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Title: **N.P. van Wyk Louw and R.A.F. Hoernlé: Notes on Liberal and Nationalist Discourse in South Africa, 1939-1955.**

by: **Gerrit Olivier**

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# N.P. VAN WYK LOUW AND R.F.A. HOERNLÉ
# Notes on Liberal and Nationalist Discourse in South Africa, 1939-1953

## 1. Introduction

The contribution of the poet N.P. van Wyk Louw (1906-1970) to the debate on Afrikaans literature, politics and cultural life has been seminal in many respects. Although different aspects of Louw's thought need to be viewed as a whole in order to understand what I wish to call his "cultural project", his writings on nationalism will be the focus of this paper, which I wish to present as a minor contribution to the history of ideas in South Africa. The influence of the essays on nationalism collected in *Lojale verset* (1939), *Berigte te velde* (1939) and in various later publications, most notably *Liberale nasionalisme* (1958; all three collected in Louw 1986) is perversely illustrated by the fact that for decades, they did not become the object of scholarly scrutiny or critical discussion while, at the same time, Louw's central ideas gradually became assimilated into Afrikaans discourse on nationalism, literature and the relationship between the two. For example, Van Heerden's (1969) lecture on literature and nationalism, given thirty years after *Lojale verset* and *Berigte te velde*, is no more than a restatement of the ideas contained in Louw's early essays. The status conferred on Louw's political ideas by the fact that he also was the greatest poet in Afrikaans and a major theoretician on "die intellektuele lewe" probably explains why even today, his intellectual and cultural authority serves to bestow credibility and legitimacy on projects that may be far removed from the intellectual openness he propagated (cf. Boshoff 1993).

The main thrust of Louw's theory on nationalism in the 1930s, when read against the background of contemporary ideas about a typically "Afrikaans" way of life and culture, was to supply a non-sectarian and non-parochial cultural content to Afrikaner nationalism. The aestheticism and individualism of the poetry produced by the "Dertigers" meant a significant departure from previous traditions, and resulted in denouncements by the literary Old Guard of "volksvreemdheid", "obskuurheid" en "sieklike individualisme". Louw set out to destroy these notions and, while claiming not to devise a theoretical system, landed up with an almost watertight construction of what nationalism and national literature was and would become. These writings were an attempt to reconcile notions of formal beauty derived from late nineteenth century aestheticism with the conviction that literature was the core of national life. Louw claims that in the life of the Afrikaner, an organic spiritual growth from colony to nation had taken place; that the universal and human themes which every poet tries to express can only be approached in and through the particular national context within which writing occurs; that, indeed, the individual spirit is by definition embedded in the national spirit (volksgees) and that therefore

even the most esoteric poem would ultimately be a national uttering; and that, finally, "national literature" is both the expression of spiritual life required by the nation's coming-of age and the all-inclusive space within which the variety of texts written in Afrikaans would find their natural place.

Not unlike other definitions of "national literature", Louw's definition is a discursive move by which all existing texts are appropriated as part of a diverse but unified whole. Of course, such a move is impossible without an underlying concept of nation or nationhood. Louw's construction of Afrikaner nationalism draws heavily on German idealism and Romanticism, and occasionally also on rather less respectable sources like Oswald Spengler and Alfred Rosenberg (Olivier 1993: 43-51). With the help of Herder's term **Volksgeist**, which proclaimed the people as ultimate arbiter of the value of the individual (Degenaar undated: 18), Louw continuously stresses the Fichtean view of the nation as unit of political and cultural self-determination. He sees the **volk** as an organic whole, structured hierarchically like a pyramid - an entity constantly striving towards new concrete historical forms, based on economic factors but finally driven by the **will** towards nationhood and the life of the spirit. The irrational impulses underlying Louw's theory of nationhood are evident in an essay like "Die ewige Trek" (Louw 1986: 94-102), where the will, triumphant over the equivocating intellect, is seen as the real cause of historical change; and in the drama *Die dieper reg* (Louw 1938), where the historical deeds of the Afrikaner nation are accepted by the Voice of Justice as coinciding with the essential Deed that is God. The will and the deed, the deed inspired by the will, are the crucial legitimising concepts of Louw's Dertiger nationalism, and, in accordance with the idea of the nation as an organic and hierarchic whole, he introduces the "spiritual aristocrat" as source and guardian of the universal spiritual life that, nevertheless, is intimately bound up with the biological life of the nation.

