

PROBLEMS WITH WIREDU'S EMPIRICISM

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Abstract

In his “Empiricism: The Empirical Character of an African Philosophy”, Kwasi Wiredu sets out to reject some logical and epistemological categorial distinctions that can be deployed as instruments for misunderstanding and denigrating African modes of thought. Towards this end, he enunciates a doctrine he calls ‘empiricism’, which he considers is conclusively characteristic of Akan philosophy. In doing so, Wiredu ascribes some ideas to Akan metaphysics that I consider disputable. This paper aims at contesting those ascriptions. I begin with Wiredu’s thesis and arguments in favour of empiricism, and proceed to formulate and discuss what I perceive to be the major problems with the doctrine. The paper ends by offering suggestions on how the problems engendered by Wiredu’s empiricism may be resolved, and by surveying the prospects of the doctrine for African philosophy.

1. Introduction:

In his “Empiricism: The Empirical Character of an African Philosophy”¹, Kwasi Wiredu sets out to reject some logical and epistemological categorial distinctions that can be deployed as instruments for misunderstanding and denigrating African modes of thought. Prominent among these are the analytic versus synthetic and the *a priori* versus *a posteriori* distinctions. Two other dichotomies that he refutes are those between empirically and metaphysically oriented modes of thinking and between concrete and abstract modes of thinking.

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In rejecting these dichotomies, Wiredu enunciates a doctrine he calls ‘empiricalism’, which he considers inspired by both Akan thought regarding the character of human knowledge, and some tenets of empiricism (Wiredu 2011: 33). In his insistence that empiricalism conclusively characterizes Akan philosophy, Wiredu ascribes some ideas to Akan metaphysics that I consider disputable. This paper aims at disputing those ascriptions. I begin with Wiredu’s thesis and arguments in favour of empiricalism. I will then formulate what I perceive to be the major problems with the doctrine and offer systematic accounts of concepts in Akan metaphysics and epistemology which refute Wiredu’s views on them. I hope by this effort to show that Wiredu’s invocation of Akan thought as the foundation of his doctrine is less justified than he admits. The paper ends by surveying the prospects of empiricalism for African philosophy.

2. Empiricalism and Empirical Metaphysics

Wiredu proclaims empiricalism as characterizing a system of thought that is essentially empiricalⁱⁱ in its conceptual constitution. As such, its cognitive imperative is “do not admit any existents or categories of existents unless they are supportable by empirical evidence or empirically based conceptual reflection (Wiredu 2011: 31). Empiricalism embraces some of the imperatives of empiricism and rejects its excessive reliance on sensation as the basis of knowledge: it shares with empiricism the belief that all our knowledge of the external world as well as our concepts are derived from experience, but rejects empiricism’s construal of experience as a process in which objects of the mind are ideas or impressions, where an idea or an impression is a sensation (Wiredu, 2011: 31-33).

The claim that empiricalism is empirical in its conceptual constitution means that it is secured by an empirical metaphysical system. Such a system is one in which all propositions are ultimately “constructed out of empirical raw materials” (Wiredu 2011: 23). What this means is that the system may contain propositions which are non-empirical with respect to their truth-value, but all its constituent propositions will be empirical with respect to their conceptual constitution (Wiredu 2011: 22). To say that concepts are empirically constituted conceptually is to say that they

are either derivable from experience or refer to an aspect or mode of experience. Accordingly, such concepts can refer only to realms of reality within the reach of actual or possible experience, and have as conditions of their intelligibility actual or possible experience (Wiredu 2011: 23).

Wiredu substantiates his denial of the stated polarities by showing, among others, that an empirical metaphysical system contains both empirical and metaphysical propositions as well as propositions of different logical (analytic and synthetic) and epistemological (a priori and a posteriori) types. He does this by inviting us to consider the proposition: “all brothers are male”, and demonstrating the analyticity and a *priority* of the proposition by pointing out that its truth value can be determined simply by analyzing the relationship among its constitutive concepts. The concepts ‘brother’ and ‘male’ are empirical in the sense that they can only be formed through experience. Even the quantificational concepts “all” and “are” are likewise derived from experience, as “they refer to modes of experiencing and to modes of reflecting upon our experiences and their objects” (ibid.). Hence, on his terms, they are empirical.

