

## **GOD AND THE DEMON IN CARTESIAN AND AKAN PHILOSOPHIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract**

The 16<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, René Descartes, is one of the most important Christian thinkers in modern philosophy. His ideas on dualism and metaphysics (in general) have been of great interest to both philosophers and religionists. In this piece, I do not discuss Christianity or its influence on Descartes as such. I analyse presentations of God and the demon in Cartesian philosophy (as specifically found in his *Meditations*) and how they compare with the conceptions of God and the demon in indigenous Akan philosophy. Using the qualitative method, I also examine some implications of both the Cartesian and Akan notions of God and the demon in relation to moral responsibility. While acknowledging that both philosophies contain the ideas of God and the demon, I seek to show that there are significant differences which make it difficult to equate Akan conceptions of these beings to those of Descartes. I establish in this research that the Akan conception of the demon, unlike the Cartesian, is two-sided. Consequently, I caution against the uncritical adoption of non-African concepts in the interpretation of African beliefs, values and practices.

**Keywords:** Akan philosophy, Cartesian philosophy, demon, God, reason.

### **Introduction**

The need to particularise African philosophical studies and research has aptly been indicated by Kwasi Wiredu in his *Cultural Universals and Particulars*.<sup>1</sup> He has also reiterated this in his call for conceptual decolonization of African philosophy and religion.<sup>2</sup> In furtherance of this course, research such as this one – in which the beliefs and concepts of a particular African culture are presented and their distinctness shown – is crucial.

As a result of human curiosity and the search for meaning in life, thinkers in different cultures and religious traditions have attempted to provide some responses in relation to the nature and ultimate sources of goodness and evil to the human being. Even though a human being could,

for instance, act immorally, it is sometimes asked: are there other higher beings who might have influenced the human being to act that way? And how are such beings, if they exist, to be determined? Very often, these questions have led to the postulation of some notions of God and the demon – as the embodiments, and real sources, of goodness and evil respectively. The introduction of the notions of God and the demon has been made possible by a number of reasons. Two of them are worthy of mention: first, it is due to the seeming tendency of some human beings to adduce metaphysical reasons for that which appear to lie beyond their direct control; and, secondly, it is also as a result of the sheer dichotomy between good and evil and the belief that aspects of what is good or evil (which lie beyond the direct control of the human being) must, by parity of reasoning, derive from two contrasting personified beings – viz. God and the demon. As we shall soon see, these reasons are, for instance, existent in the traditional thought of the Akan people of Ghana. Yet Akan philosophy also seems to present a rational basis for the existence of, especially, God.<sup>3</sup> An indigenous Akan thinker's offering of the second reason as leading to the ideas of God and the demon does not, however, make his or her belief in these beings to be entirely different from what God and the demon are believed to be in revealed religions.<sup>4</sup> For, these beings are conceived of in such religions as absolutely good and evil respectively. It is therefore not surprising that these absolute conceptions of a good-God and evil-demon taught in a revealed religion like Christianity are in some way maintained and defended by Descartes.<sup>5</sup>

The discussion in this article shall proceed in the following order: I begin with an explanation of how knowledge of God and of His activities is thought to be acquired in Cartesian and Akan philosophies; I then discuss the same matters in connection with the demon. And, to look at where the activities of God and the demon leave the individual, I finally examine whether, and how, the human being who is deemed to know right and wrong is in some way portrayed in Cartesian and Akan philosophies as morally responsible for his or her actions, despite the potencies and influences of God and the demon.

