

" PHILOSOPHY AND RATIONALITY IN TABOOS WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE KENYAN LUO CULTURE "

BY

ORIARE NYARWATH

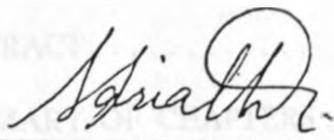
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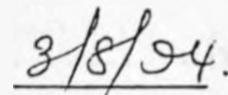
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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

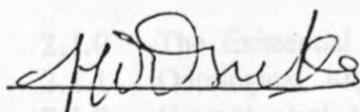


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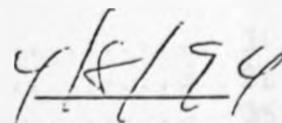


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This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University Supervisor.



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ABSTRACT

The study of the structure of the human mind and its functions, especially the processes of perception, memory, and judgment, is a central theme in psychology. This study aims to explore the various factors that influence these processes and how they are affected by different stimuli and environments. The research is based on a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical studies in the field.

DEDICATION

To my late brother Charles Osiro Nyarwath whose death was a subject of 'taboo' explanation.

To all those whose lives are subject to taboo controls.

And to all Misologists.

The study of the structure of the human mind and its functions, especially the processes of perception, memory, and judgment, is a central theme in psychology. This study aims to explore the various factors that influence these processes and how they are affected by different stimuli and environments. The research is based on a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical studies in the field.

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However, the exercise needs a very penetrative, critical and systematic mind that is philosophical mind.

ABSTRACT

This work, in its examination of the concept of taboo and its institution, recognizes that the basis for the dread of taboo which makes it appear less responsive to social change, is the mystification of this concept by which the ideas of God(s) or ancestral spirits are presented as essential to its definition and operations.

In this work, the issues of God and spirits have been examined generally and in particular in the Luo belief system. It is argued here that God(s) and spirits, as independent objective existence, are logically and conceptually untenable, hence are not capable of giving edicts for human conducts.

This work concludes that 'taboos' in general and by extension, the Luo taboos, are fundamentally human formulations for the regulation of people's behaviour in society, and hence have nothing to do with the works of 'God(s)' or 'spirits'. However, they have some social functions which should be, when necessary, rationally and with good grace appreciated. But when a social need arises which requires their change or abandonment, that should be granted as a matter of rational principle.

We have shown how this exercise can be carried out by rationally discerning some Luo 'taboos' to reveal their possible social functions since we realized that it is humanly impossible to attempt to do that to each and every 'taboo' because there are numerous 'taboos' in each society.

However, the exercise needs a very penetrative, critical and systematic mind, that is, philosophical mind.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One examines the concept of taboo, that is, its definition. It also looks at how widespread the institution of taboo is. Two fundamental ideas to the definition of taboo are identified, that is, the idea of God(s) and ancestral spirits.

Chapter Two examines the idea of God in general in order to find out the nature of the possible conceptualization of its being as an objective existent. The existential and conceptual arguments for God's existence are examined. In this chapter, the inference made is that God is a pure mental phantasy; human invention.

Chapter Three analyses the concepts of death and immortality in order to determine the logical viability of the belief in the existence of spirits as implied by the belief in 'life after death'. In this chapter, various possibilities by which the belief in 'life after death' could be justifiable are also analysed. But all of them appear logically untenable.

Chapter Four examines the Luo belief in God(s) and spirits. And an inference regarding these is that *Nyasaye* (God) for the Luo seems not to mean an objective existent or a deity. Furthermore, the word *Nyasaye* appears to have been borrowed from outside the Luo belief system. The belief in the objective existence of spirits as well, have neither factual nor logical basis.

Chapter Five is an analysis of the origin or root of taboos in the light of the foregoing analyses of God and spirits in general and in particular in the Luo belief system. The logical position asserted in this chapter is that taboos originate from human beings and therefore, have no linkage to the ideas of God and spirits since these,

logically speaking, are pure fantasies or human imaginations.

Chapter Six examines the nature of connexion between a taboo violation and the alleged resultant misfortune(s). And apparently there is no necessary relationship between a taboo violation and the presumed misfortune(s). The connexion which seems to be there is contingent and it is psychological. In this chapter, attempts are also made to give some possible rationale of some Luo taboos. It would appear that some taboos, if not all, have some social values.

Chapter Seven is a general conclusion. Given the preceding analyses, 'taboo' should not be dreaded but should be treated like any other constituents of a culture which is time-specific and has nothing to do with God and spirits. 'Taboo' should be demystified.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is basically a logical and conceptual examination of the institution of taboos as an aspect of a culture. Institution is used in this work to mean, a system of values that patterns people's behaviour.

This work attempts to explain why people tend to dread taboo violations. Undeniably, the fear of violating a taboo gives some taboos, if not all, a long lease of operation even long after they have fallen out with changes. Therefore, a taboo would appear adamant and tend to withstand the 'heat of time'. Taboos would therefore, assume some sort of a 'divine' level, so much that, they would be seen more as having been handed over to people by some supernatural beings. Hence, they assume an elevated position above the human level.

Due to that elevated status of taboos, the least welcome ideas to most people about culture, is a suggestion of change in taboos. People appear to dread taboos. They tend to see taboos in general as sacrosanct; something that man must never attempt to change or eradicate. Hence, people become almost helpless before taboos. Thus, most people, if not all people, are often subjected to some insurmountable torments that only make them prisoners of taboos.

The basic problem this thesis attempts to solve, therefore, is to explain why taboos seem to be so forceful in directing people's actions that they disregard some prevalent opposing conditions which otherwise make them appear either unreasonable or undesirable. But people do not question the demands of taboos. They seem to be led unquestioningly to actions by some 'hidden forces'. Thus, most people yield to the

dictates of taboos due to the fears of some disastrous results that they believe or have been made to believe would follow their infractions. Yet, it is never certain what the disaster is. It is simply believed that some undesirable result would occur. Moreover, even the nature of connection between the infraction of a taboo and the supposed resultant misfortune is never clear. However, it is common knowledge that human life is occasioned by some misfortunes; and yet a belief in taboos creates a situation open to arbitrary manipulation and justification of certain misfortunes in such a way that seems to transcend reason.

This thesis attempts to solve the above problems through the following objectives:

- a) By inquiring into the origin of taboos in general and hence the taboos of the Luo by extension; that is, to determine whether they originate from human beings or non-human beings.
- b) By investigating the possible moral implications of taboos as social norms, if there are any. This involves an examination of their foundation or rationale, and to determine whether they are imperative and necessary or not.
- c) By inquiring into either the causal or logical connexion, if any, between the violation of a taboo and the presumed misfortune that follows.

This thesis recognizes that the institution of taboos is still a viable aspect of many people's experiences and lives, particularly in the Luo community. Most communities which are still relatively isolated and less culturally disintegrated have this institution as a very strong and effective cultural institution. And since the majority of Kenyans, not only the Luo, live in the rural areas, they are still affected by this institution. Therefore, a critical examination of this institution which we hope this thesis offers, becomes very important.

This thesis treats with great consideration the influence a belief system, as the institution of taboos, can exert on its adherents. The improvement or enrichment of a people's well-being depends to some extent, on people's attitudes towards certain human problems and experiences. Their social problems in general depend on the attitudes people have towards their possible solutions, if they are to be overcome. The nature of people's cultural beliefs and convictions would determine whether certain policies in general would be adopted within a certain milieu. The belief in taboos is just but one of the cultural beliefs. Thus, a very comprehensive and positive understanding of such a belief would be some steps towards the improvement of a particular people's well-being through the solution of the situational problems that may be experienced. It is said so because the belief in taboos is one of the most prohibitive beliefs. And this thesis, it is hoped, presents an authoritative and comprehensive analysis of the institution of taboos in general with particular illustrations from the Luo culture. This analysis, it is believed, is relevant to the understanding of this institution in other cultures since the fundamental principles of this institution are the

same. Thus, this work should be relevant to all those communities that are still closely-knit or culturally integrated and in which taboo institution commands some influence in the people's lives.

This thesis has been necessitated by the realization that most of the works on taboos are either anthropological or religious in approach and content. Most of them are not analytic but descriptive, hence do not attempt to grapple with the fundamental issues involved in the institution of taboos, particularly in the face of rapid social change. And this thesis offers that missing dimension. It adopts an analytic approach based on a professional philosophical framework. Therefore, it is believed that this work brings out the knowledge of taboos in its basic form and adds to the general knowledge of taboos.

In this thesis, the fundamental assumption is that the role of reason (or good reason) is vital for the development of the well-being of mankind. If that presupposition is granted, then this work is very important since it tries to rationally analyse the belief in taboos, hence offers what would appear a rational attitude mankind should adopt when dealing with taboos in particular and any belief in general. It is hoped the rational attitude would alleviate some of the undesirable and harmful demands of certain taboos, thus reduce some of the unnecessary human sufferings which often appear imposed on people by taboos.¹

NOTES

1. Cfr. Commentary by Wahome Mutahi, *Daily Nation* (June 10, 1991), p. 6, *Daily Nation* (April 3, 1993), p. 7.
Daily Nation (July 12, 1991), Magazine Parts I, III-IV.

CHAPTER ONE

TABOOS

1.1.0 Institution of Taboos

Taboos are an aspect of culture which appear very effective in persuading people to conform to some norms. The violation of a taboo is believed in most societies to result into serious misfortune(s), and the contravention is always seen as a moral "crime" against some supernatural beings.

The institution of taboo is common to most cultures, if not all cultures. It regulates people's behaviour pertaining to certain objects, words and acts. Though different cultures may not have similar taboos, it is believed that the institutions of taboo in all cultures are based on same principles. If that could be true then the philosophical inquiry into and analysis of a taboo practice of any culture is very important for the understanding of the practice in most cultures. This is so because a philosophical inquiry deals with general principles underlying a phenomenon. Therefore, the philosophical study of this institution within the culture of the Kenyan Luo should shed some light in understanding this practice in other cultures as well. The concept of taboo, given its significance in the social life of a people, requires a succinct exposition otherwise it can create a situation of an ambivalent social life coupled with some sufferings, be it social, economic or psychological. This is due to the belief that an infraction of what is considered to be a taboo has some catastrophic consequences.

The concept of a taboo has been variably defined by scholars. Some definitions do not distinguish between what is simply a group cultural avoidance which is not a taboo and what is a taboo. *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. Vol. 2 seems to make that distinction by classifying *tabus* (taboos) into two classes:

The first consist of those imposed and announced by king or priest and accompanied by ritual act, and which can be also ceremonially removed ... The second class of *tabus* are those inherent *tabus* charged with the supernatural and therefore fraught with mysterious power and danger.

It is very clear that there are two distinct groups of prohibitions, distinct in origin and probably in the consequences that follow their violations. But then what makes both be termed *tabus*? Here we are faced with a problem; the problem of finding out whether a violation of a human prohibition leads to the same adverse results as the ones that follow the violation of supernatural prohibitions, as most taboos are believed to be. Moreover, there is a need to establish the possible reasons that could lead human beings into imposing prohibitions on a society. But in a nutshell, it appears irrational to dread human prohibitions the way taboos are generally dreaded. Therefore, for the proper understanding of this institution of taboo, it is very imperative to understand the difference between what is a human interdiction and what is believed to be an extra-human interdiction as taboos are understood. And any definition which ignores that distinction can hardly be accepted.

Although taboos are understood within a cultural framework, it appears that not all cultural avoidances are taboos, but all taboos are cultural avoidances. This appears to be an undeniable fact. Cultural avoidances are proscriptions of a culture.

They are customs which include what are strictly seen as taboos and non-taboos. Some of the non-taboo proscriptions are time-specific even within a particular culture. For example, in the Luo culture, there is or was an age from which women are or were not allowed to eat chicken and mutton. But it is or was not a taboo for them to eat them.¹ There is another illustration from the Luo culture, that is, it is or was a prohibition for a son or a daughter who has attained the age of puberty to enter the bedroom of his or her parents, or parents-in-law. Likewise, the parents or parents-in-law could not enter the bedroom of their sons or daughters, or sons-in-law or daughters-in-law.²

The given illustrations are just few among many cultural avoidances which are not taboos. Nevertheless, they assist in ordering life in society. Some of non-taboo prohibitions are preventive to the possible commission of some socially undesirable acts or taboos. For example, the last example given above is to check the possible commission of incest or socially unacceptable sexual intercourse like that between a man and a daughter-in-law, or a woman and a son-in-law. So what is being stated here is simply that a cultural interdiction is not necessarily a taboo. Apparently, taboos are distinctively associated with some mystic power. But a non-taboo avoidance can be violated when a situation demands without any fear of some mysterious reprisal except some humanly imposed sanctions or some social disapproval under certain situations.

1.2.0 Taboo as a Concept

Taboo is an anglicized polynesian word. It is believed to be an adaptation of the polynesian word *tapu*; or sometimes the word *tabu* is used among some

Polynesians.³ Most of the available works agree to the idea that the word 'taboo' is derived from the word *tapu* or *tabu*. *Tapu* is derived from the Polynesian words *ta* which means 'to mark', and *pu* which is an adverb indicating intensity. Therefore, the word *tapu* literally means something marked off, that is, something under ban:

The compound word *tabu*, therefore, means no more than "marked thoroughly" and only came to signify sacred or prohibited in a secondary sense ...⁴

From the above quotation, it is clear that the concept *tapu*, to the Polynesians, has no explicit sacred 'clothings' in its primary meaning. But it referred to the impositions announced by kings or priests, or in general, by human beings.

The English word taboo has become explicitly clothed with sacred, mystic and supernatural straps. This then seems to imply that it has acquired a radically different meaning from the original Polynesian one. What then is a taboo? We are going to look at a few definitions which are likely to point out some essentials which could be important in understanding the concept.

