

A Critique of the Concept of Quasi-Physicalism in Akan Philosophy

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Abstract: One important feature of recent African philosophical works is the attempt by writers to interpret some key concepts from within the context of specific African cultures. The interpretations of such writers, however, particularly in connection with Akan thought, have not been without problems. One such concept is the concept of a person. From the largely general position that a completely physical conception of the person is inconsistent with Akan cultural beliefs, the precise characterization of the non-physical constituent of the human being has been a source of great controversy. An expression that has of recent times been put forward as descriptive of that constituent is the “quasi-physical.” The notion of quasi-physicalism is the brainchild of an Akan philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, and is strongly held also by Safro Kwame, another Akan philosopher. This article attempts an explanation of the notion and argues that it is conceptually flawed in diverse ways, and as such philosophically indefensible.

Introduction

The philosophical ideas of any culture, including the Akan, may be obtained from the language, beliefs, and practices of that culture. In this regard, an examination of some Akan cultural beliefs and language should aid in the understanding of the Akan concept of a person. In Akan language, the human body is referred to as *honam*, but there are two other expressions, *ōkra* and *sunsum*, which, together with *honam*, seem to suggest belief in the existence of two distinct components of the human being. These expressions are sometimes translated as “soul or mind” and “spirit” respectively and designated as being spiritual. Akan thinkers who hold spiritual conceptions of these entities include Asare Opoku, Peter Sarpong, and Kwame Gyekye.¹ Even though Sarpong, for instance, correctly translates *sunsum* as “spirit,” he nonetheless sees it as deriving from the father—an error that Gyekye points out.² It is also held in Akan thought that the *ōkra* does not, just like the *sunsum*, form part of the brain or the body because of its complete spirituality. It is nonetheless believed to play some role in the person’s ability to live, as it is seen to be a life force with spiritual attributes. It is these spiritual conceptions of *ōkra* and *sunsum* that Kwasi Wiredu and Safro Kwame reject. They argue—for reasons that I will explain in detail in the next section—that *ōkra* and *sunsum* are not spiritual but are rather quasi-physical.

The assessment of beliefs as evidence for the existence of these spiritual entities by contemporary Akan philosophers has chiefly been based on the logical implications of

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specific cultural beliefs regarding the activities of those entities. But, it is these same sources of evidence (language, beliefs, and the practices that those beliefs underlie) that have ironically led some to argue against the metaphysical conceptions of *ōkra* and *sunsum*. Wiredu and Kwame, to be specific, explain that these entities are spoken of in physical terms and are capable of partially assuming spatial properties.³ Thus, *ōkra* and *sunsum* should accurately be described as “quasi-physical,” since they are not believed, in these philosophers’ view, to be purely physical either.

This article aims at resolving the controversy surrounding the interpretations offered by the metaphysical theorists and the quasi-physicalists in connection with *ōkra* and *sunsum*. The article is a sustained critique of the doctrine of quasi-physicalism, which it considers seriously blemished. Ultimately, it affirms the metaphysical in an indirect manner. The article, therefore, rejects the quasi-physicalist’s argument that the *ōkra*, especially, cannot be regarded as spiritual because (i) it falls in between the physical and “the so-called spiritual” realms and is closer to the physical, (ii) it is believed to accept offerings, (iii) it is capable of rendering itself visible to medicine men, (iv) medicine men use physical or partially physical means to reach to the *ōkra*, and that (v) the *ōkra* is thought of as a person’s double.⁴ The article finally argues that aspects of the doctrine of quasi-physicalism itself are utterly inconsistent with some basic Akan beliefs. Hence, the spiritual conception of *ōkra* is not wrong.

