

Malinowski and Philosophy

Petr Skalník

2021

POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

Skalník, Petr, 2021. "Malinowski and Philosophy", in *Bérose - Encyclopédie internationale des histoires de l'anthropologie*, Paris.

URL Bérose : article2478.html

BEROSE Publisher: ISSN 2648-2770

© UMR9022 Héritages (CY Cergy Paris Université, CNRS, Ministère de la culture)/DIRI, Direction générale des patrimoines et de l'architecture du Ministère de la culture. (All rights reserved).

Your use of this article indicates your acceptance of the Bérose site (www.berose.fr) terms and conditions of use, available [here](#).

Visited on 6 October 2024 at 20:41

Bronisław Malinowski, the founder of modern social anthropology, was a philosopher by way of his tertiary education at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. [1] He was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche on the one hand and Ernst Mach on the other. At the height of his brilliant career, he enjoyed a lengthy exchange of views with Bertrand Russell. This chapter will explore the place of philosophy in his innovative contribution, with special emphasis on the relationship between philosophy on one side and science, religion, culture, civilization, war and state on the other. The tension between Malinowski's emphasis on empirical research and his quest for theory building is well reflected in all his writings. Philosophy played an essential part in Malinowski's anthropology, but at the same time Malinowski never attempted to philosophize anthropology and should be seen as opposed to his lifelong friend Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz ('Witkacy'), whose prolific creativity in art and literature was a strong philosophical parallel.

In Kraków, where Malinowski was born in 1884 and where he attended Sobieski Grammar School and the Jagiellonian University, philosophy occupied an important place in his education. In fact, Rev. Stefan Pawlicki, an outstanding philosopher at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, taught Malinowski both at Sobieski and Jagiellonian. Professor Pawlicki's influence on Malinowski was such that, after first studying mathematics and physics, he chose philosophy as his main subject and wrote his doctoral thesis *On the Principle of the Economy of Mind* under Pawlicki's supervision. As Kubica illustrates, Malinowski's conversion happened in the academic year 1904–1905 when, besides the philosophical seminar led by Pawlicki, he attended another philosophical seminar by Maurycy Straszewski, as well as lectures on ethics, introductory philosophy, logics and

dialectics and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. [2] That year he also studied psychology, pedagogy and philology, along with mathematics (among the lectures was theory of analytic functions).

In the next academic year, Malinowski's last at Jagiellonian, he further pursued his philosophical interests (Kubica 1988, 103; Flis 1988, 107). His PhD thesis was completed and his final examination in philosophy and physics took place in 1906. All were evaluated with highest honours, but Malinowski was not awarded the degree until 1908, having spent the time in between with his mother in the Canary Islands in order to improve his bad health. The ceremony took place *sub auspiciis Imperatoris* (under the supervision of the emperor – Franz Josef I of Austria-Hungary) in the Collegium Novum of Jagiellonian University on 7 October 1908. [3]

His doctoral thesis was based on a critical reading of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius. While Pawlicki was a positivist, Maurycy Straszewski, the other philosophy professor in Kraków, was an empirio-criticist in the vein of Mach and Avenarius. Pawlicki, however, respected scientific findings and also moved towards empiricism. It is indeed impossible to know which of the two professors was more influential on Malinowski's decision to write his thesis on the economy of mind. [4] Characteristically, Malinowski's thesis was never published in his lifetime. It appeared in print only in 1980 in Polish (Malinowski 1980) and 1993 in English (Malinowski 1993). It is therefore necessary to trace its influence on Malinowski's anthropology by searching through all his oeuvre and questioning the philosophical ingredients in it. Aside from philosophy proper, the philosophical influence can be traced especially in Malinowski's writing on the methodology of research, sociology, religion, culture and civilization. The two last items are expressed in a particular historiography of Malinowski. In the rest of this chapter I will go eclectically through several of these concrete points, as follows:

- 1) Malinowski's philosophical background: empirio-criticism;
- 2) Malinowski's functionalism, its influence on sociology and other sciences;
- 3) Malinowski and philosophy of language (Wittgenstein);
- 4) Malinowski and religion;
- 5) Malinowski and ethics;
- 6) Malinowski and psychoanalysis;
- 7) Malinowski's philosophy of culture;
- 8) Malinowski's political philosophy.

It was Ernest Gellner (1988, 164–94), both philosopher and anthropologist, who pointed out that Malinowski was facing the same question as the rest of Europe's modern minds: how to make sense of the gap between modern Europeans and their own preindustrial and premodern past on the one hand and the civilizational gulf between modern Europe and the rest of the world on the other, which in his time became evident with increasing intensity. The latter appeared to modern Europeans to be as backward as their own past. Gellner operates with two ways of grasping of the modern chasm: Hegel's historical approach and

the positivist approach. The former preaches a teleology of history (a historic plan) achieved by mechanisms residing inside the world and not by the external forces of God or similar.