In *God in Africa* by McVeigh, taboo is defined in relation to magic:

Dynamism is also an ethic which can be summed up in one word: taboo. Anything is taboo, not when it is prohibited by the chief or chief's council, or by the law of God; but when its results automatically follows upon performance. You do or say something which, as it were, springs back and punishes you.⁵

But this definition appears incorrect. Taboo has no necessary relationship with magic. It is worth noting that in this book *God in Africa*, dynamism is used to refer to magic.⁶ But then, what is magic? It is the art of performance of certain rites and incantation of spells which are believed to invoke the supernatural power(s) to produce or prevent

a particular result which is unobtainable by natural means.⁷ It appears that there are two essential points in the definition of magic, viz: the performance of rites and the accompanying spells. These points have been recognized by Evans-Pritchard⁸ and Malinowski⁹ among others. Given that a taboo, in simple terms, is a prohibition whose violation has disastrous effects, then it is essentially different from magic. Thus it is fallacious to define magic in terms of a taboo. Moreover, the magical performance requires, among other things, the strict observance of some taboos.¹⁰ It therefore, appears absurd to use magic as synonymous with taboo. This is begging the question, that is, if granted that magic is equivalent to taboo and the performance of magic requires the observance of taboo, then obviously this is begging the question.

And as to whether taboos are prohibitions instituted by the chief or chief's council, or by the law of God, is one of the major concerns of this work, and hence can only be answered after having read through the whole of the work.

Evans-Pritchard, in his book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, defines a taboo, which is the equivalent of the Azande word *gira*, as:

the refraining from some action on account of a mystical belief that its performance will cause an undesired event or interference with the desired event.¹¹

In his paper, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought" presented at the 2nd. Afro-Asian Philosophy Conference, Nairobi, 1981; Kwasi Wiredu defines a taboo as:

something forbidden simply because it is hateful to some non-human power and will invite adversity if done.¹²

And according to *Webster's Third New International*

Dictionary, a taboo is:

a prohibition instituted for the protection of a cultural group or as a safeguard against supernatural reprisal.

From the preceding attempted definitions, it can be clearly seen that a taboo is a prohibition intended to avert a misfortune. But as to whether a taboo should not be contravened in order to avoid a supernatural reprisal is discussed in detail some where in this work. This discussion is very vital since, from the definitions given above, the idea of a non-human power appears to be central to the understanding of the concept of taboo.

So far all the definitions that we have looked at seem to be deficient. This deficiency is with respect to the victims of the misfortunes that are believed to follow the infraction of a taboo. The definitions say nothing as per the extensiveness of the effects of a violation. For example, who are affected by the resulting misfortunes, and what is the extent of the effect? In an attempt to answer the questions, let us look at what Paul Mboya says about the catastrophic effects resulting from the contravention of a taboo. Here the misfortune resulting from a violation of a taboo is referred to as *chira* in Luo language. Mboya says, in his small book *Richo Ema Kelo Chira*:

Chira chiro ng'ato, dala, anyuola, kata gweng' nigo ng'itni
mondo odongi; to ok onyal nikech ji manie gweng'no
opong gi chira kendo, chira othirogi.¹³

This literally means that a violation of a taboo results into a misfortune which can befall an individual, a home, or a clan, thus making the clan's progress impossible regardless of any efforts made.

From what has been said about *chira*, it can be understood that the misfortune can befall an individual; in that case the individual is the infractor, or some members

of the violator's family, or even the whole clan, or even the whole community, as will be seen in this work. However, the magnitude of the misfortune depends on the seriousness of the violated taboo as seen by the people bound by the practice. But before we proceed further, let us try to understand what is meant by the concept *chira* in Luo culture.

Let us begin with what appears to be very incorrect definitions of the concept.

According to a certain *Luo-English Dictionary*,¹⁴ the following is said of *chira*:

result of breaking a restriction or taboo, which is thought to bring leanness and sickness especially to children.

As much as the definition is correct in pointing out that *chira* is a condition of one's health that results from the violation of a taboo, it is also very incorrect to put emphasis on children as the major victims of *chira*. On the contrary, Ocholla-Ayayo's work appears to give the concept a wider understanding:

The breaking of their (*chira*) law may cause death to children, may prevent a family from giving birth to children, or may prevent a family from producing one sex, female or male children.¹⁵

It is also very incorrect to confine the physical symptoms of *chira* to leanness. It is a common knowledge among most Luo, especially those who believe in *chira*, that one can suddenly die from *chira*. This very abrupt death which leaves no time for one to grow thin is referred to, in Luo language, as *muorruok*. Therefore, the dictionary definition given above shows inadequate and shallow understanding of the concept *chira*. It is a great regret because such a definition is apt to mislead. And it should also be pointed out here that *chira* can befall any person irrespective of one's age and status.

Another work which seems contradictory and very misleading on this concept of *chira* is that of Hans-Egil Hauge. At one point it is said that *chira* is a kind of illness and at another it is denied that *chira* is an illness. When referring to the restrictions related to child-birth it is said:

The woman or the young girl who is there to do the housekeeping may not have sexual intercourse during the first or four days. The baby's father is also forbidden this. If anyone breaks this rule, the baby will get *chira* (a kind of illness).¹⁶

And at another point in this book, it is said:

Chira is not exactly an illness, but a wasting away, which may lead to death. Only small children and small babies get this and it is caused by e.g. a quarrel between a child's mother and her mother-in-law.¹⁷

From the above quotations, there is a glaring contradiction. In the first place to say that *chira* is a kind of illness and at the the same time say that it is not exactly an illness, is a contradiction. Secondly, to say that it is not an illness but a wasting away is also a contradiction. If granted that an illness is an unhealthy condition of a body or mind,¹⁸ then wasting away is an illness. Furthermore, Hauge categorically asserts that only children and babies get *chira*. But as has been shown earlier, that is very incorrect and misleading, because *chira* is not exclusively a children's experience.

Therefore, Hauge's attempt to explain *chira*, as has been seen, is incorrect. It appears to be a rather mediocre attempt, full of inconsistencies that betrays little intellectual grasp of the concept. Such an attempt may not be of any substantial assistance in comprehending the concept of *chira*.

After having made those vital observations which appear to blur the

understanding of the concept *chira*, let us move ahead cautiously and try to grasp this concept as it generally appears to be understood within the Luo culture. Let us start by looking at various works that apparently approximate the contention of most Luo concerning the meaning of *chira*. Ogotu's work states that *chira* is a divine punishment resulting from a violation of a social interdiction.¹⁹ Although this definition of *chira* is inadequate, it is a step ahead in the right path to the understanding of the concept. It states that *chira* is a divine punishment which gives the impression that the violated social interdictions are divine. But this definition does not indicate the nature of this divine punishment. Perhaps, this inadequacy is due to the apparent fluid and amorphous nature of *chira*, given that it afflicts in numerous forms, that is, it is manifested in various ways.

Before looking at the next definition of *chira*, let us look at what the Luo word is for a taboo. Both Ogotu²⁰ and Ocholla-Ayayo²¹ have used *kwer* as an equivalent Luo word to taboo. Apparently, the word *kwer*, in its meaning, and in the absence of a better word, is more suitable as a synonym for taboo. The works of both concur that *kwer* means a social interdiction or a forbidden act whose violation results in a misfortune(s). In Ogotu's work, it is said:

The Luo interdictions (*kweche*) and their consequence (*chira*) were meant to foster respect for property, people, the ancestors and Nyasaye.²²

And Ocholla-Ayayo says:

... that *kwer* of higher level implies the offences against the whole nation while *kwer* of lower level implies offences bringing *chira*, sin-consequences, to the individual

or individual and his family as well as to his lineage group.²³

In the above work of Ocholla-Ayayo, there is an instance of erroneous attempt to distinguish *chira* and *kwer* in a very unrelated manner.²⁴ Contrary to the common and agreed understanding of the two concepts, that is, that *chira* results from a violation of *kwer*. Fortunately, the attempted erroneous distinction is corrected by the author.²⁵ However, it should be pointed out that the consequences attributed to both *chira* and *kwer*, despite the mistaken differentiation between the two concepts, are some of the effects (*chira*) generally believed to follow the violation of some taboos, *kwechu* which is the plural of *kwer*. Some of the mentioned effects include the death of children or a child, the cessation to give birth by a woman, long drought, famines epidemics, and extinction of the whole tribe.

It is also important to note that Ocholla-Ayayo's attempt to categorize *kwe* into higher level and lower level is simply an attempt to show that not all taboos have the same degree of seriousness, and hence the difference in extent of effects of their contravention. But an allusion to this idea had been made earlier. And the author seems to concretize the effects of the two levels of *kwer* into one concept *chira* when he states:

According to the Luo, whether at higher level *kwer*, or at lower level *kwer*, by committing a particular offence, a person puts himself and other people in the dangerous situation where *Nyasaye* or *Juok* punishes him and other people related to him.²⁶

Now that we have looked at *kwer* (taboo) and its relationship with *chira*, let us come back to the nature of *chira*, that is, its manifestations. But as has been mentioned

earlier, *chira* manifests itself in many various ways, thus probably, it would be wise to state that no justice can be done by attempting to exhaust its manifestations at this stage, or even trying to exhaust them at all at some other time. Nevertheless, the following quotation, in addition to what has been stated earlier, should be enough to serve our purpose at this stage:

Chira: The supernatural consequences of having broken a taboo - any disease divined as having been caused by the sinful action of the sufferer or one of his kinsfolk, the result of an action which is '*kwer*'. (The disease may take any form - lameness, leprosy, ulcerated wounds, stomach pains).²⁷

So far we have been belabouring to attain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of taboo and its essentials. Attempts have been made to get an all-round grasp of the concept, and on the basis of those attempts, we should try to formulate an operational definition of the concept. And from the ideas that have been presented, the following definition can be inferred which is to be invariably used throughout this work. *A taboo is a social prohibition whose infraction is presumed to automatically result into a misfortune which is extensive and durable to a person, a family, a clan, or a community, and can persist through generations.*

Having formulated the above definition, let us now try to analyse it in order to get to its deeper meaning or its essential implications. Firstly, the definition implies that a misfortune automatically follows a violation of a taboo. The word 'automatically' is used to mean that the origin of the sanction is not clear, that is, whether the punishment is from gods, other spirits or resulting from the inherent quality of a taboo is not explicit. Somehow, it appears to be a mystery. And the word

also means that the misfortune resulting from an infringed taboo is inescapable, unless the required prescribed cleansing rites for averting it are performed.

Again, in the above definition, the misfortune is considered to be 'extensive'. This means that the effects of breaking a taboo are not confined to the infractor alone, but extends to others like the relations of the infractor, and may probably befall a whole community. This misfortune is also considered to be 'durable'. This has the sense that the effects of a violation are long lasting, that is, they are not temporary, and that is why it is believed that they can affect people through generations. Therefore, it is probably due to the mysterious nature of a taboo, the extensiveness and durability of the misfortune that follow its contravention, which make a taboo so dreaded in most cases. For example look at what is said here:

There was nothing more frightening among the traditional Luo people than the knowledge that one was caught by *chira*, "the sickness unto death". *Chira* they maintained, was the primary cause of most suffering and death, wherein rested the root explanation for most forms of misfortune.²⁸

1.3.0 Taboo System: A Common Institution

Ellis regarded the taboo system as peculiar to the natives of the South Seas. Anthropological research has disclosed, however, the presence of comparable ideas and customs among many other primitive peoples and even among those of archaic civilization, so that "taboo" is now a category of almost world-wide application.²⁹

In the above quotation, it is not clear in which sense the term primitive is used. But it appears some races or peoples are isolated from the practice of taboo, or are denied the belief in taboo system. Apparently, taboo system is confined to the so-

called primitive peoples and those of archaic civilizations, whoever they are. However, to say that taboo is now a category of almost world-wide application seems irreconcilable with part of the quotation, or rather we have to ask who are the primitive peoples and those of archaic civilization.

However, all in all, to try to confine the belief in taboos to particular peoples at the moment seems hard to achieve. This is so because apparently in almost every particular period in life, there are some people who are chained to certain customs and beliefs, that is those who follow customs and beliefs without reflection about them, hence may not delve deep into their foundations so that they may decide either to shake them off or retain them. Therefore, it would appear that even within the so-called non-primitive peoples and those of non-archaic civilizations, there could be some people who hold blindly to some customs and beliefs like a belief in taboo system. Thus, to categorize people *en masse* as either those who believe in taboo system or those who do not appear fallacious. Ralph Whitlock seems to have made an accurate observation when he says:

The reader will, it is hoped be inspired to search further and in a quest will arrive at a deeper understanding of human behaviour, primitive still in many respects in spite of its civilized veneer.³⁰

So it is important to note that, however some people would be or claim to be civilized, there is a possibility that in some aspects of life, those people are still primitive and still adhere to some so-called beliefs of the primitive peoples especially in matters that appear to have religious clothing like a belief in taboos. For example, among the Americans and Europeans, just to mention a few, are some people who believe that

number thirteen is an unlucky number.³¹ For any person who believes so, to lodge in a room numbered thirteen (13) would be a taboo, and to violate that would result in a misfortune. There are other practices in the so-called civilized societies which may precisely be termed taboos as outlined for the case of the British Society.³²

It was just mentioned in passing in the beginning of this chapter, and here it is reasserted that the institution of taboo is common to most cultures, if not all cultures. It should be noted that when it was stated that the word taboo was Polynesian in origin, it did not mean that the concept expressed by the word is also Polynesian in origin. So when talking about the widespread of the taboo institution, we are in essence saying that the institution based on the concept is widespread. The concept itself seems to be one of the common components of most human cultures. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 21 (1964), it is stated:

On the other hand, notions very similar to *tabu* are found widespread ethnographically and expressed by a great range of linguistic expressions, as for example in Rhodesia by *tonda* among the Ila and *bwanga* among the Bemba, or *haram* in the Arabic-speaking world.

Again, looking at the book *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, the same idea seems to be expressed. Radcliffe-Brown says of the works of Sir James Fraser.

