

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN  
PHILOSOPHY**

**by**

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## CONTENTS

Declaration	vi
Acknowledgement	vii
Key Terms	viii
Summary	ix
INTRODUCTION	x
Problem Statement	x
Methodology	xi
Structure of the Dissertation	xii
PART ONE	1
Belief in Reincarnation in some Ancient Cultures	1
CHAPTER ONE: EGYPTIAN BELIEF	2
1.1 Immortality and Reincarnation	7
1.2 Egypt and Africa	12
1.3 On the Meaning of Africa	17
CHAPTER TWO: GREEK BELIEF	19
CHAPTER THREE: INDIAN BELIEF	25

CHAPTER FOUR: CHINESE BELIEF	36
CHAPTER FIVE: INCA BELIEF	40
Conclusion for Part One	49
PART TWO	52
Personal Identity: A Prelude to Reincarnation	52
CHAPTER SIX: PERSONAL IDENTITY	52
6.0.0 On What Does Personal Identity Depend?	52
6.1.0 The Ontological Question in African Philosophy of Mind	55
6.1.1. Mind as a Disembodied Self-knowing Entity	56
6.1.2. Some Criticisms	64
6.1.2.1 Mind has no Akan Equivalent	65
6.1.2.2 Mind is Meaningless, Nonsensical, and Nonexistent	86
6.1.2.3 Mind is Bodily	96
6.1.2.3.1 Mind Signifies Mental or Brain Processes Identifiable with the Body	96
6.1.2.3.2 Bodily Identity as either a Fundament or Consequent	97
(a) Body as a Fundament	97
(b) Body as Consequent	106
6.1.2.4 Mind is neither Body-dependent nor a Disembodied Entity	107
6.1.3 Synthesis: Materialism, Physicalism, and Quasi-physicalism	111
6.2.0 The Normative Question in African Philosophy of Mind	121
6.3.0 Persistence (Survival)	123

PART THREE	128
Reincarnation in African Philosophy	128
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DOCTRINE OF REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN THOUGHT	128
7. 0. Reincarnation: Introduction	128
7. 1. The doctrine of Reincarnation in African Thought	131
7.1.1. The ‘Sage’ Question in Traditional African Philosophical Research	132
7.1.2. An African Concept of Reincarnation	141
7.1.2.1. On the Partial Reincarnation Thesis	141
7.1.2.2. On the Complete Denial of Reincarnation in African Thought	144
7.1.2.3. On the Reincarnation of Souls Not Admitted to the Spirit World	153
7.2.0. The Language and Eschatological Concepts of Ancient Egypt and Traditional African Culture	154
7.2.1. Similarities in Terms of Language	156
7.2.2. Similarities in Terms of Eschatological Concepts	159
CHAPTER EIGHT: RATIONALITY OF BELIEF IN REINCARNATION	164
8.1.0 ‘Ancestral’ Return	164
8.1.1 Ordinary Return	164
8.1.2 ‘Ancestral’ Return as a Connection between Souls	166
8.1.3 Personal Survival	173
8.2.0 The <i>Awomawuo</i> Phenemenon	183

8.3.0 The Non-Admissibles	185
8.3.1. African and Buddhist Non-Admissibles	192
CONCLUSION	195
NOTES	199
REFERENCES	240

## DECLARATION

Student Number: 4562-414-3

I declare that **An Examination of the Concept of Reincarnation in African Philosophy** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

H.M. Majeed.

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## KEY TERMS

Reincarnation or rebirth; Ancient philosophy of religion; Akan or African philosophy; Immortality and personal survival; Akan eschatology; The soul; Life-Death philosophy; Afterlife; Personal identity; Rationality of reincarnation.



## SUMMARY

This dissertation is a philosophical examination of the concept of reincarnation from an African point of view. It does so, largely, from the cultural perspective of the Akan people of Ghana. In this work, reincarnation is distinguished from such related concepts as metempsychosis and transmigration with which it is conflated by many authors on the subject. In terms of definition, therefore, the belief that a deceased person can be reborn is advanced in this dissertation as referring to only reincarnation, but not to either metempsychosis or transmigration. Many scholars would agree that reincarnation is a pristine concept, yet it is so present in the beliefs and worldviews of several cultures today (including those of Africa). A good appreciation of the concept, it can be seen, will not be possible without some reference to the past. That is why some attempt is first made at the early stages of the dissertation to show how reincarnation was understood in the religious philosophies of ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Indians, Chinese and the Incas. Secondly, some link is then established between the past and present, especially between ancient Egyptian philosophy and those of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. In modern African thought, the doctrine of reincarnation has not been thoroughly researched into. Even so, some of the few who have written on the subject have denied its existence in African thought. The dissertation rejects this denial, and seeks to show nonetheless that reincarnation is generally an irrational concept. In spite of its irrationality, it is acknowledged that the concept, as especially presented in African thought, raises our understanding of the constitution of a person as understood in the African culture. It is also observed that the philosophical problem of personal identity is central to the discussion of reincarnation because that which constitutes a person is presumed to be known whenever a claim of return of a survived person is made. For this reason, the dissertation also pays significant attention to the concept of personal identity in connection, especially, with the African philosophical belief in the return of persons.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of reincarnation, also known as ‘rebirth’, is the belief that a ‘person’ (after his or her death) can be born again.<sup>1</sup> The implication here is that a ‘person’ can inhabit different bodies at different times. This dissertation reflects on the concept of rebirth in African philosophy. Although it dwells much on traditional African thought, the dissertation does not argue that a ‘tradition’ necessarily constitutes a ‘philosophy’.

### **Problem Statement**

Reincarnation is a belief that is widespread in African and Asian societies and is increasingly becoming popular also in the West. But, the way the notion is commonly understood in the African conception of the person and of personal survival, bristles with several problems and puzzles – some of them logical – which make the notion very difficult to comprehend. Since there is not much African philosophical literature on the subject, I believe that an adequate clarification of the concept itself cannot be found fully discussed in existing books. This is why I developed an interest in carrying out a research that will lead me to some indigenous African cultures for first hand discussion and analysis of the concept of reincarnation. This way, my analyses will contribute to the understanding of the concept.

If it is said that a ‘person’, or, as is sometimes suggested, an aspect of a person survives death, then what will this aspect be? What exactly is that which reincarnates? If it is a soul (or a nonphysical entity) that reincarnates, why should it [the soul] be said to constitute a person at all? In any case, what/who is a person? Is it even true that a person is not completely material? If

a person is both physical and spiritual, then what is the relation between the two? These are some of the questions that the dissertation will seek to answer.

### **Aims:**

The aims of this dissertation are:

- i) To attempt to clarify and understand the concept of reincarnation generally.
- ii) To explore how the concept is understood in African thought.
- iii) To explore the rationality of the concept of reincarnation.

### **Methodology:**

In order to construct a truly African perspective on reincarnation, this research dwells mainly on the traditional values and beliefs of the Akan people of Ghana. Ideas generated from the examination of those values and beliefs – and from those of named traditional elders – are then used by me to develop an original traditional Akan philosophical position on reincarnation. The method of investigation, then, is purposely and distinctly philosophical – i.e., the position I come to, with regard to Akan reincarnation, is not established on the basis of the numerical strength of my discussants, but on the philosophical quality or usefulness of their views. Traditional beliefs and values are also treated the same way. The method, hence, develops, admits or rejects concepts, ideas or beliefs on the basis of logic. The Akan concept of reincarnation will thus be clarified and appraised with the aid of logic.

The research also makes use of published materials, nonetheless.

## **Structure:**

The structure of the dissertation is as follows:

### *Part One*

#### Belief in Reincarnation in some Ancient Cultures

Reincarnation is a basic concept that has attracted the attention of many thinkers, including ancient philosophers. This is probably due to the fact that the doctrine is directly connected with such enduring but perplexing questions as the nature of a person, life and death which humans have always been interested in. And, for the necessary background discussion of the doctrine, I intend, in this part, to explain briefly how reincarnation was understood in some ancient cultures, focusing on ancient religious philosophies of Egypt (in chapter one), Greece (chapter two), India (chapter three), China (chapter four) and the Inca Empire (chapter five).

### *Part Two*

#### Personal Identity: A Prelude to Reincarnation

This part shall serve to prepare the ground for a proper examination of the concept of reincarnation. Essentially, an enquiry into the criteria of personal identity will be made. This is very important for the success of this dissertation because knowledge of that which enables us to

‘identify and reidentify’ a person is absolutely necessary if reincarnation is to be understood at all. The problem of personal identity – especially, as found in African philosophical thought – will, thus, be discussed in chapter six.

### *Part Three*

#### The Doctrine of Reincarnation in African Thought

This part consists of two chapters: seven and eight. Chapter seven which spells out the African concept of reincarnation starts with an introductory discussion of the meaning of reincarnation. The introduction looks at the various ways the concept has been explained, and how it relates to notions such as rebirth, ‘return’, transmigration and metempsychosis. The chapter then proceeds to examine the concept in African thought. Since the beliefs of a people are most of the time found in their linguistic expressions, chapter seven will analyze expressions of some African languages, in an attempt to explain how the concept of reincarnation is understood.

The Ibo expression *ilō uwa*,<sup>2</sup> which means ‘a return to the world,’ *ababio*, an Akan name which translates as ‘one who has returned,’ and a Yoruba word like *iyabo* seem to suggest a doctrine of reincarnation in African philosophy. I will seek to clarify this view on the basis of my analysis of the relevant concepts in Akan culture. The research methodology is, as stated above, essentially philosophical.

I will also be concerned with such questions as the following: what is that which actually reincarnates? Is it the case that every person living is reincarnated? If not, why do some persons reincarnate while others do not? Are there any factors, in other words, that may

necessitate a person's return? How many times can a person come back? Do persons keep reincarnating forever? These questions also have far-reaching implications for personal identity because of the related problem of establishing in this world the actual identity of any individual, or of knowing whether different bodies could really be said to constitute, or belong to the same 'person'. [Although the latter question is dealt with in chapter eight, that will not be possible if these questions are not handled first.]

Indeed, in traditional African thought 'ancestors' (properly referred to as 'the living-dead') are believed to have some form of discarnate existence.<sup>3</sup> At the very least, they are, as Mbiti observes, 'partly human and partly "spirit"'.<sup>4</sup> But, this generates further questions as to how the living-dead can be identified individually, and why they are spoken of as if *those* embodied beings who once lived among 'us' (the living) can maintain their personal identities even after they have 'lost' their (original) bodies at death? So, the question of sameness of persons in both the present life and the hereafter is something that I will explore.

The final chapter, chapter eight, analyses the doctrine of reincarnation, focusing on the rationality of the concept. A brief but critical look will be taken at the Akan or African interpretations of reincarnation, in relation to the concepts of personal identity and personal survival. This will be done with the view to settling the question of the rationality or otherwise of the concept of reincarnation.

I will also make efforts to find out in this chapter if it is possible to have a situation where a person reincarnates in a body ( $B_1$ ), and after the death of  $B_1$  reincarnates in another body (say,  $B_2$ ), and in  $B_3$  after the death of  $B_2$ ? If a person can thus reincarnate in several bodies successively, then what will be the consequence of this for the personal survival of the various

reincarnated persons? The idea that the living-dead can reincarnate leads me to also question whether they survive as specific individuals or as aspects of *all* the bodies they once inhabited?

Moreover, for the proponents of the doctrine of reincarnation, it would not be out of place for a living person to claim that he has survived death(s). But the question is how or on what grounds can such a claim be made? How can we ascertain the truth of memory claims about our previous lives? In an effort to answer such difficult questions as these, it will become evident that belief in reincarnation is irrational.

### *Conclusion*

I will conclude that although the doctrine of reincarnation – especially as understood in African thought – is irrational, it offers some useful insights into the broad concept of personal identity. I will also show that the dissertation clarifies some thoughts about life, death and, to some extent, moral responsibility.

## PART ONE

### BELIEF IN REINCARNATION IN SOME ANCIENT CULTURES

The question as to whether or not *this* life is the only one there is, has exercised fertile minds throughout the history of humanity. Of course, the issue is not much about whether we (as humans) are content or happy that we are here or that this world is really known to us at all, but to a large extent, it has to do with the justified curiosity of persons, using the power of reason to understand a past that they literally were *not*, and a future that they are yet to experience. The expectation here is that the understanding thus acquired would help them gain some knowledge about themselves, why the present life is as it is, how they are to conduct themselves now, and how they are to approach the future. In point of fact, this knowledge-seeking venture relative to the past and future has unsurprisingly led some, indeed many, to speculate on the possibility of a next life or world. It has also led some philosophers and non-philosophers alike to offer some interesting and intriguing insights, even suggesting sometimes that their present lives are nothing but what were once the remote future lives of their past existences.

If the preceding statement is assumed to be true, it would mean that a future life needs not be otherworldly but can indeed be experienced on earth. It would then serve as a convenient and perhaps a generally acceptable basis for accepting the belief in reincarnation. Reincarnation is the belief that after the death of a person he or she can be born again to live on earth.<sup>1</sup> Reflections on rebirth or the cycle of rebirth as understood among ancient thinkers is what this part attempts to trace. In this regard, attention shall be paid to the religious and philosophical



traditions of Egypt, Greece, India, China and the Inca Empire. I intend to discuss the various cultures differently, except for a few places where it will be necessary to make allusions to the other(s), and then conclude.<sup>2</sup> The concerns of this part of the dissertation are important because an old but pluriversal doctrine like reincarnation which has been widely reflected upon and written about in various cultures – but not so widely in the African – cannot be academically explored without first situating it in the history of knowledge and ideas.

## CHAPTER ONE

### EGYPTIAN BELIEF

Unless otherwise mentioned, the views, beliefs and practices attributed to the ancient Egyptians would include anything that falls within the periods of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms of Egypt and a couple of centuries later. The Old Kingdom covers the period between 2780-2280 BC, comprising the third to sixth dynasties and marked by the predominance of Memphis; the Middle Kingdom between 2000-1785 BC comprising the eleventh to the fourteenth dynasties; and the New Kingdom between 1580-1080 BC comprising the eighteenth to twentieth dynasties with the notable feature of the predominance of Thebes.<sup>3</sup>

Death, or the absence of life, is necessary if reincarnation is to be conceivable. But it does appear that an understanding of the nature of death (that which ushers a person into any next life) would be greatly enhanced by a good appreciation of the meaning or nature of life. In broad

terms, questions relating to the constitution of life, its origin, what a good life is, and the purpose of life – if there is any – are critical in determining a people's attitude toward death.

If the question is put 'is death the absence of life in the body?' the answer one would ordinarily expect is 'yes'. But what this answer does is that it affirms the biological<sup>4</sup> interpretation that is often put on life, thereby restricting the definition of the term to natural science. The presence or absence of life, the identification or misidentification of 'the living' would thus become an empirical matter that should be settled by mere observation. But the matter is more serious and complex than that because some form of life is sometimes associated with the biologically dead, and the living are sometimes also spoken of as dead. This locution was not absent in Egyptian culture at all. For instance, in the *Teaching of Ptahhotpe* life was not mentioned in connection with people who were not living moral lives.<sup>5</sup> As Gardiner rightly observes '... it is more perplexing to find diametrically opposite views expressed or implied with regard to questions of fact or belief, as when the same being is described almost in one breath both as alive and as dead ...'<sup>6</sup>

The conception of the ancient Egyptians on the origin of life and its relation to the notion of immortality is extractable from their cosmology. They speculated a period when there was only void, a state of nothingness when, as the Pyramid Texts (1466) shows, '...heaven was not, when earth was not, when mankind was not, before the gods were born, before death had come into existence.'<sup>7</sup> In Memphite thought, Ptah (God) emerged and created the universe out of the nothingness.<sup>8</sup> As expected of a first cause, Ptah owes his existence to nothing else. This idea is better expressed in the translation by the Egyptologist James Breasted of the words on the Memphite Stone (also called Shabaka Stone) in a part of which Ptah declares '... I was the

maker of myself, in that I formed myself according to my desire and in accord with my heart.’<sup>9</sup>  
There was, however, no order in the universe until the coming into being of Atum Ra through his daughter Tefnut, at the command of Ptah.<sup>10</sup>

From this background, one would not be far from right to expect that they trace the origin of life to Ptah. What is worth noticing is the portrayal of Ptah as having brought things into being by word. A Memphite inscription reveals Ptah to have ‘primitively divided himself into “Heart” (the seat of the imaginative, judging faculty), as impersonated by Horus, and “Tongue” (the organ of command, i.e. the executive, willing faculty), as impersonated by Thot’. Functioning through his own parts, so to speak, Ptah thus pervaded all things that came to live. Although Gardiner argues that the Egyptians believed that ‘Ptah ... is the vital principle [of all living creatures]’, he restricts their conception of the living to ‘all gods, all men, all cattle and all reptiles.’<sup>11</sup> In Egyptian thought, he then concludes, life was extended to only humans and animals but not to plants.<sup>12</sup> His position has obvious consequences for the determination of entities that human life could possibly be said by the Egyptians to transfer into, if there was the need. One possible reason that can be adduced for the elimination of plants is that they were not considered alive because they did not appear to exhibit anything that resembled a capacity (however minimal) to act or show awareness. But one can question whether indeed plants lack every bit of activity? It appears also that any attempt to explore this question of activity is tantamount to a quest to know whether motion or rest is the principle of life, a question which Aristotle adequately addressed himself to.<sup>13</sup> Such an attempt should take into account the fact that not all ‘activity’ is visible to the eye or immediately perceptible to the senses, hence microscopic and sub-atomic reality.<sup>14</sup> Mysticism being such an important feature of Egyptian thought – and Ptah, the origin of life, being essentially metaphysical<sup>15</sup> – I do not think the priests would not have conceived of the

possibility of extraempirical activity, or the presence of life forms which the human eye was incapable of seeing directly. One can thus make the point that whenever life seems to be so much associated, as the Egyptians appeared to have done, with vitality or activity (or vital or activating principle) life somewhat becomes synonymous or, in biological parlance, isomorphic with vitality itself; and, that given the preceding statements, life – that is, both visible and invisible life forms – might have been conceived by the Egyptians to have indeed originated from Ptah.<sup>16</sup>

A living person, however, consisted of a body (*khat*) and soul (*ka*), the latter being the person's double that he was born with.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the *ka* which was thought of as 'conceptual' and a 'replica of the physical reality,'<sup>18</sup> the Egyptians also speculated a bird-like soul which they called *ba*.<sup>19</sup> Their conception of a person appears quite elaborate, for they even included other constituents like mind (*khu*) – which was considered as the 'shining part' that linked the person to God<sup>20</sup> – and even the shadow of the person (*khaibit*).<sup>21</sup> Now, given that the *khu* was within the *ka*, and the latter was believed<sup>22</sup> to survive death, one thing can be inferred: that although a person had both physical and non-material properties, upon death only a rational soul remained.<sup>23</sup>

While it cannot be dismissed that the soul of the departed was treated with some respect, the view that the extensive funerary rites (apparently directed at the soul) suggest some form of 'ancestral worship'<sup>24</sup> is strongly disputed. What is certain though is that the idea of immortality or, at least, the assurance of a next life was part of the beliefs of the Egyptians. An attitude of disdain and pessimism toward this life and that of adoration and celebration toward the next had come to gain currency by the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. Beyond *this* life, a longer life or existence was consequently envisaged.

The Egyptians addressed themselves as a people who feared death but I do not think that their fear of death is necessarily to be construed as fear of the ineluctable act of dying *per se*. Rather, they dreaded the idea that they might cease to enjoy the benefits of life. I am not saying for a moment that daily life was good for everybody; far from it! However, any knowledge, impression or appreciation of a ‘good life’ or ‘good living’ by anybody could not be totally decoupled from what the individual had personally experienced in this life or had been led to think about with the experiences of others. This way, one does not need to lead a relatively comfortable life to conceptualize, know or want to have more of the good things in this life; neither is there any need for the one leading a relatively difficult life not to be in that condition to be able to think of a life that has more of what he or she lacks. It comes as no surprise to me therefore, that what appeared to be a desire for immortality among the Egyptians seemed to be largely a quest for a guarantee of or for more of the things offered by the present life and seen now as valuable. Evidence of this can be found in the symbolic trinkets and other items placed in the tomb, in some prayers<sup>25</sup> said by the dead, and in the things that were said to await the souls that got to the yonder West.

Some scholars attribute a notion of reincarnation to the Egyptians (the priests in particular), some even credit them with the introduction of the doctrine while others completely deny that they had any understanding of the doctrine in the sense in which it is ‘properly’ defined in academic circles, such as that of Sri Aurobindo. Also, while some of those who associate the Egyptians with the doctrine – evidence forthcoming – do so with little or no evidence, some of those who deny that they (the Egyptians) knew or taught the doctrine have not had, in my assessment, good enough bases or arguments for the position they hold. [Some, like Gardiner, have carefully avoided declaring whether they think that the doctrine was existent in Egyptian thought or not.]

At this section of the chapter, I will examine the views of such scholars with the intention of stating how well the doctrine can or cannot be constructed from the religious philosophy of the Egyptians.

### 1.1. *Immortality and Reincarnation*

The doctrine of reincarnation suggests that there is a stable part of a person that constantly and consistently is not subject to death. The part is also believed to be spiritual, and distinct from the body. This immortal part, often understood as a soul, a rational soul, is that which takes on flesh repeatedly in a person's cycle of rebirths. In this case, the 'person' who is believed to consist in the soul survives in different bodies as a completely rational being. This understanding more or less cuts across all the cultures discussed in this chapter. [A detailed discussion of the constitution of a person and the philosophical basis for the postulation of the immortal soul is handled in chapter six.] I turn my attention now to the discussion of reincarnation in Egyptian thought.

The notion that a dead person can be born into this world again, or literally can 'be made flesh again'<sup>26</sup> – which is what reincarnation means – was, in Joseph Osei's view,<sup>27</sup> present in Egyptian thought; but he offers no reasons why this was so. It has also been suggested<sup>28</sup> that the doctrine was held by the Egyptians apparently because they believed that the soul 'transmigrated from body to body.' The problem here is that, since no further explanation of this statement is provided, it does appear that transmigration is equated to reincarnation. If my interpretation is right, then this argument for reincarnation is circular. For, the arguer presumes the truth of what

is supposed to be proven. Among other reasons, John Palo also puts down some weak arguments for his conviction that reincarnation was ensconced in Egyptian thought. He takes the following quotations from *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*:

Homage to Osiris, O Governor of those who are in Amenti (heaven)  
who maketh mortals to be born again, who renewest thy youth ...

Nebensi, the lord of reverence, saith: 'I am Yesterday, Today, and  
Tomorrow, (and I have) the power to be born the second time'

and, in Manfred Lurker's work, Palo finds another quote from *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*:

Undergoing my repeated births I remain powerful and young.<sup>29</sup>

Let me first make some things clear about the god Osiris: Osiris was believed to be the king of the dead, 'husband and brother of Isis, and father (or brother) of Horus, killed by Set but later resurrected (after Horus killed Set).'<sup>30</sup> It was also held that upon the death of a person, the soul became the 'child' of Osiris<sup>31</sup> and also got 'absorbed in the personality' of the latter. All souls in the underworld were thus called gods. It would be naïve to suppose that this extension of personality could come about minus any power, force or potency to the 'young Osirises' in a proportion that is equivalent to those of gods and thus higher than those of living persons. Therefore, the expression 'born again' in the first quotation does not necessarily imply re-embodiment in the human form (as reincarnation implies), and the reference to the renewal of youth is only an attempt to use figuratively the energy of (human) youth as an expression of vibrancy or potency of all in the underworld. There are in the second and third quotations similar terms as one finds in the first. The use of 'power' and 'powerful and young' in the second and

third respectively suggest such superhuman potency as mentioned above. Also, the rebirth or repeated birth of a god cannot by any means be called reincarnation because ‘reincarnation’ implies the rebirth of a human being in a human form. The statement in the second quote attributed to the lord of revenge is not of much help to the argument for reincarnation because of the same reason as stated above.

My comments in the immediate paragraph above do not of course mean that certain deities (especially, the non-Osirises) were not believed to have their ‘living’ terrestrial representatives. However, it would be wrong to call any such representation, as M. Kamath did, reincarnation.<sup>32</sup> When living persons are literally said to *be* certain deities, what is often implied is that those persons are believed to be earthly manifestations – I do not award any truth value to the belief – of the deity concerned. Such a belief is most likely put forward to suggest some possible connection between the deity itself and the human representative, so that the deity can be expected to work, affect or be affected through the representative. In the specific cases of Palo and Kamath, therefore, there is not much in their submissions to serve as evidence for reincarnation in Egyptian thought.

Even though it has been stated above (and does not appear contestable) that the *ka* was an essential element of a person, the idea that it survived in a new human body is strongly denied by Mark Albrecht based on the views of James Breasted. Albrecht’s two reasons against the survival of *ka* in a new body are: first, that the Egyptian practice of mummification was purposely to ‘prepare the deceased for the next world, not a return to this one,’ and secondly, that *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* only reveals ‘the soul being able to change itself into various life forms after death’ but not the ability to inhabit another human body on earth.<sup>33</sup> Such life forms



were often regarded as spiritual and thus imperceptible. Knowledge of those beings therefore was not to be affirmed or refuted on empirical grounds. The Egyptians' claim that the soul changed into other life forms was matter of belief.<sup>34</sup>

Albrecht's second point, although factual, would be an acceptable justification only if *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* is the only legitimate source of Egyptian thought and history. But, it is not. On the first point, I should say that it is misleading to depend on mummification and the elaborate funerary rites (or attention paid to the mummy, including the placing of items in the tomb) to suppose that all such practices were intended for the next life of the deceased. The items said something about the next life of the endured soul alright but mummification itself had little to do with the personality or experiences of the soul in the *duat*. True, that an aspect of the soul stayed around the grave and was believed to be capable of harming living humans who desecrated the place but this was spoken of in terms of the *ba* which was said to be bird-like and distinct from the mummy. I do not think it would have made much sense to regard a lifeless object, the corpus, to be capable of acting; no wonder that when such a thought was entertained by the older Egyptians, later thinkers dropped it.<sup>35</sup>

A distinction was thus made between the *khat* (body, mummy) and the *sahu* (spiritual body). The latter 'sprang from the *khat*.'<sup>36</sup> 'Spiritual body' sounds contradictory but it was a cleverly constructed notion to attribute action to something other than the dead body; probably, to the soul. And given that the soul was not just believed to survive physical death but also became an extension of Osiris, an extension which was impossible except metaphysically, the soul was possibly conceived as a metaphysical entity with possible connections to the *sahu*. In this case, it seems reasonable to assert that the spiritual body was conceived to encase the soul. I do not think

that this position is set aside by Hall's view that it was in the *sahu*, after death, that the 'concomitant parts of the man were re-united.'<sup>37</sup> Even in the practice where a priest whose duty it was to sleep in the death chamber – specifically, at the base of the upright-positioned coffin that contained the body – was said to 'see all the transformations of the god [the deceased]' in the yonder world, there was nothing in that to suggest that the transformations were those of the mummy itself, instead of the soul. On the basis of this exposition, I am inclined to accept the view that 'the real origin of mummification is to be found in a simple desire to preserve the dead man to his family.'<sup>38</sup> However, given 'the vast stores of wealth and thought expended by the Egyptians on their tombs,'<sup>39</sup> some people (such as the poor) were constrained or even excluded from the mummification of their dead. It was also to be expected that those who did not believe in personal survival – and there were indeed some such people – would not mummify their dead.

To examine further the question of reincarnation in Egyptian thought, an important issue that is worth considering is that of *ka*-names<sup>40</sup> discussed by Margaret Murray in her *The Splendor that was Egypt*. A *ka*-name is given to a person on the basis of the basic attribute that the bearer's specific soul is conceived to have. In this sense also, the *ka* 'is an abstract personality' of the individual. Both Palo and Oderberg cite her as providing evidence for reincarnation in the *ka*-names of some kings. For instance, the *ka*-name of Amonemhat I of the twelfth dynasty is given as 'he who repeats births' and that of Setekhy I of the nineteenth dynasty was 'repeater of births'. Someone might raise the objection that these names could imply rebirths in other forms of life (but not necessarily in the form of successive human re-embodiments on the basis of which alone reincarnation can actually be claimed). My initial reaction to this would be that it defies every

grammatical rule to regard a movement to a different level, a new state, or a new form of life as a ‘repeat’ of the original state or form. It is impossible to change and yet remain the same; sameness and change are mutually exclusive. Similarly, a life form ‘A’ can only be said to have been repeated if there comes another ‘A’ after the original. The implication of this on the *ka*-names borne by the kings is that they (the kings) were believed to have lived before or to be capable of living their human lives again through the process of birth.<sup>41</sup> The idea of reincarnation can thus be said to have been conceived by the Egyptians. The doctrine was not alien although it might not have featured significantly in the general religious consciousness of the people.

## 1.2. *Egypt and Africa*

This section and the next are written in the spirit of identifying which people the preceding ancient perspective of reincarnation should be ascribed to. Some philosophers have come up with the idea that ancient Egypt was part of the Mediterranean cultural space, and have subsequently claimed that Egypt was rather European, not African. But there is overwhelming evidence that such thinking or claim can in no way be close to the truth. Hegel is one philosopher who, in his *Philosophy of History*, held this misconception claiming that sub-Saharan Africa, ‘Africa proper’ (and, apparently, its present-day black inhabitants) lacked history and had never been part of ‘the historical process through which ... the human spirit fulfilled itself.’ He placed sub-Saharan Africa, as Abiola Irele observes, ‘at the opposite pole to Europe, as its ideal and spiritual antithesis.’<sup>42</sup> He distinguished ‘Africa proper’ from the other two historical (or civilized) parts of Africa, namely, ‘European Africa’ (i.e. the part ‘to the north of the desert’) and ‘the river region of the Nile’. His error, however, stems mainly from his inability to realize that (i) ancient Egypt

was not only civilized but also black, and (ii) European civilization or history itself which he thought was antithetical to the African condition might have had Egyptian (or black) influence.

The misconception about the geographical space of Africa can be traced (in part) to the ancient period of the Romans, when North Africa's Mediterranean coastline became part of the Roman Empire after 146 BC. The region around Carthage in present-day Tunisia was the first to be established as a province, and named Africa Vetus. Between that time and 46 BC the empire had extended to the Libyan coast and Numidia in present-day Algeria to constitute Africa Nova. And, by 42 AD the expansion subsequently reached Mauritania.<sup>43</sup> Just this area was where the Romans introduced the term 'Africa' to cover. But history has proven that their knowledge of the continent was quite limited. A remarkable consequence of the conquest of the Mediterranean coastline, however, was the religious, economic, political and cultural integration of the coastline into the Roman Empire.<sup>44</sup> But this integration had the potential to, and perhaps later did, mislead some to suppose that the area was civilized by the Romans or was always identifiable with Roman (or European) civilization as such. In reality though, the people – specifically, the indigenous black Egyptians – had had their civilization for thousands of years. The Roman occupiers, it must also not be lost sight of, engaged in a '[m]issionary enterprise whereby the Black people's culture has been caricatured in literature and exhibitions, in such specimens as provoke disrespect and laughter.' Indeed, 'the Roman Emperors Theodosius and Justinian were responsible for the abolition of the Egyptian Mysteries that is the culture system of the Black people, and also for the establishment of [c]hristianity for its perpetual suppression.'<sup>45</sup>

Among those who see Athenian culture as the foundation of Western civilization are some who might insulate the former from any Egyptian influence while, at the same time, wrongly

projecting the Athenians as the originators of some philosophical ideas that had for centuries existed in the pristine culture of Egypt. The ‘miseducation’ on the Egyptian contribution to the intellectual history of humankind – not only to the West – might also be attributed in ancient times to some dishonesty on the part of Aristotle and the Lacedaemonians. When Alexander the Great conquered Alexandria, it was ‘to be expected that the library of Alexandria was immediately ransacked and looted by Alexander and his party, no doubt made up of [his tutor] Aristotle and others, who did not only carry off large quantities of scientific books: but also frequently returned to Alexandria for the purpose of research.’<sup>46</sup> Although Aristotle was betrayed by the sheer number of his ‘self-authored’ works (about 400), the lack of uniformity between his lists of books, the fragmentary character of his writings, and the adoption of doctrines (on the soul, God, etc) from the Egyptians,<sup>47</sup> he failed to acknowledge his sources. The harm that he did, perhaps unintended, was to help obliterate – though unsuccessfully – the Egyptian mark on history, and facilitate the Athenian claim to those ideas.

This misrepresentation is further seen in the sort of Greek history constructed by some scholars. For instance, two models of Greek history are identified by Martin Bernal: the Aryan and Ancient models. The Aryan model suggests that ‘there had been an invasion from the north – unreported in ancient history – which had overwhelmed the local “Aegean” or “Pre-Hellenic” culture.’ By this model, ‘Greek civilization is seen as a result of the mixture of the Indo-European-speaking Hellenes and their indigenous subjects.’ He calls this ‘The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985’ in Volume One of his *Black Athena*.<sup>48</sup> The Ancient model suggests that ‘Greek culture had arisen as a result of colonization, around 1500 BC, by Egyptians and Phoenicians who had civilized the native inhabitants.’ In fact, Bernal does not only admit that the

Greeks ‘had continued to borrow heavily from Near Eastern cultures,’ but also he advances in Volume Two of his work that the period of colonization mentioned in the Ancient model began ‘somewhat earlier, in the first half of the second millennium BC.’<sup>49</sup> Within this same period of Egyptian domination, the control of the Egyptian state extended ‘into Asia as far as the borders of Mesopotamia’ (1554-1304 BC)<sup>50</sup> and had substantial trade links with Phoenicia in particular. The mentioning of these regions is significant because it is indicative of areas from where Egyptian thought might have indirectly reached Athens before 332 BC when Alexander ‘liberated’ Egypt from the rule of Persia. As a matter of fact, some notable Greek philosophers (so-called) even had direct education in Egypt:

... Pythagoras after receiving his training in Egypt, returned to his native island, Samos, where he established his order for a short time, after which he migrated to Croton (540 B.C.) in Southern Italy, where his order grew to enormous proportions, until his final expulsion from that country. We are also told that Thales (640 B.C.) who had also received his education in Egypt, and his associates: Anaximander, and Anaximenes, were natives of Ionia in Asia Minor, which was a stronghold of the Egyptian Mystery schools, which they carried on. (Sandford's *The Mediterranean World*, p. 195–205). Similarly, we are told that Xenophanes ..., Parmenides, Zeno and Melissus were also natives of Ionia and that they migrated to Elea in Italy and established themselves and spread the teachings of the Mysteries.

In like manner we are informed that Heraclitus ..., Empedocles, Anaxagoras and Democritus were also natives of Ionia who were interested in physics. Hence in tracing the course of the so-called Greek philosophy, we find that Ionian students after obtaining their education from the Egyptian priests returned to their native land, while some of them migrated to different parts of Italy, where they established themselves ... [At that time], Thales to Aristotle 640 B.C.–322 B.C., the Ionians were not Greek citizens, but at first Egyptian subjects and later Persian subjects.<sup>51</sup>

Eventually, when Egyptian philosophy got to Athens it was regarded as ‘foreign’. The introduction of ‘foreign doctrines’ was a reason for Athenian elders to condemn Socrates to take the hemlock, and cause Plato and Aristotle to flee for their lives. On account of all this, first, it is difficult to discount Bernal’s Ancient model which, at least, admits the Egyptian influence on

ancient Greek philosophy. [Even the teachings of the non-Greeks above eventually became known in European history as Greek Philosophy or as part of the history of Greek Philosophy. This was after Aristotle's school and alumni had made the first major compilation of such a history.<sup>52</sup>] Secondly, given (i) the contacts or symbiotic interactions the Egyptians had with Phoenicians and other peoples of the Mediterranean cultural space, (ii) the influence of Egyptian thought on prominent ancient philosophers of Italy, Ionia, and later Greece, it is highly questionable that ancient Greece should be the source of Mystery Religions, for, most ancient philosophers often labeled as Greek either received their training from the Egyptian priests or had some contact with Egyptian culture.

I cannot also avoid mentioning that although quite a later development, the Roman conquest brought some new changes unto the religious landscape of Egypt. This is because a new religion, christianity, had been introduced to compete for the acceptance of the indigenes. From Egypt, christianity spread to other parts of Africa such as Ethiopia in the fourth century, and then to Nubia.<sup>53</sup> Egypt experienced the arrival of islam in the year 642 AD, from where it also spread to other parts of North Africa and, later, to sub-Saharan Africa. Egypt therefore contributed enormously to the phenomenon of 'the triple heritage' which, Mazrui rightly observes, is found in several parts of (sub-Saharan) Africa today. The 'triple heritage' refers to the idea that traditional religion, christianity (westernization) and islam are a defining feature of the cultural context within which the contemporary African functions. It 'explores how African contemporary lifestyles are influenced by indigenous, [w]estern, and [i]slamic factors and questions whether [w]esternization is reversible.'<sup>54</sup>

Historically, the ancient Egyptians were black and, in some sense, the forebears of black, sub-Saharan Africans. Herodotus<sup>55</sup> described the inhabitants of ancient Egypt as ‘black skinned’ with ‘wooly hair’. This view is corroborated by Cheikh Anta Diop’s presentations of the sculptures and photos of the Egyptians in his *The African Origin of Civilization*. Bernal’s *Black Athena* reiterates the same fact, while George James asserts that ‘the Greeks called the Egyptians Hoi Aiguptoi which meant Black people.’<sup>56</sup> But the black Egyptians had to disperse, or better, migrate from that place for natural reasons, among others. Their migration downwards was influenced in part by drought. For instance, when river bodies and fertile lands in the Sahara region were badly affected by extreme drought in 4000 BC, they moved downwards to live at areas where farming life could be sustained. This took them to West Africa (in particular).<sup>57</sup> It is in this light that some exploration of the connections between Egyptian thoughts concerning life and death and those of a West African culture like the Akan is particularly worthwhile. Again, since it cannot be said that none of those who migrated to West Africa proceeded subsequently to anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa, ancient Egypt and present-day sub-Saharan cultures could be expected to have affinities.

### 1.3. *On the Meaning of Africa*

The word ‘Africa’ is a direct coinage from Roman and Greek languages dating back to ancient days. It was formed from expressions which referred to the sunny conditions that prevailed in and around Egypt. This weather condition was in sharp contrast with the cold conditions that the Romans and Greeks often experienced in their home regions. In Greek language, the prefix ‘a-’ (meaning ‘not’ or ‘without’) was added to *phrike* (‘cold’) to generate the name *aphrike* (‘without



cold'). The Latin expression for 'sunny' is *aprica*.<sup>58</sup> This means the name 'Africa' was originally given to ancient Egypt by Greeks and Romans mainly for meteorological reasons.

Currently, it is known to refer to an entire continent, as a matter of geography. However, I have used and will, throughout this dissertation, use Africa or Africans for cultural purposes; especially, in connection with sub-Saharan Africa where the peoples share, to a large extent, similar cultural values. Depending on the context, also, 'Africans' could refer to the inhabitants of either ancient Egypt or present-day sub-Saharan Africa. It is baffling nevertheless why a culture, a people, should be expected to refer to themselves by a name culturally insignificant and unknown to them. This is why it is fitting that although Ali Mazrui, in his *The Africans*, employs the term 'Africa' he, at the same time, registers his protest for having to do so.

Following the example of Mazrui, therefore, I am also not comfortable with the use of the terms 'Africa' and 'Africans'; but I must use them anyway in the absence of better, indigenous terminologies.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GREEK BELIEF

F. M. Cornford traces the origin of *palingenesia* (reincarnation) in ancient Greek philosophy to the Dionysiac cult-society, which he describes as a ‘self-contained group, with a common life centred in its daemon.’ Although the cult-society conceived that the daemon (or soul) ‘both resides in all its members at once, and also lies beyond any one of them,’ its idea that the common life is divine and immutable is what really led to the doctrine of reincarnation, because the group held that this common life ‘which is perpetually renewed, is reborn out of that opposite state, called death...’<sup>59</sup>

As Plato (427 – 347 BC) also links the doctrine to ‘theologically minded priests and priestesses,’ Guthrie’s understanding of him is that, by this, he [Plato] ‘probably *had* in mind the Orphics, whose religious beliefs were closely allied to those of the Pythagoreans.’<sup>60</sup> What is clear from the accounts of both Cornford and Guthrie is that reincarnation, in Western thought, has its origin in the religious philosophy of ancient Greece.

In Orphic mythology, humans fell because of a primal sin but could rise again through purifications and, thus, rebirths.<sup>61</sup> The sin came about because Titan killed and ate his child<sup>62</sup>; consequently, in an attempt to lead good moral lives, the Orphics ‘suppressed the Titanic and cherished the Dionysiac’ in them. In doing this, particularly the latter, the Orphic would exhibit ‘the romantic, Dionysiac strain of *enthusiasmos* in which reason abdicated and man feels the ecstatic joy of possession by the god.’<sup>63</sup> This notwithstanding, they thought of a world next to

this which was of great value, and in which the soul of a person could live after death. This suggests that they had a dualistic conception of a person and the world. Life in the 'real' sense was that lived by the soul in the yonder world. As a result of this belief, the Orphic aspired to (qualify his or her soul for) that life. Indeed, what most people regarded as life was death to the Orphic, as he also saw 'the body as the tomb of the soul.'<sup>64</sup>

The Orphic attitude to life, death and the afterlife subsequently found some echo in the views of later Greek philosophers on eschatology.<sup>65</sup> John Burnet even suspects that Pythagoras (c582 – c500 BC) was directly influenced by his contemporary Orphics to come up with some of the views which he expressed on the afterlife.<sup>66</sup> The Orphic dualism is seen in such works of Plato as the *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Meno* and *Phaedo* where emphasis is also laid on the soul and preference given to the next world. In comprehensive terms, confirms Hamilton and Cairns, Plato's doctrine of the soul had been 'associated with the Orphic Mysteries and Pythagorians.'<sup>67</sup>

In quite a similar fashion as the Orphic teaching that accentuates the inherent importance of the soul, some Greek philosophers identified life with the soul or, at least, saw the soul as the bearer of life or as a life-giving principle. Some even went further to make taboos of foods which they considered to have affinity with human life.<sup>68</sup> This apparently was to show the sanctity of human life and the need not to violate it. Again, because human life was conceived to extend beyond this world or existence, it became a sort of tautology to think of life in terms of existence, and contradictory to see death as a sort of non-existence. This was because life or the bearer of life, to the Orphic, always *was*.<sup>69</sup> The tautology would have arisen because by saying that, that which lives exists, one would be implying that, that which exists (life, or the soul) exists; while by regarding death as nonexistence, one would be virtually classifying life (or soul) which always

exists, as capable of not existing – at least, at the period of bodily death. Empedocles (c490 – c430 BC) probably saw through this when he remarked that what was ordinarily called life was not existence [in its fuller sense] nor is death destruction.<sup>70</sup> Life, to him, was a period in which things were joined together to form a human being, and death merely a dissolution of this compound, since, he would agree, nothing which *was* could be annihilated. The same line of thought is found in Democritus (c460 – c359BC) who understood life and death in terms of ‘change in the arrangement of atoms.’<sup>71</sup> Plato also conceived of death as just a separation of the soul from the body in the *Phaedo*.

Also, the Orphic notion of the immortality of the soul was extended or transformed by Heraclitus (c540 – c470 BC) into a transcendental concept of existence within which all opposites (in terms of experiences and entities) dissolved. That, since everything moved constantly between Fire and moist or life and death, humans acquired and dropped simultaneously some amount of both opposites in every action they took. As a result, ‘one [could] even say “life and death [were] the same,” the immortal mortal, as the everlasting cycle [pursued] its course and one thing changes into another.’<sup>72</sup> But the soul, he observed, would always drift toward fire (life).

With such a broader view of life and the world in general, and with the emphasis laid on the soul came the need for the Greek philosophers to explore how the immortal soul actually carried on with its independent life. If, as already discussed, the soul existed in the afterlife then questions about its functions and experiences, about how these two connected to the past or reconnected the soul to earthly life, and whether an afterlife existent should have anything at all to do with any future life on earth could not have escaped the attention of the soul-theorist philosophers of Greece.

A return of the soul to this world was postulated. Although the belief in rebirth was shared among a number of philosophers, the time given for a soul to be reborn or complete its cycle of births was not unanimous. Empedocles did suggest that a soul would not be born again after ‘thrice ten thousand seasons’, a period which Guthrie<sup>73</sup> compares with the ten thousand years mentioned by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (248e). Quite related to this is the view held by the later Pythagoreans and which also became part of the teachings of the Stoics that reincarnation of the soul took place in as short a period as every two hundred and sixteen years,<sup>74</sup> while for Plato it was a thousand years between any two births.

In Greek eschatology the soul was not believed to inhabit only human bodies. In Orphic religion, for instance, the soul was believed to inhabit ‘successively animal and vegetable bodies ...’<sup>75</sup> Porphyrius reports Pythagoras as also believing that the soul could change into other nonhuman forms.<sup>76</sup> This is in spite of his (Pythagoras’) claims about his past lives in a human form.<sup>77</sup> Another example is Empedocles who reveals his numerous incarnations as once a boy, then a girl, a bush, a bird and a fish.<sup>78</sup> The strength of these and other evidences<sup>79</sup> offered in support of reincarnation will be explored in the last chapter, although greater emphasis shall be laid on the rationality of the African belief in reincarnation.

An interesting argument was used by Plato in the *Phaedo* in support of reincarnation. Just as Empedocles believed that ‘nothing can come from nothing,’<sup>80</sup> Plato considered impossible the creation of anything, including human souls, *ex nihilo*. As a result, there was the need for souls to reincarnate, otherwise as humans continued to be born into this world, there would come a time when there was going to be no souls left to inhabit new bodies. The cycle of rebirth, it thus seemed, offered a rational explanation for the perpetuation of human life on earth. In the

*Republic*, Plato added that the souls that were or ought to be reincarnated had to be fixed in number, and that since each soul was immortal<sup>81</sup> the population of souls could not decrease, neither could it increase. For there to be an increment, one of two impossible situations had to obtain: first, that souls be created *ex nihilo*, and secondly, that ‘nonsoul’ entities be turned into souls, so that all things would eventually become souls. To avoid these, therefore, reincarnation had to be true.

It was also a feature of Greek mythology to have souls judged after death, with the promise of possible salvation for the soul from the wheels of rebirth. The Orphics held the belief that souls could achieve this and eternally live with the gods through purifications. But, unlike some later Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus and Plato who thought of two contrasting afterlife abodes akin to the christian<sup>82</sup> conceptions of heaven and hell, the Orphics believed that ‘the incurable souls were condemned to lie in the Slough’ and nothing more.<sup>83</sup> Since salvation was associated with a life with the gods or as a god, it appeared normal for people who were believed to be in the final laps of their incarnations (those who had reached apotheosis) to be referred to as gods. Empedocles who saw himself as one, and addressed himself to his people as follows: ‘I go among you all as immortal god, mortal no more ...’<sup>84</sup> Until the soul was redeemed from the cycle of rebirth, Empedocles believed that the soul had to be successively embodied to pay for its sins. What he shared with the Orphics was that he also had no concept of hell,<sup>85</sup> and also believed that not all humans could reincarnate.<sup>86</sup> Given the influence of Orphic mysticism on Greek religious philosophy and the similarities beginning to emerge from the above between Empedocles’ ideas and Orphic teachings, I would not rule out a possible influence on Empedocles by Orphic thought for the views just attributed to him. My suspicion is, in fact, enhanced by Guthrie’s observation regarding the intellectual environment at the time of

Empedocles, that ‘there existed a systematic body of religious doctrine, commonly and with good reason known as Orphic, which was current especially in Western Greece, and by individual writers of genius could be modified to suit their own purposes.’<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the Orphics and Empedocles, however, Heraclitus as mentioned previously conceived of a hell. The conception of a heaven and hell or abodes of bliss and misery for souls was, to a large extent, also envisaged by thinkers who saw the serving of justice as the natural consequence for certain kinds of world. One such world is *the present* in which the righteous who, by the principle of like to like, are not supposed to suffer or be harmed, actually experience that; while the vicious rather appear to be comfortable and happy. With the two afterlife dwelling places, it would be expected of such thinkers to suggest that the righteous dwell in eternal bliss while the vicious find home at the place of pain and misery. Traces of this are found in Plato’s *Gorgias* where a myth portraying the scene of judgement in the Meadows makes some souls go to Tartarus and others to the island of the Blest.<sup>88</sup> In the *Republic* the myth is given of Er<sup>89</sup> who said of the judgement scene that ‘the unjust were commanded to take the downward road to the left’ where they could dwell in misery for a thousand years while the just lived in a joyous heaven.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INDIAN BELIEF

Thoughts about the concepts of life, death, rebirth and the moral as well as practical significance of these to the evolution of humanity pervade various literary works of Hindu origin. The ones that offer the most classical insights into the concepts are the Samhita or Vedas, the Brahmanas, Upanishads and the Mahabharata epic poem of which the Bhagavad Gita is part.<sup>90</sup>

Although the doctrine of reincarnation in Indian thought is often said to have been developed by the ancient Aryans, glimpses of belief in the afterlife and even postmortem (re)embodiment of some sort was held among the indigenous people whom the early Aryans came to meet. From J. N. Farquhar's remark that among the non-Aryan Indians 'there were probably totemistic clans who believed that at death a man became, like his totem, a tiger, an ox, a frog, or a snake,' H. Rose surmises a reason for it: that the non-Aryans merely observed the resemblances 'among kindred.'<sup>91</sup> But, all this suggests that the non-Aryans believed that the person could be thought of in terms of other non-human bodies after death.

The idea of reincarnation (in the sense of a return to this world in a human form) was however absent, just as it was in the case of the early Aryans. The latter taught the Vedas. Life was portrayed in the Vedic hymns as transcending the physical, a view made partly possible by the conception in the Atharva Veda that the human being consisted of an 'unborn part' (*aja bhāga*) and a body (*ashu*). This unborn part is interpreted as the soul.<sup>92</sup> The soul was believed to have some prior existence to birth and a post-death existence. But elsewhere<sup>93</sup> in the same Veda, some



important features of the body are mentioned; these are the *Menas* consisting of mind, feeling and will. But as one can see, these are para-physical features or, as Valea calls them ‘psycho-mental faculties’ which, by being dependent on the mechanisms of the body, one would clearly not differentiate them from the bodily as such. In spite of this, the Veda just mentioned also treated the dead as whole persons, speaking of them in both bodily and non-bodily terms. This was common in the funerary prayers and rituals.

The abode of the person in the afterlife was important to the Aryans. A land for the righteous where there was not going to be suffering was envisioned alongside a terrifying abode for the wicked. At death the body was cremated, so the god of fire, Agni, was obviously at hand. And, due to the tendency for humans to seek the best for their loved ones (and in this case, the deceased) it seemed a rational approach to seize the moment’s opportunity to petition Agni, through the funerary prayer and ritual, to take the soul to the world of the righteous. This they did. But, despite this significant role of Agni in the Vedic eschatology, it was not the god of death. Yama was. Yama also played some judgemental roles in the afterlife. ‘Divine justice was provided by the gods Yama, Soma and Indra, but not by an impersonal law such as karma. One of their attributes was to cast the wicked into an eternal dark prison out of which they could never escape.’<sup>94</sup> According to Rose, notably, the soul was never conceived to return to the earth.