The positivist approach, on the contrary, put forward knowledge as the prime mover, not history. Because of the priority of knowledge, the modern Western cognitive method is superior to both premodern European and non-European cognitive styles. 'Positive' spirit is the highest and most powerful of the methods of gaining knowledge. The question is why. Gellner stresses experience (in Latin *empiria*) as the sovereign tool of knowledge, superior to any transcendental explanations. The impartiality of the empiricist option clears the road for a cosmopolitan view of humankind. Besides, the historical approach was laden with the quest for reconstruction as the key to the explanation of the present.

Gellner argues that Malinowski's predicament was resolved by his adherence to the teachings of Ernst Mach because Mach advocated the explanation of the world as made out of observable facts. Knowledge does not speculate about the world, it is, in Andrzej Flis's words, 'active adaptation, a practical-vital activity', 'a response to biological human needs', 'attained by the least effort' (Flis 1988, 115). This Gellner calls the 'Pragmatist Assumption', which complements positivism. Gellner concludes that Malinowski's thought 'was indeed pervaded, even dominated, by both the Positivist and the Pragmatist Assumptions' (Gellner 1988, 175). The response was Malinowski's anthropology, whose synchronist functionalism is its philosophical base, aimed against the fragmentary and atomistic Frazerian study of survivals. Another philosophical base for Malinowski was holism. Malinowski lumped these philosophical elements together so that they enable one to see humankind as a biological and social whole. Malinowski, then, had established anthropology as the integral science of humanity.

But Malinowski did not have a specialized biological education; he was never educated in biology, zoology or physical anthropology. I would maintain that his main concern was not so much the constitution of a multifield anthropology straddling biological, cultural and social directions, but the creation of a new anthropology based on a different philosophical base, that of a 'functional view of cognition' borrowed from Mach (Gellner 1988, 177).

It is, of course, not incidental that the 'second positivism' of Malinowski's student years coexisted with modernism, in Poland a special brand called 'Young Poland'. And as mentioned above, Malinowski was so much under its spell that he decided to devote his life to (positivist) science rather than to art. This is an apparent paradox. His friendship with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, better known as 'Witkacy', was decisive here because the multifaceted artistic talent of Witkacy functioned as an unwitting challenge to Malinowski. In a way, the more the two knew each other, the more Malinowski tried to escape from Witkacy's influence (Skalník 1995). Malinowski's diaries, as compared to some of Witkacy's writings, are ample evidence for this divergent development, which reached its climax in a row over loyalties to scholarship and the fatherland. The news of the outbreak of World War I reached Malinowski and Witkacy while they were in Australia. While Malinowski, an Austrian subject, chose to proceed with his anthropological research and departed for New

Guinea, Witkacy, who came to Australia with Malinowski as his artist-assistant, decided to uphold his duty as a Russian citizen and left to fight on the front (against Germany and Austria). Witkacy opposed Malinowski philosophically and ethically. He was opposed to empirio-criticism and already in his 'Unproductive Dreams' ('Marzenia improduktywne', in Witkiewicz 1977) he 'attacked the monistic vision of reality and Mach in what was a vicious and rather dilettante attack' (Flis 1988, 114). Witkacy, in one of his plays written after the break with Malinowski, attacks Malinowski's scientific/scientistic theory of religion. Through the mouth of the clan chief Aparura, Witkacy charged: 'It does not matter that Malinowski, this damned Anglicized, uncontrollable dreamer, has investigated us. Totems are true, no matter what scientists write about them' (Witkiewicz 1972, 553). Flis explained that, 'irrespective of how prosaic needs may be satisfied by religion [...], it constitutes a sphere of spiritual experiences irreducible to psycho-physical needs. No interpretation or description can shake this autonomy' (1988, 124–5).

The moral, philosophical dilemma continued after World War I. When after the war the renewed Poland, whose citizenship Malinowski accepted, called him to a professorship in Kraków, he declined with reference to his duty towards science. He wanted to finish writing up the results of his research in New Guinea and to keep a modest lectureship at the London School of Economics, as that job gave him enough free time and financial means to concentrate on his writing. Much later, Malinowski departed for a sabbatical year to the US as a British citizen in 1938, but once Poland and Britain entered war with Germany he decided to stay in the US in order to pursue his career and especially to finish his lifetime ambition, a book on the 'scientific theory of culture'. [5] Witkacy returned from the Russian front and from 1917 stayed back in Poland while continuing to write plays and novels, and even published a philosophical treatise. He became a famous, though controversial, modernist painter. Over the years he tried to continue corresponding with Malinowski (Witkiewicz 1981), but the 'Bronio' of their youth was now Professor Malinowski, who no longer shared the world of his erstwhile bosom friend. Witkacy committed suicide when he learned that Soviet Russia had invaded Poland on 18 September 1939.