Central to Wiredu’s arguments is his insistence that an empirical metaphysic characterizes Akan thought. This would mean Akan thought considers experience - both actual and possible - as the only condition of intelligibility of its postulates. For this reason, Wiredu denies to Akan metaphysics the intelligibility of transcendental concepts, which he defines as “concepts referring to entities, beings, processes, relations that are, in principle, not conceivable through possible experience” (Wiredu 2011: 27). On this view, concepts such as God, Time and Space can be intelligible in Akan metaphysics only if they are irreducibly empirical.

I think that such a view implies that the only admissible doctrine that Akan metaphysics espouses is a thoroughgoing physicalism that conceives of everything in existence as ultimately physical. Wiredu seems to base his empiricalism on such a totalistic metaphysical doctrine. Empiricalism, then, is a version of materialism. However, I argue from Sections four to six that both philosophical and linguistic considerations in Akan render such a position quite mistaken. Before then, let us consider some conceptual challenges to Wiredu’s empirical notions of space and time.

3. Empirical Notions of Space and Time

According to Wiredu the only way to conceive of space “is through the notions of location or place and of infinite extendibility, both of which are empirical” (Wiredu 2011: 28). He asserts that such a conception is influenced by Akan thought (ibid.). In my opinion the contents of an empirical metaphysical system must ultimately constitute objects of possible empirical experience. If so, then it is doubtful if Wiredu’s understanding of the notions of space and time can cohere well with other concepts in an empirical metaphysical system which, as indicated, must refer only to existents within the reach of actual or possible experience. As such, empirical concepts can only be understood by generalization or extension from particular instances. Given this, it is doubtful whether Wiredu’s notion of “infinite extendibility” can stand without amendment in an empirical metaphysical system.

Furthermore, I agree with Wiredu that the terms ‘location’ and ‘place’ in the Akan language signify ‘space’. However, it is doubtful whether the notion of infinite extension can be easily attributable to Akan thought. Such an idea will be rendered in the language as “*bɛɛbi a enni ewiee*”, i.e; “a place/location that has no bounds” or “an endless place/location”. It is doubtful whether such a concept will be admitted as intelligible in the language. Even if it is, it is doubtful whether such a concept would be admitted by the users of the language as empirical in its conceptual constitution in the sense that it is derivable from experience or refers to an aspect or mode of experience. These doubts arise from the sort of association that Wiredu makes between the concepts of ‘infinity’ and ‘empirical’. It seems to me that these two notions are antithetical in such a manner as to make them cohere only in constant tension with each other. My reasons for saying this are that the conceptual idea of space as extendible location is irreducibly locative. As such, it can only yield the idea of space as a series of places. If so, then two problems arise. First, it is difficult to conceive an infinity of it; and second, even if we succeed in doing so, it becomes difficult to understand how we can experience such an infinity. The question then becomes: what will the actual or potential experience of such an infinitely extendible location be like?

In my view, if we can only experience space as a place of limited instances, then we cannot experience it as infinitely extendible series of locations. Such an idea of space cannot be accessible to experience. It will appear that Wiredu has associated the two notions in such a way as to suppose a transition from the finite to the infinite, the concrete to the immeasurable, without outlining the mechanism of their association. The idea of “unboundedly extendible location” is even more accessible empirically than the idea of “infinitely extendible location”. This is because the notion of ‘unbounded’ is more amenable to experience than that of ‘infinity’. “Unbounded” also suggests a more stringent commitment to an empiricist metaphysic than the notion of infinity does. However, the idea of ‘unboundedly extendible location’ translates into the patently absurd idea of ‘an unbounded series of bounded locations’. Yet, in my view, it is conceptually less problematic than the idea of infinitely bound space. These considerations lead to two suggestions. The first is that by employing infinity to define space in the manner he does, Wiredu may have subscribed to a metaphysical commitment usually identified with transcendental conceptsⁱⁱⁱ, which he claims are not intelligible in Akan thought. However, Wiredu cannot subscribe to a transcendental concept without violating the structure of his empiricism. The secondly is that it is doubtful whether his empiricism can be attributed to Akan thought, because the Akan conceptual scheme contains transcendental concepts that are definitely intelligible in that scheme. These objections to Wiredu’s definition of space apply likewise and in exact measure to his proposed definition of time as a series of events “inevitably or immediately to occur and those of the infinite future of whatever metaphysical status” (Wiredu 2011: 30).