Reincarnation as presented in the post-Vedic literatures cannot be well understood without first explaining the law of karma. It is the law that in every action is its effect. It is presented as a natural law that works independently of human will. Good consequences for good actions, bad for bad actions. Now, the earliest sign of reincarnation or *samsara* – which literally means ‘wandering’ – is traced by both R. C. Zaehner (in his *Hinduism*) and Swami Aghananda

Bharati<sup>95</sup> to the Upanishads, but this credit can as well go to the composers of the Brahmanas in which afterlife experiences were said to be curtailed through a second death to enable souls come back to earth to live. This return took place after the souls had received the entire recompenses or punishments for their deeds in the previous life. This implied that, if souls were indeed imperishable, the person in the afterlife was conceived to have some physical (material) properties that could be expected to perish. I recognize though that by the term ‘reincarnation’ the understanding is often that an enduring aspect of a deceased successively takes on a new body on earth, only to survive again after the death of the acquired body. As this suggests, all forms of death occur on earth.

The Upanishads contain the belief that apart from purified souls which pass through flame (or life) to live eternally with Brahman (the Godhead), certain souls – due to their lack of ‘knowledge of reality’ – are rained down unto the earth by the moon to become, in the words of Zaehner, ‘worms, moths, and biting serpents’ and, Rose adds, ‘fish, bird, or man.’<sup>96</sup> Although death in the Upanishads takes place only on earth, in contrast with what the Brahmanas contain, it may still not be right to dissociate reincarnation from Brahmanic teachings. Indeed, the Upanishads provide the earliest hint on reincarnation only on the count of second earthly death, because the thrust of reincarnation – the act of re-embodiment on earth – is not absent at all from the Brahmanas.

If, by karma, the collective deeds of a person are needed to determine the status of his post-mortem being, then this status cannot be determined exhaustively while the person is still alive. This is because the person ordinarily does not stop acting while living. In this respect, he needs to die or end that life session before the cumulative effect of his actions can be determined, since

every single action matters for the emergence of the actor's 'body of deeds.' The notion of adequate recompense and the tying of deed to being (or to *ontic* category) weave into the doctrine of karma the possibility of a next life, a rebirth, reincarnation. This, however, would not mean that 'a next life' and 'reincarnation' are synonyms. It is thus appropriate for P.T. Raju to assert that the ideas that different actions have different 'fruits' and that humans must enjoy the 'fruits' of their actions gave birth to, or necessitated the concept of reincarnation. These ideas he also observes, are central to the doctrine of karma, a doctrine which was somehow known to both the Brahmanas and the Upanishads, but 'developed much later in the Mīmamsā concept of *apurva* (unseen force).'<sup>97</sup> Karma, more or less, has come to serve as a basis for the gradations of personality and of qualities of life in any earthly existence. For instance, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* declares '[a]ccording as one acts, according as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil...'<sup>98</sup> Again, karma accounts somehow for the variations of being in the world, for a person's current karmic debts determine the being in the form of which he appears in future: a worm, dog, plant, or human. If human, the social status he or she occupies also depends on the same doctrine of karma.

In some sense, the earlier comment that karma is the basis for reincarnation is not contradicted by Sri Aurobindo's <sup>99</sup> attempt to make the evolution of the soul – in his words, the soul's 'efflorescence out of the veil of matter and its gradual self-finding' – the true basis for rebirth. That, the soul having had some stints with the finite, the body, 'is driven to seek its infinity again by the principle of succession ...' This movement of the soul, he thinks, makes reincarnation logically unavoidable. While the claim about the soul's ability to seek its infinity might not be a misrepresentation, it definitely requires further analysis. By suggesting that the soul 'seeks,' I understand him as saying that the soul desires and has the intrinsic capacity to achieve what it

seeks or desires. I do not think that Sri Aurobindo would accept the view that in seeking its objective, so to speak, the soul moves in any direction at all between higher and lower form of life. The choice of direction must therefore be purposeful. But in the case of an embodied soul – that is, of a person who lives on earth – the direction to take would not be a matter of the soul’s own choosing, since by so doing the notion of human responsibility would be made nonsense of. The reason for this is that it would become conceivable that the soul is given the opportunity to choose a direction, a future that would enable it to escape the deserved effects of its deeds in the present life. The only moment that the human soul can conceivably choose whether to move up in purity or down into a lower creature is when it is existing prior to its first attachment to a body and has no karmic debts to pay or credits to look forward to. But so far as humans who are already living on earth are concerned, it appears that the purposeful movement of the soul is in turn contingent on the drive of karma. Thus, reincarnation does not issue ultimately from the soul’s propensity to achieve purity or infinity, but from the weight of karmic debts which must be paid. Whether there would be a rebirth in a higher or lower level of being, and whether a further embodiment would be necessary at a particular stage of the soul’s development, all depend on the demands or dictates of karma accrued in a previous life.

A position that Sri Aurobindo would support is that to live the life of a reincarnated person now is to live out (to some degree) a karma, doing which activity also launches the person to a next karma-living, and successively. I say this because this view is consistent with the position M. V. Kamath attributes to him (Sri Aurobindo) that ‘there is no soul that incarnates ... It is karma that incarnates.’ It is noteworthy, however, that if anyone takes the reincarnation of karma literally, such a stance would be almost impossible to defend because I do not think it would be easy to

justify any notion of ‘ownerless karma’ – that is, the belief in a transfer and practical manifestation (in a new life) of karmic effects that belong to no one or to no soul.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is explicitly taught reincarnation when Krishna tells him that the soul or self (*atman*) ‘casts out’ old bodies for new ones in just the same way as humans jettison old for new garments. What is ordinarily referred to as the soul is in reality – that is, in its untainted, independent, original state – a speck of the transcendent Self (the Godhead, the Brahman). The *atman* is sometimes spoken of as external to and, according to Sri Aurobindo, bigger than the body. The Brahman is seen as a World-Soul that permeates everything; but the *atman* is the evidence of the permeation in humans. When the self thus progressively casts off successive bodies, it is expected to go back to or re-unite with the Brahman. The self (*atman*), in this struggle, in this progressive journey to the Brahman is to be aided by the individual who bears it, by acquiring a specific kind of knowledge: that of the ultimate oneness of the self and the Brahman. This knowledge leads to salvation, but its absence in a person is *maya* (ignorance) and a basis for rebirth.

For a moment, one may be tempted to assume that all would go along with the equation of the soul, which appears personal, with the self. But, Valea questions this sort of equation, suggesting that they are two completely different entities in a person. What is at issue is the personal, not the physical or nonphysical, status of ‘soul’ and ‘self’. He argues that if we refer to *atman* as the self, we can no more equate the soul to the self because the *atman* derives from the impersonal Brahman, while the soul is often understood in personal terms. To enforce this distinction, he restricts the use of ‘self’ to only the *atman*. But the Brahman, he does not dispute, is essentially metaphysical. To me, the rendering of *atman* as the self and not the soul by Valea might not be

correct under all circumstances, even if the Brahman is indeed impersonal. If it is accepted, for example, that a thing or some part of it can be *in* another, then logically the constituents of the other will now include the received element (whether the received maintains its distinctness in the host or fuses with the basic or natural properties of the host). In this context, therefore, it would be false to say that a host entity cannot have as part of itself something that originates from without (or from another entity); stated differently, it would be wrong to claim that because one entity gives forth its part to another, the latter is not partly constituted by what it receives from the other. In this sense, it would be difficult to consider *atman* as not to have ever been part of the constitution of a person. Indeed, it is believed to be the subject of human experience. Consequently, even though the *atman* finds itself at the human level where it is personal in character, it is at the same time, identifiable with the impersonal Brahman. The latter is particularly true after the *atman* has shaken off all its karmic debts and is in its pure state. It is then to be expected (except in the case of Valea) that the *atman* would be conceived in two ways, personal and impersonal, matter-connected and matter-deficient. ‘Self’ and ‘soul’ – with the impersonal and personal features they are respectively claimed to possess by Valea – are rather true of the same *atman*.

Moreover, as long as the idea is formed of something that it is an immaterial and eternal aspect of a person, and is commonly regarded as the essence or core of that person, then, that idea meets the general requirement among soul-theorist philosophers to be termed as soul or self – the two terms are used interchangeably. There is no doubt that relative to a living person, the just-given description fits the nature and characteristic of the *atman*. The different features given by Valea to the soul and the self are features of the same entity. They refer to different stages or states of the same soul; that is (i) when the soul is in or attached to the body, and (ii) when it is no longer

attached to the body or is thought of in its pure independent form. The difficulty in claiming any sort of complete difference between the two can be seen in an issue Valea reports, unconscious of its importance to the present matter. It relates to karma. He says that in order to show how karmic debts work themselves into the future life of a person, the Vedanta introduced the notion of *sukshma sharira* (spiritual body) as that which formed the outer layer or skin of the *atman*. From every indication, the 'spiritual body' served as the conduit between the *atman* and the body, and also bore the karma of the previous body which the *atman* had the objective of casting off eventually. If the *atman* lacked every personal attribute, it would neither have anything like an objective or ability to cast off its karma or body, nor require, as Brahman does not, any sort of body at any state of its existence.

The development and trajectory of belief in reincarnation across various stages in ancient Hindu mysticism has been winding and sometimes confusing. To answer any anticipated call for clarity then, I cannot end this section with a better summary than that of Raynor Johnson<sup>100</sup>:

The essence of the Vedanta is monistic, i.e. it accepts one supreme principle *Brahman*. *That thou art* is the supreme concept of Indian thought: the spirit of man is one in its nature with the supreme Spirit. We only think that other things have some reality because we have not known our true nature. We are ignorant of this: reality is obscured from us by veils of *maya*. Re-incarnation, a continual cycle of births and deaths, is man's destiny until he achieves freedom and enlightenment by the realisation of his own true nature. The great law of karma, of justice working through chains of cause and effect, secures that the conditions of man's living are those which he has created for himself in his long past. By the long process of upward striving or aspiration, and by progressive detachment of the unreal, the veils of *maya* are ultimately pierced, the karmic debts are ultimately discharged and the great returning home takes place.

At around the sixth century BC when Hinduism had lost some force, a new religion called Jainism was born as a revolt against the status quo. Indeed, Jaina philosophy which, according to Rose, is 'probably the oldest living Indian creed,' supplied both doctrine and vocabulary to the

later Hindu thought and Buddhism as well. The Jains, for instance, held that a person consisted of a *jiva* (soul or life) and *ajiva* (body or the ‘inorganic’) and that when the soul had no attachments with the body it was called *atman*. But until all attachments were severed, at the time of death the soul, according to Kamath,<sup>101</sup> did ‘contract into the seed of the next birth which it had to undergo, as a result of the nature of its previous deeds . Each person had to strive to liberate their souls (that is, to make them reach their highest state – *moksha*) and each become a great soul (*paramātmān*) existing independently of any other soul (including the Brahman).<sup>102</sup> At this stage, *nirvana* is achieved; that is the stage where the soul gets into eternal ‘blessedness.’

It is not clear whether or not the Buddha (c566 - 480 BC) – also known as Chakyamuni, Butsu, Siddhartha and Gautama – actually taught reincarnation of the soul. Given the hold that the notion of rebirth of the soul had had on Indian thinkers over the centuries, and the influence it might have had – possibly minimal, though – on some people at his age, it is quite interesting how he appeared not to have made the immortality of the soul one of the central themes of his teaching. Yet, in another breath, he recognized and even endorsed rebirth of some sort. This notwithstanding, his reluctance<sup>103</sup> to either endorse or reject publicly the immortality of the soul has made some to say that Buddhism had ‘no information on the soul.’<sup>104</sup> The Buddhist doctrine of ‘not self’ (*an-atman*) – the doctrine that no such thing as ‘self’ exists, therefore there is no real self which could be the subject of human experience<sup>105</sup> – has also helped much in the gaining of currency of the view that the Buddha did not consciously teach reincarnation. This is because the *an-atman* doctrine effectively eliminates the possibility of any enduring soul or self that experiences rebirth.



What is a bit of a baffle is how the Buddha (the Enlightened) could still have spoken of his past lives, with what I have said so far about him. For instance, in his attempt to advise his followers to be wary of women whose enticements he equated to those of demons and blamed for the ‘ruins of kingdoms and the destruction of people,’ he recounted his own folly in a previous life when he was a peacock: that he ‘allowed himself to be seduced by a blue bird whom he wished to take to wife.’ But, in its (his) attempt to find dainty food requested by the blue bird, it was killed by a hunter. He also said that he was once the heir apparent of the Çibi kingdom several *kalpas* (‘huge periods of universal life’) ago.<sup>106</sup> It can be said here that the Buddha was not necessarily teaching any uninterrupted sameness of person who constituted the subject of spiritual progression, as we found in Hinduism. I can, therefore, explain the claims about his past lives in two ways: first, that he might have cited the peacock example to facilitate his move to wean his followers from things that people so much cherished and were attached to in the material world. And, one of these, it might have appeared to him, was women. [It would be a fair question here to ask, assuming the preceding comment is right, if men could not also be objects of desire?] He thought that attachment to the material world or the false belief in personal possession stood in people’s way to enlightenment and to *nirvana*. Another possible explanation for the reference to his past lives (particularly, regarding the second example) is that the Buddha did not see the absence of soul or self as an impediment to the rebirth of humans.

If my analysis of the two instances of past lives gives someone the impression that those instances are consistent with everything I have previously said about the Buddha, then, I am clearly misunderstood. His notion that a person is soulless but rather composed of only the body alongside its consciousness, cognition, feeling and mental constructions (the *skandhas*) which, as Albrecht puts it, ‘dissolve upon death and reactivate at birth,’ clearly suggests some renewal or

continuity of 'person' although there is a gap or lull in activity between death and rebirth. This is why even after several *kalpas*, he could be spoken of as 'that person' who was the prince. Following his example, a person who knows of his (the person's) previous life can say to himself today, 'I, who now am, *was* then'. If this is right, then the question is, relative to the experiences in the past and present lives, is there someone, some self, whose experiences are the two? Buddhists say 'no', but the logic in this is quite tortuous.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHINESE BELIEF

It would be much helpful to clarify a few issues about the conception of life and death among the ancient Chinese as a prelude to the discussion of their beliefs respecting the afterlife and reincarnation. Citing J. Legge's *Chinese Classics*, Dyer Ball advances that the Chinese did not know the difference between sleep, death and swoon,<sup>107</sup> yet shortly after that he remarks that the people saw death as a 'prolonged sleep' and that, should the soul inhabit the body again, the person might come back to life. He also states that some items which they believed to 'promote vitality' (such as gold and cowries) were put in the mouth of the deceased. From the two positions, I cannot help but ask how a people who did not know the difference between sleep and death could know that the soul had withdrawn from the body in one of the two states of affair, but not in the other? The practice of stuffing the mouth of the deceased with those items comes to confirm that they saw the soul as the bearer of life; but the belief that the items could draw the soul (life) back into the body – as per Ball's explanation – was merely wishful thinking. It is, however, doubtful if the people were not observing everyday or regularly how mouth-stuffing was literally not bringing corpses back to life; therefore, the practice of mouth-stuffing was more likely to be a ritual for the dead.

According to Marcel Granet, the ancient Chinese revered the earth, crediting it for containing and developing all life. This probably was deduced from the way seeds germinated and plants generally sprouted after they had gone through some decay in the soil. Human life was also tied

to the earth, as is evident in the way they approached matters that had to do with conception, birth, death and rebirth. Burial of the dead took place within the family house but their souls eventually resided in the granary – typically a corner of the house where seeds that were about to be sown were kept. In order to make contact with the earth at the granary, that corner was also used as the conjugal sleeping-place, so that a child there conceived would have ‘taken its substance from the very substance of the ancestors.’ This way, the ‘life principle’ emanating from or identifiable with the discarnate persons were tapped into to make every birth a ‘reincarnation of a forbear.’<sup>108</sup>

Ball’s support for the view that the Chinese believed in immortality cannot be far from right. His reason, though, was that there was ‘ancestral worship’ in the society. His idea of ‘ancestral worship’, though a later development was the natural consequence of the situation described in the preceding paragraph because ‘the cult of ancestors,’ Granet hints, ‘was in the process of being formed from the moment that people believed they could sense the souls of the dead floating confusedly in the dark corner of the house’ where the conjugal sleeping-place was situated.<sup>109</sup> But, before Ball’s view could become true of the Chinese society then, the people’s belief had been that the spirits of the dead continued ‘to exist in a dim, unrationalised and unmoralised world of shades, from which they could emerge when evoked.’<sup>110</sup> However, this simple, peasant conception of the afterlife was not to remain so for long. The conception degenerated as a result of ideas received from elsewhere, especially from India.<sup>111</sup>

The state of ‘hopeless confusion’ (to borrow P. J. Maclagan’s expression) that Chinese conception of the afterlife later found and still finds itself in can even be seen in Ball who seems not to be aware of some of the things about Chinese reincarnation discussed above. He does not

only accept the notion of three souls of a person – a view which is different from the one that, each soul has three parts, which still would have been new in the Chinese context – but he also throws in the idea that the soul never got (completely) separated from the body upon death, implying that even when the body was literally dead there was still life in it, or that the body (not only the soul) never died.<sup>112</sup> He finds inspiration from J. J. M. deGroot's observation in his *Religious System of China* that since life did remain in the body after death, the body and the soul actually co-existed. The main problem here, apart from the inconsistency of this relatively new perspective with the earlier views preceding it, has to do with finding satisfactory answers to the critical questions that spew out. For instance, how different was the life claimed to have remained in the dead body from the life lost by the withdrawal of the soul from the body? Was the body thought of as ever mutable? If yes, when? If not, how did the corpse-with-life relate to the soul? Which of the souls, to be sure? All three? When and how did a person come to have three souls? At the time that the person had not experienced any death, where were the souls? Did they exist as distinct entities?

Ball does not, of course, provide answers to these but it is clear to me that any theory about para-immortal bodies and three-souled persons would make the postulation of reincarnation a difficult exercise. No wonder he never imputed any doctrine of reincarnation to the ancient Chinese. If one were exposed to only the era described by Ball, he or she would not find enough philosophical ground in the traditional system to teach reincarnation. Though I have no reason to claim that was the case with Confucius (K'ung Fu-tze) and Lao-tse, I admire more now their refusal to endorse, teach or venture into any speculation on the doctrine.

Confucius (c551 - 478 BC) was this-worldly in his predominantly moral teachings. Even when he traced the ‘material substance’ (matter) to the earth (*yin*) and the ‘spiritual substance’ (soul) to heaven (*yang*), he insisted that the ‘spiritual must not be transported beyond the world.’<sup>113</sup> Confucianism taught that the soul did live after death, but it said ‘nothing regarding the character of that existence.’<sup>114</sup> In the case of Lao-tse (604 BC -531 BC) there are signs in his teachings of ‘longevity or even of a “lastingness” after death as things desirable and to be secured by devotion to Tao.’<sup>115</sup> With such an attitude toward the afterlife, Maclagan sees it as ‘perhaps one of the points through which the later degenerate Taoism, with its search for the Elixir of immortality, can claim kinship with the ancient and more philosophical doctrine.’<sup>116</sup> Another thing that was to influence later Taoism was the entry of contemplative Buddhism – which taught karma-induced rebirth until the stage of enlightenment – into China in the sixth century. For instance, the fourth century taoist Chuancius (Chuang-tzu)<sup>117</sup> taught reincarnation. Thus, while it is true to say – in comparing China with India – that the fourth century BC was the period when the doctrine of reincarnation enjoyed a general (majority) acceptance in India, Albrecht’s view that this coincided with the period when ‘reincarnationist thought developed in China’ is in the least, nuanced. If by ‘developed’ he implies sustained and visible teaching of the doctrine, then he might have some point. But, if by that word he is suggesting the introduction and first historical presence of the doctrine, then he is wrong.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INCA BELIEF

Having dealt with belief in reincarnation in four cultures of the ancient world, there is still the need to further widen the scope of the discussion with an American perspective. The reason is that doing so will enhance our understanding of reincarnation as a universal concept.

In the study of ancient American history and, especially, of ‘ancient New World Religions,’<sup>118</sup> one cannot fail to mention the Aztec, Mayan and the Andean cultures. But the focus of this chapter is on the Incas of (ancient) Peru whose culture was Andean. The Andean cultures also included the Moche or Machuca who established between the Andes and the Pacific around 100-750 AD,<sup>119</sup> the Tiahuanaco who between approximately 700 and 1100 AD<sup>120</sup> reigned in where is now Bolivia,<sup>121</sup> the Chiribaya who thrived between AD 900 -1350 in the extreme south of Peru<sup>122</sup> and the Chachapoya who established in north-eastern Peru ‘around 900 AD up to the Inca conquest of the territory around the year 1475’.<sup>123</sup>

For the avoidance of confusion, the name ‘Inca’ must first be explained. The term ‘inca’ was used by the religious upper class of Tiahuanaco to refer to themselves. It was this group of people who later grew in authority and became rulers of a new empire that was also named ‘inca’.<sup>124</sup> Before then, however, they had been driven away from Tiahuanaco by the warring Andean Aymarans who eventually destroyed Tiahuanaco toward the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Incas then took over the mantle of leadership in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and expanded. The Incas spoke the Quechua language together with other Quechua-speaking city-states with whom they had

formed a confederacy by the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The confederacy, according to Tarmo Kulmar involved ‘Cuzco, Písaq, Paucartampu, Urupampa, Ollataytampu and Machu Picchu’.<sup>125</sup> And, by the reigns of Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui (1438-1471), Topa Inca Yupanqui (1471-1493) and Huayna Capac (1493-1525) the Inca Empire had extended to the whole of Peru, Central Chile, northern Bolivia, southern Ecuador<sup>126</sup> and up to river Ancasmaya in Columbia.<sup>127</sup> Today, however, the descendants of the Inca are the ‘Quechua-speaking peasants of the Andes who constitutes perhaps 45 percent of the population of Peru’.<sup>128</sup>

The Incan concepts of life, death and the afterlife are, in some respects, connected to some myths regarding their origin. Although some legends have it that the creator-god (Viracocha) created them from stone (sometimes earth) – or that the creator pushed them deep into the earth and made them to ‘emerge’ from natural objects after a destructive flooding – the state religion of the Incas did not involve the worshipping of Viracocha [until a king and his son later adopted the name Viracocha].<sup>129</sup> Rather, the closed ruling class who, in any case, saw themselves as the real ‘incas’ claimed to be both the sons and incarnations of the Sun on earth. Accordingly, the sun-god (Inti or Apu Inti) was worshipped as the god of the empire. But how are we to classify these Inti-sons in terms of personal identity and reincarnation? To be able to answer this question well, it is worthwhile to start with the general Incan conception of personal identity.

A person was not seen to compose of only matter. Their wise men (*amautas*) taught that every human being also had a soul.<sup>130</sup> Unlike the body which was known to be perishable, the soul was believed to be immortal and spiritual.<sup>131</sup> In spite of the clear distinction which they appeared to make between the body and soul, some of their ideas were confusing. For instance, while holding that the human body was animated only by the soul, the Incas still believed that the soul could



leave the body for some time while the person was still alive. Such temporary separation of the soul occurred during sleep<sup>132</sup> and sickness.<sup>133</sup> While not questioning the basis for the distinction between the body and soul in general, it seems a bit irreconcilable that the soul whose presence alone in the body supposedly guarantees life could, at the same time, be deemed insufficient to cause death after it had left the body, even if for a short while. To argue for the temporary loss of the soul of a living person would be to claim that the soul might not be the bearer of human life. But this claim runs contrary to the notion that the soul is the life principle of humans. Nonetheless, belief in the temporary loss of the soul seemed to underlie the ancient Peruvian practice of divination or magico-herbal healing (shamanism).

A shaman<sup>134</sup> is not, as he was not in the ancient times, only capable of prescribing herbal solutions to illnesses identified by him as having been caused by the sorcerer's (or an evil spirit's) separation of the patient's soul from the body, but more importantly, he does this through the process of 'supernatural depersonalization or dissociation of [his own] body and spirit [apparently, soul]'.<sup>135</sup> Death only resulted from a lengthened absence of the soul, yet death was at the same time considered as an avenue for the continuation of existence. For the Inca (emperor), continuation took the form of a star in the company of the Sun. The emperor would therefore mention his death as his being 'called home to the mansions of his father, the Sun'.<sup>136</sup>

Although mummification of dead bodies of all ages was done, the Peruvians did not place the same value on all the bodies. For instance, the Chinchorro, one of the oldest Andean peoples, even mummified children. But it was just for other purposes such as display.<sup>137</sup> And when artificial mummification gained currency and became 'an Andean practice during Late Horizon times,' it was 'apparently restricted to the upper class'.<sup>138</sup> Religious significance of

mummification and, thus, the afterlife were placed on those for the very Inca elite.<sup>139</sup> Through such actions, the elite (royals) had placed themselves in a position not only to be revered but also to be worshipped as gods after their death. As a group then, their survived souls naturally became a body of ‘ancestors’ deemed in the empire as deserving of worship, although their mummified bodies were also regarded as divine and accorded respect and rites. This observation is really in line with the position of some scholars who ascribe ‘ancestral worship’ to the Incas.<sup>140</sup> According to Father Cobo, although the Incas should have ‘ideally’ worshipped those they supposedly originated from (he mentions fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers), this was not done in a sustainable way. Instead, the people somehow accepted the belief that the provincial lords and the kings were superior and enriched with divine favours which after their death could be exploited by the living. That was why ‘the bodies of the kings and lords were the only ones that were venerated by the rest of the people’ even though the rest of the people did not descend from them.<sup>141</sup>

But the mentioning of ‘ancestral worship’ or ‘ancestorship’ comes in its wake the need to make some critical remarks. First, that ‘ancestorship’ meant for the state was distinguished from ‘ancestorship’ for the basic family unit. While the former was promoted by the royals, the latter was seemingly not. In terms of the latter, every individual of any family stood the chance of becoming a venerated ‘ancestral spirit’ after death. We might then suggest that it was in the context of the latter, that questions of individuality and individual survival could have had the chance of receiving their greatest attention. After all, the survival of every single individual would have been deemed as important as that of any royal, although the question of worship might still not have arisen for both. But in a world like the Inca royals’ where the concentration was on state ‘ancestorship’ – although the soul of every human being was believed by them to

survive death – one’s curiosity cannot fail to be aroused as to why that was so. And even before we suggest any possible reasons, we can notice some distinctions between the Incan and other conceptions of survival, especially that of the Egyptians. In the Egyptian, the Pharaohs were perceived as representatives of the gods and associated with celestial bodies in and after *this* life. However, there was also significant, visible concentration on the lot or well-being of the surviving soul of every individual. Indeed, ‘[i]ntact ascent to the afterlife became an increasing preoccupation of both elite and commoners alike’,<sup>142</sup> culminating in the artificial mummification of Egyptian commoners, starting in the New Kingdom.<sup>143</sup>

Given the ‘god-like’ position the Incas had given themselves in the empire, it was only natural that they would be ‘worshipped as gods after death’.<sup>144</sup> But since such positioning was not really mutually exclusive to a genuine desire to elevate the religious significance of the commoner or his or her departed soul, the Incas’ reluctance to promote the latter appears to lend some truth to the idea that they might have invented their divine ancestry for non-religious reasons. As William Prescott suspects,

The fiction of Manco Capac and his sister-wife was devised, no doubt, at a later period, to gratify the vanity of the Peruvian monarchs, and to give additional sanction to their authority by deriving it from a celestial origin.<sup>145</sup>

This argument about the use of religion as a political camouflage is strengthened by the observations of several other scholars on ancient Peruvian history and culture. In the following quotation, the perspective of the elite on why the Inca state was created seems to support the observations:

The emperor of the Incas – the One and True Inca – was the living god on earth, the terrestrial incarnation of the Sun God. The state was deemed as created by the Sun God, and the emperor, as His vicegerent, was appointed

together with his fellow Incas – the sons of the Sun – to sustain, expand and rule it.<sup>146</sup>

It would be quite inaccurate to think that the Inca state (especially the royals who were all related by blood) had their eyes fixed on only the Andean region. They saw their ‘divinely’ political role and terrain to extend potentially far beyond that region. The translation of the name of the Inca capital ‘cuzco’ as ‘pole’ or ‘the centre of the world pole’<sup>147</sup> and the real name of their empire ‘Tahuantinsuyu’ which means ‘land of the four quarters’<sup>148</sup> or ‘the country of four points of compass’<sup>149</sup> are regarded as suggestive of a people who more or less nurtured the ambition of ruling the entire world. The point is also made that the Incas believed in ‘the inherent superiority of and wisdom of their own people, thinking they were destined to refine mankind whether other peoples accepted it or not’.<sup>150</sup> The Inca state has therefore been described by some scholars as totalitarian. It is interesting to note, however, that their over-nourished desire for power and territory also led to their downfall. For the empire became ‘administratively unwieldy’, depriving it of ‘unity’ and thereby causing succession disputes and insurrections.<sup>151</sup>

Belief in reincarnation in the ancient Incan culture has to be discussed with care. Many a time, concepts or practices cited as indicative of belief in reincarnation among the Incas have tended to be something else. One such case is the following, which also relates to the insurrections that occurred in the last days of the empire. According to James Forest,

The first Túpac Amaru, son of Manco Inca, was captured and beheaded in 1572 following a rebellion. But instead of snuffing out indigenous unrest as the Spanish had hoped, an Inca legend foretold the reincarnation of a new Inca leader out of the dismemberment of Tupac Amaru. The second Túpac Amaru, a direct descendant of the first, rose in rebellion some 200 years later.<sup>152</sup>

The fulfillment of the legend which was believed to have occurred some 200 years later, apparently made the beheading of the first Túpac Amaru a welcoming incident. For the latter was

conceived of as a redeemer. However, it is not clear whether ‘reincarnation’ is the right word to use for the description of the birth of the second Túpac Amaru. On one hand, one might suggest an affirmative answer since the Incas believed in the existence of the soul, and proponents of reincarnation claim that the soul is the basis or subject of reincarnation. Consequently, the soul of the first could be conceived by them to have taken on the flesh of the second Túpac Amaru. On the other hand, if some evidence could be found that suggests that the Incas only expected the death of the first Túpac Amaru to pave way for the coming of ‘a new Inca leader’ (not the same Inca leader) in future, or that the Incas harboured the thought of a person ‘returning’ not into a new body, then, one might as well suggest any of the following: (i) that the legend only foretold a liberating leader who was to emerge upon the demise of an earlier one, or (ii) that the Incas probably did not expect the body of the second Túpac Amaru to be inhabited by the soul of the deceased Túpac Amaru. In neither case is there any real reincarnation, a concept which requires the inhabitation of a new body by an existing soul.

But it is known that the idea of a return of the soul into the same body – as in the general resurrection of humans upon the end of the world – was indeed held by the Incas.<sup>153</sup> For instance, each king built a tomb for himself as part of a shrine he was supposed to construct at Cuzco in honour of Inti. His embalmed dead body was to be kept there with the belief that his soul would need to return into it in a future life.<sup>154</sup> When the soul re-inhabits the same body and animates it, there is no reincarnation. For this reason, the term ‘reincarnation’ is used wrongly by Ian Stevenson when he argues that the Incas ‘believed in reincarnation, but into the same fleshly body, not into a new one’.<sup>155</sup> With regard to the case involving the Túpac Amarus, the description of the second as ‘a new leader’ but not ‘the same leader’ – coupled with the lack of information from Forest confirming that the second was named Túpac Amaru because the death

of the first (in the way that it occurred) was really to make possible the movement of his soul into the second's body – make it not that wrong to assume that the Túpac Amarus happened to bear the same name merely because they were historically or 'ancestrally' related. This is especially so given the monarchical practice of name-sharing which had always existed in Incan culture. We have already mentioned an instance where two monarchs adopted the name Viracocha. We can therefore proceed safely with our discussion by not claiming, for now, knowledge of belief in reincarnation among the Incas.

But having come up with a notion of return to this world, it was only likely that some Inca peoples would begin to have reincarnation conceptions. In other words, reincarnation was 'one of several options that the Incas had available to them'.<sup>156</sup> To affirm this position, we would have to examine further not only the ancient Incan culture, but also some modern cultures of the former ancient Inca Empire. The closest hint that we have of belief in reincarnation in ancient times is Father Cobo's observation that some Inca nations,

...held that the souls that left human bodies in some places came back to be born again in other places and that when these souls left this life for good (for they said that the world must come to an end), the souls would receive a reward or punishment, according to what they deserve.<sup>157</sup>

In the instance above, we get the idea that the soul of a dead person was believed by the Incas to be reborn.<sup>158</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that modern Peruvian culture also has glimpses of reincarnation beliefs which are Inca-related. For instance, in the adventures of Harry Escombe, when he was involved in an accident and then rescued by some native Peruvians, the latter considered him the reincarnation of Manco Capac, 'the lord and father' of the Incas.<sup>159</sup> In a similar vein, Bahá'u llah (1817-1892), the founder of the Bahá'í 'cause' was in 1975 'proclaimed' by some Quechua-speaking traditional Cuzco residents to be the reincarnation of

Viracocha.<sup>160</sup> A more recent example is the case of Alejandro Toledo who is not just Andean, but a Quechua-speaking former President of Peru (2001-2006). To sell him better to the electorate, his wife is reported to have claimed on their campaign tours that he was the reincarnation of ‘Pachacuti (one of the Inca emperors)’.<sup>161</sup>

In present-day South America, there are some countries whose territories were not part of the ancient Inca Empire, yet it can be found in them beliefs or myths about reincarnation that appear to have traces of ancient Incan influence. The myth surrounding the origin of the ‘ayahuasca’ drink in Brazil is an example. This hallucinogenic drink is associated with the UDV (União do Vegetal) cult. Legend has it that Oasca, once a woman adviser to an Inca king, died. Subsequently, the *psychotria viridis* plant (locally called ‘chacrona’) – which is one of the two plants from which ‘ayahuasca’ is made – germinated from her grave. The other plant *bonisteriopsis* (locally, ‘mariri’) later germinated from the grave of the king’s marshal (called Tihuaco). The latter died upon taking a drink he had made of only ‘chacrona’. The knowledge to combine both plants for a drink was given to the Inca king but only in his next life where he had reincarnated in the body of Mestre Caiano. He was, by then, a servant of the provider of the combination idea: King Solomon.<sup>162</sup> Although this might not be an entirely Incan conception of reincarnation, it still opens up the possibility that Incan reincarnation might have, at some point, spawned in other cultures aspects of the latter’s beliefs about reincarnation.

To conclude, we would argue that the Inca Empire which was one of the most influential in the ancient times, possessed an attitude to life which was similar to those of other ancient cultures in different parts of the world. They approached life in a manner that suggested that there was a next life or lives. Amidst their political blunders and some conceptual errors, the Incas still

offered some insights into the nature of life, personal identity and reincarnation. The belief, especially among their wise men, in the existence and immortality of the soul, was the basis for the mummification and extensive burial rites they engaged in. It was also that which influenced their thinking that persons could be reborn. There was, then, belief in reincarnation in the Incan culture.

### **Conclusion for Part One**

The doctrine of reincarnation as understood in the ancient religious philosophies of Egypt, Greece, India, China, and the Inca has been presented. The discussion, unavoidably, sometimes went chronological, especially as the doctrine and related concepts appeared amended or jettisoned at different epochs within the specific cultures or by distinct philosophers of the various cultures, contemporaries or not.

The belief in the dual nature of a person ran through the various cultures; that, a person actually consisted of a body and a soul. It was only in Chinese philosophy that some three souls were conceived at some point, but this was presented as a late development and different from the once-held unitary conception of the soul. Buddhist philosophy, however, rejected completely the notion of the soul.

For the individuals and religious traditions that believed in the immortality of the soul, the notion that a person could be re-embodied (both in human and non-human forms) was postulated although with some slight differences. In Egyptian philosophy, no clear mechanisms were found that explained or determined how a person became re-embodied in the human frame although, as



explained above, the notion of re-embodiment could not be alien to the people of that culture. But some scholars of ancient philosophy, such as Kirk and Raven, and also Freeman have mistakenly denied any hints of the doctrine in ancient Egyptian culture.<sup>163</sup> They took this position in their individual responses to Herodotus (ii,123) who had observed that the Egyptians were the first to teach the possibility of an immortal soul inhabiting animal bodies and ending up in human bodies. Herodotus thought that some Greeks (apparently, Pythagoras who was known to have studied for twenty-two years at the Egyptian Mystery Schools) had adopted this Egyptian idea but were pretending to be the originators of it. John Burnet, however, took the credit for the emergence of the doctrine from Pythagoras but also stopped short of giving it to the Egyptians. He gave it to the Orphics. In Greek philosophy (especially, with Empedocles) as well as in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies the dynamics for reincarnation are predicated on moral action.

It must be noted however, that with the possible exception to the Incas for whom we could not provide some evidence, there were people in all the cultures who took this world as the only existing one. There was the feeling among some Egyptians that after death there was only silence.<sup>164</sup> I wonder how any pre-Socratic atomist – whom Cornford<sup>165</sup> describes as believing that ‘material substance, tangible body is not only real but the whole of reality’ – could be expected to believe in a soul that reincarnated or existed in some other world (if there was any soul and other world at all). While Buddhism does not deny the reality of a next world *per se*, it would reject the claim that *there are souls, and that such souls have some afterlife existence*. In Chinese philosophy, finally, Confucianism paid no attention while early Taoism paid little attention to the next world.

It is also evident from the discussions in this part that much emphasis has been laid on the Egyptian belief, which coincidentally was the first to be discussed. Aside from its being extensive in its own right, and the pioneering efforts of the Egyptian thinkers and the significance of their thoughts to the intellectual history of humankind, ancient Egyptian philosophy has something to do with Africa, sub-Saharan (or black) Africa whose doctrine of reincarnation is the chief concern of this dissertation. Therefore, I will indicate in chapter eight how Akan eschatology and language share a few but critical features with the Egyptian. I will seek to demonstrate whether Akan language and eschatology espouse reincarnation originally or only in derivative forms.

## PART TWO

### PERSONAL IDENTITY: A PRELUDE TO REINCARNATION

This part is an attempt to reflect on the term ‘reincarnation’ within the broad context of personal identity. The reason for this is that knowledge of that which enables us, in Strawsonian language, to ‘identify and reidentify’ a person is important and should be prior if reincarnation is to be understood at all. In effect then, the task of this part shall be two-fold. First, to explore the notion or notions of personal identity – seeking to understand what personal identity depends on – and, secondly, to clarify how some interpretations of personal identity yield or make possible the doctrine of reincarnation. Reincarnation shall therefore be explained in relation to such concepts as transmigration, rebirth, and metempsychosis.

### CHAPTER SIX

#### 1.0.0. ON WHAT DOES PERSONAL IDENTITY DEPEND?

There is a sense in which ‘personal identity’ and ‘personhood’ appear to draw our attention to a common subject. They can, for instance, be understood to concern matters relating to persons. But considering the trend of current discourse in (African) philosophy, particularly about the issue of identity, such sameness in area of concern does not still amount to sameness in meaning between the two expressions. The traditional philosophical notion of *personal identity* has been about whether as a human being, as an individual (*ontic*) being, a person’s constitution is

knowable. And if yes, as many suggest is the case, whether he or she is completely material, physical, or both? The answer offered to the latter question is usually assumed to be true of all humans. It is regarded as an attribute which humans are entitled to, and is never lost, no matter how they live their lives on earth. But in some contexts, particularly in the African culture, the way an individual acts or behaves toward other members of society may make him or her to be seen as having or not having attained *personhood* yet – although the individual's (personal) identity, in the preceding sense, is intact. The quality of the person's action or behaviour is, very often, assessed on moral grounds. In Akan thought, for example, one is considered a person if one exhibits good moral character.<sup>1</sup> As a result, personhood can be acquired or lost, or conceivably alternate between the two at different periods of a person's life. It is apparent, therefore, that the question of personal identity is one of ontology, while that of personhood is moral. The sort of person mentioned in the Akan example, therefore, is normative. In sum, the criterion for personal identity is different from that of personhood, and neither of them must consciously be treated as if it admits of the language and criterion applicable to the other.

To elucidate further, it would be apt to introduce some views expressed by Segun Gbadegesin. In his interpretation of the concepts of reincarnation and destiny in Yoruba thought, he underscores the centrality of the concept of personal identity ('what a person is') to the analyses of the two other concepts. In both cases, he would argue, the identity of a person is sought or suggested. Although I agree with this position, his definition of a person as 'a combination of *ara* (body), *emi* (soul or life force), and destiny (*kadara* or *ipin*)'<sup>2</sup> muddles rather than clarifies the issue of identity. The confusion seems to lie in his merger of destiny with body and soul to constitute the Yoruba person. However, as Lee Brown has observed, this approach 'is problematic' because it 'infuses a normative feature into ontological concerns.'<sup>3</sup> That is, it infuses destiny into the

ontological aspects of body and soul. Brown's criticism is apposite. Although destiny, I would stress, is not the same as 'personhood', it is still relevant for the construction of moral identity. This is because it is believed to contain, among other things, what actions a person will take in his or her life time. And, since some actions of a person are subject to moral description, those actions are potentially subsidiaries of the content of that person's destiny. Consequently, personhood somehow may be driven by destiny. Destiny, unlike what Gbadegesin appears to portray, is not of the same species as the other two i.e. body and soul. It has a direct bearing on the normative sense of personal identity. In contrast, Adeofe Leke replaces destiny with *ori* ('inner head') as the third constituent of the Yoruba person.<sup>4</sup> This constituent, which he describes as 'non-corporeal', is rather 'the bearer of destiny and, hence, constitutive of personality'. Since *ori*, unlike *ipin*, is conceived of as an entity, Leke does not commit the same mistake as Gbadegesin's.

A similar argument reflective of an interpretive confusion, an ontologico-normative mix-up, is found in the analysis made by Teffo Lebisa and Abraham Roux.<sup>5</sup> In discussing what they understand to be 'personhood', they start by posing the question, the rather abstract and ontological question, 'what is a person?' The seriousness of their error is revealed when they cite Descartes' ontological response to this question (given as 'the thinking thing'), and proceed to contrast that with the moral (or social) identity of a person in the African context.<sup>6</sup> In Western thought, they then argue, 'the starting-point for an account of personhood is usually epistemological and psychological', while in African philosophy 'the starting-point is social relations'. By 'personhood', they seem to mean 'personal identity' in general. Even so, an appreciation of the ontological-normative distinction would have made it pellucid that in African

thought, the identity of a person is not necessarily sought in social terms. The right way to find an answer would depend on the relevant sense of ‘person’ for which identity is being sought.

N. K. Dzobo makes a distinction between the normative and non-normative conceptions of a person in another way.<sup>7</sup> He advances that, the former addresses the question ‘who is man?’, but not such questions as ‘what is a man?’ and ‘what is the nature of man?’ He indicates that any attempt to answer the former question would invariably make persons to showcase their ‘image’. That is, to show exactly ‘who’ they understand themselves to be and want others to note them for. The Akan, he explains, shows morality as what ‘shapes his/her character’; and that, this is implied by the proverb ‘[d]isgraceful behaviour is unbecoming of an Akan born’.

So far, I am focused on the normative conception of identity although I have mentioned as well what I intend by the ontological conception. I have done so for two reasons: (i) because the normative dimension brought about mainly by discussions in some African literatures needs to be tinged with some clarity in order to make our early comprehension of it possible; and (ii) because a detailed discussion of the ontological problem comes after the next (short) paragraph.

It must be noted that both the ontological and normative interpretations of ‘person’ are believed to lead to some form of immortality. This point will, however, be developed later (in section 1.3.0.). But, before then, a detailed discussion of that which identifies a person has to be made.

### **1.1.0. *The Ontological Question***

Some philosophers of Akan origin such as Danquah and Gyekye posit two fundamental components of a person, spiritual and physical.<sup>8</sup> The physical is called *honam* or *nipadua* (body)

while the metaphysical consists of *sunsum* (spirit) and *ōkra* (soul). The *sunsum* is believed to be the active part of *ōkra*, and that both do survive death as an *ontic* unity.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary Akan philosophers do not dispute over the meaning of *honam*. What one might regard as controversy though, usually centres around three main issues: (i) the meaning and reality of *sunsum* and *ōkra*, (ii) whether any or both can be equated to the traditional philosophical concept of ‘the mind’[as in Western philosophy], and (iii) whether the mind-body problem arises in Akan philosophy.<sup>10</sup> To be able to do a good analysis of these three main subjects of controversy among Akan thinkers, then, it is pertinent that an attempt is made to understand the meaning and basis for the postulation of ‘mind’, as well as its rejection by philosophers. As the discussion progresses, though not in the order given above, the nature of the controversy unfolds.

#### 1.1.1. *Mind as a Disembodied Self-knowing Entity*

Gyekye identifies the mind with the *sunsum-ōkra* (spiritual) component of a person. That component he regards as eternal.<sup>11</sup> With the understanding that the mind is essentially transempirical and thus distinct from the body, Gyekye advances that ‘[a]s for the *mind* – when it is not identified with the soul – it may be rendered also by *sunsum*, judging from the functions that are attributed by the Akan thinkers to the latter’.<sup>12</sup> The *sunsum*, for instance, is ‘said to have extrasensory powers: it is that which thinks, desires, feels’.<sup>13</sup> What is worthy of note here is that these functions are the exact features or functions that, among others, are identified with the mind in metaphysics. In the *Phaedo*, Plato attributed consciousness to the mind, just as Descartes later did in his *Meditations*.<sup>14</sup> For both Plato and Descartes, mind *is* consciousness.<sup>15</sup> In Yoruba thought views similar to Gyekye’s are expressed. For example, according to Gbadegesin,

although *okan* means the physical heart, it is also ‘the mind, as a centre of consciousness responsible for thinking, desiring, wishing, deliberating, etc.’<sup>16</sup> All this, suggests the belief in an incorporeal aspect of a person that also has the (internal) capacity to know.

Although Gyekye maintains an ontological unity between *ōkra* and *sunsum*, he thinks they are logically distinguishable. His reason is that what is said of one in the Akan idiom is not said of the other, sometimes.<sup>17</sup> Also, certain human functions might specifically be identified with one but not the other.<sup>18</sup> For instance, he states that ‘*sunsum* is responsible for thought in the narrow sense – as ratiocination’ and is the ‘activating principle of a person’. At the same time, Gyekye suggests that *ōkra* ‘is the life principle of a person’.<sup>19</sup> Gbadegesin, however, criticizes Gyekye for reasons that I find a bit weak. He describes Gyekye’s analysis of the spiritual component of a person as confusing. Judging by the activities just attributed by Gyekye to *sunsum* and *ōkra*, he (Gbadegesin) questions what else *sunsum* does as the ‘activating principle’ given that *ōkra*, like the Yoruba *emi*, is believed to give and take away life from the body (i.e. by its presence and absence from the body respectively).<sup>20</sup> Well, I think that the supposed ‘confusion’ can still be resolved under some interpretations of the spiritual unity thesis espoused by Gyekye. My initial comment is that it is very difficult to fault Gyekye on the ‘activating’ issue given his position that the *ōkra* and *sunsum* are not ontologically distinct. For, by that, it could be said that he is not referring to different entities per se. [I do not suggest that Gbadegesin thinks otherwise of Gyekye.] But I make this point because of the truth that anything ascribable to a section (*sunsum*) of a thing (*ōkra*) can still be said to be part of the properties that are connected to the thing itself. In the particular case of *sunsum*, however, we may accept one thing. That, with Gyekye’s idea that *only* the *sunsum* is active, he seeks to draw a correlation between any sign in humans suggestive of the presence of an active spiritual aspect and *sunsum* specifically. In this



sense then, human capacity for action would be linked by him with *sunsum*. Usually, especially in Western philosophy, ‘life’, ‘the bearer of life’ or ‘life principle’ is equated with the ‘activating principle’ because it is supposed that what has life is also active, or in the case of human life, is purposefully active. But this, with regard to human (or rational) life, is not always correct. It is possible, for instance, for a person to be alive although inactive.

I do not claim that *sunsum* or ‘the activating principle’ is the cause of (every) human physical activity, such that such simple actions as purchasing a tooth-pick or reminding myself which day today is, is traceable to it. A careful examination of Gyekye seems to indicate that apart from the specific activity of cognition, he associates *sunsum* (the activating principle) with such general psychological phenomena as the disposition to desire certain ways of life or behave in certain ways. This way, the tendency for a person to exhibit (most of the time) ‘qualities like courage, jealousy, gentleness, forcefulness, and dignity’<sup>21</sup> are in Akan thought traced to his or her *sunsum*. But how ‘the activating principle’, seen by Gyekye as spiritual, generally influences the bodily activities of a person is not clearly explained by him, neither is it well articulated in the Akan belief system itself.

Another problem that might be raised is the question whether or not the mind is influenced by the activating principle? This question though, is quite problematical because the idea that the mind can or cannot be influenced by the activating principle is difficult to express in Akan thought. This is particularly so if by ‘the mind’ we mean the soul. By the analysis of Gyekye, the soul is ‘*ōkra* plus *sunsum*’.<sup>22</sup> Thus, to ask whether ‘the activating principle’ can affect the mind amounts, in part, to asking whether *sunsum* can affect itself. But this question can hardly be attractive to the Akan thinker, given that the *ōkra* aspect of the soul is, after the manner of

Gyekye, never active. This is because it is pointless and intellectually unstimulating to ask whether *sunsum*, being the activating principle, activates the only active part of the soul (which is, itself). Gyekye's logical distinction between *sunsum* and *ōkra*, and his idea that the former is active while the latter is passive, implies, on his account, that not all things that have life (for example, *ōkra*) are active.<sup>23</sup> This is why life (or living capacity) should be distinguished from activity (or activating capacity). To my mind, this is exactly what Gyekye did when he wrote that *sunsum* was the 'activating principle in a person' and *ōkra* 'the principle of life'.<sup>24</sup>

Another criticism leveled by Gbadegesin is that, 'from the characterization of the *ōkra* as the bearer of destiny, it would appear that it (and not *sunsum*) should be regarded as the component on which "one's health, worldly power, position, influence, success, etc would depend". This is how *ori* (as the bearer of destiny) is conceived in Yoruba thought'.<sup>25</sup> Once again, as a result of the passive nature of *ōkra* except for its *sunsum* aspect, what Gyekye seems to be arguing in this quotation is that the message (destiny) registered on the *ōkra* is brought to fruition by the way a person acts. [I am not interested in whether or not a person acts freely.] But a person's dispositions or capacity for action is traced, as per Gyekye's explanation above, to *sunsum*. This shows that in Akan culture the bearer of destiny (*ōkra*) need not be entirely responsible for the manifestation of that destiny. Its only responsibility is that of holding the destiny which a person is believed to live out. Were it not to hold the destiny, there would not have been anything for the active part (*sunsum*) to influence the person's general dispositions toward. The spiritual component on which the manifestation of one's destiny actively depends is believed to be *sunsum*. And, since *sunsum* and *ōkra* are ontologically one entity anyway, the attribution by Gyekye of the activities mentioned in the quotation to *sunsum* appears to be mainly for the purposes of exactness and detail in analysis. The Akan conception on destiny is different from

that of the Yoruba, at least, in terms of the functions just attributed by Gbadegesin to its bearer, *ori*. Consequently, his approach to the Akan doctrine implies, perhaps, an unnecessary transfer of the Yoruba perspective to the Akan.<sup>26</sup>

In Gyekye's work, he discusses 'the relation between the soul (that is, *ōkra* plus *sunsum*), and the body,'<sup>27</sup> and brings God into the picture. According to him, God is not only spiritual, but is also 'eternal, immortal'.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, the soul – unlike the physical body – 'conceived as an indwelling spark of God,' does not perish.<sup>29</sup> In specific terms, he would also argue, *sunsum* – being part of *ōkra* – derives (its spiritual nature) from God.<sup>30</sup> But, he notes, *sunsum* has been misconstrued by some Akan scholars (such as Danquah) as physical and sometimes confused with *ntoro*<sup>31</sup> which is a paternally related 'genetic factor.'<sup>32</sup> And, that as a result of the human or material origin of *ntoro*, the mortal nature of it is mistakenly extended to *sunsum* as well.