In the case of Malinowski, his self-imposed vocation as a scientist – or more precisely his ambition to become the prime agent of the anthropologization of ethnology in Britain and to create a new scientific discipline of social or sociocultural anthropology – had preference above all. Perhaps paradoxically, Malinowski's empiricist and positivist response to his inability to become a famous author or artist did not diminish his quest for artistic success. He still cherished art above science and tried to write his monographs, chapters, forewords and articles in a literary style. In this he is a precursor of Clifford Geertz, who some fifty years later came up with the suggestion that anthropology is a text, a sort of new literary genre.

The explanation of this lasting tension in Malinowski's anthropology is also philosophical because positivism went along with modernism, at least in Poland. As Jan Jerschina (1988, 128–48) shows persuasively, Malinowski's intellectual formation took place in the last two

pre-war decades, when positivist and modernist ideas amalgamated. Similar to nineteenth-century Polish romanticism, they were a rejection of Hegel's philosophy of history, which indirectly denied the Poles, at that time without their own statehood, both national subjectivity and history. In the Polish romantic-modernist vision, in contrast to Hegel, the state was to be subordinated to the nation as a cultural community, to be in the service of the people. Malinowski was familiar with both Hegel's philosophy and the Polish poets such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki and Norwid, who were highly valued by the modernist literati and artists. We will see that the philosophy of history and political philosophy were to play an undeniably major role in Malinowski's anthropological writings following Hitler's seizing of power in Germany. Jerschina argued that it is impossible to determine which of the two – positivism or modernism – was more decisive in the formation of Malinowski's personality. Polish modernism was marked by the critique of Hegel's panlogism and his hierarchical philosophy of history; by historiosophic pessimism (which included decadentism and perception of the decline of modern [European] civilization); interest in the essence of culture as an autonomous entity embracing folk culture, Eastern cultures and aestheticism; fascination with natural beauty, sex and eroticism; a focus on the individual as a monad acting independently in history and society; interest in religion, mysticism, myth and magic; humanism; and democratism, which rejects aristocratic cosmopolitanism, but expounds cosmopolitanism, which appreciates cultural values of others and rejects racism (Jerschina 1988, 130). Is this a list of Malinowski's inclinations and values? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that he was well aware of these traits of Polish modernism, and no, in that he did not apply them unreservedly. If yes, then he was selective in putting different emphases on each trait in his work and life. For example, if we analyse his diaries we will identify many traits of Polish modernism in them. There is pessimism, vanity, national nostalgia and even some racist remarks. But we would hardly find any references to democratism, patriotism, cosmopolitanism or an aversion to Hegel's historical conception. They will be found in his academic writing, especially those texts which were written after the National Socialists took power in Germany. At any rate I do not see Malinowski as an agent of Polish modernism. Jerschina concluded that more of Malinowski's theoretical and methodological ideas 'were rooted in modernism than were based on the positivist method, categories, way of thinking and value system' (1988, 145).

Another question, however, is the extent to which Malinowski's sociocultural anthropology was a manifestation of modernity and tolerant, if not altogether egalitarian, cosmopolitanism. Here I would argue that Malinowski was very much part of the cosmopolitan modernity. With his pioneering field researches in Oceania and Africa and his theories of various aspects of human behaviour, he globalized the perception of society and culture by proving that 'savages' are part of the modern world.

The evaluators of Malinowski's contribution to anthropology and sociology often dismiss his theoretical input. My position is close to Gellner's in that I firmly believe Malinowski has never been usurped as the archpriest of social anthropology; his position as a founder of the discipline is continuously matched by the inspiration it has exerted on generations of

anthropologists since. How many of us today spend our precious time studying philosophical currents such as positivism, empirio-criticism, scientism, pragmatism or holism? They may be part of the history of human thought, yet we (at least those who are interested in authentic knowledge) still insist on spending long periods of time in the field collecting data about what people do and think they do. We may be not aware of how past philosophy influences us, yet we want to know how isolated data make sense and what the purpose is of this or that cultural feature, to gain as complete picture as possible.

Indeed, today we are more aware of the intricacies of producing data as part of the process of cultural construction – we are much more aware of contradictions and conflicts which contribute equally ‘well’ to the functioning of the social whole, as do the benign cultural features. The wholes are not bounded any more, nevertheless they are ‘semiautonomous social fields’ to follow Sally Falk Moore. But there would be no such concepts were it not for Malinowski, who first clearly formulated his crude but essential theoretical and methodological functionalism. Science is a continuous process of overcoming previous truths and proposing new ones. In anthropology this is doubly valid.

