

# Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion

KWASI WIREDU

## I. PARTICULARISTIC STUDIES OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIES AS AN AID TO DECOLONIZATION

Let me begin by defining what I mean by decolonization in African philosophy. By decolonization, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past. The crucial word in this formulation is "undue". Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of a colonial ancestry. Conceivably, a thought or a mode of inquiry spearheaded by our erstwhile colonizers may be valid or in some way beneficial to humankind. Are we called upon to reject or ignore it? That would be a madness having neither rhyme nor reason.

Yet there are reasons for adopting a doubly critical stance toward the problems and theories of Western philosophy--particularly toward the categories of thought embedded therein. The reasons are historical. Colonialism was not only a political imposition, but also a cultural one. Gravely affected, or even perhaps infected, were our religions and systems of education. I will address the question of religion later, but I want directly to notice an aspect of the system of education introduced by colonialism that is of a particular philosophical relevance. It consists in the fact that education was delivered in the medium of one foreign language or another.

Now if you learn philosophy in a given language, that is the language in which you naturally philosophize, not just during the learning period but also, all things being equal, for life. But a language, most assuredly, is not conceptually neutral; syntax and vocabulary are apt to suggest definite modes of conceptualization. Note, however, that I say "suggest" not "compel", for, if the phenomenon had the element of necessitation implied by the latter word, no decolonization would be possible. Nevertheless, the starting point of the problem is that the African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, has most likely become conceptually westernized to a large extent not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances. To that same extent he may have become de-Africanized. It does not matter if the philosophy learned was African philosophy. If that philosophy was academically formulated in English and articulated therein, the message was already substantially westernized, unless there was a conscious effort toward cross-cultural filtration. Of course, in colonial times such concerns were not the order of the day, to say the least, nor have they, even now in post-colonial times, acquired that status. This gives the present conference a special significance; for, as far as I know, it is the first conference on decolonization in African philosophy.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/3.pdf>

It would have been gathered already that philosophical decolonization is necessarily a conceptual enterprise; it is not just a critique of doctrine but also of fundamental conceptualization. I use "critique" here in the sense of an examination of validity rather than the exposure of invalidity. Indeed, philosophy, or at any rate the best kind of philosophy, is a critique, for the most part, of fundamental conceptualization. That is to say, it is the critical examination of the conceptual framework upon which the thought of a culture is erected. English philosophers, for example, brought up on the Western tradition of thought, are not supposed to take Western categories for granted. That would be to wallow in the unexamined life. They are expected to examine their conceptual inheritance afresh, as far as practicable, and this must be done on two fronts. First, they must review the accumulation of technical vocabularies presented in the tradition together, of course, with the associated theories. These often depart, sometimes quite radically, from common modes of conceptualization, although they may have some basic links with them. A technical heritage can have quite a commanding influence in the life of a culture. Yet, there is nothing sacrosanct about it, and philosophical genius sometimes consists in subverting good portions of it.

There is also a common-language front, for technical vocabulary is a specialization of common language and may owe some of its characteristics to that origin. It is this link that gives technical philosophy much of its cultural identity. Consider, for example, the use of the word "idea" in British empiricism. By "idea" Locke says he means the immediate object of our perception. But it turns out that he takes this to mean a sensation. Since a sensation is a condition of the human body, this means that the table I perceive is a state of myself, if it is an idea. Locke wavered on this, but Berkeley and Hume asserted it without any inhibition. Indeed, by the time we reach Hume, the perceived table has become a momentary state, not a perduring object, and the perceiver too has become nothing but the same momentary state without a possessor. This concept of a perceived object would puzzle any ordinary native speaker innocent of empiricist sophistication into fits. Yet, on the other hand, the straightforwardly substantive status of the word "idea" in English and its objectual idioms seem to facilitate making it into an object in an ontologically serious sense, at least to start with. The point now is that an analogue of this does not occur in every language. Obviously, in languages of a contrary tendency it would take an uncommon taste for paradox for one to come up with the empiricist idea. This suggests that in examining conceptual formations at the level of the technical discourse, philosophers need also to keep a critical eye on the conceptual intimations of the natural languages in which they work.

The situation is more complex in the case of Africans who have been trained in some foreign philosophical tradition, for instance, English-speaking philosophy, for there is now a cross-cultural dimension. They must assume both of the critical duties just noticed. But in addition, they must not forget that they have their own languages which have their own conceptual suggestiveness calling for critical study; which is why I said early on that African philosophers have to be doubly critical. Clearly, African philosophy at this historical juncture has of necessity to be comparative. This comparative approach is required not only when African philosophers work in areas of discourse called African philosophy in so many words but also in all philosophical work on all philosophical topics whatsoever. In particular, African philosophers should not wait until they are doing courses specifically designated African

philosophy before they bring their African conceptual resources to bear on their treatments of issues. Whether it be in logic, or epistemology, or ethics, or metaphysics, or whatever, they must introduce African inputs wherever feasible.

I think that it is a colonial type of mentality that regards African philosophy as something that should be kept apart from the mainstream of philosophical thinking. Compare how things stand or might stand in, say, the study of British philosophy. Surely, it would be more than mildly idiosyncratic for a British teacher of philosophy in a British university to propose, in his teaching of, *Metaphysics*, for example, to hold in abeyance all metaphysical insights deriving from British sources until s/he has the occasion to teach a course on British philosophy. In fact, there may be no such course in the given British university for the good reason that there may be no need for it. It would be a great day for African philosophy when the same becomes true of an African university, for it would mean that African insights have become fully integrated into the principal branches of philosophy.

That time has not come yet. In colonial times little, if anything, was heard about African philosophy. I finished my undergraduate studies in Philosophy in Ghana in 1958 just a year after our independence from Britain. In the whole of that period of philosophical study not a single word was said about African philosophy, nor, indeed, was the phrase "African philosophy" ever mentioned. In all fairness, my teachers cannot be blamed for this. They were hired to teach us Western philosophy, and that is what they did. Actually, it probably would have been an advantage if contemporary African philosophers had had to begin with a totally clean slate when they began in post-independence times to research into African philosophy. But, as it happens, religious and anthropological studies had been made of African world views in departments of religion and anthropology, and these tended to contain elements relevant to African philosophy. Now, although these studies were not technically philosophical, they were conducted not only in foreign languages, such as English, French and German, but also in terms of categories of Western metaphysical thought that have become widely received in Western culture. To take only a few examples, consider such categories of thought as those contained in the following dichotomies: the spiritual versus the physical, the supernatural versus the natural, the mystical versus the non-mystical, the religious versus the secular, being versus nothingness. These are modes of conceptualization that are very deeply entrenched in Western thought. I do not mean to suggest that every Western thinker believes that there are things falling under one side or the other of each of these dichotomies. What I think is the case is that most Western thinkers would find these dichotomies at least intelligible. Thus even a Western religious skeptic, while denying that there are any spiritual or supernatural beings, may, nevertheless, at the same time grant that the notion of a spiritual entity is not meaningless. Only logical positivists, and perhaps a few others, have wanted to say that such notions are meaningless. But the requiem for logical positivism is generally considered to be concluded.

When African thought was approached with intellectual categories such as the ones just mentioned some quite lopsided results ensued, although they did not seem to bother people much. Some of the findings of this sort of study of African thought that were, and still are, assiduously disseminated are that Africans see the world as being full of spiritual entities, that Africans are religious in all things, not even separating the secular from the religious, that African thought is, through and through, mystical, and so on. Some African philosophers have

followed this way of talking of African thought quite cheerfully. One reason may be that in their academic training they may themselves have come to internalize such accounts of African thought so thoroughly that they have become part of the furniture of their minds. Such minds are what may justly be called colonized. They are minds that think about and expound their own culture in terms of categories of a colonial origin without any qualms as to any possible conceptual incongruities. Such a mode of thinking may correctly be said to be unduly influenced by the historical accident of colonization. It may well be that if the concepts in question had been critically examined, they might have been found to be appropriate, but it may very well also be that they might have been found to be inapplicable in the context of African thought. In either case, an important preliminary question would have been answered and the way cleared for potentially enlightening accounts of African thought and its continuation in the modern world. In either case, moreover, the old accounts would have been decolonized.

In the negative case, that is, in the case in which critical inquiry discovers a foreign category of thought to be inapplicable within African thinking, an additional question of the greatest philosophical interest arises. If those categories do not make sense in African thought, does the fault lie in the concepts themselves or in African thought? I suspect that sometimes it will be the one and other times, the other. But we won't find out if we don't investigate, and if we don't investigate, then we wallow in colonized thinking. What makes the difference, then, between decolonized and colonized thinking is what I am in the habit of calling due reflection in our approach to discourses about African thought framed in foreign categories.

I have so far been talking of categories of thought, that is, fundamental concepts by means of which whole ranges of issues are formulated and discussed. But the question of decolonization also affects particular propositions expressed in terms of those categories. As an intellectual package, Christianity, for example, consists of particular metaphysical and ethical propositions. Any African who espouses Christianity without critical examination at some point of the truth or falsity of its propositions, or the validity of their supporting arguments, where there are any, must incur the label of being an intellectually colonized African. (I say "at some point" because many of us are already Christians by the time we have emerged from elementary school without ever having had the occasion to pose the question.)

On the other hand, if one goes along with the Christian package after due reflection, then one is entitled to be exempted from the colonized description. This point is worth emphasizing. An African is not to be debited with the colonial mentality merely because s/he espouses Christianity or Islam or any other foreign religion. It just may be that salvation lies elsewhere than in African religions. But an African should not take it for granted that this is the case simply from having been brought up in a foreign religion. The issue, in other words, needs to be confronted in the spirit of due reflection.

One way in which some Africans have seemed to want to evade this intellectual responsibility has been to say that religion is a matter of faith rather than reason and that, therefore, any critical probing is out of place. This expedient can be viewed from more than one unflattering perspective, but the following consideration should expose adequately the logical futility of the maneuver. Where two religions are in question, in this case, the indigenous African religion and Christianity, the suggestion that religion is a matter of faith is clearly

incapable of explaining a preference of one over the other. Moreover, ordinary common sense dictates that one should not jettison what is one's own in favor of what has come from abroad for no reason at all. It is, accordingly, difficult to see the faith defense as anything other than the rationalization of an intellectual inertia born of an early subjection to evangelism, that is to say, a colonized condition of the mind.