However, Gyekye's criticism of the alleged materiality of *sunsum* – and, for that matter, his criticism of Danquah – is also rejected by Gbadegesin. His reason is that Gyekye only provides 'one premise in the form of a conditional ... and does nothing more to show the incorrectness of [Danquah's] position'.<sup>33</sup> In the said conditional statement, Gyekye reveals the implication of Danquah's erroneous view – constituting the consequent – that 'the *sunsum* perishes along with the body'. Gyekye does this by restating Danquah's position – for the antecedent – as wrongly meaning that *sunsum* 'is also something physical or material'. Indeed, this restated wrong position is consistent with Danquah's own explicit attribution, on one hand, of materiality to *sunsum* but spirituality (and thus, immortality), on the other hand, to only the *ōkra*.<sup>34</sup> To show

then, that *sunsum* does not perish, it is reasonably adequate that Gyekye shows – as he appears to have done – that *sunsum* must have the same spiritual nature as Danquah sees of the *ōkra*.

Gbadegesin claims that Gyekye does ‘nothing’ to disprove Danquah’s position (i.e. that *sunsum* is material and, thus, perishes). Yet his (Gbadegesin’s) next paragraph is a four-step argument made by Gyekye showing why *sunsum* cannot be material. The argument he makes of Gyekye is:

1. The functions or activities attributed to the *sunsum* indicate that it is neither material nor mortal nor derived from the father.

- a. *sunsum* moulds the child’s personality (Busia 1954)

- b. *sunsum* constitutes or determines a person’s personality and character (Danquah 1968), etc.

2. Personality involves such characteristics as courage, thoughts, feelings, actions, etc.

3. Such qualities as (courage, jealousy, gentleness, forcefulness) are psychological, not sensible. Therefore,

4. If *sunsum* is what constitutes an individual’s personality, it cannot be a physical thing.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the following six-step argument is provided by him as a summary of Gyekye’s argument linking *sunsum* with God and, thus, de-linking it from fathers (or physical sources):

1. Busia (1954) and others (e.g. Danquah 1968) claim that *sunsum* derives from the father and that it is therefore mortal.

2. But *sunsum* derives from the supreme being. Therefore:

3. It must be divine and immortal.

4. After all, trees, plants, and other objects also have *sunsum*.

5. But if *sunsum* derives from the father, these natural objects cannot have it.

6. Therefore *sunsum* does not derive from the father.<sup>36</sup>

On this showing, Gbadegesin cannot be right in his claim that Gyekye does nothing more than the construction of the conditional statement to prove the incorrectness of Danquah. I can only

make sense of his claim if he implies that Gyekye's arguments are not convincing as he sometimes attempts to show. But even here, I still have difficulties accepting some of his criticisms.

First, I must indicate where I agree with Gbadegesin. It is quite correct to hold that if *sunsum* can be conceived to be physical, such a physical object – like the Yoruba *okan* (the heart) – can possibly produce or be responsible for some psychological happenings in the human person.<sup>37</sup> However, whether or not psychological qualities (such as fear, anger, jealousy and courage) often attributed in Akan to *sunsum* are necessarily attributed to a physical object requires further interpretation. Unlike in Yoruba thought where the *okan*, believed to be the 'spiritual source of emotion and thought'<sup>38</sup> is identified with or as a physical organ, *sunsum* is not. Again, it does not only fail to be part of the human body, but also, there are no convincing reasons to believe it is part of the human DNA either. Consequently, aside from their speculative significance, Gbadegesin's assertions that (i) '... suppose the function of *sunsum* is the development of personality, nothing prevents it from performing this function as a physical thing. Courage can be connected with a solid constitution of the physical *sunsum* which strengthens the psyche,'<sup>39</sup> and (ii) 'Just as I argued in the case of the Yoruba *okan*, it seems to me that a purely physical concept of *sunsum* is not logically inconceivable'<sup>40</sup> serve no factual purpose and can hardly be true of the Akans.

Finally, Gbadegesin dwells on information on one page<sup>41</sup> to construct the six-step argument which he attributes above to Gyekye. Although the statements constituting the said argument can literally be taken from that page, the manner in which the argument is constructed, the way statements 4, 5, and the conclusion are particularly joined with the others to constitute *the*

argument is inappropriate. There is a gap between the statements that deal with the Supreme Being (i.e. 2 and 3) and those about the *sunsum* of trees and natural objects (i.e. 4 and 5). But this gap, as it will soon become evident, was not created by Gyekye. The nature of the argument constructed by Gbadegesin appears to hint of two different arguments meant by Gyekye to show that *sunsum* does not originate from the father. If it does, Gyekye notes, *sunsum* would have to be, like the father of a person, physical. What, also, Gbadegesin does not reveal is that the argument he has constructed is about an issue Gyekye developed from, at least, the previous page (i.e. p.90 of Gyekye's *Essay ...*). Indeed, a careful look at both pages would indicate that Gyekye was consciously making series of arguments – including some other arguments that Gbadegesin does not mention – to prove the spirituality of *sunsum*. Gyekye there argues, for instance, that (i) if *sunsum* is the bearer of conscious experience as Danquah claims, then it must be spiritual because a 'purely material thing, like wood or dead body, cannot experience anything', and (ii) since *sunsum* performs 'part' of the functions of the *ōkra* – particularly, as Danquah also recognizes, making possible the realization of the soul's destiny – it must, like the soul, be spiritual. That a new argument was being made by his reference to trees and plants is underscored by Gyekye's use of the expression 'proved also' at the point where that reference was made. It is therefore surprising why Gbadegesin chose only two of Gyekye's arguments, put them together to generate one discordant argument about why *sunsum* cannot originate from the father.

In the very sentence that 'trees, plants and other natural objects' are mentioned by Gyekye, coming after his two 'other' arguments just mentioned above, he makes reference to *sunsum*. That, *sunsum* should be understood in the same context as he had previously discussed in the preceding chapter (i.e. chapter five). In his words:

By “personality” Busia must, on this showing, be referring to the *sunsum*, which must, according to my analysis, derive directly from the Supreme Being, and not from the father. (What derives from the father is *ntoro*, to be explained directly.) It must, therefore, be divine and immortal, contrary to what he and others thought. That *sunsum* cannot derive from the child’s father is proved also by the fact that trees, plants, and other natural objects also contain *sunsum*, as we saw in the previous chapter.<sup>42</sup>

Over there (i.e. in that preceding chapter), *sunsum*, being spirit, and, indeed all spiritual entities, are said to originate from God who, by nature, is Spirit.<sup>43</sup> It is this idea that he sought to extend to the present discussion. To be fair to Gyekye, therefore, I think Gbadegesin should have mentioned this. But having failed to do that, Gbadegesin rather accuses Gyekye of not mentioning (apparently, on page 91) that *sunsum* is spiritual.<sup>44</sup> If my recommendation were followed, the accurate picture consistent with Gyekye’s position on the spirituality of *sunsum* would have been: *the human sunsum, like those of plants and trees, does not owe its spiritual existence to fathers because it derives from the Supreme Spirit (Being)*’ and not, as Gbadegesin implies<sup>45</sup> *‘the human sunsum, like those of plants and trees, does not owe its existence to fathers because plants and trees do not even have human fathers to pass on their sunsum to them’*. The question he goes on to ask, that ‘But must trees have human fathers for their *sunsum* to be passed on to them’<sup>46</sup> is unwarranted and completely misses the point. The reason is that Gyekye believes that *sunsum* is not hereditary and never passed on.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.1.2. *Some Criticisms*

The foregoing exposition on the notion of ‘the mind’ comes along with numerous implications. Such implications have made it possible for the notion to be criticized on the following varied grounds:

a) *Mind has no Akan Equivalent*

Wiredu is the champion of this idea. He notes that in both African and Western traditions it is sometimes believed that an aspect of a person exists that is different from the completely physical body. This aspect is known as ‘the mind’ in Western thought. But, the mind is therein classified as an entirely metaphysical entity<sup>48</sup> responsible for thinking. On the contrary, he reveals that *ōkra*<sup>49</sup> is not only unidentifiable with thought but also it is not entirely metaphysical. Moreover, if thought is our matter of concern, he would argue, then we should be dealing with *adwene* (literally, ‘thought’ or ‘thinking capacity’).<sup>50</sup> For these reasons, it would be impossible to render ‘the mind’ as *ōkra*. Another reason why such rendering would be wrong is his conviction that the *ōkra* ‘has to have an “adwene” itself’. This, he argues, is evidenced in the *ōkra*’s ratiocinative and comprehension abilities. For it is believed to either receive its message of destiny from God or inform<sup>51</sup> God of its destiny as a condition for getting into this world. He adds elsewhere<sup>52</sup> that *adwene* is not even part of the things which make up a person because Akan philosophers do not regard it at all as an entity or ‘substance.’ He therefore concludes that ‘the mind’ (as understood in Western dualism) cannot be translated into Akan.

Upon a closer look, however, I think that his analysis is partly right and partly wrong. He is right in stating that *adwene* is not regarded as a substance or entity. The position is also correct that *adwene* is different from *ōkra*, and that the latter must conceivably possess the former as an attribute. Before I begin my critique, however, it is necessary that we establish certain preliminary positions about translation of concepts, either within or



between cultures. Translation of expressions is possible in some three ways. First, it is conceivable that even within the same language, some two words would always replace each other because they almost exclusively translate into each other. Examples are the words 'help' and 'assist' in the English language. The second scenario is when one of the two words has other meanings (or connote other concepts), although they can replace each other. 'Depart' and 'leave' are examples, for the latter could also mean a period of rest taken by a worker. Finally, there are instances where two words will replace each other even though either word has other connotations. As will soon become clear, 'mind' and 'soul' fit the last situation. It would thus be wrong, given the third scenario to suppose that two words can never mean the same unless there is complete agreement in meaning, in all other contexts that either word can be used. Simply put, words can replace each other in specific contexts but differ in some other areas that their meanings each extend to.

From the above, it seems to me that in both intra- and inter-cultural translations, equivalence would be drawn between words (largely) on the basis of their point(s) of convergence or agreement. In seeking equivalence of terms between any two languages, then, what one needs to find out are (i) whether an idea or concept appears to be held in the two cultures, (ii) whether there are terms literally used in the two cultures for the idea to be analyzed, (iii) whether the terms also refer to concepts other than the concept to be analyzed, (iv) to what extent do the terms agree on their extended meanings? (v) to what extent do they differ on their extended meanings? (vi) are there some other terms used to refer to the concept? and, (vii) does the essence of the concept reflect in the

understanding of the two cultures? Let me show how by not following these steps, Wiredu's views on the Akan concept of mind is not quite correct.

Wiredu begins his investigations by first looking for words to translate, but not ideas to name. One disadvantage in adopting his method is that when a complex term such as 'mind' is to be examined, our analysis might not be comprehensive enough. He sets off by declaring: '[o]ur major issue is whether there is any exact equivalent in Akan of the English word 'mind'.<sup>53</sup> What this approach does is to make it seem, although that might not be his intention, as if the Western perspective is the foil through which African philosophy must be carried out.<sup>54</sup> It is not surprising then, that he goes ahead with his discussion by first outlining the English conception of the term, to be followed by how inadequately, he thinks, Akan expressions match it. In doing so, he relied substantially on the lexicographer's definition of 'mind,' as:

1. the part of a human being that reasons, understands, perceives, etc
2. the faculty of reasoning or understanding.
3. a person considered in relation to his intellectual powers.
4. reason or sanity.
5. opinion or intensions.
6. psychic or spiritual being.
7. remembrance or recollection.
8. attention or thoughts.<sup>55</sup>

He distinguishes the first and sixth (the 'substance view' of mind) from the rest (each of which is either 'dispositional' or 'ideational').<sup>56</sup> Having identified the substance view as philosophical and metaphysical, he plays down its role in the determination of Akan

equivalent for 'mind'. His reason for doing so is that: (a) the 'substance view' does not constitute the core definition of the term because it is not acceptable to all English speakers (including philosophers), and (b) with regard to the sixth in particular, 'the dictionary itself, by ranking it sixth suggests that the item in question does not give the primary meaning of the word'.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, it is instructive to note, his analysis of the meaning or equivalent of mind in Akan would come to be directed at matching just the ideational and dispositional views of mind. This approach, I think, is not satisfactory.

By restricting himself to those definitions which relate to thinking, he appears to have prepared the ground for his major statement that 'the only conceivable translation of "mind" into Akan is "adwene"'.<sup>58</sup> But this is exactly where the red flag needs to be raised: that given that 'mind' has multiple meaning, the choice of translation depends on, at least, which sense of mind one intends to translate. It is interesting why we have to pay less attention to the philosophical aspect of a definition when we are engaged in a philosophical analysis. It is also not clear why because some individuals – he cites Gilbert Ryle – do not believe in the existence of an entity, the name of the entity loses the concept or meaning which it was originally projected to carry. If a concept was not conveyed by the term (i.e. in the metaphysical 'mind'), Ryle would not have had anything not to believe in. It is one thing to argue that there is no (metaphysical) 'mind'; it is another to assert that the term 'mind' is never used – or, at least, intended – to refer to a notion of (metaphysical) substance. The former does not guarantee the truth of the latter claim. Moreover, it seems absurd for one to insist on the latter. The absurdity in doing so is that one would then be barring oneself from arguing for or against the notion of substance ('mind'), for one's arguments would not relate to anything that has meaning.

Indeed, agreement on the reality of ‘something’ has not always been a basis for the meaningfulness of the concept of that ‘thing’, neither has agreement on the meaning of concepts been always necessary for the reality of the things conceptualized. ‘God’ and ‘life’ (i.e. life as opposed to death), respectively, are instances. Therefore, all English-speaking philosophers do not need to agree or ‘believe that there is any such thing as “psychic or spiritual being”’ for that sense of mind to be essential in the English language and culture.

The best possible way to proceed is to lay emphasis on philosophical features and see how the nonphilosophical ones may help or jeopardize our course. We will attempt to do this as we go by the seven short steps mentioned above, and illustrated below.

*(i) Is a Common Basic Idea Held in Both Cultures?*

By (i), we are enjoined to look for an idea, not a term. This idea is to be identified first in any culture of our choice. This frees us from the temptation to start off with English terms which are potentially the forerunners of non-Akan conceptions. We should then ask the question, ‘is there any belief in Akan culture that suggests that a person is composed partly of a nonphysical entity that also has the capacity to exist independently of the body?’ After asking the same question of the other culture, the answers we find will provide a basis to move to the next stage where we look for referents in the two cultures. We cannot assume though, that the answers we provide about the two cultures regarding the question above will be in agreement. And, if there happen to be disagreement, there will not be any need to proceed to stage (ii).

*(ii) Is there a term for the Idea in Both Cultures?*

Luckily, as per Gyekye's exposition of the Akan concept of a person and Wiredu's list of the English definitions, a movement to stage (ii) is possible because such belief as the one inquired about in the paragraph above is found in the two languages that Wiredu compares. Consequently, we ask if there are names for the belief. The answer is yes. In Akan, this is not called *adwene*, as Wiredu rightly observes. It is called *ōkra* (the active part of which is *sunsum*). In English, it is called *mind*. In both cultures though, there are philosophers who deny the actual existence of the entity. But this only shows that *ōkra* or mind is a meaningful concept and, at the same time, a subject of intellectual dispute. It is noteworthy, however, that a meaningful concept might be unintelligible. If a concept has meaning or significance or leads us to understand something, it is simply meaningful. But such a concept (and what it leads us to understand) might still be unintelligible if it does not stand up to the test of serious intellectual enquiry. In other words, we might know what a concept means and yet reject it as unintelligible or illogical. This is why I question the tendency by logical positivists to regard the concept of *ōkra* (mind) not just as both unverifiable and unintelligible, but also as subsequently meaningless.<sup>59</sup> Even though it is not necessarily true that the concept of 'the mind' (in the metaphysical sense) is either meaningless or unintelligible, I have cited logical positivism just to make one point. The bottom-line is that 'meaningfulness' and 'intelligibility' are sometimes confused or intersubstituted. As we have seen, the alleged unintelligibility of the concept of 'the

mind', in turn, leads positivists to argue wrongly that the concept is meaningless. Meaningfulness differs from intelligibility, but logical positivism fails to distinguish the two. Meaningfulness (of expression or thought) implies understandability, whereas intelligibility implies logical propriety; the latter suggests the former but the reverse does not hold.

*(iii) Are there any Extended Meanings (Connotations) of the Term in Either Culture?*

With regard to stage (iii), I must state that *ōkra* could mean 'cat'; while *sunsum* may refer to 'shadow,' 'spiritual,' 'spirit' or 'spirit being,' or 'personality'. In this situation, as in the one above where the English Dictionary provides other meanings of a term, an affirmative answer for stage (iii) is provided for both language cases. The importance of stage (iii) is: to help us see later whether our choice of meaning or answer for (i) was exhaustive and precise.

*(iv) To What Extent Do the Extended Meanings of Both Terms Agree?*

As regards their similarities in respect of extended meanings, any additional agreement between 'mind' and *ōkra* would make a strong case for the equivalence we drew between them at stage (i). This does not in any way mean that agreement in extension is necessary for the correctness of the comments made at stage (i). In addition to the meaning established at stage (i) therefore, what we also see is that the *ōkra* and the Cartesian 'mind' are each believed to be the reliable indicator of human life. They are also believed to be capable of cerebration. In the case of *ōkra*, this is particularly true when it is independent of the body. I share Wiredu's view that the rendering of the first lexical

definition (supplied by him) as the Akan equivalent of mind is wrong. To him, the part of a person which the Akans believe to be responsible for thinking – the part that ‘reasons, understands, perceives’ – is the brain (*amene*). In other words, that which performs those activities is simply ‘the person, “onipa”’ but the ‘instrument of thought’ is the *amene*.<sup>60</sup>

What is much attractive about this view is how it enables him to relate *adwene* to *ōkra*, in the latter’s prenatal life. The *ōkra*, Wiredu states, is believed to receive from or tell God its destiny before it gets into the human world. But for the *ōkra* to do this, he argues, it should be possible for one to ‘conceivably talk of the “adwene” [thought] of an “okra”’.

<sup>61</sup> He is quiet though, on the question of whether the *ōkra* requires any instrument of thought, and whether *that* instrument also has a quasi-physical character similar (he would say) to that of the *ōkra* itself.<sup>62</sup> He did not comment on these very questions because he probably felt they were fit for a future discussion, or they just did not attract his attention. To my mind, the *adwene* possessed at the destiny-taking or -giving stage is indicative of the *ōkra*’s capacity to think without a brain. For the *ōkra* is believed to be devoid of any matter. Thought, it then appears, is not always dependent on brain activity.

An important rider required at this stage is that while the brain might not be necessary in the preceding sense of ‘thought’, it does not follow that a human being does not need a brain to think. I make this point fully aware that some philosophers see humans as some form of machines, particularly in reference to the body with all its physical and apparent mechanical structures. Others completely deny that only human beings can think. In contemporary studies of consciousness, especially of artificial intelligence, cognition is very often attributed to computers. However, anytime it is suggested, as Newell and Simon do<sup>63</sup> that the sort of intelligence awarded to ‘computers is exactly the same as for

human beings,'<sup>64</sup> Searle would reject it with the argument that such equation of intelligence neglects the role of intentionality which is required for a good explanation of consciousness. On the contrary, he awards intentionality to the human being: that,

... I am a certain sort of organism with a certain biological (i.e. chemical and physical) structure, and this structure, under certain conditions, is causally capable of producing perception, action, understanding, learning, and other intentional phenomena. And part of the point of the present argument is that only something that had those causal powers could have that intentionality.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Searle's position – aspects of which will shortly be shown to be shared in Akan thought – amounts to the following: that the human being (and more specifically, the brain) is said to think because he or she has the capacity for understanding (or for 'intentionality'). And that even when we 'attribute "understanding" and other cognitive predicates by metaphor and analogy to cars, adding machines' or 'the programmed computer,'<sup>66</sup> what we do by this is that 'we extend our own intentionality' to these artifacts. Thus, he denies any equation of the thought processes of the human being with the programme of a computer. In his judgement, the latter only recognizes forms or symbols of language without necessarily understanding its meaning. He writes,

the formal properties [of a computer] are not by themselves constitutive of intentionality, and they have by themselves no causal powers except the power, when instantiated, to produce the next stage of the formalism when the machine is running ... Because the formal symbol manipulations by themselves don't have any intentionality; they are quite meaningless; they aren't even symbol manipulations, since the symbols don't symbolize anything. In the linguistic jargon, they have only a syntax but no semantics. Such intentionality as computers appear to have is solely in the minds of those who program them and those who use them, those who send in the input and those who interpret the output.<sup>67</sup>

In the strict sense, therefore, it will be hard to hold 'the equation, "mind is to brain as program is to hardware"' because the brain's mind is not exactly like a computer



program. For as he elsewhere reiterates, '[a] program merely manipulates symbols, whereas a brain attaches meaning to them'.<sup>68</sup>

Another angle, though controversial, to the machine argument – and on which I comment shortly – is introduced by Susan Blackmore. While agreeing with Searle that consciousness can be discussed in relation to machines, she makes two important different points. First, that self (human) consciousness – which Searle appears to take for granted – is an illusion. Secondly, that the so-called human consciousness is replicable in machines, and that 'making a machine that is conscious in the same way as we are means making one that is subject to the same kind of illusion.'<sup>69</sup> It must be noticed that she does not present herself as an eliminative materialist – i.e., as someone who does not believe that consciousness exists – but rather claims that consciousness 'is not what it appears to be.'<sup>70</sup> 'In fact we don't know how to recognise consciousness in anything at all,' she argues.<sup>71</sup> The illusion in humans comes about because we are 'meme machines' (a term borrowed from Dawkins 1976) whose existence largely entails – and whose experiences are grown by – 'ideas, habits, skills, stories or any kind of behaviour or information that is copied from person to person by imitation.'<sup>72</sup> The things copied are the memes. According to this theory, since a person tends to copy from others their ideas or experiential terminologies, there is, then, the tendency to apply the copied experiences to oneself, thinking erroneously that one possessed those very experiences. But this, according to Blackmore, is an illusion. That, this does not differ from what would pertain to 'a community' (my expression) of meme robots who, being together and interacting,

will spontaneously invent self reference. I expect them to do so, and to re-enact the whole process of selfplex creation. That is, they will initially use the word

for 'I' to refer to a physical robot, then begin to talk about it having beliefs, desires, possessions and so on, and this will in turn provide the opportunity for memes to cluster around the growing self concept. Once this happens these robots will, like the human-imitating robots above, acquire the illusion that they are a conscious self experiencing an objective world.<sup>73</sup>

The turn of the debate concerning consciousness now is quite interesting, especially in relation to Akan philosophy. Artificial intelligence is a question that is beginning to catch on with Akan thinkers, and would require full-blown research in the near future.<sup>74</sup> But, from the discussions thus far, it is more likely that consciousness as applicable to humans would not be attributed or extended in Akan thought to computers or artifacts. The computer known in Akan as *afidiebadwenba* (lit. the intelligent machine) is noted for the logical nature of its processes, but not for exhibiting all relevant features of human intelligence. In this wise, Searle's position would find some space in Akan philosophy. This is not to advance that humans are regarded in Akan thought, as some Western philosophers do, as any forms of machine. A human being is simply organic body and soul.

Regarding Blackmore's argument, the conception of humans as memes is rather confusing. It tends more to robotize humans than seek to identify which aspects of human life that robots can vaguely be said to imitate. Robots imitate but humans cannot be said to just imitate. We learn. Learning entails consciousness or 'intentionalizing' (to borrow

Searle's expression). I admit that human capacity for learning differs from person to person, sometimes age and even health count. But it is because we are conscious of what we learn that we are able to decipher which learnt ideas, expressions, behaviours best express our own intentions or help achieve our self-set objectives. When ideas, methods, behaviours are dropped for new ones, as Blackmore herself claims they are, that can only be because some conscious being is aware that certain ideas are or will no more be useful, or that he or she has logical or factual reasons to believe that some previous beliefs will no longer hold, or that the chances of achieving some set-targets will improve by not behaving as before. It is a person who has 'desires' and 'beliefs' but not – as Blackmore conceives of – robots. Robots have inputs, inputs designed to generate certain predictable sort of answers. Unlike robots or computers 'our immediate responses to real-world problems pop out without much thought', 'we can censor or revisit choices made on first blush with further analysis', and also 'we can have the sensation of knowing that we know the answer without having it in mind'.<sup>75</sup> When we learn, indeed, we do nothing but participate in things like these. We are then entitled to speak of our consciousness of things, or, if we increasingly perform these with higher success rate, speak of higher levels of our learning abilities.

The exposition above seems to be in the direction that consciousness is a product of the processes of the brain or, generally, of the nervous system. Although the puzzle for some,

respecting this position, has been how consciousness comes about in the brain, objections have also been raised about the propriety of concentrating on such a question at all. For instance, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has criticized Searle, Thomas Nagel, and also Paul Churchland for addressing themselves to the question of how consciousness originates in the brain,<sup>76</sup> instead of what she sees as most critical: the broader question of the ‘natural history of consciousness’.<sup>77</sup> The best approach, in Sheets-Johnstone’s estimation, to ‘genuine understandings of consciousness demand close and serious study of evolution as a history of animate form’.<sup>78</sup> I will explain why I disagree with her on some counts, but first, let us understand the following: In the context of animate forms or beings, consciousness is often conceived of as a kind of internal perception. But, according to Sheets-Johnstone, recent biological studies of invertebrates and vertebrates suggest ‘internal proprioceptors to have derived from external sensory organs, that is, to be the result of a migration of certain formerly external proprioceptive bodily structures’.<sup>79</sup> She seems now to imply that the history of consciousness goes far beyond humans, though not necessarily up to the region of inanimate matter. She would also find spurious claims about the internal (noncorporal) sources of consciousness, as advanced in Cartesianism. It appears logical to her that in perceiving, the sensations of the perceiving organism – human or nonhuman – are felt to belong to it. Therefore, the self or awareness of the self, (in her words, ‘*know Thyself*’<sup>80</sup>) appears to be a biological process built into the process of having a sensation.<sup>81</sup>

Granted the accuracy of the preceding biological theory, it is still questionable how the history of consciousness or how the notion that perceptions initially evolved inwards from without, should take precedence over the issue of understanding the origin of

consciousness in the human brain. This is because, first, Sheets-Johnstone does not successfully show that ‘the history of consciousness’ (in the sense which she extends to vertebrates and invertebrates) is applicable to humans. The idea that things perceived internally by these animals were once perceived externally, even if true, does not prove that humans also underwent the same process. It is thus not necessarily the case that looking beyond the question of origination of consciousness in matter (i.e. in the human brain) would result in some form of investigation that is more paramount. I do not claim that doing so would not be important at all. To my second reason: what I accept, and Sheets-Johnstone does as well, is that humans are beings whose sensations, knowledge and experiences are, as we know now, processed internally – i.e. with the help of the brain. The knowledge of who we are, the understanding which the brain enables us to gain of issues, and how a defective brain makes us lose these, warrant a study of the brain and how it influences or determines various levels of our consciousness. We might not yet know the origin or fully understand the connection between the brain and consciousness, but the origination of consciousness (in the brain or matter) is, for the above reasons, a germane issue to pursue. I disagree, therefore, with Sheets-Johnstone on the view that *‘the proper question to answer concerning consciousness is not ‘how consciousness arises in matter’.*<sup>82</sup> The imperative to study the nature and origin of consciousness is more so considering our present need to understand and improve upon the workings of the brain. Doing this would imply that we no more take certain questions about our consciousness lightly. We seem, for instance, to take for granted that we are conscious; but exactly how conscious are we?<sup>83</sup> Consciousness – and for that matter, the brain; or generally, the nervous system – is a complex question indeed.

While rejecting certain aspects of the biological argument, I recognize the importance and the positive prospects of the scientific cum philosophical study of consciousness. Progress made in this line of research would even be critical to the concept and current studies of epistemology. Citing Quine (1960), Patricia Churchland and Terrence Sejnowski, for instance, seem to share this view, that '[i]n a recent departure from ... *a priori* philosophy, some philosophers have argued that epistemology itself must be informed by the psychological and neurobiological data that bear upon how in fact we represent and model the world'.<sup>84</sup> In spite of this, the situation still exists that consciousness, or self-consciousness (self-perception) specifically, is not fully comprehended by us. Paul Churchland extends this further. He thinks the notion of self-consciousness is a 'mystery' because by that notion we claim to have knowledge of the entire process of our 'inner' perception or experience, although that is false. At the same time, however, we cannot deny that we do have some internal perceptions. Self-perception, he thus writes, is

the perception of one's internal states with what we may call (largely in ignorance) one's faculty of introspection. Self-consciousness is thus no more (and no less) mysterious than perception generally.<sup>85</sup>

His latter comment appears informed by the idea that since we do not fully have self-consciousness – which is a subset of consciousness – we cannot really claim to understand consciousness. Again, given that in having self-consciousness (or knowing our mental states) 'one must apprehend [mental states] within some conceptual framework or other that catalogs the various different types of mental states', the problem of understanding consciousness also comes about because any such framework 'grows in

sophistication and comprehensiveness'.<sup>86</sup> These seem to be a direct challenge to the Platonic-Cartesian position that self-consciousness is incontrovertible.

Since the notion of the incontrovertibility of self-consciousness is fraught with several difficulties including those just mentioned, the suggestion (such as found in the biological argument) has sometimes been that, perhaps the external approach to understanding consciousness would be better. Very often, such arguments have tended to sprout from or ended in the evolution theory. The (evolution) theory usually has the advantage of acknowledging the little that we scientifically know of our mental states while laying emphasis on the external aspect of consciousness. 'Our faculty of judgement', it suggests, 'is in causal contact with the external world, through the various sensory modalities' and 'also with systematic causal contact with the rest of the internal domain [more closely, with the brain] of which it is a part'.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, therefore, human consciousness (or mind – in metaphysical language) is directly or indirectly interpreted in connection with the brain or brain activity. It is due to the absence of this sort of closeness between 'mind' and 'machine', for example, that explaining the mind in terms of the latter is seen by Michael Polanyi as not only 'meaningless' but as claiming knowledge in a way that is not 'characterized by a rule of rightness'.<sup>88</sup> The reduction of 'mind' and even 'life' to matter, as done by Julien de la Matrie, would as well be rejected by Polanyi<sup>89</sup> since the alleged vitality in matter is not itself matter. To Polanyi, 'the accidental configuration of matter from which life had started' suggests strongly that 'evolution, like life itself, will then be said to have been *originated* by the *action* of an ordering principle'.<sup>90</sup> But this principle is by no means inanimate matter. It is rather what he calls '[t]he first beginning of life' itself.

But there is something to observe about Akan thought and Polyani. Unlike what is usually held in Akan thought, he does not necessarily attribute the origin of life to God. He only thinks that some form of life can be conceived to precede matter in the evolution of consciousness. The evolution theory in one way or the other gives some role to matter in the development of (human) life. Similarly, some Akan thinkers such as Wiredu would not discount the inclusion of matter in the coming into being of the human species, although the impersonal evolution account of the emergence of the first conscious (human) being would be rejected by him. Wiredu's idea that God brought the human being into being from 'something' (physical)<sup>91</sup> supports my point. If the most basic source of consciousness or, in general, of conscious beings is – as Polyani claims – some 'ordering principle' or 'the first beginning of life', then the Akan thinker might ask 'what is the source of 'the first beginning of life'? It must be observed that even though God is believed in Akan thought to be the origin of life, the centrality of the brain to the existence and sustenance of consciousness in human beings is not overlooked.

This brings us back to our earlier point that even though the *ōkra*, in its independent life, is believed to think without a brain, it does not follow that a human being needs no brain to think. The effect of concussion or defective brain on the thinking abilities of a person is bad still. To explain this point further, I make some references to Gyekye. He seems to draw attention to the role of the brain in post-natal persons. He explains that in a person, the *ōkra* (specifically, the *sunsum*) is that 'which thinks, desires, feels', and that it performs these activities by 'acting on the brain'.<sup>92</sup> But, exactly how it 'acts on the brain' he does not quite show. He regards those activities attributed to the *ōkra* as implying consciousness, and claims subsequently that since consciousness 'is equivalent to the ...



mind in Descartes', it can 'be a translation of *ōkra*'.<sup>93</sup> But I do not quite agree with the translation of *ōkra* as consciousness. In Descartes, consciousness actually means nothing but the awareness by an immaterial (thinking) substance of both itself and its thought activities. And, since all that the thinking substance entails is this awareness, Descartes calls it 'consciousness' or 'mind'. When a person is conscious, in Akan, it is believed that his '*kra*' is still with him, but that is not to say that when the person is unable to 'desire, feel, or think' (or is unconscious) – as comatose patients do suffer – his '*kra*' has departed. It is believed by Akan thinkers that when the *ōkra* leaves the body the person dies, but I do not think that when a person is unconscious he is necessarily pronounced dead. This means that life, not consciousness, is identifiable with the Akan mind. It is also not clear to me why *ōkra* (or any part of it) should be considered as 'consciousness' itself, since all that has been shown so far is the attributive nature of *consciousness*. That is, that the *ōkra*, when on its own, is conscious.

Again, I doubt the prominent role awarded by Gyekye to *ōkra* (or, specifically *sunsum*) in the rational activities of a person. The role it plays in a human being's taking of conscious decisions – if it does at all – seems rather minimal, as compared to the brain.<sup>94</sup> For instance, in making a (logical, not ontological) distinction between them, Gyekye gives an indication of the active (thought) character of the *sunsum* and the passive nature of *ōkra*. This implies that if something would be harmful or helpful to the entire entity (*ōkra*), it is the *sunsum* that knows or is capable of knowing. But if, as Gyekye suggests above, it is the same *sunsum* which, for each person, 'thinks, desires, [and] feels', then it is really surprising how a person would not know that a particular food which he or she has chosen to eat is potentially harmful to the harmony between *honam* (body) and the

very ontological unit which the *sunsum* is part of. In most cases, this is what happens whenever a person is believed to have, for the first time, literally eaten something that his *'kra* is allergic to. This is another reason why the first definition of mind on Wiredu's list, which is also consistent with the Cartesian view, cannot have *ōkra* as its Akan equivalent.

The term 'mind' and Descartes' real intention behind its postulation are understood differently by Wiredu and Gyekye. The former thinks it was to account for the 'phenomenon of thought' while the latter sees 'thought' as narrow, preferring 'consciousness' rather. Gyekye agrees with Bernard Williams that the Cartesian *cogitare* and *cogitatio* are supposed to mean much more than the English 'think' and 'thought' respectively. *Cogitatio* can 'as well be a sensation (at least, in its purely psychological aspect) or an act of will, as judgment or belief or intellectual questioning'.<sup>95</sup> In my view, although the English word 'thought' is not interchangeable with 'desire' or 'feeling' or 'judgement' or 'belief' or 'intellectual questioning', all these psychological activities are similar in their having to entail or be a manifestation of some amount of thinking. Thus, consciousness cannot fail to imply the presence of thought. It is because of the fact that anyone who is conscious is, by definition, also (engaged in any of these forms of) thinking, that, I reckon, Descartes preferred to describe a person in terms of thought. It is why he defined a person as a thinking thing. The 'sole purpose' of introducing the mind in Cartesianism was therefore not to account for the phenomenon of thinking (as Wiredu holds), neither was it to account for consciousness (as Gyekye seems to imply). It was simply to account for the identity of a person, whom Descartes realized was also knowable in terms of consciousness and, therefore, of thought.

*(v) To What Extent Do the Extended Meanings of Both Terms Disagree?*

The extent to which both terms differ is largely manifested in the nonphilosophical meanings of *ōkra* and *mind*. In that context, the former only means ‘cat’. Wiredu, on the other hand, understands the nonphilosophical definitions of *mind*, especially the fifth, seventh and eighth to imply ‘thought,’ while the third and fourth are regarded as suggesting a disposition to exhibit some quality of ‘thought’. But as we are aware already, there is nothing about *ōkra* that justifies its being understood as ‘thought’, not even as the disposition to think. The significance of this stage is this: that it reveals why Wiredu was unsuccessful in seeing any similarity between *ōkra* and *mind*. He concentrated on the nonphilosophical sense of *mind* where it was impossible to locate any similarities with the *ōkra*. Another limitation in Wiredu’s analysis is that it does not take into account other features of the *mind* which Descartes and, indeed, most dualists, accept. Such features include those that we have put forward at stage (i), and the fact that both *ōkra* and the *mind* are believed to be immortal and form the core of a person.

*(vi) Are there Other Terms in Both Cultures for the Idea?*

With regard to other possible expressions for *ōkra* and *mind*, it is from our earlier comments that *sunsum* is as immaterial as the *ōkra*. However, since some interpretations of Akan philosophy (as done by Gyekye<sup>96</sup>) make *sunsum* logically but not ontologically different from *ōkra*, we cannot offer *sunsum* as a new word or substitute for *ōkra*. On the other hand, *mind* is often interchanged with *soul* although, even in the English language, there are times that *soul* would not mean *mind*. This reinforces the point about contextualization in translation and intercultural studies. For instance, the statements ‘he

has lost both of his parents, poor soul!’ and ‘it is an expensive work of art although it lacks soul’ cannot be respectively replaced, without complete loss of meaning, as ‘he has lost both of his parents, poor mind!’ and ‘it is an expensive work of art although it lacks mind’. Aside from *soul*, the term ‘mind’ (in the dualist sense) is also referred to as the understanding, thinking thing, reason, ego, self, the ‘I’, and disembodied person. But just as we saw about ‘soul’, these terms are not always interchangeable, except that they may be contextually equivalent in meaning. Meaning within which the concept we are investigating is also established.

*(vii) Does the Essence of the Concept Reflect in the Understanding of Both Cultures?*

The ability to identify and project one idea between cultures while, at the same time, allowing or recognizing conceptual differences— as has been done from stages (i) to (vi) — makes any intercultural equation of concepts a matter of context. And, by the leads given at stages (i) and (v) in particular, it is not difficult to see that there is a way in which Akan and non-Akan (especially, Western) metaphysicians would agree to share the belief that a person is more than just a body. They would accept that an entity other than the body exists. This is the essence of the concept of mind, and it is found in both cultures. Now, while both cannot be expected to agree in every detail on the nature and workings of their conceptions of mind, actual disagreements on some aspects of the concept cannot *per se* persuade us to see the concept as nonexistent in both cultures. In fact, they are the sort of things we must look for in any intercultural philosophical analysis. Philosophers do not expect peoples to share the same thoughts, but anytime thoughts are not exactly shared, there is still some ‘concept’ aspects of which the peoples involved are said to

disagree on. In our case, that concept is *the concept of mind*. When this fact is related to Wiredu, one realizes that by projecting mind as ‘thought’ and going ahead to look for Akan expression for ‘thought,’ he did well in finding only the right Akan equivalent of the non-‘substance view’ of *mind*. But, on his own account, the non-substance view was not philosophical. It is also evident that he would not want *mind* to be understood in metaphysical (‘substantial’) terms, although he admits that the substance view is philosophically situated. But granted the philosophical character or origin of the substance view of mind, his translation of *mind* as *adwene* (thought) is philosophically inadequate and imprecise.

b) *Mind is Meaningless, Nonsensical, and Nonexistent*

As hinted earlier, not every traditional Akan thinker believes in the reality of supernatural events and existents. In fact, the attitude of such thinkers manifests their clear attempt to depart from widely held beliefs. I choose ‘widely held beliefs’ over ‘received beliefs’. This is because in spite of the prevalence of metaphysical beliefs in the traditional society, it is difficult, in the absence of a ‘doxographical tradition’ (to borrow Gyekye’s expression),<sup>97</sup> to know if the so-called ‘received’ metaphysical beliefs came to us unaccompanied at all by views from the empirically-minded forebears. Since this can hardly be established, a resort to the expression ‘received ideas’ when referring to only those that are prevalent would be quite misleading. In modern times, a traditional elder,

Nana Boafo-Ansah is cited as someone who ‘thought that Onyame (Supreme Being, God), the ancestors, and the *abosom* (lesser spirits) were all “figments of the imagination”...’<sup>98</sup> It would then be consistent with his orientation to assert that the *ōkra*, being spiritual, would also be unreal. Wiredu’s interpretation of the *ōkra* which will further be examined (under section 1.1.3. below) is that *ōkra* is not metaphysical. But there are reasons, as I will also show, to believe that the *ōkra* is indeed conceived of as metaphysical.

When Hume rejected metaphysics, particularly the mind, in the eighteenth century, his arguments were to be a source of encouragement to logical positivists in the exposition of the latter’s brand of twentieth century empiricism. In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume argued that the metaphysical had to be rejected because it neither fell under ‘matters of fact’ nor ‘relation of ideas’. These two were the only available means through which, in his view, we could determine whether something was an object of human enquiry.<sup>99</sup> The use of verifiable and logical propositions as the criteria for the elimination of metaphysics, especially of the *cogito*, by the logical positivists is indicative of the Humean influence.<sup>100</sup> Since the (metaphysical) mind cannot be known, they would maintain, propositions about it cannot also be understood. For there would be nothing to assure us that what we mean by such propositions are correct, nor that we know how to determine which propositions about the mind are true. The mind is not only nonexistent, it is also cognitively insignificant. Statements about it are thus meaningless and nonsensical.

The skepticism of Hume, however, led him to reject the idea of permanent identity of persons entirely. He thus, threw in a whole new dimension into the question of personal identity, a dimension which has possible serious consequences for the *ōkra*. His position was originally a reaction to the Platonic and Cartesian suggestion that personal identity was to be found in a permanent constituent of a person, a mind, consciousness. And that, they suggest, the proof of the existence of the mind is necessarily shown in its ability to become conscious of its 'self' through introspection. He thus objects:

when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception.<sup>101</sup>

What is implied here is that no such single thing as 'mind' (the 'I') shows a person's identity. For a person's mind stretches to only perceptions. A person is thus 'a related collection of mental states'.<sup>102</sup> He disagreed with the Cartesian view that true perceptions are limited to the introspective sort. Thus, he observes, a person perceives both 'himself' and others who, in constitution, 'are nothing but bundle or collections of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.' But the trouble, he thinks, is that we cannot perceive, or at least capture in thought when an idea in the mind is changing (or is having itself replaced by another) due to such factors as 'causation, contiguity and resemblance' of the ideas.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, personal identity (as any one form of 'perceptible' identity) is, strictly speaking, indeterminable and nonexistent. My observation is that his conclusion would pose some serious challenge not only to the Platonic or Cartesian concept of the mind, but also to (certain interpretations of) the *ōkra*.

When the *ōkra* is conceived of or interpreted to mean consciousness (as Gyekye does), it tends to make the *ōkra* take on certain misleading features associated with Cartesianism. For instance, it might be supposed that (i) the *ōkra* is essentially or ultimately ‘thought’, or that it admits of Hume’s definition of consciousness as ‘nothing but a reflected thought or perception,’<sup>104</sup> and (ii) its only source of knowledge, like the Cartesian ‘I’, is through introspection. From our previous analysis, however, the first supposition is obviously not applicable to the *ōkra*. It is rather true of *adwene*. As regards the second point, it would be wrong, I think, to conceive of the *ōkra* that way. First of all, I have cast doubts above on whether *ōkra* is that which, like the Cartesian mind, knows (instead of the person knowing, by the use of his or her brain). Secondly, it is not even a requirement in Akan that ideas be internally or introspectively generated for them to be, in Cartesian sense, ‘known’. Thirdly, it is held in Cartesianism that the mind can exist independently of the body, and that in such existence, it is only conscious of abstract or metaphysical truths. The same cannot be said of *ōkra*’s period of independent existence. This is because of the belief that, first, the *ōkra* could, prior to its association with a human body, conceivably understand the destiny or life of the being whom it will be part of in the human world. Secondly, in the post-mortal life of *ōkra* (particularly, in its capacity as a living-dead), it is believed to know and contribute to the welfare of the human community. But, since (i) as in the first case, the said destiny is about the human world, and is considered as realizable in this sort of world; and (ii) this human world to which the living-dead supposedly contributes is also believed to be partly physical, it is self-stultifying to hold that in the *ōkra*’s independent existence, the material world is not knowable – or has never been known – at all to it. This implies that the (independent) *ōkra*, unlike the



Cartesian consciousness, knows things that are external to it. Consequently, the conception of *ōkra* as ‘consciousness’ cannot take either of the two forms mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph. For, that would smack of some external influence on the analysis of an African philosophical belief.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, if the *ōkra* is understood in terms of Cartesian consciousness, it would be difficult for Hume’s critique of permanent identity not to apply to it.

Nevertheless, it cannot be suggested that all is well with Hume’s argument. His theory is cast in the mould of the epistemological skepticism of the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus who made knowledge impossible because all things were in constant movement toward the ‘ultimate fire’ (his substrate). Things, according to him, had no stable or permanent features that could be objects of knowledge.<sup>106</sup> I can infer from Hume also, that the ‘self’ (‘I’) is a function of perception in the relation  $I = x(p)$ , where ‘I’ is the ‘self’, and ‘x’ any impression that could affect our perceptions ‘p’. His ‘empiricism included pretty rigid adherence to the doctrine that for every idea there is a corresponding impression. Ideas and impressions are both “perceptions.” They differ in “vivacity and strength”<sup>107</sup> This means that the self, in his view, is any perception. True, Majeed has had countless number of perceptions since his infancy, and innumerable thoughts (internal perceptions) as he writes this essay. But the question that arises is this: can it be said (about Majeed) that there is a person who has so many perceptions now and many more in retrospect? If we can, and I think we should, answer in the affirmative, then what is it that has maintained itself despite his transient perceptions over the years? There has to be, of course, an identified person first for us to think of changes in that person’s perceptions. This position is also conveyed by John Perry’s understanding of the

concept of ‘personal identity’. To him, it is about how we explain different events as ‘belonging to a person.’<sup>108</sup>

Reducing the notion of personal identity to a collection of properties is a move which is, indeed, difficult to defend. Gyekye’s handling of Bertrand Russell’s <sup>109</sup> *bundle theory* of substance quite supports this point. Russell first argued that ‘a “thing” is nothing but a bundle of co-existing qualities such as redness, hardness, etc ... that the “thing” is to be replaced by a collection of qualities existing in the place (of the thing) in question’.<sup>110</sup> Gyekye infers from the quotation above that Russell implies that all the attributes of a person, for instance, come together to constitute what we refer to as ‘the person’ anytime such a reference is made. This is because Russell would want those attributes to collectively be a replacement for the individual (substance). Gyekye’s criticism of the theory, which I share, is that it is impossible to know all attributes of a person at a time in order that they can together be a replacement for ‘substance.’ A person may be said to have essential (or permanent) attributes and nonessential (or accidental) ones. The former which identify him as a human being, are also applicable to all humans. So, they cannot determine his individual identity. An example of such attributes is rationality. The accidental qualities – such as the person being short, quick-tempered, an athlete, a thief, a twin, an Akan – cannot either, because they are innumerable. The bundle theory, therefore, cannot account for a person’s identity.

It must now be pointed out that it is not always the case that anytime the nonmaterial conception of mind has been rejected, it has been supplanted with conceptions of the bundle type. Even though, for instance, Wiredu denied the complete nonmateriality of

*ōkra* and, for that matter (of what I call) the Akan ‘mind’, he accepted a dispositional meaning of ‘mind’. The point about disposition is shared by Gilbert Ryle. Ryle is important here because the metaphysical mind is nonexistent in his estimation. He argues that ‘my mind’ refers to that which ‘... signifies my ability and proneness to do certain things and not some piece of personal apparatus without which I could or would not do them ...’<sup>111</sup> Again, like Wiredu, he does not take the discussion of that which is conscious (or thinks) beyond the physical. In reaction to the metaphysically-inclined arguer, for instance, he declares: ‘... it is a logical solecism to speak ... of someone’s mind knowing this or choosing that, the person himself knows this or chooses that, though *it is* a mental fact about the person’.<sup>112</sup> I think that the view expressed in the preceding statement is appropriate. It is even grammatically unwarranted to suggest that a person’s mind, not the person himself, knows.

I would add briefly that the idea that the (metaphysical) mind is that which knows is exclusively conveyed by the confused language employed by some metaphysians, especially in Cartesianism, to describe the mind. If a person is essentially his or her mind, as Cartesians argue, then it would be redundant for any non-metaphysian to talk about ‘a person’s mind’, for that would be tantamount to saying tautologically ‘a mind’s mind’. But the Cartesian is wrong because, first, a human being’s mind (metaphysical or dispositional) cannot be the same as him- or herself. Therefore to argue as if a person is reducible to his or her mind, or that anything that is true of the mind is necessarily true of the person is to confuse a subset with the universal. For, mind is of a person.

It is crucial to remind ourselves once again that the concept of mind is not adequately captured in Wiredu's 'potentiality' thesis, neither is it in Ryle's 'proneness' argument. It is quite apparent that the concentration of these two philosophers seems here to be on the non-'substance view' of mind which I have already partly criticized. It is also worthy of note that the charge of logical solecism would not apply to the *ōkra* because it cannot, as I hinted earlier on, be said to (significantly) take decisions for any living person.

In what seems a bit unjustified to me, the linguistic problems associated with the Cartesian's use of 'mind' are used by some philosophers as a basis to reject the ontological meaning of the mind. By mind here, I mean, loosely, a metaphysical entity which is capable of independent existence. The Cartesian appears to identify mistakenly the human capacity to know (or think) with the alleged metaphysical entity itself, identifying them almost as one and the same thing (i.e. as mind). But this provides no license for one to suppose that by being able to restrict the explanation of 'mind' to the former, one at once proves the nonexistence of the latter. Ryle states of the metaphysical entity, for instance, that

the radical objection to the theory that minds must know what they are about, because mental happenings are by definition conscious, or metaphorically self-luminous, is that there are no such happenings; there are no occurrences taking place in a second-status world, since there is no such status and no such world and consequently no need for special modes of acquainting ourselves with the denizens of such a world.<sup>113</sup>

What he criticizes here are the private language thesis and the claim that the thesis is suggestive of the necessity of the entity, mind. By private language is meant the thesis that the mind knows for certain its ontological self, together with the thoughts that it has. And, that no one can know another (person's) mind. The private language thesis

ultimately seeks to show that persons are certain of their existence because they are self-conscious minds. It therefore lays significant emphasis on a thinking, metaphysical entity whose knowledge, realm and existence are, to its proponents, unquestionable. But two implications can be drawn from the metaphysician's position: first, that the mind is involved each time a person thinks (at least, in Cartesianism, about self-evident propositions). And secondly, that the mind is a metaphysical entity capable of knowing. It is essential to draw attention to these two important positions about the mind, for they suggest two different contexts of the use of 'mind'. The first relates to an embodied person, while the second does not necessarily imply the presence of any such person. The latter is about a purely noncorporeal entity. [I conceive of *ōkra* in this latter sense.] With this distinction, it is possible to dispute or reject the view that a metaphysical entity is that which understands (whether necessary or contingent truths) in a person, without necessarily rejecting the view that there is a metaphysical component of a person. But this is exactly what Ryle does not do.