4. Quasi-materiality and the Empirical Concept of God

It would be difficult to maintain a reasoned belief in a transcendental concept of God in Akan thought on Wiredu’s definition of transcendentalism and his empirical metaphysics. Besides his pronouncements in his essay that have formed the basis of the discussion so far, this conclusion lies well-argued on the surface of his ontology of God in his *Cultural Universals* and *Particulars*. In this book, he confirms the view widely held by Akan philosophers^{iv} that Akan ontology espouses a hierarchy of beings

at the apex of which is the Supreme Being (God). He then asserts that “everything that exists in [the ontology] exists in exactly the same sense as everything else. And this sense is empirical” (Wiredu 1996: 49). This is another utterance of empirical metaphysics, asserted in the context of the thoroughgoing physicalism that I alluded to in Section One. For this reason, I consider *Cultural Universals and Particulars* and “Empiricism: The Empirical Character of an African Philosophy” organically linked, and will therefore draw on Wiredu’s views in the former to illustrate my objections to his views in the latter.

Existence, in this metaphysics, belongs only to fully material and quasi-material beings; and a quasi-material being is “any being or entity conceived as spatial but lacking some of the properties of material objects” (Wiredu 1996: 53). All existing entities cannot sustain their existence in some realm other than that governed by the laws of physics (Wiredu 1996: 50). Therefore, the existence of a transcendent God^v is not only false but also incomprehensible in Akan thought (Wiredu 1996: 40-50). The same conclusion applies to notions like “spiritual” and “supernatural” if these refer to entities that sustain their existence in some realm other than that governed by the laws of physics. As we have seen, the ontological status of Wiredu’s quasi-material beings is central to the structure of his empirical metaphysical system. It will therefore not be amiss to consider this category of being in some detail in a bid to illuminate my point that quasi-physicalism ultimately reduces to physicalism.

Besides Wiredu, Safro Kwame is the only philosopher I know who explicitly affirms the plausibility of this category of being. Since he identifies his version of the category with Wiredu’s, it will be meaningful to bring his views into this discussion. In Safro Kwame’s view, quasi-physicalism is “a limited version of physicalism” (Safro-Kwame 2004: 346) characterized by three mutually reinforcing attributes. Firstly, it admits the possibility of the existence of objects belonging to a category between those that obey the known laws of physics and those that do not. Secondly, it rejects any claims of the existence of spiritual or immaterial objects on the grounds that such claims are conceptually confused, unclear and in breach of Ockam’s razor. And, thirdly, it “stretches the limits of matter or materialism as far as is compatible with what we know or do not know, without embracing dualism” (ibid.).

Kwame denies that adhering to quasi-physicalism implies acceptance of physicalism^{vi}. His foremost reason for this denial is that in the philosophy of mind, physicalism necessarily reduces to the mind-brain identity thesis^{vii}. Yet it provides insufficient evidence in support of this reduction as there exists compelling conclusions on the limitations of science to justify the reduction of all mental events to physiological states (Safro Kwame: 344-345). Therefore, even though he assumes as obvious the existence of physical objects, he finds no compelling reason for endorsing physicalism rather than quasi-physicalism.