One of the most striking facts about Louw's later essays on nationalism, which during the Fifties were serialised in popular magazines like *Die Huisgenoot*, is the almost total absence of the rather scary ideas outlined in the previous paragraphs. Degenaar (1976) and even more strongly Olivier (1993) therefore distinguish two clear phases in the thinking of Louw on Afrikaner nationalism.[1] Olivier (1993:17) presents the following, perhaps rather crude summary: "Die Louw van die jare dertig is 'n idealis, 'n aristokraat en 'n antidemokraat met nasionaal-sosialistiese simpatieë; die Louw van die jare vyftig is 'n pleitbesorger vir die liberale waardes van die 'oop gesprek' en oorreding, iemand wat sy oortuigings met 'n nasionalistiese politieke paradigma probeer verbind en as voorloper van die verligte nasionalis gesien kan word."

The concept of *Liberale nasionalisme*, also the title of one of Louw's collections of essays, was to become his most lasting contribution to the Afrikaans debate on nationalism. This expression points to the liberal core of the kind of nationalism he now expounds; it also signifies his attempt to reach an

intellectual **rapprochement** between two opposing political beliefs, which could then be used to negotiate the conflicting demands of various race groups within South Africa.

Degenaar, Olivier and various other critics have commented rather fully on the differences between Louw's early and later essays, but no one has come up with a convincing explanation for the changes that occurred in his thinking between 1939 and the early Fifties. One of the reasons for this is that we do not have a reliable biography on Louw, and neither do we have a proper history of the Afrikaans intellectual. Our attempts at understanding are not made any easier by the fact that during the war years, Louw published very little on the topic of nationalism. The fact that in the late thirties, Afrikaner nationalism was still a developing force while in the Fifties it had attained a degree of political hegemony certainly explains, to a large extent, the move in Louw's writings from militancy and religious fervour to an insistence on rational debate. The turning point in his thought, however, can be located in 1946, two years before Malan assumed power.

The hypothesis to be investigated in this paper is that, among the many factors which could have contributed to the major shift in Louw's thinking on nationalism, the writings of R.F. Alfred Hoernlé were one of the most important. There are three initial facts indicating that the relationship between Louw and Hoernlé could facilitate a greater understanding of Louw's own development. Louw's essay on "Vegparty of polemiek?", published in 1946 in the newly established Afrikaans intellectual journal *Standpunte*, contains flattering references to Hoernlé's writings as an example of the kind of political debate that is required in order to resolve the political power struggle in South Africa. This is the only reference to Hoernlé in Louw's writings, but according to Professor E. Lindenberg, who studied under him at the University of Amsterdam in the early Fifties, Louw made extensive use of *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* (Hoernlé 1939) in his lectures on the political situation in South Africa. A single glance at Louw's personal copy of this book in the N.P. van Wyk Louw Collection at the Rand Afrikaans University is sufficient to convey the impression that it was used regularly. Finally, there is the tantalising possibility that Louw's reflections on the "solution" to the "Native question" in South Africa were directly inspired by Hoernlé. In a letter to his brother W.E.G. Louw on 22 June 1939 Louw, for the first time in either his published writings or his private correspondence, stated the belief that total segregation was "ons enigste redding".[2] Could it be that this statement was inspired by Hoernlé's Phelps-Stokes Lectures, delivered just a month earlier at the University of Cape Town, where Louw was a lecturer in Education? I have been unable to establish whether Louw attended these lectures, but it is highly unlikely, given his intellectual interests, that he could have been unaware of Hoernlés arguments.

My paper will be ordered along the following lines. First, I will analyse "Vegparty of polemiek?", the first clear example of

Louw's new approach to nationalism and South African politics, exposing the striking similarities between the analysis Hoernlé gave in 1939 and Louw's views on the rôle of political discussion in bringing about a **rapprochement** between liberalism and nationalism. This is followed by an analysis of similarities between Hoernlé's philosophical stance and Louw's intellectual claims. Next, I will discuss various aspects of Louw's later essays on nationalism in order to illustrate that Louw's new interpretation of nationalism can be understood as a conscious parallel to Hoernlé's contribution to the South African debate on liberalism. Finally, I will analyse the practical problems raised by both writers, showing how Louw's philosophical stance produced a dilemma that is more satisfactorily resolved in Hoernlé.