### **Knowledge and Activities of God and the Demon in Cartesian Philosophy**

Descartes belongs to a group of philosophers who are described as rationalists – a group which is opposed to the philosophical school of empiricism. While rationalists argue that reason (but not the senses) is the

“real” source of human knowledge, empiricists hold that the only source of knowledge is sensory experience. Together, rationalism and empiricism constitute the main schools of thought, when it comes to the problem of knowledge, in Western philosophy. Nevertheless, one should not be surprised to learn that rationalists, and for that matter metaphysicians, value less the empirical world or experiences, yet they apparently depend on these to advance their position that: there is not just a metaphysical realm, but that reality must be sought from that realm. This is just the way rationalists such as Descartes sometimes argue.<sup>6</sup>

### **Concerning God**

Descartes discusses how God can be known (that is, the origin of the idea of God) and the activities He performs in almost all his six *Meditations*. In the “First Meditation”, he introduces the idea of God on the basis of his past beliefs concerning God – as a perfect being, as creator and good.<sup>7</sup> Yet, he acknowledges, most importantly, that he undergoes the unpleasant experience of deception<sup>8</sup> contrary to the nature of the good-God who created him. At the same level of belief (as in belief which is prevalent in the society in which he has been brought up) he presupposes a superhuman, potent demon responsible for the deception he experiences and the erroneous decisions that result from it.<sup>9</sup> However, since belief is not knowledge, he begins to account for the knowledge of God in the Third Meditation.

In the Third Meditation, he argues for the innateness of the idea of God purely from a logical point of view. That: if an object ‘A’ has a property ‘B’ which it did not generate on its own, then, some other object ‘C’ which alone is capable of causing B might have produced B in A. He writes:

By the name God I understand a substance that is infinite [eternal, immutable], independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself and everything else, if anything else does exist, have been created. Now all these characteristics are such that the more diligently I attend to them, the less do they appear capable of proceeding from me alone; hence from what has been already said, we must conclude that God necessarily exists. For although the idea of substance is within me owing to the fact that I am a substance, nevertheless I should not have the idea of an infinite substance – since I am finite – if it had not proceeded from some substance which was veritably infinite.<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge of God, Descartes suggests, is not something a human being acquires by his or her own effort, but apparently by the prior inscription of the idea of God (by God Himself) on the mind of the person. And that the human being is able to know this when he or she comprehends the logical impossibility for a finite (human) being to cause an idea or a thing which is infinite. But this human being who is the subject of knowledge is nothing but the mind itself (Second Meditation). Only God, then, according to Descartes could have caused the idea of His own infinite beingness in humans. This ties in well with the rationalist goal of identifying the nature of things that have “real” existence with the metaphysical, rational realm. In other words, having used almost entirely the First Meditation to show that sensory experiences are deceptive (and so empirical knowledge is false), he seeks to point out that a metaphysical being such as God could be known *with certainty* not through sensory experience, but human reason alone. Human reason or mind is, according to Descartes, not part of the human body and vice versa (Second and Sixth Meditations).

Another important reason offered by Descartes why God alone could have created him is that he is fallible and dislikes his fallibility. Consequently, he could not have created himself in a way that (as he knows now) displeases him. Descartes argues:

... if I had been the author of my own existence, I should not at least have denied myself the things which are the more easy to acquire [to wit, many branches of knowledge of which my nature is destitute]; nor should I have deprived myself of any of the things contained in the idea which I form of God...<sup>11</sup>

However, given that Descartes’ attempt to assess the quality of his knowledge could be understood as an attempt to tell the quality of the knowledge of the human being, he seems to be suggesting also that human beings, generally, would be quite dissatisfied with their fallibility and, thus, must have been created by some other being.

Yet in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes postulates some goodness in his fallibility, suggesting that since God wants him to have what is good, it is probably in his interest to be fallible.<sup>12</sup> In support of this position, he first admits that the human mind is limited in its capacity to understand the workings of God (and to know the truth about all things). He, however, proceeds to recommend that when the fallible human being is considered, not separately, but within the totality of God’s creatures, His perfection in creating such a human being should still be affirmed. The

fallibility or, generally, the limitations of the human being might just be necessary for different parts of God's creations to work together for the good or, at least, for them to be made sense of. As he advances, 'I cannot deny that He may have produced many other things, or at least that He has the power of producing them, so that I may obtain a place as a part of a great universe'.<sup>13</sup>

Part of what it means for something to be perfect, Descartes observes, is that the thing in question should be true and exist always. And, since God is regarded by him as perfect, Descartes then claims in the Fifth Meditation that God's existence is a necessity. Meaning, it is, as a matter of logic, impossible for there to be a God who does not exist, since existence is the essence of God.