However, this ostensible distinction between the quasi-physical and the physical, attributed to epistemic modesty, dissolves into full-blown materialism on closer inspection. The mechanism of this dissolution is the allure of scientific knowledge and evidence. Thus, according to Safro Kwame, the progress of scientific knowledge is likely to render the “the quasi-physicalism of today” as “the materialism or physicalism of tomorrow” (Safro Kwame: 1996: 346). On this view, all current quasi-physical beings are but, in fact, physical-to-be beings. It is for this reason that I think the distinction between the quasi-physical and physical is vacuous^{viii}.

Other indications of Safro Kwame’s full-blown physicalism disguised as quasi-physicalism reveal themselves in the normative judgment implied in his dismissal of claims of the existence of non-material entities as conceptually unclear. It is easily inferred from the tenor of his arguments that conceptual clarity is best established by the conceptual tools employed in scientific investigation of entities comprising “atoms, fields, energies, sets, and numbers” (ibid). From this, the conclusion that a non-materialist concept of God in Akan thought is conceptually unclear can be drawn without difficulty. Gyekye has criticized Wiredu’s category of the quasi-physical in the context of their debate on the metaphysical constituents of a person in Akan thought. He objects to the idea of quasi-physical entities^{ix} on the grounds that it is obscure, and mistaken when applied to the Akan concept of *okra* (Gyekye 1987: 86)^x. As seen, Wiredu’s physicalist metaphysics, which admits only of material and quasi-material beings, yields the same conclusion on the nature of God as the conclusion we drew in the previous paragraph from Safro Kwame’s work. Gyekye’s

objections gain more credence in the discussion of the nature and attributes of God because if the quasi-physical entities of Wiredu's metaphysics are granted, then God and all other beings postulated in Akan ontology will fully assume the attributes of material objects. However, it is doubtful that such characterization of the nature of the Akan God would be correct.

It is important to reiterate at this juncture in our deliberations that counter-examples to a physicalist/materialist and non-transcendentalist conception of God abound in the Akan language and philosophical thinking. If we admit the idea of infinity as a transcendental concept, then a long tradition in Akan philosophy suggests, along with J. B. Danquah, that we cannot insist that the only intelligible concept of God in Akan thought is a non-transcendental one. Among the names and appellations that Danquah assigns to the Supreme Being in *Akan Doctrine of God is Odomankoma*. According to him, "Odomankoma corresponds to a conception of the Godhead as the Interminable or Infinite Being" (Danquah 1944: 30). Further to this, the term also yields the meaning of an "eternal, inexhaustible, undimensional" being (Danquah 1944: *ibid.*).

It is worth observing how Danquah makes a special effort to specify his meaning of *Odomankoma*. According to him, the various meanings of the word "are not to be understood in simple plurality or severalty senses. There are several words available in the language to express those ideas, such as *bebree* (many); *p̄ii* (plentiful); *peewa* (copious), etc., and when *Odomankoma* is used in the sense of manifold it must be understood in the deeper sense of infinitely manifolding" (Danquah 1944: 59). The concepts that Danquah contrasts with the "infinitely manifolding" are empirical ones. This compels the conclusion that he distinguishes his meaning of *Odomankoma* from any empirically derived ones. Accordingly, Danquah admits a transcendental concept of God.

Gyekye accepts Danquah's insights on the subject, and adds to them with the claim that "Onyame^{xi} is the Absolute Reality, the origin of all things. Absolute Reality is beyond and independent of the categories of time, space, and cause" (Gyekye 1987: 70). We can gather from these views that credible conceptions of infinite space and time, and of a transcendental God can be made in Akan philosophy which definitely

admits the reality of a realm beyond experience. Hence Wiredu cannot claim that his empirical metaphysic represents, without qualification, Akan philosophical thinking.

5. A Nuanced Ontology

An argument may be advanced in favour of the empirical concept of God in Wiredu's empirical metaphysics. The attributes of such a God will not merely be theoretic or nominally empirical, as belief in Him can be considered to imply and generate a causal effect on the behavior of the believer. And if one does *x* because one believes God wills one to do *x*, then since the behavioural manifestation of such belief is experiential, the source of the belief may arguably be considered to be involved in the empirical^{xiii}. Attractive as this argument is, it is doubtful whether it can be deployed in favour of Wiredu. At least three reasons will count against such support.