## 2. Vegparty of polemiek?

This essay subtitled "Notes on polemic literature and intellectual life in S.A." contains the seeds of what was to become Louw's major political project in the early Fifties. Complaining about the lack of polemic literature in South Africa, Louw gives a brief outline of "vier groot gedagtekomplekse" (Louw 1986a: 497) in South African political discourse: imperialism, nationalism, socialism and liberalism. Imperialism he contemptuously dismisses as an intellectually inferior phenomenon ("dit is 'n mag maar geen idee nie; dit het heelwat breinkrag tot sy beskikking, maar geen gedagte" - 1986a: 497); socialism he briefly criticises for not understanding the national aspirations and rights of different groups in the Union, and for not sufficiently respecting the great European liberal tradition; nationalism and liberalism he singles out as the two streams of thought which one could expect to make a major contribution to intellectual life in South Africa.

Louw's criticism of Afrikaner nationalist discourse provides important clues to his later essays. While praising the Afrikaner for resisting "'n eeu van verkleinering, verdrukking en uiteindelike wapengeweld" - a clear reference to Smuts' *'n Eeu van onreg* - and also for resisting all attempts to become part of "'n groter verband", he also identifies the most important element that is lacking: "Maar een ding het die Afrikaanse nasionalisme nie gedoen nie: dit het geen algemeen-geldige intellektuele basis vir sy eie strewe geskep nie; en daarom is sy strewe vandag nog so 'blind', so onverstaanbaar en onverklaarbaar vir dié wat buitekant hom staan" (Louw 1986a: 500). This statement is followed by a slightly fuller diagnosis: "Kort gestel: twee dinge het die nasionalisme nagelaat om te doen: 1. hy het geen redelike antwoord gevind op die fundamentele politieke vraag, 'Watter morele reg het 'n klein nasie om as nasie te wil voortbestaan?'; en 2. die Afrikaanse nasionalisme het in die hitte van sy eie stryd om selfbehoud baie min aandag gegee aan die voortbestaan van ander groepe in Suid-Afrika as aparte nasies" (500). It is interesting to note that Louw's single example of this problem in Afrikaans writing on nationalism, apart from a very critical footnote on Stoker's

*Stryd om die ordes*, is taken from Tobie Muller's "Geloofsbelydenis van 'n nasionalis", published in 1913 (cf. Keet & Tomlinson 1925). Compared to more contemporary defences of Afrikaner nationalism and segregation like Geoff Cronjé's crude sociological writings (cf. Cronjé 1945) or Diederichs' highly idealistic tract on *Nasionalisme as lewensbeskouing* (Diederichs 1936), Muller's "Geloofsbelydenis" could certainly be regarded as an example of intellectual humility. Be this as it may, Muller fails Louw's test of reason because he ultimately appeals to the belief that different peoples came into being with a certain purpose. Louw responds to this by stating that the belief that God created separate nations would have to have as its logical concommitant the belief that He could also destroy them - but, in fact, the Will of God is an unknown factor and therefore not to be admitted into the argument.

What Louw then requires of nationalism is "['n] algemeen-geldige intellektuele basis vir sy eie strewe" and "['n] redelike grond vir ons handeling" (Louw 1986: 501). On the next page, he takes this one step further by stating that "Die tweede opsig waarin die Afrikaanse nasionalisme nog te kort skiet, is dat hy die nasionalisme as 'n besondere en plaaslike, nie as 'n universele prinsiep insien nie" (502). Turning to the section on liberalism in "Vegparty of polemiek?", this is exactly the point at which Hoernlé is brought into the debate to exemplify intellectual qualities that are still lacking in nationalist discourse. For Hoernlé - and this is one of the more salient points from *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* - the main reason for the decline of South African liberalism lies in its failure to reconcile liberal principles with the realities of a multi-racial society. I quote: "There have been many champions of liberty: our own distinguished fellow-citizen, General Smuts, in his Rectorial Address at St. Andrews University, is one of them. But, they have all been content to re-state the ideal of liberty on traditional lines against attacks upon it, and denials of it, by 'totalitarian' thinkers, whether belonging to the Communist or the Fascist 'ideologies'. What none has done is to re-examine, in the light of the experience of a multi-racial society, like South Africa, what liberty means and how, if at all, it can be realized in that sort of society." (Hoernlé 1939: 106) Louw's summary of Hoernlés views on this point is illuminating; by referring to "rasse- of volkesamestelling" and "die multi-nasionale Suid-Afrika" (Louw 1986: 504) he almost surreptitiously adds the concepts of "volk" and "nasie" to Hoernlés analysis, which in *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* and elsewhere is almost exclusively concerned with the issue of race.