The multidisciplinary appeal of the subject matter of this article is not surprising at all. Matters regarding the constitution of the human being have not only been explored by thinkers of varied cultures, but also are a subject of study across a number of academic disciplines such as philosophy, religion, psychology, anthropology, and comparative cultural studies. This article intends to influence contemporary debates about African or Akan thought, thereby providing possible ways of enhancing the understandings (in the academic fields mentioned above) of the constitution of the human being. It corrects the misinterpretations of the quasi-physicalist, highlighting the part-spirituality of the human being. The spiritual aspect of the person, which is also believed to survive death (that is, the *ōkra*), is the subject often mentioned in the traditional Akan religious practice of libation pouring. It is also believed to be capable of enforcing morality in the physical human community. Also, the clarity that this article gives to the concept of the *ōkra* (mind) provides useful information for scholars interested in (i) the question of whether or not *ōkra* (mind) differs from *adwene* (thought) and *amene* (brain), and (ii) the issue of whether or not any relationships exist among the three. It could, for instance, be observed that the article does not point in the direction of the mind being part of the body or the brain; nor is the mind shown to be physical or quasi-physical. Studies of Akan psychology and culture, and indeed African studies, could thus benefit from the philosophical analysis embarked upon in this article.

Finally, the postulation of quasi-physicalism, amidst its many problems, is an interesting exercise in contemporary Akan philosophy. It even offers some ideas that compare with aspects of Western philosophy. Its rejection of the spirituality or, rather, part-spirituality of the human being is, in some respects, consistent with the conventional attitude toward the metaphysical in some Western conceptions. In modern Western philosophy, discussions on personal identity often go back to Descartes who, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, postulated a metaphysical mind in addition to the body. Yet, the mind is seen by anti-metaphysians such as D.M. Armstrong and U.T. Place as not different from brain processes, which to them is quite empirical.⁵ D.M. Armstrong notes,

“The mind was not something behind the behavior of the body, it was simply part of that physical behavior.”⁶ He calls this a “Materialist or Physicalist account of the mind.”⁷ What distinguishes Wiredu and Kwame from the Western anti-metaphysians, however, is their apparent admission that the *ōkra*, for instance, is indeed an entity distinguishable from the body and capable of existing after death. But, while Gyekye accepts the idea of the immortality of the *ōkra*, he seems to suggest that at death, the surviving entity is a union of *ōkra* and *sunsum* which, together, constitute one spiritual component of the human being.⁸ Therefore, Gyekye’s position, although not necessarily Cartesian, is ultimately dualistic; and I am more inclined toward it than toward Wiredu’s and Kwame’s.

Some conceptual clarifications, however, have to be made now. It can be drawn from the above criticisms, first, that Armstrong and Place reduce the mind to the physical or material. And, that the mind is seen by them as fundamentally bodily and perceptible. But it is instructive to note that materialism may not mean the same as physicalism. Thus, conscious efforts must always be made not to conflate them. Before I explain why, however, I should acknowledge that even though Armstrong does not make any careful distinction between materialism and physicalism in the preceding paragraph, he calls elsewhere for such a distinction.⁹ It is consistent with the doctrine of physicalism to affirm as an existent anything which is “a physical object” or, at least, describable “in a language of physics.”¹⁰ This implies that in certain cases an intangible object would pass for the physical provided what is said about it is compatible with the laws of physics. Materialism, on the other hand, “misleadingly seems to conjure up a Newtonian account of matter.”¹¹ That account admits of only the tangible, as inherent in Newton’s theory of gravitational fields where matter attracts matter. Materialism and physicalism are, therefore, not the same.

Quasi-physicalism: A Critique

Quasi-physicalism is the philosophy that considers as existent objects “belonging to a category between the realm of the obviously physical, i.e. those objects that obey the known laws of physics, and the realm of the so-called spiritual or completely immaterial objects ...”¹² In line with this philosophy, therefore, the *ōkra* of a living or dead person is deemed to be quasi-physical.¹³ For, that is the form in which the *ōkra* (of a dead person for instance), when it reveals itself to the living, is thought to be.

On the contrary, John Mbiti and Gyekye would consider such “perceptions” of the *ōkra* (of the dead) as quasi-physical at all.¹⁴ For instance, even though Mbiti reports people “seeing” and “hearing” certain figures (such as *mizimu*—the living-dead among the Baganda), he still refers to them as “spirits,” as spiritual beings. Similarly, Gyekye argues that even though such spiritual beings “can make themselves felt in the physical world” and, “by the sheer operation of [their] power[s], assume spatial properties,” they are neither physical nor quasi-physical.

