

## Preface

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Porto-Novo (Benin), 19–21 September 2002. A conference on 'The encounter between rationalities', jointly organized by the Centre Africain des Hautes Etudes, the UNESCO network 'Paths of Thought' and the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (ICPHS), took place there on the occasion of its 26th General Meeting. Seventy-two delegates from 33 countries. An ambitious academic programme, which, like all such programmes, we knew quite well we would never be able to cover, had been drawn up in four sections:

1. *What is rationality?*
2. *Rationality and academic disciplines* (rationality and irrationality in the 'hard' sciences; rationality and irrationality in the 'soft' sciences; the indiscipline of disciplines)
3. *Rationality and cultures* (beliefs in witchcraft; rationality and language; religions and rationality; talking about the sciences in non-European languages [practical workshop] )
4. *Rationality and social practices* (in politics: rationality and irrationality in the management of people; in economics: rationality and irrationality in the management of things; in relations with others and the self: 'madnesses', 'rational' behaviour).

While we await publication of the conference proceedings we must thank *Diogenes* for using this issue to reflect the rich character of the Porto-Novo debates by publishing eight of the papers that were actually presented on that occasion and five of those that were prepared for it but could not be given because of various problems. The first group includes the articles by Françoise Davoine, Ioanna Kuçuradi, Remi Sonaiya, Jean-Max Gaudillière, Harris Memel-Fotê, Richard Rorty and Luca Maria Scarantino. Those by Jean-Godefroy Bidima, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Paulus Gerdes, Dismas A. Masolo, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Eunice Njeri Sahle belong to the second.

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This selection, which in any case is not exhaustive, does not necessarily claim to be representative; it simply gives the reader an idea of some of the issues raised in Porto-Novo and through them the main recurring question: is there any sense today in talking about reason in general? Should we note the many forms rationality has assumed through history and abandon the idea of a single indivisible rationality, disavowing the universal demand for coherence, truth, justice that exists in all cultures?

What was arrived at in Porto-Novo was the idea that reason, that universal human possession and 'the thing in the world we most share', as Descartes accepted, is both single and plural. The very many facets that rationality displays today force us to be conscious of the complexity of situations and perspectives. But in no case do they reduce us to taking up relativist positions. Human beings always give meaning to their actions. Today thought can and must find new paths in a world that is both global and diverse. That is the only way to reach beyond the various dogmatisms and terrorisms, and build a lasting peace and a more humane world.