Malinowski instigated a revolution, saying ethnology was to be substituted by anthropology, which not only suggests new theories of society, but does it by an altogether different method. This method includes synchronicism, which means that the data collected about the present are supreme above those which relate to the past. Synchronicism is closely related to Mach’s empirio-criticism, discussed at length in Malinowski’s 1906 dissertation. It is part and parcel of the function conceived as the unit of least effort. This is the meaning of ‘economy of mind’ for anthropology and other social sciences, of which Malinowski at the time of writing the thesis had as yet no certain idea. However, economy of mind concerns all science (i.e., scientific knowledge as such and its universal validity and applicability). Thornton, in his discussion of Malinowski’s thesis and his vast review of Frazer’s *Totemism and Exogamy*, indirectly points out that both Malinowski via Mach’s positivism and Frazer through his comparative study of texts agree that the common denominator of science is practical and intellectual objectification of nature which works, that is, which is true (cf. Thornton and Skalník 1993, 27–8).

It is intriguing that Mach in his popularizing science stressed the vital importance of comparison in science and thought of ethnology as being an eminently comparative discipline (Mach 1898, 238–9; cf. Thornton with Skalník 1993, 28–9). Andrzej Flis, a contemporary Cracovian philosopher, concludes that Malinowski drew mostly on these three philosophical sources: empirio-criticism (mostly Mach), scientism (Pearson) and neo-Kantianism. Mach’s philosophy influenced Malinowski in that he searched for functional explanations rather than causal ones and that he strived for an understanding of culture. The concept of function was for Malinowski the main tool of science. From its mathematical meaning Malinowski proceeded to fructify the notion of function by psychological ingredients in his studies on primitive beliefs and forms of social order (Malinowski 1915), finally arriving at the functional theory of culture and society. Flis further argues that

Malinowski views scientific knowledge as ‘a practical activity of life’ which is ‘an instrument of the satisfaction of human needs’ (Flis 1988, 126). Thus he implements Mach’s thesis on the instrumental character of science and creates his own brand of theory of culture. We will come back to the philosophical foundations of Malinowski’s ‘scientific theory of culture’ later in this chapter.

Let us proceed with Flis’s arguments about Mach’s influence on Malinowski. Flis believes that Malinowski was inspired by Mach, but that it is impossible to find ‘empirio-critical or positivist theses’ in the functionalism of Malinowski’s anthropology. ‘Malinowski adopted little, but transformed much’, writes Flis (1988, 126), and points out the ‘metaphysical’ explanations at which Malinowski allegedly arrives in his *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935) and *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (1944). Flis also objects to branding Malinowski as empiricist because not everything in Malinowski’s work boils down to experience, and quotes from Malinowski’s review of Frazer’s *Totemism and Exogamy*: ‘The fewer hypothetical assumptions and postulates to be found in a given description of facts, the greater the value of this description, but because every precise description of facts requires precise concepts, and these can be provided only by theory, every description and classification must thus be based of necessity on a theoretical formulation’ (Flis 1988, 126; quoted from Ludwik Krzyżanowski’s translation in Thornton and Skalnić 1993, 127).

Gellner shows quite persuasively that Malinowski was a ‘Zeno of Kraków’ who showed that the present controls the past, whether in Europe or in the Trobriands. ‘The past is another country [...] forever hidden and inaccessible’ (Gellner 1988, 178). Malinowski’s ahistoricism or synchronicism relies on four pillars, one of which, according to Gellner, is the Zenonic argument that ‘any system is responsive only to contemporary constraints, which can and do act on it, but it cannot be responsive to the past or the future. [...] Hence any system can only be explained synchronically’ (185). Gellner sees the real achievement of synchronist functionalism in ‘its doctrine of stability’, which required anthropological fieldworkers ‘to account for the present situation in terms of contemporary constraints’ and ‘*obliged them to treat stability as a problem which requires explanation*’ (187, Gellner’s emphasis). Thus, Malinowski’s great discovery is that the present should be explained by the present, in the same vein as Durkheim’s tenet that the social should be explained by the social (185). Gellner concluded that the explanatory rigour of anthropology was immensely raised by Malinowski’s ‘synchronistic approach’ (188).