...but that as a result of his investigations he came to the conclusion that the Polynesian body of practices and beliefs is only one of the number of similar systems of superstition which among many, perhaps all the races of men have contributed in large measure, under many different names and with many variations of detail, to build up the complex fabric of society in all the various sides or elements of it which we describe as religious, social, political, moral and economic.³³

Before Frazer embarked on his research on taboo, there was a common view held by some anthropologists, among others, of that time that the institution of taboo was a preserve of the brown and black races of the Pacific. And here we are trying to widen the scope a bit by attempting to dispel any similar contention by any person, not only the anthropologists and a few others, that the concept of taboo is a matter of only some cultures and not others. Quite a good number of literature point to the contrary. Let us proceed and look at some more literature that stand to support the above view: the view that the concept of taboo is widespread.

William Howells, in his book *The Heathens* subscribes to the idea that the notion of taboo is not alien to most cultures, though the taboo practices may vary from one culture to another:

Tabu, as an idea, is widespread, though few cultures have rendered it into so well formed a doctrine as that of the Hebrews and the Polynesians. It attaches, in one tribe or another, to all sorts of things.³⁴

Following in the same train of thought, Paul Mboya, one of the Luo sages, makes an observation which reinforces the above contention. In the preface to his small book *Richo Ema Kelo Chira*, he states:

Nyasaye noketo libembini e piny eka nomiyogi timbegi,
tukegi, kwergi, kendo nogwedhogigo manomiyo gigo
mor.

This literally means that God put lineages on earth and then gave them their own customs, games, taboos, and blessed these things and made the people happy. Although the translation might not be very accurate, what is expressed, in other words, is that God gave to each lineage its practices, games, taboos, through which a lineage is made

happy since he blessed these things. But as to whether it is true that these things were given to people by God; this is not the right moment to try and argue that out. It is dealt with in detail somewhere else in this work.

In a nutshell, it is being said that the concept of taboo is pervasive and it is expressed in different linguistic expressions in different cultures. And in addition, even the taboo practices are different. But that the idea or the principles underlying the various linguistic expressions and practices appear to be the same.

The few works we have looked at and those we are about to come across associate taboos with either God or ancestral spirits. But this association requires us to try and establish how these interdictions were attained from God. Furthermore, the issue of God's existence must be attended to, though here, we are more interested in the Luo justification for their belief in the existence of God. The classical proofs for the existence of God have never been without contest.³⁵ So we are interested in whether the Luo justification for the belief in God's existence is in the same line with the classical and thus subject to the same criticisms, or whether it is different, and if so, are their justifications logically convincing or not.

Another issue we have to address ourselves to, is whether people survive death.³⁶ It is also often suggested that taboos originated from the ancestors and that they are their custodians. But again we are to establish the justification for the Luo belief in the *life after death*. We are not just interested in establishing their justification, but also to critically examine them. Furthermore, if granted that taboos originate from the

ancestors, we have still to try to find out why whatever they practised and wished, should be honoured and perpetuated.

Also very essential to the whole of this work, is the principle of causality. We have to address ourselves to this fundamental principle for this work. It is believed that a violation of taboos causes a misfortune. If that is granted then it is very vital for the understanding of the institution of taboos that we understand the nature of connection between the violation of a taboo and the misfortune that is believed to follow. When dealing with the principle of causality, we have to distinguish between a necessary condition and a sufficient condition for the consequential occurrence. For example, to say that X causes Y, we have to establish whether X is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of Y, or whether X is simply a necessary condition for the occurrence of Y. Cause in the system of taboos can never be identified with a necessary condition but a sufficient condition. For example, there can never be fire where there is no oxygen. That means that oxygen is necessary for fire i.e. for there to be fire, there must be oxygen. But it is not scientifically necessarily true to say that oxygen causes fire. But oxygen is just one of the causal factors for the occurrence of fire. The occurrence of fire requires a sufficient condition which means that for fire to be, there must be all the necessary conditions, but not simply one or two necessary conditions. So from the foregoing argument, 'cause' in a taboo system appears to be identified with sufficient condition which is the sum of all necessary conditions.³⁷

Therefore, for us to claim that a contravention of a taboo causes a misfortune, we have to establish that a violation is a sufficient condition for whatever misfortune so-claimed to follow. However, at this stage, let us proceed to examine the origin of taboos.

NOTES

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28. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
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30. Ralph Whitlock, *In Search of Lost Gods: A Guide to British Folklore* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1979), p. 9.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-97.

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CHAPTER TWO

TABOO AND SUPERNATURALISM

In this chapter and the next, attempts are made to develop and analyse further some of the issues that came out in our attempt to define the concept of a taboo. One of the issues is the linkage of the meaning of a taboo with the idea of either supernatural, mysticism, or other non-human involvement. We observed in chapter one that the involvement of the non-human powers seems to be central in the meaning of a taboo. 'Non-human' is used here in the sense that it refers to anything which is perceived as capable of involvement in the taboo operations other than the people living in the physical world.

At this juncture we should ask ourselves what this non-human power could be. But as indicated by the title we would like to look at the role of supernatural beings in the taboo system. Supernaturalism is used here to refer to the belief in the existence of beings independent of the laws of nature.

Under supernaturalism we would be dealing with two categories of supernatural beings, that is, (i) God and (ii) the human spirits. These two categories are the ones generally believed to be involved in the daily life of the living people. Therefore, if anything, then either of the two is likely to be involved in the taboo system. We are not asserting that either of them is involved in the operations of taboos, but we are saying that if it is believed that there is some supernatural involvement in the operations of taboos, then it would only be highly probable or sensible to talk of either of the two.

As we saw in the various definitions, the meaning of a taboo is somewhat strongly attached to the idea of supernatural beings. Some of the definitions point out explicitly to the involvement of either God or ancestral spirits. For example, Paul Mboya states that the taboos originated from God.¹ Gilbert E.M. Ogotu's work also supports the view that either God or ancestral spirits are involved in the taboo practice. In his work, it is stated that taboos were from God, and are under the custody of the ancestors, and whose violation is punished by God and ancestral spirits:

In all these, the point being emphasized is the importance the Luo attach to social mores which they believe were given to their ancestors by God, and taken care of by the ancestors. Violation of a custom led to more troubles and the punishment was believed to come direct from God.²

In the same work, it is expressed that the Luo believed in the intervention of the ancestral spirits to ensure that people lived upright according to the customs, and that the contravention of the customs was punished by these ancestral spirits:

Like good guardians they made sure the living led upright lives by obeying the customs of the community and observing the interdictions.³

McVeigh, in his book *God in Africa* also presents a view that supports the position that a contravention of the African customs is an offence against the whole community including the ancestors who are believed to be the custodians of the African customs:

Anyone who fails to abide by the tribal mores is an offender not only against the living members of the society, but the entire community, composed of both the living and the dead. Indeed they thereby commit a special

crime against the ancestors whose task is to look after the welfare of all. ⁴

The involvement of God and the ancestral spirits in the operations of taboos as believed by the Luo is amply summarised by Ogotu:

The ethical sanctions did not only concern the ancestors but *Nyasaye* as well. Whenever one was seen contravening a customary law, the Luo did not reprimand him saying that the ancestors would punish him but that God would. God gave the forefathers a code and it was upon the ancestors to make sure the living obeyed the laws and customs. Failure to observe the customs was punished by *chira*. ⁵

The work by Ocholla-Ayayo also points to the involvement of supernatural beings, particularly God and the ancestors:

If the procedure was not followed it was believed to bring *chira*, which entails supernatural consequences to the village because of an act contrary to customary laws. ⁶

The ancestor may also invoke *chira* on the lineage of the party who breaks the contract of a child marriage Nyar Osiep... ⁷

The relationship between *Nyasaye* and man is asymmetric. Man must give *Nyasaye* his due respects, honour, praise and keep his constant sacrifices, follow rules and law of the society, for the law and rules of the society are his law and taboo. ⁸

If *Nyasaye* is wronged by a person's failure to give him his due respect, honour and sacrifices, or by his breaking the law, custom or tradition of the society he withholds his blessing and prosperity to man. ⁹

From the above quotations from the work of Ocholla-Ayayo, it comes out clearly that the Luo are presented as believing that taboos, among other customary practices, come

from God, and that their violations are wrongs against God and ancestors.

So far it can be seen that the belief in the involvement of God and ancestors in the taboo practice of African cultures in general and Luo culture specifically, presupposes the existence of both God and ancestral spirits. However, at this moment we would like to ask some questions, for example, how is the belief in the existence of God and ancestral spirits justifiable? How did or could the Luo have got their cultural practices which include the taboos from either God or ancestors? How are the sanctions against the taboo violations enforced?

But before we try to answer some of these questions, we would like to start by looking at the justification for the belief in the existence of God from the general philosophical argumentations. Then we would look at the general philosophical argumentations on the belief in either the immortality or survival of death. Thereafter, we would move on to analyse the Luo belief in the existence of God and either the immortality of the soul or survival after death.

When dealing with the general philosophical argumentations on belief in God, we would like to approach it from two perspectives, that is, the existential approach and the conceptual approach. The existential approach deals with arguments which presuppose that God exists, and are therefore only concerned with expounding some pieces of evidence to support the belief in the existence of God, while the conceptual approach deals with various ways that attempt to grasp God as a concept; that is, it analyses the intelligibility of the concept God.

2.1.0 The Existential Approach

As we have seen, this approach deals with arguments which basically attempt to justify that God exists. And as has been mentioned, they deal with pieces of evidence which are to confirm or imply that God exists. These arguments are often termed the traditional proofs or classical proofs for God's existence. But because there are a lot of written works on these proofs, we would not like to belabour much with them. So we would simply analyse them briefly to enable our discussion on God's existence to be consistent.

2.1.1 Ontological Argument

This argument was first formulated by Saint Anselm (1033-1109 A.D.) who was a theologian and philosopher. He was born in Aosta in the Italian Alps. He is famous for his attempt to prove the existence of God through reason.

Anselmian proof of God's existence is based on the human understanding. He said that we have an idea of a perfect being, and that this is what we mean by God. This idea is a being greater than which cannot be conceived:

God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived
- That which can be conceived not to exist is not God. ¹⁰

Anselm argues that for a being to be perfect, the being must exist both in the mind and in reality, that is, must exist outside the mind. And such a being must exist necessarily, otherwise 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' can still be conceived. For a being that exists accidentally is a lesser being than that which exists necessarily.

To Anselm, a being that exists in the mind alone is less perfect than that which

exists in reality. So he concludes that the greatest being that can be conceived must exist both in reality and in the mind. Therefore, God exists in reality.¹¹

The ontological argument was majorly criticized by a French catholic monk Gaunilo (or Wenilo), who argued that Anselm's argument could lead to absurd conclusions. Gaunilo argued that we can conceive of the most perfect Island than which no more perfect island can be conceived. But to infer, that since we have the understanding of this most excellent island therefore it exists in reality as well because it is too excellent to exist in understanding along, is absurd.

You can no longer doubt that this island which is more excellent than all lands exists somewhere, since you have no doubt that it is in your understanding. And since it is more excellent not to be in the understanding alone, but to exist both in the understanding and in reality, for this reason it must exist. For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so the island already understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent.¹²

The bone of contention in Gaunilo's criticism and which most people support is that, going by Anselm's line of argument, we can deduce the existence of a being, or anything for that matter, from merely having an idea of that thing. And this is basically what Anselmian proof does. It deduces God's existence in reality from the mere thought of him as the most perfect being, 'a being greater than which none greater can be conceived'. Anselm does not show how God exists both in the mind and in reality. Thus he does not show or prove the greatness of God. If Anselm's proposition that greatness of a being depends on the existence of that being both in the mind and in reality, or outside the mind, then God's greatness could only be accepted

if it is proved that he exists both in the mind and outside the mind. But since this has not been proved, then God's greatness and existence in reality has not been proved. Therefore, as per now, God's existence remains in the mind alone.¹³

Anselm's argument somehow alludes to the idea of an objective absolute perfection of god. But the idea of perfection seems to be relative. It is a human evaluation and judgement and it does not appear possible that there is any existent about whose absolute perfection all people would agree. So when Anselm talks of a most perfect, it becomes difficult to ascertain whether all people would agree that that being is actually the most perfect being.

Anselm also asserts that God's existence must be conceived necessarily. But here we have to ask for the essential properties of God by which it can be conceived. Given what God is understood to be, it seems that God does not possess any essential attributes by which it may be conceived. Hence, it appears that God cannot be conceived which is contrary to Anselm's assumption. Ironically Anselm was aware of the impossibility of understanding God as it is:

Anselm answers that we cannot speak of God directly and as He is in Himself, but we can speak of Him by way of analogies and images (*'per aliquam similitudinem aut imaginem'*). This knowledge of God is indirect since we know him through something other than Him and we do not see Him as He is in Himself... this (divine) nature is ineffable since it is inexpressible by words or any other means...¹⁴

Saint Thomas Aquinas also objects to the Anselmian argument, especially its assumption that God can be defined. Aquinas points out to what we have tried to question, that is, can we have a grasp at God's essences? But Aquinas seems to say that

it is not possible to have that knowledge.

The argument begins with a definition of God; but this implies that we have an understanding of God's essence or real nature: a definition, in the tradition of Aristotle, reveals or makes plain the essence of the thing defined. If, for instance, I define man as a "rational animal", then I am trying to show what man essentially is. But how can we pretend to have genuine knowledge of God's essence.¹⁵

So what we are pointing out is that, the conceptualization has more to do with abstraction especially if it is a conceptualization of an existent. For an existent, such an abstraction requires objectivity so that its existence is not a subject of dispute for most people if not all people. And this is not the case with God.

Therefore, it would appear agreeable with Gaunilo's objections to Anselmian proof when he asserts that some people cannot conceive God but his non-existence.¹⁶ Thus ontological argument as we have seen in our discussion is fallacious and it does not prove that God exists. It has failed and what remains of it is to support the contention that, so far, God remains a metaphysical phantom.¹⁷

Before concluding this ontological discussion of God, we would like to remark that Anselm believed in God before he attempted a proof of its existence. It appears that his primary objective was not to prove that God exists, but to justify his own belief in God. For his attempt presupposes God's existence which he had believed in. Therefore, ontological proof would appear to have been meant for others to show them that what Anselm and some others believed in was a real existing God:

He said that man should accept faith first, then use reason to gain a deeper understanding.¹⁸

2.1.2 Cosmological Argument

This argument was advanced by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274 A.D.) who was born in Italy. He was a catholic theologian and philosopher. He was educated under Benedictine and Dominican monks and at the Universities of Naples, Paris, and Cologne.

