worth millions of rand  
believe me little one

Refuse to die little one  
refuse to die  
for this gun in my hand  
shall bring back the land  
I know not much about guns  
only that they have done more than nuns  
and oh yes they do take away life  
only to bring back our lives  
'true little one  
believe me little one

(Dikeni, 2002: 2-3)

Perhaps the most well-known western writer to have expressed existentialist despair was the English playwright, Shakespeare. His lines from the tragedy Macbeth, ('Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day') (William Shakespeare, Tradegies, Vol. I. Page 528) have never been equaled. The entire speech can be read at: [nfs.sparknotes.com/macbeth/page\\_202.html](http://nfs.sparknotes.com/macbeth/page_202.html)

Today, in the early part of the twenty-first century, there are a number of westerners writing existential poetry, and much of this poetry can be found on the Web. One

poem that spoke to us, written only three months ago at the time of writing is: 'The Modern Dream', the last line of which says: 'Children beware. The living nightmare. The Modern Dream'. The entire poem can be found at the following website: <http://allpoetry.com/poems/about/Existentialism>

**Question**

Which of the writings quoted and referred to above speaks to you most powerfully? Why? What do you think this says about you?

**Question**

Do you think life has meaning? If your answer is 'yes', what meaning does life have for you?

Some people believe life has no meaning, that it is pointless trying to live a good or worthwhile life. These people are called nihilists.

### **Philosophers at work**

The opposite of existentialism is nihilism. Nihilism means 'the philosophy of nothing'.

According to nihilists, there is no purpose in life and there is no such thing as the soul. Human beings are tiny bits of nothing in the vastness of the universe and life is simply a waste of time. We might as well shoot ourselves or jump out of the window. Or get up early every day and go to work if we want to. Who cares? The motto is 'So what?'. It does not matter who we are or what we do.

But nihilism is a strange thing. It can lead to violence and chaos, but it can also free people, particularly people who have grown up in very repressive religious environments.

Also, if Michel Foucault was right, and too many of us are trapped by rules and regulations, then nihilism can definitely help us change this.

### ***Just supposing ...***

A friend of yours has a lot of problems, problems she cannot seem to solve. Things are going downhill and she seems very depressed all the time. One day, you learn she has tried to kill herself and now she's in hospital, recovering. You visit her in the hospital.

What do you say to your friend? Should you say anything at all?

**Question**

### ***Does it work?***

#### ***What existentialism can help us to do***

Existentialism can help us to:

1. question other people's ideas and values
2. be more open about ourselves
3. trust our instincts
4. spot fakes
5. enjoy life more.

#### ***What the failings of existentialism are***

1. It may make us too trusting.
2. It can be confusing.
3. It may lead to despair.
4. It may leave us feeling helpless and angry.
5. It may be seriously disruptive.

### ***Quick summary***

Existentialists believe that the most important thing we should do is to discover, for ourselves, the meaning of life.

Existentialists do not believe that there is one meaning to life (eg to live for God or the church or some ideology) – far from it. Modern existentialists believe that our 'duty' is to decide, for ourselves, what life is about.

Existentialists believe we should repeatedly ask ourselves one question: 'Is this how I want to spend my life?'

### Thought break

Ask yourself: 'Is this the way I want to spend my life?'

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Another interesting response to the question 'What is the meaning of life?' is found in what is known as black existentialism. The scholar Lewis R. Gordon, in his collection *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, contemplates the situation of black people in the world generally. He asks the probing question: 'What is to be done in a world of nearly a universal sense of superiority to, if not universal hatred of, black folk?' (Gordon, 1997: 27). Gordon also makes the claim that the issue of race has emerged, throughout its history, as the question fundamentally of 'the blacks' more than for any other group (1997).

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### Thought break

How do you respond to Gordon's probing question, 'What is to be done in a world of nearly a universal sense of superiority to, if not universal hatred of, black folk?'

Do you believe Gordon's question is valid, and if so, why?

If you believe it is a valid question, then what do you consider should be done in order to solve this problem?

Is the question of race, as Gordon states, a peculiarly 'black' problem? Give reasons for your answer.

### **Existentialism in a nutshell**

Existentialism is that method of inquiry in philosophy that asks: 'What is the meaning of life?'

How we approach existentialism depends, to a certain extent, on our culture. People from different cultures will tend to answer the question 'What is the meaning of life?' differently.

To some, ignoring existentialism is equal to running the risk of living what the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates called 'the unexamined life'. The unexamined life, said Socrates, is not worth living. Our lives may be full of activity, but we are likely to experience a certain flatness and staleness. We may find ourselves, when we are older, feeling that life has passed us by.

For the last 200 years, Western societies have tended to ignore existentialism in the belief that technological progress could satisfy all human needs. These societies are now paying a heavy price for this delusive love affair with technology: social breakdown, violence, alienation and cynicism are now the hallmarks of the West.

What does it mean to say: 'I am an African?' What does it mean to live on the continent of Africa, at the beginning of the 21st century? Western economic writers sometimes refer to Africa as 'the world's basket case'. They point to Africa's wars, starvation, financial collapse and corruption as evidence that Africa seems to suffer from some sort of death wish. In the Western media, the people of Africa are still portrayed as being backwards, as needing the help of the West.

Like some great question mark at the centre and crossroads of the world stands Africa. Our best available scientific information tells us that the human race originated there. Probably we humans lingered in Africa for thousands of years before moving off to the ends of the earth, and during that time we developed much that is now common to human thought and life wherever they are found. Africa is then in some sense the mother of us all ... indeed, of all civilisation.

(King, NQ, 1986: 17)

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### Thought break

How do you feel about Africa if you compare it to the rest of the world today? Does it stand out as a significant member among the continents of the world? If so, what is its contribution to progress in the world?

How much do you know about the history of Africa, and of South Africa? If the answer is 'Not much', where is the best place to find out more? Does your library stock any books on African history written by black Africans? What history books did you study at school? Who wrote these books?

Much of the history of Africa has been dominated by colonial occupation. Colonialism in Africa provided the framework for the organised subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of many on the African continent. This subjugation ignored indigenous knowledge systems and impacted on African people's 'way of seeing' and 'way of being'. In fact, African identity, to all intents and purposes, became an inverted mirror of Western identity. This state of affairs gave birth to numerous attempts to reassert distinctively African ways of thinking and of relating to the world. Such attempts find expression in that spoken tradition and body of literature referred to as African philosophy.

### **African philosophy**

African written philosophy goes back to the time of the pharaohs. Greek and Roman expansion into North Africa produced many African intellectuals, the best-known of whom is St Augustine. St Augustine is probably one of the most important people in the Western Christian church. His books *Confessions* and *The City of God* contained some of the key ideas of later Christianity: the belief in original sin, the possibility of salvation through Christ and the Church, and the need to work towards establishing God's kingdom on Earth.

In Eastern Christianity, one of the best-known of the desert fathers is the man known as Moses the Black, who, despite (or perhaps because of) his own violent youth, specifically espoused non-violence, the taming of one's anger (no matter how justified) and harmony.

In the era of post-colonialism (from the mid-20th century onwards) increasing numbers of African scholars felt they had to develop social and economic philosophies that would enable Africa to develop. Given the importance of the community, and the West's destruction of Africa, these scholars rejected capitalism. Instead, they created various forms of socialism which were based on traditional African social and political communalism. Examples are Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, with his idea of *ujamaa*; Kenneth Kaunda's ideas of Zambian humanism; Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea, who put forward the idea of scientific socialism; Léopold Senghor of Senegal with his reference to Negritude; and Steve Biko with his ideas on Black Consciousness.

The main thing to remember about African philosophy is that it is a response to the problems and troubles of Africa and to the domination of Western thought. African thinkers are keen to disprove the Western belief that Africans are unable to develop a scientific and rational culture. And, at the same time, African thinkers want to confront the question we asked earlier on: 'What does it mean to say, "I am an African"?'.

## Thought break

What do you think it means when someone says, 'I am an African'? Does such a claim merely refer to the fact that someone lives in Africa, or does it say something more?

African philosophy can be divided into:

- ▶ ethnic philosophy
- ▶ sage (wisdom) philosophy
- ▶ political philosophy
- ▶ pure philosophy.

### Ethnic philosophy

Ethnic philosophy can be defined as 'the philosophy of Africa'. It is distinctive and consists of the religious and moral beliefs of the continent of Africa. Given the vastness of this continent and the diversity of the peoples of Africa, this philosophy should not be simplified. This philosophy contains people's view of life and Africa's ability to criticise its own traditions. Essentially, the philosophy of Africa looks at the 'whole experience of human beings (in other words, the philosophy of Africa is holistic).

### Sage (wisdom) philosophy

Sage, or wisdom, philosophy focuses on those individuals in society who are known to be wise and far-sighted and who can think critically. These are the people whose views challenge the authority of the community's decision. In the Western version of 'wisdom', historically, these people have been social critics and innovators.

### Political philosophy

Africa's political philosophy is unique. Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amílcar Cabral, Léopold Senghor and Frantz Fanon are regarded as the main representative of African political philosophy. The assumption underlying this philosophy is that there must be a peculiarly African political philosophy, different from capitalist, socialist or communist political philosophies.

### Pure philosophy

Pure philosophy is philosophy done by African philosophers in the areas we looked at earlier: empiricism, critical rationalism and existentialism. Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, Henry Odera Oruka, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Paulin Hountondji represent this type of philosophy.

### Philosophers at work

African philosophy has its roots in a spoken tradition. Written philosophy in Africa south of the Sahara emerged mainly as part of the anti-colonial struggle and the challenges of post-colonial reconstruction. African traditional thought, like classical Western traditional thought, asks the following questions:

- ▶ How should we understand the universe? Who and what is God?
- ▶ Who is my neighbour?
- ▶ What is my duty to my community?
- ▶ How should my community be governed and led?

Unlike Western thought, however, which puts the individual at the centre of life, African thought puts the community at the centre of life. This community is not simply the political community – far from it. The African community is much more sophisticated than this: it shares some features with Buddhist ideas of the human community as being a vast, ever-expanding net of spiritual, psychological, biological and emotional relations. The African community, like the Buddhist community, includes the unborn, the living spirits of the dead, the Earth, mountains and sky.

African philosophy's impact on Western thought is growing as Western society becomes more and more troubled, more and more unhappy and more and more fragmented. The New Age movement, despite its name, is an old movement. Its emphasis on our 'irrational' need to communicate with the unseen, to learn plant lore (herbalism), to look again at shamanism and to move out into the community of our neighbour owes a great deal to African thought.

People who have promoted African philosophy include:

- ▶ Kwame Anthony Appiah
- ▶ Peter Bodunrin
- ▶ Amilcar Cabral
- ▶ Frantz Fanon
- ▶ Segun Gbadegesin
- ▶ Kwame Gyekye
- ▶ Paulin Hountondji
- ▶ John Mbiti
- ▶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- ▶ Henry Odera Oruka

- ▶ Léopold Senghor
- ▶ Tsenay Serequeberhan
- ▶ Kwasi Wiredu.

## Ubuntuism

The central ethical idea in traditional African thought is *ubuntu*. The idea of *ubuntu* is related to human happiness and well-being. *Ubuntu* is usually translated into English as 'humanity'. A fuller meaning of the word *ubuntu* can be found in the Nguni expression *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. This means: 'A human being is a human being through other human beings.' In other words: 'I am because you are.' *Ubuntu* avoids the materialism of the Western world. *Ubuntu* recognises that the human self exists and develops only in relationships with other persons.

There are many African examples of *ubuntu*, of caring and sharing, and of forgiveness and reconciliation. The relatively non-violent transition of South Africa from a totalitarian state to a multi-party democracy is based on the values of *ubuntu*. It is a commitment to peaceful co-existence among ordinary South Africans in spite of their differences. *Ubuntu*, argues the South African philosopher Joe Teffo, serves as a cohesive moral value in the face of adversity. Although the policy of apartheid greatly damaged the overwhelming majority of black South Africans, Teffo observes that:

There is no lust for revenge, no apocalyptic retribution. A yearning for justice, yes, and for release from poverty and oppression, but no dream of themselves becoming the persecutors, of turning the tables of apartheid on white South Africans. The ethos of 'ubuntu' is one single gift that African philosophy can bequeath on other philosophies of the world.

(Teffo, 2000: 45)

## Thought break

Do you think that the African idea of *ubuntu* has any significance for education? If so, how could it influence the practice of teaching in the classroom?

## **Quick summary**

African philosophy consists of ethnic, moral, political and wisdom philosophy. It is a response to the problems Africa faces and to centuries of European domination.

African philosophy is a holistic philosophy which shares certain ideas with Buddhist philosophy: it stresses the importance of the human community and the community's place in the universe.

African philosophy claims that happiness at least partially consists of living for others, in supporting each other. It is an anti-materialistic philosophy.

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## **Does it work?**

### ***What African philosophy can help us to do***

African philosophy can:

1. help us build communities
2. encourage human beings to be more humble
3. give us a deeper understanding of ourselves
4. help us appreciate mystery
5. help us re-examine the need for tradition in human life.

### ***What African philosophy cannot help us do***

1. It does not challenge power structures.
2. To date, it seems to be unable to accept women as men's equals.
3. It does not encourage critical thinking.
4. It tends to ignore the needs of the individual person.
5. It tolerates cruel superstitious practices (eg the burning of witches).

Read the following, which is taken from a speech made by Kenneth Kaunda:

The Westerner has an aggressive mentality. When he sees a problem, he will not rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot live with contradictory ideas in his mind; he must choose one or the other or evolve a third idea which harmonizes or reconciles the other two. And the Westerner is vigorously scientific in rejecting solutions for which there is no basis in logic. He draws a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural, the rational and the non-rational, and more often than not, he dismisses the supernatural and the non-rational as superstition ... Africans do not recognise any division between the natural and the supernatural. They experience a situation rather than face a problem. By this I mean they allow both the rational and the non-rational elements to make an impact upon them, and any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation rather than the result of some mental exercise.

(In Coetzee, 1998: 126)

We could all reflect on this next piece, written by Kgalushi Koka of the Afrikan Study Programme:

Why is there a need to find out and know who the Afrikan is? The Afrikan identity is probably wide and varied. Like every living being, the survival instinct of the people of Afrikan descent is emerging quite strongly in an attempt to defeat the onslaught on their personality and the obliteration of the Afrikan's true identity in the circle of the human race.

(Koka, 1998: 2)

### Thought break

What significance does the struggle for an African identity have for education in, for example, South Africa?

Read the following two quotes. They both emphasise the importance of community rather than individuality, past and present.

Our two-million year heritage of hunting-and-gathering life, simple at first but ultimately very complex, left its mark on our minds just as much as it did on our bodies. On top of the technical skills of planning, coordination, and technology, there was, equally important, the social skill of cooperation. A sense of common goals and values, a desire to further the common good, cooperation was more than simply individuals working together. It became a set of rules of conduct, of morals, an understanding of right and wrong in a complex social system. Without cooperation – within bands, among bands, through tribal groups – our technical skills would have been severely blunted. Social rules and standards of behaviour emerged.

(Leakey & Lewin, 1992: 34)

Persons are what they are in virtue of what they are destined to be, their character and the communal influence on them ... A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute to the continued existence of the community ... The meaning of one's life is therefore measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence.

(Gbadegesin, S, in Coetzee, 1998: 62)

### **African philosophy in a nutshell**

African philosophy is a complex response to Africa's unique position in the world and human history. It is essentially a form of existentialism.

African philosophy challenges the arrogance of the West and asks the West to rethink its claim of cultural superiority.