The object of this article, then, is to examine this controversy about the spirituality or otherwise of the *ōkra* in particular. It focuses, nonetheless, on establishing whether the arguments advanced by the quasi-physicalist are defensible. Unlike Mbiti and Gyekye, Wiredu’s preference for his coined term “quasi-physical” appears to be based on the strength of the fact that *ōkra* is “perceptible.”¹⁵ Secondly, he also maintains that there are several other qualities often attributed to some parts of a person that stand those parts out as quasi-physical. He cites the instance of the common Akan belief that when someone eats a

kind of food which his *'kra* is allergic to, he or she falls sick so that “the *ōkra* may need to be pacified with offerings of appropriate food and drinks.”¹⁶ He suggests that the *ōkra* is portrayed to have some amount of physical desire, the ability to choose and enjoy food, and the ability to receive. But if his evidence is granted, his conclusion can, with some reflection, still be rejected. Since a person’s *'kra* is believed to be linked or subsumed with his body, and the person lives in a world which is both physical and spiritual, he or she is possibly not prevented in the physical realm from reaching to the nonphysical side. The problem probably is “how” this reaching is done.

Indeed, it would be difficult not to start with or, at least, include the most obvious (i.e. the physical realm) in the exploration or explanation of the spiritual realm, if the explanation is to convince anybody of the existence of a spiritual entity or event. In any such case where the metaphysical is postulated, the rationality or acceptability of the postulation would most likely be based on the possibility of a mutual, cross-realm affectation or causation. That is, the strength of the evidence for a causal relation between the physical and the purported metaphysical realms would be crucial for a possible understanding of the metaphysical. But this role played by the physical does not in any way call for the description of a metaphysical entity itself as para-physical. If it is granted, for the sake of argumentation, that an illness originates from the *ōkra* or that the *ōkra* is badly affected by the eating of food, it appears that only a cross-realm causation is implied, not necessarily the quasi-physicality of the *ōkra*. Again, assuming that a spiritual being could be made perceptible with some invocation done with the aid of material objects, or that certain physical effects can be predicted with some degree of certainty whenever some items are allegedly offered to *spirits*, then, those objects would rather become just channels of interaction.

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

or non-existence of completely non-physical entities and methods, the traditional African healers would have to be barred from employing any physical entities or methods in their therapies and procedures. They never are."¹⁷

In the first place, it has been indicated already how of little value it is to ignore the claim of a cross-realm effect or interaction, only to confirm the obvious fact that (i) the metaphysical and material are completely different in constitution, and (ii) some amount of the physical is involved, at some stages, in the art of reaching to the spiritual realm. Secondly, it is a portrayal of lack of understanding of the worldview of medicine men to suggest that they do not understand that the concept of "the spiritual," by definition, completely excludes anything physical. For if an object is believed by them to be capable of being inhabited by an invoked spirit, for example, the object is not misunderstood to be the spirit itself at all. Nor is the spirit believed to have become material. Thirdly, the medicine men believe, instead, that the spiritual and the physical do interact, or that events in one realm can affect the other. This is evidenced in their use of objects in many of their healing techniques. It is thus possible, they would agree with John Perry, for the material world to form the "evidential base" for *something* that is "well beyond the material world."¹⁸ Indeed, finally, the belief that a person has a spiritual component and that this component can affect the body (and vice versa) renders untrue S. Kwame's view that the mind-body problem does not arise at all in the Akan concept of the person.¹⁹