Firstly, it is not at all certain that empirical behavior should manifest a belief. Even if it does, it is not clear why the fact that it does means that the object of the belief is part-empirical. Secondly, it has been argued that Akans hold a transcendental concept of God. As seen in Section One, Wiredu defines transcendental concepts as referring to entities etc. that cannot be conceived, even in principle, through actual or possible experience. This is inconsistent with the hypothetical argument above. Thirdly, the conclusion of the said argument is severely undermined by Wiredu's assertion that "the belief in *Nyame* has no essential role in the conduct of Akan life" (Wiredu 1996: 57), in that if this belief were absent from Akan consciousness, absolutely nothing would be lost "in terms of sustenance of any institutions or procedures of practical life" (Wiredu 1996: *ibid.*). These claims vitiate the strength of any appeal to an empirical concept of God. Besides this, they are as mistaken as the idea of attributing an ontologically homogeneous materiality to Akan thought. Besides Danquah's philosophy of God and Gyekye's patent agreement with the idea of a transcendent God, numerous examples can be found to show that *Nyame* plays as essential role in the conduct of life in Akanland in the sustenance of institutional processes and thereby refute the two quotations above.

In the first place, even though the source and justification of Akan morality is not divine (Wiredu 1992: 194; Gyekye 1987: 146; Asamoah 2000: 23), the Akan language and the attitudes of many Akans assign a significant role to God in moral deliberations. For instance, when a person (x) suffers an injury at the hands of another (y), and where x sees no practical resort to reparation for the injury suffered, and yet considers reparation as necessary or deserving, but does not consider retribution as an option, x would resort to the intervention of God for remedy by saying “*Nyame betua wo ka!*”, meaning “God will pay you back”. Similarly, when many Akans consider that they have avoided some calamity without any rational or empirical cause of that avoidance, they may say: “*anka nyame ampata a.....*”, which means, “had God not intervened.....”. What these statements show is that the belief in God by some Akans affects their conduct. Now, if God can also be conceived of as a transcendental being, as argued in Section 4.0, then these two examples have two implications for our discussion. They show, first of all, that the belief in *Nyame* has a role to play in Akan life because it affects the conduct of some Akan people, and secondly that there is obvious tension between Wiredu’s statement of an empirical metaphysic which does not allow for a transcendental God, and these statements which allow for a transcendental God that influences the world empirically.

Why could Wiredu not reply that the makers of these statements that exemplify the ordinary usage of the Akan language are conceptually confused, and therefore misuse Akan concepts? This appeal to conceptual confusion will fail, and the reason becomes clear when we consider Wiredu’s claim that God plays no role in sustaining Akan institutions. In response to this claim, I wish to point out that virtually every formal ceremony in both the public and private spheres of Akan life, regardless of its importance, begins with the pouring of libation, and every Akan libation begins by summoning *Nyame*. What this suggests is that the attributes of a transcendently conceived God do not necessarily have to be exclusively theoretic and non-empirical either. Assigning some empirical attributes to God is quite compatible with the idea of Him as a being that transcends the empirical world.

We cannot escape the fact that the Akan doctrine of God, as well as its ontology of non-material existence, is very nuanced. As Wiredu himself admits, spatial imagery and symbolization are employed very often in talking about “extra-human beings and powers, even including God” (Wiredu 1996: 52) in Akan discourses. He confirms this while refuting the strict polarity of theoretical and practical modes of thought by stating that “frequently, a theoretical reflection would be couched in a practical phraseology.... Generally, the ascent from practical vocabulary to theoretical thought will be via metaphor” (Wiredu 2011: 19). In fact, the dexterous employment and interpretation of metaphors have resonance and are very revered in Akan discourse. For this reason, we can accept the soundness of representing attributes of God in physical imagery as metaphorical reflections of the ontological nuances that do not preclude his conception as a being that essentially transcends the space-time scheme. Thus the appeal to conceptual confusion fails.

