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Death Accusation in Yoruba Society: A Critical Reflection

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Abstract

This paper, using critical method of philosophical inquiry, reflects on the credibility of Yoruba belief that death especially of individuals considered too young to die is caused by the devil, evil forces, and/or the enemy. Among the Yoruba people, death is conceived both as a natural phenomenon and a process that could be precipitated by human agency. Hence, when an adult dies, such death is considered natural. However, when a young person or a benefactor dies suddenly, death, in that instance, is believed to defeat human understanding. As a result of this multi-dimensional belief system, relatives of the dead easily point accusing fingers at perceived enemy of the deceased, accusing such individuals as precipitating the death of their loved ones. Devoid of physical violence and poisoning can death be precipitated either remotely or otherwise? This paper discusses this and concludes that death accusation is a mere name calling that could not be justified under any guise save for molestation of the personality of the person in question because human is a mystery to himself.

Key words: Death; *Death accusation; Olodumare; Traditional Yoruba Society; Existentialism*

Introduction

This discourse is borne out of the personal interest of the writer, a member of the Yoruba community. It is also borne out of the academic lectures in this area as well other readings that picture African (Yoruba) cultural heritage and practices. The work reflects on death accusation in Yoruba society with the aim of showing its plausibility or otherwise. Death as an event is inevitable; it seems to be the leverage that brings out the fact that equality of human beings is attainable. Nevertheless, people tend to accuse others for being the cause of others' death. It is within this purview that this paper is set to study Yoruba responses to death in order to adjudge their attitude of apportioning blame when death strikes.

In a typical Yoruba traditional society, it sounds reasonable sometimes to hold such accusation which could be due to human negligence either on the side of physicians giving wrong medication or on the family of the deceased. Same applies to many other examples to mention just two. On the other hand, it could be fallacious to hold such position, because death is inevitable. Mere reflecting on its activities, indicates that at least one thing must happen for death to take place. Be it through any means including those called mistakes. Just like my father will say, 'when the death time of one comes, it will bring something as a cover-up.' It implies that it must be the effect of a cause whenever it comes to any individual, and such cause could be any means unknown. In that sense, it is thus fallacious to blame another person for such. But people can't see it that way. Only few, have this understanding.

The inevitability of death in Yoruba traditional society does not rule out the fact that it can be induced. Most often than none, every effect has causal link whether tangible or intangible, physical or spiritual, direct or indirect. On this note, it becomes imperative for humanity to always trace this causal link for proper 'accountability' and 'responsibility.' It is very important also to note that despite the inevitability of death, it ought not to be induced in order to maintain the sanctity of life of human entity as different from that of animals. So, it is not out of place to always trace causal link(s) to the death of a person most often to exonerate some and to apportion blames to others. Human life is sacred and it must be respected. Death must come but it ought not to be induced.

However, Biblical injunction nullifies this belief; according to its injunction 'man is a dust' certainly shall return to dust while the spirit will return to the creator. By implication, when a man

dies, either by man or natural one, it just the fulfilment of what has been declared by the creator of man. Absolutely man is a being towards death in Heideggerian's existential philosophy, but death comes in two major ways viz-a-viz natural and artificial. This is enormously taken by the religious people. However, there is a need not to take it for granted that there are situations permeating someone's death that warrants human sympathy, gingers curiosity, evokes emotions, call for human judgement etc., and in this light, it need not be taken for granted that whichever dimension the demise of such victim takes should be taken for granted because he/she must die at last. This is reflected in the Yoruba popular saying, *"oju lo n kan omode to ku l'ewe, bo dagba na yi o pada ku ni"* meaning "a child that died earlier is only being in haste, for he will surely died." A proper starting point of this dialogue, however, is an elucidation of the nature and origin of death.

Nature and Origin of Death

Death is a natural phenomenon. It remains the only reality that no man or scientific finding could deter from happening when its time comes. The reality of death from ages has forced man to border about its origin and essence. The Yoruba as an ethnic group is not an exception to this as scholars of Yoruba orientation have continually reflected on the nature and origin of death. It is, however, pertinent to mention that the Yoruba word for death is *Iku,*[1] which besides being their designation for 'dying' stands also, and more importantly as the name for the personified power, the agent which the Yoruba believe to be responsible under commission form *Olodumare*, for killing and removing from this earth.[2]

The question about the nature and origin of death is important in this discussion because it form the basis for the plausibility of accusation whenever death strikes in Yoruba society. This position is built on the previous scholastic position such as Idowu, Awolalu, Dopamu, Adeoye, Ogungbemi, just to mention but few. That death *(Iku)* starts to kill only when he was offended; that is, when his mother was killed in *Ejigbo-Mekun* Market. *Odu Oyeku Meji,* one of the *Ifa* literary corpuses, captures this:

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[1] Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief,* (Ikeja: Longman, 1996 rev. & enlarge ed.), 201.

[2] Ibid., 201.

Won pa iya iku	Iku's mother was killed
S'oja Ejigbo-Mekun	In Ejigbo-Mekun Market
Iku gbo n *le,*	Iku heard in the house,
Iku han bi ago Il'oye	Iku screeched like the *agan* of *Il'oye*
Iku han bi eyin arawo:	Iku ran out like an *arawo's* egg:
O f'oka se kese	He made cobras his spurs,
O f'ere se bata	He made boas his shoes,
O f'akekee S'oju	He made scorpions his girdle;
Iku ta ori igba,	Iku fell upon the Locust Bean Tree,
Igba gbiri' a n'le	The Locust bean Tree prone to the ground
Iku ta ori egungun	Iku fell upon the white silk cotton Tree
Egungun gbiri' a n le	The white silk cotton tree fell prone to the ground.[3]

Derivable from the above *Ifa* corpus is the fact that *Iku* (death) began to kill to avenge the killing of his mother. The failure of *Iku* (death) to stop killing since the time his mother was murdered till today to some extent might render this account inauthentic. This spirit equally could be responsible for the Yoruba not taking this as the orthodox belief about the origin of death. Beyond this, Idowu and Ogungbemi see *Iku* as the creation of *Olodumare* and that *Iku* was made for the specific purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled.[4] If this is taken, then the question is, how do we account or ascertain a person whose time on earth is fulfilled, since there was no scientific prove or any tangible evidence that presupposes the time

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[3] Ibid., pp. 201 – 202.

[4] See Bolaji Idowu (1996) and Segun Ogungbemi (ed.), *God, Reason and Death: Issues in Philosophy of Religion,* (Ibadan: Hopes Publications, 2008).

that man has to spend on earth? The Judeo-Christian bible that provides a probable solution to this is in itself contradictory. For instance, it is recorded in Genesis 3:3 that "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years" while the book of Psalm 90:10 declares "The days of our years are three score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." It is however relevant to mention that despite these two conflicting categorical statements about the years to be spent by individual on earth from the same sacred book, many people were recorded to have spent more than that on earth. Jesus Christ, who the subject matter of New Testament is, was crucified to death at age thirty-three in the same bible, thereby raising the question of when actually death needs to occur.

The question of justice also creeps in here. Justice is a great aspect of Yoruba traditional society which they don't toil with. They believe in *Iseto ododo* that is, doing the right thing that is just. The justness of *Iku* (death) killing up to this present generation therefore raises the question of how many people did death has to kill to avenge the death of his mother? Is death represented in the myth an immortal being? If yes, then, what right has it to kill those that knew nothing about the death of his mother? If no, when then, is death going to stop killing? What justification does death have for his heinous killing?, among others are questions that becloud a logical mind on the origin of death in Yoruba society. Ogungbemi seems to have provided a partial answer to these puzzles when he reiterates that "death's action in avenging the death of his mother without investigation amount to injustice."[5] As positive as Ogungbemi's response could have been, it still leaves us with much to be desired.

The possibility of this litany of questions could have been considered by Lawuyi and Olupona to argue that:

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[5] Segun Ogungbemi (ed.), *God, Reason and Death: Issues in Philosophy of Religion,* (Ibadan: Hopes Publications, 2008), 98.

> An image of a nurturant death is raised in this myth, which Idowu has dismissed not the orthodox belief of the Yoruba about the Origin of Death: He could not understand the idea of Death as not responsible for death and consequently dismissed the significance of native metaphors as opted for the more seemingly Christian or Western influenced philosophy that construes Death as a lieutenant of the Supreme God, *Olodumare.*[6]

This position of Lawuyi and Olupona seem to be influenced by the Western ideology and not that of Idowu. Thus, their position might not necessarily reflect the traditional understanding of the origin of death as earlier explained by Idowu. All these are pointer validating the preponderance of death as "a mystery to every individual."[7] Whichever way death is being conceived, the Yoruba in their traditional society are not denying the categorization of death into two major types, namely good and bad or natural and unnatural death.[8] To the Yoruba only people that died at old age die naturally and their death is considered good death while children and youths who die a premature death, barren women, and those killed by *Ayelala,* or *Sango* or Soponno[9] or through abortion, suicide or euthanasia, a bad or unnatural death.[10]

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[6] Olatunde B. Lawuyi & J. K. Olupona, "Metaphoric Associations and the Conception of Death: Analysis of Yoruba Worldview," in *Journal of Religion in Africa,* Vol. XVIII (I), (1988), 2.

[7] Martin N. Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A Step forward in African Thinking,* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 118.

[8] See Segun Ogungbemi, *A Critique of African Cultural Beliefs.* (Ikeja: Pumark Educational Publishers, 1997), 70 - 76.

[9] See J. Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites,* (London: Longman, 1979), 54

[10] S. Layi Oladipupo, "Situating Abortion, Suicide and Euthanasia in the Context of Death," in *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies,* Vol. 6 (2010), 49.

Death Accusation

In Yoruba traditional society, just like any other African ethnic group, death is often associated with a cause. They hardly accept the reality of death as part of life cycle that comes at its own time. This belief of the Africans is captured in the words of Nkemnkia that, "the cause of death is always shifted to someone else, no matter in what manner or form one dies. In Africa societies, people have to consult the *charlatan* or the witchdoctor to determine who is to blame for the death of someone."[11] It is a common attitude in Africa (Yoruba) societies to see people accusing someone for the death of their beloved ones in attenuating Lepp's position that "primitive people rarely consider death the natural end of life. It is generally attributed to more-or-less fortuitous causes – the machinations of sorcerers, the ingratitude of a son, or malevolent spirits."[12] This further reflects the propensity of the fact that in African (Yoruba) society there is always an explanation for any occurrence.

The accusation that borders on death in Yoruba society can be traced to the need for justice in Yoruba traditional society. This is evident in the fact that *Esu* and *Orunmila* have a close affinity which whenever it is broken can lead to miscarriage of justice or errors in judgement in favour of one or the other. This possibility is demonstrated in the pact that was brought about between *Orunmila* and Death. Idowu posits "it is also believed that *Esu* once overcome Death in a combat and deprived him of his club, and it was *Orunmila* who helped Death to get his club back."[13] Thus, the Yoruba accused the assumed enemies as the cause of death of any victim of death that dies prematurely and try to revenge and if possible avenge for the dead as reflected in the action of *Orunmila* who helps Death to get his club back from *Esu.* This belief is not unconnected to their mythological account of creation that presents *Orunmila* as *Eleri Ipin* and *Esu* as the errand boy of *Olodumare*.

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[11] Nkemnkia, op.cit., 118.

[12] Ignace Lepp, *Death and its Mysteries* (trans & intro) by Bernard Murchland, (London: Burns & Oates Limited, 1969), 27.

[13] Bolaji Idowu, op.cit., 76.

The Yoruba regards the end of life here on earth which death symbolises as seriously important. This is reflected in their saying *Awaye ma a ku kan o si, ile aye l'oja orun n'ile* meaning "there is none who will not die, the world is a market place heaven is the home." Despite, this belief they still don't always take death as that which brings *finnis* to human existence. They are of the view that after-life exists, thus their notion of reincarnation and/or immortality. However, their belief that not all death comes naturally necessitate their attitude of trying to attach a cause to death of premature and a time the aged. One of their popular saying that reflect this is "*Aje ke lana, omo ku loni, tano o mo pe aje ana lo pa omo* meaning "witch cried yesterday and a child died today, who does not know that the witch that cried yesterday is the one responsible for the death of the child."

Yoruba belief that death is an attainment through old age is predicated in their unwavering assumption that often leads to accusation when a person died prematurely. The belief that, "death is meant for the aged and that given that the right conditions, every person should live to a ripe old age."[14] This belief is demonstrated in what follows the death of the aged and when a person dies young. One of the things that distinguish the death of the aged from the young is the celebration that follows the death of an aged person, while the death of the young is always accompanied with mourning. It is during this period of mourning that accusation words such as; "*won o je o gbe aye se rere*" (he was not allowed to experience good in life), "*igi to to ki i pe n'igbo*" (a straight tree do not last long in the forest) come out. Beyond this, they often raise curses on the assumed causal agent of death in pretence using words like "*E ni o se yi ko ni lowo; e ni o se yi ko ni bi mo; a so ewure ko pe meji eru egbe re ni yo o ma a se*" (whoever does this will not be wealthy; whoever does this will not bear child; goat do not have clothes to change, such would forever be slave to his

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[14] Ibid., 202.

mate.) This is because to them the death of a young person is a tragedy that could be averted if not been caused.

The extreme end of death accusation of enemy as one responsible for the death of an assumed victim of death in attaining justice is embodied in their practice of *Oku riro*[15] or what is called 'self-revenging death-cause'. When this is done, they believe that the dead will fight for himself and avenge his enemies. This stage is resulted to if the response or attitude of the perceived enemies seems to be more nauseating.