The seeming near-physicality of the *ōkra* merely on the basis of the offering of sacrifice of food and other items, and even the pouring of libation to the living-dead (an act which Wiredu regards as utterly irrational), would be difficult to deny only if it is understood within the ordinary context that these offerings are meant for the consumption of the spirits.²⁰ It would be irrational indeed for a traditional Akan thinker to believe that a drink just poured on the ground, food placed at a section of the house or an object left on a crossroad have actually been eaten or taken by the spirits. For, the items "offered" do not necessarily vanish at all. The drink sinks into the ground and dries out; the food stays in the bowl until it is taken away or replaced by humans; and, the item left on the crossroads remains there and gets rotten, eaten by insects, or just displaced through some unintended human or natural action. The significance of such sacrifices could only be to show human attempt to commune with "the spirits." Such that, they (the spiritual entities) would be willing to return some favors as they witness the premium human beings place on the relationship with them. The premium being, among others, the latter's parting with those items in memory of the former. In the case of the pacification of the *ōkra*, it still does not appear there is any basis to suggest that it engages in any physical or quasi-physical act of eating any portion of the food and drinks that are allegedly offered to it. The alleged pacification sometimes involves nothing but the eating of a particular food by the individual to correct some imbalance in his system. Usually the imbalance is believed to be between his *'kra* and *honam*, caused originally by the ingestant that was bound to disturb the body and the harmony between it and the *ōkra*.

Wiredu makes reference to Debrunner's statement that the *ōkra* is a person's double, "conceived in his material image complete with a head, hands, legs and all."²¹ But Debrunner's claim is a bit inaccurate. He seems to have been misled by the personal or rationalistic terms in which the *ōkra* is described to conclude that it has the same parts as the physical person. But this notion is completely absent in Akan language. It makes no sense to use phrases like "my *ōkra's* leg," "my *ōkra's* head;" or even say that "her *ōkra's* chin is like this" or that "his *ōkra's* hand has done that." Simply put, the *ōkra* has no such parts as

claimed by Debrunner. It only makes sense to conceive of the *ōkra* as a person's double when it is interpreted as a spiritual aspect of an individual who has a particular physical shape. This is far from saying that the *ōkra* has that same shape. In cases where, as Wiredu suggests, the *ōkra* is "seen" by medicine men, there is still the question of whether the *ōkra* is "seen" in human form. While Wiredu seems to hold that this is the case, it is not quite clear whether the shape is the actual shape of the *ōkra* itself. Given the absence of expressions in the Akan idiom compartmentalizing the *ōkra*, it is quite doubtful whether Akan thinkers would actually consider any such shape, assuming the *ōkra* is indeed seen, to be its own shape. It is conceivable that it takes on the shape of the person it was known to inhabit just for the purposes of easy identification of its bearer.

Wiredu, in denying the spirituality of the *ōkra*, also remarks that "any theory of souls or spirits can only be an empirical theory" because "if a determinate and coherent definition can be given, the question whether such things actually exist can only be answered by empirical research."²² I have already conceded some role for the empirical in the study of metaphysics, but only because such a role is a matter of procedural aid. The concession is also to show how inadequate the empirical is in explaining certain phenomena. This is not to suggest, as Wiredu does now, that only purely empirical research can confirm the reality of things, spirits included. Continuing, he states that "to say everything is spirit, even if only "ultimately," is to advance a wild empirical claim which any slight empirical reflection must discourage."²³ I question why spirits cannot be conceived to exist as essentially nonphysical beings, or why a theory of spirits is thus "an empirical theory." He seems to put the method of investigation ahead of the object to be investigated, because he chooses a method of investigation and intends to make the object of investigation take on the core feature of the method. But the method of investigation cannot determine for a researcher the nature of what it is that he or she wants to investigate. This is because any object of human enquiry is expected to be one of two things: that, it either admits of one's chosen method of investigation or it does not. Indeed, the existence of a thing is not only independent of its being an object of investigation, but also of any chosen method of investigation. In the case of the essential nature of *ōkra*, it seems that it does not admit of Wiredu's criterion.²⁴ Empirical means is not the sole or permanently exhaustive medium for humans to acquire knowledge because there are other credible ways of knowing. These include logical deductions (from self-evident propositions) and paranormal cognition. To proclaim panpsychism is to induce everybody, the empirically- and metaphysically-inclined, to some sort of investigation. It is to make an open claim that is to be investigated by any philosophically acceptable method, except that different success rates are to be expected whenever largely different methods are employed. To say, therefore, that everything is (or contains) spirit or is ultimately spirit is not necessarily to advance any empirical claim, let alone a wild one.