It is, as noted above, possible for Africans to be Christians in a non-colonized manner, but it is not clear that such Africans are always eager to acknowledge the widespread consequences of that persuasion for the evaluation of African religions. There are, as I will suggest later, definite incompatibilities between Christianity and various African religions. These are not incompatibilities that lie at the peripheries of these religions; they go to the roots. Consequently, an African who espouses Christianity on due reflection may have to admit frankly, and with stated reasons, that s/he rejects the religion indigenous to his or her culture. There is nothing wrong with this in principle. What is wrong is the apparent attempt on the part of some African Christians to have it both ways.

It is probably clear without further argument that the exorcising of the colonial mentality in African philosophy is going to involve conceptually critical studies of African traditional philosophies. I might mention that African philosophy consists of both a traditional and a modern component. It would have been unnecessary to make a point that, in the abstract, sounds so trite, were it not for the fact that some people seem to equate African philosophy with traditional African philosophy. It is, in any case, perhaps not so trite to insist that the imperative of decolonization applies to both phases of African philosophy.

As far as contemporary African philosophizing is concerned, it is important to understand that the imperative of decolonization does not enjoin anything like parochialism. There are cardinal branches of philosophical learning that were not developed in African traditions in most parts of Africa south of the Sahara. These include the disciplines of logic and its philosophy and the philosophy of mathematics and natural science. I have called for the domestication, in Africa, of disciplines such as these in previous writings, and I would like to take this opportunity to make a clarification. By domestication I do not mean the mindless copying of conclusions arrived at somewhere else. I mean taking up broad intellectual concerns relating to certain subject matters.

Consider logic. In our traditional life we do argue and we do evaluate arguments both with respect to their validity and soundness. In their disputations our elders are even wont to enunciate fundamental logical principles such as the laws of non-contradiction (viz. nothing is both the case and not the case) and excluded middle (viz. something is either the case or not the case). For example, among the Akans of Ghana inconsistent talk before any group of elders would be likely to invite the reminder that *Nokware mu nni abra*, literally, there is no conflict in truth, which, evidently, is an invocation of the principle of non-contradiction. And trying to evade an option as well as its contradictory will earn you the censure *Kosi a enkosi, koda a enkoda*, that is, you will not stand and you will not lie! The latter form of remonstrance, which is a stern way of trying to wake somebody up to the principle of excluded middle, is, in fact, so common that the logical carelessness in question will trigger it among almost any group of Akans, not just the elders.

Nevertheless, we do not, to my knowledge, have in Ghana the tradition of logical study as a formal discipline. It does not appear that we have formed within our traditions the habit of trying to set out the principles of reasoning, among which non-contradiction and excluded middle are of a very basic importance, in the manner of a system (as in logic). Nor, consequently, have we tended to investigate the assortment of theoretical questions that arise in such an enterprise (as in the philosophy of logic). For Africans to apply their minds to these projects, taking advantage of whatever insights may currently be available internationally in these areas of investigation, is for them to try to domesticate the disciplines concerned, in this case logic and the philosophy of logic. Since in the modern world Western logicians and philosophers have been engaged in these kinds of researches for a considerable time, there is no doubt but that the African who looks at their results might find something useful to build on. In this sort of thing, to be sure, there would be no wisdom in trying to reinvent the wheel.

Even so, in any such pursuits Africans will have to be doubly critical in the manner already explained. To attend to logic a little further: this discipline is a certain kind of study in syntax and semantics. Although it is fashionable to call the systems that are constructed and studied therein artificial languages, it cannot be supposed that these "languages" are totally independent of the natural languages in which the constructions are initiated. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that some aspects of the results obtained, especially in the philosophical reaches of the researches, may depend on characteristics of the syntax and semantics of the particular natural languages involved that are neither universal nor necessary to all natural languages. Africans working in these areas will have to be especially alert to this possibility lest they multiply concepts and concerns beyond necessity. Still, it is eminently reasonable to expect that there are some things of a universal validity in these disciplines, cross-culturally speaking. For example, if the simplest form of conditionality required for defining the relation between the premises and the conclusion of a valid argument must involve the notion of necessity, this will be so in Europe and America as well as in Africa, China, Japan, etc. Whatever the truth in regard to this question, it is of no consequence where its discoverer comes from. This is at once the basis of the possibility that we in Africa can learn something from the West and that the West, too, can learn something from us.

Decolonization, then, has nothing to do with the attitude which implies that Africans should steer clear of those philosophical disciplines that have at this particular point in human history received their greatest development in the West. Any Africans who take this view cannot, in any case, hold it consistently across all academic disciplines. They will have to have a strange mentality indeed to advocate, for example, stopping the study of mathematics and natural science in African universities. But if these disciplines are admitted, then why stop short of their philosophies? If Africans do not enter these areas of philosophy and make their presence felt in them, they will in perpetuity remain outsiders to the project of understanding and clarifying modes of thought that have played a huge part in the making of the modern world. Worse, they will have to call, at least occasionally, upon the help of those peoples who have mastered the relevant specialities; this means that they will be in a state of perpetual dependence.

Without prejudice to the foregoing reflections, however, it is clear that, for historical reasons, this is the time for the greatest decolonizing attention to be paid to the study of

traditional African philosophy. Since, as already noted, decolonization is a highly conceptual process, this implies that there will have to be intensive studies of those elements of culture that play significant roles in the constitution of meanings in the various African world views. Of these, language stands pre-eminent. One cannot hope to disentangle the conceptual impositions that have historically been made upon African thought-formations without a close understanding of the indigenous languages concerned. This immediately prescribes a certain methodology in the study of African traditional philosophy. Put simply, it stipulates that emphasis should be given to detailed, in-depth, studies of the traditional philosophies of specific African peoples by researchers who know the languages involved well. (This, I might emphasize, is a policy of emphasis not of exclusion. Other types of work, such as those of the domesticating type alluded to above, will also have to go on.)

Sometimes there are pressures on African philosophers to venture continent-wide generalizations about African philosophy. Perhaps, sometimes available information permits judicious generalizations of this scope. For example, a communalist outlook seems to be quite widespread in traditional life on the continent. This would lead one to expect a certain type of ethical orientation, but any such inferences, even if they seem to be supported by the anthropological data, will still need to be substantiated by linguistically informed and conceptually critical philosophical studies of the particular people concerned.

Such studies are what I call *particularistic* studies. They take the form of inquiries into topics such as "The Yoruba Conception of a Person", "The Chewa Notion of the Afterlife", "The Akan Conception of God", "The Nuer Notion of Spirit", "The Zulu Conception of Morality," and so on. Notice the concepts involved in these titles: Person, Afterlife, God, Spirit, Morality. Do these concepts have unproblematic counterparts in the language and thought of the people concerned? In any case, how do the African concepts that one has in mind compare and contrast with these concepts as they occur in Western thought or, more strictly, in various brands of Western thought? (This verbal circumspection is necessary owing to the fact that Western thought is not a monolithic structure but rather a variegated one, rich in diverse modes of conceptualization.)

The questions just raised are preliminary issues needing to be settled before we can take up issues of validity or truth. Clearly, they are issues whose treatment will require extensive knowledge of the relevant languages. That knowledge will have to be brought to bear upon the evaluation of specific philosophical attributions to various African peoples couched in terms of concepts such as the ones noted above. At present, particularistic studies in the literature have tended too precipitously to take cross-cultural equivalences for granted with regard to the concepts mentioned and a large range of others. This has meant that wittingly or, most likely unwittingly, African conceptions of the relevant subjects have been assimilated to Western ones. It is a remarkable fact that this conceptual superimposition can occur even in the process of an attempt to point out differences.

Consider the following example. Father Tempels in his *Bantu Philosophy* explains that the Western conception of being is static while the African counterpart is dynamic. The latter is, he says, dynamic in the following sense. For Africans "Being is force and force is being." In the face of a message of this sort, formulated in a foreign language, I recommend that African philosophers should ask themselves the following question, which, on the face of it, but perhaps

only on the face of it, is quite a simple question. How is the thesis proffered to be expressed in my vernacular? This is a question that our training in foreign languages tends to make us forget to ask. By contrast, many other peoples think philosophically in their own vernaculars as a matter of course.

In this matter I have tried to do as I preach with the following result: Zero! The thing cannot be done. The thesis cannot be expressed in my language, namely, the Akan language spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. In this language, unlike, say, English, there is no such thing as the existential verb "to be". The only possible renditions of the notion of "being" are either predicative or adverbial. To be or being always prompts the question "To be what, where?" or "Being what, where?." The Akan expression for "to be" is *wo ho* or *ye*. The word *wo* in this context is syncategorematic; it is incomplete, requiring some specification of place, however indeterminate. Thus *wo ho* means "is there, at some place." Similarly, *ye* cannot stand alone; it needs a complement, such as in *ye onipa* (is a person) or *ye tenten* (is long). Thus the best that one can do in rendering the existential use of "being" would be to say something like "*Se biribi wo ho*" which translates back to English as "The circumstance that something is there, at some place." Good sense forbids trying to go any further in the experiment of casting "Being is force and force is being" in Akan.

The conclusion to which this ill-fated thought experiment brings us is that the thesis in question cannot rightly be attributed to the Akans. Apart from the intrinsic interest of this finding, it is of some relevance to the evaluation of Tempels' account as he often writes as if he thought that what is true of the Bantu is true of all Africans. We, on our part, however, do recognize that if it cannot be attributed to the Akans, it does not follow that it cannot be attributed to the Bantus that Tempels studied. Decolonization in African philosophy does not imply forcing philosophical unanimity upon the diverse peoples of Africa. As it happens, however, the late Alexis Kagame, a Bantu philosopher and scientific linguist, also argued that the existential verb "to be" does not occur in the Bantu group of languages, and pointed out that the Bantu analogue of "to be" always prompts the question "to be what where?" If Kagame is right, then whatever it was that Tempels noticed about Bantu thought was radically mis-stated by the use of an inapplicable Western category of thought, namely, the concept of being as existentially construed. It is a concept that was obviously deeply ingrained in Tempels' own manner of thinking, and he very well may have thought it universal to all human thinking. Since some concepts are actually universal, no necessary opprobrium should attach to Tempels' apparent procedure. Nevertheless, the necessity for a critical examination of accounts of African thought such as Tempels', with an eye to the unraveling of any conceptual superimpositions remains undiminished. And it is fair to say that any Africans who go about disseminating Tempels' claim without confronting the conceptual issue are simply advertising their colonial mentality for all who have eyes to see.