Death Accusation: A Critical Review

Death is a natural occurrence that defeats human understanding. The inevitability of death notwithstanding does not make it an acceptable phenomenon in and among human beings especially, the Yoruba. The unacceptability of the *naturaliness* of death in Yoruba society explains their idea of death accusation as earlier discussed. Death accusation in Yoruba society could be related to the position of Lepp that, "death is something so strong that in spite of our experience of it we do not think it is possible for those we cherish; it always surprises us as something unbelievable and paradoxical."[16] It is therefore explainable from this, that the love and passion that human beings have towards their loved one may not be unconnected with the reason for identifying a causal factor to the death of their beloved despite its inevitability. Death accusers tend to forget that "whatever the success of our efforts against death, we all know that it is inevitable, that none can escape it, that it is a sociological as well as a biological necessity."[17] Apparently, the Yoruba as ethnic group share this view as it often reflects in some of their saying such as *iku o gb'owo a o ba fun l'owo* (*Iku* (death) does not receive money it could have been offered money). This on a neutral ground presupposes that little can be done to deter death whenever *Iku* is ready to strike. Idowu pungently reveal this that "thus, it is the belief of the Yoruba that sooner or later, everyone must die, Death is the inevitable conclusion to man's earthly existence."[18] With this, Yoruba people of Nigeria in the meantime need to re-examine their outrageous accusation that do follow when death come calling at loved ones, because death accusation as it operates in Yoruba society following Idowu's submission could be reduced to only an effort at entangling others in unfounded accusation that could not be substantiated either.

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[15] *Oku riro* is a tradition in Yoruba burial rites; it is resulted to in relation to their belief in the potency of the dead fighting its causal agent.

[16] Ignace Lepp, op.cit., 26.

[17] Ibid., 30.

The inconsistencies of the Yoruba on the import of death could be adduced as rendering any form of accusation at death a mere figment of imagination. This argument is built on the fact that, despite their tendency of accusing others for the death of people, they equally uphold the possibility of some individual who are over-ambitious to be responsible for their own death. For instance, they use to say, "*o kan ju ja ye,*" (he rushed to ends his life), "*iku ki i pa ni; ayo ni paniyan*" meaning *iku (*death) does not kill; it is excesses that kill, among others to console themselves when death occurs. It is, therefore, contradictory for the Yoruba who believe that premature death is induced by enemies to still console themselves of the pain and agony of death through their saying as in the aforementioned. Aside this, the Yoruba do console themselves with some of their sayings when death strikes and takes away a young person who is faced with troubles or challenges that constitute the polarities of human existence. One of such saying as put by Adeoye is "*Ki a ku ni kekere, ki a fi esin se irele eni o san ju ki a dagba dagba ki a ma ni adie irana*"[19] (it is better for one to die young and remain relevant than dying at old age unnoticed.) This saying also finds its corrolary in "*Iku ya ju esin lo.*" Literally, this means it is better to die than live in penury among others.

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[18] Bolaji Idowu, op.cit., 204

[19] C. L. Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 319.

Yoruba idea of death accusation could equally be reduced to absurdity because of their belief that the whole world is a marketplace (*Ile aye loja).* Thus, to the Yoruba, the life of individuals replicates a marketplace which has three stages. First, the early morning when both sellers and buyers come to the market square, representing the coming of individuals to the world. The afternoon, which represents the second stage, is when buying and selling take place, this stands for the struggle for survival. The third stage is the evening when individuals both the sellers and buyers go back to their respective place of abode, that is, death. It is in this sense that the individualistic nature of death is brought to fore because it is one thing that nobody can do for his loved one. By implication, everybody will die his/her own death, hence, their saying as articulated by Adeoye "*afowoba fi sile nile aye ati pe aw'aye e ku ko si, ko si eni ti ko ni i ku*"[20] meaning life is transient and there is no one that will not die.

The significant attribute to demonstrate that a death is good or bad is the burial rite. Burial rite is one of the cultural values held in high esteem in Yoruba traditional society and from it one could depict a good death from bad one in the light of the funeral rite that follows the death of the ages and the young ones. This is shown in seeing the bereaved ready to celebrate the life of their departed soul when death struck at old person but the other way around when it comes calling at young person. Varying degrees of preparation are visible in celebrating the death of an aged person. The Yoruba in their traditional thought believe that "*eni omo sin lo bi'mo*" (he that has children to bury him, actually has children.) They often use to sing:

Oku olowo a l'odun meta	The remembrance of a rich man shall last three years
Oku otosi a l'osun mefa	The remembrance of a poor man shall last six month

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[20] C. L. Adeoye, op.cit., 319.

Oku o l'omo	The remembrance of he that have children
Ase n se tun se	Will be celebrated continuously
Bi a ba se yi tan	If it is celebrated now
A o se mi si	There will be another
A se n se tun se[21]	Will be celebrated continuously

This song is one of the many reminiscence of the variance attribute of the Yoruba to natural death. They believe that the after-life is enviable from the funeral rite and that the major things that determine ones after-life experience is *iwa* (character). The Akungba Akoko people of Ondo State, Nigeria use to establish this preponderance in burial and funeral ceremony by singing:

Ki la o beere lowo re?	What shall be demanded from you?
Iwaaa!!!	Character!!!
la o beere lowo re,	That will be demanded
iwa!	Character!
a o ni beere ile ti o ko,	Your number of houses shall not be demanded
iwaaaa!!!	Character!!!
la o beere lowo re,	That will be demanded
iwa!	Character!
a o ni beere aya ti o fe,	Your wives shall not be demanded
iwaaaaa!!!	Character!!!
la o beere lowo re,	That will be demanded
iwa!	Character!
a o ni beere omo ti o bi,	Your children shall not be demanded
iwaaaaa!	Character!
la o beere lowo re,	That will be demanded
iwa!	Character!
a o ni beere owo ti o ni,	Your money shall not be demanded
iwaaaaa!!!	Character!!!
la o beere lowo re,	That will be demanded

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[21] This is one of the popular songs that the Yorubas used in celebrating the life of the departed soul. It is used to show the important of child bearing and the futility of one's accomplishment without children to bury one at death.

iwa! Etc.[22]	Character! Etc.

This, however, seems to contradict the previous song that stressed one's status in life. Nevertheless, from the above song, it is pertinent to reiterate that Akungba community believe that character of the deceased will be his/her judge in the great beyond. This is demonstrated in *Ogagago*[23] ceremony often held at the dusk of the final funeral ceremony. *Ogagago* songs showcase the lifestyle of the deceased and correct or boo the children bad behaviour. The children's wickedness and those who engage in adultery used to be brought to limelight without any iota of contest from children being booed or reprimanded with songs during this traditional ceremony at burial in Akungba community. One of the popular songs goes thus:

Oni 'ye ma sin ba re	He's burying his father,
Oni ba ma nsin ba re	He's burying his mother,
Olorun loke	God of heaven,
Olorun loke	God of heaven,
Jo omo mi sin mi o	let's my children burry me,
O di afose![24]	It's stamped!

In my interaction with a friend Mr. Olajide Ogbeye,[25] an indigene of Akungba community on the reasonability of the praises that follows when the children of the deceased are of good character and the molestation on the other hand when the children are found of ill-mannered, he responded that it is a way of teaching morals.

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[22] This is also one of the songs that reveal that character is very important in one's life time for it will speak for one after one must have died. Beyond this, the Akungba Akoko people of Ondo State use this song in teaching morality for the living.

[23] *Ogagago* is one of the traditional rites that accomplish burial ceremony in Akungba Akoko, Ondo State. It usually observed at the dusk of the funeral ceremony of the deceased. During this ceremony morality is encourage through different songs. This is done either to praise the children of the deceased for their morality or reprimand moral laxity.

[24] This song is one of the songs that come to bear during *Ogagago* ceremony in Akungba Akoko, Ondo State.

[25] Mr. Olajide Ogbeye (38) is an indigene of Akungba Akoko, Ondo State.

He explains further that, in the early 1990's, he witnessed an *Ogagogo* ceremony held for a man who was survived by a daughter who engaged in adultery with one fair teacher called *Orisa.* According to him, the daughter was reprimanded with *Ogagogo* songs and that chief among the songs was:

Mi ya bora o	I want to bleach,
Mi ya bora o	I want to bleach,
Mi o je Orisa gba ya mi lo	I would not allow Orisa to snatch my wife
Mi ya bora o	I want to bleach,
Mi o je Orisa gba ya mi lo	I would not allow Orisa to snatch my wife
Mi ya bora o![26]	I want to bleach!

Upon this rendition, the woman could not hold back tears as she wept uncontrollably. When they were about to get to her father's house, the song was changed to:

Nu omi oju re nu	Wipe your tears away,
Nu omi oju re nu	Wipe your tears away,
O ma gbe oro ale i wo ode ba o	Adultery is a taboo in your father's house,
Nu omi oju re nu[27]	Wipe your tears away.

The ceremony was a big show of shame for the daughter, the aftermath led her to put a divorce the second day and later got married to the same *Orisa,* but unfortunately, the marriage lasted for only three months. The import of this tradition is to further show that death accusation in Yoruba society is reflection of a crude tradition that could not be sustained in the contemporary society. This is because an aspect of funeral rites such as *Ogagago* could equally be used for teaching morality. By implication, death of loved ones sometime could be used for moral edification.

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[26] This song is used to reprimand a lady in Akungba Akoko during the *Ogagago* ceremony of her father for her involvement in adultery in early 1990's.

[27] This song equally was used to call the attention of the lady in 26 to the consequence of her crying to her father's house.

However, it is apposite to sustain the claim that death accusation is more rampant when death strikes and takes away a young person rather than when the departed soul is aged. This belief in the face of modernization seems to have taken a new dimension where both old and young are celebrated after their demise. Mbiti explains this when he posits that "...but modern change tends to make burial procedures more even or similar for everybody."[28] Mbiti's position is a clear reflection of what obtains in contemporary societies (Yoruba) inclusive where death of a young but fulfilled person is celebrated as if it was an aged person that died.

Ogungbemi seems to have provided a soft solution that if adopted, death accusation could be remembered. He states:

> As rich people die so also the poor, old and young, educated and uneducated, and so on. So, death is not a respecter of anyone; it strikes like a thunderbolt at will, whether the victim is ready or not. Above all, death cannot be bribed, and it does not take ransom. As birth is an entrance to life so is death its exist. We cannot have birth as entrance to life without death as its exits.[29]

Ogungbemi's position provides an anchorage on which the idea of accusing others as causal agent of someone death is unjustifiable. Perhaps Yoruba people might have this understanding as some of their sayings accord respect for death such as; "*iku o gba owo a o ba fun l' owo*" (death would not take money, we would have offered him money, and "*iku o mo omode ko mo agba*" (death does not recognise age.) It is only when they are trying to console themselves that they take solace in accusing others for the death of the younger ones. Otakpor affirmed this, for him "life and death are biological twins, but unlike normal twins, even identical ones, life and death are coeval. There is no life without death, to live is to die."[30] If this possibility is sacrosanct, then, death accusation is a mere figment of imagination because it is provable that man is a being toward death as eulogized in Heidegger's existentialism.

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[28] J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1970), 208.

[29] Segun Ogungbemi (ed.), *God, Reason and Death,* 109.

Following the above, accusing others as the cause of other death is a cheap way of fault-finding. It raises the question of the tenability of such as most of the accusations are attached to spirituality, though, they equally do same to accidental death forgetting that what goes round will always come round for as "we talk about the death of others just as others would mourn and talk about our own death."[31] The pointer here is that whosoever accuses anybody for the death of others could have either been accused or will be accused of the death of others because the death of others reminds us of our own death. We mourn our own death many times over while mourning the death of others. This shows us that there is no need for accusing anybody, as the causal agent of others death for "death is a universal phenomenon. It is a reality that cannot be denied. Even when people find it difficult to embrace it, it occurs both to the aged and the youth, either naturally or unnaturally. It transcends human understanding and comprehension, for it will surely come upon all."[32]

Conclusion

Let us conclude this conversation with a question: when and how should we die? If this question is answered, then, death accusation might be meaningful but if not, it remains a fallacy. By implication, whatever explanation is offered for death accusation in Yoruba society, it seems to be rooted in the collective unconsciousness of the reality of when and how human being is to die. This is fathomable in Yoruba society such that when all effort

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[30] Nkeonye Otakpor, "Ogungbemi on Death: A Moral Issues," in Segun Ogungbemi (ed.), *God, Reason and Death*, 129.

[31] Nkeonye Otakpor, "The World is a Market Place," in *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 30. No. 4, (1996), 525.

[32] S. Layi Oladipupo, "Situating Abortion, Suicide and Euthanasia in the Context of Death," 57.

failed at explaining the cause of death, the Yoruba result to God (*Olodumare*). Some of their sayings such as "*Olorun ni kan l'oye,* (everything is clear to God) and "*Ohun ti o so kunkun si eniyan kedere lo han s'Olorun*" (what is hidden to man is clear in God's sight), reflect this thought.

If the Yoruba could say all these whenever it becomes impossible for them to locate who is to be accused for the death of a person, the implication then is that "everything comes from God and that everything moves towards God."[33] This is in consonance with the existential position of Heidegger that man is a being towards death. It follows that death accusation is a mere name calling that could not be justified under any guise save for molestation of the personality of the person in question because human is a mystery to himself.

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[33] Nkemnkia, op.cit., 122.

Humans, Persons, Personhood and Morality in African Communitarianism: Gyekye Revisited

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Abstract

Two undeniable characteristics of African philosophy are the conceptions of humans as communitarian beings and a strong criticism of individualism or atomism which is perceived to be Western. However, among African philosophers, there are contrasting opinions regarding the definition and place of the human person in relation to community. Menkiti emphasizes the role of communitarian integration in defining personhood. Gyekye criticizes Menkiti while claiming a moderate communitarian moral achievement as the key to earning personhood. Both seem to accept a distinction between being human and being a person. In his criticism of Menkiti, Gyekye introduces a distinction between ontological humanness and moral personhood. I argue that the distinction is cluttered with inconsistencies. I propose an alternative that simplifies and grounds personhood within a framework that is compatible with Gyekye's Akan moderate communitarianism.