He argues, for instance, that 'mind is a noun but does not name an object,'<sup>114</sup> and that mind and body 'do not indicate two different species of existence' but 'two different senses of existence'.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, he observes, "'I" is not an extra name for an extra being' but is 'an index word'<sup>116</sup> which refers, like a proper name, to anyone who writes or utters it. It is still instructive to note that while it is true that 'I' is grammatically an index word, the same word has also been used by some metaphysicians to refer to an immaterial entity, soul. Thus, by informing us of the grammatical use of 'I', Ryle does not show that there is no metaphysical aspect of a person.

From his radical objection, he seems to have the idea that we do not know for sure, or empirically know of the existence of the mental (spiritual) world, and as such no such world exists. One can as well say that he seems to imply that the metaphysical soul exists not, because the term (soul) means nothing real. But an Akan thinker would reject his position with a well known maxim that ‘everything that has a name exists’ (*nea ewō din biara wō hō*). Parmenides’ powerful logic that ‘it is impossible to think what is not’<sup>117</sup> seems to carry the same reasoning. Perhaps Ryle, just like logical positivists, lacks the means to know the metaphysical component of a person the way they want. Maybe, the feature they associate with the soul – i.e. the feature of its being spiritual – belongs to the class of things they generally call ‘unreality’ or ‘nonexistence’. Ironically, this very feature (nonperceptibility) forms the nature of, or is what the name ‘spiritual world’ stands for. So it would equally be a logical solecism for them to assert that, that ‘thing’ (soul) whose features are so-and-so is not a ‘thing’, or is nothing.

A similar fate is suffered by the Buddhist doctrine of ‘not self’ – *an atta* in Pali, or *an-atman* in Sanskrit. It identifies the ‘self’ (soul) and the sense of belonging as what connect humans to suffering, and attempts to eliminate human suffering by, among other things, rather denying the reality of the ‘self.’ Considering the ‘I’ as ‘a mere figment of the human imagination, with nothing real to correspond to it,’ the doctrine, in the words of Edward Conze, encourages us ‘to struggle against the intellectual conviction that there is such a thing as a ‘self’, or a ‘soul’, or a ‘substance’.<sup>118</sup> It is evident that just like Ryle, Buddhists would claim that the ‘self’ does not mean anything, for it corresponds to nothing.

c) *Mind is Bodily*

i. *Mind Signifies Mental or Brain Processes Identifiable with the Body.*

By the conception that the mind (in relation to ‘thinking potential’) is a mental process, one may be tempted to identify it with the brain. But this should not be the case in the Akan context. In Akan thought, for example, the idea that a person’s thoughts are never described in terms of the *amene* (brain) makes Wiredu caution us against any such identification. On the contrary, the thinking potential (or mind) of a person is meaningful to the Akan when it is expressed or rendered as *adwene*. The *adwene* is ‘a logical construction out of actual and potential thoughts’, and – contrary to the nature of the brain – is ‘conceived of in an exclusively non-substance way’.<sup>119</sup> The meaning of ‘mind’ which he is interpreting is indeed unlike what we know in the English language in which, he again observes, ‘the notion of the identity of mind and brain appear to make sense’<sup>120</sup>

Even though views such as those expressed in the greater portion of note 120 above seem to vindicate Wiredu, I still do not agree with him on some other aspects of the Akan concept of a person. I will make out a case for this in section 1.1.3.

ii. *Bodily Identity as either a Fundament or Consequent*

(a) *Body as a Fundament*

The idea that memory is the criterion of personal identity is often traced to John Locke. Past and present (physical) experiences are, to him, important for the identification of a person provided the person can remember them as his or hers. But one thing which is evident from such a conception of a person is the tacit acknowledgement that since it is physical beings who have those physical experiences, such beings are logically anterior to any memories they would have. Jeffrey Olen<sup>121</sup> can also be said to share the same thought as Locke's about the human being. It is not in every case, however, that an approval of memory criterion necessitates the notion of prior bodily existence. Anthony Quinton, for instance, is able to argue for the soul on the basis of continuity of mental experience. He notes that:

the soul, defined as a series of mental states connected by continuity of character and memory, is the essential constituent of personality. The soul, therefore, is not only logically distinct from any particular human body with which it is associated; it is also what a person fundamentally is.<sup>122</sup>

But another philosopher whose argument suggests that the body is fundamental is John Perry. Even though he defends various aspects of the memory criterion, he rejects H. P. Grice's view that 'the self is a logical construction and it is to be defined



in terms of memory'.<sup>123</sup> To him, the body or, generally, the material world is rather more fundamental because it is necessary for the understanding and possibility of memory.<sup>124</sup>

However, both Locke and Perry make a number of points that I find unassailable and worth repeating briefly here. For Locke, a person is 'a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places'.<sup>125</sup> And by 'reflection' Perry understands that Locke implies 'introspection'. The centrality of this rational activity of introspection to his definition of a person is not different from the approach Descartes adopted to the recognition of the self which, at the same time, was said by the latter to provide a person's identity. Consequently, one may be tempted to think that he affirms the immaterial substance. One may thus suppose that he would subscribe to the Cartesian view that 'the thinking thing' (the human soul) is what personal identity is dependent upon. Having not yet forsaken the apparent rational approach, Locke goes on now to indicate what personal identity depends on in this way:

since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things: in this alone consists personal identity, that is, the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person, it is the same self now [as] it was then<sup>126</sup> ... and would be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past and to come ...<sup>127</sup>

However, Locke makes an emphatic statement that seems to distinguish him from Descartes and the rationalistic inclination to the effect that 'identity of "immaterial substance" is neither necessary nor sufficient condition for personal identity' because

a person is ‘a complex of material and immaterial substances’.<sup>128</sup> My first comment relates to his likening of this conception of identity to that of the vegetable tree, implying that physical properties also enable us to identify a living tree as the same tree over a period of time. When he was criticized by Joseph Butler<sup>129</sup> that such sameness pronounced on a tree as being the one planted fifteen years ago does not mean the strict, philosophical sense of sameness because their properties differ, Perry attempts to ridicule or debase the ‘philosophical sense’ by advancing that it fails to see that ‘even if the tree had retained a number or even all of the original material particles it had, and thus exemplified sameness in the strict and philosophical sense, it [the tree] might still have grown’.<sup>130</sup> Actually, I do not know what Perry takes ‘strict philosophical sense’ to mean, but I am not convinced that philosophers do not take physical appearance into account when examining the nature of an object.<sup>131</sup> The most immediate feature of the tree has to do with its physical appearance; and the issue would be settled far quickly by the ‘strict philosophical sense’ if all that mattered for the solution was whether or not the tree has grown. When there is talk about change in property in the philosophical sense, it implies change in volume, size, quantity, quality or, generally, directly perceivable and unperceivable qualities such as plant cells. Therefore, strict philosophical sense would not allow or fail to identify growth as a form of change. Even metaphysicians who give much credence to the immaterial world do recognize that physical objects do change, and that plants grow.

Secondly, Perry thinks that Butler should accept Locke’s idea that personal identity does not depend necessarily or even sufficiently on any immaterial substance because ‘we don’t know or care whether we are, throughout our lives, in “vital union” with

one or many immaterial substances; we are willing to affirm or deny personal identity in complete ignorance of this question'.<sup>132</sup> I do not think that we – that is, all humans – affirm or deny personal identity in complete ignorance of whether we are in vital union with any immaterial substance. In Akan philosophy, the spiritual (that is, *ōkra* plus *sunsum*) is largely believed to constitute the core of a person. I am not suggesting that Akan thinkers submit to the soul theory of the Cartesian sort. But, in a sense, their conception of the eternity of the nonempirical soul, a soul that carries a person's destiny, life and is his essence<sup>133</sup> show a clear case of a people who care and are willing to affirm personal identity only on the grounds that a person is in vital union with the more fundamental immaterial component. In Indian (Hindu) and many other philosophies similar beliefs are held. Perhaps, people do not ordinarily intend any immaterial substance(s) in their everyday conversations when they make such statements as 'she is dancing', 'we are Ghanaians' or 'this scholar is Zulu'. However, when humans get curious – as it is normal practice for humans to reflect on themselves – they tend to find answers to questions regarding who they truly are. In doing so, it seems that many people do come to the conclusion that every living person has an immaterial component or that a person is ultimately spiritual. Hence, I do not think it is not a normal practice, as Perry would like us to believe, to care about whether a human being is in a vital union with an immaterial substance when some people are deciding on personal identity. So, even though this immaterial substance may not be a necessary condition for all humans to affirm or deny personal identity, it cannot be denied that it is a necessary condition for many people.

On the part of Locke, he interprets consciousness in a way that I find puzzling. He observes: 'if the same consciousness ... can be transferred from one thinking substance to another, it will be possible that two thinking substances may make but one person'.<sup>134</sup> This seems to pose no problems, but with a bit further thinking one should see that this statement implies that the continuous existence of consciousness of the same person in different bodies gives both of them one personal identity. So now, let us understand this situation: that prior to the 'transfer', the original person had one of his legs amputated in infancy and his awareness could stretch back to that event; however, the new recipient of the consciousness at the time of the 'transfer' had his natural legs. The question is, is it not possible that the new recipient cannot still stretch his (acquired) consciousness to the sort of legs he now possesses after the operation? Or, will he not know that he is a different person now (with natural legs)? It appears reasonable to expect that he will know that he has a new leg, and that he is physically different from what he used to be. Else, he legitimately will begin to question himself whether he is not going mad. Therefore, it is quite possible that some truths known to or about a person will remain unchanged, even after a successful transfer of consciousness. When two different bodies conceivably 'share' the same consciousness through transfer, logically, the new or additional bearer of consciousness gets the signal of difference. The content of consciousness for the two cannot thus be equal in all absolute terms. Hence, no two individuals can ever be one.

To show his rejection of the soul criterion of personal identity, Locke again argued:

let any one reflect upon himself, and conclude that he has in himself an immaterial spirit, which is that which thinks in him, and, in the constant

change of his body keeps him the same: and is that which he calls himself: let him also suppose it to be the same soul that was in Nestor or Thersites at the siege of Troy ... which it may have been as well as it is now the soul of any other man: but he now having no consciousness of the actions either of Nestor or Thersites, ... can he be concerned in either of their actions? attribute them to himself, or think them his own, more than the actions of any other men that ever existed?<sup>135</sup>

He suggests that the answers to the preceding questions should be ‘no’ because ‘the same immaterial substance, without the same consciousness, no more [makes] the same person by being united to any body, than the same particle of matter, without consciousness united to any body, makes the same person’<sup>136</sup> With this, I have two issues to raise. In the first place, his affirmation of the consciousness criterion and the denial of ‘immaterial spirit’ seem not to possess the needed energy to overthrow the soul theory of personal identity. This is mainly because the sort of consciousness he is projecting somehow finds a place in what, for example, Descartes indicates is what a person has to have to be able to know the self. He only chose to call it ‘soul’ and considered it substance of a kind. Apart from the description (as ‘substance’), I do not see any difference in the role and nature of conscious experience of a person, as postulated by both soul theorists and Locke. In one sentence, Locke’s idea that consciousness is a factor in personal identity is implicit in the mentalistic soul theory of personal identity.

Secondly, when I examine his reason for rejecting the soul (or ‘spirit’, as he also likes to refer to it), I understand him as asserting that ‘soul’ is a universal term that, like body, everyone possesses. The soul therefore cannot distinguish one person from the other, unlike consciousness which every individual’s own is different. Why does he think or create the scenario that the soul of somebody now should be the same as that

of Nestor, Thersites and indeed any other man? Why, again, must Locke depend on that scenario to opine that if somebody wants to claim his or her identity on the basis of a soul, that individual cannot do so unless he or she also claims to be the rest of humankind? Why should that person, indeed, be the same as the rest of humankind (both the living and the dead)? Why is it that consciousness, which I know to be equally a universal term and still an attribute of every living person, should now not be considered as universal? I do not see any justifiable reason in Locke for not treating consciousness like the other universal terms. Evaluating the soul from a universal perspective but relegating consciousness to the domain of particulars does not represent a fair distinction. The interpretation of (the Cartesian kind of) soul given by Locke, motivated by his determination to make a difference between it and ‘consciousness’, led him to this unfortunate situation. That is, the situation that the soul, not consciousness, is universal. ‘Person’, for instance, is a universal term but there are individual persons. The same can be said of ‘consciousness’, ‘soul’, and ‘body’.<sup>137</sup>

An interesting criticism of Locke is provided by Sydney Shoemaker who nevertheless does not deny the role of memory in the identification of persons. He rejects the idea that memory should be used just as a first person criterion of personal identity. His reason for this is that:

[n]ormally, I can identify a past sensation only as one... that I remember having. And when this is so there cannot arise any question concerning the ownership of the sensation, and there is no room for the employment of criteria of ownership or personal identity.<sup>138</sup>

As a result of this, ‘in making statements about one’s own past the criteria of personal identity must be third person criteria,’<sup>139</sup> so that the criterion of checking memory claims is by the testimony of others regarding the accuracy of those memory claims.<sup>140</sup> This way, the criterion of personal identity would involve both memory and bodily identity.<sup>141</sup>

Shoemaker’s problems begin when he starts to discuss the reliability of memory claims. He claims ‘it is a conceptual truth that memory statements are generally true.’<sup>142</sup> By ‘conceptual truth’ he means ‘logical fact’. Thus, he suggests, when somebody makes a memory claim such as remembering a sensation, the claim is ‘a logical fact and generally true’.<sup>143</sup> All we need to do is to question whether he is using ‘remember’ correctly. And, that if we realize that previously he had used the term in ways that showed that he understood it, then ‘his apparent memory claims are really memory claims and can generally be relied upon’.<sup>144</sup> To begin with, I do not disagree with him on his point that memory claims are true. But my agreement is limited to the speaker, the first person alone. Memory claims are not mistaken to the speaker because that person reports or, better, claims knowledge of what he or she experienced. The person would regard the sensation or event reported of as true because, normally, that person is not expected to lie to him- or herself.<sup>145</sup> However, it is a different issue when it comes to memory claims that are aimed at making the listener believe the truth of the claims. There is a big gap here, a wide possibility of contamination that makes it inappropriate for Shoemaker to assert that the inference ‘[h]e claims to remember doing X, so he probably did X’ is not inductive, but a necessary truth.<sup>146</sup>

The conclusion ‘... he probably did X’ would be true, and perhaps always true, if it is understood as suggestive of, at least, some degree of uncertainty about the speaker’s actual performance of the act. In that case, ‘he probably did X’ only means ‘he either did X or did not’. Now, this disjunctive situation cannot be false because it exudes the law of excluded middle. But even here, the truth of the (reconstructed) conclusion is only by virtue of a logical relation, and not because it assures us that the act concerned was performed. To be sure that the action was performed, and to know whether Shoemaker’s inference is necessary, other methods would have to be employed.

Against this background, when we use Shoemaker’s criterion that the third person should only check if the first has a record of actually doing things he claimed to remember doing in the past, I anticipate some problems. For example, what if on some past occasions, a person claimed correctly to remember feeling some pain in the leg, but now that same person makes a similar claim just to deceive (others)? The person who wanted to stay out of work today and pretended in the morning to be in pain, can claim to remember in the evening the sensation that was ‘experienced’ in the morning. Would we not make fools of ourselves by endorsing his wrong current claim based on sincerity that relates to events numerically different from what now confronts us? Under no circumstance should we fail to judge each claim on its own merit or strength if we are interested always in truth. The demeanours of people can change. Those of even the most honest people can change when they are confronted with some serious problems for the first time, under duress, or are looking for some favours that would positively have a remarkable impact on their lives or those of their



loved ones. Simply put, memory claims can never be necessary to the listener, no matter how accurately or truthfully the speaker has ever been with the use of 'remember'.

Memory-based arguments, however, are not always relative to past events as that of Shoemaker. Bernard Williams looks into the future for personal identity. For him, what gives a person an identity is what makes the person speak of the same self, his or her same person, in matters relating to the future. Williams' memory theory builds on the same old puzzle of memory transfer. He tries to examine whether any two embodied persons, say A and B, could fear future pain or torture that originally belonged to the pre-transfer other. He thinks, after the transfer they will still speak as their former selves, and would thus realize that their fears have not vanished, not even allayed (though they have new bodies). So, 'the principle that one's fear can extend to future pain whatever psychological changes preceded it seems positively straightforward ... If we were the person A then, if we were to decide selfishly, we should pass the pain to the B-body-person *who now has the original body of A*'.<sup>147</sup>

*(b) Body as Consequent*

Codell Carter believes that there are cases where the question of personal identity cannot be fundamentally resolved by physical appearance. And, that this comes to the fore anytime we are compelled to look beyond the body, and ask people to still identify themselves. In this wise, a person's identity and its corroboration are to be

found in the answers he gives.<sup>148</sup> The most fundamental factor in the identification of persons, then, is what people say about themselves.

I doubt whether language is proven here to be fundamental to the body. I admit he does not discount the bodily criterion neither does he reject the memory criterion. His only point is that there are several criteria of personal identity and the choice of any of them should be informed by which criterion is adequate for the situation. The linguistic criterion, he argues, is adequate for some situations that the bodily criterion falls short. Hence, he advances, ‘the bodily criterion, though it may be more basic than is the memory criterion, is no more basic than is the linguistic one.’<sup>149</sup>

It seems unclear to me how a person said to be known physically in the past and is somehow before us today (with a changed appearance) would have his identity established by merely saying who he is. Our knowledge of who he is would depend on confirmation, not necessarily on (his) claims. But in confirming, the benchmark is the past, not the present. And, since in the past the person was known embodied, it is still possible for a body theorist to argue for the primacy of the body. Indeed, our acceptance of the identity claim of the person we just met might still be dependent on such physical features as body marks and fingerprints, and even DNA testing that match the features for the old person.

d) *Mind is neither Body-dependent nor a Disembodied Entity*

Unlike Gyekye’s regard of the mind as a disembodied entity and in Cartesianism where the mind is regarded as a substance whose ‘whole essence is thought,’<sup>150</sup> some

have rejected the 'entitative' concept and argued for the possibility of 'thought' (and thus 'thinking') not to be the function of any part of a human being. In Cartesianism, that which is real is anything that the mind 'perceives clearly'. The mind is believed to perceive (in this way) its own self, for instance. Objects of such perception are those seen as internal to the mind. But since such a mind is purported to indicate to a person that which exists, Moritz Schlick thinks that this solipsist approach to knowledge tends to reduce the world to the person or his perceptions. This is because, he thinks, it forces me to 'add the phrase "owned by Me" to the names of objects.' But, he observes, not everything can be accounted for this way. For instance, *patterns of thought* (not his words), in the form of the laws of nature, are real,<sup>151</sup> although they are also independent of any human mind. In other words, although the operation of the laws entails experience, they are not the experience of anybody. That is, the ordering of those data, the manifestation of those laws or thoughts, is a nonpersonal experience. He writes:

verification without a "mind" is logically possible on account of the "neutral," impersonal character of experience ... Primitive experience, mere existence of ordered data, does not presuppose a "subject," or "ego," or "Me," or "mind".<sup>152</sup>

What is interesting about this is not the obvious rejection of metaphysics which he, like all other logical positivists, is associated with. It is not just his argument that the metaphysician's sense of mind (as ego or consciousness) could not be offered as that which is behind any orderly pattern of movement or 'reasoned' behaviour in the universe. But, more importantly, his position that the ordering of data (thought) will continue to take place even when there are no human beings to observe them.

Daisaku Ikeda also separates brain activity from consciousness (mind) with an analogy provided in the early twentieth century by Henri Bergson.<sup>153</sup> In the analogy, the relation between ‘the brain and consciousness’ is likened to the one between ‘a peg and the clothes hung on it’. The brain does not produce or originate consciousness, just as a peg is not the provenance of clothes. He does not deny that in a living human being, there is a connection between the brain and consciousness. However, he adds, ‘no analysis of the brain cells alone, no matter how thorough, will reveal the substance of the consciousness ... [So, consciousness or] the workings of the mind ... go far beyond the limitations of the physical brain.’<sup>154</sup>

According to Peter Geach, something can only be said to be identifiable with thought when that thing has some permanent connection with thought. The brain lacks this connection because no brain thinks forever. And, since some other things – specifically, language – contain thought all the time, the actual (temporary) engaging in thinking by a particular person would only identify less the person’s brain with thought. Although he admits that a person thinks, the functioning of his or her brain (or any part of the body, for that matter) is not always necessary for evidence of thought to be found. As he puts it: ‘thinking is a vital activity of a man, not of any part of him, material or immaterial’.<sup>155</sup> He would rather identify thought with language itself, since ‘its relation to language is one of formal, not efficient, causality’.<sup>156</sup> In other words, unlike ‘the physiological processes in a human body’ with which thought is only ‘contingently connected,’ there is something in language that meets the criterion of permanent connection. By the idea of ‘the non-contingent connexion of thought with language’, he has in mind ‘the intrinsic intelligibility of

language.’ Thus, he concludes, ‘[t]he origination of the logical structure embodied in language is not just evidence of thinking; it *is* thinking’.<sup>157</sup>

Some Akan philosophers have expressed similar views on the nature of ‘thought’ in Akan philosophy. Indeed, Kwasi Wiredu’s ideas come close to those of Geach’s. For he explicates that to the Akan thinker, ‘what does the thinking’ is not any immaterial mind, but it is ‘the person, ‘onipa’’.<sup>158</sup> He, in some respects, differs from Geach though. For instance, he argues of the Akans that ‘the instrument or mechanism of thought’ is believed to be the brain.<sup>159</sup> But Geach would be reluctant to centre thought processes on the brain. Wiredu nevertheless maintains, in a Geach-like manner, that ‘thought, not being an entity, is neither material nor immaterial, physical nor nonphysical’.<sup>160</sup>

What runs through the views expressed by Schlick, Ikeda and Geach concerning the mind is that it is conceptually separable from the brain or body. Secondly, that the body is not a requirement for the mind to exist or manifest. An important reminder here is that an Akan thinker (as I discussed previously, and contrary to Wiredu) would regard the mind as an entity. In spite of this, the arguments of these three philosophers add some flavour to the argument I made earlier [in section 1.1.2. (a) above] for the possibility of thought even in the absence of the brain.

### 1.1.3. *Synthesis: Materialism, Physicalism, and Quasi-physicalism*

Quite a number of arguments under 1.1.2. above reduce the mind to the physical or material. Over there, the mind is seen generally as bodily and perceptible. But it is instructive to note that materialism may not mean the same as physicalism. Even though under 1.1.2.c.i. Armstrong, for instance, does not make any careful distinction between materialism and physicalism, he calls elsewhere<sup>161</sup> for such a distinction. It is consistent with the doctrine of physicalism to affirm as an existent anything which is 'a physical object' or, at least, describable 'in a language of physics.'<sup>162</sup> This implies that in certain cases, an intangible object would pass for the physical provided what is said about it is compatible with the laws of physics. Materialism, on the other hand, 'misleadingly seems to conjure up a Newtonian account of matter'.<sup>163</sup> That account admits of only the tangible, as inherent in his (Newton's) theory of gravitational fields where matter attracts matter.

In connection with persons, there are some 'perceptions' that Mbiti and Gyekye would not consider as physical.<sup>164</sup> For instance, even though Mbiti reports people 'seeing' and 'hearing' certain figures (such as *mizimu* – the living-dead, among the Baganda), he still refers to them as 'spirits,' as spiritual beings. Similarly, Gyekye argues that even though such spiritual beings 'can make themselves felt in the physical world' and, 'by the sheer operation of [their] power[s], assume spatial properties,' they are neither physical nor quasi-physical. Quasi-physicalism, by the way, considers as existents objects 'belonging to a category between the realm of the obviously physical, i.e. those objects that obey the known laws of physics, and the realm of the so-called spiritual or completely immaterial objects ...'<sup>165</sup>

Unlike Mbiti and Gyekye, Wiredu would not want to describe the beings referred to in the preceding paragraph as 'spiritual'. He prefers his coined term 'quasi-physical'.<sup>166</sup> He also maintains that there are several other qualities often attributed to some parts of a person that stand those parts out as quasi-physical. He cites the instance of the common Akan belief that when someone eats a kind of food which his *'kra* is allergic to, he or she falls sick so that 'the *okra* may need to be pacified with offerings of appropriate food and drinks'.<sup>167</sup> He suggests that the *ōkra* is portrayed to have some amount of physical desire, the ability to choose and enjoy food, and the ability to receive. But if we grant his evidence, we can, with some reflection, still reject his conclusion. Since a person's *'kra* is believed to be linked or subsumed with his body, and the person lives in a world which is both physical and spiritual, he or she is possibly not prevented in the physical realm from reaching to the nonphysical side. The problem probably is 'how' this reaching is done.

Indeed, it would be difficult not to start with or, at least, include the most obvious (i.e. the physical realm) in one's exploration and explanation of the spiritual realm, if one is to convince anybody of the existence of a spiritual entity or event. In any such case where the metaphysical is postulated, the rationality or acceptability of the postulation would most likely be based on the possibility of a mutual, cross-realm affectation or causation. That is, the strength of the evidence for a causal relation between the physical and the purported metaphysical realms would be crucial for our possible understanding of the metaphysical. But this role played by the physical does not in any way call for the description of a metaphysical entity itself as para-physical. If we grant, for the sake of argumentation, that an illness originates from the *ōkra* or that the *ōkra* is badly affected by the eating of food, it appears to me that only a cross-realm causation is implied, not necessarily the quasi-physicality of the *ōkra*. [I continue shortly on the alleged

quasi-physicality of *ōkra*.] Again, assuming that a spiritual being could be made perceptible with some invocation done with the aid of material objects, or that certain physical effects can be predicted with some degree of certainty whenever some items are offered to ‘spirits’, then, those objects would rather become just channels of interaction.

The lack of understanding regarding the last point has led to the situation where the wrong sorts of questions are sometimes asked in the analysis of traditional African beliefs. It is a bit easy, for instance, to ask and stop at the question whether some material object has been used or whether some reference has been made to anything physical in someone’s explanation of a spiritual event or experience. Such a question is often asked with the one-sided hope that an affirmative response to the question would make unlikely the existence of the supernatural. It is then assumed to be awkward why everything cannot be regarded as physical or potentially physical, since even the alleged ‘metaphysical’ realm cannot be explored without any aid at all from the physical world. This attitude tends not only to reduce in advance our willingness to consider the metaphysical, but also it deprives us of the opportunity to develop any interest in investigating the reality or otherwise of ‘the spiritual’ itself. The right questions to ask, then, would be whether there is anything beyond the phenomenal world, and whether and how such realities may connect with the physical [especially, to produce some effect(s)]. This way, we show our readiness to accept the spiritual if it can be or is found. With any alleged cross-realm-generated effect, for example, it would have to be examined whether one specific situation obtains: i.e. whether the effect is radically different from what the physical objects used in the process can produce on their own – both individually and collectively. If it is, then the bringing into being of the effect would understandably be traced to the (other) nonphysical component. Indeed, this is a rational approach. It is an application of J.S. Mill’s *method of difference* and, more specifically, *method*



*of residues*. Such an attribution to the nonphysical might not mean that the physical objects were not part of the set of things that were considered to be the cause of the effect, except that they were not the probable cause. This is why Safro Kwame's recommendation below is quite misplaced: that

To test the existence or non-existence of completely non-physical entities and methods, the traditional African healers would have to be barred from employing any physical entities or methods in their therapies and procedures. They never are.<sup>168</sup>

In the first place, we have seen how of little value it is to ignore the claim of a cross-realm effect or interaction, only to confirm the obvious fact that (i) the metaphysical and material are completely different in constitution, and (ii) some amount of the physical is involved – at some stages – in the art of reaching to the spiritual realm. Secondly, it is a portrayal of lack of understanding of the worldview of medicine men to suggest that they do not understand that the concept of 'the spiritual,' by definition, completely excludes anything physical. For if an object is believed by them to be capable of being inhabited by an invoked spirit, for example, the object is not misunderstood to be the spirit itself at all. Nor is the spirit believed to have become material. Thirdly, the medicine men believe, instead, that the spiritual and the physical do interact, or that events in one realm can affect the other. This is evidenced in their use of objects in many of their healing techniques. It is thus possible, they would agree with John Perry, for the material world to form the 'evidential base' for *something* that is 'well beyond the material world'.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, finally, the belief that a person has a spiritual component and that this component can affect the body (and vice versa) renders untrue S. Kwame's view that the mind-body problem does not arise at all in the Akan concept of the person.<sup>170</sup>

The seeming near-physicality of the *ōkra* merely on the basis of the offering of sacrifice of food and other items, and even the pouring of libation to the living-dead (an act which Wiredu regards as utterly irrational),<sup>171</sup> would be difficult to deny only if we go by the ordinary explanation that these offerings are meant for the consumption of the spirits. It would be irrational indeed for a traditional Akan thinker to believe that a drink just poured on the ground, food placed at a section of the house or an object left on a crossroad have actually been eaten or taken by the spirits. For, the items ‘offered’ do not necessarily vanish at all. The drink sinks into the ground and dries out; the food stays in the bowl until it is taken away or replaced by humans; and, the item left on the crossroads remains there and gets rotten, eaten by insects, or just displaced through some unintended human or natural action. The significance of such sacrifices could only be to show human attempt to commune with ‘the spirits’. Such that, they (the spiritual entities) would be willing to return some favours as they witness the premium human beings place on the relationship with them. The premium being, among others, the latter’s parting with those items in memory of the former. In the case of the pacification of the *ōkra*, I still do not think there is any basis to suggest that it engages in any physical or quasi-physical act of eating any portion of the food and drinks that are allegedly offered to it. The alleged pacification sometimes involves nothing but the eating of a particular food by the individual to correct some imbalance in his system. Usually the imbalance is believed to be between his *'kra* and *honam*, caused originally by the ingestant that was bound to disturb the body and the harmony between it and the *ōkra*.

Wiredu makes reference to Debrunner’s statement that the *ōkra* is a person’s double, ‘conceived in his material image complete with a head, hands, legs and all’.<sup>172</sup> But I think Debrunner’s claim is a bit inaccurate. He seems to have been misled by the personal or rationalistic terms in which the *ōkra* is described to conclude that it has the same parts as the physical person. But this notion

is completely absent in Akan language. It makes no sense to use phrases like ‘my *ōkra*’s leg’, ‘my *ōkra*’s head’; or even say that ‘her *ōkra*’s chin is like this’ or that ‘his *ōkra*’s hand has done that’. Simply put, the *ōkra* has no such parts as claimed by Debrunner. It only makes sense to conceive of the *ōkra* as a person’s double when it is interpreted as a spiritual aspect of an individual who has a particular physical shape. This is far from saying that the *ōkra* has that same shape. In cases where, as Wiredu suggests, the *ōkra* is ‘seen’ by medicine men, there is still the question of whether the *ōkra* is ‘seen’ in human form. While Wiredu seems to hold that this is the case, it is not quite clear whether the shape is the actual shape of the *ōkra* itself. Given the absence of expressions in the Akan idiom compartmentalizing the *ōkra*, I do not think that Akan thinkers would actually consider any such shape, assuming the *ōkra* is indeed seen, to be its own shape. It is conceivable that it takes on the shape of the person it was known to inhabit just for the purposes of easy identification of its bearer.

Wiredu, in denying the spirituality of the *ōkra*, also remarks that ‘any theory of souls or spirits can only be an empirical theory’ because ‘if a determinate and coherent definition can be given, the question whether such things actually exist can only be answered by empirical research’.<sup>173</sup> I have already conceded some role for the empirical in the study of metaphysics, but only because such a role is a matter of procedural aid. The concession is also to show how inadequate the empirical is in explaining certain phenomena. This is not to suggest, as Wiredu does now, that only purely empirical research can confirm the reality of things, spirits included. Continuing, he states that ‘to say everything is spirit, even if only “ultimately,” is to advance a wild empirical claim which any slight empirical reflection must discourage’.<sup>174</sup> I question why spirits cannot be conceived to exist as essentially nonphysical beings, or why a theory of spirits is thus ‘an empirical theory.’ He seems to put the method of investigation ahead of the object to be

investigated, because he chooses a method of investigation and intends to make the object of investigation take on the core feature of the method. But the method of investigation cannot determine for us the nature of what it is that we want to investigate. This is because any object of human enquiry is expected to be one of two things: that, it either admits of one's chosen method of investigation or it does not. Indeed, the existence of a thing is not only independent of its being an object of investigation, but also of any chosen method of investigation. In the case of the essential nature of *ōkra*, I am convinced that it does not admit of Wiredu's criterion. [The essential nature of spirit beings, in general, is discussed shortly.] Empirical means is not the sole or permanently exhaustive medium for humans to acquire knowledge because there are other credible ways of knowing. These include logical deductions (from self-evident propositions) and paranormal cognition. To proclaim *panpsychism* is to induce everybody, the empirically- and metaphysically-inclined, to some sort of investigation. It is to make an open claim that is to be investigated by any philosophically acceptable method, except that different success rates are to be expected whenever largely different methods are employed. To say, therefore, that everything is (or contains) spirit or is ultimately spirit is not necessarily to advance any empirical claim, let alone a wild one.

There are obvious difficulties with the notion of quasi-physicalism itself. I must admit, however, that the difficulties are mainly as a result of the complex nature of the notion of personal identity in general, and the challenge this presents to anyone attempting to give a comprehensive account of the identity of persons. This is shown clearly when (i) quasi-physicalists are compelled to recognize that certain existents (such as *ōkra*) do not yield fully to physical laws, which they regard as the sole arbiter of truth, and (ii) dualists also admit that the spiritual can be physically perceived. Why then, one would ask, does the quasi-physicalist not prefer to be

a quasi-metaphysian, and the metaphysian to be called a physicalist of some sort? There are no indications that the two groups of philosophers actually characterize themselves in the manner just suggested. I will now go ahead to make a few remarks bearing this in mind.

According to Wiredu, the *ōkra* is believed to be capable of rendering itself visible (to some medicine men) although it is not material or tangible.<sup>175</sup> Assuming this is true, the resort to it by Sefo Kwame and Kwasi Wiredu to claim that it is quasi-physical makes their interpretation appear to ignore the essential quality of spirits. It is not clear why, for instance, from the occasional visibility of ‘spirits’ quasi-physicalists describe them only in terms of features exhibited on those occasions. Again, with the traditional Akan belief in the potential visibility of spirits – and possibly on multiple occasions – it is only fair to ask what the identity of those spirits are when they have not allegedly revealed or are not revealing themselves to human beings? Are they nonexistent? If they are, how possible is it for nonentities to know when and who to appear (or even reappear) to? How can medicine men, for instance, receive inspiration from and be able to invoke nonentities in their practices? The very ideas of the occasional exposure and visibility of particular ‘spirits’ (as held by quasi-physicalists), the invoking or reinvoking of specific spirits in various cultural contexts, and the very concept of the living-dead suggest that spirits are always existent. They are believed to exist whether or not they are being felt by humans. I do not dispute that at the very moment when a spirit is believed to have revealed itself, it is most probably quasi-physical. After all, it can, at least, be ‘seen’ (whatever the means is). But sight alone does not define the physical; so, the *ōkra* cannot be regarded as quasi-physical based on fleeting visibility alone. Whereas we can refer to a hologram as quasi-physical, we cannot do same for *ōkra* because its category of existence does not by nature admit of physical attributes. For it is nonphysically-natured and remains so at most of its normal times.

And, given the belief that spirits do not die, one more thing can be said. That, there might not be strong reasons to deny that what comes to be quasi-physical occasionally would *ceteris paribus* relapse to its original state, anytime the quasi-physical manifestation ends. It appears more acceptable to me that spirits, including the *ōkra*, are essentially metaphysical in nature, even though they have some capacity for quasi-physical manifestation. The difference between the essential nature of spirits and their capacity to be quasi-physical can be likened to water and ice. Water is essentially liquid but it also has the capacity to turn to ice under certain conditions. It will be most inappropriate to claim that water is solid or half-solid just because the ice which it occasionally turns to is solid.<sup>176</sup>

The quasi-physicalist is a physicalist in disguise. His claim to allow for things that are not entirely subject to the laws of physics is misleading. This claim initially seems as if it recognizes metaphysical realities which Akans actually see *ōkra* to fall within.<sup>177</sup> But, in reality, what the quasi-physicalist means by something not being ‘entirely subject to the laws of science’ is that it is something ‘which current laws of physics do not explain, but might be proved by physics in future’. For instance, S. Kwame, who can be called a ‘modern’ quasi-physicalist, declares that:

the modern or contemporary quasi-physicalist does not deny that as our discovery of physical laws proceeds and our scientific knowledge increases, we may come to accept some or all the quasi-physical objects as bona fide physical objects. The quasi-physicalism of today may then turn out to be the materialism or physicalism of tomorrow.<sup>178</sup>

There is every indication in the preceding quotation that the purported quasi-physical entities would not have been affirmed as real if they were not capable of becoming (known as) physical objects in future. So, given that all physicalists, quasi or not, already affirm the reality of physical objects, the quasi-physicalist becomes both today’s physicalist and tomorrow’s physicalist today. That is, he is a physicalist today who has the foresight of knowing what might

become physical tomorrow. He therefore becomes somebody like a prophet who hopes that his predictions come true in future. But, like any act of prophesy, failure is an important possibility.

Even the statement that ‘the *ōkra* is a quasi-physical object’ is one which the quasi-physicalist would regard as confirmable on physical or empirical grounds. Otherwise, I wonder how else he can claim to know such an object, since the claim is not *a priori* and, also, ‘metaphysics’ is a taboo word for him. This confirms he is a physicalist today, not only tomorrow. It can therefore be said that the empirical criterion of knowledge, whether with regard to entities perceived today or ultimately in future (or to objects scientifically explicable today or in future) is quite useful to the quasi-physicalist. But this may not be construed to mean that the quasi-physicalist would want to be seen as an empiricist. For being someone who brings to bear the empirical character of (especially) the Akan belief system, Wiredu, for instance, would prefer to be called ‘an empiricalist’, not ‘an empiricist’.<sup>179</sup>

The quasi-physicalists’ interpretation of ‘what defies the laws of science’ cannot also be seen as consistent with the Akan conception on the *ōkra* because it (*ōkra*) is regarded as incapable of scientific proof. In future, therefore, the *ōkra* (which the quasi-physicalist admits is incapable of proof for only today) will not cease to be metaphysical. I doubt very much if it will ever be subject to the physical laws which the quasi-physicalist suggests. It is with the same skepticism that I view Teffo Lebisa and Abraham Roux’s rejection of metaphysical thinking in the ‘African accounts of the person’. In their understanding, such thinking ‘has to do with a lack of scientific knowledge’.<sup>180</sup> The tension between metaphysics and science, seen essentially as between the belief in the reality of spiritual entities and the requirement of scientific proof, is of such a nature that we cannot expect one to collapse into the other. It is, however, possible to have a little bit of

both, as found in such experience as the manifestation of the *ōkra*. It would thus be beneficial to recognize that the existence of spirits (such as the soul or God) as held in Akan and other religions does not take away anything from the distinct role and importance of science itself. In fact, ‘both religion and science are concerned about our understanding and interpretation of reality, even though their interpretations generally differ’.<sup>181</sup> Reality should not just be explored from only the scientific or metaphysical angle, but ought to be understood as ‘a complex phenomenon that can be grasped from different approaches’.<sup>182</sup> These approaches include the physical, metaphysical or a combination of both.

### **1.2.0. *The Normative Question***

The normative criterion of identity is based on the idea that persons ought to act in ways consistent with their moral nature. And a person would be deemed to have exhibited his or her moral nature or character when he or she acts morally. In Akan thought, it is believed that a person is created<sup>183</sup> by God ‘(to be) good’.<sup>184</sup> As a result, ‘[t]he Akan, fully satisfied with, and profoundly appreciative of, the high standards of the morality of a person’s conduct, would say of such a person: “he/she is a real human person” (*ōye nipa*)’.<sup>185</sup> The fact that moral conduct is so important to Akans as to be a determinant of personhood is also informed by the belief that ultimately moral actions are conducive to the perpetuation of human communities. That which is good, Gyekye notes, ‘is thus identical to the welfare of the society’.<sup>186</sup> Some African scholars have also attached much importance to moral action and personhood for similar reasons. By moral action, such scholars would mean ‘that which promotes social good’. They have thus gone ahead to define a person in collective social terms. This is evident in Mbiti,<sup>187</sup> Senghor,<sup>188</sup> Menkiti,<sup>189</sup> Kenyata,<sup>190</sup> and Lebisa and Roux.<sup>191</sup> With his theory of ‘moderate



communitarianism,' however, Gyekye draws attention to the reality and importance of both individualistic and communal values in African cultures.<sup>192</sup>

An important rider: the moral identity of persons is argued for in diverse ways. Even the belief that a person is fundamentally rational is reducible to moral identity. For, by being rational one would be expected to act on the basis of knowledge of right and wrong. Similar in approach is Didier Kaphagawani's concept of personhood which is framed in epistemological way. [I disagree with him on some aspects though.] In explaining his belief that traditional (or collective) knowledge – of which the elders are an embodiment – is prior to or takes precedence over that of the individual, he sought first to tell the benefit of his epistemological doctrine. He states that 'it underscores the processual nature of personhood'. By this, he means 'the constant and gradual remaking of persons through, inter alia, the acquisition and mastery of both cultural and esoteric knowledge'.<sup>193</sup> This implies that as one grows and, expectedly, acquires more knowledge one becomes more of an epistemological person. That person, in other words, continues to gain knowledge of culturally acceptable behaviour (including moral behaviour), methods and practices, as he grows. But the issue with this view is that it tends to make personhood a unidirectional concept. This is because such a person is not expected to ever lose his personhood in his progressively epistemological 'life'. This is not always the case because there is the possibility of one actually losing track of issues or even stagnating in terms of knowledge. This would imply that one can grow without actually increasing in knowledge and, thus, personhood.

As sated earlier in section 1.0.0., the question of personal identity is traditionally about what permanently individuates a person. Thus, it is conceptually separable from the normative identity

which may or may not be achieved at all by an individual. Both conceptions of identity, however, have a way of leading a person to the prospect of survival of death. In Akan thought, the normative identity plays a significant role in the emergence of the ontological being after death. If a person consistently behaves morally and is known to be 'nipa pa (a good person) he is regarded as someone whose commitment to the welfare of his fellow humans and community is immense. He is thus seen as a reliable individual whose invaluable contribution to the community must be sought all the time. A socially responsible person who dies naturally automatically becomes a revered living-dead. This way, the community continues to benefit from his benevolence, guidance and power gained as a result of his (i) having been a member of the human community before, and (ii) current, elevated, and more potent position as spirit. On the contrary, the soul of a socially irresponsible person is believed to wander on earth after death. It is precluded from becoming a revered member of the living-dead. This means, at least, that not all persons held in Akan thought to survive death do so because they are good.

The concept of a person is, from now on, discussed mainly in the ontological sense, this sense being the proper domain of personal identity.

### **1.3.0. Persistence (Survival)**

The aim of this short section is to explain how the notion of survival, often postulated by dualists, leads to the question of reincarnation.

Though there are divergent views on the constitution of a person, as discussed above (from section 1.1.0. to 1.1.3.), there seems to be an implicit admission among most of the philosophers

therein mentioned that a person who is regarded through time as ‘the same person’ must have some stable property to warrant that identification. However, since bodily features are seen as transient – and we still have to posit a stable property anyway – dualists have ‘reached the conclusion that unless we postulate something like a “soul”, we cannot understand the identity that remains constant throughout our life’.<sup>194</sup> But the postulation of the soul in various philosophies has often led to the position that persons (or their souls) are eternal. This, as we saw in section 1.1.1., does not exclude African philosophy. Immortality, according to Mbiti,<sup>195</sup> is no more than the persistence of memory fused on a specific subject or object. Thus, someone would know a specific person to have survived death as long as he remembers *that specific* living-dead. Albert Mosley shares this view as well.<sup>196</sup> According to Daniel Masolo, even the alleged shadowy appearance of a dead person to the living amounts to just a memory of the departed by the living.<sup>197</sup>

Claims about the reality of human immortality have, however, been made for different reasons. I identify three for the purposes of this chapter. The first relates to what some philosophers and scholars see as an attempt, albeit unnecessarily, to veil off from humans the unavoidability of death. In the words of Keleman, ‘[o]ur trying to disconnect from our bodies is’ because of ‘our attempt to overcome the pain of our finiteness and the helplessness of our dying.’ ‘We have done this,’ he adds, ‘by “spiritualizing” ourselves, by invoking other dimensions of existence and investing them more value than this existence’.<sup>198</sup> The difficulties with which some humans face death, a phenomenon held among the Fon people of Benin as one of the ‘hard’ realities of human existence,<sup>199</sup> is also shown when people ‘set’ and ‘live up to images of what to be’ in a future life.<sup>200</sup> The future, the next life, would then appear to them as valuable. Accordingly, a

meaningful life in the present world would be one that aims at (or at least, include) the next life, a life the ‘gravitation’ toward which is not supposedly hindered by death.

In any conception of a next life, the survival of the same person is also presumed, unlike – to digress for a moment – in the non-ontological sense of identity where personhood is conceived of as a ‘dynamic, gradual and persistent process in which personality is continually reinvented.’ In this latter sense, ‘death marks the end of the creative process, thus signaling the end of the quality of personality ...’<sup>201</sup> It appears from the foregoing that while survival of a person is understood in ontological sense, his or her personality (or, here, creative qualities) do not survive death. But I find a slightly different position in Akan thought. Here, the living-dead who were known to be skillful in certain earthly arts are believed to be capable of inspiring individuals of successive generations to take after them. The spirit of an erstwhile drummer, for example, can reveal drum beats to a chosen individual in dreams. The creative quality of such a spirit cannot be said, then, not to have survived his ‘death’.

Persistence has, secondly, been argued for on the basis of the sheer goodness of life. The attempts by humans to protect and enhance their lives may be due to this factor. In this sense, some would say, those human endeavours serve as confirmation of the perception that it is just good to live. Viewed solely in this manner, it might not be suggested that the clamour for life exposes human fear of death. It is not that ‘what we really mind is the process of *dying*’.<sup>202</sup> Rather, Nagel explains, ‘[i]t is *being* alive, *doing* certain things, having certain experiences, that we consider as good.’ Consequently, he argues, ‘if death is an evil, it is the loss of *life*, rather than the state of being dead ... that is objectionable’.<sup>203</sup> True, there is nothing in the preceding quotation that implies a claim of survival; but Nagel would inadvertently play into the hands of

possible fear-of-death arguers with his subsequent remark that ‘[i]f there is no limit to the amount of life that it will be good to have, then it may be that a bad end is in store for all of us’.<sup>204</sup> I raise this issue against him because his comment would undoubtedly make it easy for anyone who believes that death must necessarily be feared to advance a notion of afterlife, a survival that obliterates the phenomenon of bodily death. His notion of ‘a bad end’ would be an inspirational factor for such arguers.<sup>205</sup>

Finally, it is sometimes suggested that the nature of a person (or the core element of a person) provides a logical basis for the postulation of human survival. In Akan ontology, the human soul, regarded as the core element of a person, is believed to be a speck of its creator (God). The soul is, by extension, regarded as divine since God is divine. Aside the divine nature, some other important features are believed to be assimilated by the soul from the latter. It becomes, for example, immortal as God is. This is illustrated by the maxim ‘could God die, I will (also) die’, meaning ‘since God does not die, a person, that is, his or her soul ... will not die either’.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, the notion of immortality as found in ‘the classical concept of mind,’ just like the christian concept of soul, cannot also be separated from ‘the image of man as a noble *being*. So long as mind [can] be regarded as a spiritual entity – something not made of blood and tissue – [the human being] appeared free to relate himself to divinity’.<sup>207</sup> This is why perhaps Boethius<sup>208</sup> identified ‘free’ human souls as those ‘engaged in contemplation of the divine mind,’ and that ‘less free souls are rather bound by earthly fetters.’ In most African cultures, persistence of a person is a core belief even though some – like the Luo, at least, according to Masolo – do not have a term for the very aspect that survives death.<sup>209</sup> The importance attached to the concept of survival is also evident in Yoruba thought. In Gbadegesin’s<sup>210</sup> interpretation of the concept of destiny and reincarnation, he indicates that ‘[t]he Yoruba seeks three goods ... the good of

wealth, the good of children, and the good of immortality.’ Among these, ‘the latter is, for them, the most important, because it is the crown of existence (*iwa*).’

One advantage that there is in having the foregoing discussion is: it makes it possible for us to think of the possibility of reincarnation, granted the truth of persistence. The reason for this is that any prospect which a person has for reincarnating would be grounded on the truth or acceptability of the notion of survival. After all, only a persisted person can reincarnate. Whether or not survival is possible and reincarnation is philosophically defensible are beyond the scope of this chapter. But before considering these questions, it is pertinent that the concept of reincarnation be also understood. So, I turn attention now to the meaning of reincarnation.

## PART THREE

### REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

This part of the work is dedicated to the exploration of whether or not there is belief in the doctrine of rebirth in African philosophy. It also deals with the rationality or otherwise of belief in the doctrine. It is expected that from the meaning to be given in chapter seven of the term ‘rebirth’ or ‘reincarnation’, a definite position will be taken in response to the views expressed by some African researchers who deny the doctrine’s existence in African thought. As the thesis of this dissertation, I propose to defend the position that there is belief in reincarnation in African philosophy. The position will, in turn, be the basis on which the rationality of rebirth will be determined.

### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### THE DOCTRINE OF REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN THOUGHT

##### *REINCARNATION: INTRODUCTION*

In the ordinary conception of the doctrine of reincarnation, a bodily person ‘A’ is simply identified as another bodily person ‘B’ who is known to have died. Accordingly, person ‘A’ would be mentioned as the reincarnation of person ‘B’. With a cursory look at this conception, it appears less problematic. This would be so if one only believes that the body is the usual means

by which persons are identified, and that persons B and A meet that identity condition because they are both described in bodily terms. In other words, person 'B' was not known – just as person 'A' is not identified – metempirically (and thus unusually). But what does reincarnation really mean, especially to the philosopher? And, how problematic is the philosophical explanation? Reincarnation, Geach interprets, 'consists in one and the same human mind's successively animating two different human bodies'.<sup>1</sup> With this introduction of the philosophically debatable term 'mind' into the definition, Geach's subsequent rejection of reincarnation is played down by Codell Carter<sup>2</sup> as being the result of the former's self-invitation of complexity into an otherwise simple doctrine. 'In actual cases suggestive of reincarnation,' Carter adds, 'there is a marked absence of such terms as "mind," "soul," and "spirit"...' However, as I made evident in part one of this dissertation and shall stress in chapter eight, not all claims of reincarnation fail to imply the involvement of the mind or soul.