Let us be clear about one thing. That the existential notion of being cannot be rendered in Akan or, if Kagame is right, in the Bantu group of languages, does not in itself show that there is anything wrong with it. As previously suggested, it may possibly be that these African languages are inadequate and are in need of a supplementation in this regard. On the other hand, it may be that this existential concept of being is a semantically defective concept, notwithstanding its great currency in Western metaphysics. This is a separate question. All that



our remarks show, if they are right, is that the view that "Being is force and force is being" cannot be attributed to the Akans or the Bantus for a deep semantical reason. Should it enter the head of an Akan or Bantu metaphysician to argue that the Akan or Bantu way of expressing the notion ostensibly expressed in English by the existential verb "to be" is metaphysically superior to the Western construal as evidenced in Tempels' sentence and in certain even more famous sentences in Western metaphysics, that contention will have to be argued on what I have called independent grounds. I mean by that, considerations that are independent of the peculiarities of the given vernaculars and are, therefore, intelligible to all concerned irrespective of language, race, persuasion, etc. The possibility of independent considerations, by the way, is a precondition of inter-cultural dialogue. And the possibility of this last, we might note parenthetically, is the refutation of relativism.

Another thing we ought to be clear about in this connection is that the linguistic considerations involved in any African philosopher's attempts at conceptual decolonization need not be above debate. On the contrary, any such debate is a sign of a decolonizing vitality; for, remember, the hallmark of decolonized thinking is due reflection not durable deference among African thinkers.

There are still other things to be noted. The very idea of a communal philosophy that is entailed in the notion of particularistic studies of traditional African philosophies might be put in question. It might be suggested that to talk of the Bantu conception of this or the Zulu conception of that is to postulate a unanimity or consensus in philosophical belief among the traditional peoples for which there is not, and probably can never be, sufficient evidence. It is necessary, in response to this, to explain at once that talk of the communal philosophy of an ethnic group does not necessarily imply that the conceptions involved are entertained by all members of the group. What it means is that anybody thoughtfully knowledgeable about the culture will know that such conceptions are customary in the culture though s/he may not subscribe to it. The evidence for a communal philosophy is very much like that for the customs of a culture. In fact, in quite some cases customs are encapsulations of some aspects of a communal philosophy.

It is important, however, to note that a communal philosophy is the result of the pooling together over a considerable length of time the thoughts of individual thinkers. Propositions about, say, the constituents of human personality or the nature of time just don't materialize impromptu out of a cosmological bang, big, small, or medium. They emanate from human brains. In an oral tradition the names of the thinkers are often forgotten. This is not always so, however. In Ghana, for example, it is not at all rare for a proverb to be prefaced with the name of its author. Nor is it unusual for such sayings to evince originality and independence of mind. It goes without saying, therefore, that a communal philosophy is a gathering together of inputs from thinkers who may not have agreed on all points. And this, perhaps, accounts for the apparent inconsistencies that one sometimes notices in such bodies of belief.

Two lessons emerge. The first is this. There is nothing necessarily impeccable about a communal philosophy. It is the combining, in an almost imponderable process, of the opinions of fallible individuals. Moreover, these opinions are often only the most striking of the conclusions of the thinkers in question, preserved in the popular imagination in separation from the possibly complex and subtle reasonings that may have given rise to them. Such underlying

argumentation is usually, although not invariably, forgotten. Yet it is this that gives a philosophy its profundity when it has any. It is, accordingly, the responsibility of contemporary African philosophers to delve beneath the communal beliefs to find their underlying reasons wherever possible. That is a necessary preparation for evaluation and reconstruction, two responsibilities complementary to the first.

Why is this a decolonizing program? It is because, ironically, the models of exposition in African philosophy established by writers like Tempels, who directly or indirectly worked for the colonization of the African mind, portrayed African communal philosophies as doctrinal givens, unquestionable for the African consciousness, though otherwise extremely questionable in themselves. An associated phenomenon, which is doubly ironic, is that in reaction to what is perceived as the colonial denial of philosophical capabilities to the African psyche, some contemporary African philosophers are apt to approach African communal philosophies in an almost warlike spirit. Any criticism of any aspect of these philosophies is regarded as a racial affront or, if it is by an African, as nothing short of a betrayal. This is a retrograde inflexibility for which, by and large, we have colonialism to thank.

This inflexibility is particularly unphilosophical because a philosophical thesis is a fundamental claim on the entire universe. It says what reality, whether social, physical or spiritual, is like. Thus, when the Akans, for example, say that the life principle of a human being is a speck of the divine substance, they cannot be understood to be characterizing Akan human beings alone. They are claiming that all human beings--Chinese, Indians, Africans, Americans, Europeans, etc.--are of that description. Then, for example, may not European or Chinese thinkers subject the thesis to a critical examination, provided that they take the trouble to inform themselves properly of its meaning and eschew any attitude of racial superiority?

To present African philosophy as an untouchable possession of Africans is to invite a touristic approach from its foreign audiences. If the philosophies may not be evaluated as false, they may not be evaluated as true either. In that case they might merely be noticed as cultural curiosities. This would aggravate a situation which already is not very healthy, for one has the distinct impression that many foreigners, particularly in the West, who have woken up to the recognition that there is such an animal as African philosophy do not as yet manifest any tendency to suspect that it is something from which they might conceivably have something to learn.

The second of the two lessons lately foreshadowed is that it is important to search out and study the thought of the individual indigenous philosophers who are contributors to the communal philosophies of our traditional societies. Such original thinkers are, in any case, worth studying in their own right. Studies of this kind, which are even more particularistic than studies of African communal philosophies, have the following decolonizing potential. They are likely to help erase the impression fostered in colonial and colonial-inspired treatments of African thought that Africa is lacking in individual thinkers of philosophic originality. An added bonus could be that the example of critical and reconstructive thinking on the part of our own indigenous philosophers might also help to wean some of our contemporary African philosophers from the merely narrative approach to the study of traditional African philosophy. The work that Professor Odera Oruka of the University of Nairobi has done in this direction in

his *Sage Philosophy* therefore invites urgent continuation by as many workers in African philosophy in as many places on the continent as possible.

Since I mentioned customs at one point, let me repeat that, along with language, they constitute an essential resource in the study of a communal philosophy. Indeed language might, from one point of view, be seen as a kind of custom, a custom of symbolization. In the study of a culture, therefore, customs can be a veritable philosophical text. All of which suggests that if we want to correct any misapprehensions of a colonial origin about African philosophy, we ought to settle down to detailed investigations into particular African cultures.

This is not to say that there are no problems in this program of decolonization by particularization, so to speak. Take again the matter of language. Studies of the kind recommended involve essential uses of specific African languages. But there is a great multiplicity of languages in Africa, often inside a single African country. Thus if you take, Akan, for example, it is spoken by only a minute proportion of the population of Africa. The question naturally arises whether the particularistic approach would not create blockages in inter-African philosophical communication, not to talk of philosophical communication further afield. This is an important question. The answer is as follows. To begin with, particularistic studies of various African peoples making such uses of particular African languages actually do exist already, especially in the religious and anthropological literature, and they cry for a decolonizing corrective. Furthermore, the philosophical interpretation of one African language may lead African philosophers speaking other African languages to make analogous inquiries into their own vernaculars with fruitful, if not necessarily corroborative, results. Actually, in my experience such studies have tended to converge more often than diverge.

Another circumstance which makes particularistic studies based on a given language not particularly impenetrable to non-speakers is that, as a rule, they consist of inferences from primary data regarding which there is often little uncertainty and on which, consequently, the non-insider can relatively safely depend. It is for this reason that non-speakers, whether they be African or non-African, can often evaluate controversies among African philosophers speaking the same language regarding the interpretation of aspects of their vernacular. For a quick illustration, recall the information that in Akan "to be" in the sense of to exist can only be expressed as "*wo ho*", i.e. to be at some place. Suppose that two Akan philosophers, noting this, nevertheless disagree as to whether it follows that the notion of an immaterial substance is incoherent in the Akan language. I suggest that only a sense of logic is required in any other African or, for that matter, any member of the species *homo sapiens*, to deliberate on the issue.

It is worth emphasizing, besides, that African philosophers in our time cannot live by decolonization alone but also by the direct interrogation of reality. What is truth, goodness, freedom, time, causality, justice? What is the origin of the universe, the meaning of life, the destiny of the human soul (whatever it is)? What are the principles of correct reasoning? What are the best ways of acquiring knowledge? Grant that colonialism may have led to distorted accounts of the conceptions of our forefathers and foremothers on many of these issues. Grant that in some cases these issues may need recasting. Still, we contemporary Africans, too, have a duty to venture suggestions on these matters. In doing so we will, of course, have to take due account of our own heritage, as philosophers in other cultures routinely do. But we do not always need to call explicit attention to the cultural roots of our theories of reality. In any case,

we would need to offer independent justifications for them. It may be said, then, that although at the present time we are still in an era of post-colonial reconstruction which calls for a large dose of decolonization, we ought not to be oblivious to the other imperatives of philosophical thinking. Decolonization, even as only one of our preoccupations, is not something that we will be doing for ever in African philosophy. Of course, it will always make good sense in some contexts to speak, say, of the Bantu conception of something or other just as it still makes good sense for Western philosophers to talk of the ancient Greek conception of various things in historical and even analytical investigations, but such discussions will eventually not have quite the special urgency that they now have in African philosophy. The time will come when there would be, for the most part, no pressing need for the kind of particularism discussed above here.