Key words: *Communitarianism; Persons; Personhood; African philosophy; Morality*

Introduction

Current discourse in fields like bioethics, normative political theory and global health has highlighted the need to engage with indigenous philosophical systems in order to mitigate cultural imperialisms and to broaden perspectives. A key element, in the African context, that has been highlighted by most philosophers is the communitarian vision of human beings. Political leaders of the independence age like Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kenyatta and Senghor saw communitarianism as a form of grounding for an African socialism. For their part, philosophers like Mbiti, Menkiti, Gbadegesin and Gyekye among others, have tried to give a more structured and critical account of African communitarianism, where the human being is conceived as never fully constituted without reference to community. The various accounts form a debate that has been at the centre of recent African philosophical thought.

A key question in this debate is the definition of personhood. Philosophically, the exponents of this debate could be called realists in that they try to offer metaphysical accounts from traditional cosmologies for the way things are and the way things ought to be. My goal, as part of a search for plausible frameworks on which to ground an African ethical discourse is to critically examine the theoretical positions and the practical normative consequences of the visions of Menkiti and Gyekye on personhood. In section II, I present Menkiti's communitarian account of personhood. This is followed by Gyekye's critical response to Menkiti. Section IV offers a criticism of Gyeke's position. The last Section presents an alternative hermeneutic of Akan philosophy and a Builsa communitarian vision of persons and morality that is consistent with Gyekye's moderate communitarianism.

Menkiti's Communitarian Account of Personhood

Menkiti's paper "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought"[1] is often cited as a seminal document in favour of a communitarian version of personhood. The paper is, in reality, a polemic against what Menkiti sees as a flawed attempt to conflate Sartre's existentialist claim that 'existence precedes essence' with an African view that humans achieve full personhood through individual agency. Sartre affirms that: "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself

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[1] Menkiti, I. A. (1984). Person and community in African traditional thought. *African philosophy: An introduction, 3*, 171-182.

afterwards. ...Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."[2] This could seem attractive to those who share the opinion that in African communities, personhood is a condition that is earned through the choices and actions that a human being undertakes. Sartre's view underlines the non-givenness of a human essence and the role of agency in the construction of what one becomes.

Menkiti sets out to distance African philosophical thought from this view by presenting what he calls a "certain conception of the person found in African traditional thought."[3] Whilst not denying the importance of human agency in the construction of the person, Menkiti sees two important differences, both grounded on communitarian claims, between Sartre's position and African traditional thought. First, he says: "whereas in the African understanding human community plays a crucial role in the individual's acquisition of full personhood, in the Sartrean existentialist view, the individual alone defines the self, or person, he is to become."[4] Second, Menkiti, underlines that the definition of what the individual becomes, that is, a person, is awarded by the community and not simply through a process of personal choices as it would seem according to Sartre. This is because, "in the African view it is the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory."[5] As a result, "the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be. And this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically, but also regarding epistemic accessibility."[6]

In arguing his case, Menkiti presents an African communitarian notion of personhood that has become a centre of debate among African philosophers for the past four decades. The arguments he employs to support this view are socio-cultural and linguistic. In the first place, Menkiti sees a gradual acquisition of personhood through socialization and rites of passage. Hence, "personhood is something to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed."[7] Infant persons are accorded less elaborate funerals when compared to older persons. Older persons who have achieved greater socialization are awarded full personhood. An Igbo proverb holds that "What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up." Personhood, therefore, according to Menkiti has "some sort of ontological progression" between infancy and old age. This progression is proportional to the level of incorporation into society. Older persons are believed to be more integrated in community and for that matter are accorded greater personhood.

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[2] Sartre, J. P. (1948). *Existentialism and Humanism* (1947). Philosophy: Key Texts, 115.
[3] Menkiti, Op. Cit. p. 171
[4] Ibid. p. 179
[5] Ibid. p. 172
[6] Ibid p.171

The 'ontological progression' in the acquisition of personhood can be observed, according to Menkiti, in the fact that in many languages, English included, "we have the choice of *it* for referring to children and newborns, whereas we have no such choice in referring to older persons."

A summary of Menkiti's position would be: the acquisition of personhood is a process that human beings achieve through socialization. Personhood is not defined by possessing an individual innate property or capacity. It is achieved gradually through interacting with a community which ultimately awards personhood to humans in varying degrees. The possibility of a failed personhood thus exists for some human beings who have not been able to socialize according to the standards set by community.

Kwame Gyekye's Criticism of Menkiti

The Ghanaian, Kwame Gyekye, has created a space for himself in the African communitarianism vs. individualism debate by proposing what he calls moderate communitarianism. This school of thought, whilst upholding the communitarian nature of African

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[7] Menkiti, I. A. (1984). Person and community in African traditional thought. *African philosophy: An introduction, 3*, p. 173

societies, contrasts the positions of those African philosophers and politicians who tried to find a justification for socialism in African communitarianism. The claim of moderate communitarianism is that the individual is not submerged by the community as it would seem under other forms of communitarianism; s/he retains autonomy and agency to contribute towards personal well-being and communitarian common good.

Gyekye takes a very critical stance towards what he sees as radical communitarianism, espoused especially by Menkiti. He sees Menkiti as having succumbed to the "temptation of exaggerating the normative status and power of the cultural community in relation to those of the person, and thus obfuscating our understanding of the real nature of the person."[8]

In his critical analysis of Menkiti's African notion of personhood, Gyekye quickly writes off the claim that the pronoun *it* is used in many languages to refer to infants who have not yet attained personhood. He draws from Akan and the Ga-Dangbe languages of Ghana to show that this claim is not always true. He also questions Menkiti's usage of an English language pronoun to justify an African notion of personhood. He then proceeds with a counter example to address Menkiti's claim that elderly individuals are considered to be more of persons than infants because they receive more elaborate funerals and are generally considered to be wiser. In Akan culture, immoral older persons are neither considered wiser nor accorded elaborate funeral celebrations by the community.

The question, however, on which Gyekye dwells and which he claims to be of philosophical interest is Menkiti's notion of the moral concept of personhood. He addresses Menkiti's paper in two major publications: *Person and Community* and *Tradition and Modernity*. As we shall see, Gyekye seems to have modified his initial criticism in the five years that separate the publication of these two works.

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[8] Wiredu, K., & Gyekye, K. (1992). *Person and community*. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.p. 106

In his earlier criticism, *Person and Community*, Gyekye is categorically opposed to any possibility of human beings becoming persons on the basis of social or moral achievement:

> A human person is a person whatever his age or social status. Personhood may reach its full realization in community, but is not acquired or yet to be achieved as one goes along in society. What a person acquires are status, habits, and personality or character traits: he, *qua* person, thus becomes the subject of the acquisition, and being prior to the acquisition process, he cannot be defined by what he acquires. One is a person because of what he is, not because of what he acquires.[9]

Where Menkiti sees an ontological progression towards personhood, Gyekye, in *Person and Community* sees a change in social status which for the individual is measured in the degree to which:

(i) his sense of responsibility, expressed, in turn, through his responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group;

(ii) what he has been able to achieve through his own exertions –physical, intellectual, moral; and

(iii) the extent to which he fulfils certain social norms, such as having a marital life and bringing up children.

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[9] Ibid. p. 108

He continues:

> All these strivings are aimed at attaining some social status. The individual may fail to in his strivings, and in the Akan community, for example, may consequently be judged as a 'useless person' (*onipa hun*), an opprobrious term. But it must be noted that what the individual would be striving for in all his exertions is some social status, not personhood. These strivings are in fact part of the individual's self-expression, an exercise of a capacity he has *as a person.* And even if at the end of the day he failed to attain the expected status, his personhood would not for that reason diminish, even though he may lose social respect in the eyes of the members of the community. So it is social status, not personhood, at which individuals could fail. Menkiti is mistaken in thinking individuals can fail at personhood.[10]

Thus, in *Person and Community,* it would seem that being human and being a person are the same thing. Whilst upholding a "natural sociality of the human person which at once places him in a system of shared values and practices and a range of goals,"[11] he rejects the notion that "personhood is defined or conferred by the communal structure."

In his later publication, *Tradition and Modernity*, Gyekye re-presents his criticism of Menkiti's radical communitarianism. Whilst confirming his earlier rejection of Menkiti's position, which he claims to be "befogged with confusions, unclarities, and incoherencies," this time Gyekye takes a more accommodating stand on the possible distinction between human beings and persons. The ambiguity surfaces in Gyekye's hermeneutic of the Akan expression *onye onipa,* meaning he is not a person, used when "an individual's conduct consistently appears cruel, wicked, selfish, or ungenerous."[12] With regards to the above expression, according to Gyekye: "Two important things can be said to be implicit in this statement. The first is that, even though that individual is said not to be a person, he is nevertheless acknowledged as a human being, not as a beast or a tree. *A clear distinction between the concept of a human being and a concept of a person is thus deeply embedded in that statement: an individual can be a human being without being a person.* Second, implicit in that statement is the emphatic assumption that there are basic norms and ideals to which the behavior of an individual, *if he is a person*, ought to conform."[13]

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[10] Ibid. p. 109
[11] Ibid. P. 109

For Gyekye, the basis of the distinction between being a human being and a person is both moral and communitarian. This is because, after carefully offering a rider that excludes children from his analysis,[14] he offers two examples of individuals who might be referred to as not being persons. The first would be an individual "whose conduct is known to the community to be generally unethical, not one who occasionally experiences moral lapses or failure of moral commitment."[15] Such a person would be one who does not live up to the standards of "kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, and respect for and concern for others"[16] in short one whose actions or behaviour are not "conducive to the promotion of the well-being of others."[17] The distinction, therefore, between a human being and a person would be on moral grounds.

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[12] Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience*. Oxford University Press. p. 49.

[13] Ibid. p. 49

[14] Ibid. p. 50

[15] Ibid. p. 50

[16] Ibid. p. 50

[17] Ibid. p. 50

The distinction is also based on communitarian grounds because Gyekye says that "if a human being lives an isolated life, a life detached from the community, he would be described *not* as a person but as an individual. A life detached from the community would be associated with an egoistic life. An individual detached from the community would not be considered a responsible moral agent. Thus, a distinction is made also between the notion of a person –a concrete being situated in a social context—and that of an individual—a being detached from the community."[18]

It is interesting to note in the above passage that Gyekye refers to a human being who 'would be described *not* as a person' as an individual. This creates an equivocation that generates difficulties in interpreting his own work. When he presents moderate communitarianism as opposed to radical communitarianism, he insists on the agency and autonomy of the individual with respect to the community.[19] The individual is presented as a moral being whose achievements enrich the community. The autonomous individual member of the community described by Gyekye would seem different to the morally unaccomplished human being described as not a person. Yet in the above text, the human being who is not morally a person is referred to as an individual.

Gyekye goes on to claim that: "the moral significance of denying personhood to a human being on the grounds that his actions are dissonant with certain fundamental norms or that he fails to exhibit certain virtues in his behavior is extremely interesting for communitarians. *Personhood, in this model of humanity, is not innate but is earned in the ethical arena: it is an individual's moral achievement that earns him the status of a person.* Every individual is capable of becoming a person insofar as he is capable of doing good and should therefore be treated (potentially) as a morally responsible agent."

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[18] Ibid. p. 50

[19] Ibid. p. 36-41

He then concludes in a lapidary manner, affirming that: "Thus a moral conception of personhood is held in African thought: personhood is defined in terms of moral achievement."[20]

Gyekye's position in *Tradition and Modernity* is different from his stance in *Person and Community*. Both are critical of Menkiti, who Gyekye sees as a radical communitarian. Yet both Menkiti and Gyekye have in common that personhood is not innate, it can be distinguished from being human and that it is to be achieved or earned. The main difference, however, lies in what it takes for a human being to achieve personhood. Where the former sees the achievement of personhood as dependent on social incorporation, status, age and communitarian conferral, the latter emphasizes individual moral achievement of values and practice of virtues that, at the end of the day, are communitarian: namely, "kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, and respect and concern for others; in short, any action or behavior conducive to the promotion of the well-being of others."[21] This position is consistent with Gyekye's moderate communitarianism which tries to safeguard the agency and responsibility of the individual in the face of what he sees as radical communitarianism expressed by Menkiti among others.

Criticism of Gyekye

I argue that Gyekye's acceptance in *Tradition and Modernity* of a moral notion of personhood that distinguishes between human beings and persons is burdened with difficulties in both theoretical and practical spheres. At the theoretical level, Gyekye claims that: "for any *p*, if *p* is a person, then *p* ought to display in his conduct the norms and ideals of personhood."[22] Since it cannot be taken for granted that *p* will always achieve what she 'ought to,' there is a real possibility that *p* will remain a human individual with an unachieved personhood. In other words, though every human being is expected to strive towards personhood, success is not guaranteed. The criteria of success are moral and communitarian.

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[20] Ibid. p. 52
[21] Ibid. p. 50
[22] Ibid. P. 50

The achievement of personhood is an ideal that is acquired through moral conduct and, for that matter, not coterminous with human being. If so, personhood is a property that cannot be predicated of all human beings. As a property, it needs to be accounted for. Gyekye offers an account by pointing to moral characteristics such as 'he has good character,' 'he is peaceful—not troublesome,' 'he is kind,' 'he has respect for others,' 'he is humble.'[23] From these we can only conclude that Gyekye's moral concept of personhood is different from his ontological concept of personhood. The latter is based on the Akan concepts of *okra* (soul), *sunsum* (spirit) and *honam* (body) as constituent elements of human personhood.[24] In fact, the Gyekyean *opus* taken as a whole, is ambiguous on the use of the word personhood. In *Essay*, the ontology of personhood is derived from possessing the above mentioned constitutive elements, in *Tradition and Modernity*, it is 'earned in the ethical arena' by human beings and if they fail, they can be referred to as 'he is not a person'.