He was a great follower and admirer of Aristotle. No doubt his argument for the existence of God was greatly influenced by Aristotle's idea of God as the Unmoved Mover. No wonder the cosmological argument is often called the first cause argument. Aquinas offered the famous Five Ways which make up the cosmological argument. But all these are based on one and the same principle, the principle of sufficient reason which simply states that there must be a sufficient reason for every positive truth.¹⁹

One of the Aquinean five ways is explicitly based on the principle of causation. Aquinas argued that every effect has an efficient cause and that there is nothing which is uncaused. So the chain of causation moves backwards finally to the uncaused cause. This uncaused cause is the Prime Cause, which causes itself, and this is what is referred to as God.

The second way is based on the concepts of change and movement. He argues that change and movements are realities. But whatever changes or moves does not change or move itself. He seems to be implying that there is nothing like self-change or self-motion, but that any change or motion requires, at least, an agent. But an agent also requires another agent, and the regression forms a series of agents. But in the final analysis, there must be a beginning of all these change actions. And this beginning is

the prime mover which is God.

The third way is based on the concepts of necessity and contingency of beings. Aquinas argues that the vast majority of beings in the universe are contingent beings whose existence are restricted to particular points in time. Due to that, there must be in time when there were no beings except a being whose existence is necessary. This necessary being was the start of the contingent beings. Therefore, without the existence of the necessary being, the existence of the contingent beings would have not been. And this necessary being is God.

The fourth way is based on the principle of gradation or graduation. This concept of gradation has been used as a paradigm for comparison in the order of good-better-best. Aquinas argues that in the universe there are degrees of things. Some things are perceived to be better than others. But there must be the final one which is the best or the most perfect. And this most perfect thing in the universe is what is called God.

The fifth way is based on the principle of purposefulness or in other words, it is based on a teleological principle. This way holds that everything in the universe seems to be projected towards an end. This implies that the existence of things are not purposeless. But that which gives purpose is God:

Therefore, Thomas concludes that there is something which causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfection they have. And this we call 'God'.²⁰

However, this cosmological argument has not been spared criticisms. One of the general criticisms is in regard to the application of the principle of causality in its

explanation. Aquinas, in his attempt to logically explain God's existence, has operated under an assumption that nothing can be without a cause. Therefore, everything in the universe must have a cause. And he also holds that the possibility of a regression *ad infinitum* is absurd. Therefore, he concludes, these must be the first cause. But when Aquinas suggests of a first cause he, in essence, admits explicitly that there is something which is not subject to the principle of causality. In other words, he admits that there is at least a thing to which the principle of causality does not apply. This realization comes in anticipation of the question; what was the cause of the first cause? Further still, we can ask; why must something be exempted from the influence of the principle of causality especially if it is used for justifying its existence? David Hume, Bertrand Russell, and others have argued strongly against the validity of this argument for the first cause:

If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so that there cannot be any validity in that argument. ²¹

What the above quotation seems to point at, is that if there can be something without a cause, then there is nothing logically that points out that it must be God. In that line, we have no reason to assume or argue that the universe cannot be without a cause. It can as well be without a cause just like the Aquinean God. The universe could be eternal as well, and hence does not require the first cause. Therefore, we have to content ourselves with the logical argument that, so far, the Aquinean argument has not advanced any sufficient reason that would eliminate the possibility of the universe being without a cause.

Another thing that we would also object to in the cosmological argument is to assert that the first cause is necessarily God. But as we have seen there is no sufficient reason which indicates that the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause, or the unchanged 'changer', or the prime mover, must necessarily be God. Therefore, we suggest that the mere fact that something starts everything, in case there is such a thing, does not necessarily make it God.

So as has been pointed out earlier, Aquinas does not accept the possibility of an infinite regression of causes. He maintains that to accept an infinite regression is absurd. However, we would like to note here that even the termination of the regression is as absurd as the acceptance of the infinite regression, that is, regression *ad infinitum*, since there is no reason for the termination of the regression.²² Moreover, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the human mind to conceive an uncaused cause or an infinite being for that matter, so much that, to claim its conceptualization appears absurd.

Aquinas' contention that there is no possibility of self-motion or self-change is also disputable. He seems not to conceive of a possibility of self-change or self-motion which could be purely due to the very nature of a certain thing. However, some movements and changes appear to originate from the very things that undergo changes or movements as a result of their very nature. Let us take, as an example, the process of growth of living things. This process is due to cell multiplications which is purely due to the very nature of the cells. It is also interesting to note that the very process of growth can be altered or stopped by man, in some cases, for example, take the case

of a plant. The growth of a plant can be stopped simply by putting it under certain conditions not conducive to its cell multiplications. And as a result it will not grow or it might die. Let us take again, as an example, the case of air. What would we say to be the cause of the movement of air? We would think that air is by nature in motion. This is due to the very nature of air molecules which are by nature in motion. So again how do we bring in the idea of the chain of agents here? Therefore, it would appear that contrary to Aquinas' belief that there is no self-change or self-motion, there are in fact quite a number of things in the universe which appear capable of self-change or self-motion. Hence, there are certain cases where we do not see the necessity of agents in the process of either change or motion.

Again, Aquinas argues that the very presence of contingent beings in the universe logically presupposes the existence of a necessary being from which all the contingent beings originated. But we would like to point out that this does not appear correct. It is very possible to think only of the existence of contingent beings without dragging in the idea of a necessary being. Therefore, the mere presence of contingent beings in the universe does not logically imply the existence of the necessary being, which to Aquinas must also be God.²³ Moreover, even if there would be a necessary being, why must it necessarily be God.

Coming to the fourth way which is on gradation, Aquinas argues that since there are degrees of perfection of things or beings, there must exist the most perfect of all things which to him is God. But we would like to register our first objection in regard to the concept of perfection (best). Perfection is a human judgement about

things. But different people may judge a particular thing differently depending on what factors they consider to constitute perfection. In other words, what we are saying is that different people use different standards for judgements or evaluation, and this makes judgement to be a very relative process. But then what is Aquinas' standard or point of reference? And whatever the paradigm, is it acceptable to everybody?

But even if it is granted that there is a possibility of grading beings in the order of the good-better-best in terms of perfection or in terms of nobility, we should have in mind that in the universe there are different categories of things or beings. In this case the gradation should be intra-categories for it to make sense. By categories we mean different groups of things or beings, for example, human beings is a category, and non-human beings are also grouped into different categories, for example, plants, other animals, stones, and others. Therefore, our intra-category graduation would yield the 'most perfect' thing for every category. This would mean that there would be as many 'most perfect' beings or things, but which are incomparable as the categories. In such a case, which most perfect being or thing would be God? It would therefore, seem not to make sense, logically speaking, that a conception of the most perfect being is necessarily a conception of a God.

Aquinas also argues that looking at the world, it portrays some sense of purposefulness. To him, observed bodies seem to obey the natural laws in a very regular and ordered manner which truly show that they tend to a goal. Therefore, everything in the world seems to be having a purpose which cannot be adequately explained by natural teleology, but through someone with understanding, and this we

call God. This assumption of goal for everything appears difficult to comprehend. It is hard to determine that nothing can exist in the universe without a purpose. For example, it may be asked; what could be either the purpose of the earth or the universe itself? Or what is the purpose of human existence? It would appear that human existence has no purpose; neither has the existence of the universe.

Again it seems that the idea of purposefulness is tied up with the human thinking. Man prescribes purpose to things. But some things in themselves may not necessarily have a purpose in their existence. Therefore, it appears untrue to assert or even to assume that everything that exists in the universe has a purpose. Furthermore, for anybody to assert that everything that exists has a purpose presupposes, out of logical necessity, the knowledge of every purpose for every existent, otherwise there is no sufficient reason or any other reason, for the assertion that everything has a purpose.

We should also note that the idea of purpose seems to imply that the existence of things is just a means to an end. In that sense, every existence is just a means towards the attainment of the purpose. But if that supposition be granted, then we have to object to the idea of purpose since it does not appear true that every existence is a means and not necessarily an end in itself.

Therefore, from our discussion of the cosmological argument it comes out strongly that this argument for the existence of God is invalid, hence fails to show or prove that God exists.

2.1.3 Argument From Design

This argument holds that a look at the universe shows a wonderful organization. The universe seems to operate on regular order and that everything in the universe seems to fit very well. This argument is sometimes called teleological argument, and it is very empirical in its approach. According to this argument, the universe is a complicated system where each and every part plays a fitting role within the system without any mistake at all.²⁴

But such a marvellous organization, so the argument goes, could not have been by chance; it must have been designed by a superb designer.

This argument is associated with William Paley (1743-1805 A.D.) who, in his book *Natural Theology, or Evidence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearance of Nature* (1802), compares the universe with a watch. He argues that, assuming you have never seen a watch, then you come across it in a desert, your first inference is that the watch is an artifact - the work of art:

If we found a watch in a sandy waste we would never suppose that its existence and structure were the result of chance, even if we had never seen a watch before. Instead we would at once infer that it has been deliberately made by some intelligent being. God is thus compared with a watch maker. ²⁵

Paley goes ahead and says that even human beings are works of art whereby the body is the complicated system. Every organ or part of the body works so harmoniously with other parts of the body, and to Paley, that cannot be by chance. There must be an artist. But who is the artist? To Paley, the artist of the universe is God who is the

supreme intelligence who designed the universe.

However, this argument has also been subjected to some strong criticisms. The first criticism, just as we had mentioned earlier, is that this argument presupposes the beginning of the universe. It works with the assumption that at some time in the past there was no universe. Then it was designed by God. But as we had pointed out also, there is no reason or sufficient reason why the universe must never be eternal, that is, without a beginning and end. And if it is possible that the universe can be eternal, then there is no reason why it must have had a designer-God.

David Hume who is the main critic of this argument does not see why, even if granted that the universe must have a designer, that designer must be God. In other words, he does not see why the designer must just have the attributes of God.²⁶ Furthermore, we have to disagree with Paley on his analogy of the watch and human body on one side and the universe on the other side. It does not appear an appropriate analogy because, when it comes to a watch and human body, we are able to observe and examine exhaustively the watch and the human body in such a way that we cannot do with the universe. There are still a lot of things we cannot comprehend about the universe, unlike the watch and human body. This argument assumes the absolute knowledge of the universe like the watch, which is false.

Again many people would not agree that the world or universe is orderly as Paley and other protagonists of the argument from design would want us to believe. Only certain aspects of the universe would be perceived as orderly while some would be perceived as disorderly. For example, some people would argue that some

catastrophic events like drought, floods, and earthquakes are some aspects of the universe that portray it as disorderly. Just like Bertrand Russell does not accept that the world or universe is orderly, hence it would appear that this argument from design only assumes order:

When you came to look into this argument from design, it is almost astonishing thing that people can believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience have been able to produce in millions of years. I really cannot believe it. Do you think that, if you were granted omnipotence and omniscience and million of years in which to perfect your world, you could produce nothing better than the Ku Klux Klan or the Fascists? ²⁷

Therefore again, this argument from design does not logically, or in any other way, prove that God exists. God is perceived as super-intelligence or a supreme or superb designer, but on a slight reflection, we would or may discover that it is almost impossible if not impossible for us, with deficiency in our ability to understand or know, to have the knowledge of the perfection of the perfect or the most intelligent being - God. Thus we cannot assert with certainty that there is something that exist and which is called God.

2.1.4 The Moral Argument

This argument was advanced by a great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 A.D.) who was a thinker of knowledge about many subjects. He was born in Konigsberg, Germany. He became a Professor of Logic and Metaphysics. He believed in the existence of God. ²⁸

Kant did not believe that God could be known by speculative reason but that it could only be experienced through the moral faculty of practical reason. So the belief in God is founded in the moral nature of man. Kant had objected to the ontological argument of Anselm because its proposition was that God's existence cannot be denied which in other words, implied that God's existence is self-evident. However Kant argued that only analytical propositions cannot be denied. But since all questions of existence are synthetic and not analytical, all of them can be denied without contradiction, thus God's existence can be denied:

But Kant does deny, as on the critical hypothesis he is bound to do, that existence can conceivably form part of any concept of anything; for he is committed to the view that for us at least existence or actuality has no determinate meaning except in relation to possible experience, that is ultimately to sense perception... Thus if the existence of God is to be proved at all, it must be shown to be a condition of possible experience, that is as synthetically connected with our actual perception of phenomena. It can never be demonstrated by pure reason alone. ²⁹

Kant also criticized the cosmological argument due to its use of the idea of a necessary being which essentially means that the proposition 'God exists' becomes necessarily true. But this is similar to the ontological argument which he had criticized:

namely that the concept of first cause as itself a term in the phenomenal series is not required by and is even inconsistent with the demands of the understanding; whereas the postulation of it as outside the series is the postulation of the existence of a determinate thing in itself. But the thing in itself cannot be known, since it cannot be given in sense perception, and therefore its existence can never be demonstrated synthetically. Hence

the demonstration of the existence of a transcendent first cause can be achieved only by pure reason, that is falling back on the ontological argument which has already been discredited.³⁰

Furthermore, Kant objected to the cosmological use of the concept of cause which he stated is a matter of human experience and logic. He emphasized that our experience and logic must be confined to "our space-time continuum". So he concluded that we cannot logically transcend our spatial world, the realm of this our common sense world and attain any degree of certainty. Thus it is not justifiable both in our observable world and the realm beyond to infer the efficient cause from the impossibility of the infinite regression. But this is exactly what the cosmological argument does.³¹

After having rejected the validity of both the ontological and cosmological arguments, Kant formulated his moral argument for God's existence which implied the moral necessity of God. According to this argument, man through the moral law aspires for the highest good which is happiness. But this highest good can only be attained when man's moral law is harmonized with nature. And since man is not the creator of nature, he is not able to obtain a complete harmony with nature:

his will cannot by its own strength bring nature as it touches on his happiness, into complete harmony with his practical principles.³²

Therefore, according to Kant, it appears that man must be happy and if man must be happy, then God must exist. But since man is not able to make himself happy without the aid of God, Kant assumed that God then must exist, since only then can man acquire his most desired goal-happiness. Kant also assumed that the moral law,

which directs man towards his highest good, comes from God:

If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is one to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed ... If the cause of these emotions does not belong in this visible world, the object ... must be Supernatural and Divine. ³³

According to the moral argument it would appear that God must exist to balance out right and wrong in the sense of distributing reward and punishment. It seems that it is the soul which is subject to the greatest goodness. But this good would appear attainable in the realm beyond this world, otherwise it would be hard to understand why Kant ties the moral rules with the immortality of the soul which is commonly understood to refer to personal existence after the physical death.