Hoernlé's attempt at rethinking classical liberal principles within the context of a multiracial society is thus taken up by Louw to suggest quite the opposite intellectual project for Afrikaans nationalism, i.e. to relate the concrete and often selfish struggle of nationalism to a "generally valid" and "universal" principle rooted in West-European humanism - "want albei [liberalism and nationalism - G.O.] is die voortsetting van die groot humanistiese tradisie van ons Europese Weste" (Louw 1986: 503). In short, what Hoernlé was to South African

liberalism, Louw wants to be for Afrikaner nationalism. By elevating nationalism to a principle which is generally valid and even universal Louw puts it on equal footing with the liberalism espoused by Hoernlé, and claims for it the kind of intellectual authority that could not be denied in any rational debate. I will not address the difficult question of how liberalism or nationalism could ultimately justify such claims; I merely wish to point out that the absence of such explicit claims in Hoernlé's writings is indicative of a fundamental difference in the philosophical and epistemological attitudes of these two figures.

Why does Louw find it necessary to place nationalism on a level with liberalism in order for a great debate to begin? There are several answers to this question in Louw's discussion. The first is that he sees these two philosophies as expressing the political aspirations of different sections of the South African population or, in Louw's terminology, different nations. "Wat die nasionalisme vir die Afrikaner in sy stryd op dood en lewe was, was die liberalisme vir die nie-blanke groepe van die Unie. (...) Die Suid-Afrikaanse liberalisme is bowenal die eis van geregtigheid - ekonomies en maatskaplik - vir die nie-blanke groepe wat ongeveer drie-kwart van die totale bevolking van die Unie vorm." (Louw 1986: 503) Louw sees the theoretical impasse of two incompatible "rights" as "'n tipiese 'tragiese' situasie in die geskiedenis"; on a more practical level, this impasse boils down to a balance of powers: "die naturel het sy getalle; die blanke - veral die Afrikaner - het sy kulturele, ekonomiese en militêre oorwig" (505).

The second, and related, answer to the question posed above is that in Louw's view Afrikaans nationalism requires a clear answer from the liberalist about the future envisaged for South Africa. Here Louw's constant involvement with the issue of "voortbestaan" becomes evident in a reference to the nightmare of "toeploeg" and in the statement that "Om 'liberaal' te wees, kom minstens vir die Afrikaner (...) op nasionale selfmoord en ook individuele vernietiging neer" (Louw 1986: 505). A rather mealie-mouthed statement by Hofmeyr (1945: 17: "The right course (...) is (...) since no one can say with certainty to what in the long run the policy of development will lead, to go forward in faith") is then quoted by Louw to illustrate the liberal's lack of concern about the final goal of racial policies. This is a surprising assertion indeed in an article in which Louw quotes from Hoernlé's two major works on South African politics, *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* and *Race and Reason*, and praisesd them for their "onvergelyklike helderheid". For the one single concern that governs the famous final chapter of *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* is the argument against reliance on faith, coupled with the argument for the necessity of the liberal to work towards a long-term view of race relations. "[T]he weakness of the liberal position," Hoernlé writes, "- the weakness of liberal thought in South Africa, and perhaps elsewhere, too - is, and has been, that it has not related its makeshift efforts to any 'long-range' programme." (Hoernlé 1939: 179) Even more surprisingly, Louw makes no mention

of the fact that Hoernlé in his painful search for a long-range programme that would eliminate domination and possibly be accepted constitutionally, ultimately arrives at "Total Separation" (Hoernlé 1939: 168-178). Instead, Louw reiterates his belief that the liberal "denkarbeid" of finding a policy that would maintain liberal principles without creating injustices in a "multi-nasionale staat", of perhaps also constructing a form of state unknown to Europe, has not been undertaken by liberalism, not even by its "waardigste voorstander", R.F.A. Hoernlé (Louw 1986: 506).