There are obvious difficulties with the notion of quasi-physicalism itself. I must admit, however, that the difficulties are mainly as a result of the complex nature of the notion of personal identity in general, and the challenge this presents to anyone attempting to give a comprehensive account of the identity of persons. This is shown clearly when (i) quasi-physicalists are compelled to recognize that certain existents (such as *ōkra*) do not yield fully to physical laws, which they regard as the sole arbiter of truth, and (ii) dualists also admit that the spiritual can be physically perceived. Why then, one would ask, does the quasi-physicalist not prefer to be called a quasi-metaphysian, and the metaphysian to be called a physicalist of some sort? There are no indications that the two groups of philosophers

actually characterize themselves in the manner just suggested. I will now go ahead to make a few remarks bearing this in mind.

According to Wiredu, the *ōkra* is believed to be capable of rendering itself visible to some medicine men although it is not material or tangible.²⁵ Assuming this is true, the resort to it by Safro Kwame and Kwasi Wiredu to claim that it is quasi-physical makes their interpretation appear to ignore the essential quality of spirits. It is not clear why, for instance, from the occasional visibility of “spirits” quasi-physicalists describe them only in terms of features exhibited on those occasions. Again, with the traditional Akan belief in the potential visibility of spirits, and possibly on multiple occasions, it is only fair to ask what the identity of those spirits are when they have not allegedly revealed or are not revealing themselves to human beings? Are they nonexistent? If they are, how possible is it for nonentities to know when and who to appear (or even reappear) to? How can medicine men, for instance, receive inspiration from and be able to invoke nonentities in their practices? The very ideas of the occasional exposure and visibility of particular “spirits” (as held by quasi-physicalists), the invoking or re-invoking of specific spirits in various cultural contexts, and the very concept of the living-dead suggest that spirits are always existent. They are believed to exist whether or not they are being felt by humans. I do not dispute that at the very moment when a spirit is believed to have revealed itself, it is most probably quasi-physical. After all, it can, at least, be “seen” (by whatever means). But sight alone does not define the physical; so, the *ōkra* cannot be regarded as quasi-physical based on fleeting visibility alone. Whereas a hologram can be described as quasi-physical, the same description cannot be given of *ōkra* because its category of existence does not by nature admit of physical attributes. For it is non-physically natured and remains so at most of its normal times. And, given the belief that spirits do not die, one more thing can be said. That, there might not be strong reasons to deny that what comes to be quasi-physical occasionally would *ceteris paribus* relapse to its original state, anytime the quasi-physical manifestation ends. It appears more acceptable then that spirits, including the *ōkra*, are essentially metaphysical in nature, even though they have some capacity for quasi-physical manifestation. The difference between the essential nature of spirits and their capacity to be quasi-physical can be likened to water and ice. Water is essentially liquid but it also has the capacity to turn to ice under certain conditions. It will be most inappropriate to claim that water is solid or half-solid just because the ice which it occasionally turns to is solid.²⁶

The quasi-physicalist is a physicalist in disguise. His claim to allow for things that are not entirely subject to the laws of physics is misleading. This claim initially seems as if it recognizes metaphysical realities which many Akan thinkers actually see *ōkra* to fall within.²⁷ But, in reality, what the quasi-physicalist means by something not being “entirely subject to the laws of science” is that it is something “which current laws of physics do not explain, but might be proved by physics in future.” For instance, S. Kwame, who can be called a “modern” quasi-physicalist, declares that: “the modern or contemporary quasi-physicalist does not deny that as our discovery of physical laws proceeds and our scientific knowledge increases, we may come to accept some or all the quasi-physical objects as bona fide physical objects. The quasi-physicalism of today may then turn out to be the materialism or physicalism of tomorrow.”²⁸ There is every indication in the preceding quotation that the purported quasi-physical entities would not have been affirmed as real if they were not capable of becoming (known as) physical objects in future. So, given that all physicalists, quasi or not, already affirm the reality of physical objects, the quasi-physicalist becomes both today’s physicalist and tomorrow’s physicalist today. That is, he is a physicalist today

