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GWYNETH HENDERSON: In this week's "University Report" sociology, psychology, social anthropology and philosophy -- and if you're wondering how we can say anything useful about all four disciplines in one programme the answer is we can by going to the University of Malawi where they all belong in one department -- and its umbrella name is the Department of Human Behaviour! And it isn't just an administrative convenience having them in the one unit as you'll see in a minute. Of course the University of Malawi is young and didn't have too strong a colonial academic heritage to live down but even so I can see the purists shuddering too at a new African university having such an esoteric subject as philosophy when there is so much to do for development. Well the head of the Department of Human Behaviour, Professor Gordon Hunnings -- himself a philosopher -- has been discussing with Douglas Lamb this and all other issues concerned with this new grouping of sociology, psychology, social anthropology and philosophy into Human Behaviour, and first Douglas Lamb asked Professor Hunnings how and why this integration has taken place.

PROFESSOR HUNNINGS: First of all let me say something historical about this that the original idea of the human behaviour department, this kind of grouping of subjects, came from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi, Dr. Ian Michael, right in the early days of the foundation of this university. He was an enthusiast for this idea because he saw, I think correctly, that there was this area of common concern on which these three disciplines bear and not only that but there was a considerable overlap between the various subjects that made up this type of grouping. Simple examples come readily to mind: sociology and social psychology and social anthropology share a very considerable no man's land between them where each one of them can stake out an empire only to be challenged by the others. And instead of challenging we've tried to get them to cooperate and employ their different methodologies, because we must recognise the difference in methodological approach of the

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disciplines, but to employ these different methodologies to illuminate the common area. That's one thing I think is important. It's a process of mutual support and reinforcement. Other considerations come to mind as well. Psychology and philosophy grew up together and for a very considerable time indeed, until comparatively recently, they were indistinguishable. Psychology became increasingly experimental and naturally has gone its own way but even so, in spite of these divergencies there are theories of mind, problems like the mind/body problem and others, which are again still a no man's land and on which both the philosopher and the psychologist might have something interesting to say. And not always be sure that what he's saying is either philosophy or psychology. So I would say that what we do is to use inter-disciplinary courses where we can, frankly recognise the differences between the disciplines as well and develop independent subjects in their own right in addition to the inter-disciplinary sort of experimental subjects that we offer.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

You stress the different methodological approaches of these academic disciplines. Does this mean that a greater stress is put on theory as preparation for further study? Or is the course more problem orientated?

PROFESSOR HUNNINGS:

No, I would thank that your first suggestion is more nearly correct. We are very much concerned with theoretical problems though quite naturally we don't want to develop an ivory tower approach to the social sciences and we do try very hard to orientate the courses towards not only practical problems but African practical problems. This is important. But the theoretical framework is also extremely important and this is something I'd like to talk about a little. Africa is slowly sinking under the weight of questionnaires which are being administered in all kind of fields. I've absolutely no objection to this as a technique, as a way of gathering empirical data - it would be difficult to find a better method of doing it - but our studies in the philosophy of science, in the other sciences, have shown that raw facts do not lie about like nuggets to be picked up and arrange themselves into pretty patterns, they have to be fitted into a categorical framework before they begin to make sense, before you can begin to use them for purposes of explanation. And this at the moment is the principle weakness of sociology I would say - that too little attention is being given by sociologists to the kind of theoretical framework within which the empirical data is to be fitted. By all means let's have the empirical data, let's solve the short term kinds of problems, what Karl Popper would call the "piecemeal engineering problems" of sociology but we are also concerned with the larger scale problems of what constitutes an explanation of a sociological phenomenon. What it any are the laws of social development and these sorts of problems which are still very important and from which too many sociologists are at the moment shying away and philosophical gad-fly can perhaps annoy them into

PROFESSOR HUNNINGS: - if only to reply to the papers that we write - to tell us what they thin about the structure of society, the nature of social change the relation to history and these sorts of problems which are extremely important.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Well I must say I am convinced - I usually am when it comes to the question of integration. Now philosophers generally imagined to be dreamy impractical people who don't like in the real world - and indeed philosophy as a subject does seem to be rather the odd man out with sociologu, psychology and social anthropology as bedfellows in the new Malawi grouping. Douglas raised this question with Professor Hunnings and this is the philosophers answer.