It would seem that an individual can be ontologically a person and at the same time morally not a person. The criteria for the distinction are, in my opinion, vague and problematic. Unlike other technical terms regarding personhood, for example, legal personhood, that are governed by distinct conventions such as age, the distinction between ontological and moral personhood seems to be grounded on less precise concepts: kindness, benevolence, respect, and promotion of well-being of others. Quantification and establishment of these notions, except in extreme cases of violation, is difficult to objectivize and determine. In fact, from the characterization Gyekye offers, it would seem that individuals who are 'not a person' would constitute a rarity: their evil conduct has to be habitual, evident and known to the community.

Apart from vagueness, the distinction is problematic when we submit it to the test of how human beings in a community ordinarily live. Take for example, a small African farming village community called Kojokrom. The inhabitants of Kojokrom are born into the village and generally assimilate the language, traditions, norms and customs of their ethnicity. They are all human beings and persons. However, there is a man called Kojo who habitually and systematically tries to take land away from other villagers, goes out to harvest from his neighbour's farms, refuses to listen to advice of the elders, beats his wife and children and deprives them of food, does not participate or contribute in communal labour and other forms of internal taxation, and has been known to poison the well from which his in-laws draw water to drink and bath. We may say Kojo is not a person, *onye onipa*. The designation, Kojo is 'not-a-person' is a rebuke, a chastisement, a sort of down-classing that Kojo has earned as a result of his immoral behaviour. In other words, he no longer deserves to be called a person because of his grave moral shortcomings. This is an act of disentitlement or disfranchisement. For this to happen, for Kojo to become not-a-person, he needs to have been a person in the first place or at least to have been considered to be a person. My point here is that, the natural way of being human is to be a person. If I may put it more emphatically, ontological personhood automatically confers moral personhood. It takes exceptional behaviour to be one considered as not a person. After all, the other villagers of Kojokrom who do not behave like Kojo and yet are not necessarily heroic examples of kindness, benevolence, etc., are still called persons.

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[23] Ibid. P. 50
[24] Gyekye, K. (1995). *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. Temple University Press. chapter 6.

It is an anomaly to be a human being and not a person. From this perspective, it seems inconsistent that Gyekye would talk of 'earning' personhood in the ethical arena. It would be more appropriate to talk of losing personhood in the ethical area where a person *earns* a bad reputation. Thus a human being who refuses to behave according to what is expected of humans may be referred to as not-a-person. Gyekye seems in his line of reasoning to go along the same line as Menkiti when he envisages a human being first and then a person. The above analysis would point to the contrary, it is person-first who can lose his designation as a person

through bad behaviour. If we are to go along this distinction, then it would be more coherent to say personhood is something that can be lost, but not necessarily something that is earned.

Gyekye's claim of earning moral personhood is problematic because he seems to equate something that can be lost with something that is earned. We generally attain what we do not have or possess. This is different to losing what we have. There are things we have just by being who we are, not by being x and subsequently attaining y, but we can lose these things. For example, we all have surnames (excluding acquired surnames through marriage that confer a status). The fact that we all have surnames does not mean we have attained them. They are simply given. However, we can lose our surnames if we behave so badly that our parents decide to disown us. But it would be wrong to say that we have earned our surname through good behaviour. Hence, when a person refuses habitually to behave morally, then society can deny him/her some of the rights of personhood, for example through imprisonment.

Considering the Akan framework, instead of framing the discourse in terms of 'earning' or 'attaining', it would be more appropriate to talk of 'retaining' that which is a given. Hence moral personhood is retained through exercising some amount of virtue or avoiding that which the community considers as evil. The only case one could make for 'earning' or 'attaining' personhood in this framework would be the case of a human being who has 'lost' his personhood and needs to do something to regain it and thus 'earn' or 'attain' it.

In recent times, African scholars like Majeed who have also noticed Gyekye's ambiguous use of the term personhood have tried to resolve the question by establishing a distinction between personal identity and personhood. Majeed writes:

> … considering the trend of current discourse in (African) philosophy, particularly about the issue of identity, such sameness in an area of concern

> does not still amount sameness in meaning between the two expressions. The traditional philosophical notion of *personal identity* has been about whether as a human being, as an individual (*ontic*) being, a person's constitution is knowable.... But in some contexts, particularly in African culture, the way an individual acts or behaves towards other members of the society may make him or her to be seen as not having attained *personhood* yet—although the individual's (personal) identity, in the preceding sense, is intact. ... As a result, personhood can be acquired or lost, or conceivably alternated between the two at different periods of a person's life.[25]

The solution, in my opinion, raises further problems. First, the claim that the traditional philosophical discourse on 'the notion of personal identity has been about whether as a human being, as an individual (*ontic*) being, a person's constitution is knowable', is reductive. The philosophical debate regarding personal identity embraces many other questions, such as, diachronic and synchronic concepts of self, consciousness, memory and persistence in time.

Secondly, an analysis of the word 'person-hood' makes the claim of such a distinction self-defeating. The English[26] word personhood can be compared to other words like childhood, adulthood, brotherhood, neighborhood, where the suffix 'hood'

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[25] Majeed, H. M. (2017). *Reincarnation: A Question in the African Philosophy of Mind.* Pretoria: UNISA Press. p. 74

[26] It is interesting to note that some Latin languages like Spanish and Italian do not have an exact equivalent of the word personhood. A dictionary translation would render personhood is Spanish as *personalidad* and in Italian as *personalità* both of which are the same word for personality.

denotes a condition or quality or group.[27] The case of personhood refers to a condition or quality, unlike the neighborhood which refers to a group. As a quality or condition, it is predicated of a being. Take for example, the word childhood applied to a kid called Kwesi. If Kwesi is subjected to slavery, forced labour and deprivation, we can describe him as not 'having a childhood.' This would mean that the child Kwesi *qua* child, has been deprived of the opportunities due to the condition of being a child.[28] It does not, however, mean that Kwesi is not a child. *Mutatis mutandi* an individual who is said to be deprived of his personhood is still a person. This, to some extent, explains why when a human being is maltreated, as if she were not a person, irrespective of her moral failures, we still feel some amount of indignation.

Even though *a prima facie,* Majeed's solution seems attractive because it allows us to talk of 'personhood' as a socio-moral concept and to attribute an ontological value to the use of 'person or personal identity,' in my opinion, it clutters up the discourse by introducing a further and contestable distinction between personal identity and personhood. Whereas with Gyekye, we had arrived at the difficulty in grounding the difference between persons and human beings, Majeed's solution re-proposes the problem albeit with different terminology.

Furthermore, while Gyekye, is careful to state that: "There is no implication, however, that an individual considered 'not a person' loses her rights as a human being or that she loses her citizenship or that she ceases to be an object of moral concern from the point of view of the people's treatment of her," it is difficult to imagine how on a practical level, non-discriminatory treatment of human beings regarded as not persons can be avoided. Gyekye may claim that rights, citizenship and moral concern by others derive from being human rather than being a person. Hence, all human beings would be guaranteed minimum basic rights. Yet, it is also true that earning personhood endows privileges that are not accorded to all human beings. For example, Gyekye says that humans who have attained personhood through a high moral standing are accorded more elaborate funerals that are not accorded to others. If we go along with the line of reasoning whereby certain privileges are reserved to humans who have earned personhood through moral achievement, we can arrive at potentially disastrous ethical choices. An extreme example will illustrate this point:

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[27] Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990 edition)

[28] We shall return to the notion privation later.

A common problem facing healthcare in the African context is the lack of human and material resources. Practitioners are often faced with the dilemma of choosing who to cure and who not to. Assuming a practitioner has to make a choice between curing (a) Esi, a 28-year-old unmarried woman with 3 children from two fathers, who is also known in the community to be a petty thief, a husband snatcher, and a back-biter who practices witchcraft on her rivals, hence a 'non-person' and (b) 78-year-old Kwame, a retired army general who is generous, kind and well-respected as a person in the community. Would it not be more likely that Kwame would be cured instead of Esi?

The point here is that a form of communitarianism that places moral achievement as the key distinguishing factor between human beings can lead to discrimination or exclusion of individuals who are perceived to be morally unsuccessful. Distinctions between human beings based on their achievement, be they moral or material can lay the grounds for excluding weaker members of society: the anti-thesis of humane communitarianism.

In conclusion, I would say that Gyekye's interpretation of African Akan philosophy offers a porous grounding for moral discourse linked to personhood. How this could be salvaged whiles maintaining Gyekye's moderate communitarianism, which I find attractive, is what I will try to do in the next section.

An alternative solution

The key notion around which Gyekye builds his moral concept of personhood is the Akan expression *onye onipa,* he is not a person. In *Tradition and Modernity,* he interprets this expression as the

basis for a distinction between being a human being and being a person. I argue that this distinction is superfluous. I will try to offer an alternative interpretation of the expression *onye onipa.*

The declarative statement 'he is not a person' as used in the Akan language is a value judgment; it bemoans the absence of the innate goodness that the Akans believe human beings are endowed. It is, therefore, pointing to something that ought to be present but is not. This is clear from the fact that the same phrase used in reference to a dog has a different value than when it is said of a human being. In the case of a dog, it is simply a factual statement.

The value judgment 'he is not a person' points to what Aristotle[29] and Aquinas[30] would classify as a privation. Where privation refers to the lack of form or quality that is required by the nature of a being; *privatio est carentia ens quod est aptum habere.* Hence, blindness in humans can be interpreted as a privation, because it is the lack of sight, which is a quality that humans are supposed to possess by nature. Behaving in a morally abhorrent manner can also be classified as a privation since it is a manifestation of the absence of virtues which are required of a human being as a communitarian being. There is, however, an important difference because in the first case, the individual cannot be held responsible for his/her lack of sight, whereas in the latter, it is believed that the freewill of the individual intervenes and hence, s/he is responsible for his/her lack of virtue, which is what makes his/her condition morally evil. Hence the expression 'he is not a person' should not be interpreted literally as a factual statement, but rather as a moral value judgment, indicating a privation.

Privation is a type of deficiency that does not alter the nature of the being in which it is found. Otherwise, it would no longer be a privation, because if the nature is altered, the same quality cannot necessarily be expected of the altered being. In this light, Gyekye's claim that the expression 'he is not a person' points to a 'clear distinction between a concept of a human being and a concept of a person' does not really stand. The expression is simply a value judgment pointing to a person whose moral behaviour is deficient and has privations. This does not alter the person ontologically. And, morally, the individual continues to be a person, despite his/her failings, which is the more reason why s/he is to be helped and encouraged to acquire the moral qualities that are lacking.

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[29] Phys. 192a 3

[30] Summa Theologiae Ia-IIae, q. 18, a. 1

In trying to define the role of community in the grounding of morality and in flourishing of the human person, communitarians do not need to recur to distinctions between individual human beings and persons. In fact, in another Ghanaian context, the communitarian grounding of personhood and morality is explicit and yet does not make any distinction between human beings and persons. Among the Builsa people of Northern Ghana, a human being is called *nurbiik* which can be translated literally as 'son of a person', therefore every human being is considered as one who matters to someone. The concept of *biik* –son or filiation- is particularly important to the Builsas as illustrated by the saying that *nworuk kan nak du dek biik a paar kobi ya,* literally meaning that 'even lightening will never strike its own son to the bone,' it will always exercise restraint or mercy. In this framework, every human being, by virtue of his/her filiation has a dignity and a worth that others need to take into account when dealing with him/her. Hence, the respect awarded to every person is not dependent on personal achievement, but on the ontological category of being-in-relation to another being who is a person. In fact, traditionally, Builsas introduce themselves by first referring to their family names before specifying the first names. This underscores the fact that the person, even though she has an individual identity, comes into being with a network of constitutive relations. The concept ties in very well with the Akan saying that *onipa firi soro besi a, obesi onipa kurom,* when a person descends from above, s/he descends into a human society. Thus, being in a community is not an optional way of being nor is it the fruit of a contract; it is the natural way in which humans are. The act of being, *actus essendi,* or concrescence, in the Whiteheadian sense, of the human is both individual and communitarian, hence a moderate communitarianism.

Having established this point, morality among the Builsas becomes a question of treating the other person as another self. Each human being is a person because s/he is a son or daughter, and since we are all sons and daughters, we possess the same dignity and, what is worthy and good for oneself is equally good and worthy for the other person. Hence morality among the Builsas is akin to the biblical recommendation of doing unto others as one would to oneself. A *nurbiok* (bad person) would therefore be one who consistently places his/her personal interests above those of other members of the community, thereby being greedy, egotistic, vain, and trying to obtain wealth through dishonesty or by cheating others. A *nurmang,* on the other hand refers to persons who are altruistic, generous, magnanimous, considerate and collaborative in the community. Even when a rich person is known to flaunt his/her wealth by being ostentatious to the extent of organizing feasts and dishing out gifts, the Builsas would never refer to such a person as a *nurmang,* (a good person) at the best, s/he will be called a *nurkpiong* (meaning big person), a term which does not have the same moral value as being a *nurmang.*

The Builsa framework which underlines the constitutional relationality of the human being can be found in many other African frameworks. Among Gyekye's Akan, as has been highlighted by Ajei and Myles, [31] the ontological elements of the human person, namely *okra, sunsum* and *honam,* have a communitarian dimension whereby relationality is instrinsically constitutive of the human being.

Conclusion

We have so far tried to look at how two African communitarian philosophers, Menkiti and Gyekye interpret the notion of personhood. Whereas Gyekye's position seems attractive because it accords a degree of autonomy and agency to the individual in relation to community, his accommodation of a notion of personhood that is earned through moral achievement creates both theoretical and practical difficulties.

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[31] Frimpong-Mansoh, Y. A., & Atuire, C. A. (2019). *Bioethics in Africa*, Vernon Press.