The question that presents itself is: Why does Louw, while characterising South Africa as a multinational state and referring to the possibility of a new constitutional arrangement, not give Hoernlé the credit for having arrived at conclusions similar to those inherent in the very vocabulary of "Vegparty of polemiek?" Why does he not claim Hoernlé as an ideological ally? The answer to this must lie in the fact that Louw and Hoernlé came to their conclusions along very different routes, and that there were aspects to Hoernlé's argument that must have been indigestible to Louw. Hoernlé arrives at "Heartbreak House" (the title of the penultimate section of *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit*) by 1) comprehensively describing the existing situation of racial domination in South Africa, 2) outlining the rather limited rôle of the "spirit of trusteeship" within this context, 3) developing a theory of what the liberal spirit would require the good state to provide its citizens, and 4) asking whether a liberal native policy is possible. Outlining the necessity of a "short-range" programme for liberals, and the even greater moral necessity of defining a "long-range" programme, if only to guide more immediate projects, Hoernlé rejects the long-term options of "Parallelism" and "Total Assimilation", the first because it offers no genuine escape from domination, the second because there is no hope of assimilation being accepted by the dominant white group. What remains, then, is the option which Hoernlé deliberately does not call segregation, but "Total Separation" and which he defines as "an organization of the warring sections into genuinely separate, self-contained, self-governing societies, each in principle homogeneous within itself, which can then co-operate on a footing of mutual recognition of one another's independence" (Hoernlé 1939: 183). Hoernlé means every word he is writing in this passage, and therefore also fully realizes that the economic separation needed to effect such a radical reorganization would "spell disaster" (176) for both white and black. Hence the "Heartbreak House" of a conclusion that is both logically inevitable and practically unachievable.

Louw, in contrast, departs from the assumption not only that nationalism expresses the material interests of the Afrikaner, or that it constitutes a certain belief, but also that it can be elevated to a generally valid, universal principle. In one important passage he also equates this principle with truth: "Laat ons dit so stel; as ons nasionalisme op 'n ware politieke prinsiep berus, dan moet die prinsiep oral en vir almal waar wees - 'waarheid' is immers nie my of jou waarheid nie, maar almal

s'n, of liewer iets bokant ons almal, onafhanklik van almal; iets wat **bestaan**, of ons dit nou al erken wil hê, of nié." (Louw 1986; 502) This statement tallies with ideas on truth expressed elsewhere by Louw; it also helps clarify his insistence on South Africa being a multinational state, which appears in "Vegparty of polemiek?" as a systematic verbal preference rather than an explicitly stated conviction. This is Louw's way of forcing the liberalist to accept the validity of Afrikaner nationalism. But his claims go much further. Once nationalism is given the status of universal truth and principle - and it should be remembered that at this stage Louw was still very close to the "volksnasionalisme" he had defended in the Thirties - denying it to all the peoples of South Africa would seem to sin against reason itself, and projecting it onto every other "nation" in the country almost a requirement of logic. Hoernlé presents a rather different conclusion concerning the position of black people: "For the Native peoples of the union, at any rate, it should be clear that there is **no escape from white domination by way of Parallelism or Assimilation, but only by way of Total Separation.**" (Hoernlé 1939: 183) This is not predicated on any belief about the "Native peoples" possessing nationalist aspirations; indeed, Hoernlés strident criticisms of existing policies towards the black people in his earlier articles (collected in *Race and Reason*) make it clear that assimilation to "Western civilization" is an inevitable process. One would not expect Louw in an article on the need for polemic literature to address the vexed question of how the idea of a multinational state is to be reconciled with an integrated economy. But nowhere else does he attempt to do so, except when praises the Tomlinson Commission in 1956 for, in fact, having overridden the objections to territorial segregation that Hoernlé so eloquently raised in 1939. "Die een radikale geneeswyse vir ons kwaal het ál duideliker begin word. Uiteindelike billike gebiedskeiding met volkome vryheid vir almal..." (Louw 1986a: 593).

### 3. Hoernlé's "Whole" and Louw's "Volledigheid"

In the early fifties, Louw wrote a number of essays on nationalism and politics that can be regarded as extensions of ideas raised in "Vegparty of polemiek?"; these were his own contributions to the kind of debate he theoretically outlined in the 1946 essay. Before turning to other items from *Liberale nasionalisme* I wish to draw attention to a less tangible aspect of Hoernlé's approach that would help explain Louw's admiration for him, but which probably also inspired Louw to attempt a fuller understanding of the South African situation.