Let us now look more closely at Malinowski’s ‘scientific theory of culture’. Malinowski placed ‘culture’ very high on his conceptual hierarchy. The only competitor, as I have tried to show, was ‘science’. On 5 January 1910, Malinowski wrote to his tutor Pawlicki: ‘I am very keen on going to England for at least a year, for there, it seems to me, culture has reached its highest standard’ (Ellen et al. 1988, 204). Jerschina explained this keen interest in culture:

Some theoretical conclusions, notably his interest in the biological and economic foundations of culture, and some aspects of methodology, are positivist in origin. His concept of culture as a relatively autonomous

entity, his anthropocentrism, the wide scope of anthropological interest, his anti-Hegelianism, his whole underlying meta-theory, all of this is modernist in origin. (1988, 146)

There is a hidden controversy behind Malinowski's lifetime ambition to create a truly scientific theory of culture. On the one hand there is hardly any anthropologist who would deny that Malinowski's revolutionary feat consisted of the method of long-term intensive fieldwork. On the other his theoretical contribution about culture, a concept which he consistently put forward throughout his life, has been belittled or even dismissed. I think that Malinowski's culturology, if we may use such a term here, should receive more attention and be put into the context of his overall oeuvre. An additional paradox rears its head here: Malinowski is known as one of the founders of social anthropology. Yet his main thrust was to come to grips with culture as its basic concept. That, of course, put him into contrast with Radcliffe-Brown, the other founder, who was far from any engagement with the theory of culture and who saw anthropology as comparative sociology or the science of social systems.

Re-reading Malinowski today is especially needed if we want to understand better why Malinowski remains our guru. Andrzej Paluch rightly stresses that Malinowski 'viewed anthropology as a science of culture'. In saying so, however, Paluch (and I hasten to join him in this) means that Malinowski first submitted the existing theories of culture to criticism before he posited his own. This he did in a review article on Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy*, published in Polish during his early London years and in his review of Durkheim's *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. In the first pages of the review article, after praising Frazer for various abilities and results, Malinowski stresses that a 'host of scholars' armed with Frazer's 'splendidly collected material [...] will perhaps often be able to formulate more precise and more scientific theories than the original author' (1993, 125). He then declares unequivocally that 'the theories set forth by Professor Frazer in the present work cannot stand up to serious criticism. [...] They are extremely interesting from a methodological point of view because they possess all the advantages and defects of the English anthropological school.' Further, he claims that Frazer's writing on totemism suffers from 'lack of method' (126-7). Malinowski's overt target is evolutionism on the one hand and implicitly positivism on the other:

The fewer hypothetical assumptions and postulates to be found in a given description of facts, the greater the value of this description, but because every precise description of facts requires precise concepts, and these can be provided only by theory, every description and classification must thus be based of necessity on a theoretical formulation. (1993, 126-7)

Malinowski then proceeds with a description of totemic beliefs and ceremonies, and concludes with a 'fundamental reproach' of Frazer's method, as he

does not give us a clear and objective picture of the state of things, independently of any hypotheses or theories. On the contrary, when describing facts Frazer constantly employs concepts drawn from purely hypothetical and, as it were, personal assumptions and dogmas. He

makes no clear demarcation between facts and inferences from facts;
there are no clearly noted assumptions. (1993, 135)

Instead, Malinowski reveals his own position, in a way a philosophical view of science, no doubt influenced by Mach's empirio-criticism:

[...] the aims of exact science do not consist in constructing theories and hypotheses concerning areas beyond the limits of experience, but rather in an exact and accurate description of facts. The interest of an exact scientist should focus on understanding and penetrating the mechanism and essence of social phenomena as they exist at present and are accessible to observation, and not in order that these phenomena should serve as a key to solving the riddle of a prehistoric past about which we cannot know anything empirically. (1993, 140)

And he continues with his credo:

All of this would be a banal truth for a natural scientist, but in the sociological sciences the interesting but inexact chats about the origins of various social institutions and beliefs should be replaced at last by less attractive but more exact investigations of sociological laws. [...] Methodological philosophizing without a basis in facts is as far off the mark as the uncritical collecting of facts and the construction of often nonessential theories. (1993, 140–41)

What is to be pointed out is Malinowski's identification with 'exact science', which studies social phenomena 'at present' and excludes from the realm of science anything which does not originate from empirical observation. Thus Malinowski's emphasis on the present as the departing point of any social research, what I would call 'presentism' (for which he would become famous at the height of his career), is clearly discernible in 1910 when he began his studies of sociology in London. Anthropology (although he does not operate with the term as yet) is part of the 'sociological sciences', which investigate 'sociological laws' and are opposed to 'methodological philosophizing' and 'uncritical collecting of facts'.

Going into the question of language (as part of culture), Malinowski is contrasted with Wittgenstein. It was again Gellner, in his posthumously published book, poetically entitled *Language and Solitude* (1998), who uses Malinowski's method and philosophy in order to prove once again that Wittgenstein's language philosophy leads us astray into the loneliness of circular arguments. The breakthrough, of course, is fieldwork and the study of concrete languages as specimens for the proof that learning a 'native' language gives insight into the 'native point of view' (Malinowski 1935, 326). Language is part of the broader language of culture and evidence of the philosophical levels that each concrete language and culture displays (Malinowski 1923). But, not being a specialist on language, I choose to refrain from further comment.