Moderate communitarians do not need to recur to this distinction in order to find a balance between individual autonomy and communitarian recognition of personhood. The constitutional relationality of the human person found in many African frameworks is in itself sufficient to ground personal moral obligation and achievement whilst upholding the role of the community in defining personhood. This scheme, in my opinion, provides a good framework in which the ethical obligations of the individual must be tied to the communitarian goal of promoting all that is good for each individual. It also frees us from theoretical conceptual superstructures that complicate the discourse.

Hobbes' Geometrical Method in Natural and Political Philosophy

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Abstract

The method of geometry or geometrical method may seem more appropriately suited for subjects like geometry, physics and mathematics and not for subjects like ethics and political philosophy. However, with Hobbes, the method is employed across the spectrum, both in geometry and physics, on the one hand, and in ethics and political philosophy, on the other. In Hobbes's view, every philosophical system ought to employ the geometrical method. *The geometrical method is the compositive-resolutive method, according to which (a) effects are engendered from causes or singulars and then in conjunction with clear definitions some conclusions is deductively arrive at, and (b) constructing a system mentally by breaking it down into its basic components and then figuring out how they fit together. In this paper, I argue that Hobbes employs the geometrical method both in his natural and political philosophy and that he does this through his conception of motion.*

Keywords: *Thomas Hobbes; Geometrical method; Natural philosophy; Political philosophy*

Introduction

Hobbes is well known for his political thought or philosophy. Indeed he is widely seen by many as one of a handful of truly great and influential political philosophers. His book, *Leviathan* is considered a classic in social and political thought, both in its analyses of the origin and source of political conflict and civil war and their resolution. Among his many important claims is that political conflicts and civil war are primarily caused by differing opinions regarding who is the ultimate political authority in a commonwealth. He believes that the only way to escape such a state and to maintain a state of peace in a commonwealth is to institute an impartial and absolute sovereign power that not only is able to decide on matters of differing opinions but is also the final authority on all political issues. Hobbes believes that his political ideas and philosophy scientifically demonstrate such a conclusion.

But Hobbes is also a thinker with wide-ranging interests on other issues, some of which are in natural philosophy. His natural philosophy is mechanistic, meaning that it is founded on the idea that all phenomena in the universe, without exception, are reducible to matter and motion, in particular that they can be explained in terms of the motions and the interactions of material bodies. For Hobbes, human beings are essentially machines. Their thoughts and emotions operate according to physical laws and chains of cause and effect, action and reaction. Hobbes' mechanistic view means that he did not believe in the soul, or in the mind as separate from the body, or in any of the other incorporeal and metaphysical entities.

This mechanistic view is not only present in Hobbes' natural philosophy but also in his political philosophy. As machines, human beings pursue their own rational self-interest, doing so while mechanically avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure. The formation of the commonwealth or society and the maintenance of peace in a commonwealth are driven by such self-interest. The commonwealth, for Hobbes, is a similar machine — as the human body. Although it is artificial and larger than the human body it is nevertheless operating according to the laws governing motion and collision — the same laws that govern the human body and the universe.

In this paper I want to engage with the question: "Does Hobbes have a consistent method that he employs in his natural and political philosophy? It is my contention that he does.[1] I will attempt to show this by focusing on his geometrical (or geometric) method which, I claim, he employs both in his natural and political philosophy. I would show that Hobbes' consistent employment of the method across the natural and political is illuminated by his conception of motion.

Hobbes' method

Hobbes' method, which follows broadly from his definition of philosophy has a twofold aim. The first is to construct a demonstrably certain philosophical system of knowledge of effects deduced from knowledge of causes, or knowledge of causes acquired by a piecemeal analysis of effects. Secondly, to create an overarching theoretical system that discriminates finely between determinable accidents or causes of universals (such as figure, and extension) from determinate accidents or singulars. In short, Hobbes aim is to scientifically demonstrate his conclusions by proceeding geometrically. Hobbes calls this method, which is largely geometrical', the compositive-resolutive or analytical-synthetical method.[2] In compositive, effects (singulars or consequences) are engendered from causes, i.e. we begin with causes of universals, and then in conjunction with clear definitions we deductively arrive at conclusions.[3] But with the resolutive method effects provide the starting point, i.e. a system is mentally constructed by breaking it down into its basic components and then figuring out how they fit together.

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[1] I will attempt to draw these connections from four of Hobbes' works, (1) The *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck, (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996; (2) *De Corpore*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 1,
William Molesworth (ed.), (3) *De Cive*, in H. Warrender (ed.), *De Cive: The English Translation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983; (4) *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. *Further references to the Human Nature and De Corpore Politico would be referred to and footnoted as Human Nature.*

[2] Hobbes was so impressed with the procedure, demonstratively certainty, and utility of geometry that he believes that every philosophical system ought to employ the geometrical method. See De Cive, p.25 and Human Nature, p.199.

[3] Hobbes takes causes of universal to be similar to names or words, or what he refers to as the "settled significations of names" (*Leviathan*, p.33, 34), hence for him a proper method in philosophy is one that begins with definitions of these primitives and deductively walks its way to consequences or conclusions (of conditional knowledge). A method that fails therefore to begin with definitions can only yield, what he calls, opinion (*Leviathan*, pp.47, 48).

Hobbes first presents his ideas on philosophical method in the first part of *De Corpore*. Following this he applies this method to both the abstract world of geometry and to the real and existing world of physical objects. Keeping to his aim of scientifically demonstrating his conclusions by proceeding through the geometrical method, Hobbes begins his investigations with a number of foundational definitions, including those of space, time and bodies. He follows this up by using these definitions to *compose* an abstract world of geometric figures and then to draw a number of conclusions about them. At the end the third part of *De Corpore*, the geometrical investigation shifts away from the abstract world to the non-abstract world (the real and existent world). This shift signifies a movement from geometry to physics.

Although the third part of *De Corpore marks* a shift from geometry to physics, Hobbes reiterates his point (at the start of his physical investigations) that resolution and composition are the methods to obtain philosophical knowledge. In the passages that follow I would explain how the geometrical method is utilized in Hobbes' natural and political philosophy.[4]

Matter and Motion in Hobbes

Matter for Hobbes is the same with body, and body is that which can be thought of as possessing accidents or properties, i.e. capable of composition and resolution. Given that for him all that exist is body, and body exists only in motion, any philosophical system (natural and political), in his view, has to be teased out in mechanistic terms, i.e. in terms of body in motion. Bodies in general correspond to natural philosophy, while human persons, and compound human persons joined together into a commonwealth (considered as body) corresponds to ethics and

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[4] In the Leviathan, Hobbes describes geometry as the only "science that it hath pleas God hitherto to bestow on mankind (p.28), and as "the mother of all natural science" (p.461).

political philosophy. In *Human Nature* he writes of the two principal kinds of bodies "...one whereof being the work of nature, is called a *natural* body, the other is called a *commonwealth* and is made by the wills and agreement of men."[5]

We may understand the connection between matter and motion and their relationship to the natural and civil when we consider Hobbes' division of bodies into two kinds (natural and civil); a division that illuminates the chart on page 61 (chap. ix) of the *Leviathan*. Here Hobbes takes the consequences from qualities of animals, men (speech and reasoning, etc.) as deriving from natural philosophy and not political philosophy. This idea seems to be emphasized in Hobbes' view of the difference between ontological (natural) and practical (civil). In this sense natural bodies is the chief concern of natural philosophy, while civil bodies is the domain of political philosophy, such that the former is prior to the latter. As he puts it, "But seeing that for the knowledge of the properties of a commonwealth, it is necessary first to know dispositions, affections, and manners of men."[6]

Compositive-Resolutive Method in Hobbes' Natural Philosophy

Hobbes takes geometric figures grounded in motion to exemplify the compositive method in natural philosophy. Given that motion is "the privation of one place, and the acquisition of another,"[7] and a line, is "made by the motion of a point, superficies by the motion of a line, and one motion by another motion"[8] any geometric figure whatsoever can be generated by compounding the causes of universals.

In view of Hobbes' starting point, his compositive method, in broad outline specifies the causes of universals in terms of motion, and then intuitively deduces singular geometric figure from it. The application of this to a square, for example, would be to first spell out the causes of a line, plain, terminated angles, straightness, rectitude and equality, and then compound them. Another example would be a circle, which is defined as the set of points on a plane equidistant from a given point, and which can be generated by knowing first the causes of universals, and then drawing all the extreme points to connect an equidistant point by equal *radii*. The point about these examples is that they show how, by defining the causes of universals, the compositive method yields knowledge of singulars.

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[5] *Human Nature*, p. 192.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, p.196.
[8] Ibid.

For Hobbes, the resolutive method, proceeds "from known things to unknown,"[9] a method, which he thinks is relevant in "...the teaching of natural philosophy,"[10] and which heuristically begins "... from *privation;* that is, from feigning the world to be annihilated."[11] The sort of question that this method allows us to ask, according to Hobbes, is, with the exception of a cognizing being, what and what would be left over in the universe if it were stripped of all bodies? Our likely answer, in Hobbes view, would be, besides the cognizing being and its ideas of bodies before annihilation, only space would remain. Space being "*the phantasm of a thing existing without the mind...* in which we consider no other accident, but only that it appears without us".[12] Hobbes believes that the absence of bodies in space have implications for time, which he defines as "*the phantasm of before and after in motion.*"[13] This is because defining time as the passing of one body out of one space into another by continual succession would make it supervene on the existence of the motions of bodies, hence the annihilation of bodies, would *ipso facto,* obliterate any concept of time. Hobbes then asks us to close the thought experiment by replacing bodies in the world, and of course the legitimate question to ask would be what has the method given us?

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[9] Ibid, p.194.

[10] Ibid.

[11] *De Corpore,* p.91.

[12] Ibid, p. 94.

[13] Ibid, p.95.

Hobbes appears to spell this out in five ways. First, that the replaced bodies in space occupy some part of it as coincident and coextend with it. Second, that bodies are independent of human thought or cognition. Third, that they are extension of space. Fourth, that what are perceivable are accidents and not bodies. And fifth, accidents that are *in* bodies are determinable, while those not are determinate.[14] Determinable accidents, such as extension, solidity and figure are essential to bodies and cannot be destroyed unless bodies are destroyed, while determinate accidents such as tall and short, square and rectangle, or hard and soft are not quiddities of bodies, hence could be destroyed or as Hobbes put it they "do perish continually, and are succeeded by others."[15]

Hobbes here appears to confuse the relationship between universals and singulars, and it is curious that he takes things like rectitude as universals, and surprisingly, given his conception of accidents, he shies away from the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. More worrying, he seems to conflate an absolute notion of space and time with a relational notion. However, notwithstanding these worries, Hobbes' method, given the way I am setting it up as heuristically piggybacking geometry seems not to be theoretically undermined.

Compositive-Resolutive Method in Hobbes' Political Philosophy

There is strong textual support of Hobbes employment, in his political philosophy, the compositive-resolutive method. Similar to his natural philosophy Hobbes use of the compositive method in his political philosophy supervenes on the principle of motion, from where a deduction of the structure of the commonwealth is made. Motions in animals are of two sorts: voluntary and vital motions, the difference being that motions are voluntary insofar as they are preceded by "thought of *whither, which, may,* and *what,*"[16] i.e. presupposed by the will, and vital if not presupposed by the will. Hobbes calls the causes of voluntary motions, i.e. thoughts or deliberations, which occurs in the nervous system infinitesimal motions or endeavors,[17] because they are motions "made in less space and time,"[18]

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[14] Ibid, 104. As Hobbes further note on the same page: "When an accident is said to be in a body, it is not to be conceived, as if anything were contained in that body, as if for example, redness were in the blood".

[15] Ibid, 104.

Endeavor is of two kinds. When it is toward something that causes it, it is appetite or desire, but if it is the opposite it is aversion.[19] Since endeavor implies continual mutations, personal appetites and aversions are in constant flux, hence "it is impossible that all the same things should always cause ...the same appetites and aversions."[20] Hobbes' view of endeavor appears to be drawing a distinction between determinable and determinate accidents of endeavor. Desires or appetites and aversions in this sense are determinable accidents in the sense that they are the very essence of endeavor, and given that no endeavor can be thought of without them, they can only be destroyed when endeavor is destroyed. On the other hand, *this* and *that* particular desire or aversion is not a quiddity of endeavor but determinate accident that continually change in space and time. Hobbes reference to the mutations of endeavor seems to suggest the second sense of determinate accidents of endeavor. To understand endeavor this way is to buy into the implications and consequences that follows. Let us examine these implications and consequences.

The first implication is the absence of interpersonal agreement on what is desirable, for "whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire; that is it, which for his part calls *good:* and the object of his hate, and aversion, *evil.*[21] Second, humans are faced with an interminable series of desire, which can only be satisfied momentarily and finitely. One who drinks water to quench her thirst has momentarily satisfied her desire, but since the desire for water is open-ended its present satisfaction does not suggest a future indifference to water. And since most of human desires are open-ended a third implication arises: that humans are forward-looking and concerned with the satisfaction of future desires. Fourth, all desires are instrumental: being of value because they lead to the desire of self-preservation. This analysis of human desires and connection to the objects desired direct us to some conclusions which can be summed up in the following three deductions.

First deduction: *all must covenant with all to end the war of attrition.* This seems to follow pretty well from the quiddity of desires. Given the fact that human desires and conditions in the state of nature the deducible consequence is that for rational finite agents to live "out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live"[22] opting for a mechanism of conflict resolution, is a necessity. These facts and condition include the fact that the satisfaction of future desires are not guaranteed because of inter-personal conflict of desires, or what Hobbes calls a war "of everyman against everyman;"[23] the absence of true rights because "everyman has a right to everything, even to one another's body;"[24] and the scarcity of resources to satisfy desires.