For the time being, however, we in Africa have no option but to include in our projects, as a matter of urgency, a decolonizing program of pursuing the universal by way of the particular.

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN RELIGIONS

In the first part of this paper I looked at the decolonization of African philosophy mostly in general terms. Now, I would like to examine decolonization with specific reference to the philosophical study of African religions. As you might expect from my advocacy of strategic particularism, my focus here will principally be on Akan religion as an example of African religions. I invite others to compare and contrast (where appropriate) their own perceptions of their indigenous religions. Religion is, indeed, an area in which there is a superabundance of characterizations of African thought in terms of inappropriate or, at best, only half-appropriate concepts. I shall examine concepts like creation out of nothing, omnipotence and eternity, and categorial contrasts such as the natural versus the supernatural and the physical versus the spiritual.

Africans nowadays frequently are said to be a profoundly religious people, not only by themselves but also by foreign students of their culture. This was not always so. Some of the early anthropologists felt that the concept of God, for example, was too sublime for the African understanding, granting that they had any understanding at all. The present situation in which indigenes as well as foreigners vie with one another to testify to the piety of the African mind is a remarkable reversal of earlier attitudes and prepossessions. There is virtual unanimity, in particular, on the report that Africans have a strong belief in the existence of God.

On all or virtually all hands it seems to be assumed that it speaks well of the mental capabilities of a people if they can be shown to have a belief in God, especially a God of a Christian likeness. Accordingly, the literature on African religions is replete with generalizations about African beliefs in the Almighty. In this discussion I want to start with a fairly extended look at the concept of God in the thought of the Akans of Ghana. Since this is the group to which I belong and in which I was raised, I hope I may be excused some show of confidence, although, of course, not dogmatism in making some conceptual suggestions about their thought. I will also try, more briefly, to make some contrasts between Akan thought and the thought of some other African peoples on the question of the belief in God, though this time

more tentatively. It will emerge that not all African peoples entertain a belief in God and that this is, moreover, without prejudice to their mental powers.

Any cursory study of the thought and talk of the Akans will indeed reveal an unmistakable belief in a supreme being. This being is known under various names. I mention just a few here. *Nyame* is the word most often used for this being. It means something like "Absolute satisfier". Another of his names is *Onyankopon*, which means, literally, "He who is alone great", a notion that reminds one of St. Anselm's "That than which a greater cannot be conceived", though this is not to assume conceptual congruence in other respects. There is also the name *Twediampon* (He upon whom you lean and do not fall). Cosmologically, perhaps, the most important name is *Oboade*, which, for the time being, I will translate as Creator. Frequently, the word *Nana* is added to either of the first two names. The word means grandparent, or ruler, or, in a more general sense, honored personage. In this context all these meanings are available, but often it is the grandfatherly connotation that is uppermost in the consciousness of people invoking the name.

Indeed, in the literature this grandfatherly appellation of God has often been emphasized by indigenous writers because some early European writers had suggested that the Akan (and, more generally, the African) God was an aloof God, indifferent to the fate of his creatures. These foreign observers even had the impression that this attitude of the supreme being was reciprocated by the Akans when they (the visitors) found among them no evidences of the worship of God, institutional or otherwise. In fact, however, the Akan have a strong sense of the goodwill of God; only this sentiment is not supposed, cosmologically speaking, to be manifested through ad hoc interventions in the order of nature.

The word "nature" is, perhaps, misleading in this context, in so far as it may suggest the complementary contrast of supernature. Here we come face to face with an important aspect of the cosmology of the Akans. God is the creator of the world, but he is not apart from the universe: He together with the world constitutes the spatio-temporal "totality" of existence. In the deepest sense, therefore, the ontological chasm indicated by the natural/supernatural distinction does not exist within Akan cosmology. When God is spoken of as creator we must remind ourselves that words can mislead. Creation is often thought of, at least in run-of-the-mill Christianity, as the bringing into existence of things out of nothing. The Akan God is certainly not thought of as such a creator. The notion of creation out of nothing does not even make sense in the Akan language. The idea of nothing can only be expressed by some such phrase as *se whee nni ho*, which means something like "the circumstance of there not being something there". The word *ho* (there, at some place) is very important in the phrase; it indicates a spatial context. That of which there is a lack in the given location is always relative to a universe of discourse implicitly defined by the particular thought or communication. Thus, beholding a large expanse of desolate desert, an Akan might say that *whee nni ho*. The meaning would be that there is a lack there of the broad class of things that one expects to find on land surface of that magnitude. The absolute nothingness entailed in the notion of creation out of nothing, however, scorns any such context. This abolition of context effectively abolishes intelligibility, as far as the Akan language is concerned.

But, it might be asked, does it not occur to the Akan that if God created the world, as s/he supposes, then prior to the act of creation there must have been nothing in quite a strict sense?

The answer is that it depends at least on what one means by "create". In the most usual sense creation presupposes raw materials. A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words and ideas. If God is conceived as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions a world order out of indeterminate raw material, the idea of absolute nothingness would seem to be avoidable. And this is, in fact, how the Akan metaphysicians seem to have conceived the matter. Moreover, *Oboade*, the Akan word that I provisionally translated as "creator", means the maker of things. *Bo* means to make and *ade* means thing, but in Akan to *bo ade* is unambiguously instrumental; you only make something with something.

An almost automatic reaction to such an idea for many people is: If the "divine architect" fashioned the world out of some pre-existing raw material, then, however indeterminate it may have been, surely, somebody must have created it. But this takes it for granted that the concept of creation out of absolute nothingness makes sense. Since this is the question at issue, the reaction begs the question. If the concept of nothing in Akan is relative in the way explained, then obviously the notion of absolute nothingness will not make sense. The fundamental reason for this semantical situation in Akan is that, as pointed out in previous sections, in the Akan language existence is necessarily spatial. To exist is to *wo ho*, be at some location. So if God exists, he is *somewhere*. If nothingness excludes space, it has no accommodation in the Akan conceptual framework. On the other hand, if nothingness accommodates space, it is no longer absolute.

Of course, as suggested earlier, if a concept is incoherent within a given language, it does not necessarily mean that there is anything wrong with it, for it may be that the language in question is expressively inadequate. In the case of the concept of creation out of nothing, however, its coherence, even within English, is severely questionable. In English, the concept of "there is"-note the "there"-which is equivalent to "exists" is quite clearly spatial. Because the word "exists" does not wear its spatiality on its face, it has been possible in English to speak as if existence is not necessarily spatial without prohibitive implausibility. Besides, the maxim that *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (Out of nothing nothing comes), which, ironically, is championed by Christian philosophers, such as Descartes, conflicts sharply with the notion of creation out of nothing. That nothing can come out of nothing is not an empirical insight; it is a conceptual necessity, just like the fact that two and two cannot add up to fifty. Thus to say that some being could make something come out of nothing is of the same order of incoherence as saying that some being could make two and two add up to fifty. Besides, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the causal connotation of creation is incompatible with the circumstance or rather, non-circumstance, of absolute nothingness. Causation makes sense only when it is, *in principle*, possible to distinguish between *post hoc* and *propter hoc* (i.e., between mere sequence and causal sequence). If there was one being and absolutely nothing besides him, then logically, that distinction was impossible. If so, the notion of causation collapses and with it that of creation.

So the notion of creation out of nothing would seem to be incoherent not only in Akan, but also absolutely. At least, the last reason given in evidence of its incoherence was an independent consideration, in the sense that it was independent of the peculiarities of Akan or English. It appealed only to a general logical principle. In fact, the conceptual difficulties in creation out of nothing have not been lost on religious thinkers, which accounts for the fact that it is not very unusual to find a sophisticated Christian metaphysician substituting some such rarefied notion as "the transcendental ground of existence" for the literal idea of creation even while

cooperating with the generality of pious Christians in speaking of God as the creator. Another escape from the paradoxes of *ex nihilo* creation by some religious sophisticates, going far back into history, has been by way of emanationism. It might be worth remembering also in this connection that Plato's *demiurge* was an idea innocent of *ex nihilo* pretensions.

Be that as it may, it seems clear that the Akan supreme being is thought of as a cosmic architect rather than a creator out of nothing. The world resulting from the process of divine fashioning is conceived to contain all the potential for its development and bears all the marks of God's good will once and for all. In this scheme there are postulated various orders of beings. At the top of this hierarchy is God. Immediately below him are a host of extra-human beings and forces. Then come human beings, the lower animals, vegetation and the inanimate world, in that order. All these orders of being are believed to be subject to the universal reign of (cosmic) law. And the absence of any notion of creation out of nothing reflects the Akan sense of the ontological homogeneity of that hierarchy of existence.

Since I have mentioned inanimate things, I ought, perhaps, to dispose quickly of the allegation, often heard, that Africans believe that everything has life. The Akans, at least, are a counterexample. Some objects, such as particular rocks or rivers, may be thought to house an extra-human force, but it is not supposed that every rock or stone has life. Among the Akans a piece of dead wood, for example, is regarded as notoriously dead and is the humorous paradigm of absolute lifelessness. A graver paradigm of the same thing is a dead body. Thus the automatic attributions of animism to Africans manifests little empirical or conceptual wisdom.

To return to the subject of order. The strength of the Akan sense of order may be gauged from the following cosmological drum text.

Odomankoma  
 He created the thing  
 "Hewer out" Creator  
 He created the thing  
 What did he create?  
 He created Order  
 He created Knowledge  
 He created Death  
 As its quintessence

I quote this from J. B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God*. The translation is Danquah's, and it incorporates a bit of interpretation, but it is, I think, accurate. What we need particularly to note is that to the Akan metaphysician, order comes first, cosmologically speaking. The stanza is a statement, above all else, to quote Danquah again, of "the primordial orderliness of creation."