### **Concerning the Demon**

In the *Meditations*, even though the existence of the demon and the negative influences of the demon on the human being are maintained by Descartes, the argument he offers in support of these are not as extensive as those of God.

Knowledge of the demon ("malignant demon") is based on the abstraction that since God could not be interested in deceiving him (Descartes), there must be another being who is interested in doing so.<sup>14</sup> And, going by the attributes Descartes awards to the demon, it is evident to him that the demon does not only exist but is, indeed, the source of his deceptions. He conceives of the demon as "some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, whoever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me."<sup>15</sup> He finally confirms in the Sixth Meditation that "God is no deceiver".<sup>16</sup>

From the foregoing, the activities of God and the demon can be summarized as follows: God is perceived, among other attributes, as creator, origin of perfection and goodness, and as a being who is interested in the welfare of humans. On the other hand, the demon is perceived as evil, interested in deception, skilful in leading human beings astray and, thus, not a promoter of human well-being.

## **Knowledge and the Activities of God and the Demon in Akan Philosophical Thought**

### **Concerning God**

God is known as *Onyame* or *Onyankopɔn* in Akan language. Knowledge of His existence is not based on pure reason (*a priori*) but on reflections regarding this partly empirical world and/or human experiences. As a result, knowledge of God and the general nature of Akan religion are often described as naturalistic.<sup>17</sup> There are, nonetheless, some sources of indigenous knowledge that, if not properly understood, could mislead one into thinking that knowledge of *Onyankopɔn* is *a priori*. One such source is proverbs. There is, for instance, an Akan proverb that: “*Obi nkyere abɔfra Onyame*” which literally means “no one teaches God to a child”. This initially seems to suggest innate knowledge of God, since it might be supposed that if no one teaches God to a child, then, he or she might have known God or had the idea of God before coming into this world. But the proper interpretation of the proverb is that “the child, being a rational being, would come to the realization of God as he or she matures and, thus, gains more awareness of himself or herself, the environment and the nature of the world.”<sup>18</sup>

This implies that knowledge of God is not devoid of empirical considerations. It also suggests that while human knowledge of God could be seen as naturalistic, it is not devoid of reason. For, it is held that a critical reflection on the natural world could or should lead the human being to knowledge of the existence of *Onyame*. The difference between the Akan perspective and the Cartesian doctrine of rationalism is that the latter, unlike the former, emphasizes the capacity of the human mind (on its own) to lead the human being to the knowledge of God independently of experience. Although many humans do not ordinarily split up reason and experience as distinct sources of knowledge, the philosophical relevance – or is it? – of the doctrine of rationalism is exactly its attempt to do so, in addition to its suggestion that sensory experience must not be relied on for “real” knowledge.<sup>19</sup> And, this is what Descartes dedicates the First and Second Meditations to showing.

### **Concerning the Demon**

The idea of the demon, in Akan thought, requires careful analysis. Unlike in Cartesian thought where just one demon, the “evil genius”, is postulated, the demon has two representations in Akan philosophy. These

are *ɔbonsam* and *sasabonsam*. While *ɔbonsam* is believed to be a spiritual, personified being who is offensive in his dealings with humans, *sasabonsam* is really not. On the basis of the original belief that *sasabonsam* was a sort of an earthly beast (so to speak) – residing in thick forests which were not too far from the abodes of humans in the olden days – one can assert that knowledge of *sasabonsam* was empirical, or at least was so intended. The same cannot be said of *ɔbonsam* who has always been conceived to be a spirit. There are no material presentations of *ɔbonsam*, except that (i) in some minimal sense, some accidents (*akwanhyia*) and temptations (*nsowwe*) that befall humans in the natural world are traced to *ɔbonsam*, and (ii) literally and metaphorically, someone seen to be the source of trouble or temptation to another may be described as *ɔbonsam*.