Reincarnation has been defined by N.Y. Thomas as 'the passage of the soul from one body to another, usually of the same species...'<sup>3</sup> His definition, however, seems to be true of only some but not all forms of reincarnation, for Buddhists do not believe in the existence of the soul although they teach reincarnation. It is on this basis that I prefer the view<sup>4</sup> that reincarnation is the belief that a person who once lived on earth can be born again. But while this definition is comprehensive and precise enough, it does still suggest 'an element of a dead person "migrating" into a completely new body'.<sup>5</sup> The element involved here is understood differently depending on one's orientation. For instance, while Buddhists have in mind some residual form of energy of a dead person, dualists postulate a soul. In either case, however, the survival of *a specific person* is implied.



Although reincarnation is sometimes called transmigration of souls, metempsychosis, rebirth,<sup>6</sup> and is also related to such terms as transformation and return, it may not be right to presume that they carry the same meaning. Mark Albrecht makes the following comments:

- i. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* speaks of the soul being able to change itself into various life forms after death. But this change is understood as a sort of spiritual evolution in the heavenly realms, not a bodily return to this earth.
- ii. James Breasted ... summed up the opinion of most Egyptologists when he wrote, 'It was this notion which led Herodotus to conclude that the Egyptians believed in what we now call transmigration of souls, but this was a mistaken impression on his part.'
- iii. [Therefore] the ancient Egyptians certainly believed in an afterlife in another realm or world, but references to reincarnation in the traditional understanding are simply absent.<sup>7</sup>

If the factuality of Albrecht's conclusion is granted, there would be two main issues: first, that his conclusion that the Egyptians had no knowledge of reincarnation is dependent on such understanding of reincarnation as I accepted above. Secondly, that he equates and thus interchanges reincarnation with transmigration. But transmigration could mean just a *transfer*, any transfer, of the soul (upon the demise of a person). This seems to be what the fourth definition below of what it means to 'transmigrate' implies:

1. to move or pass from one place to another.
2. to migrate from one country to another in order to settle there.
3. (of the soul) to be reborn after death in another body.
4. to cause to transmigrate, as a soul; transfer.<sup>8</sup>

The opening left by the fourth definition serves as some form of justification for a description of the transfer of the soul into other life forms (either terrestrial or celestial) as transmigration. What can here be asserted about the soul is that it has transmogrified or metamorphosed, but that would not at all constitute reincarnation.

The equation of reincarnation with metempsychosis is particularly troubling because unlike ‘reincarnation’ which would imply that one soul inhabits one human body, ‘metempsychosis,’ according to Burnet,<sup>9</sup> ‘would mean that different souls entered into the same body.’ And this obviously is inconsistent with our accepted definition above. By that definition, a reincarnated person is believed to be inhabited by one specific ‘element’. As a result, Burnet adds, ‘*metempsychosis* is not used by good writers’ when discussing rebirth (reincarnation), ‘and it is inaccurate.’ Rebirth, thus, seems to me a good synonym of the traditional notion of reincarnation, for it suggests rightly the idea of *return* of a person (often the soul) into this world by means of a new human body.

The next section discusses in detail the concept of reincarnation in African thought.

#### 1.0. *THE DOCTRINE OF REINCARNATION IN AFRICAN THOUGHT*

In this section, I examine the concept of reincarnation from an African point of view. I seek to show that the concept is, contrary to claims by some African philosophers and scholars, existent in traditional African thought. In doing so, I mainly concentrate on – but do not limit myself to – ideas borne out by the traditional philosophy of the Akan people.<sup>10</sup> Since my position is developed within the context of traditional African philosophical research, it is important that I set off with the resolution of some problems respecting this form of research. For, without doing so, my argument cannot be well appreciated.

### 1.1. *The 'Sage' Question in Traditional African Philosophical Research*

In the preparation of this chapter, I have used some terms that need to be clarified first. One of these is 'sage(s)'; and my initial understanding of it is that:

In the intellectual history of Africa, there have been individual persons who, although are not known by names, could be said to be the originators of the philosophical thoughts in the traditions of Africa. By traditional African philosophers or sages, I mean these elders (originators) who also did not have formal learning in philosophy as a discipline but thought critically with concepts in what can now be regarded as the traditions of Africa. Contemporary elders who have not also had formal training in philosophy and are not also exposed to Western and other non-African philosophies, but are engaged in the critical analyses of conceptual problems respecting the cultural or traditional beliefs of Africa could also be referred to as traditional African sages.<sup>11</sup>

I mention traditional sages not because modern (professional) philosophers are irrelevant to my work. In fact, both groups of philosophers are. When I refer to traditional wisdom, I do so only to reinforce the traditional or indigenous basis for the belief in reincarnation in the African culture. What I am not saying though, is that the views of traditional thinkers constitute the entirety of African philosophy. [It is not the place of this research to go into the question of what African philosophy is. This question has thoroughly been discussed by Wiredu, Hountondji, Gyekye, Ramose, and Appiah, among other African philosophers.<sup>12</sup>] Among traditional elders of every generation, it cannot be expected that all of them be philosophers (sages); even so, a non-philosopher is still capable of occasionally producing thoughts that are philosophical or, at least, have philosophic relevance. It would therefore not be out of place for a qualitative research like the present one, to make use of the views of such men and women in the traditional setting – something which I occasionally did. In the context where the philosophical idea is known to almost everyone who is fairly conversant with Akan thought as having been transmitted from past generations, we may – in accordance with the definition above – attribute it to the (unnamed) sages of the past. What might be problematic though, is to suggest that the traditional

sage should not be sought, in our modern times, in the African city where most of the educated population reside. For, there still are, at least, some traditional enclaves in many sub-Saharan African cities. This is not to deny that most traditional elders, and for that matter, traditional sages reside in the villages where the traditional setting is well depicted or largely maintained. As a result, the choice of looking for sages from the villages by a researcher on African philosophy would most probably be due to the natural tendency to go for what one wants from where that thing most likely is.

There have been calls by some African philosophers<sup>13</sup> to include women and young people among those who qualify to be called African sages. The fear, here, is that looking for sages from among traditional elders tends to exclude these groups of people. Although the call is right, it does not seem to apply wholly to the Akan culture. This is because there cannot be any accurate translation or sense of the term ‘traditional elders’ without the inclusion of Akan women. Women are not only seen as repositories of traditional knowledge and wisdom, but are also involved in the highest levels of political administration and the sustenance of traditional values and practices. There are Queen-mothers in every palace taking part in every decision that concerns the health of the traditional area. One of them, Yaa Asantewaa (the Queen-mother of Ejisu) led the Asante nation to a major uprising in 1900 against colonial rule. Queen-mothers also play central roles in the nomination of chiefs, most importantly, in line with tradition. Again, arcane knowledge – available to those ‘traditionally acknowledged as the custodians of the verities and secrets of nature’<sup>14</sup> – is sought and skillfully utilized by some women as well. In the process of judging, the very act of (judges or, usually, elders) retreating for a deeper reflection on a difficult issue is known as ‘consulting the old woman’. Consequently, the individuals whose duty it is to pass judgement would say before retreating *ye’kōbisa aberewa*

(lit. ‘we are going to consult the old woman’). It is never said ‘we are going to consult the old man’. It would therefore be very unwonted in Akan culture for women to be seen to be pruned of wisdom – a virtue which, from the foregoing, is literally sought from ‘the old woman’. Finally, wise sayings of women, especially grandmothers, are not at all stopped from being quoted in appropriate contexts to support arguments. Such is the depth of recognition that women command in Akan culture. Indeed, women are also regarded as traditional elders. So, there is no reason why some of them cannot be philosophers. The call, therefore, to extend the search for sages beyond ‘traditional elders’ – apparently, males – to include women would be useful to us only in the sense that it required of us to have mentioned in the initial explanation (of ‘sage’) that women were included.

The use of ‘sage’ in reference to only the elderly, as far as I know, has not been to spite the youth. In the traditional system, wisdom is perceived to come with age. And, since advancement in age is potent with the emergence of sage, surely, the youth (even at forty) is not at ripe enough age to qualify as a sage. The youth who shows signs of wisdom is encouraged to see them as a good beginning and to continue dedicating him- or herself to the critical interrogation of life and tradition. The elders, and for that matter sages, would not forbear engaging in reflection and critical discourse with the youth, for they say: *abōfra hunu nensa hohoro a, ōne mpaninfo didi* (lit. ‘if a child knows how to wash his or her hand, he or she dines with the elders’). In line with this thinking also, researchers interested in traditional wisdom have tended to fall on the elders because of the experience and knowledge they might have gathered over the years about traditional values, thereby serving as a bridge between the past and the present. This point about the elders is worth making alongside the ‘apologetic’ reason offered by Gail Presbey. According to her,

the decision to emphasize the word ‘sage’ in ‘sage philosophy’ originally reflected the desire to secure for some Africans (mainly elder, rural men whose reputations made them good candidates) recognition as philosophers. This was a useful apologetic strategy in the fight against cultural imperialism.<sup>15</sup>

From the foregoing, it appears that the reason some African philosophical researchers would seek the views of the uneducated villagers is to contact traditional philosophers among the elders – i.e. to contact individuals who, most of the time, are interested in and reflect on philosophical topics or ideas in the African context. This means that not every gray haired is necessarily a sage by virtue of advancement in age alone. Kwame Gyekye, for instance, uses the word ‘sage’ in this sense.<sup>16</sup> His usage of the term which generally encompasses the explanation I give of it in the second paragraph of this section, is (in relation or, rather, restriction to traditional philosophers) technical. We have only had to modify our technical equation of ‘the traditional sage’ to ‘the traditional philosopher’ to include women (for the sake of emphasis).

By the normal meaning of the word, a sage is ‘1. a profoundly wise person; a person famed for wisdom. 2. someone venerated for the possession of wisdom.’<sup>17</sup> The place where the person lives – city or village – and his or her level of education are, according to this definition, immaterial. Not content with this definition, Oruka attempts an improvement but ends up in some confusion. He explains ‘sage’ as ‘someone with wisdom, insight, or ethical inspiration who uses his or her talents for the betterment of the community’.<sup>18</sup> But as Presbey rightly points out, ‘not all who show such commitment are regarded as “sages”’.<sup>19</sup> This does not mean that Presbey would not be receptive to the idea of including the thoughts of the committed ones among the sources of African philosophy. Her concern, however, is that we would not be fair to them if we hold on to the tag ‘sage philosophy’ in describing the research that takes them into account. She starts rhetorically,

Since [many young researchers form the group which is] most attracted to sage philosophy, how is one to find those interested in interviewing, for example, bright, articulate, young urban African women intent on solving social and political issues of their day? And if one found a researcher eager to undertake such a project, would the title ‘sage philosophy’ then sound like a misnomer?

Naming this method ‘sage philosophy’ has the consequence of putting the emphasis on the status of the author of any particular idea, rather than the idea itself ... The method would change significantly if the goal were to search for good ideas, wherever they may be found, rather than searching for the right people, and then hoping they have good ideas.

Such a change in focus should not overlook, however, the need to guard against sidelining rural people, considering them ‘backward’ or out of touch with the pulse of the present.<sup>20</sup>

It is not clear what Presbey means by ‘good ideas’ and how exactly we are to categorize and make use of them. She apparently calls those ideas ‘good’ because they are in connection with ‘solving social and political issues of [the] day’. Consequently, she encourages us to learn from Oruka by ‘[looking] to anyone who is able to offer perspectives and helpful suggestions regarding the challenges facing Africa today’.<sup>21</sup> But philosophy is not just about having perspectives and offering suggestions as Oruka claims<sup>22</sup>; it is a question of methodology and orientation. Although philosophy should ultimately contribute to the betterment of society, all other disciplines or subjects of human learning should as well. And, people engaged in the various disciplines contribute to the solution of human problems with the perspectives they have, or even criticize. What would make a person a philosopher is, primarily, the general disposition or commitment of the person to conceptual analysis, and the logical basis of the concepts that underlie his or her arguments.<sup>23</sup> Now, while it cannot be denied that a non-philosopher may bear an idea that is philosophically relevant, he nevertheless does not become a philosopher. This is the real reason why ‘not all who show commitment’ to the betterment of their communities can be called sages. Our reluctance to call them so is not a weakness at all; they just cannot be called sages (philosophers) qua the nature of their commitment. The case with the philosopher and

philosophical ideas compares, to some extent, with that of the footballer and the playing of football. This is because not anyone able to kick football around is or should be called a footballer.

There is, indeed, no contradiction between being a sage and educated – as the normal definition of sage tends to show. One only has to be careful how the views of the educated are to be categorized, after one has satisfied oneself that the method or orientation and, for that matter, content of the views are philosophical. I admit, also, that an educated person can also possess philosophical views on traditional issues. However, if our goal is to understand how the traditions of Africa generate and deal with certain philosophical concepts, then, the main challenge here might be this: knowing the extent to which the person's interpretation of traditional ideas might have been influenced by non-African ideologies and concepts. If the influence is evident, and the person's conclusions are drawn from such non-African perspectives acquired through (Western) education, then, it would be difficult to consider the position of such an educated person as traditionally African. But, while admitting that acquiring formal education does not disqualify one from having perspectives on traditional concepts, one's ideas do not become part of African philosophy only because they can solve some 'social and political' problems in Africa. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that the act of doing or proposing something to improve upon the African condition of life is not the sacred mandate of every African intellectual or citizen.

I however agree with Presbey that calling a philosophy 'sage philosophy' puts emphasis on the person, not his ideas. That is why I do not see myself as doing 'sage philosophy'. I also do not do what, by definition, 'sage philosophers' do. 'Sage philosophy' is the philosophy that requires of



researchers the following: that ‘individual informants are named and quoted at length, and differences in views between informants are noted’.<sup>24</sup> My main reason for relying significantly on traditional wisdom (whether developed by known or unknown traditional sages) in this research is to explore the indigenous basis for the existence or otherwise of belief in reincarnation, and the justification – if any – of such a belief. It is not because the views of traditional thinkers are sacrosanct. It is also to contribute toward the development of (sufficient) philosophic literature on the subject of reincarnation in the African context. The traditional perspective on issues presented in this chapter is my own generation, having been born and lived most of my life among the Akans. Although I have adequate knowledge of Akan culture, I never hesitated in seeking clarification on some aspects of the Akan concept of rebirth.<sup>25</sup> I also analyze the views of professional African philosophers and scholars to ascertain how they differ or are in concert with traditional beliefs. With this background, together with the way the other chapters of this dissertation have been written, it would not be appropriate to label my work as ‘sage philosophy’. I am simply interested in philosophic ideas, relative especially to the African culture.

The usefulness of the term ‘sage’ has been called into question for other reasons as well. Although Odera Oruka, for example, did not neglect the views of sages in his works, he nevertheless thought of their views (especially, in the context of ‘sage philosophy’) as not being the ‘growth area’ of African philosophy.<sup>26</sup> By this he meant that it did not, more or less, constitute the best framework within which the growth of African philosophy and, to some extent, Africa’s march forward were to be found. Therefore, the usefulness of the term ‘sage’ might erode with time in the context where the future of philosophies is to be seen in terms of how they address contemporary problems of a people. Presbey captures very well Oruka’s

position on this in the following quotation concerning an interview which Oruka granted Kai Kresse:

... Odera Oruka complained that many recent dissertations submitted in Africa focussed on sage philosophy or, relatedly, on African philosophy of culture. Regarding this trend, he counselled that this was not 'the only area' of philosophy in Africa needing growth and attention. He then referred to the need to help 'get Africa out of its turmoil' by philosophical analysis of its social, political, and legal problems. Coupled with his remarks about national-ideological and professional philosophy being the 'growth areas' of philosophy in the future, this seems to designate sages as a passing phase of African philosophy, needed at one historical moment, but ultimately to be sidelined. Certainly, Odera Oruka did not limit his research to sage philosophy, but continued to write articles on contemporary topics of professional philosophy, such as environmental ethics.<sup>27</sup>

But, is it really true that nonprofessional or traditional philosophers or philosophies cannot help solve contemporary issues that confront Africa? My response is negative. In recent times, political conflicts – sometimes too difficult for mainstream African politicians and intellectuals to solve – are handed to traditional authorities for mediation and resolution.<sup>28</sup> This practice is common in Ghana. Traditional authorities, I admit, are not the same as traditional sages. But traditional sages play significant roles in the critique and reshaping of traditional values and beliefs which continue to be useful to the contemporary African situation. Thus, one cannot deny that the traditional belief system within which the traditional thinker functions does not show signs of something that requires to be 'sidelined' at all. Traditional sages or their ideas will only be 'ultimately' sidelined if the traditional systems of Africa are obliterated or seriously undermined or weakened. But I do not see such a thing happen; at least, not in the near future.

The quotation above also seems to suggest that traditional philosophy or what is called 'African philosophy of culture' sharply differs from the other 'phase of philosophy in Africa' which allegedly answers 'the need to help "get Africa out of its turmoil"'. This other area, he implies, is the 'philosophical analysis of [Africa's] social, political, and legal problems' apparently by

‘national-ideological and professional philosophy’. I am not quite sure about the accuracy of this claim either. Given the hold that tradition has on many African people – i.e. among the uneducated majority and significant portion of the educated – it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the appreciation of the scale of contemporary problems of Africa and their solution would not be comprehensive enough if traditional values and the experiences of the traditionally-inclined in contemporary Africa are ignored. It follows, then, that traditional thinkers who best articulate the traditional experience cannot be ignored by the professional philosopher. In the least, Africa will always need both of them. Ideas of sages, and for that matter, ‘sage philosophy’ (for lack of a better word), should not thus be a ‘passing phase’ and eventually ‘sidelined’. There are examples in other parts of the world – such as Japan, South Korea and, recently, China – to show that with some careful melding, human (developmental) problems can be effectively tackled without abandoning traditional wisdom and values. This must be Africa’s way forward. There is indeed some evidence that the Akan (or African) belief system is rich in ethics, and to a large extent, promotes the respect for human, political and legal rights of citizens.<sup>29</sup> Again, taboos and caveats in, for instance, traditional Akan communities that made and continue to make people respect the environment, were in existence long before colonialism. People could not build too close to water bodies, neither could they hunt nor farm on – and thereby, in religious language, desecrate – protected forests. This does not mean though, that improvements in the ways rights are protected (or laws are enforced) in traditional systems are not needed. Indeed, all cultures, including the advanced democracies of the modern world, have had cause to improve upon the reach and content of the rights of their peoples.

## 1.2. *An African Concept of Reincarnation*

In this section, I intend to discuss the concept of reincarnation mainly from the Akan point of view, although relevant information from other African cultures will also be brought in.

It is held in Akan traditional thought that a person who once lived on earth (*asaase so*) can be born again after his or her death. A name suggesting rebirth is accordingly given to the baby believed to be a 'returned' person. One such name is *ababio*, meaning 'one who has returned'. The name consists of two root words: *ba* (to come) and *bio* (again). There are three types of rebirth in Akan (and generally, African) religious philosophy: (i) the 'return' of a revered 'ancestor' (living-dead) in the form of a child to a member of the living-dead's family, (ii) the serial rebirth of a specific child to a specific couple, and (iii) the reincarnation of some whose souls could not be admitted to the spirit world. On the basis of their rejection of the first one, some philosophers and scholars of religion have disputed the existence of reincarnation in African thought. While, for instance, Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti<sup>30</sup> argue that there is only 'partial reincarnation' in the African culture, Innocent Onyewuenyi denies that there is any reincarnation at all in African thought.<sup>31</sup> But, for the reasons discussed below, the three of them cannot be right with their claims.

### 1.2.1. On the Partial Reincarnation Thesis

Prior to my definition of this thesis, it is appropriate to eliminate confusion by stating certain beliefs which it really will not contradict. To begin with, the traditional African view that a person is a composite of matter and spirit is upheld by the thesis. For, the very notion of

reincarnation entails the concepts of body and soul. Reincarnation, as noted above, suggests the human soul takes on new flesh again. Hence, it is also expected that any belief in reincarnation, ‘partial’ or not, must still confirm the belief in the survival of the soul – such as that of a living-dead. However, what might be disputed by the thesis regarding the soul has to do with the complete inhabitation of a new flesh by a living-dead.

The thesis of ‘partial reincarnation’ is the idea that a baby identified as the incarnation of a living-dead might possess certain traceable features of the latter but not the soul of the latter. The main reason for the development of the thesis is that the complete reincarnation of a living-dead is inconsistent with the African belief in the continual existence of the living-dead in the spiritual land of the dead (*asamando*, in Akan).<sup>32</sup> It is suggested, consequently, that only some features,<sup>33</sup> dominant characteristics<sup>34</sup> or afflatus<sup>35</sup> of the spirit of the dead finds their way into the baby, hence ‘partial reincarnation.’<sup>36</sup> They also argue that even if at birth, a spiritualist is consulted to determine which living-dead a baby ‘is’, this is only a determination of the living-dead whose character traits or influences a baby bears.<sup>37</sup>

Although the idea of the continual existence of the living-dead in the spirit world is true,<sup>38</sup> it is not quite clear whether spiritualists are called in to determine character traits and influences because such children as observed by them do not always grow up to live like the living-dead whose core earthly identities they allegedly bear. The determination by a spiritualist of the ‘returned’ person cannot also suggest that the baby in question is, at that moment, exhibiting any reasoned behaviours reminiscent of the supposed living-dead. For, the baby is just too young to exhibit those characteristics. From the foregoing, it does appear that: (i) if the identification of the reincarnated is based on ‘dispositions’ allegedly exhibited at infancy, it would not provide

reasonable link between the ‘returned’ person and the living-dead, and (ii) even if the claim for ‘partial reincarnation’ is made on the basis of future dispositions of a growing child, that would also not guarantee a link between the two persons. For, the child might grow up different in character from the living-dead. These difficulties in the partial reincarnationist’s account for the idea of return in African thought leave us with the possibility that (iii) maybe, the belief that a child could indeed be a person known to have lived on earth before is one truly held in some African cultures after all.

In the case of statement (iii) above, it may, as rightly observed by the three scholars, conflict with the belief that the living-dead alleged to have reincarnated continues to live in the spirit world. However, that observation is consistent with – and indeed supported by – the attempts often made by people to ensure complete return of a person<sup>39</sup> or stop particular persons from being born repeatedly.<sup>40</sup> The phenomenon of the serial birth and death of a baby to a specific couple is known in Akan as *awomawuo*. The term is from the expressions *wo* (to give birth [to]), *mma* (children), and *wu* (to die). So, the term literally means ‘the act of giving birth to babies and they die’ or ‘the act of giving birth to babies for them to die’. Until they are stopped from returning to the spiritual realm, it is believed that such babies keep returning to *this* life only to die at different levels of their childhood.<sup>41</sup> It may be objected that such babies are really not normal (humans) but are spirits who only take on human body (*honam*) for a moment [like the ‘chinchirisi’ (spirit children) discussed by Rose M. Amenga-Etego<sup>42</sup>]. The problem with this statement is that in the context of the spirit-mother who weeps anytime a human being is born, all humans – i.e. humans who die at old age and those who die shortly after birth, or die in-between – are believed to have spiritual attachment to the same mythical mother. But, this does not make any human being spirit. Consequently, the baby serially born by an earthly mother

suffering *awomawuo* is not spirit either. It is a human being except that it is thought to require something extra to make it stay (longer) on earth. The human being, in Akan thought, is composite – surviving death as soul only, but made up of body and soul on earth. Thus, having lived on earth (with a body and soul), died and returned, that baby is a reincarnated person.

This position has serious consequences for the notion of ‘partial reincarnation’<sup>43</sup> often presented as the African concept of reincarnation. It renders the notion inaccurate. After all, ‘partial reincarnation’ only applies to rebirths of the living-dead. It fails to take the serially born babies into account. And, since the souls of such babies are deemed to inhabit new bodies fully, it is wrong to argue that there is only belief in the partial return of persons in African thought

### 1.2.2. On the Complete Denial of Reincarnation in African Thought

On account of the continuous survival of the living-dead as alluded to above, Onyewuenyi advances that there cannot be a concept of reincarnation in African thought. His reason is that unlike the original sense of the doctrine, it cannot be maintained in the African context that the soul (of a living-dead) ‘informs another body for another span of earthly life.’<sup>44</sup> And that this complete inhabitation of a new body at death is all that the Latin origin of the word ‘reincarnation’ entails, namely ‘*re* = again; and *incarnare* = to enter into the body.’<sup>45</sup> He then comes up with the radical position that any human soul after death would either inhabit a new body (completely) or it would not at all. So, ‘[r]eincarnation cannot be partial or apparent. Either it is or is not.’<sup>46</sup> He wonders how African thinkers can believe in the non-inhabitation of new bodies by the living-dead and still claim any sort of reincarnation.<sup>47</sup> What I find worrying about

Onyewuenyi is that even though he, just like Idowu, would not deny the *awomawuo* or *abiku* (in Yoruba) or *ogbanje* (in Igbo) phenomenon,<sup>48</sup> he fails to realize that as per his classical definition of reincarnation above, the phenomenon, at least, is suggestive of reincarnation.

Granted the truth of the continual existence thesis, Onyewuenyi stirs up some controversy with his view that the description by some (African scholars) of the ‘return’ of the living-dead as reincarnation – as the African concept of reincarnation – is due to the influence of ‘Western anthropologists and administrators’ who had earlier on labeled it as such.<sup>49</sup> But, the alleged foreign origin of the characterization of the ‘return’ of the living-dead is undercut by the seeming conception in most traditional African philosophies of the return in personal terms. Onyewuenyi does not only regard such a conception as foreign, but also as ‘blatantly unchristian’ and rather ‘preached and taught’ by ‘many “educated” Africans’.<sup>50</sup> I have no problems with his assertion that reincarnation is not a christian doctrine, although I am aware that the jettisoning of the concept was a later development in christianity.<sup>51</sup> But, if he suggests that most educated Africans went through Western (and for that matter, christian) education, and reincarnation had not been taught by christianity, then, it is questionable how the belief in the return of persons held among some of the educated should be traced to Western education. Among the educated, I should add, a few have most probably come into contact with (the works of) Western administrators and anthropologists. Therefore the alleged Western origin of a doctrine so ingrained in the traditional system of Africa is suspect.

Onyewuenyi again remarks, in connection with belief in reincarnation, that ‘[s]ome of the funeral rites which are blatantly unchristian, and performed behind the scenes and in the dark, are functions of this belief.’<sup>52</sup> But, it is very surprising that he would talk about rites without



mentioning at all any of them. It is undeniable, and I suspect he is also aware, that traditional rites suggestive of some notion of personal return are performed. In Yoruba, for instance, prior to burial, the living-dead candidate is spoken to and urged not to delay in returning to the family.<sup>53</sup> In Onyewuenyi's own Igbo culture, Ikenga-Metuh notes, 'prayers at funeral rites do not request increased happiness for the deceased in the spirit-land but for his safe arrival there and his quick reincarnation with even greater prosperity and success.'<sup>54</sup> The Igbo, therefore, looks forward to comparing the lot of the one who has made an *ilo uwa* ('a return to the world') with that of his or her former self. That appears to be the ultimate way of ensuring that the prayers that were offered at the funerary rites of the deceased were answered.<sup>55</sup> Again, I do not think he would argue that only educated christians perform those rites or believe in the return of persons. What appears to be true, then, is that the existence of traditional expressions and names, and acceptance of the notion of return point more to the traditional origin of the performance of the sort of funerary rites hinted by Onyewuenyi, than to the mere influence of Western education. And, 'many "educated" Africans' – who might have converted to christianity and islam – would then perform those rites because they never abandon their traditional beliefs and obligations completely.<sup>56</sup> The educated Africans cannot therefore be said to be 'complicit in their own degradation' and 'thereby undermining their cultural identity'<sup>57</sup> by performing those rites.

Some other analyses of the connection between the living-dead and babies made by Onyewuenyi also require close scrutiny. The first is about the African concept of being, his discussion of which takes rise from Placide Tempels' understanding of Bantu philosophy. In the latter's view, it would be wrong to conceive of being as 'that which possesses force' because '[f]orce is the nature of being'; '[f]orce is being' and 'being is force'.<sup>58</sup> There is some indication in Onyewuenyi (as in Temples) that this force is – and rightly so – nonphysical. As he declares,

there is ‘essential difference between different forces or inner realities of beings, just as there are differences between categories of material visible things’.<sup>59</sup> In the case of a human being, therefore, force would be his or her immaterial aspect. In Akan thought, one would observe, the essential force would be his or her *ōkra-sunsum* entity, which is also believed to have rational and activating properties. This is how the living-dead – as souls – are conceived of. Although Onyewuenyi rejects and tries very hard to avoid the use of the word ‘soul’ in describing the living-dead, his explanation of (the human) ‘force’ would make sense to the Akan only in terms of what has just been put forward as the Akan equivalent of the post-humous soul.

Yet, Onyewuenyi (following Tempels) argues as if ‘force’, in terms of which the living-dead are conceived of, is the same framework within which ‘being’ (i.e. in relation to persons) must be or is conceived in African thought. That, as we shall soon realize, is incorrect. Although force is being in African thought, being is not always force. The Akan concept of being, for instance, includes natural (material) objects. It is believed that natural objects may contain spirits (*sunsum*) but those objects are never conceived of as spirits. Similarly, while the living-dead are indeed regarded as spirits, a person is – at least, in Akan concept of being – both physical and spiritual. A person is not seen as spiritual or ‘force’ alone. The accuracy of the preceding statement is not changed by the fact that the living-dead are spoken of in ‘personal’ terms. Onyewuenyi seems to be confused by the personal terms in which the living-dead are spoken of to support Tempels’ view that being – in this case, a person – consists in just force. He concludes, then, that force (the spiritual being) is what is regarded in the African culture as ‘the whole man’. He finds nothing wrong in maintaining this conclusion and, at the same time, speaking of a ‘visible state’ of ‘man’. He writes,

When a person dies, the traditional African does not say that the 'soul' of the dead has gone to the spirit-world. It is not the 'soul' or 'part of man' that has gone to the world of the spirits but the whole man though not in the visible but invisible state.<sup>60</sup>

The description of 'man' in terms of 'visible and invisible state(s)' is carefully chosen over, say, 'visible and invisible parts' because using the latter would defeat his aim not to see the living-dead (really, the soul) as constituting part of a person. And, as a result of his refusal to identify a living-dead as the soul that was once part of the person, Onyewuenyi was left with the bizarre option of making the soul, the spiritual part, constitute 'the whole man'. It would not have been much of a problem to suggest that a person, in African ontology, consists of both physical and spiritual entities, and that the core of the person, though, is spiritual. This would have been consistent with his usage of 'visible' and 'invisible' in the above quotation. Even so, his usage of these two expressions (i.e. 'visible' and 'invisible') would have still betrayed his insistence on projecting 'force' alone as 'the whole man'. If he really thought that 'man' was in African thought believed to have a material *part* (or even to be entirely material), he would not have avoided being hit by the feeling that it was quite incomprehensible to state that there was still a 'whole man' when that 'man' was devoid of material or visible properties. Given that 'man', at least in Akan ontology, is believed to be partly physical, it is wrong to submit that Akan metaphysicians would regard that which goes to the spirit world after death as 'the whole man'.

Having claimed that, that which survives death is neither the soul – although he did not successfully prove this – nor body, Onyewuenyi seems to take literal assertions about the living-dead to support his idea of 'the vital force' of 'man'. The least he could have done, though, was to state clearly what he understood by the 'soul' so that his idea of 'the vital force' could be distinguished from it. But that he never did.

Now, there are several reasons why the ordinary account of the afterlife could be misleading. First, it is hardly said in the ordinary conversations of any peoples who believe in life after death – not just in African cultures – that *a person does not survive death but his or her soul does*. Rather, they would utter, for instance, that ‘a person survives bodily death’, ‘you will be judged after death’, and in Akan *onipa wu a, na onwui* (literally, ‘when a person dies, he or she is not [completely] dead’ – a seeming contradiction in terms). In all these statements, one would notice, ‘person’ is used in different senses. Death is spoken of the person (in embodied form) while a disembodied entity is spoken of in personal terms about life in the afterlife. There is some thinking behind such statements as made above. Thus, it would be quite unfair for a researcher not to explore what the people mean when they make statements whose nature strikingly calls for such exploration. A good appreciation of what the people mean, not merely what they say, should reveal their belief that behind the physical being, there is a soul which is essential to the identity of the individual in both this and the spiritual worlds. But holding this belief does not in any way suggest that the soul alone constitutes the complete person either.

The soul’s centrality to ‘personness’ appears to be informed by the belief that it is what passes through all three forms of life, viz. life before birth, earthly life and the afterlife.<sup>61</sup> In the afterlife, especially, the psychological capacities of the entity are believed to be strengthened, but it is still identified with (and literally ‘as’) the person because of the stability of its presence, its capacity to appear in a known human form, and its continual maintenance of family ties and equivalent earthly social positions even in the spirit world. This should account for the utterance by a Yoruba – mentioned by Idowu and noted by Onyewuenyi<sup>62</sup> – that ‘I am going to speak to my father’ although the father is materially dead.<sup>63</sup> But from our analysis above and, especially in chapter six, we realize that the features and functions attributed to the spiritual aspect, the living-

dead, are in specific terms attributed to the soul. It does not matter if a people do not mention 'soul' in their ordinary conversations about the spiritual entity, nor would it change anything for us if the people do not have a word in their native language for the entity. We shall term something 'soul' whenever those attributes and functions obtain. Consequently, Onyewuenyi's 'whole man' and Temples' 'the man himself' – by that Temples meant “the little man” who was formally hidden behind the perceptible manifestation of the man'<sup>64</sup> – mean nothing but the soul (in the afterlife). The alleged human shape of the soul, sometimes influenced by the human form in which the living-dead are said to reveal themselves to the living, has already been treated with some skepticism by us in chapter six.

The African concept of rebirth, nevertheless, is difficult to explain. This accounts for some of the problems in Onyewuenyi's work. From Temples' idea that the living-dead 'perpetuate themselves through reproduction in the living person', Onyewuenyi describes the African notion of rebirth as 'rather the "life-giving will" or "vital influence" or "secretion of vital power" of the ancestor on his living dependants.'<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere, he adds that:

[t]he influence of the ancestor, which has [wrongly] been called 'reincarnation' comes [after conception]. 'It is the human being, who already possesses life in the womb of his mother ... who finds himself under the vital, the ontological influence of a predestined ancestor or of a spirit'.<sup>66</sup>

In all this, however, he remarkably fails to spell out the nature of the 'vital influence'. How do we know or determine a 'vitaly influenced' person? What does such a person have that a non-vitaly influenced person lacks? Are there any things that the 'vitaly influenced' person could not have done had he or she not been so influenced? And, how do the things tie the person to the living-dead? Yet, Onyewuenyi's inability to tell the nature of the alleged influence is not entirely his making because the relationship between the living-dead and the earthly person, and the

implications of that relationship do not seem to be addressed – at least, not in any coherent manner – in the traditional African doctrine of rebirth. Although I do not claim to know the extent of the ‘influence’ Onyewuenyi has in mind, I sense only a link (between the two beings); a link that does not really allow us to claim influence of one over the other. This link, which I expatiate on shortly, is fundamentally metaphysical. For, the nature and activity of the living-dead is believed to be spiritual. This appears to underlie Onyewuenyi’s rightful adoption above of the expression ‘or of a spirit’. I doubt whether the connection to the living-dead can, strictly speaking, be in terms of character and physical features. The reason for this is that apart from, say, a birthmark, any character trait or physical feature exhibited at the right age by the person might be borne also by other members of the family who would not necessarily be named after (and, thus, not be identified ‘as’) the living-dead concerned. Such physical determinants might just be biological or hereditary, and therefore applicable to the generality of the family. In this case, then, the determinants might as well originate from remotely dead members of the family.<sup>67</sup>

When a living-dead is believed to have *ba bio* (‘returned’) in the body of a new baby, the respect shown to the baby for being an incarnation of the person after whom it is named, and the words spoken thereof to it on its naming day – urging it to stay on earth – tend to reveal more of a people who do not conceive of the baby as just an afflatus or as a reappearance of character. It cannot also be said that those words are spoken to the bodily baby *per se*. This is because the instrument for understanding (for embodied persons), the brain, would not have developed in the baby to a level appropriate for the comprehension of the words. Nor can it be ruled out that the baby’s soul, believed to possess some pre-natal rational properties, might also be believed to understand the import of the ritual (or message). Consequently, the traditional conception of the soul in personal terms and address of the baby as if the living-dead, tend to suggest that

somehow the baby is *personally* connected to the soul of the dead person. And, since the connection is spiritual, the suggestion seems to be that the soul of the baby is in some *personal* relationship<sup>68</sup> with that of the deceased who is, at the same time, in the spirit world.<sup>69</sup> The belief that spirits of the revered-dead never leave the spirit world even when they are thought to have ‘returned’ to earth is not peculiar to traditional African thought alone, but it is also found in ancient Egyptian philosophy where some Kings were conceived of as the incarnations of certain deified dead kings who were believed to exist in the spirit world at the same time.<sup>70</sup> Thus, instead of the impersonal physical and character traits whose presence in the family might precede in time the named living-dead, the personal conception of ‘return’ is supported by the naming and treatment of the ‘returned’ in terms of such *specific* dead personalities as father, mother, and other known individuals.

Another thing that appears to point toward a personal connection in traditional thought is the practice of determining alleged returned persons by the oracles. In this sort of determination, and even in any others involving the use of birthmarks, only a certain ‘person’ is believed to have returned. This suggests some connection between the living-dead and the baby (or the baby’s soul, specifically). In this wise, birthmarks in themselves do not give away any living-dead because the body that originally bore those marks had long perished. The notion of rebirth in traditional thought, therefore, seems to amount to nothing more than a personal connection between souls. In spite of this, in the performance of burial rites among the Yoruba, the soul is spoken to and encouraged to return to the family, and when it literally so does – i.e. when it establishes connection with the soul of a newly born – an oracle or birthmark may be used by them to identify it. In realization and appreciation of this, the family then names the child after the identified living-dead. The Yoruba, therefore, identify some children with the living-dead.

This is why Onyewuenyi's claim that in the African concept of rebirth 'the child or children are not *identified* with the dead'<sup>71</sup> is untenable.

### 1.2.3. On the Reincarnation of Souls Not Admitted to the Spirit World

The third kind of rebirth in Akan thought is that of people whose souls could not be admitted to the spirit world. They include people believed to have – in their previous lives – died 'prematurely in an accident or by some untoward disease', and thereby requiring 'a more regular term of life.'<sup>72</sup> Indeed, '[t]he traditional Akans are one group who appear to be strongly persuaded of this doctrine'. The return of such persons seems to be compelled by their inability to fulfill their destinies in their previous lives. This is a logical fallout of the belief in traditional Akan philosophy that destinies must ultimately be lived out.<sup>73</sup> Such people are believed to have their souls completely reborn for them to make up for their earlier shortcomings. This is another reason why Mbiti, Idowu and Onyewuenyi might not be right to claim that reincarnation – in the sense of complete inhabitation of a new body by the soul – is absent in African religious thought.

Having discussed the concept of reincarnation in traditional African thought, I will now attempt to address an issue that I raised in chapter one. Over there, I argued that ancient Egyptian philosophy was (black) African philosophy, and indicated my intention to show (in this chapter) how Akan eschatology and language might demonstrate this in the features they share with the ancient Egyptian.



## *2.0. The Language and Eschatological Concepts of Ancient Egypt and Traditional African Culture*

Much has already been written in chapter one about the Egyptian origin of Greek (and for that matter, Western) philosophy, and also about the fact that the denizens of ancient Egypt were black. Indeed, some scholars provide a much broader sense of the Egyptian influence. For instance, M.A. Murray reveals that ‘[i]n every aspect of life Egypt has influenced Europe’<sup>74</sup> and that, ‘every country bordering on the Mediterranean owes a debt to Egypt; ... that countries further afield, such as Russia, Persia, Arabia and perhaps even India and China, were in contact with the greatest civilization of the ancient world’.<sup>75</sup> This section of the present chapter does not discuss further the link between ancient Egypt and other cultures. What it does, though, is to seek to strengthen the (black) Africanness of the Egyptian culture, by establishing some connection between Egyptian language and beliefs and those of sub-Saharan Africa.

I need to caution that it is still too broad to have ‘Egyptian beliefs’ as a point of discussion; hence, there is the need to narrow the discussion to some specific area(s) of life. In our context, it will be the areas of life, death, and the afterlife. With regard to these, we shall identify some expressions that somehow connect the two cultures. And, just as Onyewuenyi paid attention to Egyptian concepts that have survived in Wolof culture,<sup>76</sup> I will seek to do same for Akan thought. My work will ultimately reinforce the long held position by some scholars on Egypt that most sub-Saharan cultures especially in West Africa have features that were part of or, at least, are modified forms of the beliefs and practices of the people who participated directly and were responsible for the civilization associated today with ancient Egypt.<sup>77</sup> It must be noted that the linguistic expressions of Egypt might not have perfectly survived in contemporary sub-Saharan

languages but there will be some evidence to suggest that the expressions we choose are adequately Egyptian. Our evidence will be philological. For this reason, I suggest that syntactic and semantic modification of some expressions of Pharaonic Egyptian and Coptic languages into Akan and, in general, sub-Saharan languages should be tolerable and expected. This is due to the power of ‘living languages’ to:

[acquire] new words from other languages; ... [form] new words by joining roots or words together; ... [deepen] the meanings of words; ... [change] the sense in which words have been previously used; ... [abbreviate] words.<sup>78</sup>

Initially, a comparison between such an ancient language as the Pharaonic Egyptian – described by Theophile Obenga as ‘the oldest witness of the languages [to be] compared’<sup>79</sup> – and a modern black African language like the Akan may appear arbitrary and impossible.<sup>80</sup> On the contrary, ‘the similarities – morphological, phonetic, and lexical’ – that we shall find between them ‘eliminates the effects of convergence, and random, haphazard borrowing’.<sup>81</sup> And, since similarities could not have ‘[come] about by chance ... one is consequently compelled to recognise the family of resemblance’ between ‘Pharaonic Egyptian, Coptic and modern Black African languages.’<sup>82</sup>

The Akan language is classified among the *kwa* group of languages in West Africa.<sup>83</sup> These languages are said to share certain characteristics including being ‘built up of monosyllabic roots.’<sup>84</sup> Some expressions in *kwa* languages are also noted to have similar meanings, sometimes with slight variations in pronunciation; and that, expressions related to certain concepts are fundamentally similar across many of the languages. Variation in pronunciation may be due to the philological rule that ‘vowels can be used interchangeably’ or ‘substituted for one another in the course of time.’<sup>85</sup> For instance, the monosyllabic word ‘ye’ which is phonetically close to

‘ya’ relates to mother(hood) or wife. So, in Yoruba ‘ye’ or ‘yeye’ means mother, while ‘a-ye’ and ‘a-ya’ mean wife in Isoko and Yoruba respectively.<sup>86</sup> I must add here that ‘wife’ in the Akan dialects Asante Twi and Fante are ‘ye(re), o-ye(re)’ and ‘ye(r), o-ye(r)’ respectively.

There are several expressions of *kwa* languages, and Akan in particular, that appear to originate from ancient Egyptian language(s). For the purpose of this chapter, I concentrate, from now on, on the Akan.<sup>87</sup>

## 2.1. Similarities in Terms of Language

- (i) It was observed in chapter one that the Egyptian *khu* was a spiritual entity, and thus not part of the physical body. It would therefore be acceptable to suggest that in the Egyptian language ‘[t]o become a khu is a synonym for to die.’<sup>88</sup> Since, according to Lucas, there is no sound like ‘kh’ in most *kwa* languages, the sound is ‘modified to “k” or “w”’. So, *khu* becomes *ku* or *wu*. This, I have noticed, is the case in *Twi*. Now, while Lucas is right on the question of modification, his subsequent claim that in *Twi* (‘Tchi’) ‘wu means to die or kill (that is, to cause to die)’<sup>89</sup> is not entirely correct. The expression *wu* only means ‘to die’ but not ‘to kill’. Consider the following Asante *Twi* statements:

- a. *Kofi a-wu*            (Kofi is dead)
- b. *wa-wu*             (He or she is dead)
- c. *Nyame n-wu da*    (God will never die)

On the other hand, ‘ku’ means ‘to kill’, but it cannot replace *wu* in any of the statements above. Doing so would not generate the same meaning as there is in those statements. Both *wu* and *ku* nonetheless are connected to death.

- (ii) From what has been stated so far regarding the non-existence of the sound ‘kh’ in Akan, the Egyptian word for life (*ankh*) is not only translated into Akan with a word that is phonetically close to the Egyptian, but with it, the expected replacements for ‘kh’ come into play. Instead of either ‘k’ or ‘w’, the Akan word for life generously combines both in *nkwa*.
- (iii) The Pharaonic Egyptian word for ‘mouth’ is *ra*. It is *ra*, *ro* or *lo* in Coptic.<sup>90</sup> From *ra* to *ro* to *lo*, the expressions end up as *a-no* in Akan. The *a* in Akan is only pronominal.
- (iv) The word for ‘house’ in Pharaonic Egyptian language is *pr*; and becomes *për* in Coptic, *per* in Wolof, *ver* in Mofu, Uzam and Zidim,<sup>91</sup> and then *fie* in Asante Twi.
- (v) The Pharaonic Egyptian word for ‘take’ is *mi*, and in Coptic it becomes *mo* or *ma*.<sup>92</sup> In Asante, *ma so* means ‘to lift up’ or ‘take’.
- (vi) The Pharaonic Egyptian word *ka* (soul) survives in Akan as *kra* or *õ-kra*.<sup>93</sup>
- (vii) The Asante rendering of ‘small’ hints of an Egyptian connection by sound. In the former, it is *ketewa* while in Pharaonic Egyptian it is, according to Obenga, just *ktt*.<sup>94</sup> The absence of vowels in *ktt* is not unusual. In fact, ‘Egyptian is notorious for not writing down its vowels,’<sup>95</sup> and as a result the hieroglyphs do not offer us ‘the pleasure of really *speaking* ancient Egyptian with any certainty.’<sup>96</sup> In spite of this shortcoming, the word *ktt* should sound like *ketete* which is still similar to another Asante expression for ‘small’, viz. *ketekete*.

- (viii) The Pharaonic Egyptian word for ‘palm (tree)’ is *bai*, and also, *ba* or *bei* in Coptic.<sup>97</sup> It appears in Asante Twi as *a-be*.
- (ix) In Pharaonic Egyptian language, ‘bad’ is expressed as *bin*. It is also in Coptic *baaně*, *bani*, *booně* and *boni*.<sup>98</sup> In Asante, it is *bōne*.
- (x) ‘Mother’ is *mw.t* (Pharaonic Egyptian); *mōū*, *mōu*, *mō*, *mē* (Coptic)<sup>99</sup>; and *maame*, *na*, *ε-na* in Asante.
- (xi) ‘Man’ (as in masculinity) is in Pharaonic Egyptian language *s* or *z* (‘in the Old Kingdom’) but in Coptic ‘man; husband’ is *sa*.<sup>100</sup> In Asante Twi the word *se*, which also relates to masculinity, means ‘father’.

In terms of morphology, Obenga makes a very revealing observation about the Pharaonic language: that ‘there is only one way of translating the *negative imperative*: we use *m*, from the verb *imi*, itself a negative verb.’<sup>101</sup> The similarity with the construction of the negative imperative in Akan is striking. In Asante, for instance, *ma* is used. For instance:

#### **Positive Imperative:**

<i>sōre</i>	Stand up! (second person singular)
<i>monsōre</i>	Stand up! (second person plural)
<i>kō</i>	Go! (second person singular)
<i>monkō</i>	Go! (second person plural)

#### **Negative Imperative:**

<i>ma-nsōre</i>	Don’t stand up! (second person singular)
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<i>ma-monsōre</i>	Don't stand up! (second person plural)
<i>ma-nkō</i>	Don't go! (second person singular)
<i>ma-monkō</i>	Don't go! (second person plural)

Secondly, *m* in Pharaonic Egyptian language means, among others, 'within', 'out of', 'at the time that'. The same expression in Coptic means 'inside' or 'during'.<sup>102</sup> In Asante Twi, *mu* has similar meanings. For instance,

<i>εwō adwen mu</i>	(It is <u>in</u> or <u>inside</u> the mind)
<i>εwō ōman yi mu</i>	(It is <u>in</u> or <u>within</u> this country)
<i>γεwoono 'πε bre mu</i>	(He or she was born <u>during</u> the dry/harmathan season)

The Asante expression for 'out of', 'from' (i.e. from within something) is *efiri mu* or *εwō mu*; as in

<i>medemawo εwō ōdō <u>mu</u></i>	(I offer/give it to you out of love)
<i><u>efiri</u> m'akoma <u>mu</u></i>	(It is from [the bottom of] my heart)

## 2.2. Similarities in Terms of Eschatological Concepts

- (i) The elaborate funerary rites performed by the ancient Egyptians upon the death of a person were not only because they served the interest of the departed. However, it was also to ensure the peace and well-being of the living. According to Gardiner,<sup>103</sup> the Egyptians believed that the correct and timely performance of those rites

- prevented the wrath of the soul of the dead on the living (family). Similarly, it is a traditional Akan belief that the dead can disturb members of the living family, particularly those responsible for the performance of the funerary rites, if they fail in their obligation.<sup>104</sup>
- (ii) It was held by the Egyptians that until the funerary rites for a dead person were duly performed, he or she remained a wandering soul around the human community. This belief is still shared by Akans. They call such a soul *samantwentwen*.
- (iii) I must add, in connection with the wandering soul, that in both Egyptian and Akan philosophies it is believed to cause disease.<sup>105</sup> However, dead persons who are properly buried (the living-dead) are believed in Akan to cause diseases as well. They do so particularly to living family members who commit serious moral offences, or act against or fail to protect the interest of the family.<sup>106</sup>
- (iv) The concept of *ka* (soul) and *ka*-names (soul names) that were found in ancient Egyptian religion are remarkable points of comparison with the Akan. Not only is it held in Akan ontology of invisible beings that a person has '*kra*' (soul), but also that each Akan person bears a '*kra-din*' (soul name) depending on which day he or she is born.<sup>107</sup> See the following Asante example:

<u>Day</u>	<u>Male Kra-din</u>	<u>Female Kra-din</u>
Sunday	Kwasi	Akosua
Monday	Kwadwo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Kwabena	Abena
Wednesday	Kwaku	Akua
Thursday	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Kofi	Afua

- (v) Closely linked to the above, is the Egyptian conception that the soul never died, hence the notion of the ‘living soul’.<sup>108</sup> In Akan as well, the soul is described as *ōkra teasefo*, meaning ‘the living soul’.
- (vi) The idea in Egyptian thought that Kings never died<sup>109</sup> – at least, metaphysically – is also held in traditional Akan thought.<sup>110</sup>
- (vii) As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some physically dead Kings were in ancient Egypt deified. Those Kings were, according to Gardiner, associated with solar or celestial bodies.<sup>111</sup> Living Kings who were perceived as ‘their “living” terrestrial representatives’ were thus associated with heavenly bodies as well.<sup>112</sup> Similar conceptions of the King exist in Akan belief. Eva Meyerowitz’ research on the Bono (Akan) Kingdom of Ghana shows that the King was once regarded as ‘the son of the Moon Queenmother and incarnation of the moon-sky-fertility-god’. And, that ‘since the mid-fourteenth century the Kings have proclaimed themselves to be born of the Sun’.<sup>113</sup> Even though the switch from the moon to the sun is factually significant, the association of Kings with celestial bodies (or beings) is still worthy of note.
- (viii) Ancient Egyptians believed that spirits of the dead could revisit their earthly homes<sup>114</sup>; and, this belief is also held in traditional Akan culture.<sup>115</sup>
- (ix) Some living persons (particularly those deemed to be living immoral lives) were called ‘dead’ in Egyptian culture.<sup>116</sup> This conception of the person is found in the Akan notion of *teaseawuo* (literally, ‘dead while alive’). The Akan expression equally applies to immoral persons.