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

Even the statement that “the *ōkra* is a quasi-physical object” is one which the quasi-physicalist would regard as confirmable on physical or empirical grounds. Otherwise, how else can he claim to know such an object, since the claim is not *a priori* and, also, “metaphysics” is a taboo word for him. This confirms he is a physicalist today, not only tomorrow. It can therefore be said that the empirical criterion of knowledge, whether with regard to entities perceived today or ultimately in future (or to objects scientifically explicable today or in future) is quite useful to the quasi-physicalist. But this may not be construed to mean that the quasi-physicalist would want to be seen as an empiricist. For being someone who brings to bear the empirical character of (especially) the Akan belief system, Wiredu, for instance, would prefer to be called “an empiricist,” not an empiricist.²⁹

The quasi-physicalists’ interpretation of “what defies the laws of science” cannot also be seen as consistent with the Akan conception on the *ōkra* because it (*ōkra*) is regarded as incapable of scientific proof. In future, therefore, the *ōkra* (which the quasi-physicalist admits is incapable of proof only for today) will not cease to be metaphysical. It is very much doubtful if the *ōkra* will ever be subject to the physical laws which the quasi-physicalist suggests. It is with the same skepticism that I view Teffo Levisa and Abraham Roux’s rejection of metaphysical thinking in the “African accounts of the person.” In their understanding, such thinking “has to do with a lack of scientific knowledge.”³⁰ The tension between metaphysics and science, seen essentially as between the belief in the reality of spiritual entities and the requirement of scientific proof, is of such a nature that one of them cannot be expected to collapse into the other. It is, however, possible to have a little bit of both, as found in such experience as the manifestation of the *ōkra*. It would thus be beneficial to recognize that the existence of spirits (such as the soul or God) as held in Akan and other religions does not take away anything from the distinct role and importance of science itself. In fact, “both religion and science are concerned about our understanding and interpretation of reality, even though their interpretations generally differ.”³¹ Reality should not just be explored from only the scientific or metaphysical angle, but ought to be understood as “a complex phenomenon that can be grasped from different approaches.”³² These approaches include the physical, metaphysical or a combination of both.

Conclusion

The notion of quasi-physicalism has been examined from the Akan philosophical perspective. The idea held by Wiredu and Kwame that the *ōkra* is quasi-physical (but not spiritual) has been found not to possess enough logical grounds for its postulation. Indeed, the very nature of *ōkra*, as this article has attempted to explain, appears rather spiritual. It has also been pointed out that even though the spiritual realm in Akan thought is difficult to explain, it is, just like the physical, true to the Akan. Thus, the spiritual is relevant to the understanding of Akan cosmology and person, which are both not entirely physical.

The Akan expression *sunsum mu nsem* and *sunsum mu ahintasem* translate respectively as “matters of the spiritual realm” and “the secrets (or mysteries) of the spiritual realm.” The former is used in reference to questions of metaphysical concern, while the latter is used in connection with the esoteric nature of the objects and happenings of the metaphysical realm. In both there is some evidence for the Akan belief in the existence of a spiritual realm. What

requires to be noted, also, is the Akan belief that the human being (*onipa*) has *sunsum* (spirit), and that *sunsum mu nsem* also involve him or her. Some of the difficulties inherent in quasi-physicalism results from the failure of its advocates to recognize this aspect of Akan thought.

The *ōkra* is deemed in Akan thought as a spiritual entity. As such, the capacity of the medicine men to “see” it—as a result of their spiritual potency— does not negate the conception that it is fundamentally spirit. The quasi-physicalist’s argument that the *ōkra* is not spiritual is therefore not quite defensible. In any case, it is surprising how the quasi-physicalist would deny the ‘reality’ of the spiritual realm, but would approve or adopt the claim of a possible perception of the *ōkra* by the medicine man whose capacities were in the first place developed by spiritual means. The spirituality of the *ōkra* also suggests that it cannot accept and eat offerings as the quasi-physicalist suggests. Although, finally, the *ōkra* might be spoken of in personal terms, Wiredu’s endorsement of the idea that it is a person’s “double” has been proven mistaken because of the complete nonexistence of any references to parts of the *ōkra* in Akan language. Quasi-physicalism, therefore, does not appear to get it right on such areas of Akan thought as discussed in this essay.