However, this moral argument seems to have weaknesses as well. For example, we could object to the assumption that moral rules are from God. It is undeniable fact that moral rules are social conventions formulated out of the social needs for the harmonious social life. Moreover, not all would agree on what is morally right or morally wrong. People are socialized into believing that certain acts are morally wrong and others are morally right. So, matters of morality are social. For example, if there would be only one person in the universe, it would never make sense for him to talk or bother with morals.³⁴ Moral rules are to regulate the inter-personal relations. If it is granted that moral rules do originate from God, then for this single person in the universe for whom the issue of morality does not apply the issue of God would not arise too. But if we accept that God exists on the basis of the presence of moral conscience, then for the single person in the universe God would not exist. Hence it

would be absurd that God would exist only for a collectivity of people and not for an individual. Kant holds that the very existence of moral rules presupposes the existence of God, but here is a case whereby moral rules never arise, thus God's existence cannot be derived from the mere fact that people have moral conscience.

Another objection to this argument has been advanced by Bertrand Russell. He argues that, if the difference between right and wrong is due to God's order or fiat, then for God himself the distinction does not apply. God can, therefore, not be described as good:

If you are going to say, as theologians do, that God is good, you must then say that right and wrong have some meaning which is independent of God's fiat, because God's fiat are good and not bad independently of the mere fact that he made them. ³⁵

Russell's argument appears valid. If God is to be judged as good, then there must be some standard independent of God by which it is judged. Nevertheless, even if it is accepted that we know what is right and wrong because God exist, what is the mode of transmission of this knowledge? And if it is through human conscience as has been hinted, and as is commonly believed, then what is the difference between knowledge from God and that from a human being? But all in all, the knowledge of right and wrong appears to emanate from human reflections, and not from any other source. There is no reason to believe that what is right is so because God wants it to be so, and vice versa. We do not know what is right or wrong from God.

Moreover, the idea that the knowledge of right and wrong presupposes God's existence still raises some controversies. It is undeniable that quite often we come

across variations on what is considered right or wrong among different societies. And even within a particular society there is variation over time. That is, we may find that some time in the past a certain act was considered right or wrong in a particular society, and thereafter we find that this changed. So that what was either right or wrong at one time is no longer so. But even among different societies, we find that there is no universal knowledge on what is either right or wrong. We are saying that, a particular act need not necessarily be either right or wrong in all human societies. But if we grant that the knowledge of what is right or wrong is from God, we would then conclude or infer that what is right or wrong to God varies among different societies or within a particular society. However, such an inference would be absurd, since it implies that there is no single thing or act which is either right or wrong for God consistently over time and among all people. And that would mean that nothing is either essentially right or wrong according to God. Therefore, nothing is either right or wrong in itself. Hence nothing is either right or wrong according to God, otherwise, it would also be either right or wrong for all people.

What we are trying to point out is that given that there is ethical relativism or moral relativism, to assert that the knowledge of what is right or wrong comes from God is absurd because it would mean that according to God, an act may be right to a particular people (society) or a period of time, and at the same time the same particular act is wrong for a different people (society) or a certain period of time. This means that an act can be right and wrong for God at the same time which is a contradiction. Therefore, it is absurd to believe that the knowledge of right or wrong comes from

God. But if the knowledge of right or wrong must either come from God or man, and as we have seen, it is not possible for it to come from God, then logically, the knowledge of right or wrong must come from man.

Again to argue that for there to be justice in the world, there must be God who rewards, which is another aspect of the moral argument, is hard to accept. This aspect of moral argument holds that God must exist to reward right acts and punish wrong acts. But this reward-thesis presupposes justice in the life hereafter (after death). We should always remember that Kant, in some way, tied the issue of moral rules to the belief in the immortality of the soul. At this point we would like to pose some questions based on the assumption that God is the enforcer of justice; why is it common that most good people suffer, and the wicked people prosper? Can't God enforce justice in this part of the universe, that is, the world in which we live? But if God will only enforce justice in the realm beyond, as some people may argue, then does it imply that there are some parts of the universe which are not under God's jurisdiction? And if that is admissible then again the idea of God is absurd.

Therefore, on the basis of our discussion based on the idea of right and wrong, we cannot validly argue that there must be God who judges what is right or wrong, or who metes out justice on the basis of right and wrong:

Here we find in this world a great deal of injustice, and so far as that goes that is a reasoning for supposing that justice does not rule in the world; and therefore so far, as it goes it affords a moral argument against deity and not in favour of one. ³⁶

This quotation seems to answer an implicit question. What is the use of God in the

face of injustice in the world? Or in other words, what has God to do with right or wrong? But as we have said there is no reason to imply that the moral conscience of right or wrong is not from purely human reflection, but from God. Therefore, we cannot logically infer the existence of God from our sense of right or wrong. Thus the Kantian Moral Argument for the existence of God, like the others that we have discussed, does not hold. It is invalid.

2.1.5 Personal-Encounter Approach

This approach includes some of the experiences which are logically difficult to discern. It includes such experiences like visions and miracles. Or, in other words, it is a revelational approach. Under this approach we would like to basically analyse the claim that God can be revealed through such experiences like visions and miracles among others. But before we attempt to discuss this approach let us try to get the meanings of the basic concepts involved in this approach.

a) Revelation

According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, a revelation is an act of communicating divine truth especially God's disclosure or manifestation of himself or of his will to man.³⁷ But what are some of these acts through which God is revealed? Some people have argued that God's self-revelation is normally, and not only, either through visions, miracles or dreams.

b) Miracle

Again, according to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, a miracle is an extraordinary event taken to manifest the supernatural power of God fulfilling his purpose or it is an event or effect in the physical world which deviates from the laws of nature.³⁸ However, Saint Augustine (354-430A.D.) is more precise and rather more objective than the ordinary understanding of miracle. According to Saint Augustine's definition which is described as a scholarly definition:

A miracle is an occurrence which is contrary to what is known of nature.³⁹

NOTE: The emphasis is mine.

As we have mentioned this Augustinian definition is more objective and realistic in the sense that it admits and takes into consideration the fact of human limitation in the realm of knowledge. Augustine recognizes the fact that what is known of nature is limited and that there is a possibility of the growth of knowledge rendering what is now considered a miracle non-miracle. So what is a miracle is relative and is only a miracle as per the present limit of our knowledge; but as the limit of our knowledge expands, some of what are miracles cease to be miracles.

c) Vision

This concept as well is defined by *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* as something seen otherwise than by ordinary sight; an imaginary, supernatural, or prophetic sight beheld in sleep or ecstasy especially one that conveys a revelation. This book goes further to state that a vision is a direct mystical awareness of the

supernatural, usually invisible form.

However, the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion* gives a rather more detailed account of vision. In this book, T.C. O'Brien has given a meaning of vision in a more wider sense.

A vision by definition may be classified as "preternatural i.e. occurring as to manner and-or content outside the normal course or range of human knowing ... The nature of the visionary's experience, finally, may be purely "internal" a vision in the imagination or mind of the beholder, whether sleeping, awake, or in rapture; the vision may be "outside" in the way. ⁴⁰

d) Analysis

After having attempted brief definitions of the concepts revelation, miracle and vision, we can then try to analyse them. The meaning of a miracle as we have seen, presupposes God's existence. We say so because to evaluate and interpret an event in order to come to the conclusion that the event implies some supernatural power, especially God, depends on the belief that some supernatural power exists. In other words, it seems almost impossible to attribute supernatural power to anything unless one believes in the existence of such powers ... So what we are saying is that for any event to have any supernatural interpretation presupposes the belief in the existence of some supernatural existents. Therefore, it appears that what is commonly done in such interpretations is to harmonize the event with the belief. And according to the dictionary definition given above it is stated that a miracle is an extraordinary event taken to show God's power. Then the question we would like to ask is: Why take the

event to manifest the power of God? Why give the event a 'Godly interpretation? It becomes clear under the context of our discussion that to take an event as a miracle presupposes the existence of God. But if that is the case, then miracles do not logically point towards the existence of God. And to argue so would be fallacious:

However this account of miracles presuppose that God exists, and hence it cannot be used as a premise in a proof of his existence. ⁴¹

Furthermore, we have to point out that it is rather difficult if not impossible to have a general consensus on what is to be considered 'extraordinary'. For example, when is an event extraordinary? Some would say that an event is miraculous when it does not conform to the laws of nature. But how do we know that it does not conform to the laws of nature? However, for us to answer this question, sensibly, we have to assume that we have the absolute knowledge of all the laws of nature. This requirement is necessary, otherwise we can never be certain that a particular event does not conform to the laws of nature, or to be more precise, to any law of nature. Some events may conform to the laws of nature, but due to our ignorance about some of those laws, we make unwarranted conclusion that that event is extraordinary. Therefore, what we are alluding to is that some events would only be miracles due to our ignorance of natural laws in operation. For example, to some people even their own growth is a miracle. When after some time they discover that they have grown or undergone remarkable changes, they consider that a miracle. Moreover, there could be some people in this present century who still consider the cosmic shift of day and night a miracle or even the flight of an aircraft. Just to give one more common

example; some people have cited cases of people who were considered dead but suddenly came back to life, or became alive again. But our question here would be: how did they ascertain that a particular person in question was or had actually died? Could it not be that such a person was just in a coma? So what we are suggesting is that such a person could not have been clinically dead.

We therefore conclude our comment on miracles by suggesting that even if some events remain or be miracles to us today because we cannot naturally explain them now, that does not mean that they must remain extraordinary for all future generations. Here, we would somehow agree with St. Augustine's observations that what is considered a miracle is just what is seen as contrary to what is known of nature.⁴² So what is considered a miracle now must not necessarily remain a miracle for us in future, or for other future generations. But even if they be miracles for all the future generations, that alone does not imply that therefore God exists.

Coming to visions, we again argue against it as we have done against miracles; that to have a vision of God presupposes God's existence. How a particular vision is interpreted depends on a particular framework of belief. And in this context, the interpretation of a vision depends on one's belief in the existence of God. This point is supported by T.C. O'Brien who rightly points out that a visionary experience may purely be 'internal' in which case it becomes an imaginative or a mental construction, and for it to be seen as indicating God's existence, one must have the notion or an idea of God. This observation also applies to an 'outside' visionary experience. This criticism is further strengthened by the fact that the so-called visions or miracles can

be ordinarily explained by some people, and these explanations need not necessarily be embedded with the idea of God.⁴³

Therefore, in conclusion, the claim that one may have a personal encounter with God does not hold. Interestingly enough nobody knows what God is. Most of the claims about the encounter with God are strictly speaking encounters with some unique experiences but which are deliberately given the God-explanations. But God has never been encountered in the real sense. Only when most people have some experiences which are strange to them, then they claim that those experiences show that there is God, and for some people, those unique experiences are experiencing of God directly. But we are stating that the mere fact that an experience is unusual or extraordinary for that matter, does not offer a logical necessity for the existence of God. Thus even the argument that we can personally encounter God does not show that God exists. Moreover, a revelation is a very subjective experience whose truth cannot be established; in other words, it cannot be an objective evidence for the existence of God:

However, it is pervasively felt that while it is true that many people have religious feelings - feelings of dependency, contingency, and fearsome awe - nothing can be made of the notion of an experience of God. ⁴⁴

So far, as we have seen, there is no single existential argument that we have studied that logically proves that God exists. Almost all of the arguments are not logically searching for God but are out to confirm their proponents' belief in the existence of God. These arguments are basically to rationalize and fortify their beliefs and convictions. And that is why almost all of them logically presuppose the existence

of the very God they are to prove. This has been rightly pointed out by Erich Frank who observes that these arguments only make sense to those who already have faith in the religious sense:

All these demonstrations may seem sensible and convincing to one who believes in the existence of God. But modern man, who no longer has faith will never be convinced of God's existence through such artificial and complicated argumentations. Fundamentally, they all presuppose faith; in fact, they merely transpose the act of faith into the medium of rational thinking, and this is their true philosophical significance. If we analyse them logically, we find that through them human thought rises above this world and above itself unto God. For this reason they give to the faithful who can follow such a procedure a feeling of religious devotion. ⁴⁵

Erich Frank goes ahead and suggests that the argumentations for the existence of God are things of the past and which make no sense to the present man who believes in indisputable facts of science. Especially when it comes to asserting the existence of God, we need an objective proof since existence, in this case, is a matter of fact. But here is a case where God's existence is asserted but at the same time it cannot be proved. It seems absurd; otherwise we have to seek for the basis of that assertion:

Philosophical proofs of God, therefore, were meaningful in the Middle Ages when those people whom the philosophers addressed believed unreservedly in the truth of religion. But today, when the philosopher has to reckon with modern man, who does not acknowledge anything except the indisputable facts of science and their scientific cogency, these abstract demonstrations can hardly carry weight. They are an inheritance from times past. ⁴⁶

2.2.0 Conceptual Approach

This approach basically analyses the concept "God". From our analysis of the existential arguments, we have seen that there is no logical ground for the existence of God yet the religious faithfuls are not willing to yield to the dictates of reason. They still hold that God must exist. And they probably would argue that the mere fact that there is no logical proof for the existence of God does not disprove God's existence.