### Activities of Onyame, ɔbonsam and Sasabonsam

*Onyame* is conceived as a good being who does not only intend, but does, good things for the human being. In this sense, it is often said “*Nyame ye*” (God is good). Indeed, Gyekye confirms the good naturedness of God.<sup>20</sup> He is believed to have created the universe, as a result of which He is referred to as *bɔrebɔre* (creator).<sup>21</sup> He is also eternal (*ɔdomankoma*) and omnipotent (*otumfoɔ*). His omnipresence is expressed in the maxim “*Nyame bewu na mawu*” (“if God will die, then I will also die”) where “I” means “my soul”.<sup>22</sup> This implies that the human being is primarily spiritual. The maxim is said in the context of immortality of both God (who is also believed to be a spirit [*sunsum*]) and the human being (*ɔdasani*). These are some of the activities associated with God in Akan thought which are relevant for this piece.

*ɔbonsam*, however, is associated with evil (*bɔne*). *ɔbonsam*, being a spirit, is not perceptible and is believed to take delight in misleading humans to commit errors (*nfomsoɔ*) and evil deeds (*nyuma bɔne*). To a great extent, *ɔbonsam*'s character is similar to that of the Cartesian evil genius and the Christian Satan. Even though Satan, like all spirits, is conceived as the son of God (Hebrew 12:9, Job 1:6), his activities bring him closer to the Cartesian evil genius because he is seen as a ruler of some sort who depends on sin and deception (Revelation 12:9); as devil (Mathew 4:1); tempter (Mathew 4:3); liar and father of lies (John 8:44); and the adversary of the human being (1 Peter 5:8). However, *sasabonsam* does not seek after humans in order to deceive or harm them, although it is believed to harm humans who come across it in the forest. This demon is

presented in Akan culture as a fearsome being residing in deep forests. Yet since *sasabonsam* cannot be found in any “deep forests” (which, by the way, are not quite common today), it has attained a mythical status in Akan culture. It is conceived to be a being so huge, powerful, strong and fearsome that the no spiritual powers of dwarfs<sup>23</sup> – let alone the capacities of the less potent human beings – can match its powers. This is expressed in a famous maxim *enye mmoatia aduosonson yonko ne sasabonsam a w’abu akyakya* (meaning, a hunchbacked *sasabonsam* is mightier than seventy-seven dwarfs). This maxim is often used to express the relativity of ability in human life; very often, the subjugation of inferior force to a stronger one whenever they clash.

In Akan mythology, *sasabonsam* is sometimes conceived in human form as well. There is a well-known myth about how a woman who found the former’s child in the forest and brought her home. Thinking that the child’s hair was overgrown, the woman shaved the child. When *sasabonsam* found out, he got angry and asked the woman to fix back every single strand of hair that had been shaved off by her or else, he was going to take the woman’s child with him into the forest. To cut a long narration short, the woman was saved by her imbecile child who – apparently, being sensible for the first time – asked *sasabonsam* to cover all the footprints he had left on the compound of the mother. In doing so, while carrying his child, *sasabonsam* naturally (but reluctantly) went backwards until he found himself once again in the forest with his child. Since then, *sasabonsam* has lived in the forest but has resolved to harm humans as a form of retaliation.

There are critical observations that one can make about the myth above. First, the evil activities of *sasabonsam* towards humans appear to have been partly brought by the latter upon themselves – as seen in the woman’s bringing home and shaving of *sasabonsam*’s child. *Sasabonsam* did not originally seek after humans in order to harm them. He is thus portrayed as defensive and not offensive. Perhaps, this explains why he “lives” in the forest and supposedly attacks humans only when they get into the forest. Secondly, respect for the dignity of the human being in Akan culture is in some way predicated on the belief that every human being is useful. In this light, a relevant maxim like *kwasea mpo ho wo mfaso* (“even the imbecile is useful”) finds expression in the role played by the woman’s child in the myth above. Thirdly, *sasabonsam* is indeed different from *ɔbonsam* since the former does not seek after humans to deceive or harm.