6. God the Invisible and invincible Father

These nuances are well captured in discussions on Akan thought regarding the relationship of God to the universe of being. Wiredu has distinguished the notion of ‘the world’ from ‘the universe’, and asserted that as creator of ‘the world’, God cannot be part of it. However, “we might then reserve the word “universe” for the totality of absolutely all existents. In this sense, God would be part of the universe” (Wiredu 1996: 50). He translates ‘the world’ in Akan as ‘*abodee*’, but provides no translation for ‘the universe’. I disagree with his translation of *abodee* as ‘the world’, as I do his claim that God must be part of the universe, if this implies his non-transcendence of it.

In my view, the concept “*abodee*”, which literally translates into English as “created thing(s)”, is the widest of God’s creations, and constitutes ‘nature’ at large^{xiii}. As such, it includes the idea of “the universe” in English, which I understand as the totality of everything that exists in space-time, including all physical space, time, matter and energy, the planets, stars, galaxies, and the contents of intergalactic space” (Wikipedia.org). Then there is “*ewiase*”, which is a narrower concept, and whose etymology provides a good guide to its understanding. It is a contraction of two

words: “*ewi*” and “*ase*”. “*Ewi*” connotes the English expressions “the skies above”, “the heavens”. It can therefore be understood to refer to everything that lies some distance above the surface of Earth, including the atmosphere and the rest of outer space. Thus interpreted, “*ewi*” would seem to refer to all celestial bodies and the void that exists between them. However, this would hardly be distinguishable from “*abodee*”. If we grant that such ambiguity would hardly be intended, then “*ewi*” is better interpreted to refer strictly to the sun together with its planetary system. One reason why this interpretation is plausible is that the Akan word for the “sun” is “*ewia*”, which is clearly derived from the root “*wi*”. This is given credence by the fact that the Akan expression “*ewi mu adjo*” means, “the sun has gone down”.

The term “*ase*”, on the other hand means “under” or below”. Accordingly, “*ewiase*” can be held to refer to the atmosphere in the solar system. According to my interpretation, then, “*abode*” is a wider concept than “*ewiase*” in the sense that it alludes to the existence of other planetary systems and can include existing things of which we may have no knowledge. If my distinction between *ewiase* and *abodee* is correct, then Wiredu’s claim that *Onyame* is part of the universe (“*abode*”) can hardly be sustained in Akan ontology, a basic postulate of which is that God exists, as do all other entities which He has created, on a continuum of existence. I subscribe to the view that this continuum of existence comprises visible and invisible, as well as immanent and transcendental realms which multiple categories of existents inhabit and conduct their being in accordance with the potency of the sunsum encoded in them (Gyekye 1987: 73; Minkus 1977: 114). All existents share in *sunsum*, a non-material power that links them and distinguishes their place on the continuum. In a nutshell, the level of the *sunsum* of a being determines its place on the hierarchy of existence, and place on the hierarchy differentiates different kinds of beings.

Therefore, the continuum does not have to be conceived as entirely susceptible to space-time coordinates. It does not have to represent an ontologically homogeneous materiality. There is thus no strict and diametrically opposed distinction between the two realms of existence, so the various categories in them can freely relate to, and influence

each other. Thus Wiredu is right in insisting (Wiredu 1996: 55) that the Cartesian notion of ‘spiritual’ as ‘fully immaterial’ is not rightfully attributed to Akan philosophy as Gyekye does (Gyekye 1987: 87). But this rejection of Cartesian dualism should not imply an exclusive endorsement of full-blown material monism. In my view, Akan thought allows for freely asserting the reality of spirits and immaterial beings in the universe without insisting that these kinds of beings are fundamentally quasi-physical, a term which, as we have argued, reduces to “ultimately physical”.