But then we are faced with some very basic questions. What is the cogency of their argument that makes them believe in God despite their inability to explain the basis of their belief? What is 'God' that they believe in? How have they come to know him? What is God's nature? In simpler terms, what does the word God refer to?

2.2.1 Does God Exist?

'Is God real or not?' It has often been assumed that the dispute between the believer and unbeliever is over a matter of fact. The philosophical investigation of the reality of God then becomes the philosophical investigation appropriate to an assertion of a matter of fact. That this is a misrepresentation of the religious concept is made obvious by a brief comparison of talk about facts with talk about God. ⁴⁷

When the positivist claims that there is no God because God cannot be located, the believer does not object on the grounds that the investigation has not been thorough, but on the grounds that the investigation fails to understand the grammar of what is being investigated—namely, the reality of God. ⁴⁸

D.Z. Phillips and probably some other people would object to our Existential Approach since to them, the whole discussion is wrongly directed; in other words, it is directed to a wrong goal. They would say that we have directed our discussion to a wrong question. They would want us to direct our attention not to 'God's existence' but to the nature or reality of God. For to them, to ask whether God exists or not is nonsensical. God is a religious concept which, to them, must be understood within the religious framework, and not otherwise:

It follows from my argument that the criteria of meaningfulness cannot be found outside religion, since they are given by religious discourse itself. Theology can claim justifiably to show what is meaningful in religion only when it has an internal relation to religious discourse. Philosophy can make the same claim only if it is prepared to examine religious concepts in the contexts from which they derive their meaning. ⁴⁹

Some people like Phillips would appear to have missed the basic issue in the religious discourse, or discourse about religion. They do not seem to address themselves to the fundamental issue relating to the basis of religion. Here we are interested in the foundation of religion. And since central to most religions, if not all, is the idea of God, we have to address ourselves to the question of God. But this very basic issue is what people like Phillips try to evade:

One cannot have religion without religious discourse. This is taught to children through stories by which they become acquainted with the attributes of God. As a result of this teaching the child forms an idea of God ... What is relevant to note is that the child does not listen to the stories, observe religious practices, reflect on all this, and then form an idea of God out of the experience. The idea of God is being formed in the actual story-telling and religious services. To ask which came first, the story-

telling or the idea of God, is to ask a senseless question. ⁵⁰

Phillips analogizes the issue of which comes first between the story-telling and the idea of God with language and principles of logic. He says that as soon as one has the language one has the logic of that particular language without either being prior to the other. But we would like to object to that analogy. It should be noted that the analogy is unwarranted since language and the logic of that language are necessarily tied together while story-telling and the idea of God are not. Different stories have different contents and not necessarily the idea of God, hence to make the idea of God a content of a story is very deliberate.

Nevertheless, we would be inclined to agree with Phillips when he observed that the idea of God is learnt. We accept that people are socialized into religious and other aspects of cultural practices save some few cases where some people have initiated certain ideas. But still even such ideas are subject to propagation. So undeniably Phillips admits that the idea of God is learnt in childhood through stories. But this is just one of the very first stages of socialization into the idea of God. Still the idea of God is not confined to childhood learning alone, it can be learnt at certain later stages as well. However, coming back to Phillips' contention which is the most common way of getting the idea of God, we should note that stories are human formulations, their contents are as well human ideas which are passed on to children. But this only holds as long as it is granted that the idea of God is only and purely an idea hence has no objective referent outside the human mind.

Nevertheless, let us come back to what Phillips and probably others, would want us to address ourselves to - namely the reality of God. So perhaps it would be necessary if we pose the question: What is the nature of God's Reality? But before we attempt to answer that question, let us try to understand what is meant by reality. In the ordinary sense, reality is understood to mean actuality. That is, it refers to an objective situation which is outside the subject or the human mind. It does not refer to a pure idea which has no objective referent. But in the metaphysical sense, reality refers to anything which is available to the human intellect. In this case reality would comprise anything that exists outside the human mind as well as anything that could be a purely mental object.

So after having attempted an understanding of reality, let us try to apply it to God. Taking the first meaning of reality, it is almost undeniable that the word God does not refer to any objective situation. So the word has no objective referent outside the human mind or thought. This inference is based on what appears to be the level of the present human knowledge. Probably with the expansion of human knowledge, some more will be said about God's objective reality. But as for now, God does not exist objectively:

But no criteria of identification have been given for identifying the referent, the alleged reality, that 'God' supposedly denotes. God is plainly not some locatable reality 'out there'.⁵¹

After having disqualified God from the first meaning of reality, the only meaning left by which God can be understood is the metaphysical meaning according to which God is only a mental being or object. God is just an idea in the human

mind. So coming back to the issue of God's existence, we can as well say that God does not exist independent of human awareness, but only exists in the thought of people. Therefore, we would say that logically, the reality of God is purely a mental reality or in other words, a mental construction. But let us try to see the metaphysical implication of such a mental reality.

2.2.2 God and Ontological Being

Ontologically, 'being' is the primary object of intellect. It is perceived in the sense of existence and essence. In the sense of existence, being is in the act while in the sense of essence it is perceived as "that which is", in other words, that which corresponds to some existence.

Essence is the necessary and primary being of a thing as the first principle of intelligibility, that is, the primary intelligible being of a thing. And the intellect can only grasp the essence of things. Due to the fact that essence is the necessary and primary being of a thing, Spinoza conceives of a 'being' as anything which is perceived clearly and distinctly, and which exists necessarily or at least can exist. Therefore, a real being exists necessarily of its own nature in such a way that its essence entails existence. And a possible being is one whose essence entails possible existence.

Going by that argument, therefore, an actual or a real being has a mental existence which corresponds to an object outside the mind. Thus a real being has a real or an actual essence. But a possible being is a being apt to exist. In as far as a possible being is capable of existing, it is not nothingness or a mental fiction, but some people

may prefer calling it a partial nothingness.

A mental fiction is a fantasy of the mind which has no objective correspondence in reality. It is neither a real being nor a possible being. It is an ideal being which is irrealizable or inactualizable being:

In a word, we may say that the mental fiction is an ideal and irrealizable (inactualizable) being, while the possible being is indeed an ideal being that is also actualizable.⁵²

At this juncture perhaps we should note that there is further categorization of mental beings. This categorization is very important for our understanding of the difference between a mental fiction and a possible being. The possible beings have the potentiality of being actualized. These beings are metaphysical abstractions. Therefore, they have some correspondence with reality. But a mental fiction is not an abstraction but a mental invention.

Coming back to the issue of God, would we say that it is a possible being, a logical being or a mental fiction? But obviously God is not a possible being for it is not a metaphysical abstraction. For example, a seed of a tree is a tree in potency. It has the potential of becoming a tree, thus it is a possible being (tree). We can then see that such a possible being has correspondence in objective reality. It is an abstraction. But God is not a possible being since it is not an abstraction.

Logical beings and mathematical beings are generally referred to as being of reason. For example, the notions of numbers and time *per se* or conceptual time. But are these beings strictly speaking? Apparently, these are not beings. They are not intelligible in themselves. They can only be conceptualized in relation to an existent

outside the mind. Take for example the notion of a number one (1) as a mathematical number. One *per se* is unintelligible as a being. It cannot be grasped by the mind since it has no essence. Hence, it is not capable of existing out of necessity. But it can only be conceptualized in relation to an objective existent. Spinoza argues that a logical being or a being of reason does not exist for it is really nothing, but a mode of thinking which we think is most agreeable. Concepts like time and number only help us remember and recall things more vividly. They enable us retain, explain and figure out things already comprehended more easily.

So, now that we have tried to eliminate the two possibilities, viz; the possible being and the logical being, for God as a 'being of the mind', we are left with only one logical alternative; that is, God can be nothing except a mental fiction. And if we have to go by Spinoza's line of reasoning both logical concepts and mental fictions are not beings as such. They are simply thoughts. We cannot treat them as beings since they are not intelligible. That is, as 'beings' they cannot be conceived of clearly and distinctly, and therefore cannot exist of necessity. In other words, they cannot be conceived of in terms of essence which is the primary being of a thing. Thus they are not ontological beings.

Therefore, concluding this ontological analysis of God, and given that undeniably God is only a mental reality since it could only be either a possible being, a logical reality, or a mental reality. But as we have seen it is neither a possible being nor a logical reality. Then it logically follows that God is only a mental fiction or a mental reality.

2.2.3 God as an Invention of Man

As can be seen, our conceptual approach to God was an attempt to grasp what God is in a non-anthropomorphic sense. We tried to see if the concept God has any objective referent. But as we have seen, there is nothing as God in a non-anthropomorphic sense. Moreover, we have even seen that it is also impossible to conceptualize God as an ontological being. Therefore, non-anthropomorphically, God is unintelligible.

Some people like Soren Kierkegaard, D.Z. Phillips and Norman Malcolm would even give an additional dimension of God. They would want us not to look at God as an existent but as an eternity:

Kierkegaard emphasized the point when he said bluntly,

‘God does not exist.’ He is eternal .⁵³

But the above quotation attributed to Kierkegaard is ambiguous. It is not clear whether he meant that God is the same thing as eternity or whether eternity is a property of God. However, putting the issue of ambiguity aside, what do we understand by eternal, and so by extension, eternal God? Eternity can simple mean timelessness. But in that case it does not make sense to equate God to timelessness or to give God the property of timelessness. Eternity is simply a non-termination of human thought in an object either progressively or retrogressively. And hence, eternity is a human process.

Again God has been described in many ways, for example, as eternal, ultimate, ineffable and even mysterious. But to describe God as so is a contradiction. These

characteristics in principle deny the possibility of predicating anything to God. They deny the possibility of saying things like God being the creator of the universe and its controller, God being ever-loving, or God being able to punish. Therefore, in essence, God cannot be known, experienced or encountered. Thus the ineffability thesis is absurd.

In summary, we have seen that there is nothing that can be known as God, and anything that can be said as God and about God is purely a human invention. This view is supported by the fact that the non-anthropomorphic understanding of God is impossible; and that is why God can only be presented in anthropomorphic sense in which the human qualities are amplified in God in order for God to be outside the operations and activities of people. He transcends the human domain. But in essence, God is not transcendent, it has only been made transcendent. Therefore, God is a projection of human nature into transcendency.

We have seen from the Existential approach and the conceptual approach that it is man or human beings who search for God. They want to subject their natural limitations to something else either as their explanations or as compensation for them; and so people have heaven and earth or the life-here and the life-hereafter by which the heaven compensates for the limited earthly life; and God compensates for the human limitations. For example, when man realizes his or her limited knowledge, he or she constructs an omniscient being; when he or she realizes his or her limited potency, he or she creates an omnipotent being; when he or she realizes the temporariness of life, he or she creates an everlasting one. In simpler terms, we are suggesting that the idea

of God is a human projection. We are not asserting that there is no God simply on the basis that his existence cannot logically be proved. But so far what is being said of God is unintelligible thought. It seems that God is a projection of what man desires but which he does not have. Thus he attributes to God what he does not have. This idea was long observed by a Greek thinker Pseudo-Dionysius (c.a. A.D. 500):

Thus we attribute to God adjectives such as infinite, immortal, incomprehensible according to the negative way by trying to negate attributes that are usually consigned to human beings, such as finite, mortal and comprehensible. Or we confer upon God adjectives such as omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent according to the superlative way by attempting to surpass attributes that are usually associated with human beings, such as, potency, knowledge, or presence. Finally God is referred to as the first uncaused cause or the creator of all things according to the way of causal inference. ⁵⁴

Before we conclude this discussion of God, we would like to make one more reference which also suggests that God is a human construction. Sigmund Freud, a psychoanalyst (1856-1939A.D.) could not have been so far from what appears to be the truth when he observed that God is created by man:

Philosophers stretch the meaning of words until they retain scarcely anything of their original sense. They give the name of 'God' to some vague abstraction which they have created for themselves; having done so they can pose before all the world as deists, as believers in God, and they can even boast that they have recognized a higher, purer concept of God... ⁵⁵

However, some believers in God could still object to our analysis by arguing that we have used wrong approaches to God. They would say that God cannot be grasped by reason, but by faith. But if we may ask; what is faith? Religiously

speaking, faith is firm belief in God without evidence or reason. Faith presupposes the object in which one has faith. So, to have faith in God simply presupposes that God exists. Therefore, faith is not an epistemological thesis. It does not offer any more knowledge than what is already presupposed. This then makes the claim that God can be known through faith senseless.

If we try to analyse the foundation of faith, we would only come to a wish. There is nothing like God in which one has faith, except that one wishes that there is God:

Yet, the merely subjective consciousness of those who have faith is not sufficient foundation upon which to base the existence of God. The principle of voluntary belief, this 'I believe', hardly differs from the principle of the sovereign, 'I think' or 'I will' which it was to replace.⁵⁷

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24. See Russell, B. *op. cit.* pp. 9-11; Tiechman, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28; Nyabul, P.O., *op. cit.*, pp. 62-66; Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
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CHAPTER THREE

DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

In our previous discussions we saw that the understanding of taboo is somehow tied up to the belief in some supernatural involvements. We specifically found out that God and ancestors are believed to be involved in the taboo practice. In the last chapter, we saw the general philosophical argumentations for the belief in God, and noted some objections which if granted showed that the arguments are fallacious and do not prove that God really exists.

This chapter is part of the main theme of taboo and supernaturalism. Since we have looked at the general discussions on the issue of God's existence, this chapter discusses the general argumentations for the belief in immortality. The discussion on immortality is necessarily linked to the issue of ancestor's involvement in the taboo practice. Ancestors are by definition "dead" and if there is to be a claim that they are participants in the taboo system, then we are necessarily implying that they are somehow conscious. But in what sense can we talk of the dead as conscious? We saw that there is some claim that a violation of a taboo is an offence against the ancestors, and that they therefore punish the offenders.