Hoernlé's "synoptic" approach to reality, which was derived from his belief in Absolute Idealism, is outlined in his autobiographical essay "On the Way to a Synoptic Philosophy" (Hoernlé undated), in I.D. MacCrone's memoir in *Race and Reason* (Hoernlé 1945), and more fully in a thesis by L.F. Freed (1965). Freed summarizes this approach as follows: "He [Hoernlé] held, not incorrectly, that Absolute Idealism permitted the intellectual freedom of formulating an attitude towards the

Universe as a whole, wherein and whereby it was possible to perceive order, system, coherence, and organisation in the relationship of things constituting a 'whole'." (Freed 1965: 316) The perception of the whole in Hoernlé's philosophy is coupled with the conviction that this is not merely a subjective and psychological attitude. The purpose of the synoptic view is "to facilitate the discovery of the dimensions and dynamics of Reality (...) and all with a view to their possible manipulation for the advancement of man" (Freed 1965: 316).

While there is no evidence of Louw having been aware of Hoernlé's philosophical standpoints, there are striking similarities between the views outlined above and Louw's insistence throughout his later essays, more especially in his essays on philosophy, that it is the task of philosophy and all systematic thought to grasp the whole (for a discussion, cf. Olivier 1993: 209-212). Although they contain no explicit statements of a purely philosophical nature, *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* and *Race and Reason* are, even today, impressive illustrations of Hoernlé's diligence in seeing all sides of the South African political situation. Louw does not embark on a polemic with Hoernlé, indeed accepts Hoernlé's analysis, but then reiterates the importance of a long-term solution to race problems from the point of view of Afrikaner survival, and adds a further dimension: that of nationalism as "universal principle", which leads to the substitution of the concept of race by the concept of nation. With both liberalism and nationalism featuring as timeless principles of universal human reason, the debate is removed from the practical political terrain into the realm of theoretical speculation and the search for a truth which is independent of individual wishes. This is the dogmatic element in Louw's political philosophy, the intellectual a priori that obstructed attempts at squaring up his political beliefs with social and economic realities. Whereas Hoernlé's liberalism is located in the sphere of values, Louw legitimises his own nationalism as principle and as truth; and whereas Hoernlé's "whole" is cautiously constructed with the aid of empirical detail, Louw's "whole" is primarily an intellectual construct.

## 4. Liberale Nasionalisme

In the philosophy of nationalism that Louw developed during the early Fifties there are essentially two elements derived from liberalism that serve to redefine the concept of nationalism defended in *Lojale verset* and *Berigte te velde*. The first is rational discourse and the second a social concept of justice. While Louw's idea on rational discourse reach further than any similar concept in Hoernlé's writings, his discourse on justice shows signs of having been influenced by Hoernlé.

### 4.1 Rational Discourse

The expression "die oop gesprek" has become almost synonymous with Van Wyk Louw's name, to such an extent that the anti-

intellectual tendencies in his earlier writings are obscured. For example, in the essay "Die ewige trek", written to commemmorate the Centenial celebrations of the Great Trek in 1938, Louw argues that in historical crises like those experienced on three different occasions by the Afrikaner, no amount of intellectual reflection or discussion could produce a solution: "By die groot keerpunte sal die reg van die partye net so 'n fyn ewewig vertoon as die praktiese oorwegings. En ook hier sal die skeppende wil en die daad ingryp, en die een reg tot werklikheid laat word, terwyl die ander alleen sy koue en abstrakte bestaan as eis en moontlikheid sal voer." (Louw 1986: 101) Indeed, Louw's metaphor of the "trek" for the development of a **volk** relies in every crucial detail on the belief that the course history is ultimately determined by the Hegelian quest for further spiritual growth and the heroic efforts of Carlylean great men (cf. Olivier 1993: 24-30).