- (x) The practice in ancient Egypt of burying the dead with material objects<sup>117</sup> is also practiced by Akans today.<sup>118</sup> The belief in both cultures is that even as a spirit, the dead person will make use of them in his or her next life.
- (xi) In ancient Egypt, anytime Kings died, servants were ‘strangled and buried’ with them.<sup>119</sup> The practice of burying servants with the Kings had always been with the Akans until after independence when the penal code of Ghana outlawed it.<sup>120</sup> Kings were believed to require the services of the (spirits of the) servants in the spirit world.<sup>121</sup>

On the basis of the discussions so far carried out in this section, I submit that traditional Akan and, to some extent, black Africa do have cultural affinities with ancient Egypt. From the foregoing also, the issue of whether or not Akan eschatology and language espouse reincarnation originally or merely in derivative forms from ancient Egypt is not too difficult to answer. At this point, it is relevant to hark back to our position in chapter one that the idea of return (in human form) could not be absent in the thinking of the Egyptian priests, although the doctrine of reincarnation, as we have it in Akan religious thought today, had not been developed by them. But given the Egyptian origin of such concepts as the duality of persons, metamorphosis and, thus, the belief that living persons (specifically, the Pharaohs) could be incarnations of superior or revered spiritual persons who once lived as embodied persons on earth, it was to be expected that any philosophers or peoples who came into contact with and assimilated Egyptian philosophy would have theories of incarnation and return that were not radically different from the Egyptian ones.

In Akan ontology, it is not only Kings who, when they die, are revered – and considered powerful – but also any individual whose way of life and death qualifies him or her to be a living-dead. It could not therefore happen in Akan religious philosophy that living persons be incarnations of only Kings. Akan thinkers then extended the notion of return to cover any living-dead.<sup>122</sup> The idea of return of the living-dead in Akan philosophy is, though extensive than the Egyptian, probably derived from Egypt. As regards the other forms of reincarnation discussed in section 1.2. above, they are later developments probably initiated by the Akans themselves or are the result of borrowing by Akans from other black African cultures with whom they currently share those beliefs. But these forms of reincarnation are, to some extent, successful attempts at finding new grounds for the realization of the same Egyptian notion of return. The Akan doctrine of reincarnation is, strictly speaking, not the same as that of the Egyptian, yet the influence of the latter on the former is neither hidden nor unreal. The point about the Egyptian influence is made quite stronger by the survival of Egyptian eschatological concepts and expressions in the Akan language.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### RATIONALITY OF BELIEF IN REINCARNATION

I attempt, in this chapter, to evaluate the belief in reincarnation. I do so both in general terms and with specific reference to the African culture. The evaluation serves to determine how rational belief in reincarnation is. By 'rational', I mean that which is logically acceptable. Hence, finding out how rational reincarnation is, amounts to nothing more than seeking to know how logically acceptable belief in the doctrine is. The idea that a soul may return in the body of another person (reincarnation) is examined here within the following rubrics: the 'ancestral', *awomawuo* and the non-admissible returnees. Thus, the discussion centres on the core issues raised in our interpretation of the Akan concept of reincarnation. At the same time, the present discussion is, at various stages, allowed to take a general form if the need be.

#### 1.0. *'Ancestral' Return*

The notion of 'ancestral' return may be explained in two ways:

#### 1.1. Ordinary 'Ancestral' Return

In ordinary conceptions of 'ancestral' return, a living-dead is simply said to have completely returned (*ba bio*) in the body of a new-born baby. This conception is not what the real Akan

philosophers hold, and they appear to be right in rejecting this thesis for reasons I will shortly provide. The ordinary conception is the literal interpretation of Akan rebirth where the new-born is conceived of as the material re-emergence of the living-dead as such. In the ordinary sense, therefore, reincarnation is one of a total changing of a spirit into an embodied spirit of the new-born. Although the body is part of the ordinary man or woman's conception of the new person, that would not have been so if the idea of the spiritual identity of the 'returned' living-dead (who really is a soul) were maintained. One reason that accounts for this is the apparent suggestion in ordinary conceptions that the soul, like in many ancient philosophies, completely returns into a new body. But as Mbiti and Onyewuenyi observed, this does not indeed express the African philosophical position on rebirth. However, as a concept, such *bio ba* (reincarnation) cannot pass any test of logical scrutiny because many Akans who take reincarnation in this literal sense still cleave to certain traditional beliefs regarding survival that appear antithetical to the ordinary conception of reincarnation. An example is the belief in the continual existence of the living-dead in *asamando* (the spirit world). The belief that the living-dead, whether returned or not, maintain their identity and existence in the spirit world – never to leave that abode – makes the ordinary conception logically inconsistent. At best, one position can be affirmed at the cost of the other, viz. if the living-dead always exist in the spirit world, then, they cannot be deemed to have completely returned unto earth (*asaase so*) to inform new bodies at any time. The reverse is also true. But, as one would notice, the ordinary conception of 'ancestral' rebirth is ultimately not true because the option that the living-dead might completely leave *asamando* to be born does not hold in Akan thought.

It would appear a plausible interjection to make here that the taking up of the new body could be explained in terms of multilocation. For, it might be argued, the metaphysical nature of the

living-dead makes their presence in this and the spiritual worlds possible. But, the notion of multilocation cannot find space in Akan reincarnation. Akans believe that the destiny of each soul must be fulfilled; and that, the living-dead are beings believed to have already lived out their destinies and died at their ripe ages. Living a new earthly life in another body will almost certainly result in a life whose trajectory and detail are different and thus additional to the destiny originally given to the living-dead by God. But, given that there isn't any limit to the number of times a living-dead could 'reincarnate', postulating the notion of multilocation in Akan reincarnation would imply the possibility of multiple destinies, something which is inconceivable in Akan philosophy.

The ordinary conception of rebirth thus faces a great challenge in the fundamental belief in the continuous survival of the living-dead in *asamando*. This belief is also shown anytime libation is poured. In the act of libation, names of specific forebears can be mentioned and asked to bring favours to the living. And, when the occasion requires, spirits of the living-dead whose names cannot be mentioned – because of the impracticability of naming *every* living-dead of a tribe or clan – are still invited or appealed to through libation. They are simply grouped as *nananom nsamanfo* (meaning, the revered living-dead).

## 1.2. 'Ancestral' Return as a Connection between Souls

The interpretation of the Akan doctrine of reincarnation as a connection between souls is only meant to explain that the doctrine entails some metaphysical connection between the discarnate

person (the living-dead) and the soul of the embodied person born on earth. So, while the former is entirely spirit with (some human attributes), the latter is, in Akan thought, attached to matter. Since there is the belief in the existence and immortality of the soul, it has not been difficult for Akan thinkers to sense some connection between different souls – i.e., between the living-dead and the soul of the baby. For, they both belong to the same genre of entities. With regard to the concept of the immortality of the soul, one observation can also be made: that a rejection of that concept would be tantamount to a privation of Akan thinkers of several other positions that are cardinal to their conception of a person. These include belief in the existence of a community of the living-dead in *asamando*. Again, reincarnation, of any sort, would not be possible. In terms of reincarnation, our primary concern, the important question would be how we can make sense of the conception that some connection may exist between a living-dead and the soul of an embodied new-born baby. To this end, let us proceed with the following analysis.

Even though a spiritualist may be consulted upon the birth of a baby to determine which living-dead has returned, it still does not stop the elders of the baby's family from observing the physical features – including body movements, body marks, and cries – of the baby to confirm or deny the position of the spiritualist. Usually, confirmation is in the form of a match of the observed physical features with those of the once embodied person who is now a living-dead. In the absence of a trusted medicine man or spiritualist, therefore, the elders would depend on the observed features to name a child after a living-dead who once bore those earthly features. As the child grows, he or she would be expected to have the earthly dispositions of the living-dead. Nevertheless, it is instructive to note that the physical characteristics are not the primary means of identification at all. That is, it is not because the earthly person exhibits those characteristics that is why he or she is literally identified with the living-dead. Rather, it is because his or her

soul is believed to be metaphysically connected to the living-dead that is why those characteristics are expected to be borne by him or her in the first place. The metaphysical connection between the souls of the two persons seems to underlie, in reality, the people's expectations regarding the appearance of the dominant characteristics of the departed in the living. But, how and why the supposed connection comes to be established has not received proper, conceptual articulation in Akan thought.<sup>123</sup>

In spite of this conceptual lacuna, it would be correct to maintain that the question of the return of the living-dead in Akan thought is fundamentally a metaphysical one – viz. soul connection. Therefore, there cannot be a factual 'proof' of reincarnation as such, because the doctrine is only a metaphysical postulation.<sup>124</sup> It follows then, that no perceptible human being is, strictly speaking, reincarnated because that which 'reincarnates' – and the process of connecting the living-dead to the perceptible human being – is not a matter of perception. This notwithstanding, the term 'reincarnation' is sometimes used mistakenly in the description of bodily beings. By this comment, I have in mind the serially born babies, non-admissible returnees, and 'ancestral' returnees. The ascription of reincarnation to embodied persons, though more common in ordinary reincarnationist conceptions, is a major challenge to the teaching of the doctrine of reincarnation because it misleadingly makes the doctrine to require a physical proof; something which its proponents do not succeed in doing. For them to really succeed, they would have to show, for example, that a living-dead (who essentially is spirit) is the same as a new born baby. But this is not an easy task to perform because of the possible serious implications it might have in relation to life in both the past and future. For instance, how do we know that the entire earthly life of a living-dead belongs or will belong to the baby, and whether or not the living-dead would have lived or approved of the life to be lived by the baby? From close examination of traditional

Akan beliefs, however, it does not appear that the requirement for sameness – as applicable (in its entirety) to the earthly life of a past existent and the future life of a baby – arises at all. This is because the philosophical position on living-dead-rebirths is receptive of only a metaphysical connection between the living-dead and the soul of the baby. It is not ruled out, though, that the connection can have some influence on the earthly person. Since (i) the connection is not between the living-dead and the physical baby, and (ii) one cannot also explain why the earthly life of the soul (of a new-born baby) must be the life of a living-dead (who, in any case, is in *asamando*), reincarnation can really not be spoken of a physical person. The potential problem with the philosophical perspective would be if it is argued that the soul of the new-born is an extension of the soul of the living-dead. For, the idea of multilocation of the soul, when dragged into reincarnation, would imply the existence in Akan thought of the concept of multiple destinies which we have already rejected.

Another reason often cited for the belief that an earthly person is an incarnation of a living-dead is the phenomenon of memory claims. But it seems that this point too would not be enough to claim reincarnation. When children (or persons in general) are claimed to have returned on the basis of remembering distant events and past lives, it is often suggested that they were the very same persons who lived in the past or observed the events remembered. But, there are many alleged reincarnated persons who do not have any such memories.<sup>125</sup> In the Akan context, I have not yet come across anyone named *ababio* who remembers a past life.

Besides, there is even the problem of what a reincarnation-determining memory itself must entail. Conceptually, according to D.E. Harding,<sup>126</sup> a person's recollection of (part of) the life of another who lived in the past is possible, except that such recollection would amount to nothing



more than a display of clairvoyance and telepathy. He holds this view about recollection because of the conceptual possibility of what can be described in simple language as the unity of human consciousness.<sup>127</sup> He writes,

If [a proponent of reincarnation] told me that ultimately all consciousness is my consciousness, or that consciousness is ultimately indivisible, I would have no quarrel with it ... As for the claim that one can recall one's subhuman lives, what is to show that this isn't what it looks like – futile day-dreaming?<sup>128</sup>

Harding's idea of the 'ultimate indivisibility' of human consciousness appears to be a means of explaining or providing for the possibility of clairvoyance and telepathy. But the question would still be asked whether memory claims (described as, say, 'telepathic') could indeed issue in reincarnation. I must admit, to start with, that it is not quite easy to deny the theoretical possibility of a person's recall of some memories that were allegedly shared by someone else in the past. The problem really is, how – should that happen – we must explain and categorize it; and also, whether it would be enough to cause us to claim reincarnation. It must be noted that the recalling which is a metaphysical process falls within the context of belief, but the recalled events may not necessarily be metaphysical. On the basis of the latter, then, some reincarnation-rejectionists – especially, those who knew the departed – would understandably call for some physical confirmation if the present memory-based reincarnation claim is to be accepted.

But it is true of claims of memory-based reincarnation that, that which is presently remembering and the one whose memories are believed to be remembered are also conceived of as metaphysical. They are thought of in soul terms. Consequently, while the question of the souls (of dead persons and the 'reborn') is not subject to empirical proof, memory claims, as indicated above, sometimes has the tendency to take the doctrine of reincarnation outside its usual metaphysical zone.

In chapter six, I downplayed the prominent role often attributed to the soul in the thinking activities of the earthly person, although I explained that the independent soul is believed to think. I also noted there that thinking is inclusive of remembering, according to Cartesian philosophy. But, accepting for the sake of debate that recalling events (while on earth) is a function of the soul, there is still some difficulty in determining personal identity and reincarnation on the grounds of memory claims, instead of on the soul itself (for example). I take personal identity first. There is always a difficulty for one (or, as is often argued, for one's soul) to recall all of one's own earthly experiences – i.e. all experiences that, by virtue of their being one's, should find space in one's bundle of memories – let alone a dead person's memories. It follows, then, that the exact ontological identity of a person should not be discussed in terms of the content of memories, for there isn't really any set of complete memories by which an earthly person can always be identified. Rather, it must be discussed in connection with the entity that bears memories – such as soul, body, or both – and can be referred to as *the person* over time. The situation is not different with reincarnation either. Memory claims cannot be a basis for reincarnation because it is impossible to determine how many and which ones of a transitioned soul's earthly memories require to be recalled by an earthly 'soul' (or person) for there to be evidence of the former's return. Partial recall of a dead person's memories might very well be philosophically interesting, but since memories are of such nature that a 'soul' cannot fully recall them while on earth, they become, at best, inconclusive grounds for reincarnation and personal identity.

When a person dies, as indicated in chapter six, the *ōkra* and *sunsum* become a unity, and endure. And, since the former is conceptually passive and the latter active, together the resultant entity would not only be spiritual – as the two are in themselves – but also capable of acting. The

soul which the two still constitute, and in which the living-dead now essentially consist, would now have the capacity to affect. In Akan philosophy, it is held that the living-dead can spiritually affect the lives of the living, causing the latter to either flourish or suffer. It is also on the basis of the active capacity of the disembodied entity, it seems, that the connection between the living-dead and the soul of the new-born is deemed possible.

For any living person, Akan sages believe that *sunsum* is the basis of his or her personality.<sup>129</sup> Thus, a person's general dispositions in life are traced to his or her *sunsum*. It is no wonder that when a person is mentioned as the incarnation of a living-dead and named after the latter, many Akan thinkers expect the established connection between their two souls to show in the behaviour or character of the earthly person. This does not mean that *sunsum* is not believed to derive from God. In the context of the divine origin of *sunsum*, some room is still left for other factors – such as environmental, psychological, and even those unforeseen – to play some role in shaping a person's character. This is why, Akan thinkers would argue, two person's born of the same parents may not behave the same way. Hopefully, then, the suspected role of the living-dead could be counted among the factors just mentioned. In short, although *sunsum* – believed to be the basis of personality – derives from God, it is also normally thought that a living-dead could contribute to the way a person lives his or her life, or behaves. When it is believed that a warrior living-dead has connected to the soul of a new-born, for instance, the baby might be named *bediako* (lit. 'one who came to fight'). In consequence, some amount of pugnacity would be expected of the child as he or she matures.

Although it is not so clear from the Akan concept of rebirth how the connection between souls is established, we have enough information from the foregoing to appraise the concept. The belief

that a living-dead might connect with the soul of a living person is neither conceptually impossible nor irrational. It is even easier to understand or have a situation where an active spiritual entity affects another – namely, the ontic unity of *sunsum* plus *ōkra* affecting a living person's soul (whether or not some effect is felt physically by the person). However, the dynamics become quite different when the discussion moves into some areas of reincarnation. We can begin by reiterating the definition that reincarnation is the belief that a person could be born again after death. This belief, as noted in the preceding chapter, is held in Akan thought as well – as the name *ababio* seems to suggest. Yet, our analysis of Akan culture has revealed that what is really claimed by Akan proponents of 'ancestral' reincarnation is just some sort of connection between the soul of a living-dead and that of a human being on earth. From our position, therefore, the claim that the living-dead are reborn would be untenable, if by 'reborn' it is meant that the soul which a new-born baby has is that of a living-dead. For this view cannot be held without contradicting the Akan belief in either the nonmultiplicity of destiny or permanent ontological existence of the living-dead in *asamando*. 'Ancestral rebirth' only makes sense if it implies some sort of relation or even contact between the two souls – i.e., that of the living-dead and the earthly person. Although the idea of 'rebirth' of 'ancestors' is not supported by good argument and is irrational, it is, however, rich in ideas relevant to our understanding of aspects of the Akan concept of a person.

### 1.3. Personal Survival

The idea of personal survival in Akan thought is predicated on the belief that a person consists of not just body but soul as well. Upon death, the body decays but the soul is believed to move unto

another form of existence. The spiritual aspect, the soul, which comprises *sunsum* and *ōkra* continues to exist because of its origin. It is believed to originate from *Onyankopōn* (God) who is spirit by nature and also immutable. The argument is that the soul, like God, does not die. Moreover, the survived soul, whether or not it is in the form of a living-dead, is conceived of as an entity – similar also to the nature of God. Under no circumstance, however, is any survived soul believed to become one with or absorbed into the personality of God. A survived soul might, nonetheless, return to earth.

With regard to the Akan concept of rebirth, our interpretation of it has so far been aided very much by some understanding of the Akan concepts of personal identity and survival. For instance, we have come to the conclusion that persons are believed to survive death, and that the living-dead never leave *asamando* (the spirit world). But, fundamental to these positions is the belief in some sort of sameness of person in this and the next lives, although the individual loses the material body in the afterlife. This seems to be informed by the visions, activities and roles of human nature<sup>130</sup> which are attributed by Akan thinkers to the living-dead. For instance, when a living-dead is reported to have revealed him- or herself directly to certain members of the living family, that living-dead is seen in a human form. And, in the Akan context where the soul (and for that matter, the living-dead) is believed to be noncorporeal, and where a ‘substance’ view of a person is held, Mogobe Ramose’s observation regarding the immortality of the person, the ‘I’, makes a lot of sense.<sup>131</sup> According to him,

... once the ‘I’ crosses over to immortality, it is then referred to as an ‘it’ by some to indicate that it is now an object. However, African traditional thought tends to deny such objectification by ... referring to the deceased as ... that person who died. The persistent ascription of personhood to the deceased implies the recognition that somehow the person has not ceased to be a person, he or she continues to live ... [W]e can attribute life to a deceased person because ... the human body alone is not the same thing as personhood. This attribution of life to a deceased person in recognition of the belief that

personhood is much more and larger than the physical body is expressed in African traditional thought as the living-dead.<sup>132</sup>

The belief in traditional African thought, especially in Akan thought, that upon the death of the body a person continues to exist in the ontology of invisible beings makes apt Ramose's cautioning that the 'ascription of life to the deceased ... does not mean that the person is alive in the same way as it was before death.'<sup>133</sup> This ascription appeals to the Akan not only because the bearer of human life, the soul, is metaphysical and thus insulated from the mortal tendency of the body. But, it has also to do with the relay of presence from the departed. Events in the earthly community that are believed to be caused by the living-dead and, also, the availability of channels of interaction between the living-dead and the living, convince the Akan thinker that a person lives after death although in the world of invisible beings. Again, even though the post-humous being is regarded in Akan thought as a substance (i.e. *ōkra* plus *sunsum*), it (Akan thought) projects and is receptive of all the reasons given above by Ramose for the African belief in the living-dead in personal terms or as survived persons. If 'personness' depended solely on the body, the living-dead could not in any way be capable of appearing to the living, let alone engage in the rational act of communicating their wishes to the latter, for implementation.<sup>134</sup> And since, from this example, the living-dead is depicted as continuing the life of the person we once knew on earth, the actions and wishes of the living-dead are not regarded then, as coming from a source different or disjointed from the once earthly person. On this reasoning, it is quite understandable that the same person is referred to by Africans to indicate the one whose wishes and actions they are. Indeed,

... it makes sense to an African to state, in religious discourse, that I saw 'so and so' rather than I saw 'the spirit of so and so' in my dream or vision. But seeing 'so and so' in my dream or vision means having contact or communication with an inhabitant of the ontology of invisible beings, that is, an ancestor.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, in the Akan metaphysic of the afterlife where an ‘ancestor’ is not regarded as a mere spirit, but as a spiritual continuum of a person, his or her identity is distinctively ensconced in ‘personness’ than in spirituality. He or she is spirit, no doubt; but a personal spirit.

The African concept of survival must also not be confused at all with what pertains in some other philosophies, especially along the lines of resurrection taught by the Abrahamic faiths. It is on the basis of their notion of resurrection that the concept of personal survival has mostly come under philosophic attack. For instance, conceiving resurrection in terms of the raising of physical bodies from graves (by God),<sup>136</sup> Kai Nielsen rejects the concept as untrue since there is no God, in the first place, to perform any such action.<sup>137</sup> He then adds to bodily resurrection the Cartesian idea of the immortality of the soul, and classifies them as ‘unreasonable for the philosophical and scientifically sophisticated person’ to believe in.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, Jerry Irish argues that ‘for the scientifically well educated and philosophically sophisticated’, belief in ‘God and in the afterlife is unreasonable.’<sup>139</sup> Although the concept of God is central to the christian notion of the afterlife,<sup>140</sup> the claims made by Nielsen and Irish would be acceptable, as we shall soon see, to only some scientists. Some philosophers of religion have also had cause to dispute their interpretation of resurrection. John Hick, for instance, suggests that what Paul meant by resurrection in 1 Corinthians: 15 was the resurrection of ‘a spiritual body,’<sup>141</sup> not pure bodily resurrection.

In the light of the foregoing, the issues now seem to be those of ‘bodily resurrection’ and ‘spiritual-bodily resurrection’, and which of them best provides for the identification of a person after death. In relating the former to the question of personal identity, Terrence Penelhum wrote:

[If God resurrects a dead person from dust, that person is not] the very same person that died previously but merely a replica or simulacrum of him: for, since there is a time-gap between death and resurrection, during which the original body may very well have been destroyed altogether, the connecting link that would make it unambiguously the same person ... will have disappeared.<sup>142</sup>

Now, while Nielsen sees nothing incoherent and ‘conceptually puzzling’ about the ‘specks of dust’ of a person being used to generate the same person again,<sup>143</sup> Hick, sensing identity difficulties, argues that the notion of bodily resurrection is outmoded.<sup>144</sup> This is not to say that his preferred notion of survival of ‘spiritual body’ – which he also terms ‘soul’ – is unexceptionable either. We know, at least, that Aquinas disagreed with the interpretation of resurrection as contained in 1 Corinthians: 15, arguing rather that the soul is not the same as the person.<sup>145</sup> Some Christians even believe that the body is not different from the soul, and that the soul is ‘not immaterial, separate and distinct from the body’.<sup>146</sup> This means that not all who believe in God accept the notion of the soul – or some interpretation of it, at least. After all, ‘[m]ost contemporary [c]hristian apologetists’ deny the immortality of the soul.<sup>147</sup> In Akan thought, survival is not understood in terms of an apocalyptic bodily resurrection, neither is it the duty of *Onyankopōn* (God) to raise up the dead after death. The transition of the deceased (generally) to the afterlife is guaranteed. A smooth transition only needs to be facilitated by the proper performance of burial and funerary rites for the deceased. Thus, the Christian idea of the spontaneous resurrection of all dead persons to be caused in future by the supernatural action of God is absent in Akan thought.<sup>148</sup> What brings Hick closer to the traditional Akan thinker is his idea that the soul survives death. Even so, they seem to differ on whether the philosophical possibility of disembodied survival must only be in terms of ‘temporary disembodiment’<sup>149</sup> or ‘eternal disembodied survival’. While Hick would entertain the former, Akan thinkers postulate the latter.



In the general discussion of disembodied existence, however, different reasons have been adduced by philosophers why persons must in the least survive death. Consider the following examples:

(i) Nonsensory perception and other forms of influence at a distance, through which evidence supportive of the possibility and actuality of life after death can be obtained, can occur naturally ... [And, that the human soul] can be thought to have developed the unique capacity to survive apart from the biological body naturally, as a power that emerged in its evolutionary interaction with God.<sup>150</sup>

(ii) The seriousness of our endeavour to shape our lives according to ideals of truth, wisdom, love and compassion, and all that they entail in terms of the development of virtue, together with the sense of inadequacy in our actual achievement, warrant the presumption that a single life cannot be all that we are destined to have. To grant that would be a mockery of our moral existence.<sup>151</sup>

In the quotations above, the capacity for survival is suggested to be true of human beings. But, that which survives, the authors would also agree, is the soul.<sup>152</sup> The task for us now is to examine how reasonable it is to believe in the survival of the soul. In connection with (i) above, let me make a few observations. In recent years, some scientific studies on the human experience have tended to complement the metaphysic of the soul. Some of the studies have been in the areas of near-death experiences and those of persons who ‘mysteriously’ come back to life after being pronounced clinically dead.<sup>153</sup> If one wakes up a while after one has been declared clinically dead to relate experiences which one had supposedly had during the period of temporary death, the point seems to be that it was something other than the dead (biological) body which underwent those experiences. Many parapsychologists have also studied, in support of survival, what Paterson describes as the ‘impressive phenomena of mental mediumship’ and ‘apparitions of the dying’ and of the dead.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, some scholars believe that knowledge of the soul or spiritual being can be acquired through ‘sound spiritual exercises.’<sup>155</sup> Hence, on metaphysical, psychological and, to some extent, practical grounds, survival is deemed possible.

Regarding quotation (ii) above, a critical point to be made is how it differs from the Akan perspective. In Akan philosophy, a morally good life ensures that a person's soul enters *asamando* (as a living-dead). It also puts that living-dead in a good position to be named after. This is evident in the Akan saying *samanpa na yetono badin* (lit. 'we name a child after a good ghost'). Such a 'ghost' (in specific terms, a living-dead) does not return to earth to attain any further moral purity. The Akan argument, similar to Broad's,<sup>156</sup> appears to be that humans can only be relatively good, but cannot be morally perfect. Therefore, there is no need for a living-dead once regarded in the traditional society as good to return to earth for moral progression.

I understand the difficulty that a sceptic might have in accepting the claim regarding the survival of souls. After all, nothing on the physical body would lead him to the conclusion that a soul or the mind (of a person) survives death. And, even if the latter did, the sceptic might still question whether it could so persist without the body. The mind, to the sceptic, might as well relate to the human capacity for thought. Thus, the presence or absence of the mind would be expected in the quality or poverty of one's thoughts. Against this background, the question of survival becomes straightforwardly determinable. The sceptic might argue,

The weakness of the body and that of the mind in infancy are exactly proportioned; their vigour in manhood, their sympathetic disorder in sickness, their common gradual decay in old age. The step further seems unavoidable; their common dissolution in death. The last symptoms which the mind discovers, are disorder, weakness, insensibility, and stupidity; the forerunners of its annihilation.<sup>157</sup>

But questions can be raised about the correctness of the above view even if 'mind' were to be taken to mean 'mental capacity' or 'capacity for thought'. The fact that a person's bodily health or growth shares some features with his or her mental capacity at certain stages of life is not enough evidence that the mind itself undergoes the same levels of development. It could be that the sort of thoughts identified with the various stages of a person's life are somehow influenced

by the individual's physiological ability or competence to fully utilize his or her mental faculty (or to produce thoughts of different quality) at those stages. Again, in the sense that the soul is not seen as 'capacity for thought', the above usage of 'mind' cannot equate the mind to the soul. For, unlike the sceptic's 'mind', the soul is thought of as an entity. In any case, the sceptic's raising of doubts about the mental abilities of a person does not in any way suggest that no spiritual entity (or soul) exists, neither does it prove that the reality of the soul is necessarily contingent on the existence of the body.

In the Akan context where the soul is conceived of as an entity<sup>158</sup> – but not as a mental faculty (as Hume makes of the term 'soul') – belief in the survival of a person is expressed in terms of the immortality of the soul. Except in the case of 'collective immortality' – i.e. the stage where, according to Mbiti, the living-dead are no longer remembered by name and, thus, continue to live under the generic title of spirits – individuation in this and the next lives are seen as possible. The notion of 'collective immortality', nonetheless, would be plausible to the traditional Akan thinker because of the belief, primarily, that the soul, being a speck of God, does not perish. Consequently, souls (the living-dead) do not cease to exist just because their individual selves or earthly names are not remembered by the living.

But, outside the field of metaphysics, an objection might be raised why some beings whose individual identities and names we are not aware of could be believed to exist – even if 'collectively'? How then, it would be added, can we be sure of the rightness of any claims about the existence of such beings? This line of questioning may just be informed by the idea that in addressing the question of the existence of the soul (and thus, the living-dead) '[t]he sort of evidence that would be appropriate is empirical'.<sup>159</sup> In this respect, the evidence or answer we are likely to provide would not meet the expectations of the questioner. This is because

‘collective immortality’ is essentially a metaphysical concept. This notwithstanding, the empirically-inclined should still be able to assess the reasonability of the metaphysical doctrine if, for instance, he pays some attention to the conceptual possibility of it. If the criticism is, and I believe it largely is not, that something is false or nonexistent just because no empiricist ‘knows’ it to be otherwise, then, the argument looks more like *ad ignorantiam* to me. The doctrine of survival (and thus, ‘collective immortality’) could make sense even on logical grounds because the seeming lack of empirical evidence for the affirmation of survival does not ‘create a strong presumption in favour of the negative’.<sup>160</sup>

Although the soul is essentially a metaphysical concept, Amit Goswami claims that it can be scientifically explained. It must be noted, however, that his understanding of the concept is, in some respects, consistent with the Cartesian soul. In Cartesianism, and according to Goswami, the soul is consciousness. The latter explains consciousness in relation to quantum physics by which ‘objects [specifically, in their submicroscopic forms] exist as a superimposition of possibilities’ actualized only by microscopic observation.<sup>161</sup> This new science (quantum theory), according to him, promotes the idea that ‘consciousness (variously called Spirit, God, Godhead, Ain Sof, Tao, Brahman, ... in popular and spiritual traditions), not matter, is the ground of all being.’<sup>162</sup> His reason for making this remark is interesting: that

[b]efore quantum physics was properly understood, a materialist metaphysics prevailed in science – elementary particles make atoms, atoms make molecules, molecules make cells including neurons, neurons make the brain, and brain makes consciousness ... [But this] upward causation is only capable of producing material waves of possibility for (nonmaterial) consciousness to choose from, and consciousness has the ultimate power, called downward causation, to create manifest reality by freely choosing among the possibilities offered. Consciousness no longer is seen as brain epiphenomenon but as the ground of being, in which all material possibilities, including the brain, are embedded.<sup>163</sup>

But it might be observed that Goswami uses ‘consciousness’ in two different senses. In the previous quotation, he appears to use it in reference to God, but in the latter he implies also the presence of human awareness or thought. Although some religions, especially Eastern ones, seem to equate the two forms of consciousness – or expect them to merge ultimately<sup>164</sup> – it can safely be envisaged that not many scientists would endorse that equation. This is because the scientific study of consciousness, in relation to the brain, can only be a question of the latter. Such a study is usually aimed at understanding how humans come to be aware of things (including themselves), and whether consciousness can be studied independently of the brain. And, if it can, how does one of them lead us to the understanding, or deeper understanding, of the other.<sup>165</sup> To make the brain-consciousness (-awareness) studies one of brain-God would not only seem odd to many scientists but would also require that proving the existence of God be one of the major concerns of scientists. But this does not appear to be the case. This is because God is inseparable from metaphysical considerations, and thus incapable of scientific proof. On the contrary, the relationship between the quality of the brain and the human capacity for awareness lends itself to scientific exploration. A scientist can, however, believe in God on the basis of faith (or, sometimes, of reason), not science.<sup>166</sup> Cartesians labeled human consciousness ‘soul’ and regarded it as a substance, making it seem as if anyone who believes in a discarnate entity (soul) must necessarily believe that human awareness or capacity for thought (consciousness) is an entity, a Cartesian-styled soul-entity. The Akan thinker, as we noted in chapter six, would not subscribe to the latter because *ōkra* is conscious but is not consciousness. Therefore, in the light of the distinction we have made between the two forms of consciousness, Goswami’s discussion of both as one and as scientific is inappropriate. Furthermore, the notion that both types serve as the basis of scientific reality or as the scientist’s ‘ground of all being’ appears an exaggeration.

In his attempt to justify belief in the afterlife through what he called ‘a science of reincarnation,’ he considers ‘the important question of how the soul looked upon as structureless quantum possibilities remembers each of its individualized incarnate life experiences cumulatively, but not to worry’. The ‘worry’ here is about the fear of death. The ‘scientific’ explanation – which he regards as ‘convincing and satisfying’ because it makes the soul to ‘shed its Cartesian, dualistic paradoxes’ – is taken from Indian thought. The soul, presented by him as the quantum or atomic basis of the person (but not as the spiritual counterpart of the person), is what the solution is in. ‘In India,’ he suggests, ‘the wise say that liberation brings back the memory of past incarnations and banishes the fear of death.’<sup>167</sup> The weakness of this argument is not only the apparent lack of science in the notion of ‘liberation’ but also it is possible for someone who does not even believe in rebirth to not fear death. Such a person could have ‘convincing and satisfying’ reasons to believe that a life that ends with the present one, can be lived fully and, thus, accept death gracefully.

## 2.0 *The Awomawuo Phenomenon*

Since the babies who fall under the *awomawuo* conception often die as infants anytime they are born (or reborn), they do not themselves engage in any actions that could be subjected to moral and rational evaluation. Therefore, their return cannot be caused by their actions – or, really, their lack of moral action – on earth. Again, the idea of serial return of a baby would not be possible if by ‘return’ the embodied baby is what a proponent of reincarnation has in mind. This

is because of our earlier position that no two embodied persons could be the same. Surprisingly, though, embodied babies are very often said to have returned. However, since the metaphysical soul is usually what the core identity of an alleged returned baby is believed to be dependent upon, the discussion must really shift to one about the return of souls. In the context of *awomawuo* therefore, the soul of baby 'A' is believed to have completely returned in the body of baby 'B'. The idea that baby 'B' is really known metaphysically, seems to inform the belief that 'B' can be reached and better handled metaphysically. It is believed, for instance, that the metaphysical identification of (the soul of) 'B' as the same as (that of) 'A' enables 'B' to be prevented through the performance of rituals from dying too soon. But the idea that baby 'B', when identified as a reincarnated person, could successfully be stopped from dying 'prematurely' does not seem always to be the case. A woman, for example, who undergoes rites intended to prevent her from giving birth again to a child who allegedly died earlier on, might still experience *awomawuo*.

Although such relatively rare occurrences do not seem to shake the people's faith in the efficacy of those rites, to us, such instances still raise questions about the proper identification of the alleged returned baby and, also, whether issues concerning the return of babies are completely understood. Could it be that such babies died because they were really not 'returned' babies and as such could not respond to the rites? Or that babies who are meant to die cannot be ritually saved? The danger in responding 'yes' to the latter question, a move that might be necessitated by the failed cases, is that it would imply that rituals might not have been the reason why some 'returned' babies stayed on earth. For, they were bound to live. But if, as is often explained, the failure of the rites is due to some 'unknown' factors, then, it simply means that there is no complete knowledge of the *awomawuo* phenomenon or of the ways to handle alleged returned

babies. In the following discussion, it will become evident that the idea of return of persons is one that is not completely understood and, sometimes, not well presented in Akan thought. The lack of complete understanding, however, is not in itself a terrible thing because it is not given to humans to know everything. The problem really is how we account for what we do or do not know. It is not just the *awomawuo* phenomenon that has been difficult to account for, but also the third type of rebirth which I discuss below.

### 3.0. *The Non-Admissibles*

In the preceding chapter, we stated how persons who are not admitted after death to *asamando* (henceforth referred to as ‘the non-admissibles’) are believed to be reborn in order to have a ‘more regular term of life’. In reality, however, their souls (which bear their destinies) are thought to inhabit new bodies. In this sense, the soul is not portrayed to have any connection to another external soul, for the body acquires its soul here (on earth) and completely. Apart from its philosophical relevance, this belief also serves as a consolation to the family of the non-admissible soul that a destiny-fulfilling life has not eluded the deceased.<sup>168</sup> In spite of this benefit, it cannot be argued that the belief in the return of the non-admissibles is free from any philosophical difficulties. In this regard, one can cite the crucial issue of justifying how the soul of an embodied moral agent would be same as that of a dead person. In what way can earthly life of the former be claimed to be a continuation or, problematic still, a repetition of the earthly life of the latter? How reasonable is it for one to claim that an earthly person ‘A’ (although they



really mean the soul) is *the same* as another person, say ‘B’, in another period of earthly life? Can the current bearer of the soul be affected by the nature of actions performed by the previous bearer? These are legitimate questions the answers to which have often been similar but quite unsatisfactory.

In some African<sup>169</sup> and other cultures (especially Eastern ones) where it is believed that persons who are not admitted to the yonder world are reborn, the impression is given that what one does on earth does influence one’s return and status in the next life.<sup>170</sup> In this regard, reincarnation is a way of making sense of the current condition in which a person finds him- or herself. For, the person would come to the understanding that the current life experiences are the consequences of his or her deeds in a previous life.<sup>171</sup> But when it comes to the justification of why such a ‘returned’ person is indeed the person who existed in the past, the evidence often provided would be regarded by some as empirical or near-empirical. This takes the form of claims of people who are under hypnoses (as done by Edgar Cayce), alleged memories of people who describe details of their past existence (as Ian Stevenson observes of some children),<sup>172</sup> and even personal impressions drawn from observed life situations. For instance, Friedrich Rittelmeyer claimed knowledge of rebirth on the basis of his own impressions which, he suggested, had been tested a hundred times by him. He did not tell how, though.<sup>173</sup> But, it is a well-known fact about statements regarding observed situations that they are falsifiable and, thus, inconclusive.<sup>174</sup> Thus, depending upon the method of testing, Rittelmeyer’s impressions too could be subjective. In the field of observation, therefore, it is highly improbable that enough evidence could be found to support the claim that a person is, indeed, the same person who once lived on earth.

When action-induced reincarnation is interpreted in certain ways, it becomes as well purely irrational. The Buddhist conception is an example. To be able to comprehend the Buddhist situation, it is important, first, to remind ourselves of the centrality of ‘self’ or ‘soul’ to the notions of personal survival and reincarnation. The idea that a person survives death is based on the belief that a person has a soul or a core self which is both immaterial and immutable. And, that when the soul or self informs a new body upon the death of the original body, the result is a person same as the one who originally bore the soul. Reincarnation is, therefore, not only person-related, but also suggests the unalterability of the identity of a person in different lives. The Buddhist concept of rebirth, however, is neither categorically personal, nor maintains the identity of the person across lives. According to Francis Cook,

The relationship between the person who dies and the person who is subsequently born is ‘neither identical nor different’. [In the first place, it is not identical because] the man who dies and the dog who is born are not the same ‘person’. The dog has none of those markers of personhood that characterised the dead man: memory, objectives, attitudes, tastes, emotions, and so on. The man and the dog are two different beings. They are not the same self.<sup>175</sup>

One would have expected that the sort of relationship mentioned in Cook’s first statement would be justified or explained in terms of a relationship between two human beings (dead and alive). Instead, he introduced a dog even though the issue is about the identity of persons. In some respect, the introduction of the dog could have been understood, especially if the belief was that the dog was a ‘person’ bearing some ‘markers of personhood’ associated with the specific dead person. But, as Cook made us aware, that was not the case. Another way to make venial the dog’s introduction could have been if the dog bore the soul of the dead person, but Buddhists do not believe in the existence of the soul. It is, therefore, questionable why the dog should be introduced at all in the explanation of the rebirth of a person.

Cook did not see anything wrong with either the inclusion of animals in matters respecting reincarnation or with a dog taking the place of a person. That is why he brought in the dog in a bid to show why a living and a dead person might not be the same. Given that his comments (and, therefore, philosophical questions raised) about the dog could have been raised if a returned living person was mentioned, there was no need not to mention or use a living person in the justification of the relationship. Nonetheless, if for some unclear reason it is deemed acceptable to discuss a living person in terms of a pig, it would be consistent the more with our earlier position that it is highly improbable for a (living) person to be the same person as the dead.

In some other respects, the Buddhist doctrine and Cook's ideas do not seem clear at all. Encouraged by the doctrine of the 'Middle Way (*madhyama-pratipad*)' in accordance with which Buddhists are not to deny or affirm certain concepts – such as the existence of persons – Cook promotes a view which is contrary to our position that an embodied (living) person cannot be the same as another who lived in the past. This is because he does not argue that both persons are different. This is what we extract from the statement that the two are 'neither identical nor different'. With a cursory look, one may find nothing disturbing about his statement. On logical grounds, however, there are serious problems with it. The claim that something is neither A nor B is subject to three possible interpretations. First, it could mean that the thing is not A and not B, but something else, say, C. Secondly, it could mean that A and B are only part of what the thing is, and therefore the thing does not consist in either. This situation would apply if one were asked whether the ostensive definition of a human being should be in terms of either a man or woman. For, there are human hermaphrodites. Thirdly, it could mean that the thing does not only assume some properties of A and B, but also the remaining properties of both A and B would not apply to the thing. This is common in the field of mathematics, especially in Venn diagrammes

where an ‘intersection’ is defined as containing qualities that are common between distinct groups, at the exclusion of qualities (of the same groups) that are not.

The Buddhist doctrine that a (living) person is ‘neither identical nor different’ from the dead person does not really fall into any of the categories above. It only bears a superficial resemblance to the third. It pretends to imply that only some amount of the qualities (or predicates) awarded to the subject – i.e. the living and dead person – really apply to the subject. But that cannot be correct.<sup>176</sup> In the third category, it is presumed that there is a class of properties that generally constitute either A or B, except that the intersection does not admit of some. But the subject and predicate terms in the Buddhist statement do not yield a similar interpretation as noted of the relation between ‘intersection’ and the predicate terms A and B. To comprehend what I mean by this, let us treat separately the simple statements of which the Buddhist statement is made up. First, to state that *a living person is not identical (or same) as a dead person* is only to state that the two persons are different. [For the purpose of analysis, the preceding comment is re-written as *the living person and the dead person are different.*] It is not to suggest that some properties inherent in the concept of the predicate term ‘difference’ are not possessed by the persons. I wonder how meaningful it would be if someone were to insist that the different persons still did not share in some (residual) differentiating properties. It follows that unlike the explanation or definition of ‘intersection’ where some properties of the predicates A and B do not apply, there is no idea of residual properties in the concept of ‘difference’ (with respect to the subject term ‘the living and the dead person’). Therefore, the concept of ‘difference’ cannot make sense when it is taken to mean anything other than its real and only meaning, namely, the absence of sameness. On the same grounds as above, the other half of the Buddhist claim that *the two persons are not different*, only means that they are the same.

Consequently, the position that the (living) person is ‘neither identical nor different’ from the dead person, amounts to this: that they are different and the same. This position is quite irrational, because it is logically impossible for two things to be and not be the same.

There are other issues about the Buddhist concept of rebirth that need to be examined as well.

With regard to the dog discussed by Cook in personal terms, he writes:

[The] life of the dead man – meaning his unresolved craving, primarily – serves as a cause for the arising of the new being, the dog. However, the craving which survives the man’s death ... is not personal in the form of memories, attitudes, tastes, and so on ... The fact that craving is perpetuated through many lives is simply a recognition of what seems like a fact, which is that will or volition does outlive us to create later consequences.<sup>177</sup>

It is quite confusing how a philosophy which denies the existence of a person or self<sup>178</sup> can claim to have a concept of rebirth or explain how persons come about or how the craving of (dead) persons ‘create later consequences’, or even how a person’s *karmic* actions in the past life influence his or her life today.<sup>179</sup> All that interpretations such as Cook’s do is to plunge Buddhist teaching into contradictions because the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth are of such nature that they cannot be taught or made sense of without affirming somehow the existence of the self or person. But Buddhism attempts to teach reincarnation and *karma* even though it apparently does not affirm the existence of persons or selves. In any case, it does not succeed in the denial of persons. For instance, in the last sentence of his quotation above, Cook mentions a person’s craving creating ‘later consequences’. The question is consequences for whom? And, if the consequences are not for my person, then, why should I be the subject to worry about the *karmic* effect of my present actions? What, in any case, is the nature of the consequence?

To take the last question first, it appears the consequences of craving, driven by the Buddhist teaching of *karma*, are rebirth. In the quotation above, craving resulted in the dog, a fate which

followers of the religion are advised to avoid. But if, according to Cook, the survived craving is impersonal and the dog does not share in my personal attributes and life – because (i) I do not exist, and (ii) my personal fears, hopes, and memories do not extend to the dog – then, why should I be concerned about sub-human rebirth? I do not think there is even much for Cook to construe the birth of the dog as rebirth, since (i) there is nothing the dog has which is personal and, most importantly, concern my person, (ii) the craving would be derived from my person only if I (or a person) exists, and (iii) the re-emergence of a human being in the form of an animal is not the proper meaning of the term ‘reincarnation’.<sup>180</sup>

As if to acknowledge the weakness of the Buddhist doctrine of ‘not-self’, Cook finally admits: ‘even if I am a self, I had better proceeded through life as if not one’.<sup>181</sup> Beneath this comment is a less-stressed, important position of Buddhism which is rather taught with the wrong words. That position, though, does not make the religion’s teaching of reincarnation any easier. What Buddhism appears to teach is that it is possible to act, and one must so act, with some disregard for his or her individual interest. Self-interest, it is believed, induces craving which ties the individual to this earth and condemns him or her to rebirth. But it is one thing to play down self-interest, and another to argue that the self or person does not exist. In most reincarnationist teachings the ‘self’ or ‘person’ which is reborn in human or non-human form is the soul. But the Buddhist does not mean this because he denies the existence of the soul. What or who then is the person who leaves behind some cravings upon death? A real option to the concept of the soul (which, nonetheless, is unsatisfactory) is the physical person. There is indeed enough reason for the Buddhist to know the existence of this person because he or she is, for instance, quite aware that only persons can understand and live by the religious principles which he or she propagates. As per this view, the Buddhist can only pretend, as Cook admits, that he or she is not a person. It

would also be inconsistent with this view to argue that ‘person’ and ‘self’ are just nominal realities, like ‘army’ and ‘city’.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, the existence of the person (at least, the physical person) is unconsciously confirmed in the Buddhist idea of the earthly ‘craving-bearer’. Accordingly, the nominality of persons is more in tune with the Buddhist position regarding the metaphysic of the soul, but not the physical person whom Cook perceives as such. But if Cook’s is still accepted in some Buddhist circles, then, the religion’s position would be confusing at best.

### 3.1. African and Buddhist Non-Admissibles

African religious thought shares a few features with Buddhist philosophy. Such features include the belief in reincarnation and moral responsibility. For instance, Buddhism, as explained above, teaches reincarnation, a doctrine that is quite present in most African cultures. Both religious philosophies also share in the belief that some persons may not be admitted to the spiritual world and are, thus, reborn. I do not mean by this, however, that their conceptions of a ‘person’ are equally valid. In both philosophies, also, the idea that a person might find him- or herself in a new form of existence determined by the sort of life lived previously on earth is seen. In Akan thought, for instance, a survived soul may become a living-dead in *asamando* who is either reborn or not. In Buddhist teaching, one may be born lower or higher than one’s previous status depending on the nature of one’s previous deeds.

In terms of detail, however, these religious systems seem to differ significantly in the two identified features. Regarding reincarnation, Akan thinkers do not believe in the return of

persons in sub-human forms, but the reverse is true of Buddhism. Indeed, the Akan position is not different from the belief in most African cultures respecting sub-human return. The notable exception, though, is Yoruba culture where a conception similar to the Buddhist is held.

In the Akan context, moreover, reincarnation is believed to take the form of the return of a living-dead and through the serial rebirth of babies, but these forms of return do not occupy central positions in Buddhist teachings of reincarnation. Moral responsibility is the main determinant of reincarnation in the latter philosophy. This determinant, nonetheless, generates further variances between the philosophies. For instance, *karmic* actions of any individual at all, not just morally good members of society, are believed in the Buddhist thought to induce return. Also, since babies are quite *amoral*, it is difficult to conceive how Buddhism, unlike Akan religion, might support their return, unless it can be explained that any such baby was once an adult.

Furthermore, the living-dead are in Akan thought not believed to come back from *asamando* for moral progression, but Buddhism allows for the possibility of spiritual progression for persons who lived relatively good lives in successive incarnations. Finally, Akan non-admissibles return to earth only because it is believed that their lives were cut short, but Buddhist non-admissibles are believed to reincarnate as a result of their past immoral lifestyles. The kind of reincarnation suggested in the latter case is such that the 'persons' return in lower statuses. This makes it conceivable that those who are not admissible to *asamando* might qualify for a rather higher status reincarnation in the Buddhist context. For instance, if the persons died prematurely but were known to have lived relatively good moral lives. This point shows that although the term 'non-admissibles' used as a rubric in our discussion of African concept of reincarnation might



have a Buddhist interpretation or connection, the term does not mean the same in the two religious philosophies.

## CONCLUSION

The dissertation did set out to achieve three main objectives: first, to clarify and understand the concept of reincarnation generally; secondly, to explore the concept from the African point of view; and finally, to examine the rationality of the concept of reincarnation. In an attempt to meet the first aim, reincarnation was discussed in the historical sense in part one, and followed in part two by an analysis of the concept itself. In part two, reincarnation was discussed alongside such kindred concepts as rebirth, metempsychosis and transmigration. While noting the subtle differences among the three latter concepts, it was established that only rebirth – not the others – meant the same as reincarnation. With regard to the second and third objectives, they were as well attended to. That is, the doctrine of reincarnation was found to be existent in African thought, but it was argued that belief in reincarnation was irrational (though insightful in some respects).

### *A Look at the Chapters*

In part one, some historical account of the concept of reincarnation was given. It was shown how the concept existed or could have been held in the ancient cultures of Egypt (chapter one), Greece (chapter two), India (chapter three), China (chapter four) and the Inca (chapter five). These chapters, in the least, showed that the concept was not only old, but also somehow pluriversal. The elaborate manner in which the Egyptian conceptions of life, death, the afterlife and reincarnation were discussed was necessitated by Egypt's indelible connection with cultures of contemporary Africa (i.e. sub-Saharan or black Africa). The attention to Egypt, then, was

deserving given that the latter is the sense in which the term 'Africa' was used in the title of this dissertation. That being the case, the argument in chapter one that ancient Egypt was black, just as the inhabitants of the present-day sub-Saharan Africa, made the discussion of ancient Egypt in particular an indispensable subject for this dissertation. Another interesting thing discussed in that chapter was the influence in doctrine and philosophy which ancient Egypt had on other ancient cultures, especially Greece.