The interpretations given above of the ideas of God and the demon provide some basis for anyone seeking to explain or reflect on concepts in African thought, to be careful in the use of ideas and terms that reflect the cultural and intellectual realities of non-Africans. This is not to suggest that all African cultures share the same set of beliefs, values and practices, but that in researching any African culture, ideas should be presented in a way that depicts its worldview.

### **Knowledge of Right and Wrong and the Question of Moral Responsibility: Some Cartesian and Akan Conceptions**

In the Second Meditation, Descartes identifies the human being as a rational being – a being that thinks, and is also aware of his or her thinking capacity.<sup>24</sup> This rational being is also described by Descartes as a soul,<sup>25</sup> “a mind” or “an understanding” or “a reason”.<sup>26</sup> Being rational, one would have thought that it would be reasonable for Descartes to consider the human being as *fully* aware and in charge of the decisions he or she makes – whether or not the decisions are moral. However, Descartes mentions the evil genius in the ‘First’ and ‘Second’ Mediations as the cause of the wrong judgements he makes. He only begins to blame or attribute error, especially in terms of human moral inadequacies, to the human being in the Fourth Meditation where errors are partly due to the failure to exercise human reason. He acknowledges that error – which includes such negative choices as evil and wrong actions – is in part due to human fallibility (in the first place). This is good. Yet, he seems in this Meditation to identify the real cause of negative choices with the failure to exercise right human reason, believing strongly that the right exercise of reason – viz. not choosing what one wills over what one clearly understands – helps the human being to overcome his or her fallibility. This implies that although a person is fallible, what really leads him or her to negative choices is lack of good knowledge of the choices. He states:

And certainly there can be no other source than that which I have explained; for as often as I so restrain my will within the limits of my knowledge that it forms no judgement except on matters which are clearly and distinctly presented to it by the understanding, I can never be deceived; for every clear and distinct conception is without doubt something, and hence cannot derive its origin from what is naught, but must of necessity have God as its author – God, I say, who being supremely perfect, cannot be the cause of any error ...<sup>27</sup>

This Cartesian conception of error or evil is quite different from that of the Akan. Descartes seems to suggest that one does wrong only because one chooses an action which one does not fully understand, or rather, does not really know to be good. He indeed emphasizes this point with the view that it is the human will that “easily falls into error and sin, and chooses the evil for the good, or the false for the truth”<sup>28</sup> and consequently, makes him sin or fall into error. But a cause of evil recognized in Akan philosophical thought is reason itself: that humans sometimes choose wrong actions knowingly. It is held that human knowledge of right actions alone is not enough for a person to avoid acting or choosing wrongly. For instance, a human being would sometimes knowingly choose a wrong action. This may happen when one is faced with *nsɔhwɛ* (temptations) or when one wants to achieve some non-moral end.

It is not too surprising why Descartes eventually plays down the prominence of human fallibility. His objective seems to be to project the absolute perfection of God. However, there is less potential for this to be achieved with how he approaches the question of fallibility. In other words, even though I recognize that his argument about the failure to exercise right reason appears to absolve God from blame, at least for now, the suppression of the fallibility problem does not help Descartes’ course. That is, the failure to exercise right reason, it may be said, implies that the human being chooses against God’s provisions (and mercies to the human being) since he or she relies on the will (not reason) to commit evil. And this seems to make the human being the author of his or her own deeds. On the contrary, the fact that Descartes admits, in the first place, that the human being is fallible – despite his (Descartes’) attempt to overlook it as a problem to his project – readily brings in the question of why an imperfect, “incomplete” human being, created so by God, should be held responsible for his or her deeds at all. It then brings in the difficult problem of evil which Descartes recognizes in some way but which is refused its implications to affect the goodness and perfection of God.<sup>29</sup> So, in spite of the fact that he realises that God’s permission for him to be deceived – partly because he is fallible – could be contrary to the goodness of God,<sup>30</sup> he is careful not to leave the argument at this. He does not expressly discuss further the negative implications of human fallibility but it makes sense to assume that he is probably aware of some such implications. He accordingly introduces the idea of the “real cause” of error which, comfortably, blames human error on the failure of the human being to exercise right reason. Yet there is no reason for me to believe that