"Hierdie soort kortsluiting van die denk deur die daad is een rede waarom ons so weinig intellektuele lewe besit," Louw (1986: 496) writes in "Vegparty of polemiek?", thereby repudiating his earlier views that only the will and deed could resolve the **impasse** of two diametrically opposed rights. Later on in the same essay, he argues that only an intellectual debate between liberalism and nationalism could possibly resolve the dilemma of the diametrically opposed rights embodied in these two philosophies. It is therefore precisely when Louw proposes a principled discussion with South African liberalism that he introduces the concept of "polemic literature", which is nothing more than an intensified version of the "oop gesprek" he pleaded for in numerous later essays. A full analysis of Louw's ideas on "die oop gesprek", "vryheid van dink en meningsuiting" and "polemiek" cannot be undertaken here, but it needs to be stressed that in "Argumente teen 'n hark" (Louw 1986: 467-491) Louw identifies, among all the values associated with democracy, that of free and open discussion as the most important because it offers protection against human irrationality and the limitations of individual viewpoints. As ultimate aim of "die oop gesprek" in its various manifestations he also introduces a concept of truth that is absent in classical liberal theory. On the one hand, truth can be achieved by a combination of viewpoints: "Die waarheid is alleen 'duister' omdat dit so moeilik gaan om die aparte helder waarhede **saam** te dink; om hulle saam vas te hou en almal ewe veel te laat geld." (Louw 1986: 508) On the other hand, Louw talks about a truth that, while being made accessible through debate, is independent of place or time - "iets bokant ons almal, onafhanklik van almal; iets wat **bestaan** of ons dit nou al erken en wil hê, of nie" (Louw 1986: 502). Such a concept of truth is not to be found in Mill, for instance; on the contrary, as Berlin (1969: 188) argues, the logical consequence of Mill's approach is that there could be no "single, universally visible, truth", no "basic knowable human nature, one and the same, at all times, in all places, in all men", and therefore no "single true doctrine" as well. Formulated rather sharply, the conclusion would have to be that both as far as the initial input (the universal true principles) as the end result (a truth existing independently of the historical situation) are concerned, Louw's

conceptualisation of the "oop gesprek" is philosophically at odds with the basic tenets of liberalist thought.

### 4.2 The Demand for Justice

Like "die oop gesprek", the phrase "voortbestaan in geregtigheid" has become intimately associated with Van Wyk Louw. As in the case of rational discourse, the introduction of the concept of justice in Louw's "liberal" writings should be understood against the background of earlier treatments. Of relevance here is, once again, "Die ewige trek", where various concrete "rights" are seen in opposition to "'n ewige en onveranderlike regsidee", to "die volstrekte Reg waarna die grootste denkers van alle tye opgesien het soos na die koue, onbereikbare sneeupunt van die denke" (Louw 1986: 100). The dilemma of conflicting rights in a situation of historical crisis can therefore only be resolved by recourse to the will and the deed. An even more idealistic view underpins *Die dieper reg* (Louw 1938), a drama written on the occasion of the Great Trek Centenary, in which the Voortrekkers as representatives of the Afrikaners are asked to justify their deeds in the Hall of Eternal Justice. The Prosecutor's accusations about their "grondhonger" and their disobedience to legal authority are swept aside with the following words: "Gaan heen en weet dat julle reg / en daad voor God kan staan / omdat dit krag en eenvoud was, / omdat Hy self eenvoudig is: / één suiwer Wil, één ewige Daad / en bokant alle wisseling vas." On the grounds of this idealistic identity between human deed and Divine Deed all social and political injustices which the Voortrekkers may have committed are declared irrelevant. Thus Olivier (1993: 35) concludes: "Ons het in *Die dieper reg* te doen met 'n verhewigde eksistensialistiese siening van 'n volk wat sonder die moontlikheid op insig in die geregtigheid van sy eie dade, maar wel met die blinde vertroue op 'n duister 'Geregtigheid', uitgelewer is aan die 'drif' en die 'bloedsbesef': die filosofie van Spengler met God daaraan toegevoeg."

A social concept of "geregtigheid" makes its appearance in "Vegparty of polemiek?" and gradually takes priority over the metaphysical concept outlined above. That this new concept was probably one of Louw's main imports from liberalism is illustrated by the fact that he introduces liberalism in his 1946 essay as "bowenal die eis van geregtigheid - ekonomies en maatskaplik - vir die nie-blanke groepe wat ongeveer drie-kwart van die totale bevolking van die Unie vorm" (Louw 1986: 503). Among those who described the effects of racial domination on the black population of South Africa no one probably gave a fuller picture of the situation than Hoernlé in his two books, and it can be assumed therefore that Louw's references to Hoernlé are therefore an acknowledgement that native policy was fundamentally unjust. From 1946 onwards, justice becomes one of the cornerstones of Louw's political philosophy; it features most dramatically in his essays on "Kultuur en krisis", first published in 1952 (Louw 1986: 450-466). These essays were probably directly inspired by the nationalist government's plans to remove Coloureds from the voters' roll. After outlining and

discussing military defeat, mass immigration and psychological doubt as potential crises within the Afrikaner nation, Louw turns to what in his hierarchy of crises is viewed as the most serious situation of all: "Dan kom hy [the nation - G.O.] voor die laaste versoeking: om te glo dat blote voortbestaan verkieslik is bo die **voortbestaan in geregtigheid.**" (Louw 1986: 462).