7. Logic is not a Gift from Heaven

Regarding the metaphysics of the person Engmann observes, correctly, I think, that the differences between Gyekye and Wiredu reduce to one question, i.e., “What is the nature of that being which, when it is physically observed, is *sunsum*, and when it is not observed, is *sunsum*? Are we to say that it is physical or non-physical?” (Engmann 1992: 171). When applied to our discussion about God, this question can be reframed thus: “what is the nature of that being which, when empirically felt, is God, and when not empirically felt, is God?” Are we to say that it is spiritual/immaterial or not spiritual/immaterial?

However, we must note that bifurcated as it is, Engmann’s question is not well framed. What is indeed one question becomes two, with two distinct objectives. The first question interrogates the nature of God, and the second prescribes two possible answers to the first. But taking into consideration the context in which the question arises, I think the only legitimate question is the first one. It is the one with enough vigour and direction to challenge us toward a useful answer. The second question erodes the interrogative force of the first question by reducing the range of possible answers to it to only two. Consequently, this second question suggests that there are only two possible and opposite answers to the first question, and pretends that the solution to this problem lies necessarily in the laws of traditional logic, as if we have on our hands a riddle whose resolution must be “either/or”.

Such a resolution may have sufficed had the reality of God or *sunsum*

been experienced by Akans as inextricably locked under the key of logical rules. But it cannot be decided beforehand that logic and its fundamental rules provide the best standard for resolving the question about the nature of being as such. In connection with this insight, it may be useful to ponder Heidegger's pronouncement on the role that logic has played in generating and sustaining a crisis of ontology in Western philosophy: "perhaps the whole body of logic as it is known to us, perhaps all the logic that we treat as a gift from heaven, is grounded in a very definite answer to the question about the essent; perhaps in consequence all thinking which solely follows the laws of thought prescribed by traditional logic is incapable from the very start of even understanding the question about the essent by its own resources; let alone actually unfolding the question and guiding it towards an answer" (Heidegger 1987: 25).

Let us note that the 'definite answer' that Heidegger alludes to in the passage is the essent's assumed definition and full absorption by the Law of Identity^{xiv}, which predominates over the law of the excluded middle^{xv}. In consonance with this definition, I believe that a metaphysical conception of a Supreme Being as a spirit that both transcends and influences events in the empirical world is both intelligible and well founded within philosophical framework that is not exclusively regulated by these laws. The Akan conceptual scheme may be one such idea. The rigorous distinctions between matter/spirit, transcendence/immanence, metaphysical/empirical would then be subject to nullification in some aspects of Akan philosophical thinking. That this may be the case is exemplified by the range of attributes some Akan philosophers, like Danquah, ascribe to God. This range of attributes suggests that one can reserve the right to preclude the law of excluded middle in determining the validity of the claim that God concurrently transcends and is the subject of experience in the physical world. And this position conforms fully to modern systems of logic which reject the Law of Identity and its cognates^{xvi}.

The annulment of the laws of formal logic in thinking about the nature and attributes of God can be justified, among others means, by appealing to a mode of reasoning that conceives categories polarized by formal logical rules as mutually inclusive classes of entities that are capable of

fusing in a way that sustains their original features. By admitting a God that is inherently both transcendent and immanent, Danquah's philosophy of God seems to appeal to this kind of reasoning.

Perhaps this interpretation I am giving to Danquah's concept of God and to Akan ontology in general can derive some support from Nkrumah's 'categorical conversion', which espouses a synthesis of the metaphysical concepts of 'mind' and 'matter' in a way that de-emphasizes the Law of Identity. The conversion is enabled by Nkrumah's materialist perspective which proceeds from the metaphysical assumption that matter is the primary but not the sole reality of the universe, and constitutes "a plenum of forces which are in antithesis with each other" (Nkrumah 1970: 79). These material forces are "perpetually active" (Nkrumah 1970: 20), and thus "endowed with powers of self-motion" (Nkrumah 1970: 79).