If we ignore African philosophy, this means that, in a sense, we are ignoring Africa. We cannot do this without doing some form of inner violence to ourselves, simply because, as far as we can tell, the human race itself became human in Africa. There are other reasons why African philosophy cannot be ignored: Africa is a huge continent that contains enormous natural wealth and a growing human population. Africa is part of the world socio-economic order, and her philosophy has an impact on that order.

### **Was colonialism a good thing?**

The following is an article written by a rather controversial contemporary writer, Dinesh D'Souza. D'Souza is an Asian American. Again, we have highlighted some words and phrases which we think are significant. At the time of print, Dinesh D'Souza was the president of the King's College in New York City.

Colonialism has gotten a bad name in recent decades. Anticolonialism was one of the dominant political currents of the 20th century, as dozens of European colonies in Asia and Africa became free. Today we are still living with the aftermath of colonialism. Apologists for terrorism, including Osama bin Laden, argue that terrorist acts are an understandable attempt on the part of subjugated non-Western peoples to lash out against their longtime Western oppressors. Activists at last year's World Conference on Racism, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, have called on the West to pay reparations for slavery and colonialism to minorities and natives of the third world.

These justifications of violence, and calls for monetary compensation, rely on a large body of scholarship that has been produced in the Western academy. That scholarship, which goes by the name of anticolonial studies, postcolonial studies, or subaltern studies, is now an intellectual school in itself, and it exercises a powerful influence on the humanities and social sciences. Its leading Western scholars include Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Walter Rodney, and Samir Amin. Their arguments are supported by the ideas of third-world intellectuals like Wole Soyinka, Chinweizu, Ashis Nandy, and, perhaps most influential of all, Frantz Fanon.

The assault against colonialism and its legacy has many dimensions, but at its core it is a theory of oppression that relies on three premises. First, colonialism and imperialism are distinctively Western evils that were inflicted on the non-Western world. Second, as a consequence of colonialism, the West became rich and the colonies became impoverished; in short, the West succeeded at the expense of the colonies.

Third, the descendants of colonialism are worse off than they would be had colonialism never occurred.

In a widely used text, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the Marxist scholar Walter Rodney accuses European colonialism of 'draining African wealth and making it impossible to develop more rapidly the resources of the continent'. The African writer Chinweizu strikes a similar note in his influential book *The West and the Rest of Us*. He offers the following explanation for African poverty: 'White hordes have sallied forth from their Western homelands to assault, loot, occupy, rule, and exploit the world. Even now the fury of their expansionist assault on the rest of us has not abated.' In his classic work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes, 'European opulence has been founded on slavery. The well-being and progress of Europe have been built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and the yellow races.'

Those notions are pervasive and emotionally appealing. By suggesting that the West became dominant because it is oppressive, they provide an explanation for Western global dominance without encouraging white racial arrogance. They relieve the third world of blame for its wretchedness. Moreover, they imply politically egalitarian policy solutions: The West is in possession of the 'stolen goods' of other cultures, and it has a moral and legal obligation to make some form of repayment. I was raised to believe in such things, and among most third-world intellectuals they are articles of faith. **The only problem is that they are not true. There is nothing uniquely Western about colonialism.** My native country of India, for example, was ruled by the British for more than two centuries, and many of my fellow Indians are still smarting about that. What they often forget, however, is that before the British came, the Indians had been invaded and conquered by the Persians, the Afghans, Alexander the Great, the Mongols, the Arabs, and the Turks. Depending on how you count, the British were preceded by at least six colonial powers that invaded and occupied India since ancient times. Indeed, ancient India was itself settled by the Aryan people, who came from the north and subjugated the dark-skinned indigenous people.

Those who identify colonialism and empire only with the West either have no sense of history or have forgotten about the Egyptian empire, the Persian empire, the Macedonian empire, the Islamic empire, the Mongol empire, the Chinese empire, and the Aztec and Inca empires in the Americas. Shouldn't the Arabs be paying reparations for their destruction of the Byzantine and Persian empires? Come to think of it, should not the Byzantine and Persian people be paying reparations to the descendants of the people they subjugated? And while we are at it, should not the Muslims reimburse the Spaniards for their 700-year rule?

As the example of Islamic Spain suggests, the people of the West have participated in the game of conquest not only as the perpetrators, but also as the victims. Ancient Greece, for example, was conquered by Rome, and the Roman Empire itself was destroyed by invasions of Huns, Vandals, Lombards, and Visigoths from northern Europe. America, as we all know, was itself a colony of England before its war of independence; England, before that, had been subdued and ruled by Normans from France. Those of us living today are taking on a large project if we are going to settle on a rule of social justice based on figuring out whose ancestors did what to whom.

The West did not become rich and powerful through colonial oppression. It makes no sense to claim that the West grew rich and strong by conquering other countries and taking their stuff. How did the West manage to do that? In the late Middle Ages, say

1500, the West was by no means the world's most affluent or most powerful civilization. Indeed, those of China and of the Arab-Islamic world exceeded the West in wealth, in knowledge, in exploration, in learning, and in military power. So how did the West gain so rapidly in economic, political, and military power that, by the 19th century, it was able to conquer virtually all of the other civilizations? That question demands to be answered, and the oppression theorists have never provided an adequate explanation.

Moreover, the West could not have reached its current stage of wealth and influence by stealing from other cultures, for the simple reason that there was not very much to take. 'Oh yes there was,' the retort often comes. 'The Europeans stole the raw material to build their civilization. They took rubber from Malaya, cocoa from West Africa, and tea from India.' But as the economic historian P.T. Bauer points out, before British rule, there were no rubber trees in Malaya, no cocoa trees in West Africa, no tea in India. The British brought the rubber tree to Malaya from South America. They brought tea to India from China. And they taught the Africans to grow cocoa, a crop the native people had never heard of. None of this is to deny that when the colonialists could exploit native resources, they did. But that larceny cannot possibly account for the enormous gap in economic, political, and military power that opened up between the West and the rest of the world.

What, then, is the source of that power? The reason the West became so affluent and dominant in the modern era is that it invented three institutions: **science**, democracy, and capitalism. All those institutions are based on universal impulses and aspirations, but those aspirations were given a unique expression in Western civilization.

Consider science. **It is based on a shared human trait: the desire to know. People in every culture have tried to learn about the world.** Thus the Chinese recorded the eclipses, the Mayans developed a calendar, the Hindus discovered the number zero, and so on. But science – which requires experiments, laboratories, induction, verification, and what one scholar has called 'the invention of invention,' the scientific method – that is a Western institution. Similarly, tribal participation is universal, but democracy – which involves free elections, peaceful transitions of power, and separation of powers – is a Western idea. Finally, the impulse to trade is universal, and there is nothing Western about the use of money, but capitalism – which requires property rights, contracts, courts to enforce them, limited-liability corporations, stock exchanges, patents, insurance, double-entry bookkeeping – this ensemble of practices was developed in the West.

It is the dynamic interaction among these three Western institutions – science, democracy, and capitalism – that has produced the great wealth, strength, and success of Western civilization. An example of this interaction is technology, which arises out of the marriage between science and capitalism. **Science provides the knowledge that leads to invention**, and capitalism supplies the mechanism by which the invention is transmitted to the larger society, as well as the economic incentive for inventors to continue to make new things.

Now we can understand better why the West was able, between the 16th and 19th centuries, to subdue the rest of the world and bend it to its will. Indian elephants and Zulu spears were no match for British rifles and cannonballs. Colonialism and imperialism are not the cause of the West's success; they are the result of that success. The wealth and power of European nations made them arrogant and stimulated their appetite for global conquest. Colonial possessions added to the prestige, and to a

much lesser degree the wealth, of Europe. But the primary cause of Western affluence and power is internal – the institutions of science, democracy and capitalism acting together. Consequently, it is simply wrong to maintain that the rest of the world is poor because the West is rich, or that the West grew rich off stolen goods from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The West created its own wealth, and still does.

The descendants of colonialism are better off than they would be if colonialism had never happened. I would like to illustrate this point through a personal example. While I was a young boy, growing up in India, I noticed that my grandfather, who had lived under British colonialism, was instinctively and habitually antiwhite. He was not just against the English; he was generally against white people. I realized that I did not share his antiwhite animus. That puzzled me: Why did he and I feel so differently?

Only years later, after a great deal of reflection and a fair amount of study, did the answer finally hit me. The reason for our difference of perception was that colonialism had been pretty bad for him, but pretty good for me. Another way to put it was that colonialism had injured those who lived under it, but paradoxically it proved beneficial to their descendants. Much as it chagrins me to admit it – and much as it will outrage many third-world intellectuals for me to say it – my life would have been much worse had the British never ruled India.

How is that possible? Virtually everything that I am, what I do, and my deepest beliefs, all are the product of a worldview that was brought to India by colonialism. I am a writer, and I write in English. My ability to do this, and to reach a broad market, is entirely thanks to the British. My understanding of technology, which allows me, like so many Indians, to function successfully in the modern world, was largely the product of a Western education that came to India as a result of the British. So also my beliefs in freedom of expression, in self-government, in equality of rights under the law, and in the universal principle of human dignity – they are all the products of Western civilization.

I am not suggesting that it was the intention of the colonialists to give all those wonderful gifts to the Indians. Colonialism was not based on philanthropy; it was a form of conquest and rule. The British came to India to govern, and they were not primarily interested in the development of the natives, whom they viewed as picturesque savages. It is impossible to measure, or overlook, the pain and humiliation that the British inflicted during their long period of occupation. Understandably, the Indians chafed under that yoke. Toward the end of the British reign in India, Mahatma Gandhi was asked, 'What do you think of Western civilization?' He replied, 'I think it would be a good idea.'

Despite their suspect motives and bad behavior, however, the British needed a certain amount of infrastructure to govern India effectively. So they built roads, shipping docks, railway tracks, irrigation systems, and government buildings. Then they realized that they needed courts of law to adjudicate disputes that went beyond local systems of dispensing justice. And so the British legal system was introduced, with all its procedural novelties, like 'innocent until proven guilty'. The British also had to educate the Indians, in order to communicate with them and to train them to be civil servants in the empire. Thus Indian children were exposed to Shakespeare, Dickens, Hobbes, and Locke. In that way the Indians began to encounter words and ideas that were unmentioned in their ancestral culture: 'liberty,' 'sovereignty,' 'rights,' and so on.

That brings me to the greatest benefit that the British provided to the Indians: They taught them the language of freedom. Once again, it was not the objective of the colonial rulers to encourage rebellion. But by exposing Indians to the ideas of the West, they did. The Indian leaders were the product of Western civilization. Gandhi studied in England and South Africa; Nehru was a product of Harrow and Cambridge. That exposure was not entirely to the good; Nehru, for example, who became India's first prime minister after independence, was highly influenced by Fabian socialism through the teachings of Harold Laski. The result was that India had a mismanaged socialist economy for a generation. But my broader point is that the champions of Indian independence acquired the principles, the language, and even the strategies of liberation from the civilization of their oppressors. This was true not just of India but also of other Asian and African countries that broke free of the European yoke.

My conclusion is that against their intentions, the colonialists brought things to India that have immeasurably enriched the lives of the descendants of colonialism. It is doubtful that non-Western countries would have acquired those good things by themselves. It was the British who, applying a universal notion of human rights, in the early 19th century, abolished the ancient Indian institution of suttee – the custom of tossing widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. There is no reason to believe that the Indians, who had practiced suttee for centuries, would have reached such a conclusion on their own. Imagine an African or Indian king encountering the works of Locke or Madison and saying, 'You know, I think those fellows have a good point. I should relinquish my power and let my people decide whether they want me or someone else to rule.' Somehow, I do not see that as likely.

Colonialism was the transmission belt that brought to Asia, Africa, and South America the blessings of Western civilization. Many of those cultures continue to have serious problems of tyranny, tribal and religious conflict, poverty, and underdevelopment, but that is not due to an excess of Western influence; rather, it is due to the fact that those countries are insufficiently Westernized. Sub-Saharan Africa, which is probably in the worst position, has been described by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan as 'a cocktail of disasters'. That is not because colonialism in Africa lasted so long, but because it lasted a mere half-century. It was too short a time to permit Western institutions to take firm root. Consequently, after their independence, most African nations have retreated into a kind of tribal barbarism that can be remedied only with more Western influence, not less. Africa needs more Western capital, more technology, more rule of law, and more individual freedom.

The academy needs to shed its irrational prejudice against colonialism. By providing a more balanced perspective, scholars can help to show the foolishness of policies like reparations as well as justifications of terrorism that are based on anticolonial myths. None of this is to say that colonialism by itself was a good thing, only that bad institutions sometimes produce good results. Colonialism, I freely acknowledge, was a harsh regime for those who lived under it. My grandfather would have a hard time giving even one cheer for colonialism. As for me, I cannot manage three, but I am quite willing to grant two. So here they are: two cheers for colonialism!

(D'Souza, 2002)

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### **Thought break**

How do you feel about Dinesh D'Souza's sentiments regarding the impact of colonialism on Africa? If you disagree with his sentiments, then indicate why. If you agree, then also indicate why. In what ways do you think colonialism influenced education in Africa?

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To what extent do you feel that you and the people of your community are influenced by Western science? In what way does this impact on education practice in your community?

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What is 'the system'? 'The system' is the political, social and economic system we are all caught up in. Why are we all caught up in it? We are not certain. But we need money to buy food, to send our children to school, to get a home loan, to buy clothes, to buy the things we need and the things we want. So we get a job (at least, we hope we do), we put up with it (how many people like the job they do?), and before we know it we are living the life described by that graffiti on the London Underground:

**WORK EAT SLEEP WORK EAT SLEEP WORK EAT SLEEP. DIE.**

Or we are sitting in a car in a traffic jam on a crowded highway, with everybody inching forward and a few people weaving in and out trying to get ahead faster. Have you noticed people's expressions in traffic jams?

Or we are sitting in a taxi, in the same traffic jam, wishing that we could afford a car (especially that big, silver BMW in front of us) because then we would not have to sit jammed together with all these other people, especially the woman with the many shopping bags and the man who talks all the time.

Or maybe we are the person in that big, silver BMW with leather upholstery, CD/radio player, air-conditioning, automatic windows, looking at that other graffiti:

**WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE FIFTY, STRESSED AND STILL IN THE RAT RACE?**

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### Thought break

Is there a better way to live? How do you feel about 'the system'? What do you like about it? What do you hate about it?

The following is what we like about 'the system'. It allows us to:

- ▶ choose whatever religion we want (or no religion at all)
- ▶ read whatever books we want to
- ▶ decide how we spend our leisure time
- ▶ buy wool
- ▶ indulge in hobbies, such as building model aircraft
- ▶ enjoy good wine
- ▶ buy African artefacts
- ▶ buy Persian carpets.

The following is what we hate about 'the system'. We hate:

- ▶ going to work every day
- ▶ shopping at supermarkets
- ▶ traffic jams
- ▶ listening to the news on the radio
- ▶ being in a rush all the time
- ▶ unkind people
- ▶ Christmas time
- ▶ standing in a queue
- ▶ untidiness.

## Question

Where do you think the authors of this book fit into 'the system'? Are we at the bottom, the top, or somewhere in the middle?

Where do you think you fit into the system?

## The capitalist system

'The system' we have been talking about is the capitalist system, also referred to as capitalism. But what is capitalism?

Today, the question 'What is capitalism?' is, quite simply, impossible to answer.