For Louw, a thinker always in search of fundamental principles, the "right to exist" was a question of continuous concern. Moving away from his earlier aesthetic and metaphysical justifications for the continued existence of the Afrikaner as a nation, he now turns to the kind of justice that perhaps Hoernlé, of all South Africans, articulated most eloquently. Although Louw did not succeed in finding a convincing resolution to the "voortbestaan in geregtigheid" crisis defined in "Kultuur en krisis", the theoretical implications of his argument are clear and radical: 1) a nation which cannot live in justice with its neighbours would relinquish the right to exist, and 2) justice is something no longer located in the aesthetic or metaphysical sphere, but in the everyday world of economic and social interaction, which means that a clear answer could be provided to the question implied by point 1). Thus the deciding issue of justice, which was to be critically combined with the issue of "voortbestaan", entered Louw's discourse together with liberalism.

## 5. Conclusion

I have referred to the fact that the many factors that could have contributed to the radical shift in Van Wyk Louw's thinking on nationalism have not yet been investigated adequately. However, a close analysis of his seminal 1946 essay, "Vegparty of polemiek?", allows one to conclude that to a remarkable extent, Louw employed liberal principles, and specifically the writings of R.F.A. Hoernlé, to develop a new theory on nationalism. When Louw became acutely aware of the problematic nature of his earlier nationalism, he turned to liberalism and one of its most illustrious representatives. But it should also be clear that the introduction **a priori** of the concept of nationalism as a "universal" and "true" principle could only lead to a distortion of Hoernlé's argument leading to the long-range option of "Total Separation". When the kind of racial policies that Louw envisaged were implemented, it progressively became clear that Afrikaner "voortbestaan" as he understood it was incompatible with the social justice he also demanded.

Looking back to Louw's first proposal for a "polemiese literatuur" that would lead to a truth embodying both liberal and nationalist principles, it could be said that no such debate materialised, at least not in the sense that Louw envisaged it. The main effect of Louw's intervention was felt within Afrikaner nationalist discourse, where his reference to nationalism as universal principle, his defence of democratic values and his demand for justice served both to give new intellectual status to nationalism and to obstruct the view on political developments in the black community. The main architects and theoreticians of

apartheid, however, took little notice of Louw's arguments[5]; it was only when apartheid started running into problems that adaptations of the political system were justified with reference to his later writings. It is also interesting to note that Louw, while inviting dialogue, effectively writes a monologue that incoporates real and anticipated opposing points of view.

While Hoernlé did not seriously contemplate the growth of black nationalism, and while Louw's theoretical assumptions required every black ethnic group to be treated as a separate nation, mainstream black nationalism took its main cue not from the kind of nationalism espoused by Louw, but from liberalism. And when Afrikaner nationalist eventually sat down to negotiate a political settlement with the African National Congress, it was essentially liberal values that guided the process and provided common ground for establishing the kind of society that was unthinkable both to Hoernlé in 1939 and to Louw in 1946.

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1. In this paper, I use "Afrikaner" in the sense normally ascribed to it by Afrikaner nationalism, i.e. a white Afrikaans-speaking South African. This is the sense in which Louw generally uses this term; it also defines the audience addressed in his writings. It should, however, to be noted that in the introduction to Botha (1960) Louw pleads for the inclusion, on grounds of culture, of the so-called "Coloured people" within the Afrikaner community.
2. N.P. van Wyk Louw Collection, J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch. Catalogue Nr. 158.K.L.23.
3. Louw may be rather unfair in isolating the Christian and Theistic passages in Muller. In general, Muller's faith derives from the more "rational" Kantian concept of self-determination.
4. A full discussion of different conceptions of "truth" in Louw's writing will take me too far afield. The interested reader is referred to Olivier 1993: 206-209.
5. I was unable to find any reference to Louw in Cronjé, for instance; in Rhoodie and Venter's *Die apartheidsgedagte* (1959) Louw's writings are not mentioned.

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