However, consciousness^{xviii} is also part of the furniture of the universe of Nkrumah's materialism, as is energy and matter. To resolve the logical problem of the interaction of consciousness and matter without incurring the categorical absurdity inherent in the mind-body problem, Nkrumah proposes categorical conversion as the process that enables "the emergence of self-consciousness from that which is not self-conscious; such a thing as the emergence of mind from matter, of quality from quantity" (Nkrumah 1970: 20). In Nkrumah's system, the independence of mind and matter is axiomatic (Nkrumah 1970: 19). Yet, in his view, "both in metaphysics and in theory of knowledge, [the difference] does not become fundamental and irreducible" (Nkrumah 1970: 23). As suggested earlier, Akan ontology proscribes such a reduction by insisting that the categories can interact without annexing the other. It does so by positing two distinct but mutually inclusive and dependent categories. Likewise, Nkrumah resolves the problem by positing matter as a fundamental principle with a permanent potential and capability to transform itself into mind and consciousness.

8. Conclusions

According to Wiredu, an empirical metaphysics, which rejects transcendental realities, characterizes Akan metaphysics and sustains empiricism. I have tried to argue that the plausibility of such a metaphysical system characterizing the Akan conceptual scheme is vitiated by the views of other philosophers and other Akans of conceptual facility. Therefore the weak foundation upon which empiricism rests in Akan thought cannot suffice to justify the denial of the rationality and coherence of transcendental concepts in Akan philosophy. I have suggested that Wiredu's definition of such metaphysical concepts as space, time and God must be broadened to include the viability of their non-empirical ascriptions if he wishes to identify his definitions with Akan philosophical thinking. Without such inclusion, the admissibility of those definitions will remain in doubt from the point of view of Akan philosophy and many African indigenous knowledge systems.

Notes

- i In Lauer, H., et al (eds.), 2011, *Identity Meets Nationality: Voices from the Humanities*, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, pp. 18 – 34
- ii An empirical proposition is given its usual meaning as one whose truth or falsity can be known only through experience, by Wiredu.
- iii I am indebted to Dr. Carlton Simpson of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ghana, for his role in clarifying some of these ideas during my presentation of a version of this paper at a seminar in the Department in May 2011.
- iv Wiredu, K., 1996, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 46
- v On Wiredu’s terms, this means a God that is in fact and in principle not subject to experience.
- vi Defined as the thesis that only physical objects exist, or that if anything exists then that thing can be accounted for by the language and laws of physics.
- vii The thesis that if mental states and events exist apart from brain states, then they can be described in solely physical terms.
- viii This prediction about the future of science, which projects a reduction of all the sciences to physics, represents what is usually called “the thesis of the unity of science”. The thesis is precisely as Saforo Kwame states it: that with sufficient knowledge about the nature of the human psyche, it will be evident that the human psychological system can be fully described and explained with the theoretical tools of physics. For a fuller discussion of this “thesis”, see Rosenthal, D. M., 2000, “Introduction”, in (ed), Rosenthal, D. M, *Materialism and the Mind-Body Problem*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hackett Publishing, pp. 5-6
- ix And by implication the agency of any such entity
- x Here, Gyekye specifies that the okra is devoid of any physical attributes. It is a speck of the nature of the Supreme Being, and functions as the principle of life and the bearer of a human being’s destiny. Because it partakes of the nature of the Supreme Being, therefore it cannot have physical attributes.

- xi Another of the epitaphs assigned to God
- xii I am indebted to Professor Kofi Ackah for his criticisms during the presentation of this paper at a seminar in the Department of Philosophy and Classics, University of Ghana, which illuminated some of my misperceptions regarding this point and helped me to construct this argument in its present state.
- xiii The qualification 'at large' is meant to indicate that this is not the post-enlightenment and scientific understanding of nature as the physical or material world.
- xiv This law states that an object is equal to itself: $X = X$.
- xv The principle that for any given P, either P is true, or its negation is true.
- xvi One such system is autoepistemic logic, which replaces the law of excluded middle with the concept of negation as failure which proposes a third possibility: the truth of a proposition is unknown. Other systems allow for the assertion of the law of the excluded middle as a true fact but not as an *a priori* condition for truth.
- xvii Conceived as a feature of the metaphysical notion of Mind or Spirit.

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