The American writer P.J. O'Rourke (1998), in his book *Eat the Rich*, tried to find out how the stock market worked and ended up feeling bewildered. The whole network – of loans, credits, debts, foreclosures, profits, expected company performance and futures – is huge, baffling and – frightening? Exciting? Both? Neither? The New York Stock Exchange is the centre of the world's financial system. What happens on the New York Stock Exchange influences the global economy for better or worse.

But there is something far less controllable that influences the world's financial system – the weather, and the weather is not part of any human system. The weather directly influences global food production. Hurricanes, storms and drought mean crop failure and this, in turn, means that we all pay high prices for our food, no matter where we live in the world. Human beings have no control whatsoever over the climate. South Africa is a particularly good example. If South Africa's main crop – maize – is good, then the country does not have to import food, which means less foreign debt. And maize, in particular, depends on enough rain at the right time. There is nothing any of us can do about this.

We have been talking about systems and their effects. The method of inquiry in philosophy that is concerned with the nature of systems and their effects is referred to as systems theory.

### **Philosophers at work**

Systems theory sees things as a whole rather than splitting things into parts, and also encourages us to keep the objective of a system in mind. In fact, systems theory says that we should approach any problem by asking ourselves the following questions:

- ▶ Where does the system fit into the total environment?
- ▶ How do the components of the system fit together?
- ▶ What helps the system to work and what prevents it from working more efficiently?
- ▶ What is the goal of the system?

The most famous systems theorist was Ludwig von Bertalanffy. He was a biologist who came to the conclusion that living organisms had to be studied as wholes and not split up into parts (as is done in Western medicine). Over the years, Bertalanffy developed his theory to the point that he claimed that everything had to be studied as a system in order to gain true understanding. The mistake science had made, he said, was that it had studied parts of systems on their own, and not systems as a whole.

### **Modern education and systems theory**

John Dewey has been categorised as a philosopher of education who was influenced by the philosophy of systems theory, partly because of his insistence on the need for unity between the child, the teacher, the school and society at large.

Dewey lived and died (1859–1952) during a period of enormous social change in America. As a child, he lived through the crisis of the American civil war and, as an

adult, he saw the effects of increasing industrialisation on American society. As a result of large-scale immigration, this society became increasingly more and more heterogeneous.

Possibly as a result of all these changes, as a philosopher, John Dewey stressed the need for the organic unity of human beings and their social environment. When he turned his attention to education, he was convinced that it was the task of the educator to encourage the child to become a person who could and would create a community that was fully democratic (one of his most popular works was *Democracy and Education*, which was published in 1916). In such a community, each human being would be valued and would fully participate to create a society that was flexible, open and constantly evolving, and which formed a holistic unity.

In his work 'My Pedagogic Creed', Dewey wrote as follows:

In sum, I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass.

(Dewey, 1897)

Put very simply: Dewey regarded the role of education as being the place in which future communities were born, and he was of the opinion that this birth was the result of a creative dialogue between the teacher and the child. This teacher and child were always learning and, therefore, each was becoming more complex.

Dewey had no time for the dull and dreary memorisation of 'facts' that characterised 19th-century schooling. He courageously put to one side the schooling traditions of the past and, working with feminists of the day, he initiated a form of schooling (in the Laboratory School in Chicago) that started with practical activities that children naturally enjoyed (eg art, cooking, sculpting and simple weaving). This curriculum introduced the more abstract skills of reading, mathematics and science into a curriculum that was designed to encourage the child and young person to think critically, create, imagine and reconstruct a practical, just and therefore workable social reality.

Furthermore, Dewey was a philosopher of education who equated education with philosophy – according to Dewey, to become educated was to become a philosopher because philosophy, of all the traditional disciplines, accurately records humankind's past in order to examine our values and our history with a view to re-creating both.

## Philosophers at work

The concern with **changing a system** or beating the system, be it economic, social or political, is reflected in the method of inquiry in philosophy referred to as critical theory.

Critical theory as a formal method of inquiry has its origins in German philosophy, in the 1930s. The people who first got involved in critical theory were mainly concerned with the problems of Nazism – many early critical theorists were Jewish people. But from the beginning, critical theory was not just about trying to resist the Nazis. Critical theory believes that any form of power structure is dangerous and destructive. Critical theory claims that power structures do not just drive our economic and social life, they actually influence the way we think.

The most famous version of critical theory is Marxism. This is because Marxism – true Marxism – wants to abolish all inequalities of wealth and all social inequalities. Marxists, and all critical theorists, believe that we shall never experience happiness while we continue to be dominated by powerful people and powerful economic systems that trap us.

In short, critical theory can be said to be a form of social criticism.

Critical theory influences a number of philosophies and ideologies, namely:

- ▶ Marxism
- ▶ feminism (women's rights)
- ▶ the black rights movements
- ▶ some postmodernist thinking
- ▶ socialism.

People who have promoted critical theory include:

- ▶ Jesus of Nazareth
- ▶ Karl Marx (a social theorist)
- ▶ Gautama Buddha
- ▶ Moses
- ▶ Mohammed
- ▶ Michel Foucault (a philosopher)
- ▶ Paul Freire
- ▶ Leon Trotsky (a Russian revolutionary)
- ▶ Jürgen Habermas (a social theorist)
- ▶ most feminists
- ▶ Frantz Fanon (an African social theorist)
- ▶ Amilcar Cabral (an African philosopher).

Educators that have been influenced by the philosophy of critical theory in recent times include:

- ▶ Paulo Freire (1921–1997)
- ▶ Peter McLaren
- ▶ Michael Apple.

Freire was a Brazilian, and his major work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was published in 1970. This work is regarded as one of the fundamental works in modern critical pedagogy. Today, Freire's work lives on in Peter McLaren, who, at the time of publication of this book, was teaching educational theory at Chapman College, California.

### Religious leaders and social criticism

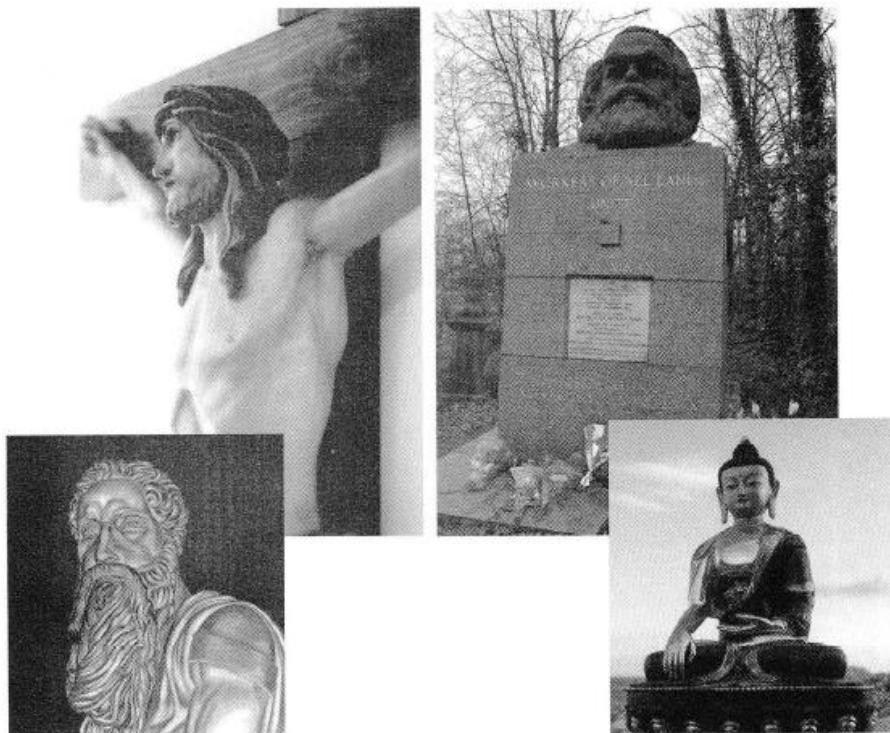


Figure 2: Jesus of Nazareth (top left); an artist's impression of Moses (bottom left); the grave of Karl Marx (top right); Buddha (bottom right)

### **Buddha**

Gautama Buddha was the founder of a way of life known as Buddhism. Buddha himself was born into a wealthy family, but he rejected the social caste system of India at the time and left behind his own life of ease and comfort to confront two questions: 'Who am I?' and 'What is the world?'

Strictly speaking, Buddhism is not a religion, but a fairly sophisticated and complex search for reality using, primarily, the powers of the mind. Buddhism rejects any form of violence, including the violent overthrow of unjust social orders. Nevertheless, Buddhism's eightfold path gently and persistently insists that all human beings should work towards creating a new world. This eightfold path consists of:

- ▶ right thinking
- ▶ right attitude
- ▶ right means of earning a living
- ▶ right conduct
- ▶ right views
- ▶ right speaking
- ▶ right effort
- ▶ right concentration.

Today, Buddhism is strongly critical of militarism, Western consumption patterns, economic greed and the sheer frenetic activity of Western life that is being imposed on peoples throughout the world.

### **Moses**

One of the people who can be said to have contributed to the formation of the Jewish religion was Moses. As far as social criticism is concerned, Moses and the liberation of the Hebrew slaves were the focus of liberation/Marxist theology during the 1970s and 1980s. The story of the Hebrew slaves' liberation from social oppression under the Egyptians and the flight into the Promised Land is, in effect, a community's search for a 'better tomorrow'. The religion that Moses founded is based, like Islam, on a call for social justice under one God.

### **Mohammed**

Mohammed's call to be the Prophet of Allah had, as its basis, his radical criticism of the social and economic inequalities of Meccan society at the time. Mohammed passionately believed that all human beings – men and women – were created by Allah and that all are equal before Allah, who is lord over creation and human life. Mohammed threatened the wealthy Meccan elite by denouncing any form of monetary trickery (eg unjust interest rates), the hoarding of capital and the exploitation of the poor (he showed particular concern for the plight of impoverished

women). His vision of society was of all humankind united under Allah. His early converts were poor middle-class artisans and ex-prostitutes.

### **Jesus of Nazareth**

One of the most famous of all religious leaders was Jesus of Nazareth. He was born about 2 000 years ago, and he died in about the year 30 AD.

Jesus' main contribution to religion was his radical criticism of oppressive social and economic structures and his single-minded focus on what he called 'the kingdom of God'. He insisted that we should forgive and love those who seek to destroy us and he insisted that wealthy people should give away their wealth to the poor.

His followers consisted of people who had been excluded from society: labourers, prostitutes, tax-gatherers. He condemned violence and was eventually put to death by the Roman authorities for encouraging social unrest.

### **Karl Marx**

Another famous critical theorist, though not a religious leader, was Karl Marx. What do we know about him?

Karl Marx was born in Prussia in 1818. His father was a successful Jewish lawyer who became a Christian in 1824, probably because of the anti-Jewish feelings that had always characterised central Europe. Karl Marx studied law at university and became a follower of the philosopher Hegel. Unfortunately, Hegel lost all influence when Friedrich Wilhelm IV came to the Prussian throne in 1840 and this, in turn, destroyed Marx's academic career. Two things resulted from this: Marx became hopelessly poor, and he tried to recuperate his losses by gambling, but failed and fell into the hands of loan sharks. The persecution of his father and the oppression of the Prussian monarchy undoubtedly had a long-lasting effect on his view of society and the evils of power.

In fact, evil power structures were responsible for the persecution of Marx and his wife, Jenny, throughout their lives. Europe, during Marx's lifetime, was still in the hands of corrupt monarchies. The Industrial Revolution led to unemployment for many and made a few wealthy. After being forced to leave Prussia for his radical views, Marx went to Germany, France and, finally, England. England tolerated him, but no more. He and Jenny lived in dreadful poverty in London and were only saved from starvation by the kindness of his wealthy friend, Friedrich Engels.

During his time in England, Marx and Engels visited the cotton mills and both were horrified by what they saw. Wealthy men who employed working-class people (men, women and children) ran the cotton industry, paying pitiful salaries. There were no labour laws to protect workers. People were forced to work as much as fourteen hours with no proper toilet or eating facilities. Children working in these places were

often permanently crippled from stooping over the weaving machines, and it was by no means rare for workers to lose fingers and hands when working the steam-driven machinery.

For many people, Marx and Engels were the two men who, in the 1800s, stood for hope and a 'better tomorrow'. Marx died in London in 1883.

Karl Marx's most influential work is *Das Kapital*. His most famous and popular is *The Communist Party Manifesto*. The Manifesto is simple in its aims:

**Question 2:** *What is the aim of the Communists?*

**Answer:** To organise society in such a way that every member of it can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom and without thereby infringing the basic conditions of this society.

**Question 3:** *How do you wish to achieve this aim?*

**Answer:** By the elimination of private property and its replacement by community of property.

(Engels, 1847)

We have just discussed Jesus of Nazareth and Karl Marx.

Do you think churches support Jesus' idea about society? If you go to church yourself, does your church reflect Jesus' view of society?

Do you agree with what we have said here about Jesus? If not, refer to the gospels of the Christian Bible and see if you can find support for your idea of Jesus. What is your view of Jesus?

Do you admire Karl Marx? Do you personally want to see private property abolished, and if so, why?

Who do you think has power in South Africa today?

Question

## The shape of power

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, saw how the shape of power changes. We have already pointed out that Foucault was extremely concerned by the power of institutions such as schools, churches and big businesses.

Foucault claimed that by insisting that people follow rules and regulations, institutions force people into being artificial. But that is only the beginning of it, according to Foucault, because all organisations and institutions do not stop at this. They invade our very selves. How? By forcing us to see life, and to live life, in a certain way.

By the word 'forcing', we do not mean that institutions use some form of physical force, such as caning disobedient children or assaulting adults (although physical force is, of course, very much part of life in all prisons). What institutions do all the time, said Foucault, is set up a complex and highly effective spy network. All institutions spy on, and write reports about, the people who are in them. This starts at school. In Western countries, parents are legally obliged to send their children to school from the age of about six onwards. In fact, many children now start school even earlier – at kindergarten. Teachers and professional child-minders endlessly monitor the child – and not just in terms of the child's academic achievements. Comments on the child such as the following are regarded as perfectly acceptable and, in fact, desirable:

- ▶ 'Ntandi is a quiet, hard-working child who achieves good grades. She is becoming better at certain sports, but she still needs to participate more in group activities. She is still too withdrawn.'
- ▶ 'Karl needs to calm down and work more consistently. He is a bright boy, but apt to jump from one thing to another. He does well in Art, but his Maths is poor. He needs to work on this.'
- ▶ 'Janet is a popular, clever student who seems to get on well with everyone. She is likely to be voted head student next year. She seems to have overcome her problem with exam nerves – the school therapist's intervention probably helped but Janet must take credit too.'

What is actually going on here? What is happening is that the school is monitoring and commenting on three students. In doing so, it is asking Ntandi, Karl and Janet to do something about certain aspects of their personalities which the school feels are not quite right. Ntandi is a quiet girl who needs to be more outgoing. Karl is too noisy and needs to be more like Ntandi. And Janet has overcome a previous personality problem. It seems as though the school has an ideal 'model' child in mind.

### Question

What does this 'model' child look like?

In the West, which is in the process of imposing this ideal on countries such as South Africa, the ideal child has certain attributes. The ideal child:

- ▶ is clever
- ▶ makes friends easily
- ▶ helps other people
- ▶ co-operates in class
- ▶ comes to school clean and neat
- ▶ does his or her homework
- ▶ has personal goals.

In other words, the ideal child/student is the one who fits in nicely with the school's system. The opposite of this is the 'weirdo' or 'misfit'. These are the children who are constantly told that they need to change their attitudes.