the exercising of right reason argument takes away the implications of the problem of evil on Descartes' conception of God completely. For it may still be asked how an omnipotent God who dislikes evil could create a being who would have the opportunity not only to choose bad actions but also have such actions in the world to choose from. This is not to deny Descartes' position that if we should examine the perfection of God in general ("creational") terms but not in terms of specific individual beings alone, it is still possible for God to be regarded as good and perfect. I think he has a point here.

To the extent that there is in Akan philosophy the conception of God as good and omnipotent, and that the human being is seen as imperfect and created by God, the problem of evil cannot logically be absent from Akan philosophy. For there is, in addition to these, evil in the Akan universe. Thus, Akan philosophy shares this feature with the Cartesian exposition on God.

However, the idea held in Akan philosophy that the human mind may "fully" understand the immorality of an action and yet go ahead to choose or perform it brings an interesting dimension to Akan moral thought. By "fully" I do not mean innately or "rationally" (as used by Descartes), since Akan ethics is not supernaturalistic but humanistic.<sup>31</sup> But by "fully understand" I mean a situation where a person is aware as a result of practical knowledge or human living, in which reason and that which is reasonable to do are neither devoid of experience nor necessarily innate. While the idea that a person could knowingly (but not as a matter of will) choose wrong actions might exist in other cultures or held by some individuals, it is not necessarily the case with Descartes. Of course, Descartes is not arguing that when a person commits a crime, for instance, he or she should not be punished. He is rather interested in telling the real cause of the crime which he does not associate with reason, but the will. He argues, as seen above, that it is the human will, not reason, which really makes a person choose evil. In the Second Meditation, he establishes – and maintains throughout the rest of the Meditations – that the mind (reason) is not part of the body and that anything the mind knows is innate, real and always true but that which we depend on our body (especially the senses) to know is potentially false. It is in this context that reason is offered by him as the source of real things such as the mind (Second Meditation), God (Third Meditation and Fifth Meditation), truth (Fourth Meditation) and mathematical properties (Fifth Meditation). Descartes is quite aware of the potential objection that what he is attributing to reason here might be

wishful thinking; because the fact, for instance, that he feels he innately knows of the existence of God does not mean that the mind might not be deceiving him. And, in order to block such an objection, he advances that anything the mind knows is true, real and can never be false. Due to this, it would be inconsistent for the same reason to lead a person to knowledge of something which is unreal, false, and evil. If a human being sticks to the use of reason, Descartes suggests, he or she avoids evil and errors; but if the will (or body) is relied upon, these negative results will be obtained.