This sense of order in phenomena is manifested at another level in the strong belief in the law of universal causation. There is an Akan saying to the effect that if nothing had touched the palm nut branches they would not have rattled (*Se biribi ankoka papa a anka erenye kredede*). This is often quoted by writers on Akan thought as the Akan statement of universal causation. It is right as far as it goes, but there are more explicit formulations of the principle, such as one

quoted by Gyekye. *Asem biara wo ne farebae*, which, literally, means everything has what brought it about. There is another formulation which, in addition to being more literal and explicit, is also more comprehensive. It says simply that everything has its explanation (*Biribiara wo nenkyerease*). The advantage of this formulation is that it discourages any impression that the sense of order under study is only conversant with mechanical causation. In Akan thought this kind of causation corresponds to only one kind of explanation; there are other kinds of explanation that are taken to evince the orderliness of creation (understanding creation, of course, in a quasi-demiurgic sense). These include psychological, rational, quasi-physical explanations and their various combinations of them. As one might expect, they correspond to the orders of being postulated in the Akan world view.

To illustrate with a case which combines all these, suppose that an illness is interpreted as punishment from the ancestors for wrong conduct. There is here a cosmological dimension. The ancestors are conceived to be the departed spirits of erstwhile elders of our societies who live in a world analogous and contiguous to ours and work for the good of the living by watching over their morals. On this showing, they are both like and unlike the living. Like the living, they have an interest in morality of which they are, indeed, recognized as, in some ways, guardians. Moreover, in so far as any imagery is annexed to the conception of the ancestors, it is person-like. But unlike persons, they are not normally perceivable to the naked eye, and they can affect human life in super-human ways for good or, in exceptional cases, as by the present hypothesis, for ill. The explanation involved here, then, is at once psychological, rational, mechanical, and quasi-physical. It is psychological because it is supposed that the hypothetical misconduct incurs the displeasure of the ancestors, which is a matter of mental dynamics. It is rational in conception, for the imagined punishment is viewed as a reformatory and deterrent measure, which, in principle, is a reasonable objective for enforcing morals. It has a "mechanical" aspect in that the illness being explained involves a physiological condition that will in many ways exhibit scenarios of physical causality. Finally, it is quasi-physical because, as pointed out, although the ancestors are psycho-physical in imagery, the manner of their operation is not fully constrained by the dynamic and associated laws familiar in day-to-day experience.

That the activities of beings, such as the ancestors, are not supposed to be completely amenable to "physical" laws is not to be taken to imply that they are regarded as contradicting them. What, in Western thought, are called physical laws in the Akan world view are understood to govern the phenomena of one sphere of existence. But that understanding, as explained, also postulates another sphere of existence, which is believed to be governed, both internally and in interaction with the human sphere of existence, by laws different in some respects from physical or psychological laws and supplementary to them. Though generally Akans do not pretend to understand many aspects of the *modus operandi* of the beings and forces belonging to the super-human sphere, they still view them as regular denizens of the cosmos. Moreover, there is no lack of 'specialists' in Akan (and other African) societies who are supposed to have uncommon insights into the operations of such beings and enjoy expertise in communicating with them. Thus, the idea of ancestors punishing misbehavior evokes no sense of cosmological irregularity. On the contrary, it is perceived as exactly the kind of thing that might happen if people misbehave in certain ways.



Certain conceptual consequences flow immediately from these last considerations. To begin with, since all the orders of being are conceived to interact in a law-like manner, the natural/supernatural dichotomy will have no place in the Akan world view, which reinforces our earlier remark on this issue made in a slightly different connection. Furthermore, the notion of a miracle does not make sense in this context, if a miracle is something supposed to happen contrary to the laws of "nature." Strange things may happen, of course, but in this system of thought, if they cannot be accounted for on the basis of the laws of the familiar world, they will be assumed to be accountable on some quasi-physical laws. This cosmological orientation seems to be not at all uncommon in Africa.

Yet, in the literature on African religions there are profuse references to the supposed African belief in the supernatural, which is frequently inspired by such things as ancestral veneration, almost standardly misdescribed as "ancestor-worship." Obviously, these misconceptualizations are the result of that superimposition of Western categories upon Akan thought-formations which is also the quintessence of conceptual colonization. Through education in colonial or neo-colonial circumstances, many Africans have come to assimilate these modes of thought and, in some cases, have internalized them so completely that they apparently can take great pride in propagating stories of the ubiquity of the supernatural in African thought. Perhaps, none of us Africans can claim total freedom from this kind of assimilation, but at least we can consciously initiate the struggle for conceptual self-exorcism.

Other aspects of the conceptual superimposition need to be noted. The beings I have, by implication, described as super-human (but, note, not supernatural) are often called spirits. If the notion of spirits is understood in a quasi-physical sense, as they sometimes are, in narratives of ghostly apparitions even in Western thought, there is no problem of conceptual incongruity. But if the word "spirit" is construed, as so often happens, in a Cartesian sense to designate an immaterial substance, no such category can be fitted into the conceptual framework of Akan thought. The fundamental reason for this is to be found in the spatial connotation of the Akan concept of existence. Given the necessary spatiality of all existents, little reflection is required to see that the absolute ontological cleavage between the material and the immaterial will not exist in Akan metaphysics. Again, that Africans are constantly said to believe in spiritual entities in the immaterial sense can be ascribed to the conceptual impositions in the accounts of African thought during colonial times and their post-colonial aftermath.

It is, of course, an independent question whether the notion of an immaterial entity is intellectually viable. I will not pursue that question here. What is urgent, though, is to note certain further dimensions of the conceptual misdescriptions of African religions. One of the best entrenched orthodoxies in the literature is the idea that Africans believe in a whole host of lesser gods or lesser deities. That many Akans have bought this story of a pantheon of "lesser gods" in their traditional religion must be due to a consistent forgetfulness of their own language when thinking about such matters. There is no natural way of translating that phrase into Akan. None of the names, as distinct from descriptions, for God in Akan has a plural. In any case, it is very misleading to call the super-human beings and forces gods. Since the notion of a god, however diminutive, is intimately connected with religion, the use of that word in this context encourages the description of African attitudes to those entities as religious. Then, since

Africans do often regard themselves as being in relationship with them, the stage is set for the inference that their life is completely pervaded by religion.

African scholars have not left it to foreigners alone to proclaim this image of African thought. Some of them have assumed eminent responsibilities in that direction. Thus, John Mbiti, for example, in his *African Religions and Philosophy*, has said things like, "Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony...", or "African peoples do not know how to exist without religion," or "religion is their whole system of being." At work here is an assimilation of African thought to Western categories.

At least as far as the Akans are concerned, it can be said that their attitude to those extra-human beings generally called minor gods in the literature is not really religious. On the contrary, it is utilitarian, for the most part. The powers in question are, as previously noted, a regular part of the resources of the world. If human beings understand how these powers function and are able to establish satisfactory relations with them, humans can exploit their powers to their advantage. One has, of course, to be circumspect because falling afoul of them could be dangerous. The way of establishing satisfactory relations with them is through those procedures that are often called rituals. But these rituals are not regarded as anything other than a method of making use of the super-human resources of the world. Because the powers that are called lesser gods are conceived to be, in some ways, person-like, the "rituals" often have a communicative component heavily laden with flattery. But the tactical character of the procedure is manifest in the fact that a so-called god who is judged inefficient, by reason, for example, of persistent inability to render help at the right time at the right place, is consigned to obsolescence by the permanent averting of attention. An attitude of genuine religious devotion cannot be thus conditional. Accordingly, it would seem inappropriate to call the 'rituals' in question religious. Nor, for the same reason, can the procedures be called acts of *worship* unless the word is used in so broad a sense as to make the concept of worship no longer inseparably bound up with a religious attitude. That the attitude under discussion is not religious or that the procedures do not amount to worship does not imply a judgment that the people concerned fall short of some creditable practice; it simply means that the concepts of religion and worship have been misapplied to aspects of the given culture on the basis of unrigorous analogies of a foreign inspiration. It would, in any case, be hasty to assume that there is anything necessarily meritorious about religious activities.

The Akans, in common with most other African peoples, nevertheless, do have a religious aspect to their culture. The question is as to its proper characterization. I would say that Akan religion consists solely in the unconditional veneration for God and trust in his power and goodness-i.e., in his perfection. This religion is, most assuredly, not an institutional religion, and there is nothing that can be called the worship of God in it. The insistence that any genuine belief in God must be accompanied with a practice of God-worship is simply an arbitrary universalization of the habits of religionists of a different culture. It is difficult, actually, to see how a perfect being could welcome or approve of such things as the singing of his praises.

Another significant contrast with other religions, particularly certain influential forms of Christianity, is that although God is held to be all-good, morality is not defined in Akan thought

in terms of the will of God but rather in terms of human interests. Neither are procedures for the promotion of morality attached to Akan religion; they belong primarily to the home.

The inclusion of the attitudes and practices associated with the Akan belief in various super-human beings and forces in the scope of Akan religion is an adulteration of the traditional religion that has exposed it quite severely to unconsidered judgment. It has helped to eclipse the religion in certain layers of the consciousness of the average educated Akan. The movement of thought has been as follows. When that overly inclusive view is taken of Akan religion, the supposed worship of the supposed gods looms so large in it that the whole religion becomes more or less identified with it. Thus it is that in Christian translation Akan religion is called *Abosomsom*, that is, the worship of stones. The same system of pious translation, by the way, called Christianity *Anyamesom*, that is, the worship of God. When, therefore ordinary educated Akans, brought up in Christianity, come to think that they have shed belief in the "lesser gods," they automatically see themselves as too enlightened for the traditional religion. Actually, the shedding of the traditional mind-cast is often only superficial. But let that pass. We were only concerned to illustrate what the uncritical assimilation of African categories by Western ones has done to an African self-image.

Let us return to the Akan God himself. An important question is how the Akans suppose that knowledge of him is obtained. In this connection there is an extremely interesting Akan saying to the effect that no one teaches God to a child (*Obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame*). This is sometimes interpreted to mean that knowledge of God is inborn and not the fruit of argumentation. But this is inconsistent with the implications of some of the names or descriptions for God in Akan.