Although this image of the ideal child seems reasonable enough, the worrying thing is that this constant message of 'We are watching you and we think you need to do something about yourself' never really stops. You get it while you are at school, while you are at college and if or when you go to work for a large employer. The significant thing, though, said Foucault, is this: eventually, we constantly monitor and evaluate ourselves.

To return to Foucault:

The new methods of power are not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalisation, not by punishment, but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus.

(In Fillingham, 1994)

What is normalisation? Let us ask a simpler question: What is normal? The dictionary helps here, we think:

Something that is normal is something that is usual and ordinary, in accordance with what people expect.

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### **Thought break**

What is normalisation? What is normal?

Can linguistic analysis help us rearrange existing power structures?

Who and what has power over you right now?

What frightens you? Who frightens you?

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### Quick summary

Critical theory is the method of inquiry in philosophy that radically questions existing social, political and economic systems. Marxism is a form of critical theory.

Critical theorists tend to be philosophers who have been 'hurt' by the system, or who have seen other people 'hurt' by the system.

Critical theorists believe that all forms of power are oppressive.

Some modern critical theorists believe that it is the way we see things that is the cause of our power or powerlessness.

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### *Just supposing ...*

Just suppose you had total power over your enemies ...

Question

What would you do to them? You do not have to be nice about it – no one is going to see your answer.

Question

Who do you think might be watching you now?

## Question

Do you ever dream of running away? In this dream, where do you run to?  
What are you running from?

### ***Does it work?***

#### ***What critical theory helps us to do***

Critical theory can help us to:

1. realistically assess power
2. identify those who have power and those who do not
3. identify weaknesses in existing power relations
4. define our own personal power and weaknesses
5. re-examine our priorities
6. re-assess our lives.

#### ***Where critical theory fails***

1. It can become fanatical.
2. It is sometimes too simplistic in its analysis of power.
3. It can be too idealistic.
4. It may lead to despair and violence.
5. It tends to ignore human emotions and desires.
6. It can be a very grim philosophy.

### ***Ken Wilber and systems theory***

In the last two decades, a new thinker and philosopher has brought his own ideas to systems theory: Ken Wilber.

Ken Wilber started writing and publishing in the 1970s, but his ideas were regarded as so odd that traditional academia rejected him. Wilber is a Westerner, an American. Originally, he studied microbiology, but he quickly became disillusioned with the scientific/medical establishment which, he claims, tends to treat suffering human beings as objects in a laboratory. Wilber realised that this view of human beings is inevitable because Western thought remains dominated by empiricist concerns that minimise humankind's search for meaning. Given this, when he first started his own research, Wilber's most pressing concern was to see whether empirical science could be harmonised with religion. This, in turn, led

to him making a prolonged and in-depth study of Buddhism, and, eventually, to formulate a 'theory of everything'.

The key to Wilber's thought is his rejection of all forms of fragmentation and his conviction that we need a 'pattern that connects'. The problem with all the forms of philosophy discussed so far in this book is that **they are all only partial truths, but they all claim to be the whole truth.**

Wilber brings all philosophies and all religions into one schema, a schema now known as 'Wilber's holon'. Wilber's concept of the holon is unique in human thought because it claims that all forms of reality have an 'inner' and an 'outer', an individual aspect and a social aspect. This is what Wilber's basic holon looks like:

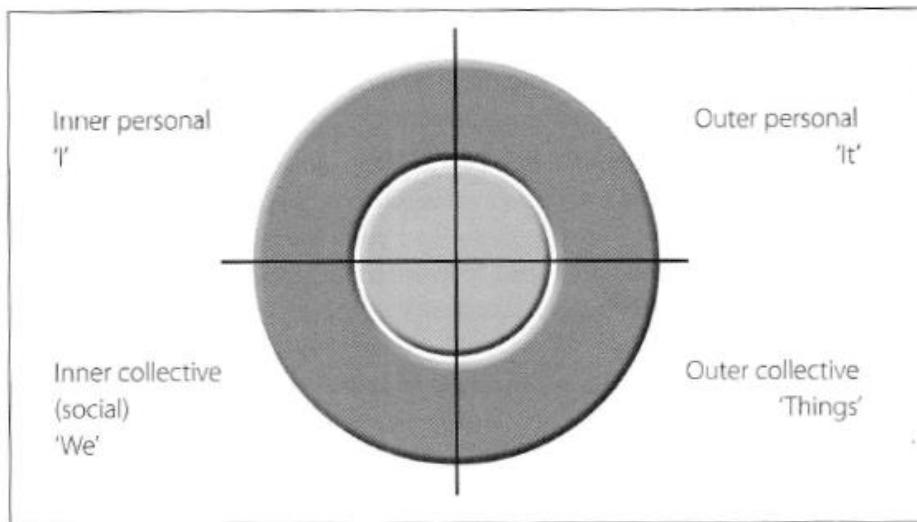


Figure 3: The holon

In other words, we are looking at four quadrants.

According to Wilber, anything and everything can be seen as a holon. You are a good example of a holon.

- ▶ Left upper quadrant: your inner personal world of your thoughts, feelings and dreams (Wilber calls this the 'I' quadrant).
- ▶ Left lower quadrant: your culture, your mutual understanding with the people around you (Wilber calls this the 'we' quadrant).
- ▶ Right upper quadrant: your personal outward appearance, what you do, the answers you give on, say, a job application form (Wilber calls this the 'it' quadrant).
- ▶ Right lower quadrant: the socio-economic system which impacts on you and all of us the whole time. This is the least personal of all quadrants (Wilber calls this the 'its' quadrant. He has also called it the 'things' quadrant.).

## A holon of philosophies

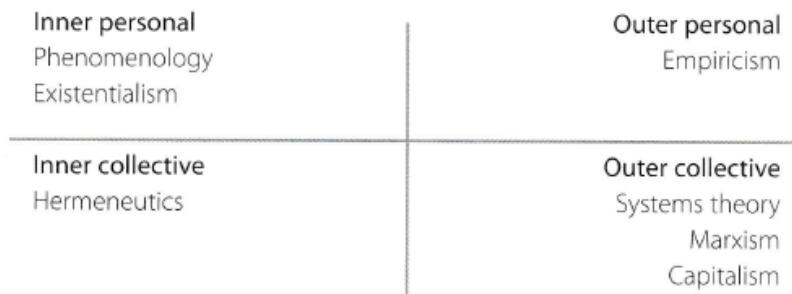


Figure 4: The holon of philosophies

According to this view, the problems of Africa are caused by African philosophy ignoring or rejecting the right quadrants. The problems of the West are caused by Western philosophy ignoring or rejecting the left quadrants.

If you are interested in finding out more about Ken Wilber, we recommend you read his work *A Brief History of Everything* (2001). (See the recommended reading for this chapter in the bibliography.) You could also visit [www.in.integralinstitute.org](http://www.in.integralinstitute.org), [www.integralworld.net](http://www.integralworld.net) and [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).

One word of warning: do **not** consult articles in the mainstream media about Ken Wilber and avoid discussions of his work by traditionally minded religious people. Wilber has also been attacked by those working in the Western scientific establishment.

### Credo Mutwa

Africa, too, has its 'system breakers'. Credo Mutwa is a Zulu sanusi, or shaman, and is the official storyteller and keeper of the Zulu people in South Africa. His knowledge has been made available to only the highest initiates of the African shamanic tradition. Mutwa has pledged himself to expose what is really happening in the world and who is behind it. Here follows a poem he wrote, committing himself to this end.

When kings are slain, and a pope is sent to hell,  
when on a marble slab ... a murdered princess lies,  
a pale sacrifice to the beasts that rule the stars,  
When out of the sky a stricken warplane falls,  
trailing behind it long bridal veils of flame,  
as missiles rage and red hot cannon roar ...  
When the battle tank briefly rules the blood drenched plains,  
an iron tyrant on another's stolen throne ...

and its long cannon shatters the trembling skies with sound,  
When nameless soldiers die friendless and unknown,  
in Africa's valleys or Kosovo's snow-bound plains,  
and whole tribes perish of hunger, disease and war ...  
When money is built into a jail to hold humankind  
and love has died and compassion is unknown ...  
and lies become truth ... and truth becomes a lie in a nameless city,  
When in streets who have no love,  
numberless children know hunger and abuse ...  
in countless homes where brute force rules supreme,  
women have become blood-spattered slaves,  
strangers to love, healing and respect,  
strangers to the gentle and comforting word ...  
Whose guilty shoulders must bear  
the heavy beam of crucifixion, all the ill we see?  
Whose quivering back must bear the barbed scourge?  
For all the evil and all the pain we have known  
weavers of lies, brewers of lies,  
who can strike at people with weapons of the night  
against which no armour and no shield can prevail.  
The written word is their poison-coated sword,  
the tinkling coin their cull and crop of maize ...  
Murderers of nations, Africa's deadliest foes,  
I curse your footsteps wherever you may go,  
In whichever cave or dungheap you may hide,  
I curse you all ... may Heaven blast your eyes,  
Tell Jabulon, the demon you call God,  
Nomabhunu's son defies him to his face,  
I swear by the stones on my mother's sacred grave,  
that as from this moment, I will fight you to the end.  
Against your kind, against your Masters too,  
I will not cease to raise the sword of Light.  
For all you have done and all you have yet to do,  
I will fight you to the end days ...

(Mutwa, nc)

In the 1950s, black South African women sang the following words while protesting against the apartheid pass laws:

Now you have touched the women, Strijdom!  
You have struck a rock  
(You have dislodged a boulder!)  
You will be crushed!

(Schmidt, nd)

These words echo some of the sentiments expressed in many forms of feminism in the West and on the African continent, in the attempt on the part of women's movements to establish a 'voice' for women in society.

## Feminism

Feminism is a group of philosophies rather than one philosophy. Women from different cultures and different societies have designed their own forms of feminism. Today, we can list the following forms of feminism:

- ▶ African feminism (which deals with the whole question of Western colonisation, gender and white male domination in Africa)
- ▶ British and US feminism (divided into first- and second-wave feminism)
- ▶ European feminism (this tends to be more Marxist and/or existentialist than British and US feminism)
- ▶ Islamic feminism (which focuses on the place of women in Islam and generally contends that Islam gives moral and spiritual equality to men and women).

All forms of feminism, though, focus on certain issues, namely:

- ▶ sexual stereotyping
- ▶ creating a bigger place for women in the world
- ▶ rejecting the view that women are inferior to men.

What does the word 'feminism' mean to you?

Question

Question

Can you remember where and when you first encountered feminism?

Question

What impact did it have on you?

Question

What is your view of feminism? Do you think the world needs feminism?

Question

What roles do men and women play in your kinship network and domestic life? Are you happy with these roles, or do you think they need to be altered?

Question

If you are a man, what is your personal reaction to feminism?

### **The women's movement in Africa**

In general, patriarchy is seen as being deeply embedded in the societal structures of the African continent, which contribute significantly to the oppression of African women. Yet there have been significant advances in the African women's movement, despite the fact that the continued destabilisation of the economy in Africa has marginalised women and invalidated their social institutions.

Research in various parts of West Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, in South Africa during 1992, and in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria during 1994, indicates that women's groups focus on legal and social reform, violence against women, conflict resolution, economic empowerment and other issues in Africa.

As a women's movement, African feminism can be described as a political, pragmatic, reflexive and group-orientated form of feminism, also referred to as 'the sisterhood of Africa'. This form of a peculiarly African feminism focuses on the struggles of African women to create a space of independence and dignity out of a triple layer of oppression, namely the oppressions created by colonial, Western patriarchal and African patriarchal cultures.

Furthermore, it criticises Western and European feminists for trying to speak for African women, thus denying them the ability to voice their thoughts. African feminism argues that African liberation depends on the development of an independent feminist voice that will perpetuate the tradition of female involvement in African societal affairs. This critical response is directed at attempts to interpret feminism as a Western cultural phenomenon, attempts which are seen to ignore alternative perspectives on feminism that emphasise the historical conditions under which women's movements, and particularly those in Africa, challenge patriarchal cultures.

African feminism also focuses on the politics of gender, that is, the power relations between men and women, which are structured around opposing notions of masculinity and femininity. In this regard, African women see their role as based on male-female complementarity in overcoming discrimination by means of more equitable gender relations and changes in the sexual division of labour in society.

South Africa has been described as a society in which patriarchy is deeply embedded, and in which women are oppressed by social structures. However, since 1990, South Africa has been engaged in a process of fundamental reconstruction, and continues to strive for a non-racist, non-sexist society, with the feminist movement contributing to this process.

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### **Thought break**

To what extent has the feminist movement in South Africa been successful in bringing about an equitable gender dispensation in South African society?

### Philosophers at work

Black women's studies in Africa, as a method of inquiry, has come to interpret feminism as a Western cultural phenomenon under whose influence local women's movements have challenged gender dimensions of customary laws in arguing for social change. In reaction to this form of colonisation, proponents of the women's movement in Africa have argued for the power of sisterhood that comes from recognising and respecting the multiplicity of perspectives that make up feminisms in Africa. Relying on postcolonial theory, they have explored issues such as the construction of the 'other', and the unique perspectives and experiences of colonised races and cultures.

People who have been involved in black women's studies in Africa include:

- ▶ N'Dri Assie-Lumumba
- ▶ Florence Abena Dolphyne
- ▶ Amina Mama
- ▶ Lindiwe Zulu
- ▶ Maria Nzomo
- ▶ Mamphela Ramphele
- ▶ Catherine Odora Hoppers
- ▶ Molara Ogundipe-Leslie
- ▶ Ifi Amadiume
- ▶ Nnaemeka Obioma
- ▶ Ama Ata Aidoo
- ▶ Philomina Okeke
- ▶ Rodo Barbre Gaidzanwa

### The beginnings of US and British feminism

In the year 1848, in the town of Seneca Falls, New York, two women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, put their domestic duties aside for a while and sat down at a dining-room table to write the following words:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal ...  
The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her ... He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise ... He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead ...

(Johnson Lewis, 2015)

Like the men who drew up the US Declaration of Independence some 200 years previously, these two women wanted a 'better tomorrow'.

How have men repeatedly injured women? This is not an easy question to answer, because women's experiences differ so enormously, depending on the country they live in, the religion that holds sway in that country, the social history of that country, etc. Also, women's experiences differ hugely even within one society. Some women, even in conservative, Islamic countries, can lead pleasant lives with access to education, literacy, mobility, social interaction and material wealth. Of course, their lives are restricted, but it is probably true to say that all human beings live with some degree of restriction.

So it is not easy to answer the question 'How have men repeatedly injured women?' Some men clearly do not injure women, neither emotionally or physically, nor by supporting social injustice.

So what did Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott mean by the words 'The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries ... on the part of man toward woman'?

They meant several things. First of all, at the time they wrote, nowhere in the world did women have the vote. Politics and the affairs of the law and the state were run for men by men. Men passed laws, men voted for presidents, men determined who owned what. Women simply did not count. And the laws men passed included laws about divorce, marriage and child custody – areas of life that determined the quality of women's daily lives.

Property laws were a good example of the sort of laws men passed. A woman, when she married, became her husband's property. It was as simple as that. She did not exist as a person. If she had any possessions of her own, these became his. If the couple got divorced, he automatically got child custody. He could beat his wife without fear of legal reprisals. In short, a married woman was simply her husband's servant and prostitute.

Today, in most parts of the world, many men still do not treat women with kindness and compassion.