Second deduction: *all must unite to create an artificial man or commonwealth, and relinquish to the sovereign most of their pre-existing rights.* This deduction introduces an element not found in the last one: a political solution. But does this not imply that parties to the contract are irrational? It seems so only if we take rationality to be subsumed by individual desires, for given that desires, both at the intra-personal and inter-personal levels are mutational and always in conflict, any political solution to the contract problem seems rational. We must bear in mind also that

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[16] *Leviathan*, pp.37-38.
[17] Ibid, p.38.
[18] *De Corpore*, p.206.
[19] *Leviathan*, p.38
[20] Ibid, p.39.
[21] Ibid, p.39.

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid, p.88.
[24] Ibid, p.91.

since "covenants without the sword are but words"[25] reason in willing peace as an end must will intercessors or arbitrators as means.[26]

Third deduction: *the sovereign has absolute right only if (the sovereign) preserves the desire of self-preservation.* This deduction closes the gap left open by the second. For if a political solution is rendered necessary, how then do we rank between the rights of the sovereign and those of subjects. This deduction grounds rights in terms of how well they promote an agent's self-preservation. The sovereign's rights, on the one hand, are defined broadly in the language of *means,* and some of these are rights against removal, murder,[27] of succession and eternal perpetuation of sovereignty.[28] On the other hand, the rights of subjects are cashed out in terms of *ends,* hence obedience to the sovereign is rendered otiose when the sovereign is unable to protect them[29] or when asked to kill themselves or resist those that assault them.[30]

In a roundabout way, Hobbes, as I am suggesting, employs the resolutive method to also construct the social contract. In the *Leviathan* Hobbes notes, in passing, that the state of nature may not have been a general condition of humans.[31] I take Hobbes to be implicitly suggesting that the state of nature is somewhat hypothetical and not historical, implying therefore that the state of nature and social contract is a theoretical construct with two aims: one, to ground political obedience, and two, to show the basic components of civil society and then figuring out how the components fit together.

If this way of reading Hobbes is right then by applying the resolutive method Hobbes proceeds from effects by annihilating the commonwealth and asking the sort of questions he asked in his natural philosophy: what and what would be left over if the

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[25] Ibid, p.117.
[26] Ibid, pp.108-109.
[27] Ibid, p.122.
[28] Ibid, p.135.
[29] Ibid, p.153.
[30] *De Cive,* pp.58-59.
[31] *Leviathan,* p. 89

commonwealth *(artificial human* or *body),* is stripped of its components. The component of the commonwealth includes the sovereign (the *artificial soul* that gives motion to the commonwealth), the magistrates and other officers *(artificial joints),* rewards and punishments *(the nerves),* riches and wealth of subjects (the *strength of the commonwealth),* peoples safety (the *business of the commonwealth),* counselors (memory), equity and laws *(artificial reason and will),* concord *(health),* sedition *(sickness),* civil war *(death),* pacts and covenants *(fiats),*[32] and procreation or children of the commonwealth (*colonies*).[33] Now what will be left if the commonwealth is stripped of these components?

Hobbes' answer would be that given the components of the commonwealth whatever that is essential to it, i.e. determinable couldn't be destroyed unless the civil body is destroyed. So while, for him the sovereign is paradigmatic of determinable accidents, the absence of which would be a return to the pre-contractual condition or the state of nature,[34] procreation and counselors are paradigmatic of determinate accidents.

Conclusion

I have shown that Hobbes employs the compositive-resolutive method, both in his natural and political philosophy. His employment of this method allows him to get to the same conclusions. A superimposition of the principle of motion, allows Hobbes in conjunction with clear definitions, to deductively, using the compositive method argue for knowledge of effects such as geometric figures and the commonwealth. This is the same conclusions that the resolutive method gives if we flip it round by proceeding from singulars to universals. And even though the deductive steps are more clearly defined in his natural philosophy than the political, the demonstrative steps of his geometrical method remain unaffected in both.

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[32] Ibid, pp.9-10.
[33] Ibid, p.175.
[34] Ibid, pp.123, 134-135.

An African Indigenous Theory of Knowledge and Belief

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Abstract

This paper advances an African indigenous theory of knowledge and belief. In effectively addressing the Western denigration of African culture and indigenous epistemic conception, this paper argues that African philosophy should be articulated in African terms. An analytic experiment of Igbo (African) epistemology is attempted with argumentative illustration of inductive reasoning in Igbo thought. The paper concludes that the conceptual distinction between knowledge and belief in Igbo thought is parallel to what obtains in Western epistemology.

Introduction

The problem a scholar/writer might face writing on an area study like the African theory of knowledge has to do with a conceptual clarification of the terms in use as well as correcting some perceived misconceptions, which due to the accidence of history, have tended to be accepted as a norm or a given. So when the Africa's indigenous theory of knowledge is mentioned, some scholars are wont to ask: what theory? And what knowledge? Do Africans have a systematized body of knowledge? Part of our concerns in this essay is to expose the pitfalls in the disguised rejection of African theory of knowledge (epistemology) and its ideological underpinnings in order to reconstruct the ideas with a view to showing the parity of epistemological concepts between African and Euro-western.

The West and the Rest of Us (Africa)

By way of citation, Chinweizu, the Africanist came up with the above-mentioned title many years ago to underscore the damaging effects of colonialism on the colonized (Africans). Now writing African history cannot be complete without a mention of African colonial experience no matter how briefly.

The discourses on the African encounter with the Euro-west are now too familiar and over flogged and so would not detain us here. The violent historical incursion of Europe into Africa brought about a new image of Africa, apart from a considerable process of social and cultural change on the continent. During this period, African personality and her cultures and tradition became devalued and disoriented leading to identity crises and cultural anomie. This scenario is well expressed by John Dollard as quoted by Abiola Irele thus:

> The cultural and political ascendancy of the Whiteman, combined with the active denigration of the Blackman, has thus had the effect of vitiating the latter's self-esteem, with profound psychological consequences, including shame and self-hatred.[1]

The Europeans invaded Africa with the disguised motive of bringing civilization to a horribly backward race. According to Irele, "The colonial enterprise was aimed at transforming the African by his progressive approximation to the ideals of western civilization, specifically through education."[2]

The ideological justification for Euro-western colonization was provided by both the Renaissance and Enlightenment scholars drawn from different fields like philosophy, history, anthropology, etc. During these periods, western civilization prided itself as the pinnacle of human civilization. The values inherent in science and reason were celebrated as the exclusive preserve of the Euro-western society. In fact, there was the belief that European civilization was synonymous with the universal or world civilization. Based on this, Africans and other non-European peoples were typed as the absolute "other", primitive, backward, pre-logical, backward, savages and possessing no history of note and therefore needed the redeeming intervention of Western civilization. A notable European philosopher, Hegel once claimed that:

> ... Africa... is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it, that is in its Northern part, belonged to the Asiatic or European world... Egypt does not belong to the African spirit.[3]

A similar sentiment was expressed by Lucien Levy-Bruhl, a notable anthropologist, when he said that human societies were classified into two, namely those with a civilized mentality and those with a primitive mentality. For him, Africans and other non-Western peoples fitted into the latter group because they possessed a pre-logical mindset which is taken to mean a complete lack of scientific, critical and analytic reason and suffused with contradictions. In apparent valorization of reason, Hegel as quoted by D.A. Masolo, unequivocally stated that:

> ... Culture was the concretization of reason in its historical moments. To identify the intensity of dialectical reason at work in the world... where there is no culture there is no reason.[4]

The point of this brief discussion of the relationship between Africa and the West is to show that the Western denigration of African culture necessarily prompted the denial or rejection of African concepts and categories like being, mind, knowledge, belief, ethics, soul, body etc.

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[1] Abiola Irele, *The Negritude Movement Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thought* London: Africa World Process, 2011, p.42.

[2] Ibid.

[3] G.F.W. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* New York: Dover Publications, 1956, p.99.

[4] D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp.4-5.

Is there one Science, knowledge?

To answer this question, whether in the negative or affirmative, one needs to reflect on the contemporary developments in epistemology, science, language, sociology, economics etc. In these fields, there has been considerable paradigm shift in terms of the mainstream discourse to alternative discursive strategy. But before going into this, let us state that the Euro-Western people with their un-linear and analytic bent of mind will acquiesce that there is one knowledge, science, theory, method etc. The point being made here would be clearer when we notice how D.W. Hamlyn in his book, *The Theory of Knowledge*, attempts to grapple with a question he raised himself thus, "why then a theory of knowledge, what are the philosophical problems about knowledge."[5] Hamlyn argues that the problems devolve into two, namely, "what knowledge is and what we understand by the term knowledge."[6] Then of course, he goes on to intimate the main problems of the theory of knowledge as;

i. Those concerning the nature of knowledge.
ii. The general conditions that must be satisfied by any genuine claim to knowledge.[7]

The interesting thing for our purpose about Hamlyn's argument is that the only people qualified to legislate or proffer answers to the above problems are:

> Those with the relevant specialist knowledge or by those who have the techniques or knowledge of the methodology appropriate for the discovery of the truth in question. Hence, the theory of knowledge is, among other things, a set of defense works against skepticism of the very possibility of knowledge.[8]

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[5] D.W. Hamlyn, *The Theory of Knowledge* London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1970, p.4.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid, p.5

[8] Ibid, pp. 4-9.

Indeed, possession of techniques or knowledge of methodology seems to betray Hamlyn's interest and admiration of the enlightenment project of reason and the criteria of knowledge as belonging to the Euro-Western. But Theophilus Okere, an African philosopher, has pointed out the revised image of epistemology and science after the searing critique by notable scholars like Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerand, Richard Rorty and others. According to Okere, with the new image it has become necessary to say that:

> Scientific knowledge is socially constructed, constructed by cultures, world-views, locations,... Science should be aware that is necessarily partial in the representation of its objects and a full account of reality would include every perspective. It should be wary of flaunting credentials of objectivity, neutrality, transparency and universality. Nor should [it] see itself as superior to alternative epistemologies or scoff at indigenous knowledge systems as ... superstitious, irrational or mythical.[9]

Deconstructing Western Narratives

Our interest here is to explain some attempts by some African and non-African scholars to rewrite and re-right the Western narratives on Africa with a view to telling the African story as they are. According to Irele, the colonial situation as a whole was a collective political and cultural oppression [and] the literature of negritude became, as a result, a testimony to the injustices of colonial rule and an expression of the Blackman's resentment."[10]

Another critical point of the critique of Western imperialism, science and knowledge came from Linda T. Smith, who tries to contextualize some key concepts, which are employed by Western imperialists to discuss alien cultures and indigenous peoples. These include imperialism, history, writing and theory.[11] According to Smith, these concepts from the "indigenous perspectives are problematic, apart from provoking a whole array of feelings, attitudes and values."[12] Furthermore, Smith, remarks that:

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[9] Theophilus Okere, *Philosophy, Culture and Society in Africa* Nsukka, Nigeria: Afro-Obis Publications Ltd., 2005, pp.159-160.

[10] Abiola Irele, op. cit., pp.44-45.

> Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. Having been immersed in the western academy which claims theory as thoroughly western, which has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been silenced. The act, let alone the art and science, of theorizing our own existence and realities is not something which many indigenous people assume is possible.[13]

Similarly, M.B. Ramose, an African Philosopher, in what he calls, "the struggle for reason in Africa", castigated the attempt by the Euro-Western peoples to exclude non-European peoples like Africa from the compass of reason, in spite of Aristotle's declaration that "man is a rational animal". Based on this it is clear that Ramose is prepared to uphold the view that:

> The liberation of reason from the irrationality of scientific racism imposes the duty to recognize that the Aristotelian definition of human being must apply to and be equally valid for all human beings where they are without this recognition there is little chance for building and sustaining world peace.[14]

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[11] Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*, New York: Zed Books Ltd. 1999, pp. 19-20.

[12] Ibid, p.20.

[13] Ibid. pp. 20-29.

[14] Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Mond Books, 2002, p.10.

The question is: what is to be done? We argue that African scholars and others interested in African themes to articulate African philosophy and other African themes in African terms. This is true of what Kwasi Wiredu, in his later works, is doing in what he calls "conceptual decolonization". This is taken to mean on the negative side "reversal through a critical conceptual self-awareness, of uncritical assimilation in African philosophy of those categories of thought embedded in the foreign languages, and on the positive side it means the exploitation of the resources of our indigenous conceptual schemes in our thinking on the problems of philosophy.[15]

Sample of Igbo (African) Epistemology

Some African philosophers have proposed that there is an African epistemology or theory of knowledge. By this, it means that there is a way of knowing that is uniquely African. This view is criticized and rejected by some analytic African philosophers who argue that ascribing a unique epistemological mindset to the Africans does not pulsate with the lived experiences of Africans.[16] The Igbo terms "*amamife*" and "*nchekwube*" which putatively translate "knowledge" and "belief" in English are used to express their understanding or opinion of the facts in the world. Thus *amamife* (knowledge) is used by the Igbo to explain those things or events for which they have good reasons and which can be verified through common sense perception or observation. This is first-hand information since the person witnessed the events and is prepared to provide evidence and justification for his claims. Here justification is based on perception which is obtained through the five senses. So, when the Igbo say the *mfuru na anya ma uche kwado kwa ya* (What I see with my eyes and which my mind or consciousness supports it), then they can claim to know it. *Nchekwube* (belief) on the other hand, is used by the Igbo to express those things which they accept on trust, faith and confidence for which there is no reliability or certainty. Such second-hand information like reports from other people are regarded as not reliable. However, the Igbo attitude to reports from the testimony or reports from *ndichie* (elders) *Ozo* (titled holders) and *dibble afa* (native doctors) is different since they regard such reports as true and reliable, though derived from second-hand information.

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[15] Kwasi Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization in Africa 4 Essays* Selected and Introduced by Olusegun Oladipo, Ibadan: Hope Publications 1995, p.7.

[16] Amaechi Udefi; An Analysis of Some Contemporary Alternatives to Traditional Epistemology, *Kaygi Journal of Philosophy* Vol.12, 2009, p.22.