One designation calls God *Ananse Kokroko*, meaning, the Stupendous Spider. The spider is associated with ingenuity in designing, and therefore the designation is clearly a metaphorical articulation of the notion of God as the Great Designer. Similarly, Oguah, citing an Akan designation which calls God The Great Planner, comments that we have here a hint of an argument which in Western philosophy is called a teleological argument. Oguah is, I think right, and this shows that the Akans do think that reasoning is involved in the acquisition of the knowledge of the existence of God. If so, the maxim cited above is unlikely to be one that seeks to rule out the relevance of argument. Its most plausible interpretation is that the reasons for the belief in God are so obvious that even a child can appreciate them unaided.

In my own experience the previous interpretation tallies best with the reactions of the Akans not steeped in foreign philosophies that I have accosted from time to time on the justification of the belief in God. They have never refused the invitation to reason, though they have tended to be surprised that so obvious a point should be the object of earnest inquiry. The following type of argument has often been proffered:

Surely, somebody must be responsible for the world. Were you not brought forth into this world by your parents? And were they not, in turn, by their parents, and so on? Must there not, therefore, be somebody who was responsible for everything?

Another type of argumentation that I have been supplied with is this:

Every household has a father, and every town or country a king, Surely, there must be someone who rules the whole universe.

In this last connection a very common Akan saying comes to mind, namely, "God is King" (*Onyame ne hene*).

Regarding these arguments, no one can, or should, pretend that they are cogent pieces of reasoning, especially the last one. It is relevant to note that these arguments were deliberately solicited from ordinary Akans, not from their metaphysicians. But two points can be made; the second is of special significance for our discussion. First, if these arguments were sound, they would prove the conclusions advertised or something close. They would, that is, prove that there is a cosmic architect or ruler of the universe or something like that. This is much more than can be said for almost all the principal arguments for the existence of God in Western philosophy. These arguments also are such that, if they were sound, they would only prove some such being as a cosmic architect or governor. Yet, as a rule, there is, at the concluding point, an inconceivable leap to the affirmation of an *ex nihilo* Creator-God! On this point Hume's words should have been the last. He pointed out, in particular reference to teleological arguments, otherwise known as the argument from design, that even if granted valid, it would only prove a designer, not a creator [*ex nihilo*]. But "faith", even when it pretends to argue, is apparently stronger than logic, and the concluding unphilosophical leap remains a favorite exercise for some philosophers.

Second, and more importantly, the fact that even ordinary Akans are so willing to reason about the basic proposition of their religion demonstrates a rational attitude to religion which contrasts with the attitude which fundamentalist Christianity brought to many parts of Africa through the missionaries. Their key idea in this regard seems to have been "faith" as belief inaccessible to rational discussion. Many Africans have taken the idea to heart and have, in some cases, even been born again. If you ask them for the reason behind their preference for the new religion over the traditional one, the standard reply is that it is a matter of faith, not reason. I explained in previous sections why this answer is not sufficient. The foregoing discussion enables us to show also that this irrationality is uncharacteristic of the traditional outlook on religion. In fact, the notion of faith as belief without, and inaccessible to, reason is untranslatable into Akan except by an unflattering paraphrase-*Gyidi hunu*-literally, useless belief, is probably all that is available, unless one preferred a more prolix circumlocution, which would be something like *Gyidi a enni nkyerease*, that is, again literally, belief without explanation. The pejorative connotation of the latter periphrasis, however, does not come through in the English version. Thus within Akan semantics it is difficult to validate the idea of faith being inhospitable to reason. In these circumstances one must admire the simplicity of the Christian solution to the problem of translating faith (in the non-rational sense) into Akan. They say simply *Gyidi*, which in genuine Akan means simply belief. Since this is patently inadequate, one must assume that the translators may have put their faith in *ad hoc* evangelical glosses. But it is also simple to see that decolonized thinking in religion must make short work of the evangelical talk of faith.

Let us once again return to the concept of God. Oguah advances the interesting claim that the Akan concept of God as the one who is alone great (*Onyankopon*) is the same as the concept of the greatest conceivable being or that than which nothing greater can be conceived, which formed the basis of Saint Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God. In a formal sense this is correct, for an Akan believer cannot consistently concede the possibility of any

being greater or even equal to God. However, this formal identity pales into insignificance when it is recalled that the Akan God is a cosmic architect while Anselm's is an *ex nihilo* creator. These two concepts are so different that the chances are that the ingenious saint would have considered the Akan concept quite atheistic. Accordingly, when we use the word God to translate *Nyame*, we must bear the disparity in connotation between this and the orthodox Christian concept of God firmly in mind.

This is particularly worth stressing in view of the tendency of many African writers on African religions, proud of their African identity, to suggest that their peoples recognize the same God as the Christians, since God is one. The origin of this tendency seems to me to be the following: almost all these writers are themselves Christians, in most cases divines. Being scandalized by the opinion of some of the early European visitors to Africa that the African was too primitive to attain the belief in God unaided, they have sought to demonstrate that Africans discovered God on their own before a European or any foreigner, for that matter, set foot in Africa. However, since they themselves have been brought up to think that the Christian God is the one true God, it has been natural for them to believe that the God of their ancestors is, in fact, the same as the God of Christianity. Furthermore, they have been able to satisfy themselves that, in accepting Christianity, they have not fundamentally forsaken the religion of their ancestors. (Incidentally, in this respect, many African specialists of religious studies have differed from average African Christians, who, if they are Akans, would probably, at least verbally, declare traditional religion to be just *abosomsom*, the worship of stones.) Listen to what one famous African authority on African religions says:

There is no being like "the African God" except in the imagination of those who use the term, be they Africans or Europeans... there is only one God, and while there may be various concepts of God, according to each peoples spiritual perception, it is wrong to limit God with an adjective formed from the name of any race.

The writer was Professor Bolaji Idowu and the passage is cited in his *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. Idowu was for many years Professor of Religions at the University of Ibadan and was in his retirement the Patriarch of the Methodist Church of Nigeria for some years. He is the author of, perhaps, the most famous book on the religion of the Yorubas, a book entitled *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. The Yorubas have a concept of God that is substantially identical with that of the Akans. This is confirmed by a careful study of direct descriptions of the Yoruba concept of God presented in the last mentioned book. In both cases what we have is a cosmic architect. But if this is so, it is an implausible suggestion that either the Yoruba or the Akan conception of God is just a different way of conceiving one and the same being as the God of Christianity. To see the fallacy clearly, consider that it is conceivable that God as a cosmic architect exists while an *ex nihilo* creator-God does not or cannot exist. Or, since Idowu's thesis is quite general, imagine that Spinoza, on the verge of ex-communication from his synagogue on account of his view that God and nature are one, had sought to placate the authorities by proleptically taking a leaf out of Idowu's book and assuring them that God is one and that therefore they were all, after all, talking of the same being. The inevitable aggravation of tempers would, surely, have been blameable on no one but Spinoza himself. As it happened, the gentle metaphysician knew better than to attempt any such misadventure. But in pure logic, when Idowu tries to serve both Olodumare and the God of Christianity, he is embarking on a

similar misadventure. More frankly, he is trying to eat his cake and have it too. The obvious lesson is that African thinkers will have to critically review both the conceptions-of god as *ex nihilo* creator and god as a cosmic architect--and choose one or none, but not both. Otherwise, colonized thinking must be admitted to retain its hold.

Since, by the present account, God is the beginning and the end of Akan religion, it may be useful to probe still further the Akan doctrine of God. In doing so, it will be important to bear in mind the point made at the end of the last paragraph about the attributes of the Akan God. I had argued that there are Akan expressions of God that will warrant saying that he is conceived to be omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, all-wise, and eternal. However, these attributes, especially omnipotence and eternity, must be understood only in a sense applicable to the type of being that a cosmic architect is. For example, the eternity of this being means simply that he has always existed and will always exist. The pressure that some Christian thinkers have felt to say that God is eternal in the sense of being timeless, that is, of not existing in time, is absent from the Akan mind. This pressure acts on some Christian minds because if God created everything out of nothing, then it might conceivably be wondered whether he did not create time also (however time may be conceived). And if he did, he can hardly be said himself to have been existing in time. It is well-known that Saint Augustine held that God created time along with everything else. (This great divine, by the way, was an African, but his mind was soaked in classical Roman culture. It is, indeed, speculated that his thought was not totally untouched by his African origins. But, if so, this particular doctrine was not one of the ways in which that fact may have manifested itself.)

Again, if we take the concept of omnipotence, we notice the same absence of the pressure to push it to transcendental proportions. The Akan God is omnipotent in the sense that he is thought capable of accomplishing any conceptually *well-defined* project. Thus, for example, he will not be supposed capable of creating a person who is at once six foot tall and not six foot tall, going by identical conventions of measurements. And this will not be taken to disclose a limitation on God's powers because the task description discloses no well-defined project. Perhaps, to many people this sounds unremarkable. But what about the following? It is apparent from one of the most famous Akan metaphysical drum texts that God is not supposed to be capable of reversing the laws of the cosmos. The question is whether the project is a coherent one. The answer from the point of view of the metaphysic in question is: "Of course, not!"

Here, then, is another illustration of formal identity amidst substantive disparities. Formally, both the Akan and the Christian may subscribe to the same definition of omnipotence as follows. "A being is omnipotent if and only if s/he or it can accomplish any well-defined project." Substantive differences, however, emerge when information is volunteered on both sides regarding the sorts of things that are or are not taken to be well-defined projects. It is interesting to note, in the particular case of omnipotence, that even this formal identity evaporates in the face of certain Christian interpretations of the concept. Omnipotence, for some Christian thinkers, means that God can do absolutely anything, including (as in the example mentioned above) creating a person who is both six foot tall and not six foot tall at the same time. On this showing, omnipotence implies the power to do even self-contradictory things. So powerful a Western Christian mind as Descartes was apparently attracted to this idea.

To be sure, the Akans are innocent of such a solecism. But they are not free from the intellectual difficulties that have plagued the Christian doctrine of omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipotence and unlimited wisdom. If God has all these qualities, couldn't he have prevented the abundance of evil in the world? And ought he not to have done so? This is the problem of evil. In discussing it one thing that will become clear is that the communal philosophy of a traditional society need not always display unanimity, contrary to the impression fostered by certain colonial-type studies of African life and thought.