We should also point out at this juncture that the dead are not only brought into the issue of taboo practice as ancestors, but quite a number of death rites and taboos related to death, not only in Africa but also in some other parts of the world, strongly point to the belief that the dead are alive. Thus our understanding of the issue of immortality appears to be a very fundamental step towards a clear understanding of

the belief that the ancestors are participants in the institution of taboo. As we had seen previously, the term 'institution' is used here to refer to a set of values that pattern people's behaviour.

3.1.0 Immortality

'Just as you please', he said. 'if only you can catch me, and I do not escape from you ...that when I have drunk the poison I shall no longer remain with you, but shall depart to some happy state of the blessed ...and when he sees my body either burnt or buried, may not be afflicted for me, as if I suffered some dreadful thing, nor say at my interment that Socrates is laid out, or is carried out, or is buried ... You must have a good courage then, and say that you bury my body, and bury it in such a manner as you think is most agreeable to our laws.'¹

Can it be affirmed that the Greek teacher, by the pathway of reason or through any experiences in the region of the emotional and moral life, gained such a view-point? Broadly, the answer is that he did not profess knowledge on the question of immortality, but he cherished the belief.²

Immortality as a concept can be understood in more than one sense. Therefore, a clear understanding of the concept necessarily demands that we look at some of the senses in which it can be understood. According to *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, immortality is an 'attribute of deathlessness ascribed to the soul in many religions and philosophies'. And the *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* 2nd edition, defines immortal as: (1) not subject to death or decay; having perpetual life (2) having everlasting fame; remembered throughout time (3) everlasting; perpetual; constant (4) of or relating to immortal being or concepts (5) an immortal being (6) a person who

is remembered enduringly. When we look at the above definitions, then we should only be interested in definitions 1, 2 and 6. But, again, definitions 2 and 6 are almost the same. Therefore only two senses of immortal seems to have been given. So, the whole definition of 'immortal' boils down to mean that when something is immortal then it has interminable life or it is subject to an everlasting remembrance.

Let us try to discern some of the possible logical implications of these two senses of immortality in relation to a person. The second sense implies that after one's death, one only lives in the memories of other people who are biologically alive. But this sense of immortality would logically mean that when the person who has the memory dies, then the person who was immortal ceases to be. But this would be a contradiction because immortality negates the idea of termination or cessation of 'life'.

Another logical implication is that one can be immortal for that person in whose memory one lives and non-immortal for that person whose memory is lost. We say so because memories seem to be prone to loss either in life or due to death. But by this argument, it would mean that one can be immortal and non-immortal at the same time, and even at different times which is an absurdity. Moreover, to say that one lives in one's memory is different from saying that one is alive. Being in the memory simply means being remembered which does not mean being alive. Thus it does not have an objective correspondent. Therefore, one does not 'live' in memory but in oneself.

Furthermore, this second sense of immortality would also logically imply that whoever is immortal is only there for others in their memories and not for oneself.

In other words, one does not exist for-oneself and in-oneself but only 'exists' for-others and in-others. And that is not an existence of a person. Some people, if not all, would agree that death is a personal concern. It is one's concern, and therefore, 'life hereafter' is also one's concern and not other's concern for one in the strict sense. Thus when talking of immortality, people normally think of their personal 'survival' where they are somehow active and participate in that life. It is a personal hope:

But it will normally be taken to mean more than that, namely that, however radically 'changed', we shall ourselves be in some form after our present life is ended. This is the essential claim and what the ordinary person would understand of us if we declared our belief in some kind of 'life hereafter'.³

It would appear then, from the foregoing arguments that the second sense of immortality whereby if one is immortal then one is everlastingly in some memory is senseless. Therefore, the belief in that kind of immortality appears nonsensical when dealing with personal immortality.

Now let us try again to explore the possible logical implications of immortality in the first sense by which if one is immortal then one is subject to interminable life or one has perpetual life. It would appear from the meaning of immortality that there is a dark cloud over this idea. If we take immortality to be a quality of being not subject to death, then logically no living thing in the universe is immortal since we know that any living thing is necessarily subject to death. This can even be shown using formal logical argument. The argument would run: 'All immortals are not subject to death. All living things are subject to death. Therefore, all living things are not immortal'. In its standard categorical form, this argument runs: 'No immortals are

subject to death. All living things are subject to death. Therefore, no living things are immortal'. Before we attempt to illustrate the validity of this argument using the venn diagram, let us first symbolize it. Let, P stand for 'immortal',

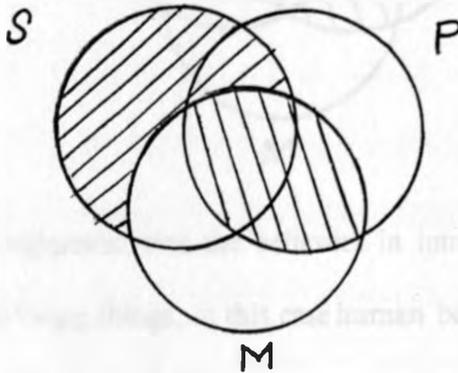
S stand for 'living things' and M stand for 'subject to death'. Therefore, the argument in its symbolic form is:

No P are M

All S are M

∴ No S are P

This argument is diagrammed as below.



This diagram illustrates the fact that there is nothing which is both P and M, and also that there is nothing which is both S and P.

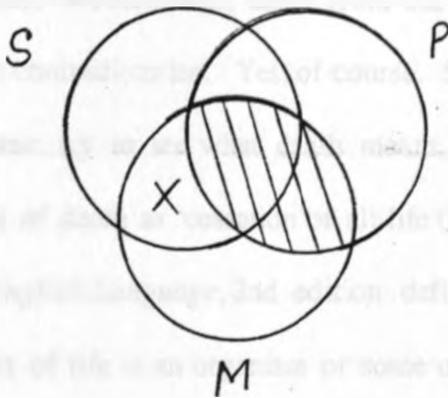
We should note that the above argument is not only valid, but also sound. All its propositions are factually true. But the belief in immortality and the fact of death appear contradictories. The belief in immortality seems to accept the following invalid argument: 'No immortals are subject to death. Some living things (human beings) are subject to death. Therefore, some living things (Human beings) are immortal'. And on the basis of our symbolization this argument can be presented in its symbolic form as:

No P are M

Some S are M

∴ Some S are P

But let us use the venn diagram and show how such form of arguments or reasoning cannot stand.



This diagram does not show that there is anything or something which is both S and P.

The argument that the believers in immortality accept asserts that there is, for sure, some living things, in this case human beings, who are immortal. But if we look at our diagram, there is nothing showing, for sure, that there is something which is both a living thing and immortal. Therefore, the conclusion that living things (human beings) are immortal cannot logically be inferred from the two true premises which are based on our understanding of 'immortality' and 'death'. Therefore, we can assert that the belief in immortality of human beings is logically unacceptable. Probably, one may object to our view and claim that we cannot rule out the belief purely on logical grounds alone. But we have to assert that intelligibility must necessarily be logical and

therefore, if the belief in immortality is to be intelligible, then it must necessarily be logical.

However, one may object to our understanding and use of concepts "immortality" and "death", and therefore deny that they are contradictory concepts. But one will have to show that they do not mean what we have so far indicated that they mean. Nevertheless, taken from our point of view, can we show concretely that they are contradictories. Yes, of course. Since we have seen what immortality means, let us now try to see what death means. The *New Columbia Encyclopedia* gives the meaning of death as 'cessation of all life (metabolic) process'. The *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd edition defines death as; (1) the permanent end of all functions of life in an organism or some of its cellular components (2) termination or destruction. And the *Macmillan Compact Encyclopedia* gives the meaning of death as 'the permanent ending of all functions in an organism'. It goes on to state that in view of recent scientific discoveries or advancement, 'Death is therefore now defined on the basis of brain functions; when the parts of the brain that control breathing and other vital reflexes have ceased to function the patient is said to be brain dead'.

From the various definitions given, death of a human person is understood simply to mean the cessation of all processes that constitute the act of life, or in other words, death is the termination of life. But immortality means the non-subjection to the termination of life. Therefore, we can infer that whatever is subject to death cannot be immortal. Thus the concepts of death and immortality are contradictory

concepts which implies that both of them cannot be either true or false at the same time. So when we come to the issue of human immortality, we know that any human person is subject to death, in other words, any human person must die, and this implies that the belief in human immortality is self-contradictory. But given that the idea of immortality of human person is only a belief, we can comfortably assert that it is a senseless belief.

But still one may object to our understanding and use of 'life', and may even suggest that our understanding of human life is inadequate, and that there is more to the meaning of human 'life' than we have assumed. Probably he or she could be right. But, so far, we have used life to mean the vitality of an organism. The *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* defines life as, 'the state or quality that distinguishes living beings or organisms from dead ones and from inorganic matter, characterized chiefly by metabolism, growth, and the ability to reproduce and respond to stimuli'. So what we are saying is that life is a condition within which are certain characterizing processes. Therefore, for something to be described as having life, that thing must be in a certain condition under which certain processes take place; the ones mentioned above.

Some scholars would argue that our understanding of a human person is mistaken; and that a person is not only and wholly a physical entity as we have somehow portrayed. Probably they may agree that if a person is only what we have seemingly portrayed it to be, then we could be right to hold that anything which is subject to death cannot be immortal. But those who advocate for or who believe in

vitalism would not agree with us, and would suggest that when a person dies there is some element or 'part' of the person which continues living and is not subject to death. And that this 'part' 'survives' death. They would want us to believe that the dissolution of the human body is not a total destruction of what is a person.

We should note at this point that 'survival of death' is sometimes used to refer to the same thing as 'immortality of the dead'. But we would like, again to point out that that phrase does not seem to make sense. Let us try to see what is generally understood by 'survive'. Again, according to the *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, survive means; (1) to live after the death of (another) (2) to continue in existence or use after (a passage of time, an adversity, etc.) (3) to endure (something). This dictionary does not point out anything to do with someone dying and some part of the person continuing living. Therefore, given the meanings of 'death' and 'survive', the phrase 'survival of death' seems to be nonsensical. D. Z. Phillips seems also to be of the same opinion. He thinks that the issue is not whether a person lives after death, but whether it means anything to talk of life after death. And it seems not to make sense if given that life and death are contradictory concepts. Phillips says:

The question is not whether there is or there is not life after death, where affirmative or negative answers to the question would both be considered intelligible, possible answers, whether they were true or false. The question is whether it means anything to talk of life after death. If one understands what is meant by 'survival' and what is meant by 'death', then one is at a loss to know what it means to talk of surviving death.⁴

Phillips also agrees with Antony Flew's observation that if given the meanings of 'survive' and 'death', then the belief that 'I will survive my death' is a contradiction:

Flew's demonstration of the contradictions of 'I will survive my death' must be devastating. If 'death' is the kind of concept which he holds that it is, then to speak of surviving it is utter nonsense.⁵

And D.M. MacKinnon also objects to the use of the phrase. He seems to subscribe to the view that the phrase does not make sense:

Of course, we do talk regularly of people surviving catastrophes and escaping death. We may even in certain unusual circumstances be justified in speaking of dead men as not really dead; in cases of catalepsy, and so on. But death itself is not something we can significantly speak of surviving. If we say, we survive death, we do not know what we are saying ... The words are combined in a way that, if we attend to them closely defies the possibility of our attaching, sense to them.⁶

However, we would like to say with Phillips that if death is the kind of a concept as we have pointed out, then it is a contradiction to believe that one survives one's death.

In this chapter, we would be using 'survival of death' and personal immortality synonymously. This is because when most people talk of 'survival of death', they often have in mind a situation in which when one dies, there is some 'part' of that person which continues to 'live'. In other words, the belief in 'survival of death', or immortality presupposes a dualistic view of a person which is part of the philosophy of vitalism. Therefore, let us move on to examine and discuss this theory of dualism.

3.1.1 The Person and the Theory of Dualism

In this section we would like to examine the foundation of the belief in immortality. Those who believe in immortality would not agree with the contention we have expressed that the belief is a contradiction. They could argue that; yes, death is a fact, but it is not as we have presented it to be. They would argue that the dissolution of a body is not a destruction of a person. To them, a person is more than the physical body; and probably not a physical body at all.

Most of their arguments would point to the idea that there are basically two sides to a person, viz., there is the corporeal and the incorporeal parts. Death only affect that corporeal part but not the incorporeal part. And that at death the two parts separate, and that the incorporeal part continues to live. Therefore, when they talk of human immortality, they in fact refer to this incorporeal part of a person. Those who belong to this school seem to be alluding to the Platonic idea that the body is simply an appearance of the reality. In this case the reality being the form of a person (the incorporeal being) which this school often refers to as the whole person. Some of the believers in immortality refer to this Platonic form as self.

We would like to point out at the outset that the proper and logical understanding of this dualistic view of the human person seems necessary for the understanding of the basis of the belief in immortality.

3.1.2 Mind, Spirit and Soul

The immaterial part of a person that is believed to 'survive death' is variably

referred to as either mind, spirit or soul. Here we are not alluding to the idea that these three concepts are necessarily equivalent in meaning. But for the sake of convenience, we are going to use them synonymously to refer to the non-material part of a human person that is believed to be immortal. We are using them so because various scholars or believers in immortality tend to use these terms in an apparent reference to that part of a human person which is not subject to death. So our synonymic use of these terms is basically to save us from any possible technical difference in their meanings.