Inductive Reasoning in Igbo

It is important to state here that direct sense perception and testimony as discussed above do not exhaust the sources of knowledge in traditional Igbo thought. For we have inductive reasoning which is often ignored in the treatment of African thought. By inductive inference in Western philosophy, it is meant a procedure in logical and scientific research in which we make judgment concerning a phenomenon or event from a mere observation of a particular fact to a conclusion covering a large number of instances or cases. Put differently, the inference which is drawn here usually starts from an instance to a general law.

The Igbo believe that past experiences provide sufficient ground to infer what will happen now and in the future. Also, they believe that the external world exists independently of them (realism) and will continue to exist. This is the significance of their saying; *Uwa ebi ebi* (world without end). A two-legged goat that is presented to an Igbo man will obviously be in contradiction to his past experiences that all goats have four legs and hence he has every reason to doubt his present sensory experience and all epistemic beliefs based on it.

Another instance of inductive reasoning among the Igbo is exhibited when, as agrarian farmers, they observe that each year there is a long period of rainy season, which usually starts from (*onwa anoo na afo afu)* month of April in the new year to *(onwa irii)* month of October. Having successively observed the cycle of the year including wet and dry seasons, they (Igbo) are able to plan their activities which include agricultural operations and ceremonies like the *Ahajioku* festival (New Yam Festival), which apart from celebrating yam as the king of crops, shows the rich

cultures of *Ndigbo (*Igbo people). What the Igbo man engages here is the use of scientific reasoning to arrive at certain conclusions in his world.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that the Igbo make a distinction between knowledge *(amamife)* and belief *nchekwube)* and there are procedures for validating the epistemic status of their claims which is parallel to Western epistemological canons.

An Appraisal of the Humean Foundation of Husserlian Phenomenology

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Abstract

One of the fundamental goals of philosophy is to provide the best possible answers to human concerns in his quest for the highest values and to develop the unique broad-range capacities of human reason. Since the history of Western philosophy represents a series of abortive attempts to achieve this feat, Husserl was convinced that philosophy could achieve this goal if it adopts the method of Phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology grew out of the conscious attempt to avoid the logical absurdities that plagued Hume's epistemology. It is against this background that this paper proposes to examine in details the affinity between Hume's empiricism and Husserl's phenomenology. It seeks not to assess the validity of Hume's empiricism but rather to substantiate the conviction that, Husserl, in his pursuit of the project of transcendental phenomenology, followed Hume's lead down into the depths of the concrete ego to find the ultimate origins of all objectivities and "worlds". Husserl's recognition of Descartes as discoverer of the transcendental sphere was accompanied by a radical interpretation of Hume as the first practitioner of genuine transcendental philosophy. Hume's philosophy is held to be a preparatory and cleansing stage through which philosophical thought must pass to its maturity and to arrive at transcendental phenomenology. Husserl disclosed that an essential task of his phenomenology is to grapple with the problem discovered by Hume, namely the "Humean Problem".

Keywords: *Husserlian Phenomenology; Humean problem; Epistemology; Foundationalism*

Introduction

The intellectual endeavour to have a concise understanding of the original and radical character of Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology requires that we situate him within the historical tradition of Western Philosophy. Although, he was not a historian of philosophy, Husserl's historical reflections convinced him that phenomenology is the necessary culmination of a centuries-old endeavour and the solution to the contemporary crisis in European science and European humanity itself.[1] Husserl maintained that the Cartesian turn to the "cogito" represents the crucial breakthrough in the historical advance of western thought towards philosophy as rigorous science. Hence, he concentrated almost exclusively on the modern era.[2] It is true that much has been written of Husserl's relationship with Descartes, it is David Hume that gained from Husserl the more extensive consideration.

Edmund Husserl at several places in his philosophical literatures, has given Hume the credit for being a forerunner of phenomenology. Husserl tells us clearly that the works of Hume deserve to be studied seriously. In all the expositions and explanations of Hume, there are to be found phenomenological insights of great importance. Husserl believes that the philosophical researches and insights of Hume are inevitable for the phenomenology and a true critique of knowledge is obviously incomplete without him. Hume in the assessment of Husserl occupies a central position in the history of philosophy and his real intentions have come to bear fruits. In terms of radicality, the philosophy of Hume surpasses even that of Descartes. The philosophical continuity from Hume to Husserl does not run via Kant. The observations and comments of Husserl on Hume are not always unitary. The philosophy of Hume is on the way to a phenomenological philosophy. Husserl's appreciation and understanding of Hume's philosophy are the result of his constant analysis of the latter's philosophy. The vast mass of Husserl's

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[1] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Philosophical Phenomenology*, op.cit, pp. 1-17

[2] ibid, p. 12

unpublished manuscripts also points to a lively interest of Husserl in Hume.

Husserl speaks of Hume at several places in philosophical literature as a genius. For him, Hume was almost treading on the path of phenomenology and his philosophy would have developed into a full–fledged phenomenology, had he not been blinded by a purely sensualistic empiricism.[3] When we take a critical look at the historical narrative Husserl offered to account for the rationale behind the development of phenomenology, we would see that an important part of phenomenology's impetus was its effort to grapple with a problem that Husserl claimed was discovered by Hume, and a problem that was central to Hume's own project. The problem Hume discovered, what Husserl called the universal concrete problem of transcendental philosophy is the constitutional problem of accounting for how the transcendence of beliefs (in causal necessity for instance) can be constituted solely on the basis of the given immanent to the mind.[4]

In Hume's *Treatise*, for example, the problem was one of taking the repetition of perfectly similar instances, which can never alone give rise to an original idea and then show how an original idea such as the idea of causal necessity, came to be.[5] This is a form of skepticism (The inability to rationally justify knowledge acquired through inductive reasoning) for Husserl, however, Hume did not develop the full implications of the problem and did indeed remain captive to the *naivete* of the natural attitude and its embrace of naturalistic sensualism when he failed to grasp the essential constitutive relationship between the data of sensualism and an intentional consciousness. Hume, according to Husserl, fails to see that his own scepticism is a stepping-stone towards a radical science of philosophy.[6] Husserl derives philosophical motivation from this because all the painstaking researches of Husserl may be understood as a struggle against the very spirit of scepticism. The incessant attempt at overcoming scepticism is therefore a very striking resemblance between the philosophical motivation of Hume and Husserl. Husserl testifies that, he wishes his transcendental phenomenology to be understood as the most radical overcoming of all scepticism. Husserl's reaction towards Humean scepticism could therefore be seen as an important foundational stage in the historical development of a pure phenomenology.

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[3] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. by W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 2010) p. 148

[4] Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Trans. by Dorion Cairns, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969) p. 256.

[5] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Edited by L.A Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.163

The Project of a Radical Epistemological Foundation

In the modern period, there are conflicting opinions concerning the method of knowing, which is appropriate for investigating the nature of reality. Hume considered this conflict of opinions as the symptoms of a serious philosophical problem namely: How can we know the true nature of things? Which method could lead us to a clear understanding of human nature and in particular the workings of the human mind?

It is the shared conviction of Hume and Husserl that up to now philosophy has failed to provide, as it ought to, an indubitable foundation for the sciences and even all human experience. David Hume considered it disgraceful that philosophy should not yet have fixed, beyond controversy, the foundation of morals, reasoning and criticism.[7] Husserl demands that philosophy be "...according to its essence, a science of true beginnings, of origins...The science concerned with the radical, must also be radical in its procedure, and this in every respect.[8] The history of

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[6] Husserl, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man" in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, op.cit., p.xi

[7] David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Edited by Charles W. Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955) p. 16

[8] Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science", Trans. by Quentin Laver, in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965) p. 69

Western thought however testifies to the failure to establish sucha foundational philosophy. This failure:

> ...implies the crisis of all modern sciences as members of the philosophical universe, at first a latent, then a more and more prominent crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total existence.[9]

In order therefore to establish the necessary philosophical foundations of morals, reasoning and criticism, Hume turns to subjectivity, a fundamental science of human nature.

There is no question of importance, whose decision is not comprised in the science of man; and there is more, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a complete system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.[10]

The intention of Hume was to build a science of man to study human nature by using the method of experimental science.

> And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.[11]

Hume insists that the goal of this science of man among other things should be to inquire seriously into the nature of human understanding and to offer an exact analysis of its powers and analysis.[12] On this basis, each philosopher, according to Hume, must begin by reflecting on his own experiences, and for him the starting point of his philosophical reflection is the human mind. Not only must the philosopher restrict himself to his own experiences, but to his own mental contents or conscious acts. For what alone is given in critical reflections are "…the perception of the human mind, which resolves themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call impressions and ideas."[13] What Hume is saying is that all human knowledge comes to us through our senses or perceptions, as he called them. For Husserl, the perceptions of the human mind take two forms: impressions and ideas. Impressions are the original perceptions, as when we hear, see, feel, love, hate, desire or will. These impressions are lively and vivid when we have them, but when we reflect upon these impressions, we have ideas of them in our memory, and those ideas are less lively versions of the original impressions.[14] For example, I might have an impression of the sun and later have an idea (image) of the sun in my memory. Also, to feel the sweetness of an apple is an impression, whereas the memory of this sensation is an idea. "Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence we may name impressions…By ideas I mean the faint images of those in thinking and reasoning."[15] We can therefore distinguish between impressions and ideas by noting the degree of "liveliness" and "vivacity" of the perception.

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[9] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Philosophical Phenomenology*, op.cit, p.15

[10] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, op. cit. xvi

[11] Ibid, p. xvi

[12] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, op.cit., p.21

The constant conjunction of similar impressions and ideas and the temporal priority of the former are convincing proof in the eyes of Hume, "…that our impressions are the causes of our ideas, not our ideas of our impressions."[16] The point Hume is trying to emphasize is that without impressions, there can be no ideas. For if an idea is simply a copy of an impression, it follows that for every idea, there must be prior impression. We can truly understand the meaning of an idea only by tracing it back to an original impression and understanding its meaning. From the above, we can safely deduce that Hume's solipsistic and purely immanent reflection begins with perception of the mind or conscious acts which are "impressions" and their derivative copies, the "ideas". This reflection is expected to show how the mind or consciousness operates on these "impressions" and "ideas" to construct the world of experience.

Husserl's phenomenological reduction or reduction is no less solipsistic in its point of departure than Hume's psychological reflection. It is for this reason that Husserl makes the statement that "…Hume's *Treatise* is the first draft of a pure phenomenology…"[17] This kinship between Hume's psychology and Husserl's phenomenology in regard to their starting point merits further investigation. According to Husserl, in order to establish philosophy as the ultimate foundational science, the philosopher must initiate the phenomenological reduction by turning inward to his own self. For him, this turn to the subject is no less concretely and experientically solipsistic than Hume.

> …anyone who seriously intends to become a philosopher must once in his life withdraw into himself and attempt within himself to overthrow and build anew all the sciences that, up to then, he has been accepting.[18]

To underline the affinity between Husserl and Hume in respect to the necessity of a solipsistic point of departure for philosophical reflection does not, and must not, blind us to the deep methodological differences separating them. The point we wish to emphasize is that both Hume and Husserl shared the conviction that philosophy must provide, if at all possible, the foundations of science, morals, indeed all human experience. Both insisted that such a foundational science must be thoroughly radical and presuppositionless. They both also agreed that this foundational ideal requires an immediately given and hence apodictic point of departure for philosophical reflection, and that this starting point is nothing but the concrete subject, the philosophising ego itself.

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[13] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, op.cit., p.1

[14] Ibid., p. 2

[15] Ibid. p. 4

[16] ibid. p.5

[17] Edmund Husserl, *First Philosophy*, Edited by Rudolf Boetin (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956) p. 157

[18] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, op. cit., p.2

The Humean Problem

The influence of Hume on Husserl's phenomenology is highly traceable to what Husserl called the "Humean problem". It is called Humean problem simply because the problem, according to Husserl, was discovered by Hume. But what precisely is this Hume's problem about?

It is the constitutional problem of accounting for how the transcendence of beliefs (in causal necessity) can be constituted solely on the basis of the givens immanent to the mind.[19] It is also the problem of taking the repetition of perfectly similar instances which can never alone give rise to an original idea, and then show how an original idea of causal necessity emerged.[20] So the Humean problem can simply be described as the problem of causation" and "induction".

The traditional theory about causation is premised on the belief that: (1) Every event has a cause, and that (2) If event B happens soon after an event A, then event A is the cause of event B. Hume insists that we cannot actually say that one event caused another, rather what we are really seeing is that one event has always been constantly conjoined to the other. As a consequence we have no reason to believe that one caused the other or that they will continue to be constantly conjoined in the future.[21] If we have to go by Hume's skeptical epistemology, the following questions would be legitimate: what is the origin of the idea of causality? Since ideas are copies of impressions, what impressions give us the idea of causality? Hume's answer is that there are no impressions corresponding to the idea of causality. Our reason for believing in causality is not because it is the way of nature but because of the psychological habits of human nature.[22]

> ...that the future resembles the past is not founded on arguments of any kind

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[19] Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, op. cit., . 256

[20] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* op. cit., p.163

[21] Richard Popkin & Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy*, (Oxford: Reed Educational and Professional Publishing Ltd, 1933), p.268

[22] Ibid., p.272

> but is derived entirely from habit by which we are determined to expect for the future the same train of objects to which we have been accustomed.[23]

In *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume articulated the view that all human reasoning is of two kinds: Relation of ideas and matters of fact. While the former involves abstract concepts like mathematics where deductive certitude presides, the latter involves empirical experience about which all thought is inductive.[24] Since according to Hume we can know nothing about nature prior to its experience, it goes without saying that even a rational man with no experience "could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him."[25] Thus all we can say, think, or predict about nature must come from prior experience which lays the foundation for the necessity of induction.