Notes

- 1 See Opoku 1978, pp. 94-95; Gyekye 1995, pp. 93-94; Sarpong 1974, pp. 37-38.
- 2 Gyekye 1995 pp. 89-94) argues that it derives from God.
- 3 Kwame 2004, pp. 345-36; Wiredu 1983, p. 120.
- 4 For the sources of these five claims, see respectively Kwame 2004, pp. 345-46; Wiredu 1983, p. 120; Wiredu *ibid*, pp. 119-20; Kwame *ibid*, p. 348; Wiredu *ibid*, p. 120.
- 5 Armstrong 1970, p. 70; and Place 1970, p. 86.
- 6 Armstrong 1970, p. 70.
- 7 *Ibid*. p. 73.
- 8 Gyekye 1995, p. 98.
- 9 Armstrong (in Gregory ed.) 1987, p. 491.
- 10 Kwame 2004, pp. 343-44. He accepts Anthony Flew’s (1984, p. 267) idea that statements constituting such a language are those that can be “formulated as statements about publicly observable physical objects and processes.”
- 11 Kwame *ibid*. p. 348.
- 12 *Ibid*. pp. 345-46. He calls this definition the “limited version of physicalism,” comparing objects here approved of as equivalent to “atoms, fields, energies, sets and numbers.”
- 13 Wiredu 1983, p. 120.
- 14 See Mbiti 1997, p. 86 and Gyekye 1995, p. 93. It is important to note that Gyekye is also Akan and carries out his analysis from an Akan cultural perspective.
- 15 Even when the *ōkra* is seen through some “medicinally heightened perception,” that does not impair the empirical argument. “However heightened,” he remarks, “the powers of an eye may become, if it sees something, that thing will have to be in space. In regard to any claim to see something, it must make sense to ask ‘Where is it?’” (See Gbadegesin 2002, p. 183).
- 16 Wiredu 1983, p. 120.

- 17 Kwame 2004, p. 348
- 18 Perry 1975, p.153.
- 19 Kwame 2004, p. 349.
- 20 Wiredu 1980, p. 42.
- 21 Wiredu 1983, p. 120.
- 22 Ibid. p. 127.
- 23 Ibid. p. 129.
- 24 The essential nature of spirit beings, in general, is discussed shortly.
- 25 Ibid. pp. 119-120.
- 26 An objection might be raised here that for someone ignorant of water's capability to turn to ice, all there is, is just ice. The point then, might be made that such a person is not wrong in stopping at ice. My response is two-fold. First, since that person knows no connection between water and ice, he is not in the position to assert that water is solid or semi-solid. He would not be party to our current debate which requires knowledge of the connection between water and ice. All he knows is that ice exists. In any case, we also do not deny that there is ice; the point is, we are simply not interested in whether or not there is ice. Secondly, if he insists that, because he knows of no such connection, there is not any between water and ice, he would be doing something inappropriate. His ignorance of the connection does not make it right for him to deny the connection. His position would be uninformed and wrong, although his ignorance of the connection is pardonable.
- 27 See Wiredu 1983, pp.119-120, and also in Gbadegesin 2002, p. 183. There are some traditional African thinkers, however, who reject God, deities, and generally, spirits. They think that these entities are a figment of human imagination but not, most importantly, because of the physical or parapsychical nature of those entities (see, for instance, Gyekye 1995, p. 48).
- 28 Kwame, p. 346. He refers to Gregory.
- 29 Wiredu 2009, unpublished. He thinks it is erroneous to call his philosophy 'empiricism'
- 30 Teffo and Roux 2002, p. 171. They argue that "[w]ith more knowledge of anatomy, and particularly neurology, these views [that is, the metaphysical-related] will change or simply vanish."
- 31 Gyekye, 2008, unpublished.
- 32 Ibid. Wiredu argues that traditional Akan religion is empirically oriented (Wiredu 1980, particularly the chapter "Philosophy, Mysticism and Rationality"). This means that religion would not necessarily be opposed to (empirical) science. His interpretation of Akan religion, nonetheless, is not in complete agreement with the sense in which religion is generally discussed here.

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