### **Why do men oppress women?**

We are not sure what the answer is to this question, given that many patriarchal structures also oppress the vast majority of men. Also, in many parts of the world, including Africa, men discriminate against and pursue the oppression or exclusion of women in society as a result of religious and cultural beliefs which regard women as subordinate to men in the hierarchy of society and the community. As a result of these religious and cultural beliefs, men in our society are raised to fill public roles that are invested with real importance and significance, while women are expected to take the supporting roles of wives and mothers. This state of affairs appears to benefit men, who often derive status at the expense of their wives' labour and child-rearing positions. Also, and perhaps less obviously, we believe that all human beings are invested with certain survival instincts that make them seek, consciously and unconsciously, control over other people.

It may be that men – or, at least, large numbers of men – are dictated to by such instincts. It is also worth bearing in mind, we think, that a certain proportion of women gain from oppressive patriarchal arrangements. Think of the women married to dictators and those women who actively seek marriage to wealthy, powerful men. Flowing from this is the fact that one of the goals of the family is to raise children who have the same values as those of their parents and who will, therefore, pursue the same goals as their parents.

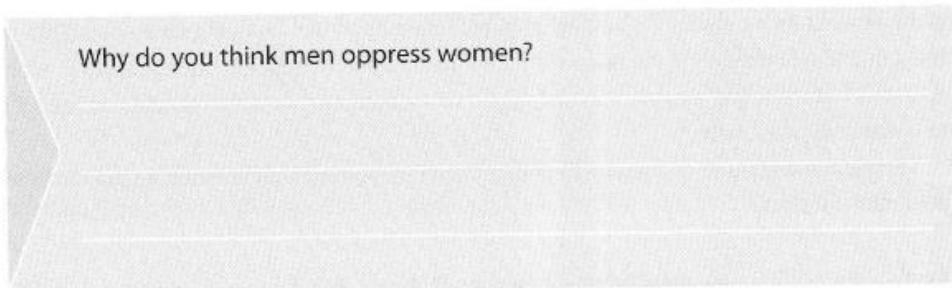
It is also alarming to note the resurgence of various forms of patriarchal world views in the USA. These patriarchal world views are associated, as the paragraph above suggests, with fundamentalist religious beliefs. The whole topic of the religious right in the USA, and the vulnerability of the US political system to the influence of extremist groups, is too huge to discuss in this chapter on feminism. What is important to note is that such groups have gained considerable power in the USA since 9/11 and are now a significant force in US politics.

For more information on the religious right in the USA, we suggest you visit the following websites: [www.theocracywatch.org](http://www.theocracywatch.org) and [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).

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### Thought break

Why do you think men oppress women?



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## A brief history of women's rights movements in the USA and Britain

The history of women's rights owes much to the history of women's rights in these two first-world countries.

### The USA

- ▶ **1792:** An English woman, Mary Wollstonecraft, publishes *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, demanding that women be given equal political, social, educational

- and civil rights. This book is the basis of both the English and American women's rights movements.
- ▶ **1848:** Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, two American women, draw up a document entitled *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*, as a result of the Seneca Falls Convention.
  - ▶ **1851:** The black woman and ex-slave, Sojourner Truth, gives her 'Ain't I a woman?' speech at the women's rights convention in Ohio. Sojourner's powerful rhetoric (which was to be reflected, years later, in the speeches of Martin Luther King) ridiculed the notion that women were frail weaklings who needed men's protection.
  - ▶ **1920:** The Nineteenth Amendment guarantees American women the right to vote.

### **Britain**

- ▶ **1869:** John Stuart Mill publishes *The Subjection of Women*. In this book, Mill describes how boys and men are brought up to believe that women are their moral, spiritual and intellectual inferiors.
- ▶ **1903:** The formation of the Women's Social and Political Union. Their newspaper, *Votes for Women*, sells 40 000 copies a week.
- ▶ **1914–1918:** During World War I, women work in factories and mines, doing jobs traditionally considered to be men's jobs.
- ▶ **1918:** Women over 30 win the right to vote.
- ▶ **1936:** The vote is given to all British women.

### **First-wave feminism**

During the first half of the 20th century, most women in Europe also gained the right to vote and various social rights. Today, women in many parts of Africa are gradually being integrated into formal institutions and social movements that create a new vision of gender relations in society.

The belief that women should be given the right to vote and that women should be equal before the law is known as first-wave feminism. In the West, and in countries influenced by Western thinking (such as South Africa), this is the earliest form of feminism. Today, it is probably true to say that all educated men and women in the West at least accept the idea that women should be allowed to vote, own property, have divorce and child custody rights and be given access to birth control. Also, it is probably true to say that educated men and women believe that women should be given equal job opportunities and equal pay.

This type of feminism has links to other methods of inquiry in philosophy, namely:

- ▶ critical rationalism, which questions tradition
- ▶ critical theory, which challenges all forms of power
- ▶ empiricism, which asks us to look at reality objectively, including social reality.

If you are a Western woman, you could be tempted to take this form of feminism for granted, but, in fact, many, many women in the world have **no rights whatsoever**. Indeed, in some countries, Islamic fundamentalism has taken away the rights that women did have. Some examples are Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and some parts of Egypt.

Islamic fundamentalism is, in our opinion, a rather misleading phrase. A better description, we believe, would be 'patriarchal fundamentalism'. Patriarchal fundamentalism, as far as we can tell, is a system of fanaticism, usually spread and imposed on women **and many men** by a tiny handful of militarists who have gained recent political control of a society or country. Or, alternatively, it is a system that seems to be based on ageing despotic political dispensations and extreme poverty. According to patriarchal fundamentalism, the universe was created and is ruled by a male god who created men in his image to worship him. Everything else is non-divine and belongs to the class of animals, women included.

**Question**

Which countries practise patriarchal fundamentalism today, in the early part of the 21st century?

### Feminist Christian theology

Feminist theology began in earnest in the early 1970s, with the publication of Mary Daly's book *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Before this, in the USA, Britain and Europe, there had been increasing pressure on churches to give women more authority in the church.

Feminist theology asks one simple question: 'Who said God was male?' The notion that God is male, some feminist theologians argue, is a direct violation of the First and Second Commandments:

You shall have no other gods before me.  
You shall not make for yourself a graven image.

By insisting on the masculinity of God, say feminist theologians, we in fact worship maleness rather than the invisible and essentially unknowable God who is beyond any form of human understanding. In doing this, we have, in fact, made a graven image in our souls (and thus violated the Second Commandment).

What about the claim, in Christian theology, that Jesus referred to God as 'Father'? Feminist theologians argue that there are a number of possible feminist responses to this question:

- ▶ Jesus himself was influenced by the patriarchal culture of his time.
- ▶ To describe God as 'Father' is to use an analogy to depict God. It certainly does not mean that Jesus thought God was male.
- ▶ Feminists do not have to be threatened by calling God 'Father', because this points to a redeemed masculinity.
- ▶ Feminist theologians point out that nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus once refer to women as being inferior to men.

At the beginning of the Christian Bible are the following words:

The Lord God called to the man and said, 'Where are you?' And the man said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.' The Lord God said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I did eat.' The Lord God turned to the woman. 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.' ... To the woman the Lord God said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'

(Revised Standard Version, Genesis 3:9–16)

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### Thought break

How much influence do you think this passage has had on women and on men's attitudes to women?

We have focused on Christianity, because this is the religion we are familiar with. What do other religions teach about women?

If you are a Muslim woman, what does feminism mean to you? A colleague of ours was informed by one of his male Muslim friends that the Qur'an and Mohammed preach women's equality. Do you agree?

### Philosophers at work

Feminism is the philosophy that claims the following:

1. Women are people in their own right.
2. Women should reject men's definitions of what makes a woman valuable.
3. Women should not make defensive claims to 'equality with men'. If anything, women are superior to men.
4. Women's happiness does not depend on having a romantic or marital relationship with a man. Women create their own happiness.
5. It is important that women do philosophy because philosophy, of all the academic disciplines, attempts to define and understand 'reality'. To date, virtually all philosophical work has been done by men and, as a result, people's understanding of 'reality' is necessarily seriously distorted.
6. Only women have the right to pronounce on abortion, because men do not get pregnant and bear children. Some feminists are pro-choice, others pro-life.

Feminism has links with various other methods of inquiry in philosophy, namely:

- ▶ critical rationalism, because it questions the status quo
- ▶ critical theory, because it radically challenges the status quo
- ▶ African philosophy, because it attempts to 'decolonise' the effects of domination by white males
- ▶ logical empiricism, because feminism precisely defines the problems women face
- ▶ empiricism, because it looks, scientifically, at the actual biological differences between men and women.

Feminism has given women enormous psychological and moral power, particularly women who have been 'let down' by men (divorcees, single mothers, battered women). Interestingly, any group of women exchanging ideas and supporting each other is, in effect, practising feminism.

People who have promoted feminism include:

- ▶ Kate Millett (a political philosopher)
- ▶ Germaine Greer (a feminist theorist)
- ▶ Marilyn French (a novelist and feminist theorist)
- ▶ Naomi Wolf (a feminist theorist)
- ▶ Margaret Atwood (a Canadian novelist)
- ▶ Betty Friedan (a feminist theorist)
- ▶ Mary Daly (a feminist theologian).

### **Feminism and education**

Today, one example of a philosopher of education who is influenced specifically by feminism is the American Jane Rowland Martin (who, at the time of publication of this book, was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts). Jane Rowland Martin is particularly interesting, because she challenges the view that motherhood and any form of academic activity are necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, she claims that this is absurd – a great deal of teaching takes place in the home and it is a mistake, in fact, to equate education only with formal, public schooling.

### **Does it work?**

#### **What feminism can help us to do**

1. It can encourage women and men to re-examine their value systems.
2. It can give women enormous psychological and moral power, and courage.
3. It can contribute alternative ideas to discussions of social problems.

#### **Where feminism fails**

1. It can limit dialogue and understanding between men and women.
2. It focuses too much on gender equality in high profile roles.
3. It fails to highlight how men can also be victimised and subjugated.

### Quick summary

Feminism is based on the principle that women have innate worth, inalienable rights, and valuable ideas and talents to contribute to society. Feminism goes beyond mere equality – it insists not only that women be given equal rights to men, but that they be respected for themselves as well. At the heart of the women's rights movement has always been the idea that each individual has certain innate rights; that each individual is a valuable, contributing member of society.

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### Feminism in a nutshell

Feminism claims that the entire experience of being human has been seriously damaged and distorted by masculine domination and the marginalisation of women..

Feminism claims that women have been, and are, denied basic human rights and that men have shown themselves to be unworthy leaders of the human race by repeatedly indulging in acts of war, violence and abusive power relationships.

If we ignore feminism, then it is likely that we will live in a state of barbarity rather than civilisation. This is because women, rather than men, bring stability, harmony and higher forms of culture (eg music and art) to human society. Societies that totally ignore the rights and needs of the female half of the human race tend to have enormous and intractable social problems. Examples of this at the time of writing are certain central African countries and countries in the grip of fanatical versions of Islam.

Some years ago, one of the authors of this book visited a Buddhist retreat just outside Johannesburg. The theme of the retreat that weekend was 'Meditation for Westerners'. The person in charge of the retreat and who took the participants through the meditation exercises was a Buddhist monk, Rob Nairn. Like all the people attending the course, he was a Westerner brought up to believe in Western values (money, success, career). In his case, though, he had found that these values did not lead to happiness and joy, but to pain, disappointment and inner suffering. In his late twenties and early thirties, he turned his attention away from his career (he had been a practising lawyer in Zimbabwe and, later, South Africa) and started studying the Buddhist scriptures.

When he was thirty-something, he gave up his career and entered a Buddhist monastery under a Tibetan teacher. He believed that this change would give him what he desperately needed: serenity and inner peace. He also believed that he would never attain serenity and inner peace unless he made peace with himself, with who he really was.

According to Buddhism and, in fact, all true religions, our greatest and most formidable encounter is not with the world, or the people we meet, or the external dangers we face, or the political system we live in. Our biggest challenge is to come to terms with ourselves. Who are we when the 'masks are off'? What are these masks that we wear every day? Who makes these masks and who, if anybody, forces us to wear them?

Society, and the people around us, makes many demands on us, right from the time we are young children. If, as children, we come into repeated contact with a person, people or group of people who dominate us and force us into their way of doing things, it will be very difficult for us to discover who we really are.

One of the things we have been looking at in this book is the experience of happiness. One of the teachings of modern Buddhism is that we cannot be happy if we do not know who we are or if we have been taught to hate ourselves.

Stop and think for a moment.

### Thought break

Can you think of a particular moment in your life when you experienced happiness and joy? What was that moment?

Let us not only look at the past. Turn to the present for a moment. Put this book down. Sit still and comfortably, and pause.

What is happening in this moment, during this pause? What thoughts are going through your head? What are you experiencing in the world of your thoughts?

### Finding time for reflection

Sitting quietly and doing some sort of inner exploration is, we believe, extremely important. It is something that our society actively discourages and it is something that certain groups of people rarely, perhaps never, have a chance to do. We are referring to people who work long hours in demanding jobs, who have large families and who, in short, are always seeking to meet the demands of others. Another thing that discourages this sort of inner seeking is constant noise and bustle.

### Thought break

Do you ever get time to do the sort of inner reflection we have referred to here? If the answer is 'no', why do you think this is?

Can you change the situation in any way?

The writings of the late poet, Raymond Carver (1938–1988) are a case in point. As a writer, Carver desperately needed peace and quiet and time to reflect and write. His inability to find these things for many years drove him to despair and alcoholism. It was only when he was older, after he was divorced and his children had grown up, that he gained any sense of peace. We think it is worth saying that he was 'saved' from alcoholism and self-destructive behaviour by his second partner, Tess Gallagher, whom he spent the final decade of his life.

In his collection of poems *Fires*, Carver claims that he had gone through life, until he was in early middle age, believing that everything would somehow work out. However, this belief suddenly died one day while he was trying – of all things – to get some laundry done in a laundromat (his wife was away working as an ill-paid waitress). He suddenly saw a vision of his life as ebbing away, with him sunk in a sea of parental responsibilities and the endless chaos of small-time jobs. His life was 'never really going to get better' (Carver, *Fires*, page 33). The American philosophy of dreaming big and working hard was proving to be false and empty. He tells us that, shortly afterwards, for both him and his wife 'the dreams began to go bust' (page 34), that their American value system would never be rewarded, that they would both live their entire lives in confusion and darkness.

The time came and went when everything my wife and I held sacred, or considered worthy of respect, every spiritual value, crumbled away.

(Raymond Carver, *Fires* [1985] page 34)

What is your response to Carver's feelings? Have you ever felt despair and threatened with a sense of chaos?

Question

## Philosophers at work

The concern about what is going on inside us in relation to who we are, and how we as people relate to our world, is the focus of attention of that method of inquiry in philosophy referred to as phenomenology.

Because we are complicated, and the world is complicated, phenomenology is a complicated philosophy. It is also a very beautiful philosophy.

Unlike the other methods of inquiry in philosophy we have been looking at, phenomenology does not really contain 'teaching'. Nonetheless, it does have something to say to us. Phenomenology claims that human beings and the world interact with each other the whole time, the one influencing the other. It is possible to sum up phenomenology in the following statement: 'I am in the world and the world is in me.'

Modern Western phenomenology is particularly concerned with the second part of this statement: '.. the world is in me.'

The modern world can be a deeply distressing and frightening place. Also, the modern world, for many Western people, centres increasingly on what is sometimes called 'virtual reality'; that is, the television, the computer screen, video, films. If the world that is in me is not real, then part of me will be unreal.