It is sometimes suggested that the problem does not really arise in Akan thought. Helaine Minkus, an American researcher who went and lived among the Akwapim Akans, learnt their language and studied their philosophy, advances a view of this sort in her "Causal Theory in Akwapim Akan Philosophy":

God's attribute of transcendence and the concomitant belief that he has delegated power to the other agents that more directly interact with human beings pragmatically diminish His omnipotence. The other agents are treated in practice as if endowed with an independent ability to act... The postulation of a great number of beings empowered to affect events, joined with the acceptance of evil as necessarily co-existing with good from creation obviates the problem of evil so burdensome to those monotheistic theologians who define the Supreme Being as both omnipotent and totally benevolent and attempt a reconciliation of these qualities with the existence of evil.

Minkus talks here of the pragmatic diminution of God's omnipotence. But this represents a dilemma rather than a dissolution. If the diminution of omnipotence is only "pragmatic", God, as the ultimate source of the powers delegated to the "other agents", remains ultimately in charge, and the original problem, equally ultimately, remains. If, on the other hand, the diminution is real, this contradicts the well attested postulate of omnipotence in Akan cosmology. Is the contradiction a feature of Minkus' exposition or of the Akan system expounded? I shall return to this question below.

Interestingly, in an earlier exposition of Akan thought Busia had shifted the responsibility for evil from God to the "other agents" not pragmatically but positively. He remarks, the problem of evil so often discussed in Western philosophy and Christian theology does not arise in the African concept of deity. It is when a God who is not only all-powerful and omniscient but also perfect and loving is postulated that the problem of the existence of evil becomes a philosophical hurdle. The Supreme being of the African is the Creator, the source of life, but between him and man lie many powers and principalities good and bad, gods, spirits, magical forces, witches to account for the strange happenings in the world.

Gyekye quotes this passage in his *Essay* and points out that if God is omnipotent, the question still arises why he does not control the "lesser spirits". This, he rightly concludes, shows that the problem of evil is not obviated. Gyekye's own account of the Akan solution of the problem of evil, which, for him, is a real problem in Akan philosophy, is that

The Akan thinkers, although recognizing the existence of moral evil in the world, generally do not believe that this fact is inconsistent with the assertion that God is omnipotent and wholly good. Evil, according to them, is the result of the exercise by humans of their freedom of the will with which they were endowed by the Creator, *Oboadee*.

On Gyekye's account, the Akan thinkers in question advocated a solution to the problem of evil which is also canvassed by some Western thinkers and is known as the "free-will defense." Gyekye is certainly right in seeing this solution in Akan thought. But Akan sources also reveal other solutions. Before noticing some of them, let us note two things with regard to the free-will defense, as it relates to moral evil. First, it does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question why God does not intervene to stop or forestall evil acts when they are planned. This is, of course, different from the idea that God could have guaranteed *ab initio* that human beings made only right choices. The usual reply to the suggested intervention is that it would destroy the free will of humans, but that reply does not appear to be plausible. Even human beings are sometimes able to intervene by force or by persuasion to stop the evil designs of others, without affecting their free will. In the abstract, countless smooth ways are conceivable by which God might forestall, counteract or neutralize the evil acts that humans might use their free will to contemplate. Possibly, there might be something wrong with this hypothesis; but clearly, it would not be because of any threat to free will. Second, this solution does not begin to deal with physical evil.

However, the problem of physical evil might, theoretically, be tackled by Akan advocates of the free-will defense with only a little elaboration on the remark of Busia quoted above. They might simply argue that the "principalities, good and bad, spirits, gods" etc., rather than God, are responsible for physical evil, in Busia's phrase, "for the strange happenings in the world." On this supposition, these happenings would be the result of the exercise, by those beings, of the free will "with which they were endowed by the Creator." In Western philosophy, by the way, the same idea occurred to Saint Augustine, who debited Satan and his cohorts with a lot of the physical evil in the world, a manoeuvre which has recently been exploited by some highly sophisticated apologists. In the face of these claims, one can but await probative evidence.

Meanwhile, we should note another Akan position on the question of evil which is evident in the quotation from Minkus (which she does not separate from her theory, on behalf of the Akans, of the pragmatic diminution of God's omnipotence). Minkus attributes to the Akans, "the acceptance of evil as necessarily co-existing with good from creation." What is proposed here is not just the semantic point that you cannot talk of good if the possibility of the contrast with evil did not exist, but rather the substantive cosmological claim that the components of existence which we describe as good could not possibly exist without those components we call evil. That the Akans do actually entertain this thought is attested to by a common saying among them. It is, indeed, one of the commonest sayings of the Akans, "if something does not go wrong," they say, "something does not go right" (*Se biribi ansee a, biribi nye yie*).

However, even if it is granted that good cannot exist without evil, that still does not amount to a theodicy, for it does not follow that the quantity of evil in the world does not go beyond the call of necessity. But there is another Akan saying that seems to suggest exactly this. The Akans delight in crediting their maxims to animals, and in this instance the epigrammatic surrogate is the hawk. It is said: 'The hawk says that all that God created is good' (*Osansa se nea Onyame yee biara ye*). The sense here is not that all is good to a degree that could conceivably be exceeded but rather that all is maximally good. Again, the hawk is not trying to fly in the face of the palpable facts of evil in the world; what it is saying is that the evil, though it is evil, is unavoidably involved in the good and is ultimately for the best—a sentiment that would have



warmed the heart of Leibniz, author, in Western philosophy, of the maxim that this is the best of all possible worlds.

But how do we know that? Possibly, because of the difficulty of this question the Akans, or at any rate, some of them, do not seem to have sustained this cosmic optimism indefinitely, and there is evidence of another approach to the problem of evil which seeks to dissolve it by foregoing the claim of the total omnipotence of God. This brings us back to the pragmatic diminution of omnipotence spoken of by Minkus. But this time the diminution is real, not pragmatic. So too is the possibility of inconsistency in the traditional thought of the Akans on this subject. Though in the context of cosmological reflection, they maintain a doctrine of unqualified omnipotence, in connection with issues having a direct bearing on the fate of humankind on this earth, such as the problem of evil, they seem to operate with a notion of the power of God implying rather less than absolute omnipotence. That power is still unique in its extent, but it is conceptually not altogether unlike that of a human potentate. Indeed, correspondingly, God himself comes to be thought of on the model of a father who has laid well-intentioned plans for his children which are, however, sometimes impeded not only by their refractory wills but also by the grossness of the raw materials he has to work with. In conformity with this way of seeing God, a popular Akan lyric cries: "God descend, descend and come and take care of your children" (*Onyame sane, sane behwe wo mma*). The apparent inconsistency in this dual conception of God and his powers in the Akan communal philosophy may possibly be due to its diversity of authorship; but, on the other hand, it may be well be a real inconsistency harbored in identical Akan minds. Actually, a similar inconsistency is evident in some Christian thinking on the same problem.

Be that as it may, the position in question is approvingly expounded by J. B. Danquah as the Akan solution to the problem of evil. I beg permission to quote from Danquah *in extenso*.

What, then, is the Akan solution to the fact of physical pain in man's animate experience? On the Akan view, we could only regard this as a difficulty if we lost sight of the fundamental basis of their thought, namely, that Deity does not stand over against his own creation, but is involved in it. He is, if we may be frank, 'of it.' If we postulate, as the Christians do, that the principle that makes for good 'in this world', *Nyame* or God, stands over against the community ... and if we postulate again that the aforementioned principle is omnipotent, and is also responsible as creator of this world, the existence of physical evil or pain ... becomes an insoluble mystery... It is quite otherwise if we deny that the principle is omnipotent but is itself a 'spirit striving in the world of experience with the inherent conditions of its own growth and mastering them' at the cost of the physical pain and evil as well as the moral pain or disharmony that stain the pages of human effort... That is to say, in Akan language, where the Nana, the principle that makes for good, is himself or itself a participant in the life of the whole, ... physical pain and evil are revealed as natural forces which the Nana, in common with others of the group, have to master, dominate, sublimate or eliminate.

This must remind one of John Stuart Mill, who was constrained by the problem of evil to resort to the concept of a limited God.

Danquah is not quite right in seeming to think that the view just noted is the one and only solution to the problem of evil in Akan thought. Whether by way of inconsistency or doctrinal fecundity among Akan thinkers, there is, as shown above, a diversity of thought on the

problem. This discussion, then, demonstrates a vitality of philosophical thought in an African traditional society that the generality of colonial studies of African thought, in tending to give the impression of monolithic unanimity, has tended to obscure. It also shows another thing. It shows, in view of the repeated examples of philosophical convergences, that although it is the hallmark of decolonized thinking to be critically cognizant of the differences between African thought and its Western counterpart in its various forms, this is without prejudice to the possibilities of parallels in intellectual concerns and even doctrinal persuasion. This, it need hardly be added, can be a basis for fruitful exchange/interchange between African and Western (and, presumably, also Oriental) philosophy.

The reference to philosophical diversity early in the last paragraph is worth exploring at least briefly. The multiplicity of philosophic options is in evidence not only within the Akan tradition, but also across the African continent. Thus, it is not to be taken for granted that the Akan doctrine of a basically demiurgic God is universal in Africa. Based on the evidence of studies such as Harry Sawyerr's *God: Ancestor or Creator?* and Kofi Asare Opoku's *West African Traditional Religion*, it might be conjectured that it is widespread in West Africa. On the other hand, if Mbiti is right, this does not apply to certain other parts of Africa. The latter observes that the "concept of creation *ex nihilo* is ... reported among the Nuer, Banyarwanda and Shona, and undoubtedly a careful search for it elsewhere is likely to show that there are other peoples who incorporate it into their cosmologies." As regards the Banyarwanda, Maquet has written as follows:

The world in which men are placed and which they know through their senses was created *ex nihilo* by *Imana*. The Ruanda word *kurema*, means to produce, to make. It is here rendered "to create" because our informants say that there was nothing before *imana* made the world. This belief concerning the origin of the material world is universal and clear. To any question on this point, the answer is ready.

This account, if it is right, together with our previous findings, shows that not all traditional Africans think alike about God. It would seem that the Banyarwanda think more like orthodox Christians than like the traditional Akans. Actually, though, Maquet's account is not unproblematic. He says, for example, that *Imana*, the God of the Banyarwanda, "is non-material. His action influences the whole world; but Ruanda is his home where he comes to spend the night."