PROFESSOR HUNNINGS: There's a great deal of misunderstand about the role of a philosopher in the university particularly on the part of non-philosophers. The legend has grown up that philosophers are concerned with particularly abstruse courses of study designed only to replicate themselves. Well if you look at any large teaching department of philosophy at a British university you will find the number of honour students who might b expected professional professional philosophers is very small indeed and that the vast majority of the teaching is aimed at students who are going to be all sorts of things but certainly not philosophers. In other words the courses are designed very often to fit in and illuminate other disciplines in a unique kind of fashion. I'd rather not talk about philosophy in general because one never knows what one is talking about, even if one is a philosopher. But to be rather more specific, people who say that philosophy has no value - the short answer is to say well are you saying that logic is a subject without value, and of course people immediately begin to back-pedal and say well of course I don't mean logic. Well are you saying that philosophy is a science studies for people who are going to be sciontists or even art students who want to know something about the great scientific ideas of the past? Are these valueless? Well, of course not, they say. Well would a historian benefit from a survey of political philosophy? Well, of course he would, and so one can go on like this and we offer all these kinds of courses at the University of Malawi. And in particular we offer a philosophical study of the social sciences concerned with the logic and methodology - particularly of sociology though not exclusively of sociology. We consider the logical structure of the social sciences as sciences. To what extent, if at all, are they to be compared with the natural sciences? Can you adopt the kind of cashal explanation that you do in physics where a mathematical law will serve as a casual explanation? If not, why not? What is the status of experiments in the social sciences since initial conditions cannot be controlled to the same extent as in a laboratory. Nor can you repeat your experiments under ideal conditions, and all these sorts of problems. And this means you have then to

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face up to the problem if the social sciences are sciences they are sciences in their own right, they have their own distinctive methodology, we must look closely into this, at their logical structure. And if I may just go on a little more about this - the other thing I'd like to say about philosophical studies in Africa is that the subject of African traditional values is one that is of considerable importance. These have not only a sociological function in terms of social structure but they do offer an attempt to explain the world, they are a kind of primitive metaphysics and as such are interesting from a philosophical point of view. The conceptual framework which is embodied in African traditional systems is of very great interest and has in fact been studied very little indeed except by social anthropologists and even here there is a great deal that had to be done. This I think is very important. I'm not of course suggesting an uncritical acceptance of traditional schemes of thought but I would point out that although these schemes of thought are not living options for modern men. In the 20th century criticism does presuppose understanding and we have not always done our homework in understanding a right what it is attempted to be said in the systems, what type of explanation is involved, and lump it all together and say it's animistic, it's just a name for our ignorance and a great deal more analysis needs to be done. This could be a source of values for the future because Africa raises not only technical problems that concern the quality of life and the kind of values that we are to embrace and philosophy can contribute to by an analysis of traditional values and by offering alternative schemes that have been suggested by many philosophers of the past.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

Yes, I wanted to take this point further. It's natural and proper for newly independent countries to lay stress on their own particular individual characteristics and obviously for the newly independent countries of Africa this involves laying emphasis on the Africaness of many of their features. Now it's common to talk about the economics of Africa or African social structures. Is it possible at all to talk about African philosophy?

PROFESSOR HUNNINGS:

I would think so. The first thing I would want to say is the the training of a philosopher involves training in a certain kind of critical method of approach to whatever problem you are going to concern yourself with. It is very much concerned with logic in one form or another and logic keeps popping up in all kinds of disguises in courses that aren't, as far as their titles are concerned, at all connected with logic. The logic of religious discourse, for example, is a particular set of problems that may seem only connected with theology but in fact spill over into the area of logic and there is a great deal of common reinforcement here and so with almost any study of African traditional value systems there

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is a great deal to be understood about the logical structures of the kind of ideas that are put together and from the fact that these are sometimes not always consistent and haven't been thought out within some sort of Aristotelian framework we mustn't conclude that they don't have a kind of logic of their own. And the kind of analysis that we would call linguistic analysis that was made fashionable by Wichtenstein in Britain up until his death some twenty years ago and has now been carried on and become a great tradition in his own right. This is something which is certainly relevant to this kind of situation. But the greatest gift that I think a philosopher could bestow upon his students in this country is the art of critical analysis of the method of attack upon whatever problem he is going to concern himself with - submitting to a rational examination of value systems, schemes of belief and so on. This I think is very important. But certainly involved in all this I'm hoping that when Malawian philosophers get into their stride they will certainly undertake without any sense of shame or inadequacy a thorough examination of their own schemes of thought, their own categorial frameworks, their own sets of concepts which have been used in the past to explain the world and to show us, you know, how things operated and what their implications were. This is a huge task which is only just beginning to be appreciated.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

But in the recognition of the role of philosophy, in sharpening up the methodologies of some of the other social science subjects and also in the integrated nature of this human behaviour course - do you think in both these respects the University of Malawi is being something of a pioneer on the continent? Are there similar programmes?

PROFESSOR HUNNINGS:

Not I think to the same extent as here, there are, of course, I think interdisciplinary approaches in all kinds of different African universities, but not I think quite like the human behaviour department here. People will often say that can't you get this kind of cooperation by having separate departments. This is not as easy as it might seem because once you get separate departments they are very much concerned with their own particular field of study and inevitably this leaves little time for discussing with other departments how to integrate courses that seem to offer this kind of approach to an integrated type of study. There is an advantage I think in having it under one department. We have one experimental course given by Dr. Chillivamba which I defy anyone to classify as either sociology or psychology. The examiners in both sociology and psychology have expressed their interest in the course because it is right in the middle of the sort of area of overlap between the two. And this type of approach I think we are pioneering and I would like to see it spread.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Gordon Hunnings, Professor of Philosophy and head of the Department of Human Behaviour at the University of Malawi was talking to Douglas Lamb in Blantyre.

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