According to phenomenology, we need to connect with the real world.

The real world is the natural world of the earth (trees, flowers, animals, mountains, the ocean) and other people (our spouse, children, the people in the street, everyone). The real world also includes things made by human beings: houses, tables and chairs, buildings, cars, highways, shops, clothes, ice cream, hamburgers, a glass of beer, a cup of coffee.

Other people are very important. Phenomenology believes that, if I am to be 'real', then I need to have deep emotional connections with at least one other human being. But phenomenology also believes that we must be careful not to let other people 'rule' us and drive us away from ourselves. We need to be careful, in fact, about the company we keep. One of the crucial points in phenomenology is that each and every one of us has a real, essential self with a vocation. (In the case of the late Raymond Carver, for example, this essential self needed to write or go mad with desperation.)

Phenomenology can be put into three categories, namely:

- ▶ phenomenology of the self (who am I?)
- ▶ social phenomenology (who and what is my community?)
- ▶ cosmic phenomenology (our place in the universe).

All these forms of phenomenology focus on the 'real world'. Phenomenology believes that the most dangerous thing is falsity. Falsity means to deceive, to misrepresent, to distort. Falsity includes:

- ▶ individual pretence (an example is someone who is always out to impress everyone)
- ▶ social falsity (an example is a party where everyone tries to work out who is more important than whom).

Phenomenology asserts that we should not reduce people to things or objects by ignoring those huge areas of human experience that we cannot see or measure.

People who have promoted phenomenology include:

- ▶ The Dalai Lama (a Buddhist leader)
- ▶ Credo Mutwa (an African shaman)
- ▶ Martin Heidegger (a German philosopher)
- ▶ Jacques Derrida (a French philosopher)
- ▶ Kwame Gyekye (an African philosopher)
- ▶ Chuwudum Okolo (an African philosopher)
- ▶ Oshita Oshita (an African philosopher)
- ▶ Martin Luther King (an Afro-American social activist)
- ▶ Albert Einstein (a scientist).

Today, in education, the philosophy of phenomenology has influenced the work of two people: Nel Noddings and Max van Manen. Nel Noddings (who is sometimes described as a feminist) was, in her youth, a teacher of mathematics. Her most famous work is *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. We have already mentioned Max van Manen in the chapter on existentialism. Like Noddings, he too believes in the need for moral qualities in the classroom and he rejects the western notion of 'objectivity', particularly as this is applied to learning.

### **Phenomenology and the mystery of human existence**

Phenomenology is essentially concerned with what it is that makes us who we are as human beings. As a method of inquiry in philosophy, phenomenology encourages us to 'wonder anew' at who we are, at who we long to be.

## Thought break

Suppose your doctor told you that you had only six months to live. What would you do during those six months? Would you continue to live your life as you are now?

At the beginning of his book *The Soul's Code*, the American psychologist James Hillman says this:

We dull our lives by the way we imagine them. We have stopped imagining them with any sort of romance, any sort of story ... [what about] beauty, mystery and myth? There is an essential mystery at the heart of each human life.

(Hillman, 1996)

In this book, Hillman looks at the lives of people who have often rejected society's demands and said: 'No. I must do this or die.' Such people include the singer Ella Fitzgerald, the erotic dancer Josephine Baker, the violinist Yehudi Menuhin, the Spanish bullfighter Manolete.

Hillman writes as follows about the legendary filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. In this next extract Bergman is describing his yearning for a cinematograph (an early 'movie machine'):

More than anything else, I longed for a cinematograph. The year before, I had been to the cinema for the first time and seen a film ... To me, it was the beginning. I was overcome with a fever that has never left me. The silent shadows turned their pale faces towards me and spoke in inaudible voices to my most secret feelings. Sixty years have gone by and nothing has changed; the fever is the same.

(Hillman, 1996)

What is it that you long for? Do you know?

### **Quick summary**

Phenomenology looks at things and ourselves as they really are. Phenomenology believes that theories about ourselves and about life and the universe can be very misleading and may lead to falsehood and deep unhappiness.

Historically, phenomenology has tended to promote religious belief because it asks us to look closely at our inner lives rather than our material possessions. Many of the world's great religious leaders practised phenomenology, including Buddha, Mohammed and, in the Christian tradition, St John of the Cross. However, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, it is reasonable to say that science has moved closer to phenomenology in that science acknowledges the mystery of life and the mystery of the human person. Furthermore, none of the institutionalised religions that exist in the early 21st century, unfortunately, encourage inner exploration and reflection – if anything, they morally oppress and hector people into submission and conformity. If we want to find out who we really are, we are better off without these forms of religion.

Read the following, which is an excerpt from a public debate in 1999 between two scientists: Richard Dawkins (zoologist, Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford and a well-known atheist) and Steven Pinker (neuroscientist and Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, also an atheist). Dawkins is speaking:

Carl Sagan, an American astronomer-author, wrote, shortly before he died, 'How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, "This is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant"? Instead they say, "No, no, no! My god is a little god, and I want him to stay that way." A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.'

Well it is common enough for people to agree that religions have got the facts all wrong, but 'Nevertheless,' they go on to say, 'you have to admit that religions do provide something that people need. We crave a deeper meaning to life, a deeper, more imaginative understanding of the mystery of existence.' Well, in the passage I've just quoted, Sagan seems to be criticizing religions not just for getting it wrong, which many people would accept, but for their deficiencies precisely in the sphere in which they are supposed to retain some residual virtue. Religions are not imaginative, not poetic, not soulful. On the contrary, they are parochial, small-minded, niggardly with the human imagination, precisely where science is generous.

### **Activity**

## Activity

Now, there are, of course many unsolved problems, and scientists are the first to admit this. There are aspects of human subjective consciousness that are deeply mysterious. Neither Steve Pinker nor I can explain human subjective consciousness – what philosophers call qualia. In *How the Mind Works* Steve elegantly sets out the problem of subjective consciousness, and asks where it comes from and what is the explanation. Then he's honest enough to say, 'Beats the heck out of me.' That is an honest thing to say, and I echo it. We don't know. We don't understand it.

(Dawkins & Pinker, 1999)

What is your response to Professor Dawkins's remarks about religion? Do you agree with him?

What is your response to his remarks about human subjective consciousness?

### Our response

We personally feel that Professor Dawkins is right. It is possible to find and create meaning without conventional forms of religion. We also personally feel it is possible to acknowledge life's mystery, and the mystery of human identity without conventional forms of religion. But we do not think it is possible to create meaning without some form of mysticism or spirituality. Perhaps you disagree.

## The problem of identity

Who we are is connected to our personal past, our culture, our parents, our upbringing and our life today. We know what our life is today, but how do we go back into the past?

Think about your parents and grandparents – how much do you know about them? How much can you remember about your childhood?

Much of our past is lost and forgotten. Even if we grow up in a home where the past is treated with great respect, where there are photo albums of us from when we were small children to the present, there will always be huge gaps. In many homes,

of course, the past is remembered through stories. And, tragically, many people grow up in circumstances that are distressing (eg broken homes, families separated because of apartheid, extreme poverty). It is actually very difficult to answer the question: 'How did we come to be as we are?'

It is even more difficult to answer the question, 'Who are we?'

## **Religious leaders and the self**

### **Buddha**

Gautama Buddha, more than any other major religious leader, emphasised human beings' need to discover their true self. Buddha himself was born into a wealthy family and was destined to take over the social role and privileges of a young nobleman. This was not to be. His confrontation with suffering, death and the realisation that human life is short forced him to become a wandering ascetic. After some years of this, he found his own path – 'The Middle Way'. This Way, he claimed, would lead all human beings to enlightenment about their inner being, primarily through meditation, which is aimed at freeing the mind of delusion and falsity. Although the religion of Buddhism has not been without its low points, Buddhism has, on the whole, not imposed itself on society in the way that Islam and Christianity have.

### **Jesus of Nazareth**

A reading of the four gospels of the Christian Bible makes it clear that Jesus' way was quite different from Buddha's. Jesus himself was convinced that our first duty is to love God with all our heart, mind and soul. It is important to realise, however, that this is not to negate the self – far from it. By loving God, we will come to experience deep spiritual fulfilment. Jesus' message was spelt out by St Augustine: 'We are made in Your Image, O God, and our hearts can find no rest until we reside in Thee' (St Augustine, 397). Christianity, at the beginning of the third millennium, means rediscovering, and re-emphasising, contemplative prayer and our need for inner healing. There is increasing dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. Some Christians today are extremely critical of the monolithic structures of the churches and the way certain churches have been, and still are, prepared to dominate human beings and, in effect, run people's lives for them.

### **Mohammed**

A sentence in the Qur'an reads: '[God] is closer to [man] than [his] jugular vein' (Qu'r'an 50:16). Mohammed himself believed he had had a direct experience of the divine, and this belief led to Islamic mysticism (called Sufism). Muslims, and particularly those who consciously follow a mystical path, believe that certain forms of prayer, movement and even dance bring human beings into the



presence of Allah. As in Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism often portrays Allah as human beings' 'lover' and 'friend' – the One God all of us need if we are to find our powers of self-expression, creativity and inner serenity. The history of the religion of Islam, unfortunately, like the history of Christianity, has been marked by militarism, violence and, in some countries, the horrific treatment of women. In recent years, criticisms of institutionalised, highly conservative forms of Islam have been numerous and have arisen from both within and outside Islam and from women and men. For example, the first international congress on feminism and Islam (organised by a Muslim man, Mr Prado), was held in Spain at the end of October 2005. This congress is now held every year.

### ***Does it work?***

#### ***What phenomenology can help us to do***

Phenomenology can help us to:

1. examine our lives closely
2. reject false value systems (eg materialism)
3. slow down and lead less stressful lives
4. resist other people's demands and expectations
5. find happiness.

#### ***Where phenomenology fails***

1. It can accept social evil.
2. It can lead to mental confusion.
3. It can be very morally demanding.
4. It has been criticised for not being a problem-solving philosophy.
5. It tends to be too uncritical of authority.

### ***Phenomenology in a nutshell***

Phenomenology encourages us to ask: 'Who am I? Who is this "I" that constantly interacts with the world around me?'

Phenomenology claims that our biggest challenge is to confront ourselves in all our ambiguity and complexity and thus to get nearer to the 'real me'.

Phenomenology encourages us to resist power structures by a process of retreat and non-engagement rather than confrontation.

If we ignore phenomenology, we run much the same risks as when we ignore existentialism. We will probably lack the capacity to feel and we are likely to never, or rarely, experience moments of real joy or real pain. A society that ignores phenomenology runs all the same risks as a society that ignores existentialism.

**sight**

## Is there a world that speaks to us?

The well-known anthropologist (anthropology is the study of humans, their origins, their societies, religions, institutions and customs), Richard Leakey, says the following in his book *Origins Reconsidered*:

In many ways it is language that makes us feel human. Ours is a world of words. Our thoughts, our world of imagination, our communication, our rich culture – all these things are woven on the loom of language. Language can conjure up images in our minds. Language can stir our emotions – sadness, happiness, love, hatred. Through language we can express individuality or demand group loyalty. Quite simply, language is our medium.

(Leakey & Lewin, 1992)

Do you agree with Richard Leakey? Or do you think human beings express themselves in other ways too?

Question

We are not certain that we completely agree with Richard Leakey here. After we read those words, we wrote down a list of all the things we could do to communicate without using language.

This is what we came up with:

- ▶ play music
- ▶ paint and draw
- ▶ scream
- ▶ cry
- ▶ smile
- ▶ frown
- ▶ dance
- ▶ make things (for example pottery and sewing).

Question

Can you think of anything else?

## The symbols of the universe

Stephen Hawking

The British physicist Stephen Hawking suffers from a disease known as Lou Gehrig's disease. This disease attacks the central nervous system and leaves the victim more and more helpless as time goes by. Today Stephen Hawking has to speak, laboriously, through a special computerised voice synthesiser. Even then, it is difficult for journalists and students to understand what he is saying.

Fortunately for Hawking, he works in the field of mathematics and it is through mathematical symbolisation and proofs that he has managed to communicate his ideas about space and time. While he was still a student, Hawking became fascinated by black holes, those extremely strange phenomena that are the spin-offs of the deaths of large stars. He worked with Roger Penrose and, together, the two men proved mathematically that black holes consisted of something called 'singularities'. Singularities are not easy to describe to the non-physicist, but they are infinitesimally tiny, dense points. Hawking then went on to speculate that the entire universe may have begun from a singularity known as the Big Bang. If the Big Bang model is correct, then the universe is in a constant state of expansion.

## Albert Einstein

You do not have to be a physicist to know the set of symbols for Einstein's formula for relativity:  $E = mc^2$ .

You probably know what these letters stand for, but in case you have forgotten:

*E* means energy.

*m* means mass.

*c* means the speed of light.

## What shape is the universe?

Modern mathematics is extremely difficult to understand for most of us, so it is a relief to know that more and more physicists are starting to move away from mathematical symbolism and are using pictures instead, which are less threatening.

In fact, one of the things that is happening now is that scientists are starting to ask, 'What shape is the universe?'

They have come up with the following:

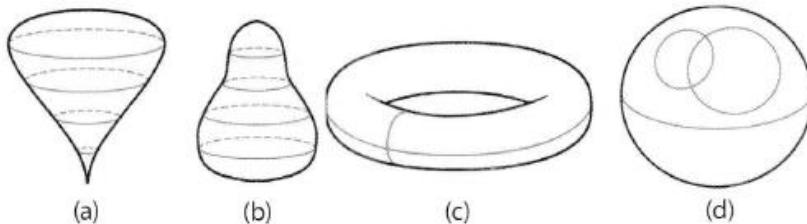


Figure 5: Possible shapes of the universe

Which one do you feel happiest with? We rather like (b) above.

What does your idea of the universe look like?

Question

### Wassily Kandinsky

Above, we said that modern mathematics was a bit threatening to most of us. This is probably because mathematics is so difficult to understand. So it is heartening to know that mathematics can be turned into other languages. We saw how this worked when we looked at the shapes of the universe.

Arts and maths tend to be 'enemies' – many people who are good at art hate maths and people who are good at maths often feel that art is a waste of time. But one artist who wanted to bring the two together asked rather odd questions:

Do numbers have colours? Do geometric shapes have colours?

This artist was Wassily Kandinsky. The details of Kandinsky's life do not really matter here. What is important is that Kandinsky did his major artistic work on colours and numbers about five years after Einstein's Theory of Relativity had been accepted as the most accurate view of the universe. The symbols of mathematics, line and form were suddenly the most important thing human beings possessed – or so it appeared at the time.

In 1926, Kandinsky made the following statement:

The hot and cold character of the square, with its obviously flat nature, makes one think of red, an intermediary colour between yellow and blue, which itself possesses this hot-cold quality ... Among all the angles, one must choose a certain angle situated

between the right angle and the acute angle; an angle of 60 degrees ... when these angles are jointed by their openings, one has an equilateral triangle and one thinks of yellow. Thus, the acute angle is yellow. The obtuse angle gradually loses its aggressiveness, its heat, and thus it vaguely evokes a non-angular line, which constitutes the primary surface: the circle ... this needs a slight blue tinge.

Visit the following website to look at some of Kandinsky's work: <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/kandinsky/>.

### Mandalas

A Buddhist mandala is a diagram used as a focus and guide for meditation. Each mandala represents the universe pictorially. Create your own wish list and then decide what colours to paint each wish. If you have got children, or you work with children, why not get them involved?



Figure 6: A Buddhist mandala

### Question

What is the colour of your universe, your world?