A more complex situation obtains with Malinowski and psychoanalysis. As is well known, the heyday of Malinowskian anthropology coincided with heyday of psychoanalysis. Malinowski was befriended by Marie Bonaparte, one of the actors in the interwar psychoanalytic

movement. Though an ardent proponent of science, Malinowski experimented with the application of psychoanalysis in anthropology. As a fresh reader in social anthropology at the University of London, he published a long article on 'mother-right' family and the Oedipus complex in Freud's journal *Imago*, which specialized in the application of psychoanalysis in the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) (1924). Later he published a study *The Father in Primitive Society* (1927) as well as the monograph *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927). Malinowski draws on psychoanalytic reasoning, namely the Oedipus complex, when he tries to understand the stability of family in matrilineal societies, such as those of the Trobriands, in contrast to patrilineal societies.

In brief, Malinowski concludes that whereas in patrilineal societies the Oedipus complex means to kill the father and marry the mother, in matrilineal society the wish is to marry the sister and kill the mother's brother (1924, 275). Kinship in his time was seen as a relationship between sexes. Malinowski, however, was no biological determinist, and Freud's psychoanalysis, a great fashion at the time, seemed to him to be a possible alternative path to better grasping of interconnections between sexuality, kinship and family. The strategic goal of Malinowski's anthropology was to offer the world a new theory of culture that would take into account the vast diversity of cultural forms. By submitting to critical analysis Freud's theory of emergence of culture through patricide by joint forces of frustrated sons (i.e., the Oedipus complex), Malinowski opened the way to his own theory, which would comprise political arrangements, legal norms and even religion.

Malinowski proceeded comparatively. On the one hand he compares Freud's psychologism with the principles of social sciences such as anthropology and sociology, and on the other he systematically compares socialization and the development of sexually conditioned behaviour in Western societies with so-called savage societies, using the Trobriand example especially. A specific framework of his analysis is another comparison: mother-right and matrilineal Trobrianders with patriarchal societies of the European (i.e., Western) type. Freud's theory comes out of the comparison as Eurocentric, moreover anchored in wealthy layers of the advanced capitalist societies. Malinowski admits that Freud discovered new dimensions of human psychology in the relations between members of a nuclear family, but underlines that from observation of 'contemporary savages' it is possible to derive that 'family' differs in various communities and even within different strata of the same community.

Malinowski asks: do the conflicts, passions and inclinations take place in the family according to its structure or do they remain the same for the whole of humanity? He answers that the structure is different in various societies and therefore the nuclear complex of the family cannot be constant in all human races and groups, but must change according to the family structure. Malinowski rightly remarks that data about modern European society do not have the same value as those which he himself collected by way of anthropological fieldwork in Melanesia.

Therefore, he calls for anthropological research in modern Europe and explicitly writes that

it is imperative that European data is processed in the same way, as if they were studied with the same methods and judged from the same anthropological viewpoint. In *Totem and Taboo*, however, Freud speculatively supposes a universal origin of culture: totemism and the prohibition of incest, exogamy and sacrifice on the basis of the drama of primeval patricide. Thus Freud tries to explain psychologically a whole range of anthropological categories, for which he has no comparative data originating from authentic fieldwork. His 'terrain' material comes exclusively from psychiatric-psychoanalytical research of the middle and upper strata in Vienna and Central Europe of early twentieth century. Malinowski writes that he found no consistent reference concerning the social milieu in any of the psychoanalytical descriptions. It is evident, thought Malinowski, that children's conflicts in richly furnished bourgeois rooms would not be same as those in the dwelling of a peasant or one-room flat of the poor working man. Therefore Malinowski believes that it is necessary to study lower, less cultivated layers of society, where things are called by their real names, where a child is in constant contact with the parents, lives and eats with them in one room, sleeps on the same bed and where the parent has no 'substitute' who would complicate the image of the family. A substantial part of the monograph makes a gradual comparative analysis of the stages of childhood and adolescence in Melanesia and in modern Western society. It points out that the world of adults in the rich strata of civilized Western society creates in children reflexes of subordination, sentiments of shame and perceptions of indecency in children, which they would otherwise not feel. On the contrary, childhood, adolescence and adult life in Melanesia take place without cover-up, shame or other types of hypocrisy. In many respects Malinowski agrees with Freud, in other very important points he parts ways with psychoanalysis.