Even though part two deals with the question of 'what reincarnation means', our knowledge of that question was facilitated greatly by a thorough prior discussion of the problem of personal identity. Indeed, without the understanding of what personal identity depended upon, it would have been impossible at all to conceive how anybody could come up with a doctrine of survival. In spite of the broadness of the question of personal identity, the dissertation attempted to group the views examined under just two main headings. These were the 'ontological' and 'normative' conceptions of personal identity. While the former concerned the entitative meaning of personal identity, the latter was moral. The discussion of these conceptions, however, together with their critique were done essentially from within the context of African philosophy of mind. Thus, it brought into focus the views of such modern African philosophers as Wiredu, Gyekye, and Gbadegesin, and subjected them to some serious scrutiny.

Part three began with a discussion of the meaning of reincarnation. The idea that a person can take on new human flesh after his or her death and live again on earth, was observed to be the real meaning of reincarnation. And, it is on the basis of that meaning that discussions regarding reincarnation were carried out throughout the dissertation. This part was dedicated to the doctrine of reincarnation in traditional African thought. Three ways in which the doctrine is expressed in

Akan – and for that matter African – culture were identified: (i) the ordinary sense, (ii) the serial return of a dead baby, and (iii) the return of the living-dead. It was concluded, therefore, that there is belief in reincarnation in African thought.

The belief in reincarnation was then analyzed both generally and with specific reference to the African perspective. While not sharing the idea that the notion of ‘the identity of a disembodied person’ could not be rendered intelligible,<sup>1</sup> the argument was still made that reincarnation could not be a rational doctrine. But, as we noticed, the discussion of reincarnation offered us some useful insights into the African concept of personal identity, and to some extent, moral responsibility.

### *Some Findings*

The following findings were made: that

- (i) Ancient Egypt which was black African, believed in or, at least, had the idea of rebirth, contrary to the views of James Breasted and Mark Albrecht.
- (ii) The long held view among some African religionists (e.g. J.S. Mbiti and E.B. Idowu) and philosophers (e.g. I.C. Onyewuenyi) that there is no concept of reincarnation in African thought was false.

(iii) Major problems concerning the interpretation of the African concept of personal identity are due to the failure of many African philosophers to make a distinction between 'ontological' and 'normative' conceptions of personal identity.

## NOTES:

### *Introduction*

1. Sri Aurobindo (1999: 234). The christian concept of spiritual rebirth in a lifetime isn't what 'born again' here means.
2. Onyewuenyi, 1996: 20.
3. In this dissertation, the term 'ancestors' stands for John Mbiti's 'the living-dead', and the two expressions are used interchangeably. They refer to the spirits of the dead believed to exist in the African thought ontology of invisible beings.
4. Mbiti, 1998: 83.

## PART ONE

1. Sri Aurobindo, "The Reincarnating Soul" in Christensen (1999, p. 234). The christian concept of spiritual rebirth in a lifetime isn't what 'born again' here means. I recognize that the doctrine of reincarnation is 'variously called transmigration of souls, metempsychosis, rebirth...' see Ninian Smart in P. Edwards (1967:122). It is not the concern of this chapter to do a detailed analysis of the term 'reincarnation' itself. That is to be done in chapter seven. I have thus tried to reduce ambiguity in this chapter by avoiding as much as possible the use of the related terminologies, without losing the essence of the points made herein.
2. In the course of the discussion, issues about soul especially about how it serves as a basis for belief in immortality will come up. But I do not intend to examine here the rationality of the postulation of the soul and the philosophical propriety of its being used as a justification for the belief in reincarnation. This will be taken up in chapter nine.

### *Chapter One*

3. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1996).
4. By 'the biological definition of life' I mean the condition(s) under which a biologist will consider the human being as alive. Whatever would be covered by this sense of life cannot be understood in isolation from the fact that life itself, even among scientists, is a 'complex phenomenon.' This complexity can be observed in two fronts: in terms of the ultimate origin and development of living organisms in general, and of the nature and origin of human life. Science thrives on evidence and mechanical justification of theory

(behind facts), yet these principles cannot be observed to the letter when accounting for the ultimate origin of organic life. This has led some scientists to describe life as simply puzzling. Sir James Jeans is an example. In his cosmogony, he indicates ‘the surprising manner in which, so far as science can at present inform us, we came into being’ (E. Gilson, 1949:124). That, our planets are ejected fragments of tidal (or mountainous) waves that once formed on the surface of the sun. This happened when a second star came very close to the sun ‘some two thousand million years ago.’ There was then an explosion of the mountainous waves, spreading their fragments into space. But, the ‘fragments of the sun gradually cooled; “in course of time, we know not how, when, or why, one of these cooling fragments gave birth to life.” Hence, the emergence of a stream of life which has culminated in man ...’ (Gilson, *ibid*: 124). What is quite evident here is the admission that life is not a simple matter to understand. In terms of human life, the situation is not different. Many would reduce human life to the ‘substance’ which is first formed at the moment of conception. But a more penetrating look at what that sort of life entails reveals a bit more – such as genes, the 46 chromosomes on which the genes are arranged, the fact that each ‘chromosome contains thousands of genes,’ and that, all of the genes ‘are present in the nucleus of every cell of the body’ (Robert Ornstein, 1985: 70-71) – Ornstein is therefore right with the observation that ‘the most dazzling biological achievement in the universe begins when one of hundreds of millions of male sperm finds and unites with the female egg.’ He describes this as ‘the first moment of a new life’ (*ibid*: 83). Moreover, just as Sir Jeans encountered, this sense of life also faces epistemological complexities, especially as the probing gets deeper. For instance, Ornstein proceeds with the explanation of the ‘new life’ this way. That, ‘that single cell quickly divides, and the new cells divide again and again to form the brain, organs, muscles, skin, and bones ... No one knows precisely how this happens – why some cells become “brain” and others become “toes” or “tongue”’ (*ibid*: 83). What is surprising about the scientists though is how some could rely on incomplete knowledge to suggest that ‘the universe and human existence in it are without a purpose and therefore devoid of meaning’ (K.E. Baier, 1981: 525). Back to the issue of definition. The biologist, J.A. Thomson, admits that the concept of life can only be illustrated because life ‘cannot be defined in terms of anything else.’ On the basis of this, he provides some two illustrations the first of which, nonetheless, appears circular. They are that (i) ‘the word “life” is often used to denote the living creature’s complete sequence of activities and experiences throughout the period during which it is alive,’ and (ii) it is ‘a short word for what is almost always going on in connexion with living creatures ... life consists of action and reaction between organism and environment ... [Therefore], life is a relation.’ By his understanding of the second, a living person must be ‘acting upon their environment and reacting to it’ (see his 2003: 1). While it seems true that a living person would normally act upon and react to the environment, it is not clear from his definition whether a person is dead when he fails to perform one of the two roles. For instance, since acting upon the environment could be counted as a conscious activity, one wonders if comatose and, to a lesser extent, quadriplegia patients would be considered not to be alive? My answer is ‘no’. To my mind, the organs of a body and their (biological) functioning, contrasted with their being consciously used by the organism to function, constitute the material living of

the organism as such. Consequently, a person would be biologically dead when none of his organs functions.

5. A. H. Gardiner, 2003: 22.
6. Ibid: 19-20.
7. Ibid: 24.
8. Joseph Osei, (1995:18); John Palo (1999: 4) also sees Ptah as a creator-God.
9. Palo, *ibid*: 1-2. Shabaka made some old papyri that he found to be carved into the stone above mentioned. The stone is currently exhibit no. 498 at the British Museum, according to Palo. He was a Nubian black Pharaoh who ruled between 716 and 698 BC.
10. J. Osei, *ibid*.
11. J. H. Breasted *The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest* quoted in Gardiner, *ibid*.
12. Gardiner, *ibid*: 21-22. My square brackets.
13. Aristotle's discussion of the question of vitality is of much interest to me given his philosophic indebtedness to ancient Egyptian thought – see, for example, James' *Stolen Legacy*. [I admit though that it would be unfair to judge the past in terms of the present and, thus, capricious to credit the Egyptians with every thought advanced by Aristotle. He is of particular concern also because some ideas attributed to him would help in the explanation and understanding of the meaning of 'life'.] As previously discussed, that which permeated all living things, the principle of life, was conceived of in Egyptian thought in metaphysical terms. It was also seen as the basis for the capacity for action possessed by such beings. Aristotle did not deviate much from this when he defined life as 'the capacity for self-sustenance, growth, and decay' (2000: 'On the Soul', Bk. II. i). The capacity for these activities was conceived by him to be internal to some (natural) bodies and as directly associated with the functioning of their souls. Again, he defined soul as 'the first actuality of a natural body potentially possessing life; and such will be any body which possesses organs' (*ibid*). This 'actualization', in any case, suggests that there is some (apparent metaphysical) movement related to the body; especially between its states of potentiality and actuality, i.e., in actualizing its potentiality. This movement can, at least, be identified with the second of the four types of movement that he outlines – viz. '(1) change of position, (2) change of state, (3) decay and (4) growth' [*ibid*: Bk. I. iii]. In Bk. V Chapter II of his *The Physics*, however, Aristotle merges these four into three kinds of movement; that is, '(a) alteration of *quality*, (b) change of *quantity*, namely, growth and shrinkage, and (c) change of *place*, locomotion' (see also the Introduction: 4). The difference is clearly as a result of the collapsing of the third and fourth of the former set of interpretations into 'b' in the latter. Again, since in his understanding it is impossible for a living creature not to have a soul, 'life' becomes somewhat synonymous with 'soul'. In this respect, his definition of soul above 'is hardly satisfactory ... since it contains the term to be defined, "soul" being virtually equivalent to "life" or "vital principle"' (2000: Intro. to 'On the Soul'). Also, his 'approach' to the



question of life ‘is more metaphysical and the treatment more abstract than might have been expected from a biologist’ (ibid). The very notion of ‘actuality’ also confirms this. For instance, he writes of the soul, the ‘first actuality’ of the body, as ‘a substance in the sense of formula; *i.e.*, the essence of such-and-such a body’ (‘On the Soul’: Bk. II, i). By this, he means that the soul, not matter, is that which makes a human being what he is. My interpretation of him is correct because the term ‘substance’ was ‘at that age not interpreted in the purely material sense which we frequently ascribe to it today’ (Heisenberg, 1962:60). It can be maintained therefore that Aristotle, like the Egyptians, discussed life and motion in relation to the metaphysic of the soul. He adds, however, that a living creature at a given time would be in motion or rest ‘by some act of mind or will’ (ibid: Bk. I. iii). He did not regard locomotion and perception as distinctive features of living things. He cited plants, which are living things, as devoid of these (ibid: Bk. I. v). Although a distinction is made between change (*metabolé*) and movement (*kinesis*), the latter which seems a bit restricted means ‘a passing which occurs between two positive terms – a starting point and a goal.’ These two terms he ‘called “contraries” (or opposites), to distinguish them from the “contradictories” positive and negative (“being” and “not-being”), which take their place in the case of “coming-to-be” and “perishing”.’ The internal capacities of natural objects to move, to live, is emphasized by the contrary terms which, he argues, ‘do not themselves suffer “movement”; there is always a subject – the thing moved – which passes from one to the other’ (*The Physics*: Bk. V, Intro.). Quite similar to the Egyptian understanding of motion as connected to the metaphysic of life principle was Thales’ belief that (magnesian) stones contained soul or life because they *moved* metals (2000: ‘On the Soul,’ Bk. I, iii) and Democritus’ statement that soul atoms or fire atoms were in all animate things (George James, 1954: 66).

14. The question of the ultimate material cause of all things, or of the nature of ‘the smallest, indivisible ultimate building blocks of matter’ (atoms) preoccupied many ancient Greek thinkers. But their speculations often lapsed into metaphysics. Democritus, for instance, suggested that atoms were incapable of explaining ‘the properties of matter – color, smell, taste – [if they] themselves have these properties.’ His atom, Werner Heisenberg understands, ‘is thus a rather abstract piece of matter’ (W. Heisenberg, 1962:59, 69). Indeed, Democritus described the atom as both ‘invisible’ and ‘indestructible’; and that, ‘atoms combine themselves for the formation of the organic and inorganic worlds’ (George James, 1954: 65). Heisenberg argues that during the ‘revival of science’ in the seventeenth century, the term ‘atom’ was wrongly conceived in purely materialistic terms, and that modern science actually reduces matter to what are called ‘elementary particles’. These particles, which include the neutron, proton, electron and meson have – like Democritus’ atoms – no taste, color or smell. Moreover, ‘the concepts of geometry and kinematics, like shape or motion in space, cannot be applied to [them] consistently.’ The elementary particle is essentially energy; and thus, is only ‘a possibility for being or a tendency for being.’ This quality, according to Heisenberg, makes it ‘far more abstract than the atom of the Greeks’ (ibid: 69, 70). There are other forms of reality that are not also visible to the human eye, save somehow with microscopic aid. An example is the earliest form of life at the moment of (human) conception; it is just ‘a speck so small it is hardly visible under a microscope’ (Ornstein, 1985:83).

15. E. Gilson criticized attempts by some scholars to argue for the existence of or faith in God on scientific grounds. H. A. Compton, a scientist, had sought to justify belief in God but only because 'the hypothesis of God' is like any '“working hypotheses” which a scientist provisionally accepts as true' although 'none of them can be proved.' However, Gilson notices a difference between hypotheses whose acceptance or rejection can change 'our scientific interpretation of observable facts' and those that cannot. Belonging to the former category are 'the notion evolution' and 'the principle of conservation of energy', while the existence or nonexistence of God belongs to the latter. The latter is not scientific. For example, if order is assumed to be in the world, he notes, 'God cannot be posited as a *scientific* explanation for the presence of design in the world; it is a *metaphysical* one.' Therefore, 'God has not to be posited as a *scientific probability* but a *metaphysical necessity*.' (1949:141 fn). Similarly, in considering the philosophy of Religion within the context of humanism, Karl Rahner argues that the former 'becomes a study of human reality insofar as man is a hearer of the divine word' (Collins, 1967: 487). But 'man,' according to him, could not have received any revelation (or divine word) if he was not already 'a finite spirit ordered by his nature' for that purpose (ibid fn). This is because, and most importantly, his 'spiritual nature' then becomes consistent and in harmony with the essential metaphysical nature of God. The metaphysical nature of God is as important to Rahner as is the nature of 'man'. This is to the extent that he defines the philosophy of religion as 'a personalist metaphysics of man' (ibid: 487). His idea is simply that 'man' is 'the one who is penetratingly heedful in his history to the word of the free God. A metaphysical anthropology is at its goal, at that moment when it has been conceived as the metaphysics of an obediencial potency for the revelation of the supermundane God' (ibid, fn).
16. Life is discussed in its original sense, for 'life, once being started, was continued by the physical methods of production ... but the gods, especially the sun-god Rē, were nonetheless the cause and manifestation of life.' Life was symbolized by what looks like the capital letter 'T' with a small circle at the top-middle. The *crux ansata*, which is the symbol I just described, was called *ánkh* by the Egyptians, the same way that they called 'life'. At some point, however, life took on a theological meaning when 'moral life was the only true life.' For instance, the immoral person, regarded also as a fool, is described as one who 'dies living everyday.' The word '*mwt*' did translate as 'to die' (Gardiner, ibid: 20-24).
17. H. R. Hall, 2003: 458.
18. J. Osei, ibid:19.
19. H. R. Hall, ibid.
20. Osei, ibid:19.
21. Hall, ibid.
22. Osei, ibid, 19-20.

23. The continual existence of the body through mummification is artificial and preservational, and cannot be regarded as survival.
24. The word ‘ancestral’ as used here relates to the forbears who are believed to live in the yonder world; ‘ancestral worship’, thus, refers to the worship of such existents. ‘Ancestor’ is an ambiguous term and philosophically not quite appropriate, so unless I am discussing a point made with or about it by someone else – in which case it will carry the meaning just given – I do not intend to use it. Osei (ibid:19) suggests that there was ‘ancestral worship’ among the Egyptians but Hall (ibid: 456) admits only the ‘erection of gravestone’ to keep the person’s name alive on earth – which of course, does not amount to worship – while Gardiner (ibid: 23) rejects completely the idea of ‘ancestor worship’ among them.
25. A dead woman’s prayer (requests) from the yonder world to her living husband showed that she needed peace, and felt pain and thirst (Gardiner, ibid: 22); and some items that the dead were buried with included mats, food and weapons (Hall, ibid: 459). They were meant for the use of the person in the afterlife to accomplish goals similar to those for which they were used on earth.
26. Visit <http://www.crystalinks.com/reincarnation.html> (p.1); **accessed on 4/30/2009.**
27. Osei, ibid: 20.
28. See ‘Reincarnation’ at <http://www.themystica.com/mystical/articles/r/reincarnation.html>; **accessed on 4/30/2009.**
29. J. Palo, ‘The Mystic Gifts from Ancient Egypt’ (1999:3). He refers to Lurker’s *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*. Visit [www.crcsite.org/egypt.htm](http://www.crcsite.org/egypt.htm); **accessed on 4/30/2009.**
30. *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*.
31. Osiris was not only the king of the dead or of the underworld (duat) and ‘god of the dead’ (Hall, ibid: 459) but was believed to judge the dead with the help of some 42 others (Kamath, 2008: 80; Hall, ibid: 462). The absorption into Osiris’ personality, Hall (ibid: 459) rightly observes, made ‘ancestral worship’ impossible.
32. Ibid, p.80-81.
33. See ‘A Short History of Reincarnation Teachings’ (p. 1-2) at <http://www.ccel.us/reincarnation.chap3.html> **accessed on 4/30/2009.**
34. Such spiritual beings were believed to dwell in the tomb and underworld. It was also sometimes held that they became stars in the sky (Gardiner, ibid: 22). But the issue becomes metaphysical eventually because the perceptible stars were not the spirits *per se* but contained the spirits of the dead.
35. Hall, ibid: 459.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid: 458. The philosophical implications of that re-union, I am unable to tackle now.
38. Hall, ibid: 459.
39. Gardiner, ibid: 23.

40. A *ka*-name is one that ‘relate to the vital essence’ of a person – see I. M. Oderberg ‘Light from Ancient Egypt’ (p.1) at [www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/reincar/re-imo2.htm](http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/reincar/re-imo2.htm) **accessed on** 4/30.2009. He refers to Murray (1949: 211).
41. When some kings were referred to as ‘good gods,’ that, I do not think was to suggest that they were not born by humans; rather, they appeared to say that the kings were representations of some deities.
42. Hegel 1956: 91-99. For Irele’s words, see Hountondji, 1983:11.
43. See ‘Africa: Roman’ in *Encyclopedia Americana*.
44. See p. 132-133 of *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*.
45. James, 1954: 159-160.
46. James, *ibid*: 125.
47. *Ibid*: 126-7.
48. Martin Bernal, ‘Black Athena’ in Harding (1993: 47-48).
49. *Ibid*: 48.
50. See p. 300 of *The Encyclopedia Americana*. Egyptian control also reached Libya and, to the south, Kush (Nubia) and Aksum.
51. James, 1954: 9-10. Confirmation of Greek contact with ancient Egypt is also found in H. Lauer: that ‘Plato, Eudoxus and Aristotle had lived in Egypt. Both Archimedes and Euclid were known to study in Alexandria (roughly 300 and 250 BC respectively). Before them, Thales (624-565 BC) did not *invent* his theorems, but rather generalized on the work of Egyptians. Proclus and Herodotus, 5<sup>th</sup> century BC both described the work of their teachers, who were priests they had met in Egypt. Pythagoras lived a long time at Heliopolis, and Democritus spent five years in Egypt’ (2004: 265).
52. James, *ibid*: 19.
53. See p. 130 of *The World Book of Encyclopedia*.
54. Kleban Levine, 1986: 9. For the year in the paragraph when islam got to Egypt, see *The Encyclopedia Americana* p. 302.
55. Cited in Osei, *ibid*: 31-32.
56. James, 1954: 160.
57. See *Oxford Atlas of World History*. The Egyptians also moved into the continent ‘as far as the Congo basin in search of raw materials’ (see p. 131 of *Everyman’s Encyclopedia*).
58. Mazrui (1986: 23). He wonders if the name did not have a Semitic origin as well.

## Chapter Two

59. Cornford, 1957:161.
60. Guthrie, 1975, Vol. IV: 249. He states elsewhere that the Orphic doctrine was an improvement and alteration of the idea earlier expressed by Hesiod that the spirits of heroes, especially of those that he regarded as ‘men of the Golden race,’ would become ‘good *daemons* ... dwelling on earth, guardians of mortal men, who watch over righteous and evil deeds...’ (Vol. II: 246). Hesiod’s view, however, contrasts with the Homeric

eschatology which painted no exciting picture about the afterlife, that the dead were in a 'shadowy existence in a dim underworld, in [dark] places where even the gods abhor' (A.M. Mair 2003: 29).

61. J. Burnet, 1950: 31.
62. Empedocles attributes the fall not only to bloodshed but also to meat-eating of any kind – see Kirk and Raven, 1957:351.
63. Guthrie, Vol. II: 265.
64. Burnet, *ibid*.
65. The idea had already been expressed by Homer that the soul (or what he called the breath-soul) did survive death in Hades – Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 9.
66. Burnet, *ibid*: 43.
67. Hamilton and Cairns, 1961: xx.
68. Anaxagoras (Freeman, 1949:274) belongs to the former group while Pythagoras and, later, Empedocles advised against eating certain foods, beans in particular (Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 224), because of the said affinity (Guthrie Vol. II: 250). This injunction, according to Guthrie, could also be seen in some Orphic writings. Unlike the problem with beans, Empedocles' injunction on the eating of laurel leaves (Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 224) was put down to the laurel being the tree of Apollo (Freeman, *ibid*: 201).
69. It was believed that the soul of the Orphic saint existed before birth and survived death (Burnet, *ibid*: 31). When Heraclitus criticized Dianysus (and by extension, its followers) for encouraging indulgence, his reason was this: 'indulgence is death to the soul' (Freeman, *ibid*: 121). Now, it is tempting to take his statement as pointing to the mortality of the soul. He did not imply that. Given his idea that the soul naturally drifted up toward the substrate 'Fire' – which he associated life with – as contrasted with moist which drew humans down to it through indulgence, the bodily (p.123-4), it becomes understandable to say that indulgence is death because it is a drawback, a hampering of the soul's movement toward life (Fire), a denial of some life and by implication, bringing some death to the soul. Indulgence did not bring absolute death to the soul as such.
70. Freeman, *ibid*: 182.
71. George James, 1954: 65. Atom, 'that which is' (*to on*) was distinguished by him from 'that which is not' (*to mē on*); 'In death,' he argued, 'the personality disappears, the senses also disappear; but the atoms live on for ever. The heavier atoms descend to the earth: but the soul atoms, which are composed of fire, ascend to the celestial regions, whence they came' (*ibid*: 66).
72. Freeman, *ibid*: 124; square brackets mine. He condemned earlier religious teachers in Greece for pretending to possess knowledge about the afterlife, and threatened them with Hell fire (p.121). The problem with him has to do with his subsequent claim – which significantly relates to what I described earlier as a 'transcendental' view – that 'To the Godhead, everything is fair, good and just; it is only human beings who find some things wrong, others right. Beauty, pleasure, virtue, everything seen through moral eyes has this relativity' (p.124). If everything is indeed good, and every action subject to moral description is, in essence, good in the sight of the Godhead, one wonders how the same being would logically be interested in casting the earlier religious teachers – whom for their lack of real knowledge he (Heraclitus) described as foolish and harmful – into Hell.

Heraclitus would make sense to me only if there is no difference between Heaven and Hell, or that those who do what is 'good' are eligible to dwell in Hell too.

73. Ibid, Vol. II: 252.
74. Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 224.
75. Burnet, *ibid*: 31.
76. Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 223.
77. Drawing from Heracleides Ponticus, Freeman notes that Pythagoras (or rather, his soul) had previously existed in the bodies of Aethalides the son of Hermes, Euphorbus the Trojan, Hermotimus the prophet of Clazomenae, and Pyrrhos a Delian fisherman (p.78).
78. Guthrie, Vol. II: 250; see also Freeman *ibid*: 201.
79. Empedocles says of Pythagoras that he could vividly remember things that occurred 10 or 20 generations earlier (Burnet, *ibid*: 43). Guthrie says this in another way, that Pythagoras 'saw easily every single thing that is, in ten, yea and twenty lives' when he slipped deep into his mind (Vol. II: 251). This seems to be the process through which he (Pythagoras) came to conclude that he was the son of Hermes. Hermes – whom Freeman (*ibid*: 81fn) identifies as the Egyptian Thot – was incidentally associated with the discovery of number and writing. And, when Empedocles described him as a man of 'surpassing knowledge' and 'master of all manner of skills', he might have also had in mind Pythagoras' claim to have recognized the voice of his departed friend in the howls of a dog that was being beaten. His claim to know his friend even in the body of a dog was, however, mocked and described as extravagant by Xenophanes (Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 181, 222). Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* espoused in the *Meno* suggests the immortality of the soul.
80. Freeman, *ibid*: 182.
81. See Bk. x, 609-10 where he says that things are destroyed by their specific evils: the body's evil being 'the accretion of desires' and the soul's is moral evil (or what he described as the denial of the soul's true being). But, since in his view the soul cannot be destroyed by vice, the soul must be immortal.
82. I have consciously written the name of the religion with a small letter at the beginning – just as I will later do for islam – 'in order to; (a) overcome computer negative discrimination which automatically insists on the capital letter c for christianity but does not do so with regard to islam; (b) express my support for Wole Soyinka's argument for the equality of all religions (see his 2004a).
83. Burnet, *ibid*: 31.
84. Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 354. The spirit of the quote is also captured in Guthrie (Vol. II: 251). It is not clear though whether Empedocles thought that his lifestyle or social status at that time was because he had reached the final stage of his incarnations, or rather it was because of the so-called final incarnation stage he had reached that is why he occupied certain important positions in society. For instance, being himself a prophet, bard and a physician, he is known to have said – see Guthrie, Vol. II: 250-251 – that those in the threshold of apotheosis are 'incarnated in the highest form of humanity,' and such persons, interestingly, are 'prophets, bards, physicians and princes.'
85. Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 352.
86. Freeman, *ibid*: 200.
87. See his Vol. II: 253.

88. *Gorgias* 523e; it is also cited in Conford 1945: 351fn. Meadows is the place in the underworld where souls ‘encamped like pilgrims at a festival’ (*The Republic* bk. x, 614).
89. Er was a man who lost his life in a battle. After placing him on the funeral pyre, he resurrected and narrated his experiences in the ‘land of the dead’ (see bk. x, 614).

### Chapter Three

90. The Vedas consist of the Rig-Veda, Atharva-Veda, Sama-Veda and Yajur-Veda. They were believed to have been composed between 13<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC; the Brahmanas in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (Ernest Valea at [www.comparativereligion.com/reincarnation.html](http://www.comparativereligion.com/reincarnation.html) p.2,3 **accessed on** 4/30/2009), the Upanishads between 8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; and, since reincarnation especially in the Gita ‘reached a state of common acceptance’ in about the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC [according to Swami Agehananda Bharati (in Mark Albrecht at <http://www.ccel.us/reincarnation.chap3.html> p. 2 **accessed on** 4/30/2009)], the Gita which did not predate the Upanishads could not have been composed later than 300BC.
91. Farquhar’s *Crown of Hinduism* (1913: 66) is cited by H. A. Rose 2003: 34.
92. Rose, *ibid*: 34. At the time when the Upanishads were composed, the soul was thought of as being of the size of the thumb, residing in the heart (*ibid*). See also A. C.B. Swami Prabhupāda, 1979:76.
93. Ath. Veda 18.2,14 cited in Valea, *ibid*.
94. Valea (*ibid*) quotes *Rig Veda* 7.104, 3-7. The law of *karma* is explained in the next paragraph.
95. Albrecht, *ibid*, cites both. Valea mentions the notion of second death in the Brahmanas.
96. In the former quote, Zaehner makes reference to *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (6.2.15-16) in Albrecht. In the latter, Rose (*ibid*: 35) quotes *Kausītaka Brahmana Upanishad* and concludes that all souls go through the moon (or what he calls ‘the gate of heaven’).
97. Raju, 1971:52-53. Mīmamsā, literally meaning enquiry or examination, was a school of philosophy formed originally to explain the Vedas.
98. Quoted in Valea, *ibid*: 3.
99. Sri Aurobindo in Kamath, 2008: 68 - 70.
100. Raynor Johnson, 1957: 31. Vedanta is the philosophy of the identity of the atman and Brahman espoused in the Upanishads. In the Vedanta, salvation is conceived of in two ways. To the Advaita school, it is achieved when there is the awareness that the soul has been eternally ‘absorbed into the perfect peace and happiness,’ when the immortal soul becomes part of the only existent, Brahman. But for the Dvaita school, it is ‘spending eternity in a *loka* (spirit world, heaven) in the blessed company of the supreme being – that is, Krishna or Vishnu for the Vaishnavas, Shiva for the Shaivites (visit <http://www.crystalinks.com/reincarnation.html> p.2 **accessed on** 4/30/2009).
101. Kamath, *ibid*: 38-40.
102. Rose, *ibid*: 35. See also S. Radhakrishnan’s views on *nirvana* in Kamath (*ibid*).
103. In the *Majjhima Nikaya* he said ‘I have not elucidated that the world is eternal, and I have not elucidated that the world is not eternal. I have not elucidated that the saint exists after death, and I have not elucidated that the saint does not exist after death. I have

not elucidated that the saint both exists and does not exist after death.’ Albrecht (ibid: 6) takes the quote from Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston eds. *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery* (1977, N.Y.: Warner Books, p.61).

104. A.C.B. Swami Prabhupāda, 1979: 50.
105. Edward Conze, 1959: 18-19. Even though later in the *Bardo Thodol* (also referred to as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*), some form of return of a person to this world is mentioned, it still does not clear up the issue of the actual and personal status of the survived element. That which remains after death is described almost confusedly as being void on one hand, and capable of perception and emotion on the other. It gives encouragement to Buddhists, as it attempts to allay fears about Yama who is believed to produce some apparent terrifying scenes in the afterlife: ‘Do not feel terror! You have a mental body made of instincts; even if it is killed or dismembered, it cannot die! Since in fact you are a natural form of voidness, anger at being injured is unnecessary! The Yama Lords of Death are but arisen from the natural energy of your own awareness and really lack all substantiality. Voidness cannot injure voidness!’ (*Bardo Thodol*, 12, quoted in Valea ‘Reincarnation in Buddhism’; ibid). The *Bardo Thodol* contains information on ‘what happens from the moment a man dies to the time he is reborn’ (Kamath, ibid: 53).
106. M. Granet, 1975: 135-6, 137.

#### *Chapter Four*

107. J. D. Ball, 2003: 14. He refers to the *Chinese Classics* Hongkong, 1861, p. 72.
108. Granet, ibid: 51-52.
109. Granet, ibid: 52.
110. P. J. Maclagan, 1926: 168.
111. Maclagan (ibid) mentions such foreign ideas as retribution, heaven and hell, and transmigration .
112. Ibid: 14. J. A. Elliott (1955:29) also mentions the three souls, one each residing in the grave, ancestral tablet and heaven.
113. Alfred Doebelin, 1942: 13.
114. Ball, ibid: 14.
115. Tao in the Tao Teh King is the object of Taoist worship. Lao-tse, the founder of Taoism, believes that ‘the world of things’ comes from the substance of the impersonal Tao (see Maclagan, ibid: 74-6).
116. Maclagan, ibid: 86.
117. He described life and death as being like links in a chain, and compared earthly human life with an inn – H.A. Giles *Chuang Tzu* quoted in Ball, ibid.

#### *Chapter Five*

118. M. Smith and K. Schreiber 2006: 17.
119. J. Huchet and B. Greenberg 2010: 2847.
120. Tarmo Kulmar <http://folklore.ee/folklore/vol12/inca.htm/pdf/pdf/inca.pdf>



12/17/2011

121. W. Corliss 2002:144.
122. S. Guillén 2004:149.
123. Ibid: abstract.
124. T. Kulmar, *ibid*. In some Inca traditions, the first Inca king, Manco Capac came from Tiahuanaco (*ibid*). Some legends however make Manco Capac and Mama Oello Huaco the first male and female children of the Sun to be sent down by the latter to the neighbourhood of Lake Titicaca. They were then guided to settle at Cuzco which also became the capital of the Inca Empire (W. Prescott, 1847: 6)].
125. T. Kulmar at <http://www.folklore.ee/Folklore/vol23/incastate.pdf> p. 29-30, 12/17/2011; the Machu Picchu aspect is confirmed in Arthur Lubow 2007: 1.
126. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*. 1994: 227. T. Kulmar also makes this point, see <http://folklore.ee/folklore/vol12/inca.htm/pdf/pdf/inca>. Pdf 12/17/2011.
127. *Macmillan Dictionary of Religion* 1994: 120.
128. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*. 1994: 227. Some scholars on ancient Peruvian history have also identified roughly the following historical periods: The Initial Period (1800-900 BC); the Early Horizon (approx. 900-200 BC) which is ‘traditionally defined as the period when artistic influences from the site of Chavín de Huantár in the Peruvian Highlands spread across much of central and northern Peru’; the Early Intermediate Period (ca. 200 BC-600AD); the Middle Horizon (600-1000AD) which ‘saw the rise of two powerful states in South America – Tiwanaku [Tiahuanaco] in the south highlands and Huari, whose capital was located in central Peru’; the Late Intermediate Period (1000-1476 AD) which started ‘the collapse of the Huari and Tiwanaku [Tiahuanaco] states and ends with the rapid expansion of the Inca Empire in the century before the Spanish conquest of Peru’; and the Late Horizon (1476-1532 AD) which was ‘the period of Inca expansion, ending with the Spanish conquest’ – see P. Crabtree and D. Campana 2001: 392-403, my square brackets.
129. See E. Bowden 2001: 5-6.
130. Garcilaso de la Vega, *ibid*: 84. This author is a descendant of the royal Incas as shown in his full name, Garcilaso de la Vega El Inca.
131. E. Bowden 2001: 7, Garcilaso de la Vega 1966: 84.
132. That, the soul left because it ‘could not sleep’ (Garcilaso de la Vega, *ibid*: 86).
133. A. E. Crawley 2003: 9.
134. The shaman is defined as ‘the connoisseur of phytotherapy, who combines elements of botany, knowledge of herbs, toxicology with religious and ritual elements based on magic, ancestral beliefs and often superstition’ – see V. de Feo [http://www.samorini.it/doc1/alt\\_aut/ad/defeo2.pdf](http://www.samorini.it/doc1/alt_aut/ad/defeo2.pdf) 12/17/2011
135. V. de Feo 2003: 251, my sq bra. In modern shamanic practices, the San Pedro cactus – i.e. the hallucinogenic drink made from the San Pedro plants *trichocereus pachanoi* and *trichocereus peruvianus* is what, when taken, induces the state of trance in which spiritual diagnosis and healing take place.
136. Prescott *ibid*: 29.
137. S. Guillén 2004: 148.
138. *Ibid*: 144.

139. Guillén (ibid: 148) even suggests that since the bodies of children, for example, were not offered food items during burial, it cannot be argued that there was any ‘interest in the well-being of the mummy, or any interest in the “soul” of the person as reflected by its mummy’.
140. Such scholars include Guillén ibid: 144 and B. Glass-Coffin 2010: 71. Citing Ramirez, Glass-Coffin adds that ‘the “official” religion of the Incas was kinship based, so that the sun, moon, planets, the Inca himself, and even the provincial leaders known collectively as *curacas*, were all related by descent, and by the animating energy which they shared’ - Ramirez, S. 2005: 65-69.
141. Father Cobo 1990: 42.
142. Guillén ibid: 155.
143. Ibid: 141.
144. Ibid: 144.
145. Prescott, ibid: 10. In Peruvian history Manco Capac and the sister-wife Mama Oello Huaco were believed to be the first ancestors of the Inca monarchy.
146. T. Kulmar at <http://www.folklore.ee/Folklore/vol23/incastate.pdf> p.34.  
12/17/2011
147. T. Kulmar at <http://folklore.ee/folklore/vol12/inca.htm/pdf/pdf/inca.pdf>  
12/17/2011
148. T. Kulmar <http://www.folklore.ee/Folklore/vol23/incastate.pdf> p. 25. 12/17/2011
149. T. Kulmar <http://folklore.ee/folklore/vol12/inca.htm/pdf/pdf/inca.pdf>  
12/17/2011
150. T. Kulmar, ibid.
151. R. Owens 1963: 22.
152. J. Forest 2007: 469.
153. Garcilaso de la Vega, ibid: 84-85.
154. Warren Mathews 2010: 31, and Prescott ibid: 29.
155. I. Stevenson 1974: 216 fn2.
156. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Karma*, 2010: 119.
157. F. Cobo ibid :19. Cobo’s view is also accepted by A. Mills and R. Slobodin, 1994: 19.
158. Belief in reincarnation was, likewise, held among other major American cultures such as the Aztecs whose reign in the region of Mexico ended in 1519. One of the major reasons why the Aztecs prohibited unwarranted human killing was that it prevented reincarnation (Arnold C. Vento 1995: 11).
159. See p. 91 of H. Collingwood’s *Harry Escombe: A Tale of Adventure in Peru*.  
12/15/2011

160. C. Buck 1986: 2. Viracocha here refers most probably to the king or his son already mentioned above.
161. M. D'Andrea 2007: 10-11.
162. A. Henman 2009: 4.

### *Conclusion*

163. See Kirk and Raven, *ibid*: 224; Freeman, *ibid*: 78. Related to these is Burnet, *ibid*: 43.
164. Gardiner, *ibid*: 22.
165. Cornford, 1950: 24-5.

## PART TWO

### *Chapter Six*

1. Gyekye, 1992: 109-110.
2. See Gbadegesin's 2004: 63
3. Lee Brown, 2004: 168. Another problem, according to Brown, about the merger is that it makes difficult 'knowing that an individual is a person'. For 'there is no obvious way of knowing an individual's destiny or whether the destiny is being pursued' (*ibid*).Gbadegesin apparently showed some awareness of the two types of person earlier in his 2002:175.
4. Adeofe Leke 2004: 69-70. Gbadegesin sometimes gives the 'makeup' of 'a human person' as *ori* (head), *okan* (heart) and *emi* (soul) as constituents (*ibid*: 53). The first two are understood in supernatural terms as well.
5. Teffo Lebisa and Abraham Roux, 2002: 170-171.
6. They claim to be contrasting the Western and African perspectives on personhood. This is particularly interesting given the fact that they admit 'the stratification of the person has received a lot of attention in African metaphysical thinking.' But this stratification, as per the issues they cite, is basically ontological.
7. N. K. Dzobo 1992: 123-124.
8. J.B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944; also 1968) provides us with his core ideas on the Akan concept of a person. Although he generally holds a bipartite conception of a person, he presents a somewhat controversial view on the nature of *sunsum* (spirit) which he draws into the physical realm (p. 115, 116, especially). His reasons for doing so, however, set him apart from the more recent Gyekye. I have written this chapter in a way that it eases itself into the points of dispute between Danquah and Gyekye, thereby avoiding any temptation to make the next section of this chapter repetitive. For Gyekye's affirmation of Akan dualism, see his 1995: 94.

9. Gyekye, 1995: 98.
10. The mind-body problem consists of three main difficulties resulting from the argument made by dualists; that there is complete difference and independence of mind from body. The three, which Quinton (1973: 319) identifies as epistemological, logical and causal problems are, respectively, about (i) how a soliloquistic mind could know other minds, (ii) whether and how the mind distinguishes from mental states, and (iii) the 'apparent causal influence of mental events on bodily ones' and vice versa. The first problem deserves some attention because it is the one 'which has been most influential in undermining dualism' in contemporary philosophy of mind (Quinton, *ibid*: 321). I recognize, as Cosmas Badasu (2005: 103-119) does, that the concept of Otherness (especially, respecting the self-other relation) found space in the philosophy of Plato who, undoubtedly, was a dualist. But while traditional dualism does not have convincing arguments to account for other minds, behaviourism does not seem to provide absolutely certain knowledge of other minds either. This is not to say that the behaviourist account is not a lot more satisfactory. For instance, with the awareness that whatever occurs to his body results in some feeling which in turn influences his behaviour, J.S. Mill (1889: 243-244) draws the analogy that other minds (or persons) must exist because he perceives their bodies and overt behaviours. Why is he sure of other bodies and behaviours?: both of them are similar to his. He has drawn an analogy because, he remarks, 'in doing so, I conform to the rules of experimental enquiry'. Similarly, Stuart Hampshire (1952, also in Norman Malcolm 1962: 153), like Wittgenstein (1962: 89-90) claims knowledge of the behaviours of others by generalizing from his. But the problem with the behaviourist account is that overt behaviour may not necessarily communicate the actual internal feeling of the observed person.
11. Gyekye 1996: 13.
12. Gyekye 1995: 88.
13. *Ibid*: 98.
14. In the *Phaedo* 65c, it is argued that it is in reasoning that any reality is known or determined by the soul. But that which does the reasoning is the same soul, and that the soul performs best its reasoning role when it is most by itself. See *Meditation II* for Descartes' position.
15. The dualist idea that the mind, not the body, is 'the person' is partly due to what they see as the ever-changing nature of the appearances of the latter. Even some scientists, such as Ornstein, admit 'From conception to adulthood you change form so drastically and so often that you almost seem to be a series of very different organisms' (Ornstein, 1985: 83).
16. See his 2002: 53-54.
17. Gyekye, 1995: 98.
18. *Ibid*: 95-96
19. (*ibid*: 97).
20. Gbadegesin: 2002: 184.
21. Gyekye, 1995: 90.
22. *Ibid*: 98.
23. In this respect, Gyekye differs from William Amo who, in his *Apatheia of the Human Mind* suggests that a spiritual entity cannot be passive. He writes, 'I call spirit a substance

- which is purely active: the same as if you should say spirit admits of no passivity in itself' (F.I. Ogunmodede, 1999: 63).
24. Gyekye, 1995: 88, 97. I distinguish human capacity for action from 'the decision of humans to act'. I do not attribute the latter to *sunsum*.
  25. Gbadegesin, *ibid*: 184. The double quotes are the words of Gyekye (*ibid*: 98).
  26. Wiredu cautions against such transfers in his *Cultural Universals and Particulars*.
  27. Gyekye, 1995: 99.
  28. *Ibid*: 100.
  29. *Ibid*.
  30. *Ibid*: 94.
  31. The *ntoro* is a 'sperm-transmitted characteristic' inherited from the father (Gyekye, 1995: 94). He mentions Busia as having engaged in this confusion.
  32. *Ibid*.
  33. Gbadegesin, 2002: 184. For the conditional statement, see also Gyekye 1987: 89.
  34. Gyekye (1995: 89) cites instances where Danquah does this.
  35. Gbadegesin, 2002: 184.
  36. *Ibid*: 185.
  37. *Ibid*: 184-185.
  38. *Ibid*: 182.
  39. *Ibid*: 184.
  40. *Ibid*: 184-185.
  41. He dwells only on p. 91 of Gyekye's *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*. I do not claim that information cannot be taken from one page to develop a good argument. However, his concentration on that page is baffling, given the forthcoming evidence.
  42. Gyekye, 1987: 91. The said previous chapter is 'chapter five' of the same work.
  43. He writes in the preceding chapter, chapter five: 'The Akan universe, essentially spiritual, is endowed or charged with varying degrees of force or power. This force or power is *sunsum*, usually translated as "spirit," which, as noted, is commonly used to refer to the mystical or nonempirical, as in *sunsum yare* (spiritual disease). In this metaphysic, all created things, that is, natural objects, have or contain *sunsum*; every deity (*ōbosom*) is a *sunsum*, but not vice versa. The *sunsum* derives ultimately from Onyame who, as the Supreme Being, is the Highest Spirit or Highest Power. *Sunsum*, then, appears, on my interpretation, to be a generic concept; it appears to be a universal spirit, manifesting itself differently in the various beings and objects in the natural world.' Gyekye, 1987: 72-73. It can be noticed though, that Gyekye's notion of 'universal spirit' is quite similar to the 'universal soul' in Plotinus' *Enneads* (IV: 7.2-8<sup>3</sup>). Plotinus thought 'of soul as a cosmic force that unifies, organizes, sustains, and controls every aspect of the world.' Similarly, 'Plato had spoken in the *Timaeus* of a cosmic soul (34b-37c)' – see also D.J. O'Meara: 1993: 17.
  44. *Ibid*: 185. His critique is that Gyekye ought to have said that 'since *sunsum*, following its source, is divine and immortal, it must therefore be spiritual too.'
  45. *Ibid*.
  46. *Ibid*.
  47. Gyekye, 1995: 94.
  48. Wiredu, 1983:120.

49. He defines *okra* as ‘that whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual’s destiny from God’ (1983:120).
50. Wiredu, 1983:116, 118.
51. The idea that the *ōkra* informs God of its destiny exists in Akan belief system alongside the notion that it (the *ōkra*) receives destiny from God. In the former case, it is not suggested that the *ōkra*’s power to inform God is independent of God. Having been brought into being by God in the first place, the *ōkra* is believed to derive that power from God. The information is, however, termed as destiny because the *ōkra*’s power of choice and the choices it makes, before taking leave of God, are respected and sanctioned by God. It is believed that God’s sanctioning of them makes them unalterable (under normal circumstances).
52. Wiredu, 1987:159-161.
53. Wiredu, 1983: 114.
54. He indeed argues strongly against doing African philosophy from a Western point of view in some other essays. See, for example, the chapter ‘How not to Compare African Traditional Thought with Western Thought’ in his 1980 work.
55. Wiredu, 1983, 114.
56. Ibid: 115-116. Although it is not my style to match up Akan expressions with English ones, the discussion in this section might appear that way because I am, at different places, examining the correctness of some of Wiredu’s rendering of expressions.
57. Ibid: 114-5.
58. Ibid: 116.
59. See, for instance, ‘chapter one’ of Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*.
60. Wiredu, *ibid*, 116, 118
61. Ibid: 120. I subscribe, like Gyekye (1995: 114), to the logic of the former; that a ‘soul setting foot into the world must be presumed to be completely without knowledge of the conditions of this world’. Such a soul cannot determine its destiny. But this does not affect the rightness of Wiredu’s position that the *ōkra* must possess *adwene*.
62. It is also suggested by Wiredu that if ‘a living being must have an entity as the principle of its life’ then ‘by parity of reasoning, the “okra” too must have an entity as its own principle of life, and this second degree “okra” must similarly have a third degree “okra” and so on ad infinitum’ (*ibid*: 128). But it is possible to imagine the inaccuracy of his reasoning. Indeed, it is questionable why the *okra* must have another *okra* for it to be able to live. The source of a thing needs not be of the same kind as the thing itself. Examples of this can be found in mountains being the source of rivers, and lanterns being a source of light. [This critique of Wiredu was expressed to me by Gyekye in a private communication.]
63. A. Newell and A.H. Simon (1963), cited by J. R. Searle (1980: 5), also reproduced at. [http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=minds%2C+brains+and+programs+by+Searle&hl=en&as\\_sdt=2001&as\\_sctp=on](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=minds%2C+brains+and+programs+by+Searle&hl=en&as_sdt=2001&as_sctp=on) [see p. 10. Date accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2010]
64. Searle, *ibid*: 5.
65. Searle, *ibid*: 10
66. Searle, *ibid*: 5.
67. Searle, *ibid*: 11, square brackets added.
68. Searle 1990: 26.

69. Blackmore, 2003: 20.
70. Ibid: 22.
71. Ibid: 19.
72. Ibid: 22.
73. Ibid: 28. Drawing from the elaborate discussion of consciousness in Dennett (1995), McGinn (1987 and 1999) and Turing (1950), she thinks there are not strong reasons for someone to hold what she sees as the ‘particularly confusing’ view that only ‘biological brains’ can have ‘human-like consciousness’.
74. The issue of animal ‘rationality’ may also be explored. [In the particular instance where the spider (*ananse*) is portrayed in Akan folklore as extremely cunning but selfish, it seems that such ‘intelligence’ as awarded in *anansesem* (*ananse*-folktales) to *ananse* tantamounts to nothing but a metaphorical extension of human intelligence to it.]
75. Bernard P. Zeigler, 2002:138, 139.
76. For Paul Churchland and Thomas Nagel’s views, see, respectively, their 1984: 21 and 1993: 40.
77. Sheets-Johnstone, 2007: 286. Her reaction to the following argument of Churchland reveals her reasons for looking beyond consciousness in the brain. Churchland conceives of consciousness as having probably evolved from matter, because humans are ‘the wholly physical outcome of a purely physical process’. Consequently, the conscious being (and for that matter, the brain) is also not radically different from inanimate matter. Rather, they are simply part of one dynamic process of matter. Sheets-Johnstone’s problem with Churchland is that his evolutionary theory (ie. ‘the reductive equation of consciousness to matter’ Sheets-Johnstone, *ibid*: 286) only gives a correlation between matter and human consciousness, not a proof. And that, Churchland does not prove his claim that through some ‘metaphysical connection’, “‘living systems’” differ from “‘nonliving systems’” “‘only by degrees’”: “‘There is no metaphysical gap to be bridged’” (quoted by Sheets-Johnstone p.285).
78. *Ibid* 284.
79. *ibid*: 298.
80. *ibid*: 299.
81. As she puts it, ‘... corporeal consciousness shows itself to have the possibility of expanding ultimately into a sense of self. Proprioceptive descent with modification foundationally explains this possible expansion. “The Reality of Selves” has its roots in corporeal consciousness’ (*ibid*: 298). I am, however, not quite in agreement with this. Since humans are essentially deemed intelligent, it would not only be doubtful but also incomprehensible to suggest that they were ever internally (or mentally) unconscious of themselves until some external sensations helped them to know that they were those (Selves) having the sensations. Sheets-Johnstone’s discussion of consciousness seems overly external. Her theory even fails to acknowledge and account for logical principles and abstractions which we can become conscious of not through any (external) sensations.
82. *Ibid*: 283.
83. Indeed, rational as we claim we are, we are not always conscious of the reasons why we behave in certain ways [see, for instance, Paul Thagard (1986) and R. Nisbett and T.D. Wilson (1977) for some evidence of this]. Sometimes, we also perform very ‘intelligent

- activities' that do not result from any 'self-conscious awareness' (Thagard, *ibid*: 313). To get instances of such activities, see P.S. Churchland (1983).
84. Patricia Smith Churchland and Terrence J. Sejnowski, 1990: 344.
  85. Churchland, Paul M. 1999: 74.
  86. *Ibid*: 73, my square brackets.
  87. *Ibid*: 74, my square brackets.
  88. Michael Polyani, 1962: 403. He compares this error or mismatch to the one that generates meaninglessness as in explaining 'life' or 'a Shakespeare's sonnet' in terms of 'physics and chemistry'.
  89. De la Mattrie stated that '[n]ot only do our "vital" [i.e. conscious] activities result from the organization of physical matter ... but so do all of our *mental* activities" – see Paul Churchland, *ibid* p 99, square brackets mine.
  90. Polyani *ibid*, p 406.
  91. See Wiredu's 'Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion' in *African Studies Quarterly* at <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/africa/asq/legal.htm> \t "\_blank". Date accessed: 9/9/2008.
  92. Gyekye, 1995: 87.
  93. *Ibid*.
  94. This does not mean though, that there might not be any interaction between the *okra* and *honam* (body) while a person is still alive.
  95. Bernard Williams cited in Gyekye 1995: 87.
  96. Gyekye, *ibid*: 98
  97. Gyekye, 1999:13.
  98. Gyekye, 1995:48.
  99. See section 4 of his *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*.
  100. I recognize that the positivists also found significant inspiration from such later philosophers as Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. Works of these three philosophers that should be of particular interest are, respectively, *On Sense and Meaning; Principia Mathematica; and Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. For more on logical positivism, see Ayer (1946), Schlick (1959) and Carnap (1956).
  101. David Hume 'On Personal Identity' in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*.
  102. Quinton's interpretation; in Quinton 1973: 320.
  103. David Hume, 'On Personal Identity' in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*.
  104. Hume, 'Second Thoughts' in Perry ed. 1975: 175.
  105. It would not necessarily be one of those interpretations informed by our colonial past, though. Wiredu exhorts us against analyzing African concepts in ways that he sees as having been 'unduly' influenced by our colonial past. See Wiredu's 'Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion' in *African Studies Quarterly* at <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/africa/asq/legal.htm> \t "\_blank". Date accessed: 9/9/2008.
  106. K. Freeman, 1949:115.
  107. Perry, 'The Problem of Personal Identity' in Perry ed. 1975: 27.
  108. *Ibid*: 10. To some extent, however, Hume saw as 'defective' his use of resemblance and causation to account for 'the unifying relations' between 'mind' and 'mental states' (Quinton, 1973: 320, my square brackets). Regarding his



‘requirement that cause and effect must be contiguous’, Quinton remarks rightly that it is an attempt to rule ‘non-spatial mental events out of the field of possible causal relationships altogether’. And this, Quinton criticizes, is ‘the mistaken product of a myopically partial viewpoint, concentrated on the physical world’ (ibid).