### Activity

Look at our wish list in Chapter 3. We said we wanted to grow exotic roses, own a penthouse flat, travel the world, and ...

What colour do you think the authors' universe is? Is it many colours?

### Other symbols

Not everyone likes mathematics and not everyone likes art. Some people like music – they play a musical instrument and/or they have a nice singing voice.

If music speaks to you, you will probably understand this:



Figure 7: Music score

None of these signs and symbols speak to the authors of this book. We like listening to music, but we cannot sing and we have not learnt to play a musical instrument.

However, the following signs and symbols do speak to Jane because she has a loom and is interested in weaving:

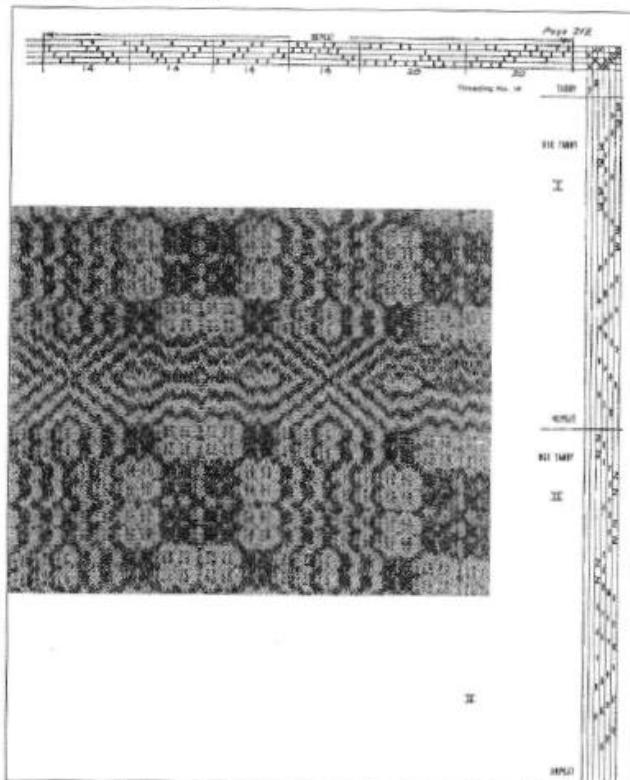


Figure 8: The 'thousand flowers' pattern

These symbols are weaving symbols. They tell weavers how to operate a loom to get certain patterns. These particular symbols tell the weaver how to weave a pattern called 'a thousand flowers'. This pattern has many, many different possibilities. It was originally a pattern used by Finnish weavers, and was taken from Finland to Minnesota, USA, in the very early part of the 20th century. One of its most beautiful possibilities is shown above. Strangely, weaving is sometimes practised by blind people, who use their fingers and hands to feel the pattern they are weaving.

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### Thought break

What else speaks to people, do you think?

The following is an extract from a book on religion in South Africa, describing symbols used by San Bushmen in their rock art.

Southern African rock art displays enormous diversity and variability in age, place and content. After all, we are dealing with a timespan of roughly 25 000 years, and a geographical area the size of Europe. I wish to draw attention to the recurring motif of the circle/spiral in Bushman engravings, interpreting it as expressive of Bushman religion, but not just religion. These figures express and evoke associations of beauty, truth and openness for those of us who live on the edge of Western-Christian power. The perspective I am presenting makes no claim to correspond with an objectively present Bushman world; also I make no attempt to escape from the spiral of understanding, I shuttle backwards and forwards between my own presuppositions and the world of the Bushmen ... As can be seen at Driekopseiland, circles occur in various forms: simple circles; circles containing crosses, emanating rays; concentric circles; or open-ended spirals ... It is not possible, or necessary, to 'prove' what these Bushmen artists intended. We no longer have access to the minds of the artists ... Circles and spirals are universal expressions of a profound religious intuition. They arise from the deeper level of human consciousness, which is a storehouse of powerful symbols.

(Kruger, 1995: 326–328)

Kruger speaks of truth, beauty and 'openness'. He obviously likes circles.

Question

What about you? What shapes speak to you of truth, beauty and openness?

Kruger also says that he 'make[s] no attempt to escape from the spiral of understanding, [that he] shuttle[s] backwards and forwards between [his] own presuppositions [that is, opinions] and the world of the Bushmen'.

Here are some of the shapes found in Bushman (San) art:

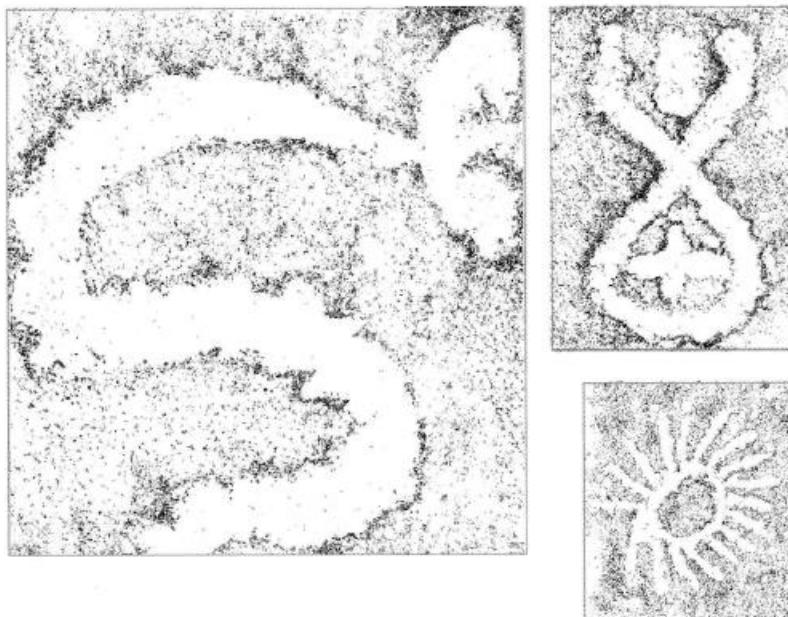


Figure 9: San symbols

Look through some consumer magazines and see if you can spot any similarities between the shapes we have been looking at in this chapter and the pictures in the magazines. Look for circles, faces and criss-cross lines. What are the most common colours?

If you have children, or you work with them, some of them might be interested in doing this with you.

Look at the pictures in the magazines and then re-read what Kruger says about San art.

**Activity**

Activity

Did any of the pictures from the magazines speak to you of truth, beauty and openness?

### Philosophers at work

The method of inquiry in philosophy that focuses on symbols and how we interpret them is called hermeneutics. The word 'hermeneutics' comes from a Greek word meaning 'interpretation'.

Hermeneutics is very similar to another method of inquiry in philosophy that we looked at, existentialism. This is because existentialism asks, 'What is the meaning of life?' Hermeneutics asks, 'How do we discover or create meaning?' In other words, how do we understand and interpret the different kinds of symbols we encounter in our world?

The following are some of the main ideas that are propagated by hermeneutics:

- ▶ Hermeneutics emphasises the importance of listening and observing.
- ▶ Hermeneutics claims that the individual's life experience influences the way he or she understands the world.
- ▶ Hermeneutics affirms the importance of dialogue in arriving at an understanding of any issue.
- ▶ Hermeneutics is anti-authoritarian and encourages the individual to create his or her own meaning and understanding.

Today, unfortunately, hermeneutics has been ignored owing to the huge impact of science, technology and consumerism.

The joke is, though, that consumerism and advertising often talk about 'the symbols of success'. You know what these symbols are: cell phones, luxury cars, designer clothes and a smart house or flat. If you want to get the feel for some of these symbols and how they work, a good place to visit is Vodaworld, just outside Midrand, Johannesburg. An upmarket shopping mall is also full of these symbols.

People who have promoted hermeneutics include:

- ▶ Carl Jung (a Swiss psychologist)
- ▶ Hans-Georg Gadamer (a German philosopher)

- ▶ Martin Heidegger (a German philosopher)
- ▶ Wilhelm Dilthey (a philosopher)
- ▶ Tsenay Serequeberhan (an African philosopher)
- ▶ John Mbiti (an African philosopher)
- ▶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o (an African writer)
- ▶ Cain Hope Felder (an Afro-American New Testament scholar).

Today, a philosopher of education working primarily in the framework of hermeneutics is the American Shaun Gallagher (whom we mentioned in the chapter on existentialism). Like Nel Noddings and Van Manen, Gallagher rejects the notion that all learning occurs solely through the brain. Instead, Gallagher (who, at the time of publication of this book, was the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Memphis in America) believes that the modern classroom needs to make a place for play and creative activities.

### **Carl Jung**

The best-known among the people who have promoted hermeneutics is probably Carl Jung. He was a psychologist who believed that all human beings interpret their world, their lives and themselves in certain ways. Jung claimed that our universe contains what he called 'universal symbols'. These symbols, said Jung, are the key to our healing and happiness and give us clues about how we should live our lives.

Carl Jung lived from 1875 to 1961. He wrote several books for people who did not have training in psychology. These are: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* and *Man and his Symbols*. Jung claimed that these universal symbols often come to us in our dreams and fantasies. If we ignore them, or if the society we live in does not allow us access to these symbols, then illness and unhappiness will be the result.

Jung identified a number of universal symbols, such as the mandala, the phallus, the mother, the father, the moon, the sun, the key, the circle and the cross. In the following quotation, Jung comments on how we can interpret our dreams and nightmares.

PATIENT: 'Yes, I have terrible dreams. Only recently I dreamt I was coming home at night. Everything is as quiet as death. The door into the living room is half open, and I see my mother hanging from the ceiling, swinging to and fro in the cold wind that blows through the open windows. Another time I dreamt that a terrible noise broke out in the house at night. I get up and discover that a frightened horse is tearing through the rooms. At last it finds the door into the hall, and jumps through the hall window from the fourth floor onto the street below. I was terrified when I saw it lying there, all mangled.'

JUNG'S INTERPRETATION: We need to look more closely into the meaning of the two main symbols, 'mother' and 'horse'. These symbols must be identical, because they both commit suicide. 'Mother' ... refers to the place of origin, to nature, to that which passively creates ... the hollow form, the vessel that carries and nourishes ... the unconscious life ... [the dream tells us that] the patient's unconscious life is destroying itself. Horse ... stands for the animal life of the body ... so the animal life is also destroying itself ... the dream speaks a language.

(Jung, 1986: 186–188)

### ***Just supposing ...***

Just suppose you were killed in a road accident today ...

What would your possessions say about you? Do you own many things, or only a few things? What network of human relationships are you involved in? What would these relationships say about you?

### **Question**

Who is the person closest to you?

Which possession do you prize the most?

### **Quick summary**

The method of inquiry in philosophy that examines symbols and the meaning of symbols is called hermeneutics.

People who practise this method of inquiry in philosophy consciously ask themselves: 'What creates and produces meaning? Can human beings live without meaning? Is there a link between despair, violence and meaninglessness?'

This method of inquiry in philosophy tends to focus on literature, art, film, poetry, music and crafts. Today, it increasingly confronts science and demands that scientists give us meaningful science rather than 'cold, objective' science.

### ***Does it work?***

#### ***What hermeneutics can help us to do***

Hermeneutics can help us to:

1. create meaning
2. discover our own hidden artistic abilities
3. resist scientific arrogance and domination
4. understand each other
5. be more tolerant of each other.

#### ***What hermeneutics cannot help us with***

Hermeneutics cannot help us to:

1. define problems
2. overcome injustice
3. be decisive
4. take action
5. be more logical.

### **Jean Baudrillard**

Jean Baudrillard is a French philosopher who has looked closely at the symbols of consumer society. Baudrillard's approach to the philosophy of meaning is a very Western approach – basically, he was fascinated by two things: the shopping mall and Disneyland.

Baudrillard asked a simple question: 'What is a shopping mall? What happens in shopping malls?'

He came up with the following answer: The shopping mall is the place where we identify with the things we buy. We even have a sort of identity based on the things we do not buy.

What did Baudrillard mean by this?

Let us take the example of a wristwatch. Suppose I want to buy a new wristwatch. Which brand am I going to buy? That will depend, essentially, on two things: how much I can afford to pay for a watch and the kind of watch I want to wear.

Suppose I have only a small amount of money. In this case, I will buy a cheap watch from, say, Clicks. But the problem I have now, according to Baudrillard, is that wearing this watch says, 'I'm poor and therefore insignificant.' So what do I do?

Maybe I do not mention my watch to anybody. Or, maybe, if someone notices my new watch, I say something like: 'Yes, I just bought this cheap watch – I'm a practical sort of person – I didn't want one of those fancy things. I just need something that tells the time.'

In other words, the watch has forced me to define myself within the consumerist system.

The worst of it, said Baudrillard, is that this is not just true of something like a wristwatch. Consumerism has invaded the whole of life. Consumer symbols are so powerful that they define us. Worse still, these symbols are often little more than plastic rubbish.

If you think all this is an exaggeration, go to a shopping mall during the working week and have a good look at what is going on around you.

### **Steve Biko speaks**

In rejecting Western values, therefore, we Africans are rejecting those things that are not only foreign to us but that seek to destroy the most cherished of our beliefs – that the corner stone of society is man himself – not just his welfare, not his material wellbeing, but just man himself ... We reject the power-based society of the Westerner that seems to be ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face.

(Steve Biko, in Malan, 1997)

### **Hermeneutics in a nutshell**

Hermeneutics takes imagery and symbolism seriously. Hermeneutics claims that arts and crafts, even more than science, are important in human life.

Hermeneutics believes that happiness is linked to our own creativity in whatever form that takes, and in whatever cultural context it is produced.

Hermeneutics encourages us to be poets, writers, authors, actors, painters, musicians, weavers, potters, quilt-makers, gardeners, cooks, homemakers and designers. It does not disparage science and technology, but it believes that this is only part of human achievement.

If we ignore hermeneutics, then we will be deeply unhappy people, because we will be ignoring our needs as human beings. Unfortunately, there is a very real risk that this may be happening to children brought up in Western schooling systems. In the digital race, the focus is increasingly on pressurising children and young people to 'perform' in mathematics, science and computer technology, while ignoring human and cultural studies.

We started this book by making the following remark:

Philosophy does not give us a simple creed to follow or a message of comfort, but it has the power to emancipate us from destructive illusions.

One method of philosophical inquiry that some feel is extreme is known as postmodernism. To understand postmodernism, we need to know what modernism is.

### **Modernism**

Modernism is the belief that has dominated Western society, and therefore most of the world, for the last two centuries or so.

It is not easy to define modernism. But we can say that it is based on the conviction that science has improved, and will improve, the lives of human beings. Science has enabled us to cure many diseases; it has enabled us to make our farming methods more efficient and it has given us the technological, urban world of today: digital gadgets, hospitals, schools, computers, cars, satellite television, and so on.

Modernism was probably at its strongest during the years following World War II, in the late 1940s and 1950s. At the time, in the West, slums were destroyed and children were inoculated against the old killer diseases of the past: polio, smallpox and TB. Money was poured into new education systems. Western economies boomed and unemployment was minimal. The motor car, telephone and television became part of virtually everyone's lives. By the early 1960s, the average Westerner fully believed that the future held little to fear. Soon, even poor countries such as Africa and India would benefit from scientific achievement and they too would enjoy material plenty or, at least, would see visible improvement in the lives of most of their people.

There is another side to modernism, too.