Gellner discounts the scientific ambitions of psychoanalysis. For him, psychoanalysis is not far from religion. Yet both Malinowski and Gellner admit that religion is an indispensable partner to science. In his published lectures, entitled *The Foundations of Faith and Morals* (1936), Malinowski declares that a sane social life must be based on a credible religious value system. However, that does not mean that all members of a society regulated by religious faith and ethics have to be bigoted sectarians or even mere practising believers. He himself is unable to accept revealed religion of any sort. But even an agnostic, underlines Malinowski, must live through faith. In the case of those 'pre-war' rationalists and liberals like himself, it was the belief in humanity and progress. This allowed him to work for the progress of science and the formation of a community of free men. This faith was shaken by the war and its consequences, as was that of Christians. Science has suffered because it was harnessed for political and party purposes, with catastrophic consequences. As a rationalist and someone who believes in the development of human personality and a liberal community of free men, he finds himself in the same unfortunate position as a believing Christian. It is high time, Malinowski argues, that the old, artificial animosity between science and religion should be put aside, and both become allies in the struggle against the common enemy. Here he clearly hints at National Socialism, fascism and communism – in brief, all kinds of totalitarianism (Malinowski 1986, 145–6). Malinowski's philosophy culminates in his political and social

philosophy, expressed in his articles on war and the book *Freedom and Civilization* (1944). It was passionately written during the last year of his life, culminating in the few months between the attack on Pearl Harbour and April 1942. Before he could make the final touches to the manuscript, he suddenly died in May 1942. The book has five parts. The first is a political prelude, followed by three parts of scientific analysis of freedom, its meaning and as a gift of culture. The fourth part, especially, puts freedom into the framework of culture and civilization. The exposition of Malinowski's political philosophy culminates in the fifth part, entitled 'The Real Battlefields of Freedom'. To Malinowski, freedom is closely connected with democracy and 'proto-democracy'. The latter is typical of primitive tribal cultures which are 'essentially democratic': 'Democracy as a cultural system is the constitution of a community which is composed of collaborating groups [...] a more fundamental definition of the concept of democracy implies the maximum of discipline with the least amount of coercion' (Malinowski 1947, 228). Democracy implies autonomy of institutions, which in turn comprises all other principles of democracy. Malinowski introduces the terms 'tribe-nation' and 'tribe-state'. The first means a culturally united people, the second the political expression of centralization. Power as a concept resides in the tribe-state or nation-state. Totalitarianism is not a return to savagery as savagery is proto-democratic. Totalitarianism is the

misuse of power in its modern technological developments, through the use of brute force, indoctrination and communication. The elimination of totalitarianism is not a problem of individual psychology or psychoanalysis, such as the elimination of aggressiveness, sadism or pugnacity. The end of totalitarianism can only be achieved through the elimination and prevention of the use of violence and the technique of the *coup d'état*, of the irresponsible armament of partial groups of humanity, and of lawlessness where law must play an active role. (1947, 241–2)

Malinowski shows that war is the expression of the excessive sovereignty of states. He therefore suggests the limitation of sovereignty, surrendered to an international body such as the United Nations:

In a democratic culture, the state functions as a guarantor of peace, as arbiter in internal disputes and as controller. [...] Only when a state, primitive or otherwise, mobilizes part of its resources for conquest and political expansion, which usually also implies economic exploitation, are such phenomena as war, slavery, oppression, and tyranny not only possible but as a rule inevitable. (1947, 271)

His political credo is perhaps best expressed in the following quotation:

Political sovereignty must never be associated with nationhood, since this produces the dangerous explosive of nationalism. Indeed, political power, insofar as it is centralized, must be vested in a hierarchy of federal units. Starting from local autonomy, it must proceed through administrative provinces, states and regional federations to a world-wide superstate. (1947, 274)

To conclude, war may have some positive aspects, but it is basically organized crime. It is a large-scale abrogation of freedom: 'one of the most destructive elements in human civilization', which 'has played but a small constructive and creative part in the history of culture'. (1947, 277)

Conclusion

The relationship between Malinowski and philosophy was close, but he kept a sound distance from it by stressing the scientific nature of anthropology. In other words, Malinowski was well aware that philosophy is a non-scientific ingredient helping to make science, in his case sociocultural anthropology, more theoretical, but firmly grounded in the empirical data gained through field research. Malinowski was inspired by philosophy in his writings on religion, ethics, war and politics, and perhaps most importantly culture. But again, he never indulged in philosophizing without empirical data. Philosophy was an auxiliary for him, a methodological tool, but certainly not an aim in itself. Philosophy helped Malinowski to be both a great researcher and theorist. Unlike other authors, I maintain that Malinowski remains an essential inspiration for anthropology and other social sciences because he kept contact with philosophy throughout his career.