The method of induction supposes the uniformity of nature. An inductive inference assumes that the past acts as a reliable guide to the future. But how can we justify such an inference, known as the principle of induction? Hume suggested two possible justifications, but rejected both: The first justification states that as a matter of logical necessity, the future must resemble the past. Hume however pointed out that we can conceive of a chaotic, erratic world where the future has nothing to do with the past, so nothing makes the principle of induction logically necessary.

The second justification appeals to the past success of induction – it has worked out most often in the past, so it will probably continue to work most often in the future. But as Hume notes, this justification uses circular reasoning in attempting to justify induction; merely reiterating it and bringing us back to where we started.[26]

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[23] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 22

[24] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., pp. 20-27

[25] ibid., p. 6

[26] ibid., p.33

Since most scientific laws are causal laws, and all our scientific knowledge is based on the uniformity of nature, Hume's problem challenges the rationality of science radically. It is this challenge that Husserl devotes himself to answer.

It becomes very obvious that according to Husserl that the Humean problem is how an immanent consciousness could transcend the field of its immanence, and how could it posit and apprehend the transcendental object. Husserl maintains that Hume with his theory of the relations of ideas is nearer to the truth but failed to get there. His philosophy was almost treading the path of phenomenology but got blinded by his sensualism not to see the full implication of his discoveries. Since he could not get rid of sensualism completely, his philosophy failed to overcome solipsism and Scepticism, a challenge which Husserl took up and addressed with his project of transcendental phenomenology.

On the Concept of "A Priori"

The concept of *a priori* has generated controversy among philosophers but majority seems to accept the description that *a priori* designates that knowledge or propositions which not only can be known to be true but also are such that no experience can possibly disprove them or provide counter-instance. In this sense, the *a priori* is equated with the "non-empirical."[27] The influence of Kant has also taken *a priori* to designate what is not only "non-empirical" but also 'necessary'. This element of necessity has made the concept *a priori* problematic and controversial. This is because many philosophers, especially of empiricist persuasion hold that all "necessary propositions are analytic. They claim that analytic proposition is one whose truth is determined by the meaning of the component terms. Accordingly, such a proposition is "non-empirical" in that it does not refer to experience and lacks factual content. All other propositions are empirical; they lack any necessity.[28]

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[27] Richard Murphy, *Hume and Husserl: Towards Radical Subjectivism*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 1980), p. 29.

[28] Ibid., p. 29

Other philosophers follow Kant in postulating a class of "necessary" and "hence "a priori" propositions whose truth is not determined by the mere meaning of its component terms. Customarily, these propositions are labeled "synthetic *a priori*". Although not derived from or dependent on actual experience, they are not empty of factual content but relate in some way or other to experience and/or its possibility.[29]

Husserl rejected the Kantian theory of the "synthetic a priori" and claimed that the Kantian concept of the "analytic a priori" must undergo fundamental modification and correction. In the realization of this, Husserl appealed to Hume's distinction between "relation of ideas" and "matters of fact". Husserl interpreted this Humean distinction in a way that for "relation of ideas" and "matters of fact" the *a priori* is equated with the central concept of evidence. Although, there is disagreement among commentators regarding both the exact line of demarcation and the tenability of this Humean distinction. According to Hume, all *a priori* reasonings concerns not "matters of fact" but solely "relations of ideas". These relations are those objects of reason whose affirmation "...is either intuitively or demonstratively certain."[30] Propositions concerning such objects are to be found in the mathematical and geometrical sciences. They "...are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence to what is anywhere existent in the universe"[31] Such propositions "...forever retain their certainty and evidence[32] these "relations of ideas" are discovered by a mere comparison of ideas.

"Matters of fact" are those objects of human inquiry that cannot be discovered by a mere comparison of ideas, "...nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature..." as that of "relations of ideas". All reasoning concerning "matters of fact" is based on the relations of cause and effect by means of which alone "…we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses"[33] the relation between a fact presently given through the memory or the senses and a fact not so given can be effected only in terms of causal connection. This connection cannot be discovered through *a priori* reasoning, an appeal to observation and experience is required.

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[29] Quinton has stated most clearly and succinctly the contemporary status of this dispute and has defended the empiricist identification of necessity and analyticity. Anthony Quinton, "The A Priori and The Analytic", in *Philosophical Logic*, edited by P.F. Strawson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 107-28.

[30] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, op.cit, p 40

[31] Ibid., p 40

[32] Ibid., p.40

> When it is asked, what is the nature of all our reasoning concerning matters of fact? The proper answer seems to be, that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect. When again it is asked, what is the foundation of all our reasoning and conclusions concerning that relation? It may be replied in one word, experience. But if we still carry on our sifting humour and ask, what is the foundation of all conclusions from experience? This implies a new question which may be of more difficult solution and explication.[34]

In order to provide answer to this new question Hume makes a subtle but highly significant shift in his analysis. If we observe rightly, it will be discovered that up till this point, Hume has been consistent in formulating a logical and conceptual distinction between the type of reasoning concerning "matters of fact" and that concerning "relations of ideas". Now Hume shifts from a logical analysis to psychological explanation. The foundation of all our conclusions from experience in terms of causation is to be discovered in custom or habit. Having noted in past experience the constant conjunction of similar events we develop a custom or habit that:

> …makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events that those which

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[33] Ibid., p. 41

[34] Ibid., p. 46

> have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses.[35]

This expectation which is developed through custom Hume calls "belief". Belief is an irrational sentiment felt by the mind and is claim to love or hatred.[36] All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or prevent."[37] Such a belief lacks, therefore, that certainty and evidence characterizing *a priori* reasonings concerning "relations of ideas". These "…forever retain their certainty and evidence."[38]

It becomes very obvious now that in contrast to "belief" rooted in past experience concerning "matters of fact", Hume's "comparison of ideas" is reasoning in the proper sense. This reasoning or "comparison" is not grounded in experience; it is *a priori* grounded on the purely immanent and hence, intuitively grasped "relations" holding between "ideas". In this way, Hume has equated the *a priori* with evidence and the latter in turn with what is purely immanent and hence intuitively given. Based on this position, we must hold with Hume that "…if there is an *"a priori"*, there is only an *immanent a priori*" for this reason, Husserl developed his concept of the *a priori* in opposition to Kant's and in close affinity to Hume's.[39]

We have demonstrated above that Hume's skepticism in respect to reasoning concerning "matters of fact" arises from its attempt to proceed beyond what is immediately given and hence intuitively evident in either perception or memory by means of causal inference.[40] Accordingly, Husserl's interpretation of Hume's concept of the *a priori* as equivalent to immediate givenness and hence evidence appears quite defensible. Less defensible as Husserl himself admits, is his comparison of Hume's "ideas" to essence and their interrelationships to be grasped in eidetic intuition. Hume's sensualism and psycologism rule out the very possibility of eidetic intuition. Yet, Husserl has credited him for his original insight into the distinction between the *a priori* and evidence.

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[35] Ibid., pp. 58-59

[36] Murphy, op. cit., p. 31

[37] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., p. 60

[38] Ibid., p. 40

[39] Iso Kern, *Husserl and Kant,* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 135-145.

[40] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, op.cit., pp. 46-47

From Scepticism to Transcendental Phenomenology

The exposition and interpretation of Humean scepticism by Edmund Husserl is quite interesting. He maintains that, Hume's scepticism is nothing but the fundamental task of modern philosophy. This task consists in our attempt to overcome this scepticism in a way, which is characteristic of every radical scepticism. We did mention earlier that all the painstaking researches of Husserl may be understood as a struggle against the very spirit of scepticism. Husserl even testifies this view in that he wishes his transcendental phenomenology to be understood as the most radical overcoming of all scepticism. To overcome scepticism does not mean to give a sham explanation of it; scepticism cannot be explained away. A true philosophy has to face scepticism in order to overcome it at a higher radical level. Husserl speaks of seeing the truth of scepticism at such a level which means overcoming of scepticism. The radical transcendental philosophy of Husserl represents such a higher level. Husserl also maintains that Hume's *Treatise* is an attempt towards such a science of philosophy.[41] In his *Phenomenological Psychology*, Husserl speaks of the *Treatise* as an ingenious work comprising the notion of a pure phenomenology. But fails to work out his project into a full-fledged phenomenology, for he lacks the eidetical method.[42] He does not have the philosophic capacity to comprehend the fundamental intentional character of our life.

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[41] Ram Adhar Mall, *Experience and Reason: The Phenomenology of Husserl and its Relation to Hume's Philosophy*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p.24

[42] Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology*, Trans by, John Scealon (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), p. 328

Hume's scepticism notwithstanding, Husserl sees his philosophy as an important stage in the historical development of pure and transcendental phenomenology.

Evaluation of Husserl's Assessment of Hume's Empiricism.

Hume's "Treatise of Human Nature" is in the opinion of Husserl his greatest and most important work. Husserl regrets that the "Treatise" remained without any remarkable effect in the eighteenth century and it never entered the mental range of Kant. It would have been better had Kant been awakened from his dogmatic slumber not through "The Essays", but through his "Treatise". In spite of the skeptical utterances in his book, it points to an immanent intuitionism (*Immanenter Intuitionismus*) and implies the idea of immanent transcendental consciousness along with its elementary acts of constitution. The underlying meaning of Hume's "Treatise" does not lie in its "skeptical paradox" but in its attempt towards a transcendental philosophy.[43]

It is particularly interesting to note that, Husserl does not understand the challenge of Hume the way Kant does. There is no problem for Hume regarding the immediate knowledge from experience and consequently synthetic a posteriori judgments pose no problem for him. The Judgements like "I perceive the table", "I perceived it" and "I would perceive it" are not problematic. There is also no problem for Hume regarding the knowledge in the field of the relations of ideas, for it is analytic and depends on the nature of our ideas. The judgement "three plus two is equal to five" is not problematic, for one could easily see wherein the truth of this result lies. The field of knowledge comprising synthetic judgements *a priori* is problematic, for they refer to objects not given to our immediate experience.[44] They must thus be shown to be in some way related to consciousness. Hume distinguishes between two fields of knowledge: the field of the "relations of ideas" and of the "matters of fact."[45]

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[43] Edmund Husserl, "Husserliana 7", *First Philosophy (1923-24). First Part: The Critical History of Ideas,* Edited by Rudolf Boehm, (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), p.198.

[44] Ibid., p. 330

It is striking to know that Husserl is primarily interested in the former and he interprets this field of knowledge in the sense of his "theory of essence" (*wesenslehre*). However, that Husserl sees more in Humean distinction between the "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" is mainly due to his interest in utilizing this for his own teaching regarding the "intuition of essences" (*wesensschau*).[46] The truths of the former are grounded in the nature of ideas, which means, in the concepts involved. The truth in this field cannot be denied without contradiction; whereas negations of the truths in the field of "matters of fact" do not necessarily involve contradiction.

At this juncture, the question may be asked: what is the meaning of *a priori* for Hume? Wherein does it consist? True to the spirit of Hume's philosophy, Husserl maintains that the Humean concept of *a priori* has nothing to do with the concept of innate ideas. Innate ideas for Hume are nothing but fictions of metaphysics. As far as Hume is concerned, the transcendent is not known to us; all that is given to us are the perceptions: impressions and ideas. In such a set-up, the *a priori* can be placed within and not outside the sphere of perceptions. Husserl rightly thinks that if there is an *a priori* for Hume, it must be immanent. The question to ask is: where can one locate such an immanent *a priori*? In the opinion of Husserl, such a task consists in finding the relations which necessarily and inseparably belong to the very essence of ideas. Although, Husserl praises Hume for having thought of an immanent *a priori*, he still criticizes him for his not being very clear in his expositions and explanations.[47]

However, Husserl is nevertheless sure that his interpretation and understanding of Hume's teaching regarding the great division

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[45] Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., pp. 20-27

[46] Mall, op.cit., p. 20

[47] Ibid., p. 21

between the "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" does justice to his philosophical intentions.

The critical point of departure for the philosophy of Hume according to Husserl is the sphere of consciousness and ideas. For Husserl, the philosophy of Hume is an immanent philosophy of consciousness. The Humean impressions are what is immediately given to us. This given is the starting point for Hume. Unlike Locke and Kant, Hume does not start with the affections of the objects on the subject. For Hume, there is no duality between the subject and object.[48] Husserl, however, does not fail to note that Hume is not fully justified his starting point. Hume as Husserl interprets and understands him may well be said to start doing philosophy with the "Phenomenologically given."[49]

Husserl criticises Hume for his failure of not having seen and realized the vast constructive possibilities in his discovery of the theory of relations of ideas. Hume was only a forerunner of phenomenology. There is no doubt about the fact that Hume lags behind Husserl in working out the details of the programme conceived by him. Thus Husserl's interpretation of Hume has two sides: (i) he praises Hume for his truly phenomenological insights and discoveries, (ii) but he takes him to task for not seeing and working out the full implications of his discoveries.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the impact of Hume on Husserl's development of transcendental phenomenology. It focused on Husserl's favourable reaction to Hume in areas crucial to the development of Phenomenology. In the attempt to determine Hume's positive contribution, this paper has been able to reveal the affinity between Humean skepticism and the Husserlian phenomenology.

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[48] Ibid., p. 21

[49] Husserl, "Husserliana 7", op. cit., p. 352.

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[1] J. I. Omoregbe, *Knowing Philosophy* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research & Publishers LTD, 1999), p. 30

[2] Benjamin B. Olshin, "The I Ching or 'Book of Changes': A Chinese Space-Time Model and a Philosophy of Divination", *Journal of Philosophy and Culture,* vol. 2, No. 2, (July 2005), pp. 17-21.

[3] J. I. Omoregbe, op. cit., P. 50

[4] William Hare, "Open-Minded Inquiry: A Glossary of Key Concepts", available at htt://www.criticalthinking.org/articles /open-minded-inquiry.cf. Last visit: June 04, 2008

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