Descartes therefore implies that when a person does not really understand or know (the moral status of) an action and he or she chooses it, he or she chooses that which is evil. I reiterate that in Descartes thinking, any such choice is based on *pseudo* knowledge or incomplete understanding which emanates from the will, but not reason. The Akan position is rather that: neither God (*Onyame*), nor *ɔbonsam* nor *sasabonsam* nor human fallibility nor the capacity to choose what one does not understand captures adequately the cause and/or justification of the moral choices of the human being. The list is incomplete without the acknowledgement of the point that there could be real (rational) knowledge of bad actions; and that real knowledge of bad actions does not necessarily lead to the avoidance of immorality and vice versa. An objection might be raised that human fallibility suffices as the cause of all immoral choices of human beings. This is true to the extent that humans can act immorally only if they are capable of doing so. However, if we need to teach the human being how best to act or how to avoid the things/beings that can lead him or her to act morally (or otherwise), then, knowledge of human fallibility is not enough. Also, contrary to Descartes, the real cause of immorality is not necessarily the exercising of the will but, sometimes, reason itself. Indeed, knowledge of a wrong action (followed by the decision to perform it) also makes it more reasonable to hold an individual responsible for his or her actions in a more direct manner than the Cartesian idea of failure to understand the (bad) nature of actions and/or their implications.<sup>32</sup> Otherwise, it may legitimately be asked why the human being should be held responsible for that which he or she does not know? Thus, for a philosopher like Descartes who grounds ideas and actions on reason or understanding, it becomes more baffling that in his ethics, he predicates moral responsibility on lack of understanding.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has done a comparison between Cartesian and Akan philosophies in terms of the concepts of God and the demon. It has been established that both concepts are existent in both philosophies, even though there are some significant differences, especially, with regard to the demon. For instance, the Akan conception of the demon is two-fold unlike the unitary conception in Cartesian philosophy. This difference unavoidably affects the kinds of activities that are attributed to the demon in the contrasted philosophies. The paper has also examined how the activities of God and the demon affect the human being, spelling out how these determine the levels of human responsibility for moral actions in both philosophies. A key observation which has been made here is that while God is held as good, perfect and the creator of the universe in both philosophies, He is not held responsible for the moral shortcomings of the human being. It is the human being who is considered responsible for his or her actions. The rationalistic Cartesian position bases the responsibility for a bad action, for instance, on the human being's inability to understand moral actions (or to follow reason), as he or she rather follows the judgement of the will. However, in Akan thought, knowledge or understanding of immoral actions (but not submission to the will) is the real basis for human responsibility.

**Notes and References**

1. Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1996.
2. By decolonization, he means ‘divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past’ (Kwasi Wiredu, “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion”, *African Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4, (1998): 17.
3. See, for instance, H.M. Majeed’s paper which entirely deals with this subject (H.M. Majeed “On the Rationality of Traditional Akan Religion: Analyzing the Concept of God”, *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 25, (2014): 127-141.
4. These religions include Islam and Christianity.
5. Kwasi Wiredu considers Descartes a Christian (Wiredu, *Decolonizing*, 30).
6. A.J. Ayer, the British Empiricist, criticises this position in his rejection of metaphysics – see A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1946), chapter 1.
7. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross trans, “Meditations on First Philosophy”, in *Descartes: Key Philosophical Writings* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997), 137.
8. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 137.
9. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 138. In the Second Meditation, this belief leads him to affirm his own existence, while refusing to entertain the thought that God is indeed the source of his errors - see Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 139-140.
10. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 156.
11. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 158-159.
12. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 164.
13. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 164.
14. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 138.
15. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 140.
16. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 182.
17. Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa, 1996), 5.
18. H.M. Majeed, *Rationality*, 138.
19. Real knowledge does not change and is always true, something which Descartes does not find in the empirical world.
19. Gyekye, *African*, 9.

20. While Wiredu understand this to imply that God created things from or with other material things – and did not create *ex nihilo* (Wiredu, *Decolonizing*, 31), Gyekye argues otherwise (Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* Revised edn. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 71. Wiredu’s perspective tends to make the Akan creator-God quite different from the Cartesian and Christian conception that God created the universe *ex nihilo*.
22. Gyekye, *African*, 14.
23. Although *mmoatia* is translated as ‘dwarfs’, this translation is not perfect. A dwarf is understood in English as a creature in legend that looks like a tiny old man, resides in the depths of the earth and guards buried treasure. However, *mmoatia* are conceived to be invisible tiny men with tremendous spiritual powers. They are not limited to the depths of the earth and may not guard buried treasure.
24. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 140.
25. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 141.
26. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 142.
27. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 169.
28. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 166.
29. The problem of evil is about how logically difficult it is for God (who is believed to be the creator of the universe) to be regarded as all-powerful, all-knowing and all- good in spite of the fact that evil continues to exist in the universe.
30. Haldane and Ross, *Meditations*, 137.
31. Gyekye, *Essay*, 143.
32. Once again, this does not mean that Descartes is proposing that a person should not be held accountable for his or her actions. I am only discussing the implications of his attempt to detach immorality or evil from reason, as a consequent to his introduction of “real” or ultimate causes.

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