How does a non-material being spend the night, and in physical environs, such as Ruanda? Presumably, the idea is that a non-material being can sometimes materialize itself, i.e., manifest itself in a material guise. But this involves a category mistake not unlike that of supposing that the square root of minus one might be able to dance calypso from time to time. Moreover it is as full-blooded a logical inconsistency as ever there was. Is the present incarnation of that inconsistency Maquet's or the Banyarwanda's? While the question remains open, confidence in Maquet's report of the belief in *ex nihilo* creation among the Banyarwanda cannot be limitless, though it cannot be discounted out of hand.

According to Okot p'Bitek, the religious thought of both the Akans and the Banyarwanda is in vast contrast to that of the Luo of Uganda. For him the Central Luo do not entertain any belief in a Supreme, or, as he phrases it, High God. They do not even have truck with the concept of such a being, nor does the notion of creating or even molding the world make sense

within their conceptual framework. In two books, namely, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* and *Religion of the Central Luo*, he argues with intriguing illustrations that "the idea of a high God among the Central Luo was a creation of the missionaries."

If truth be told, Okot p' Bitek was the true pioneer of conceptual decolonization in African philosophy. His *African Religions in Western Scholarship* might well have been sub-titled "The Decolonization of African Religions." He is an interesting exception to the practice among African writers of endeavoring to prove to the world that Africans had, by their own efforts, reached a concept of God essentially identical with the God of Christianity before the arrival of the missionaries. The general assumption among these writers, as I pointed out earlier, has been that it is a glorious achievement for a culture to be able to arrive, without outside help, at the belief in a God who created the world out of nothing. p' Bitek had no such assumption. He was a skeptic, and found nothing necessarily creditable in such a belief. He thus had no special joy at the prospect of it being demonstrated that the Central Luo were original true believers. It is, of course, open to his critics to argue that, in writing as he did, he was foisting his own unbelief upon his people. There is, certainly, no substitute for an objective and conceptually critical examination of his account of Luo religion. That would, in itself, be an admirable exercise in conceptual decolonization. For my part, given the ease and frequency with which Western categories of thought have been superimposed on African thought, I am inclined to suspect him innocent until proven guilty.

According to p'Bitek, then, the Central Luo believe in a whole host of forces or powers called, in their language, *jogi* (plural of *jok*), each independent of the rest. These *jogi* are regarded as responsible for particular types or patterns of happenings. Some of them are chieftom *jogi* who are supposed to see to the welfare of particular groups of people. Others are hostile. For example, *jok kulu* causes miscarriage, *jok rubanga* causes tuberculosis of the spine, etc. Even the supposed power of a witch to cause harm is called a *jok*. Some *joks* may be used against other *joks*, but no one *jok* dominates all. This is far cry, indeed, from the Christian religious ontology which postulates an omnipotent creator *ex nihilo* or from even the Akan system with its divine architect who is "alone great."

Substantiating his assertion that the idea of a high God among the Luo was the invention of the Christian missionaries, p' Bitek recounts the following incident in *African Religions and Western Scholarship*. I have quoted it elsewhere in a similar connection but I cannot forebear to quote it again in the present context, as it furnishes a perfect paradigm of conceptual imposition in perfect drama:

In 1911, Italian Catholic priests put before a group of Acholi elders the question "Who created you?"; and because the Luo language does not have an independent concept of **create** or **creation**, the question was rendered to mean "Who moulded you?" But this was still meaningless, because human beings are born of their mothers. The elders told the visitors that they did not know. But we are told that this reply was unsatisfactory, and the missionaries insisted that a satisfactory answer must be given. One of the elders remembered that, although a person may be born normally, when he is afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine, then he loses his normal figure, he gets "moulded". So he said "Rubanga is the one who moulds people." This is the name of the hostile spirit which the Acholi believe causes the hunch or hump back. And

instead of exorcising the hostile spirits and sending them among pigs, the representatives of Jesus Christ began to preach that Rubanga was the Holy Father who created the Acholi.

Disentangling African frameworks of thought from colonial impositions, such as this, is an urgent task facing African thinkers, especially, philosophers, at this historical juncture. Clarifying African religious concepts should be high on the agenda of this kind of decolonization.

## Notes

1. There are drum texts which suggest that the Akan thinkers were particularly conscious of this issue. See, for example, Kwasi Wiredu, "African Philosophical Tradition: A Case Study of the Akan", *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1-3, Fall-Spring, 1992-3, pp. 41 ff.
2. Kwame Gyekye insists, correctly, on what he calls "the locative implication of the existential expression *wo ho*" in his *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 179).
3. Rene Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, Translated by Laurence Lafleur, New York: Macmillan, 1951, p. 39 (Third Meditation).
4. Kwasi Wiredu, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
5. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1944, Second Edition with new introduction by Kwesi A. Dickson, 1968.
6. When, therefore, Horton says that it is in the sphere of personal relations rather than inanimate phenomena that Africans primarily apprehend order he is, as far as the Akans are concerned, putting the cart before the horse quite exactly. See Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Modern Science", in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974 (Shorter version of an article originally published in *Africa*, Vol. XXXVII, Nos. 1 and 2, Jan. and April, 1967. Note, eg. p. 147 of the reprint.
7. See, for example, B. E. Oguah, "African and Western Philosophy: A Comparative Study" in Richard A. Wright, ed., *New York, University Press of America*, Third Edition, 1984, p. 217 and Helaine K. Minkus, "Causal Theory in Akwapim Akan Philosophy", *ibid*, p. 115.
8. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p.77.
9. Ironically, it is sometimes supposed that the category of mechanical causation escapes the African mind altogether, a fallacy which J. O. Sodipo sought to lay to rest, as far as at least as the Yoruba are concerned, in his paper "Notes on the Concept of Cause and Chance on Yoruba Traditional Thought", *Second Order: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. II, No. 2, July 1973.
10. Okot p' Bitek even went as far as to say '... for the Central Luo the entities which they believed they encountered at the lineage shrine were not spirits but the ancestors as they were known before death; their voices could be 'recognized as they spoke through the diviner; they 'felt' hungry and cold, and 'understood' and 'enjoyed' jokes and being teased, etc. They were thought of as whole beings, not dismembered parts of man, i.e., spirits divorced from bodies.' (Religion of the Central Luo, Nairobi, Kenya East Africa

Literature Bureau, 1971, p 104.) I have quoted this passage in the same spirit in Kwasi Wiredu, "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*, Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992.

11. See, however, Kwasi Wiredu, "Universalism and Particularism in Religion from an African Perspective", *Journal of Humanism and Ethical Religion*, Volume 3, No. 1, Fall 1990. pp. 98 ff.
12. On this issue remarks by three famous Akan thinkers that I have quoted elsewhere (Kwasi Wiredu, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought", in H. Odera Oruka and D. A. Masolo, eds., *Philosophy and Cultures*, Nairobi, Kenya: Bookwise Ltd., 1983, pp 11-12 or p. 220 of the reprint in Norm R. Allen, *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) will bear re-quotation here. K. A Busia says, 'The gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods , and with contempt if they fail... Attitudes to [the gods] depend upon their success, and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt'. ("The Ashanti" in Daryll Forde, ed., *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 205.) J. B. Danquah, for his part, says that in Akan society 'the general tendency is to sneer at and ridicule the fetish and its priest'. ("Obligation in Akan Society", *West African Affairs*, No. 8, 1952, published by the Bureau of Current Affairs for the Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University College of the Gold Coast [now Ghana], p. 3) What W. E. Abraham says is also relevant, albeit somewhat indirectly: 'The proliferation of gods that one finds among the Akans is, in fact, among the Akans themselves superstitious. Minor gods are artificial means to the bounty of Onyame [God]' (*The Mind of Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 56).
13. Kwasi Wiredu, (a) "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought." (See note 11) (b) "The Moral Foundations of An African Culture" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, eds., *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992 (c) "Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of some African and Western Conceptions of Morals" in Albert G. Mosley, *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, 1995.
14. B. E. Ogua, cites the designation Opamfo wawanyi (from the Fanti sub-group of the Akans) which he translates as 'The Wonderful Planner'. In fact, 'The Wonderful Designer' would do just as well. See his paper "African and Western Philosophy: A Comparative Study" in Richard A. Wright, ed., *African philosophy: An Introduction*, New York: University Press of America, Third edition 1884, p. 217.
15. Unknown to the Ghanaian authors of this argument is the phenomenon, widespread in the United States of America, of single-parent households without a resident or, sometimes, even an admitted father.
16. B. e. Ogua, *op.cit.*, p, 216.
17. London: SCM press 1973, p. 146.
18. London: Longman, 1962.
19. On this see Kwasi Wiredu, "African Philosophical Tradition", *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXIV, No. 1-3, Fall-Spring, 1992-3, pp. 41 ff.

20. Margaret Dauler Wilson in her *Descartes* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) assembles relevant passages from various sources in Descartes. See especially pp. 121-131. The author makes a valiant effort to make sense of this surprising turn in Descartes' thought.
21. In Richard Wright, ed., *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, New York: University Press of America, 1984, p. 116.
22. K. A. Busia, "The African World View", *Presence Africaine*, 4 (1965).
23. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 23.124. see also pp. 125-128.
24. See, for example, Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983, pp. 105 ff.
25. J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., Second Edition with new introduction by Kwesi A. Dickson, 1968, pp. 88-89.
26. London: Longman, 1970.
27. London: FEP International Private Limited, 1978.
28. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, Second Edition, 1990, p. 39.
29. J. J. Maquet, "The Kingdom of Ruanda" in Daryll Forde, *African Worlds*, Oxford: oxford University Press, 1954, p. 166.
30. Both were published by the East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, Kenya. The second is dated 1971. The first carries no publisher's date, but the preface is dated November 1970.
31. *Religion of the Central Luo*, p. 50.
32. Kwasi Wiredu, "Formulating Modern Thought in African Languages: Some Theoretical Considerations" in V. Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious Speech*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 301-2.