Modernism believes that the ideal human being is a cool, calm, rational person who can be relied upon to solve problems. Modernism believes that the ideal world is a world ruled by reason and technology. Of course, modernism accepts that we all have emotions and personal relationships, but it believes that emotions and relationships need to be 'watched'. This is where psychology comes in, the

'science of the human person'. If I find myself getting involved with love affairs that go wrong, or I find myself constantly quarrelling with the people I work with, then I should go to a psychologist to find out what is wrong. Then I will be a perfectly balanced person, well able to take my place within a highly technological society.

Until very recently, most Westerners accepted this view of life and themselves unquestioningly. But at some point during the late 1960s and on into the 1970s, all this confidence simply evaporated.

Science was not keeping its promises. Western society became bedevilled by certain social problems: growing violent crime, huge increases in unemployment, a widening rich-poor gap, urban riots, racial unrest in British and US cities, and political extremism. Even medical science was starting to look suspect. Certain forms of cancer could still not be cured. HIV/AIDS came along. Greater numbers of people were dying of heart disease. Mental illness was widespread: depression, anxiety, substance dependency.

This is where postmodernism comes in.

## **Postmodernism**

Postmodernism tells us, in various ways, that we need to rethink our belief in science and progress itself. And it does more than this: postmodernism asks us some disconcertingly simple questions: What, actually, drives human beings? Is it reason? Or is it not, in fact, desire, wishes, dreams, hopes, nightmares?

It is at this point that modernism takes us into the shopping mall, the movie theatre, the world of the child, including Disneyland itself.

Here is what one writer, Julia Cameron, says about movies. (Julia Cameron is an independent filmmaker and screenplay writer.)

The movie camera takes us into all the odd, dark corners of our world and says, 'You see? This is what is really happening.'

(Cameron, 1992)

The movie camera, then, may be a more reliable guide to reality and to what people are 'really like' than any scientific or psychological journal. For it is the film world that explores the human story, human life. It is the film world that has examined, in all its horror, human violence and our worst nightmares. This violence and these nightmares, when they appear in scientific journals, come across as weak, unconvincing. Are clinical psychologists who interview serial killers in a maximum security prison really going to begin understanding what leads to such deeds? Does a 100-page report on such deeds and crimes really 'speak' to us?

The movie camera has no such scientific objectivity. It is prepared to show us just what happens during gang rape, gang torture and killing, and racial hatred. It is not afraid to show us urban poverty and classroom violence.

The movie camera asks us a question: 'Where do our shadow selves come from?'

Do you go to the movies? Have you ever seen a film containing explicit violence?

What effect did this film have on you?

**Question**

When faced with violence, scientific reason, by its very nature, cannot help us.

But science is guilty of more than simply failing to keep its promises. Science kills our dreams – either by examining them or by ignoring them. Read what one leading postmodernist, Jean-François Lyotard, says about his own dreams:

Sometimes I dream that I am an astronaut. I land my spaceship on a distant planet. When I tell the children on that planet that on earth school is compulsory and that we have homework every evening, they split their sides laughing. And so I decide to stay with them for a long, long time ... well anyway ... until the summer holidays.

On the first day back at school in September David, aged seven and a half, comes home with the following homework: he has to learn this little story by Erhardt Dietl. In the space of one hour he can recite it in the right tone of voice without any mistakes. He has drawn the distant planet in his exercise book and the spaceship approaching it. The first thing that school makes him learn is the happiness of a world without school, with no obligations and no homework. The world exists only on another planet. It is reached in a spaceship. It seems just as natural as climbing on a bicycle. Years ago my sister and I would go off with two or three little friends, on long bicycle rides into the blue Atlantic summer, with our parents' blessing and our day's supplies of food on the carriers.

To educate is to lead out. The moderns have stressed the efforts necessary to lead and let oneself be led out of nature toward language. But 'out' is possibly not 'outside'. It is no doubt within, far inside. One cannot reach it by uprooting oneself but by plunging deep within toward what is most intimate, where lies desire. The child knows a lot more than we do about the state of dependency not only in relation to adults, but to what he cherishes in itself, with or against 'big people', well or badly.

When are we educated? When we know more or less which is the far-off planet we desire, and when we do all that we can to set off for it. If adults are often tough and sad, it is because they are disappointed. They do not listen well enough to the invitation to grace which is in them. They let the spaceship rust.

Adults take their holidays on the Riviera or in Florida. They really need them for their work exhausts them. To carry out their work, they have to give up their desire. Yet giving it up is impossible. In each of us there is an unconquerable resistance to

the serious 'ends' that social life proposes, a profession, a career, success. These ends count for nothing against a bicycle ride to another planet. This does not mean that I am advocating spontaneity as a pedagogical method and I do not believe that children are angelic. We are indebted to them and there is only one way to clear this debt, by assisting them to take off in their spaceship to the planet of their dreams.

(Lyotard, in Peters 1995: 19–20)

Who does not, like Lyotard, dream of a carefree world of summer picnics and no duties?

A group of people who are dreaming of such a world today are numbers of American schoolchildren whose parents voted for 'stricter academic programs'. In this programme, even kindergarten children of under six bring home homework.

Question

Does life really have to be about grim, stern duty?

Let us go back to the cinema again. If the cinema shows us nightmares, it also shows us dreams, hopes, illusions, beauty and fantasy. In an extraordinary and unforeseen way, the cinema mirrors our imagination.

***Just supposing ...***

Just suppose you were asked to direct or produce a film ...

Question

What would your film be about? Do you think it would be a happy film or a sad film?

Postmodernism also takes us into the shopping mall, a place where increasing numbers of people shop, socialise, eat ice cream, etc. Many shopping malls today incorporate artificial scenery such as man-made lakes, small 'forests', aquariums, bird houses. The shops and department stores that pay such high rents in these places know they are selling far more than merchandise – like the cinema, they, too, are selling images and dreams. Indeed, in the West, people increasingly define and see themselves in terms of where they shop. Even basic, necessary consumables such

as food itself are often sold in terms of image (think of words such as 'freshness', 'healthy', 'luxury imported chocolate', 'good for your family').

Far from dismissing such claims as advertising gimmicks, postmodernism believes that human beings are deeply influenced by such claims. This is because we all naturally make associations and emotional connections with images. In short, we get a kick out of them. Such kicks may be trivial and silly, but – and this is where postmodernism is unique – perhaps postmodernism insists that silly, trivial 'kicks' tell us something about what it means to be a human being.

### **Philosophers at work**

Postmodernism does not believe in definitions and, in fact, a number of postmodern philosophers have even resisted being labelled as 'postmodern'.

Postmodernism examines the following aspects of the human condition:

- ▶ the way in which we see ourselves
- ▶ the failure of science to solve many problems
- ▶ the fact that reason may not be a good guide to solving certain problems
- ▶ the power of large, modern institutions (eg schools, hospitals, large business organisations) over the individual
- ▶ the need to experience all our emotions to the full, including our anger and sexuality
- ▶ our inner needs
- ▶ mental anguish and mental illness
- ▶ where we get our standards of right and wrong
- ▶ whether we can trust these standards
- ▶ criminality and delinquency (why are some crimes punishable and others not?)
- ▶ who defines what it means to be a 'normal' human being
- ▶ whether technology is morally neutral.

Methods of inquiry in philosophy that have a connection with postmodernism are:

- ▶ phenomenology (because phenomenology asks: 'Who are we?')
- ▶ hermeneutics (because hermeneutics believes symbols and images speak to us)
- ▶ empiricism (because empiricism asks: 'What is actually going on?' Foucault claimed to be an empiricist.)
- ▶ some forms of feminism (because feminism asks: 'Who says the male is the norm?').

People associated with postmodernism include:

- ▶ Jacques Derrida
- ▶ Michel Foucault
- ▶ Jean Baudrillard
- ▶ Jacques Lacan.

A good introductory book on postmodernism is *Postmodernism for Beginners* by R Applignanesi.

The philosopher we have quoted above – Jean-Francois Lyotard – is, as we have seen, particularly interested in education and its influence on children. Some people also claim that the French philosopher Michel Foucault was also a postmodern philosopher of education (because he so radically critiqued the modern institution).

## Postmodern writers

There are many writers of postmodern literature, and among the philosophers most are French:

- ▶ **Jacques Derrida** – who died in 2004 – focused on our need for deep relationships and our need for love and acceptance. He believed that modern political institutions such as the United Nations rely too much on legalistic political morality to bring about peace and solve problems. Derrida claimed that our real enemy is the person or act of 'bad faith', in other words, any betrayal of trust.
- ▶ **Michel Foucault** died of Aids in 1984 and is probably the most famous of all postmodernists. He himself was traumatised by the demands of the French education system. His own innate homosexuality made him feel abnormal for much of his life. Being abnormal, Foucault asked a simple question: 'Where do we get our beliefs about normality anyway?' He came to the conclusion that such beliefs were inculcated into us by modern institutions (eg schools) who monitor us endlessly. It was Foucault who reminded us that the modern school is based on Prussian military ideals of punctuality, discipline, neatness and submissiveness to authority. Foucault's best-known book is *Discipline and Punish*.
- ▶ **Jean Baudrillard** focused on the power of imagery in the modern world and made a point of touring the USA and familiarising himself with US society. His book *Simulacra and Simulation* even discusses the influence of Disneyland on present-day human beings. Baudrillard was particularly interested in consumerism and what made people buy things. He also looked at how our sexuality was tied up in imagery and consumerism. It is sobering to know, then, that Baudrillard concluded that, in the end, human society is now in a deeply alienated state.

His lasting impression of Disneyland itself was the feeling of 'being abandoned' rather than enchanted.

- **Jacques Lacan** was, by training, a psychologist. However, he came to reject many of the simplistic assumptions of Freud, and he believed that psychology needed to reject its early theories and be more humble in its claim to know 'what made people tick'. Lacan believed that human beings, like animals, are driven by basic needs: hunger, sexual needs, the need for contact with others. But, because of the enormous complexity of human social life, including human family life, as young children and even babies we have to engage in various sophisticated communication patterns to have these needs met. In the process of doing so, we lose contact with certain parts of our psyche. Lacan had a long-standing affair with a well-known French movie actress, and this too led him to focus on the question 'Who are we?' in all its complexity.

Read the following excerpt. It is taken from Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way*.

In order to thrive as people, we need to be available to the universal flow. When we put a stopper on our capacity for joy by declining the small gifts of life, we turn aside the larger gifts as well. Those of us who have stopped the flow completely will find ourselves in lives that feel barren and devoid of interest no matter how many meaningless things we fill them with.

What gives us true joy? That is the question we need to ask. For each of us the answer is very different. For my friend Berenice, the answer is raspberries, fresh raspberries. She laughs at how easily pleased she is ... For my friend Alan, music is the answer. Alan was a musician when he was younger, but he long denied himself the right to play ... Working on his creative recovery, Alan began by allowing himself the luxury of buying a new recording a week ... Alan began exploring. He bought gospel, country and western, Indian drum music ...

(Cameron, 1992: 110–111)

Raspberries, music ... What do you think you might be denying yourself?

**Activity**

### **Does it work?**

#### **What postmodernism can help us to do**

Postmodernism can help us to:

1. re-assess the quality of our lives
2. resist the pressure to turn into workaholics
3. gain more creative energy
4. question the claims of rigid morality
5. lead freer lives.

#### **Where postmodernism fails**

1. It may encourage destructive behaviour such as drug dependency.
2. It has not yet given us any alternatives to science as a way forward.
3. It underestimates the need for disciplined effort in any human endeavour.
4. It can lead to despair.
5. It is elitist. It needs to simplify its language to become more accessible to non-intellectuals.

### **One man's life: Friedrich Nietzsche**

Possibly one of the greatest ironies and tragedies was the neglect of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche during the 20th century – a century that was blinded by scientific dogmatism, ideology (such as Marxism and the rise of religious fundamentalism), corrupt politicians and continual warfare.

Friedrich Nietzsche, possibly the first postmodernist, lived from 1844 to 1900. His father was a strict Christian pastor, but Nietzsche lost faith in Christianity while he was a student. A brilliant scholar and thinker, Nietzsche was a professor of philology (linguistics) when he was only 24.

Some of Nietzsche's works are:

- ▶ *Beyond Good and Evil*
- ▶ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
- ▶ *The Twilight of the Idols*
- ▶ *The anti-Christ*
- ▶ *The Gay Science*
- ▶ *Ecce Homo.*

All these works contain the sacred, strange magic we referred to earlier. Sparkling, edgy, brilliant, bizarre and deeply disturbing, they wrestle continually with the question, 'What does it mean to live fully as a human being?' None of these works are systematic. None of them are dull. They contain passages of poetic prose that rival Shakespeare.

A drop of dew? An odour and scent of eternity? Do you not hear it? Do you not smell it? My world has just become perfect, midnight is also noonday, pain is also joy, a curse is also a blessing, the night is also a sun – be gone, or you will learn: a wise man is also a fool.

Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to all woe as well. All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love; if you ever wanted one moment twice, if ever you said: 'You please me, happiness, instant, moment!', then you wanted everything to return! You wanted everything anew, everything eternal, everything chained, entwined together, everything in love, oh that is how you loved the world ...

(Nietzsche, 1986)

The next piece is from *The Gay Science*:

The Thought of Death. It gives me a melancholy happiness to live in the midst of this confusion of streets, of necessities, of voices: how much enjoyment, impatience and desire, how much thirsty life and drunkenness of life comes to light here every moment! And yet it will soon be so still for all these shouting, lively, life-loving people! How everyone's shadow, his gloomy travelling companion stands behind him! It is always as in the last moment before the departure of an emigrant-ship: people have more than ever to say to one another, the hour presses, the ocean with its lonely silence waits impatiently behind all the noise-so greedy, so certain of its prey! And all, all, suppose that the past has been nothing, or a small matter, that the near future is everything: hence this haste, this crying, this self-deafening and self-overreaching!

(Nietzsche, 1882)

Nietzsche's life was a mixture of depth, tragedy, passion and, finally, madness. It is clear from his books that he was a passionate, almost ferocious man who believed that, whether we like it or not, our life, to be authentic, must be one of strife with the world about us and with the world within us. He himself was seriously unwell for most of his life, suffering from acute insomnia and attacks of migraine that left him temporarily blind. In 1889, when he was 45, he had a mental collapse from which he never recovered. For the rest of his life, he was cared for by his sister, Elizabeth. As far as we can tell, his intellectual abilities shrank to the equivalent of a six-year-old child. He once came upon his sister weeping and gently asked her: 'Elizabeth, why are you crying? Are we not happy together?'

A wounded healer.

## Conclusion

At the very beginning of this book, we said:

Philosophy is the asking of difficult and subversive questions.

Now, at the end of this book, we could rephrase this statement:

Philosophy is the asking of simple and subversive questions.

These are simple questions about what is right or wrong – about whether it is possible to find out what is right or wrong. These are simple questions about why people are unhappy – simple questions about how we are living our lives, about whether life is worth living. These are simple questions about truth and falsity.

What happens if we never ask these questions, if we ignore philosophy completely? Can we live like this?

The answer, we believe, is 'yes'. We can indeed go through life without knowing anything at all about philosophy, about the leading figures in philosophy, about the various forms of philosophy. We do not have to question why we live as we do and we certainly do not have to question why the world is the way it is.

But if we do this – that is, if we ignore philosophy – then we are putting ourselves at risk. We will be vulnerable to society's 'power ploys', to manipulation, to false promises, to fanatical ideologies.

Philosophy, far from being an 'ivory-tower' activity, makes us 'streetwise'. It sharpens our mental abilities, makes us alert, makes us alive, empowers us to act, enables us to 'sniff out' falsity and duplicity. For these reasons alone, philosophy needs to be taken seriously.