109. This theory, as Gyekye indicated, is found in his *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*.
110. Gyekye, 1973: 51. Every reference to Gyekye in this paragraph is taken from that paper.
111. G. Ryle, 1968: 161.
112. Ibid: italics added.
113. Ibid: 154.
114. Ryle, cited by McLaughlin 1999: 686.
115. Ryle, 1968: 24.
116. Ibid: 180.
117. Burnet, 1950: 67. A.J. Ayer (1946:56) describes as ‘primitive superstition’ the belief that ‘to every name a single real entity must correspond’. By real entity, he means a physical or material entity. But the Akan maxim would be subject to Ayer’s description if by *what exists*, the Akan philosopher means ‘that which has material content’. Similarly, the Akan thinker would see Parmenides’ dictum to be wrong if by ‘what is not’ Parmenides implies ‘that which does not have material content’. However, the Akan and Parmenides’ dictums imply realities of both material and abstract kinds. So, existence cannot be narrowly restricted to the physical alone. Generally, the notion of ‘existence’ could also be understood to mean ‘there being an object of human contemplation’. But this sense of existence does not also restrict us to the material. A good example here would be the number zero. Zero, like the concept of infinity, does not name an object and does not stand for any physical thing. It cannot also be objectified, yet it exists because it refers to a situation which can be known through contemplation. On this showing, I do not quite accept Wiredu’s interpretation of the Akan expression ‘wō hō’ as *to be in a physical space* (see ‘Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion’ in *African Studies Quarterly*). In Akan language, he writes, ‘existence is necessarily spatial. To exist is to wo ho, be at some location’.
118. E. Conze, 1959: 18-19.
119. Wiredu, 1983: 117-118.
120. Ibid: 117. There is some evidence in Western philosophy that lends weight to Wiredu’s point. It is therein suggested that the mind is nothing but brain, or that it is knowable through bodily behaviour generated by brain processes. As Ryle rejects the metaphysical concept of the ‘I’, he also comes close to making the mind bodily, or at least, a physiocerebral activity. The mind appears to him to be essentially knowable through the behavioural conditions it generates in the body. His view is also consistent with that of Wittgenstein (1962: 86). To Wittgenstein, again, the oft-said human soul cannot be anything more than a picture of the human body (See Ogundowole, 2005: 85). In a similar fashion, D.M. Armstrong notes, ‘The mind was not something behind the behaviour of the body, it was

simply part of that physical behaviour' (Armstrong, 1970: 70). His statement does not mean that mental processes automatically generate bodily behaviour but, rather, it represents 'a disposition to behave'. Thus, in outlining what he calls a 'Materialist or Physicalist account of the mind', Armstrong adds that 'if our notion of the mind and mental states is nothing but that of a cause within the person of certain ranges of behaviour, then it becomes a scientific question' (ibid: 73). By 'mental state' he intends 'a state of the person apt for producing certain ranges of behaviour' (ibid: 75). This state, he indicates, is physical because consciousness (the 'inner eye') which 'is nothing but perception or awareness of the state of our own mind' (ibid: 78-79) is an activity of the central nervous system which is an empirical process. U.T. Place (1970: 86) simply identifies sensational processes with the brain. He gives a mind-brain identity theory. But Geach (1969: 38) puts it more bluntly: that 'a man *is* a sort of body, not a body *plus* an immaterial somewhat; for a man is an animal, and an animal is one kind of living body'.

There are still others though, who admit some metaphysics. For instance, Herbert Feigl (1970: 41) prefers the identity theory because of simplicity and, what he sees as, its solution to the mind-body (dualism) problem. In his view, it makes us not to conceive of the world or reality as consisting of two realms, as found in Cartesianism, but as one. This reality, which he names *metascientific*, is 'represented by two conceptual schemes' – physics and phenomenological psychology'. [But the latter is, from all indications, metaphysics.] So, he concludes, there are no completely different realms, no 'concomitant types of events' whose interactions and workings would require to be explained. Hywel Lewis, is equally modest in his claims. He does not claim that "embodiment is the way we become particularized," although he thinks it is perilous for a dualist to ignore the importance of the body (Lewis, 1973: 113).

121. Olen, 1983: 246.
122. Quinton, 1975: 65.
123. For Grice's statement, see Shoemaker 1975: 119. He in turn quotes from Grice, 'Personal Identity' in *Mind*, October 1941, p. 340.
124. The reason for this position is that the event of remembering must involve 'a live human body, or a human being' (1975b: 145). And, that any such recollection must entail two things: the event remembered and the event of remembering, (i.e. the witnessing and representing of events). These two things which memory consists in suggest an *M*-relation. By this relation is meant that they are, respectively, 'the beginning and end of a memory process' (p.147). But, since we 'lack knowledge' of the relation between these two events, 'we are able to imagine the possibility that certain witnessings and representings might be *M*-related though they are not experiences of the same human body' (p.149). 'We can,' he proceeds, thus 'extend the class of rememberers' to include 'not just human bodies but human bodies and any other sorts of things, ghosts or even gorse-bushes, that might, for all we know, become *M*-related to them' (p.149). Therefore, he declares: 'neither the primitiveness of memory nor the primitiveness of personal identity is suggested by our investigation, but only the

derivative nature of both concepts. And they are derivative ... from our scheme of a material world of which human beings are a part. And the nature of the derivation is not logical construction, but generalization and theory building in the service of explanation and prediction' (p.153).

125. Perry, 1975a:12. For more on Locke, read chapter twenty-seven of his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.
126. John Locke, 1975: 39-40, my square brackets.
127. Ibid: 40-41.
128. Perry, 1975a: 21.
129. J. Butler, 1975: 100.
130. Perry 1975a: 23, my square brackets.
131. Even metaphysicians who are noted for denying the reality of the physical, somehow recognize the actual existence of the physical. For without knowing what those objects are in the first place, they cannot criticize their features as being fleeting.
132. Perry, 1975a: 25.
133. Gyekye, 1995:85.
134. J. Locke, 1975: 42.
135. Ibid: 43-44.
136. Ibid
137. Thomas Reid (1975: 117) criticizes Locke on similar grounds. Also, according to Reid, the notion of sameness of consciousness is even unintelligible. He approves rather of similarity of consciousness.
138. Shoemaker 1975: 127.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid: 133.
141. Ibid: 128-9.
142. Ibid: 134.
143. Ibid: 132.
144. Ibid: 131.
145. There cannot here arise the question of 'self-deception' because the notion of 'self-deception' is not only impossible, it is also a misnomer. Three scenarios will explain my point. (i) Assuming that Kofi tells other people that he is in pain, knowing he is not, he cannot be said to have 'deceived' himself. For he is aware he is not in pain. (ii) If Kofi claims to be in pain because, in his understanding, one should describe one's feeling as such whenever one feels one cannot go to work, then he cannot be said to have 'deceived' himself. For, he does not know the truth – let alone conceal it ('from himself', so to speak) – that a sensation of pain is what one needs to have to be able to claim that one is in pain. (iii) If his claim to be in pain is based solely on 'some' feeling he identifies as 'pain sensation' – which, later, is explained medically as having been due to a psychological problem – but which does not actually mean that he is in pain, then that 'pain' is imaginary. Even so, do we say Kofi 'deceived' or 'lied' to himself? I do not think so, because he never felt he was not in actual pain. He could not then have been pretending about his supposed feeling, and could not be lying to

himself about his sensation. A person can only lie about his sensations to others, not to him- or herself.

146. Ibid: 130.
147. B. Williams, 1975: 198; my italics.
148. In Carter's own words: '[e]ach speaker of a language is uniquely determined by the class of first person claims he is prepared to make. This being the case and since ... only persons speak at all, it is not surprising that one identity criterion for persons is what they say about themselves ... Often we identify people by their appearance but we also identify them by asking who they are. In cases where a lot depends on accuracy we may ask many questions ... [Although] often we seek to corroborate our conclusions by appealing to our bodily criterion ... I see no reason to think that the results of such questioning are less conclusive than the results of applying some bodily criterion. At class reunions we seldom hear such utterances like: 'You aren't Henri Grink; Henri had hair, teeth, and no pot-belly,' but we hear 'So you are Henri Grink! How you have changed. I'd never have known you' (60-61; square brackets mine).
149. Ibid: 61-62.
150. Wiredu, 1983.
151. That is, they are a kind of experience.
152. M. Schlick, 1949: 168-169.
153. Daisaku refers to Bergson's 'Mind and Body' in *L'Energie Spirituelle*, Paris, 1919.
154. Daisaku, 1977: 115-116; my square brackets
155. Geach, 1969: 38.
156. Ibid: 39.
157. Ibid: 38-39.
158. Wiredu, 1983: 116.
159. Ibid, 1983: 117.
160. Wiredu, 1987: 169.
161. Armstrong, in Gregory ed. 1987: 491.
162. Safro Kwame, 2004:343-344. He accepts Anthony Flew's (1984: 267) idea that statements constituting such a language are those that can be 'formulated as statements about publicly observable physical objects and processes'.
163. Safro Kwame: 348.
164. See Mbiti,1997: 86 and Gyekye, 1995: 93.

165. Safro Kwame, 345-346. He calls this definition the ‘limited version of physicalism’, comparing objects here approved of as equivalent to ‘atoms, fields, energies, sets and numbers (ibid).
166. Even when the *okra* is seen through some ‘medicinally heightened perception’, that does not impair the empirical argument. ‘However heightened,’ he remarks, ‘the powers of an eye may become, if it *sees* something, that thing will have to be in space. In regard to any claim to see something, it must make sense to ask ‘Where is it?’ (See Gbadegesin, 2002: 183).
167. Wiredu, 1983: 120.
168. Safro Kwame, ibid: 348.
169. Perry, 1975b:153.
170. Safro Kwame, ibid: 349.
171. Wiredu, 1980: 42.
172. Wiredu, 1983, 120.
173. Wiredu, ibid: 127.
174. Ibid: 129.
175. Ibid: 119-120.
176. An objection might be raised here that for someone ignorant of water’s capability to turn to ice, all there is, is just ice. The point then, might be made that such a person is not wrong in stopping at ice. My response is two-fold. First, since that person knows no connection between water and ice, he is not in the position to assert that water is solid or semi-solid. He would not be party to our current debate which requires knowledge of the connection between water and ice. All he knows is that ice exists. In any case, we also do not deny that there is ice; the point is, we are simply not interested in whether or not there is ice. Secondly, if he insists that, because he knows of no such connection, there is not any between water and ice, he would be doing something inappropriate. His ignorance of the connection does not make it right for him to deny the connection. His position would be uninformed and wrong, although his ignorance of the connection is pardonable.
177. See Wiredu, 1983:119-120, and also in Gbadegesin 2002: 183.
178. There are some traditional African thinkers, however, who reject God, deities, and generally, spirits. They think that these entities are a figment of human imagination but not, most importantly, because of the physical or parapsychical nature of those entities (see, for instance, Gyekye 1995: 48).
179. S. Kwame: 346. He refers to Gregory.

180. Wiredu, 2009, unpublished. He thinks it is erroneous to call his philosophy ‘empiricism’ because philosophers interpret this term to include concepts that are not extant in Akan thought. Such concepts include idealism. But he points out that Akan traditional philosophy bears no resemblance to idealism.
180. Teffo Lebisa and Abraham Roux, 2002: 171. They argue that ‘[w]ith more knowledge of anatomy, and particularly neurology, these views [that is, the metaphysical-related] will change or simply vanish’.
181. Gyekye, 2008, unpublished.
182. Gyekye, *ibid.* Wiredu argues that traditional Akan religion is empirically oriented (Wiredu, 1980 particularly the chapter ‘Philosophy, Mysticism and Rationality’). This means that religion would not necessarily be opposed to (empirical) science. His interpretation of Akan religion, nonetheless, is not in complete agreement with the sense in which religion is generally discussed here.
183. Creation here does not carry the same meaning, ‘at least, in run-of-the-mill [c]hristianity, as bringing into existence of things out of nothing’ (Wiredu 2002:21). According to Wiredu, Akan metaphysicians conceive God ‘as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions the world order out of an indeterminate raw material’ (*ibid.*). Thus, ‘the Akan supreme being is thought of as a cosmic architect rather than a creator out of nothing’ (*ibid.*: 22).
184. This is quite contrary to Mbiti’s view that ‘[m]an is not by nature either “good” or “bad” (“evil”) except in terms of what he does’ (1997: 209).
185. Gyekye, 1992:109-110.
186. Gyekye, 1996: 58.
187. Mbiti, 1997: 141 where he explains the maxim ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’ in communalistic terms. The maxim dissolves the individual into the community. That, the ‘existence of the individual is the existence of the corporate; and where the individual may physically die, this does not relinquish his social-legal existence since the “we” continues to exist for the “I”’.
188. Senghor, 1964: 49. He sees African societies as communal, as urging its members to lay emphasis on the community than the individual, because ‘it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals’.
189. Menkiti in Wright ed.1984: 172. He puts it bluntly that the African community is that which ‘defines a person as a person’.
190. Kenyatta, 1965: 297. He argues that in Africa, the primal identity of a person is his community, because ‘his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him’.

191. They suggest that in African thought, the only approach one can adopt in ‘understanding human reality ... is from the stand-point of interpersonal relations’ (Teffo J. Lebisa and Abraham P.J. Roux, 2002: *ibid*).
192. Gyekye, 1992 106; Gyekye, 2004: 54-55; Gyekye, 1997a: 149-157. Some philosophers, such as Bernard Matolino (2009: 166-167), do not find much difference to exist between Gyekye’s moderate and radical communitarianism.
193. Kaphagawani, 2004: 338. K. Agyemang (1987: Bk. II) also makes one’s human beingness depend on one’s level of self-taught knowledge, although not necessarily on traditional knowledge.
194. Michitaro Tanaka cited in Ikeda (1977: 108). In the view of Abd-ru-shin (originally known as Oskar Ernst Bernhard), when a person dies, there is a ‘severing of the ethereal man, who continues living, from the physical body ...’ (1993: 157). This ‘ethereal man’ by all standards is the soul.
195. Mbiti, *ibid*: 25.
196. Mosley, 2004: 150.
197. Masolo, 2004: 101.
198. Keleman: 1975:175. Wittgenstein (*Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*: 6.4311) holds that ‘death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through’.
199. Dzobo, 1992: 128. He cites P. Mercier.
200. Keleman, *ibid*: 174-175.
201. Kaphagawani, *ibid*: 340.
202. Nagel, 1979: 3fn.
203. *Ibid*: 3.
204. *Ibid*: 10.
205. One may wonder though, why this world should not be seen as final and meaningful. ‘It does not seem clear,’ Hektor Yan asks ‘why a life which ends in death cannot be meaningful ... isn’t it true that *how* one leads one’s life matters more than the fact *that* one’s life is blissful and eternal?’ (Tao and Hektor eds. 2006:173). Mindful of the complexity of the present world itself, Wittgenstein questions nevertheless the resort to immortality for a solution of some sort to the problems of our finitude and death. He asks whether any ‘riddle is solved by the fact that *a person* survives for ever?’ ‘Is eternal life’, in other words, ‘not as enigmatic as our present one?’ He does not even see us as capable of understanding the world fully, for ‘[t]he solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time. (It is not problems of natural science which have to be solved)’ [*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 6.4312, emphasis

mine.] But, as the present life already presents quite some difficult problems (of understanding), it is tempting for one to be content with this world in order not to add to the existing problems by the introduction of a new (or next) life. Human existence would then appear to consist in the present life. In this context, one would find tenable Bertrand Russell's assertion in his *What I Believe* that 'when I die, I shall rot and nothing of my ego will survive' (cited in Paul Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 5).

206. Gyekye, 1996:14.

207. Janaro, 1975: 150, square brackets and italics added.

208. Boethius 1962: 104.

209. D.A. Masolo, 2004: 101.

210. Gbadegesin, 2004: 62.

## PART THREE

### *Chapter Seven*

1. Geach, 1969: 1.

2. K. Carter, 1977: 55.

3. N. Thomas 1980: 425.

4. Sri Aurobindo, 1999: 234. To him, the 'person' or that which is reborn is the soul.

5. Sophie Oluwole, 1992: 42.

6. Ninian Smart 'Reincarnation' in Berchert, 2006: 331.

7. See p.1-2 of 'A Short History of Reincarnation Teachings'.

<http://www.ccel.us/reincarnation.chap3.html> **Date accessed:** 4/30/2009.

8. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1996: 2011).

9. Burnet, 1950: 43fn.

10. What is discussed in this chapter is expected to apply to the religious philosophies of most sub-Saharan cultures because their 'religions genuinely exhibit an astonishing uniformity of emphasis' (E. Zuesse 1991: 171). With regard to the few exceptional cases, one can cite the Lugbara (of Uganda and Zaire – now D.R. Congo) who do not have a doctrine of reincarnation (Wiredu 1994 cites Middleton 1960: 28). According to R. Fardon (1990: 36), 'the fact of reincarnation is not relevant' to the Chamba (of Cameroon) because '[t]he formula with which cult meetings are conventionally opened locates beings in space rather than time'.



11. See M. Majeed 2003: 155. The transmission of traditional philosophy has largely, but not solely, been through linguistic (oral) means – specifically, in the form of proverbs. The unwritten character of African philosophy excludes ancient Egyptian, Ethiopian, and postcolonial African philosophy. Aside from this statement, the existence and sustenance of various philosophical concepts in African proverbs are affirmed by H. Kimmerle (1997). On the philosophical nature of some African proverbs, see also G. Wanjohi (1997).
12. Wiredu (1980), Hountondji (1983), Gyekye (1995), Ramose (2002a), Appiah (1992), Mudimbe (1983), Bodunrin (1981), Makinde (1988), and Oruka (1983, 1990, 1991).
13. Odera Oruka does this in his ‘Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy: Obstacles in Philosophical Dialogue’ as noted by G. Presbey ‘Who Counts as a Sage? Problems in the Further Implementation of Sage Philosophy’ at [www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriPres.htm](http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriPres.htm) (p. 3-4). Date accessed: February 24, 2009.
14. Gyekye 1997b: 29.
15. G. Presbey, *ibid*: 3.
16. See Gyekye 1995, especially the ‘Preface’ to the new edition.
17. *Websters’ Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*.
18. Presbey’s understanding of Oruka’s 1991:9-10. See Presbey *ibid*: 3.
19. *Ibid*.
20. *Ibid*: 4-5, square brackets mine.
21. *Ibid*: 5
22. Oruka 1996: chapter twenty and cited by Presbey: 5.
23. I recognize, though, that some philosophers might not conceive of philosophy the same way as I do.
24. Presbey *ibid*: 4.
25. Accordingly, I must express my profound gratitude to Nana Kwasi Opong Otaferegya I for the generosity with which he made available to me his wealth of traditional Akan knowledge and wisdom.
26. Oruka in K. Kresse 1995.
27. Presbey: 4. He takes from K. Kresse 1995.
28. Many political conflicts in Africa have religious (Akrong 2003: 37) and ethnic undercurrents.
29. See Gyekye 1996, chapters one, two, four, seven and ten.
30. Idowu, 1973: 187, and Mbiti 1989: 83.

31. Onyewuenyi 1996: 26. In Tonga thought, an ‘ancestor’ is not really reincarnated but only asks for his or her name to be given to the baby (Stephaniszyn 1954: 133). Such a request is ‘received’ and communicated to the family by a spiritualist.
32. See Mbiti 1989: 159. Belief in the ‘spirituality and immortality of the soul’ is one of the ten articles of faith of the ‘Reformed African Traditional Religion’ – also known as the Afrikania Mission – a quasi modern form of the traditional religion founded in Ghana (Opoku 1993: 39). Idowu’s interpretation of the Yoruba perspective is a direct challenge to that of Hallen and Sodipo (1995: 351), that the Yoruba believe that the soul ‘returns to this world’ in each successive rebirth. On the basis of the African concept of human survival, then, Danquah seems to have a point by suggesting that death contrasts with birth, not life (1968: 156).
33. Mbiti 1991: 125-6.
34. Opoku 1978: 138.
35. C.M. Doke 1931: 241.
36. Idowu 1973: 187, and Mbiti 1989: 83.
37. The determination by a spiritualist or oracle of a ‘returned’ living-dead has something to do with the belief that some living-dead do ‘reincarnate several times’. According to Quarcoopome (1987:103), the belief may be to resolve the difficulty of knowing ‘whether an ancestor being venerated had not already reincarnated in another member of the family’. In Akan thought, it is not indicated the number of times a living-dead may return, but among the Essan people of Nigeria’s Edo State, a living-dead ‘has the privilege of coming to this world and lives again and again for a period of seven times after which he or she remains permanently in the ancestral world (Izibili 2008: 107).
38. This means, I disagree with Quarcoopome who suggests that the soul, after death, ‘come[s] back into this world by entering a womb’ (Quarcoopome 1987: 103).
39. As noted by Eric Wiafe (2008: 49), ‘[i]n certain parts of Brong Ahafo and Ashanti regions, the hair, finger and toenails are cut and put in the coffin of the deceased. It is the belief that the deceased will need all these in order to be reborn as a full person in the lineage of clan’. The Brong (or Bono) and the Asante Akans are, respectively, found in these regions of Ghana. Wiafe, however, takes the two sentences, almost verbatim, from Kwabena Amponsah (1988: 59) without acknowledging his source. He only substitutes the word ‘will’ for Amponsah’s ‘would’.
40. When a child dies and is suspected to have been born before, marks are made on the corpse prior to burial. When the mother gives birth to the next child and the family observes similar marks on the body of the new-born, the latter is then identified as having returned. Steps such as the following are taken to prevent it from returning to the spiritual realm. Names are given to shame or spite serially born babies so that they would not want to go back with them (the names) to the spiritual realm; or if they (the babies) wish to, they would hesitate for the fear that the names would make them not be received in the spirit world. This way, it is believed, the babies would stay alive. For instance, the name *dōnkō* (slave) can be

suffixed ‘to the natal day name’ of the baby. In place of *dōnkō*, the baby may be named ‘moshi’ – which is the name of a tribe in northern Ghana and Burkina Faso from whom the Asante ‘formerly drew many slaves’. Such children ‘may also be dedicated to a particular *obosom* (god) who is then expected to protect them’. The protected children are called ‘*begyina mma* (lit. “come and stay children”)’ [Rattray 1959: 65]. Such a child may therefore be called *dōnkō begyina*. Indeed, ‘[t]he funnier or uglier the name, the better’ (Sarpong 1974: 39). This is why a baby may be named *sumuna* (rubbish dump). Marks (such as the *dōnkō* marks) are also given to them for the same purposes as those for the names. The *dōnkō* marks are usually three horizontal marks, one on top of the other, made on both left and right ends of the mouth. Generally, babies believed to be ‘returned’ living-dead persons are welcome, and as such accorded respects due the living-dead. They are also given the names or titles of the living-dead. On the other hand, babies believed to be serially born are seen as irritants. A baby who belongs to this category is also believed to take delight in returning to the spirit world (Soyinka 1982) where its real mother who is also the spiritual mother of every human is (Rattray 1959: 59. Rattray adds that this mother weeps whenever she loses a child to this world through earthly birth). On the other hand, the earthly mother is put through rites to ensure that her womb would not be receptive anymore to babies who are unwilling to stay on earth. If the baby dies before the eighth day, the parents do not mourn; rather, they mock at the spirit of the baby. They ‘dress and eat as for a feast and then pretend to lie together’ (Parrinder 1978: 98).

41. In Yoruba conception, the *abiku* (‘born to die’ children) may die ‘on important occasions of their lives such as marriage’ (S. Oluwole 1995: 44).
42. See Amenga-Etego Rose M. (2008)
43. Mbiti 1989: 83, Opoku 1978: 138. By ‘partial reincarnation’ I do not intend Quarcoopome’s conception that it is a situation where ‘[a] dead person may decide to resume or continue life in another area far away from his former one’ (1987:102).
44. Onyewuenyi 1996: 16.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid: 39
47. Ibid: 26
48. For the Igbo expression, see C. Achebe 1981: chapter nine; and O. Kalu 1991:15. Achebe reveals that his ‘first book *Things Fall Apart* was an act of atonement with [his] past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son’ (S. Gikandi, 1991:25 – my square brackets. He takes the quotation from Achebe’s *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* [1975]. Originally published in 1958, *Things Fall Apart* is indeed a masterpiece that projects the Igbo (African) culture from the perspective of the colonized).
49. Onyewuenyi 1996: ix.
50. Ibid: x.

51. The concept of rebirth was dropped by the Second Council of Constantinople in the year AD 553 – see M.V. Kamath 2008: 60.
52. Onyewuenyi 1996: x.
53. J. Lucas 1970: 308.
54. Ikenga-Metuh 1991: 63.
55. For a person who participates in the performance of these rites, it would be difficult to accept the suggestion that there is no belief in the return of the living-dead in traditional African culture. On the other hand, the professional philosopher has every right to state what he or she makes of the participant's belief – whether or not it is logically grounded or coheres with other cultural beliefs, and what the belief philosophically amounts to. Onyewuenyi was only doing, as I soon will be, the latter.
56. Gyekye 1996: 16; Abinbola 1991: 51-56.
57. Onyewuenyi 1996: x.
58. Tempels, 1969: 37, Onyewuenyi *ibid*: 33.
59. Onyewuenyi *ibid*: 33.
60. *Ibid*: 37.
61. The soul is believed to emanate from God (K. Dickson 1977: 5; P.F. Bartle 1983: 98; E. Mendonsa 1975: 64).
62. Onyewuenyi 1996: 25. He cites Idowu's *Olodumare...* 1962: 192.
63. I do not see as quite correct G. Parrinder's view (1957: 266) that in the African afterlife 'mortal roles will be reversed'.
64. Tempels 1969: 55; and Onyewuenyi 1996 37.
65. Onyewuenyi *ibid*: 39.
66. Tempels, *ibid*: 111; Onyewuenyi, *ibid*: 41, my square brackets.
67. The same can be said of the Ba Maninga (of the Kongo's) concept of reincarnation. '... [Their] version of reincarnation is related, rather, to physical resemblance ... It is not necessary to die before this physical resemblance [i.e. reincarnation] can take place' (B. Simon 1993: 130, my square brackets). Hardly, though, can mere physical resemblance be called reincarnation. Nonetheless, in the proper context of return (after death), Wiredu's idea that reincarnation, in African thought, often amounts 'to nothing substantially more than a genetical metaphor' (see 'Reincarnation' in his 1994) is acceptable on the grounds of the point (in the main text) on which this note is placed.

68. As regards the traditional conception, the relationship, as I mentioned above is not clearly defined. I describe the relationship as not clearly defined because it is not explained how two beings (one soul, the other partly soul) are so linked metaphysically, that the determination of the identity of the latter in terms of the former; or rather, the metaphysical extension of the identity of the former to the latter (so to speak) becomes possible.
69. Onyewuenyi might have seen some ‘influence’ but, unable to show that it was between souls, we could not understand – as he could not indicate – the nature of the alleged ‘influence’.
70. Gardiner 2003: 23.
71. Onyewuenyi 1996: 40-41.
72. Wiredu, ‘Reincarnation’ in his 1994.
73. It may be supposed that since the spirits of those who lived immoral lives do not go to *asamando*, they must then be reborn. But this is disputed by one of my respondents, Nana Kwasi Otaferegya I, and also Karade 1994:77. The issue of return on the basis of destiny (Appiah-Kubi 1981:11) is widely held.
74. Murray’s *The Splendor that was Egypt* cited by J. Lucas 1970: 11.
75. Lucas *ibid*: 12.
76. Onyewuenyi, 1994: 78-81.
77. It is argued that the black ancient Egyptians were forced by drought (in around 4000 BC) to migrate downwards to fertile lands in West Africa – see P. O’Brien (2005: 22-23).
78. For these philological rules, see J. Lucas 1970: 27.
79. Obenga 1992: 111, my square brackets.
80. According to Obenga, ‘the oldest Egyptian hieroglyphic texts date back to around 3000 years BC and the first written forms of Coptic as early as the third century BC’ (*ibid*: 111).
81. *Ibid*: 111-112.
82. *Ibid*: 112.
83. Lucas 1970: 21-26. The *kwa* languages also include the ‘Ga-Adangme, Ewe, Egun, Yoruba, Benin, Ijaw, Igbo, Igabo Isoko’ (*ibid*: 21).
84. *Ibid*: 30.
85. *Ibid*: 27.
86. *Ibid*: 31.
87. For more on the connection between ancient Egyptian languages and those of Black Africa, see the mentioned works of Obenga, Lucas, and Onyewuenyi.

88. Lucas *ibid*: 33.
89. *Ibid*.
90. Obenga *ibid*: 117.
91. *Ibid*: 119.
92. *Ibid*: 120.
93. Lucas (1970: 296) shares this point.
94. Obenga *ibid*: 131.
95. Shawn Knight, *Egyptian Writing Systems and Grammar* (Spring 2009:2) <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/course/98-030/writing.pdf>. Date accessed: February 12, 2011. Concerning the absence of vowels in Egyptian writing, see also *The Pronunciation of Ancient Egyptian* at <http://www.friesian.com/egypt.htm> p.1. Date accessed: February 12, 2011.
96. S. Knight, *ibid*.
97. Obenga 1992: 134.
98. *Ibid*. 135.
99. *Ibid*: 136.
100. *Ibid*: 137.
101. *Ibid*: 124.
102. *Ibid*: 125.
103. Gardiner 2003: 23
104. When well prepared, the funerary rites are believed (by the Báhêmbá of Zaire) not only to ‘facilitate a peaceful journey for the deceased’s spirit to the spirit world’ but also ‘cleanse the villages’ and bring peace (Blakeley and Blakeley 1994: 406).
105. See Gardiner 2003: 24 for the Egyptian.
106. Gyekye 1996: 162. Among the Ewe, Nelson-Adjakpey (1982: 70) also cites the violation of moral code. In ancient Egypt, ‘the duly-buried dead also had power to take vengeance on those who injured their property or violated their tombs’ (Gardiner: *ibid*).
107. In the Nzema Akan dialect, ‘soul name’ is translated as *ekeladuma* (see J. Quarm 2007: 37). In Ga thought, the ‘soul name’ (*kla*-name) is associated with only one version of the *kla*. The *kla* is understood as either a ‘guardian spirit’ or ‘life force’, and that only the former sense ‘is capable of accommodating the connection of the *kla* with the day-names’ (J. Engmann 1992: 185-6).

108. Gardiner 2003: 23.
109. Ibid
110. Hagan 2001a: 23 and 35.
111. Gardiner 2003: 23.
112. He argues that the King (Pharaoh) was considered as ‘son of Rē’ (son of the Sun) and identical with Rē. And that, at death the Pharaoh ‘flew to heaven and joined the sun, the flesh of the god becoming merged in its creator’ (ibid).
113. Meyerowitz 1958: 51, 52.
114. Gardiner 2003: 22.
115. Opoku, 1978: 37.
116. H. R. Hall 2003: 462.
117. Ibid: 458-459.
118. See Busia 1962: 30 for examples of Akan items.
119. H.R. Hall ibid: 460.
120. The first Asante King who refused to endorse the practice was Otumfoō Opoku Ware II who died – or, in the Akan context, ‘went to the village’ – in 1999 (Hagan 2001b: 132). Akans believe that human beings are both physical and spiritual (M. Assimeng 1999: 43) and that Kings and servants, being humans, are capable of surviving physical death, by virtue of their souls.
121. Similarities on other aspects of life abound. I have not discussed them because they are not the subject of this work. It suffices to state, however, that the terms ‘Fante’ and ‘Asante’ themselves are traced to Egypt. The first is traced to the name of the Egyptian god ‘Fanti or Fenti’ and the second to the god ‘Santi or Sante’ (Lucas: 35).
122. It does not cover, for instance, any person who suffered bad (i.e. unnatural) death (see the publication of the Christian Council of Ghana and National Catholic Secretariat 2002: 20). The statement made above about the return of any living-dead, however, must not be taken to mean the return of every ‘ancestor’. As Mbiti (1970: 265) rightly observes about the Akan concept of reincarnation, ‘[n]ot everybody ... is reincarnated; nor is the phenomenon something that individuals look forward to, or hope for’.

123. For instance, it is not explained how the two souls which are believed to be rational, come to connect – is it by way of agreement, coercion, an attracting metaphysical element, or what? It is also not known why a specific member of the family, and not any others, would give birth to the baby whose soul is to be connected to the living-dead. Another issue is how long the metaphysical connection lasts (i.e., whether it is only for the period of childhood, up to adulthood, or till death). And, if it is till death, then, is it spasmodic or continuous?
124. In logic, ‘proof’ is not about the supply of contingent truths, but ‘philosophical knowledge [which] has its basis in the conceptual clarity of self-evident intellectual axioms, comprehended in a series of connected propositions’ – Spinoza, explained by E. Diamond 2008: 43, my square brackets. This sort of proof does not apply to belief in rebirth, since the belief is usually not expressed with self-evidence propositions. Nevertheless, the acceptability of the belief shall be determined on the basis of whether it is expressed in a coherent or consistent manner and, thus, logically acceptable. By factual proof, then, I mean complete factual evidence enough to establish the truth of reincarnation.
125. It was indicated in a BBC interview that the Dalai Lama was born with the colours of the rainbow round his hand as a sign of his spiritual stature. But, in the said interview which the BBC had with Khandro Rinpoche – a woman who is also a Buddhist teacher and regarded as the reincarnation of a renowned master – she admitted not remembering any signal that accompanied her own (re)birth. If she could not remember a more recent event such as happened at her birth, then, I wonder how easy it would be for her to recall more distant events. To be fair, I must add, she never claimed on the programme to remember her past lives (access the podcast for the BBC programme ‘The Interview’ May 5, 2009 at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2009/09/090911\\_interview\\_050911.shtml?s](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2009/09/090911_interview_050911.shtml?s)). I do not have the competence to pronounce on whether recollections of past lives are a ‘dissociative hallucinatory activity of the brain’ (R. Siegel: 1980: 911). But S. Bickrum’s insistence that such phenomena – deemed by him as socially ‘closeted rather than non-existent’ – be ‘embraced’, can, in all probability, serve a clinical purpose rather than provide a basis for our acceptance of such memory claims. It may be the case that embracing the phenomenon of afterlife experiences ‘may allow [psychologists] to provide professional support for individuals seeking to understand the dynamics and normalcy of their experience’ (S. Bickrum 1991: 12, my square brackets). But, the trouble is we are nowhere near proving that the patient has lived before.
126. D. Harding, 1988: 87.
127. He suggests, for instance, that ‘deep down we all merge’ (ibid).
128. Ibid: 87; square brackets added. In the Akan concept of rebirth, a person is not believed to experience sub-human lives either as a result of deeds in a past life or in preparation for a future life. So, there cannot be a recall of a person’s sub-human lives.
129. It is difficult to comprehend what C. Vulliamy means by his claim that *ōkra* ‘is not in any way connected with the personal soul’ (1997: 8). Thinking erroneously that the Akan person has two souls, and failing to flesh out his concept of ‘personal soul’, he appears to have in mind one of two things. ‘Personal soul’ might mean either *sunsum* or the protective duties attributed by some Akan scholars to the *ōkra*. But neither explanation suggests that a person has two distinct *ōkras*.



130. By 'human nature' I mean 'of human kind'; but not of fixed lives or destinies which humans are, in some religious and philosophical conceptions, supposed to have. The latter is rejected by Sartre (see his 1957).
131. He thinks that '(spirit or soul) in traditional African thought is coterminous with bodily corporeality' (2002b: 70). This conception of the soul is based on his interpretation of the *Sesotho* concept *moya* which, among others, mean 'spirit' or 'soul' (ibid: 69-70). But 'spirit' or 'soul' here is not in the sense of 'separate and distinct substance' (ibid: 69). This conception, in his view, is in line with the holonistic conception of person which, he observes, is not necessarily shared by Akan thinkers (ibid: 64).
132. Ibid: 68.
133. Ibid.
134. The wishes of the living-dead are a command (see W. Soyinka 2004b: 20-21 where Iyaloja, the 'Mother' of the market, reiterates this point).
135. Ramose, ibid: 70.
136. John Hick's understanding of Kai Nielsen (see J. Hick 1989: 32).
137. K. Nielsen, 1989: 1.
138. Ibid: 1, 3-4.
139. J. Irish, 1989: 152.
140. W.L. Rowe, 2001: 143.
141. Hick, 1989: 32.
142. T. Penelhum, 1982: 47, my square brackets; also quoted by K. Nielsen 1989: 8.
143. K. Nielsen, ibid: 1, 8.
144. J. Hick, 1989: 33.
145. P. Geach (1969: 22). Resurrection, to the Jehovah's Witnesses, entails restoration of the dead to their former selves (Jehovah's Witnesses 2010: 6).
146. See 'Reincarnation' in The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society 1989: 319-320.
147. Paul Bedham 1989: 36. It is even possible, suggests J. Hick, that the soul outlasts the body but is still, contrary to the views of many christians, not eternal (Hick ibid: 32-33). What is common between Hick and Nielsen, though, is that they see their individual conceptions of the afterlife, which imply resurrection of the body and spiritual body respectively, as conceivable.
148. In fact, christians exempt Jesus from this future resurrection. He is believed to have resurrected some 2011 years ago. This is not to suggest that all christians use the same calendar in the calculation of the span of historical events. There is, for instance, an almost eight-year gap between the Ethiopian christian calendar and both the Julian and Gregorian calendars (K.K. Merahi 2007: 40, 52). The christian resurrection is believed to be a prelude to God's judgement of humankind. The idea of accountability in the presence of God, however, is found in some religions that predate christianity. Of particular interest is the religion of ancient Egyptians which somehow 'taught that men really had to answer for their deeds in the presence of God' (Maurice Becqué and Louis Becqué 1960: 44). In the christian context, although all persons will experience bodily death, it is often maintained that each person is 'predestined [by God] to life or death.'

Meaning, that upon resurrection a person will have either ‘eternal life’ of ‘eternal damnation’ (Ford Lewis Battles quoted by David Peddle 2008: 5; square brackets added. See also [www.swgc.mun.ca/animus](http://www.swgc.mun.ca/animus). Accessed on February 7, 2009).

149. Stephen Davis 1989: 141.
150. D.R. Griffen, 1989: 105, my square brackets.
151. Joseph Prabhu 1989: 66. This is a slight advancement on Kant’s moral argument for the immortality of persons. Surprisingly, Kant sometimes argued as if immortality was impossible – see respectively his 1949: 225-7 and 1929: 333f; and also R.W.K. Paterson 1995: 110-111.
152. The issue of continuity is not always understood in terms of the soul. Derek Parfit does not conceive of it in bodily terms alright but he argues that it takes the form of an R-relation – i.e. one remains oneself if there is continuity in one’s memories, beliefs and desires. His goal was to show that by virtue of the R-relation, we are able to talk about identity without mentioning persons (see ‘What We Believe Ourselves to Be’ in his 1984). Since memories and beliefs cannot be there without someone possessing them, it is hard to see how Parfit could be deemed as successful in the achievement of his goal. Friedrich Nietzsche rejected outright the Cartesian metaphysical conception of a person, arguing that the fact that a person thinks or feels or wills does not guarantee the existence of any entity distinct from the embodied person (Richard Schacht 1985: 135). Indeed, he rated reason quite below bodily life (Nietzsche 1968: 324). Also drawing attention to the importance of the body is Merleau-Ponty’s view that it is through the body’s contact with the world of experience that we encounter reality. This encounter, according to him, is made possible by ‘body image’ (sometimes translated as ‘body-schema’) which is: the explanation or grasping of the nature of perceptible things in terms of their relation with the body (M. Merleau-Ponty 1992; and D. Tiemersma 1982). When, in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant identified reason to be the distinguishing feature of a person, it was, like Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* i. 7), to highlight the role it played in our moral lives. Kant traced the good will in persons to reason. The concept of the will was, however, seized upon by Harry Frankfurt to come up with the observation that only second-order desires really distinguished humans from beasts. Those desires result from a *reflection* on first-order desires which are rather impulsive and equally possessed by most beasts (H. Frankfurt 1971). The Cartesian self is unalterable but Michel Foucault suggests that through the ‘techniques of the self’ one is able to transform oneself. The techniques entail any efforts directed at changing in the society one’s actions, behaviour, and thoughts about oneself in order to achieve some state of purity or happiness (M. Foucault 1993: 203). But, prior to Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre (1966) had already recommended that we become true to ourselves by recognizing the potential in us to shape or even re-shape our lives through the choices we make. Anthony Appiah seems to share Sartre’s view in the context of liberal democracy, except that he would reject Sartre’s thesis that there is no human nature. Appiah argues that as humans, ‘it is our nature to shape our natures’ although we can also ‘use our autonomy to protect and preserve a wide variety of extraindividual commitments’ (2005: 211). Peter Strawson held a somewhat general view of a person. That which ‘identified and reidentified’ a person, in his view, did not consist in just the body, because a person can fundamentally be spoken of in both physical and mental terms (‘Persons’ in his 1977).

153. See R.A. Moody 2001 and 1977.
154. Paterson, 1995:189-190. I need to indicate, however, that some have rejected paranormal data, especially regarding telepathy and clairvoyance. They include P. Kurtz, T. Rockwell, et al. 1978: 349-64; C. Ransom 1976: 401-19; and C. Hansel 1966.
155. F. Rittelmeyer 1988: 61. He argues that '[b]y spiritual training, man's whole attitude of mind is changed, and directed toward the spirit. Obviously, humanity is advancing towards such a spiritual development. The proof of this is the instinctive impulse which men today seek Yoga-exercises, Catholic exercises, and American methods of self-training' (ibid: 62).
156. See C.D. Broad's 1930.
157. Hume, 1963: 602; see also Paterson ibid: 105.
158. What comes close to telling psychologists of a non-tangible aspect of a person is 'the electrical force-field around the human body' which is usually captured by Kirlian photography (T. Carney 1979: 160). But the energy force-field, unlike the Akan soul, is not an independent entity imbued with rational properties. Rather, it emanates from the body. The patterns it has, give some indication of the health of the body. For instance, '[p]sychiatrists can spot incipient schizophrenia this way, or a forthcoming nervous breakdown, and so on' (ibid: 161. For more on Kirlian photography, see R. Steiner 1977). In psychology, there is also a notion of 'unembodied self' which is quite different from the Akan concept of the self (soul). In psychopathology, the notion refers to a situation where 'the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body'(R. Laing 1965: 69). It differs from the Akan concept of a person this way: that '[i]nstead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a *false self*, which a detached, disembodied, "inner", "true" self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be' (ibid). In Akan thought, however, the core self is the soul, not the body. In psychopathology, anytime the disorder was regarded as temporary, 'the self began as embodied, became temporarily dissociated under stress, and returned to its original embodied position when the crisis was over' (ibid).
159. Peter Preus 1989: 6.
160. J.S. Mill 1874: 203. See also Paterson ibid: 104.
161. A. Goswami 2001: 13, square brackets mine.
162. Ibid: 10.
163. Ibid: 13-14, square brackets added.
164. According to Jacob Needleman, 'In Buddhism the Buddha-nature, the enlightened Mind, is the true nature of myself and the universe. In Hinduism, *Atman*, the real human Self, is *Brahman*, the Absolute God-Creator-Destroyer-Preserver' (1984: 166).
165. Similar concerns could be found in the lamentations of the wise Brahman whom Voltaire once met in 1761: Asked why he wished he had never been born, the Brahman responded 'I have been studying for forty years, which is forty years wasted; I teach others, and I know nothing; this situation brings into my soul so much humiliation and disgust that life is unbearable to me. I was born, I live in time, and I do not know what time is; I find myself in a point between two eternities, as our sages say, and I have

no idea of eternity. I am composed of matter; I think, and I have never been able to find out what produces thought; I do not know whether my understanding is a simple faculty in me like that of walking or of digesting, and whether I think with my head, as I take with my hands. Not only is the principle of my thinking unknown to me, but the principle of my movements is equally hidden from me. I do not know why I exist...’ (Voltaire 1961: 240. Under the title ‘Soul I’ Voltaire (1924) wrote ‘The great difficulty is to understand how a being, whoever he be, has thoughts’). In a context similar to the foregoing is David Rosenthal’s conviction that ‘[a] satisfactory theory of consciousness, therefore, will in effect specify the exact way we are conscious of those of our mental states we count as conscious’ (2002: 218).

166. Francis Collins (2007: 30) is a scientist with faith. I do not mean that science is irrational, but that belief in the supernatural can be rational. For instance, traditional African religion is a natural, rationally discovered, but not a revealed religion. I disagree, therefore, with E. Dodds’ conception of supernaturalism as irrational (1951: 1), and with Lamont’s restriction of rationality to science (1957: chapter V). God cannot be the object of scientific enquiry. Even as R. Dawkins admits that God ‘is not technically disprovable,’ his rejection of the concept of God is entirely based on the absence of scientific evidence (2007: 136, and chapter four). For a critique of Dawkins’ ideas on religion in general, you may see K. Jones (2007). In an effort to resolve the dispute between metaphysians and scientists regarding humankind’s best source of reality, S. Abhayananda (2007: 117) proposes *gnosience* – a broader view of reality that ‘include[s] both scientific and gnostic perspectives’.
167. Ibid: 16. Liberation is achieved when after several rebirths a person reaches the highest state of moral purity.
168. The deceased is materially lost to the family alright, but the benefit of another earthly life is not lost to him or her. This is different from the christian conception of the afterlife where consolation may take the form of the deceased not ‘[losing] the end for which it was created’: that is, that the deceased will, in the next life, hopefully ‘glorify God and enjoy Him forever’ (C. Lewis 1961: 24; see also Leming and Dickson [2002: 135]). The emphasis here is on (serving) God.
169. In Yoruba belief, for instance, ‘the “spirit” of the thoroughly unregenerate may find itself reincarnated in the body of a lowly animal in a kind of cosmic retribution’ (Wiredu, ‘Reincarnation’ [1994]). In Akan, the nature of rebirth is not determined by past actions.
170. Some esoteric philosophies that teach reincarnation in the West include the following: The Church of Scientology: ‘[t]he motto of their fraternal religious order Sea Organization is “Revenimus” or “We Come Back”’. Its founder L. Ron Hubbard did not equate ‘transmigration’ of souls with ‘reincarnation’ (‘Scientology’ at <http://www.crystalinks.com/reincarnation.html>. Accessed date: 4/30/2009. See also L. Hubbard 1950: 419). There is also Theosophy, founded by Rudolf Steiner. Theosophy teaches that what happens to a person in this life is not only a consequence of the person’s deeds in a past life but also a preparation of him or her for future life. And that,

one can nonetheless influence the future by the way one lives now. Theosophy also teaches reincarnation (see <http://www.crystalinks.com/reincarnation.html>. Accessed date: 4/30/2009). Past lives, especially, in Scientology might occur in ‘non-Earth civilizations’, something which brings to mind the phenomenon of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO’s) or Flying Saucers believed by the Aetherius Society and some scientists to be driven by (or show possible signs of) the existence of extra-terrestrial beings. Read more on UFO’s from E. Ruppelt (1960) and Reiner Müller ‘Unidentifiable Flying Objects’ at [rainer@www.abendschule.asn-graz.ac.at](mailto:rainer@www.abendschule.asn-graz.ac.at).

171. Morton Kelsey 1979: 228-9.
172. I. Stevenson (1966, 1974) was criticized for choosing mostly children who came from areas where reincarnation was already believed in. and, that in ‘matching up of a child’s memories, with the collaboration of villagers who knew the deceased, “the child often seems to unconsciously mirror the expectations of the informants, for whom reincarnation is received teaching” (Woogler 1987: 69, quoted in Z. Knight 95).
173. F. Rittelmeyer 1988: 67-8.
174. When in 1943 C. J. Ducasse subjected himself to a ‘life reading’ in the hands of Edgar Cayce, the preceding life’s incarnation story attributed by the latter to the former turned out to be false (C. J. Ducasse 1961: 275fn).
175. See F. Cook 1989: 182, my square brackets.
176. While the explanation given of ‘intersection’ is a definition, that of the difference and sameness of living and dead persons is not even a definition. It is a factual statement.
177. Cook, *ibid*: 182.
178. F. Cook admits that some Buddhist texts such as the *Kośa* do teach such a denial. Also, when the doctrine of the Middle Way is applied, a person or self neither exists nor fails to exist.
179. The principle of karma is viewed as less compulsive by some scholars, though. According to Joseph Prabhu (1989: 70), ‘there is no rigid one to one correlation between certain kinds of acts and their consequences. The general principle is that morally good acts tend to produce good consequences’ and vice versa.
180. Ariel Glucklich’s translation of *samsara* as ‘transmigration’ (1989: 81) would not be acceptable to us if by ‘transmigration’ he intends reincarnation. Another move which seems understandable but incorrect is the suggestion that we make ‘rebirth’ different from ‘reincarnation’; that the former may refer to an ‘involuntary, a karmic impulse’ while the latter ‘is a conscious choice made by beings who are beyond the cycle of living and dying and no longer need to be reborn, like *bodhisattvas* who come back to help all sentient beings’ (Ringu Tulku 2002: xxviii). Anyone reborn is reincarnated, and vice versa.

181. Cook, *ibid*: 182.

182. *Ibid*: 181.

*Conclusion*

1. T. Penelhum, 1970: 70-71

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