

A REVIEW OF “LA PHILOSOPHIE BANTU RWANDAISE AE L’ ETRE” BY ALEXIS KAGAME

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Alexis Kagame, a Catholic priest, in his work *La Philosophie Bantou-Rwandaise de L’Etre*, shows that he was one among the African philosophers who tried to develop further Tempels philosophy of force. He worked among the people of Rwanda who were called Kinyarwanda and tried to develop their thought through a linguistic ethno-philosophy modeled on Aristotle’s doctrine of categories. His preoccupation was to show that Bantu metaphysical categories are based on grammatical categories of the Bantu language. According to Njoku (2010), he discovered that *Ntu* is the category of being or the generic meaning of something. This he classified into four:

Muntu (human beings): The human beings spoken of here are not just the living, but the living and the dead. It is a force endowed with intelligence and thus has other forces at his disposal.

Kintu (non-human beings/thing): These are forces that cannot act on their own but require the *Muntu* for command. These include plants, animals, tools etc. They have no will of their own.

Hantu (place and time): It is the force which localizes spatially and temporally every event and every motion. When something happens, it is asked where- this talks of space; or the question of when.

Kuntu (modality). This speaks of the way of being.

From the foregoing, *Ntu* is the unifying notion among all these, even though God does not belong to it. There is an interaction between all these: *Muntu* being a being with intelligence has the consciousness that allows it to use other objects that do not have the same capacity. Thus, *Ikuntu* is at the disposal of *Muntu* for self-actualization. According to Jahn (1958) *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu* are the four categories of African philosophy. All being, all essence, in whatever form it may be conceived, can come under one of the above categories, and nothing can be conceived outside any of these categories. Kagame further emphasized that everything that belongs to any of these four categories are not substances but force. Thus *Ntu* becomes the universal force, which manifests itself in the four categories of being. It is being itself and the cosmic universal force. *Ntu* is the central point from which creation flows. It expressed not the effect of the forces of nature but their being. Since all forces are in constant movement, it would be difficult to see the *Ntu*, however, if all the forces of the universe were put to a halt, then *Ntu* will be revealed.

Alexis Kagame was one of those African thinkers that embraced the work of Placide Tempels with enthusiasm and applied it to his analysis of his concept of being. He thus consolidated the gains of the research of Placide Tempels. This is not to say that Kagame was comfortable with wearing Tempel’s mantel; he went further to explore the sources of Tempels. It is therefore not surprising that most of the criticism levelled against Placide Tempels, basically as regards the absence of a dialogical and written tradition. Although he picked up the legacies of Tempels, he borrowed also from the legacies of Aristotle. As such, Asouzu (2007) avers that he was not content with having found an ontology peculiar to the Bantu, as in Tempels, he made reference to Aristotle and fortified himself with his method. And this is where Masolo (1994) observes Kagame’s borrowing from Aristotle’s categories of being and

Kagame's assertion that there is no significant difference between the Greek and Bantu concepts of being.

Hountondji (1976) argues that the exploration of the Bantou language by Kagame takes him far beyond Tempels, whose theory of vital force, he appreciates even though he found it inadequate. With Kagame African philosophy has moved to a level that has opened an aperture of possibilities of developing a distinctive approach to philosophy in African languages. However, Hountondji criticizes him for developing a philosophy that is intimately associated with cultural nationalism, a collective African philosophy, giving birth to the negritude movement which has suffered several attacks. He wrote,

Indeed Kagame, in spite of the very attractive quality of his analysis and the relative accuracy of some of his sequences, has remained on the whole, the prisoner of an ideological myth, that of a collective African philosophy, which is nothing but a revamped version of Levy-Bruhl's primitive mentality; the imagery subject of a scholarly discourse which one may regret Kagame did not apply to something else. (p. 43).

Furthermore, in his development of the categories of being, the absence of a place for God in Kagame's project of being reveals the limitation of the philosophy; because obviously, he did not establish the non-existence of God.

Another error observable in their thought (Tempels and Kagame) is the generalization of their ideas as though that were the philosophy of the Bantu people. Their philosophies although is Bantu, cannot be taken to represent the entire thought system of the Bantu people. There are micro and macro cultures and these indicate the possibility of differences. These notwithstanding, in Kagame, we find a loud affirmation and promotion of the gains of Tempels' findings.

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