References

- Ellen, R., E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, eds. 1988. *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flis, A. 1988. 'Cracow Philosophy of the Beginning of the Twentieth Century and the Rise of Malinowski's Scientific Ideas'. In *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*, edited by R. Ellen, E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, 105–127. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gellner, E. 1988. 'Zeno of Cracow' or 'Revolution of Nemi' or 'The Polish Revenge: A Drama in Three Acts'. In *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*, edited by R. Ellen, E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, 164–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gellner, E. 1998. *Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski, and the Habsburg Dilemma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jerschina, J. 1988. 'Polish Culture of Modernism and Malinowski's Personality'. In *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*, edited by R. Ellen, E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, 128–48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kubica, G. 1988. 'Malinowski's Years in Poland'. In *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*, edited by R. Ellen, E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, 89–104. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Mach, E. 1898. *Popular Scientific Lectures*. Chicago: Open Court Publications.
- Malinowski, B. 1915. *Wierzenia pierwotne i formy ustroju społecznego: Pogląd na genezę religii ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem totemizmu* (Primitive beliefs and forms of social order: A view on the genesis of religion with general consideration of totemism). Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności.
- Malinowski, B. 1923. 'The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages'. In *The Meaning of Meaning*, edited by C. K. Ogden and A. I. Richards, 451–510. London.
- Malinowski, B. 1924. 'Mutterrechtliche Familie und Ödipus-Komplex'. *Imago: Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* 10: 228–77. In English published in 1924 under the title 'Psycho-Analysis and Anthropology'. *Psyche: An Annual of General and Linguistic Psychology* 4: 293–332. Reprint in 1995 by Routledge, Thoemmes Press.
- Malinowski, B. 1935. *Coral Gardens and Their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*, 2 vols. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Malinowski, B. 1936. *The Foundations of Faith and Morals: An Anthropological Analysis of Primitive Beliefs and Conduct with Special Reference to the Fundamental Problems of Religion and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malinowski, B. 1944. *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Malinowski, B. 1947 (1944). *Freedom and Civilization*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Malinowski, B. 1980. *Dzieła*, vol. 1. Warsaw: PIW.
- Malinowski, B. 1986. *Bronisław Malinowski: Schriften zur Anthropologie*. Edited by F. Kramer. Frankfurt: Syndikat.
- Malinowski, B. 1993. *The Early Writings of Bronisław Malinowski*. Edited by R. Thornton and Skalník. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mucha, J. 1988. 'Malinowski and the Problems of Contemporary Civilisation'. In *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*, edited by R. Ellen, E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, 149–63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paluch, A. 1988. 'Malinowski's Theory of Culture'. In *Malinowski Between Two Worlds: The Polish Roots of an Anthropological Tradition*, edited by R. Ellen, E. Gellner, G. Kubica and J. Mucha, 65–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skalník, P. 1982. 'Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942): Een argonaut uit Kraków'. In *Beroep antropoloog: Vreemde volken, visies en vooroordelen*, edited by G. Banck and B. van Heijningen, 29–41. Amsterdam/Brussels: Intermediair.

Skalník, P. 1991. 'Malinowski on War, Nationalism and the State'. In *Ideen zu einer Integralen Anthropologie (Festschrift for K. Mácha)*, edited by S. Bonk, 545–69. Munich: BB Verlag.

Skalník, P. 1993. 'Malinowski, la guerre, le nationalisme et l'État'. *Gradhiva: Revue d'histoire et d'archives de l'anthropologie* (Paris) 13: 3–19.

Skalník, P. 1995. 'Bronisław Kasper Malinowski and Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz: Science Versus Art in the Conceptualisation of Culture'. In *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Contributions to the History of European Anthropology*, edited by H. Vermeulen and A. Roldán, 128–41. London: Routledge.

[1] This essay was first published in in the volume *Philosophy and Anthropology. Border Crossing and Transformations* (2013), edited by Ananta Kumar Giri and John Clammer, London, Anthem Press, pp. 167–183 (ISBN: 9780857285126). It was conceived and partly written in 2008 while I was CEEPUS fellow in the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. It was completed in 2012 while I was guest at the Institute of African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany. I am grateful to these institutions and my colleagues for criticism and support.

[2] His essay on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* originated from this course with Pawlicki (see Thornton and Skalník 1993, 67–88).

[3] Andrzej Flis's edition of documents concerning this extraordinary academic and social event was published as appendix 1 in: Ellen et al. 1988, 195–200.

[4] In a way, by choosing anthropology as his subject, Malinowski pragmatically applied 'economy of mind' (least effort) to his own career. By sociologizing ethnology, he managed in almost no time to revolutionize (make obsolete) ethnology and establish social anthropology as an independent discipline, at least in Britain.

[5] Those who would interpret this as a lack of national feelings would be wrong, as Malinowski proved more than once that he cherished his ethnic Polishness and was proud of his acquired British status. Not without interest is the fact that his beloved mother, according to contemporaries the main source of his early successes in Kraków, had to die in comparative poverty alone while her son was carrying out his fieldwork on the other side of the globe.