Therefore, our use of the terms mind, spirit and soul is quite much in line with the Lockean view. To Locke, these three terms seem to mean or refer to the same thing whose unique characteristics are thinking and willing:

The ideas we have belonging and *peculiar to spirit* are *thinking* and *will*, or a power of putting body into motion by thought, and, which is consequent to it, liberty. For as body cannot communicate its motion by impulse to another body, which it meets with at rest; so the mind can put bodies into motion, or forbear to do so, as it pleases.⁷

From the above quotation, it seems that, to Locke, the spirit and mind are the same and he attributes to them the same function, viz; of putting the body into motion. He goes on to imply that not only is spirit the same thing as mind, but it is also the soul:

every one finds in himself, that his soul can think, will, and operate on his body, in the place where that is; but cannot operate on a body, or in a place, an hundred miles distant from it.⁸

Therefore, it is this mind or spirit or soul which is assumed or believed to separate from the body at death; and Locke says of it:

Our idea of body, as I think, is an extended solid substance, capable of communicating motion by impulse, and our idea of soul, as an immaterial spirit, is of a substance that thinks, and has a power of exciting motion in body by will or thinking.⁹

This soul is also capable of self-motion and independent existence from the body:

or if that will not be allowed to afford us a clear idea enough of its motion, its being separated from the body in death, I think, will: for to consider it as going out of the body, or leaving it, and yet to have no idea of its motion, seems to be impossible.¹⁰

3.1.3 Theory of Dualism: Analysis

The belief in the personal immortality is a widely held belief by many people of diverse backgrounds. It is a belief with a long history of philosophical debates, probably starting in the Pre-Socratic times, running through the times of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant up to our present time.¹¹

As is shown in one of the earlier quotations, Socrates believed that there is something which is not subject to death. He told his listeners during his last hours on earth, just before he was given poison to drink, that 'Socrates' is not subject to death, and that what would be buried or burnt is not 'Socrates' but the body of 'Socrates'. This Socrates' position, which is the main theme of Plato's *Phaedo*, is very interesting because it seems to be the most popular view held by most people who believe in the human immortality. It points out explicitly that the 'real Socrates' is different from

the body of Socrates. He went ahead to assert that after 'his' separation from his body, he would join the happy state of the blessed. Socrates seems to be telling us that that which persists death is capable of some sort of sensation (being happy). But this contention is highly objectionable. However, the question we are left asking is, what could be the essential relationship between 'Socrates' and his body?

Plato, being a pupil of Socrates, seems unable to disembroil himself from Socrates' influence. His view of the soul can best be understood in the light of his idea of form. To him, the soul is the form of a person, the real person. Plato believed that the soul is only imprisoned in the body, but it is capable of independent existence from the body. In his view, the soul is the real, the true, and the essential person which is immutable, and hence 'survives death'.¹²

Plato's position can be summarized by the following quotation from his *Phaedo*, and which has been quoted by Geach:

Each man's make-up includes a wholly immaterial thing, his mind and soul. It is the mind that sees and hears and feels and thinks and chooses - in a word, is conscious. The mind is the person; the body is extrinsic to the person, like a suit of clothes. Though body and mind affect one another, the mind's existence is quite independent of the body's; and there is thus no reason why the mind should not go on being conscious indefinitely after the death of the body, and even if it never again has with anybody that sort of connexion which it has now.¹³

René Descartes, who is considered as the father of modern philosophy, believed that the soul and the body are distinctly different. He held that the soul is, in its nature, entirely independent of the body and therefore in consequence not liable to

death. He believed that the mind or soul is a substance while the body is an accident, hence the soul is capable of separate existence from the body:

I do not observe that any other thing necessarily belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists in this alone ... and although I have a body to which I am very closely united, nevertheless ... it is certain that I, that is to say my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from it.¹⁴

The few illustrations we have outlined, we would believe, suffice to show what the concept of dualism is. However, we cannot help asking the question: Given the dualistic view of a person, what is it that can be uniquely attributed to the mind? Most of the advocates of this theory of a person seem to hold that it is the act of thinking that is uniquely mental or belongs to the mind. For example, to Descartes, all that which is in people but which cannot be conceived as pertaining to the body should be attributed to the soul. Thus he attributed to the soul the act of thinking in the wider sense:

By the word thought I understand all that of which we are conscious as operating in us. And that is why not only understanding, willing, imagining, but feeling also here count as thought.¹⁵

The above quotation shows that Descartes held that the body or matter cannot think, and that is why he attributed thought to the soul or mind. He argued that he could conceive of himself without a body except that he could not conceive that he was not himself. Hence, to him, it was clear that the soul and body are distinctly different.¹⁶ We have also seen Locke attributing to the soul the act of thinking and willing. Plato, as well, attributed to the soul the act of thinking. Therefore, the

theory of dualism or the Cartesian position, as Gilbert Ryle would call it, seems to hold that 'Minds are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are causes and effects, but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements'.¹⁷ So the advocates of dualism hold that both minds and bodies are entities, but different ones. And it is this supposition that makes them believe that mind or soul can exist independently of the body. For example, H.D. Lewis argues:

In our thought of immortality, for instance, it is natural to suppose that soul is some entity that survives the dissolution of the body. When Socrates told his friends half mockingly that when he died it would not be easy to catch him, they would not find it difficult to know what he meant.¹⁸

Lewis would want us believe that our natural supposition that souls are entities can support the belief in immortality. Even the fact that Socrates' friends did not find any difficulty in understanding what he was talking about cannot support the belief in immortality. But we would rather think that our natural supposition of the souls being independent entities from our bodies only reflect the prevalence of the conventional belief in immortality. And this was also the case with Socrates' friends. In fact Socrates never proved the possibility of immortality, but only cherished the belief.

Lewis, in his determination to prove the independence of minds, gives another illustration which can be seen to be very inadequate:

At these times we are apt to draw a sharp distinction between mind and body, Brown is physically here but his mind is 'far away', and while we no longer take 'far away' in a literal sense we come vividly to think that there is a good deal more involved in being Brown than the

movements and location of his body. There is also something 'going on in his mind' as well.¹⁹

What is being portrayed by the above quotation can be interpreted, and we would believe is the most plausible way, to mean that some different thing is the object of thought of Brown. The fact that Brown is seen 'not to be with' his companions does not imply that Brown's mind and body are distinct entities. It simply means that Brown and his companions are not sharing an object of thought. But in his restless effort to prove the plausability of dualism, Lewis goes ahead and gives another illustration:

A person can have a deformed body and an excellent mind, and this seems to imply that our minds are quite distinct from our bodies.²⁰

But we would like to assert that this illustration also fails. It does not logically seem to imply that minds and bodies are distinct entities. In the first place it is not clear what Lewis means by 'a deformed body'. It is not stated whether the whole body (matter including the brain) is deformed, or only a part of the body which would exclude either some parts or the brain. If it refers to the whole body, then probably there is some truth in what he says. But if it refers only to a part of the body, then there is no truth in what Lewis says, and hence the illustration commits the fallacy of composition where a deformation of a part of the body is presented to mean a deformation of the whole body.

Besides, some scholars like Lewis believe that the mind is an entity, but an elusive one. But we might be inclined to think that their search presupposes mind as an entity, and that is why they cannot intellectually grasp it in the way they expect.

So, in the view of Gilbert Ryle, they are victims of category mistake. They are searching for a wrong thing:

We seem to be concerned here with something so elusive that it seems like being nothing at all.²¹

Yes, mind as an entity is or appears to be nothing. The view of mind as an entity seems to be mistaken. As we have mentioned, this view appears to be based on a wrong supposition; a supposition that matter cannot think or know. But, as we are about to see, this supposition is unwarranted. For example, D'Arcy argues that 'The self escapes the mesh of matter for the very simple reason that matter cannot be matter and at the same time the knowing that it is matter'.²² He goes on to explicate his contention:

The argument that the thought of it cannot be the same as the material object which it judges is patently valid, but where the object is thought and not a material body there does not seem to be any special and obvious reason why the thinking of the thought should not be of the same nature as the thought. The nature of thought does not impose any conditions which would make the thought anything else than what it claims to be. There is no alien body which drags it down and puts it in chains and makes it servant to material conditions.²³

On closer analysis of this argument, it can be detected that it already presupposes that matter cannot think and that it is alien to thinking. And in this case, it seems that thought is assumed to be an entity. But we would object to that view. What we know is that thinking is an act and it necessarily presupposes a thinker. We do not know until now a thinking without a thinker. And the thinkers we know, so

far, are matter. Therefore we have no reason to rule out that matter can think. Thus, it is greatly objectionable that we should deny and insist, or even imagine that what is conceptualized within the body is not actually from it, but from the mind. We see, hear, feel, think within the body as part of its functionality. We do not know a mind without a body, but what is called mind is only conceived of within the framework of a body, actually it appears to be an act of the body.

Therefore, the view that mind and body are distinctly different entities capable of independent existence has no epistemological basis and in fact it is a serious mistake.

This has also been pointed out by Ryle:

I hope to prove that it is entirely false, and false not in detail but in principle. It is not merely an assemblage of particular mistakes. It is one big mistake and a mistake of a special kind. It is, namely, a category-mistake.²⁴

The category-mistake is what Ryle calls a mistaken allocation to mind the same category as the one to which the body belongs. What Ryle says is that the mind and the body do not belong to the same categories of entities as the dualists think. Moreover, even Descartes who was one of the ardent advocates of dualism is quoted to have confessed ignorance as to whether mind and body are distinct entities or one and the same thing:

I do not yet know whether ...the thinking nature which is in me ...is different from the corporeal nature to me, or whether both are merely one and the same thing.²⁵

Aristotle, one of the great contributors to the issue of immortality was not for dualism. He was a monist who believed that body and soul are different but cannot exist independently of each other. To him, soul is the functionality of the body. It

is neither corporeal nor incorporeal, but the capacity of a body. It is synonymous with life:

Technically he calls it the form of the body, i.e., that which gives the body shape, activity, and significance, everything that we mean by being alive.²⁶

To Aristotle, the soul is nothing in itself and it is not individual, but it is a form which begins and ceases to be with the body, and therefore in no way can it operate or exist without the body. It is 'a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it'.²⁷ Therefore, as Ross says, 'A notion like that of Descartes that the existence of the soul is the first certainty and the existence of matter a later inference, would have struck Aristotle as absurd'.²⁸

From the position of Aristotle, we can see that soul is not an entity but an activity or a condition of the body. Aristotle's view seems to be plausible. It presents a person as a body; and not a body and some immaterial part which, as we have seen, seems to have no basis. As Geach would suggest, Aristotle seems to show that thinking is a vital activity of a person and not of some particular part of the person, be it material or immaterial:

The only tenable conception of the soul is the Aristotelean conception of the soul as the form, or actual organization, of the living body; and thus you may say a man thinks with his soul, if you mean positively that thinking is a vital activity, an activity of a living being, and negatively that thinking is not performed by any bodily organ.²⁹

At this point of our discussion we would like to turn our attention to Kwasi Wiredu's work on the "Akan conception of mind". Wiredu is one of the African

philosophers who have discussed so logically and comprehensively the concept of mind using as reference the Akan conception of mind. He starts off by the understanding of mind as a faculty of reason; that it is 'simply the ability to reason or understand, and this is, of course, not an entity by a disposition'.³⁰ He explains that to the Akan understanding of a person, it is the brain ('a mene') which is responsible for the thinking, not as an entity, but as part of a person. 'They know that thinking cannot go on in a human being without the brain, that certain injuries to the brain will impair thought and that generally there is a correlation between brain activity and thinking'.³¹ This Akan conception of thinking is also shared by quite a number of scholars like Edward de Bono,³² Hammond³³ and Arthur Keith,³⁴ among others.

Wiredu therefore, differs with the dualists, and he rules out the contention that mind is that which thinks. He argues that thoughts are not in the mind but of the mind. Thoughts are what mind is made of:

On this conception, mind is not that which thinks, but the thought which is thought when there is thinking.³⁵

Wiredu argues that the assumption that thought is immaterial and therefore can only have affinities with an immaterial entity is wrong. That assumption, to him, confuses what he calls the basic ontological distinction between concept and object, a distinction he explicates so succinctly:

The characteristic of being capable of being an instance but incapable of being instantiated is the mark of particulars, in other words, of objects, entities; while the characteristic of being instantiable is the mark of the conceptual. Thus an uninstanciable referent is necessarily nonconceptual. It follows that the definition of an object or entity given two sentences back can be formulated as

follows: An object (or entity) is that which can only be a nonconceptual referent.

If therefore, an object is a nonconceptual by definition, then to treat a thought, i.e. a conceptual unit, as if it is a species of object, is to court a contradiction ...³⁶

Wiredu denies the dualistic and Cartesian contention that since mind or spirit or soul is immaterial, it is therefore more adapted and suitable than the body for thought because thought is also non-material. He advances a counter-argument to show that such an argument cannot hold:

One might just as well argue: 'Since a thought is a conceptual unit and a spiritual entity is non-conceptual, a spiritual entity cannot give rise to thought.'³⁷

However, he concludes that given the empirical facts and the modern scientific findings concerning the relationship between brain processes and thought, there is enough evidence that some correlation between thought and brain processes exists.

The hypothesis which seems most plausible to me is the third, namely, that thought is an aspect of brain process ... What seems to me to be of overriding importance is to realize that there is no good reason to think that a physical entity cannot have thought as an aspect of itself.³⁸

In his intellectual onslaught, Wiredu does not spare even the adapted Mind-Body Identity and Double Aspect theories. He criticises the Mind-Body Identity theory of committing a category mistake just like the dualistic theory, since mind is a concept and body is an object. But concept and object cannot be identical. And he criticised the Double Aspect theory for comparing the incomparable. He picks out, in particular, the use of 'mental object' in this theory. The double-aspect theory employs terms like 'physical' and 'mental' aspects of one and the same reality. But this usage

alludes to the possibility of a 'physical object' and a 'mental object' as objects of the same reality. But the notion of a mental object is self-contradictory. This is so because mental attributes and physical attributes are not comparable since mental and physical describe what are categorically incomparable.³⁹

On the basis of our discussion of the theory of dualism, it has come out very clearly that the theory is a misconception. The theory commits the category mistake. Apparently, it is based on an unwarranted speculation about human nature. In essence, then it lacks a well considered basis. Thus we can comfortably assert, on the basis of our discussion so far, that the dualistic view of a person is entangled with contradictions and absurdities. Therefore, there is no sensible and logical foundation for the theory. Moreover, most of the recent scientific research findings tend to point to the fact that most of the activities that we attribute to the mind or soul as entities, are actually attributable to the organic person:

To speak of the soul as a substance that is the active source of movement, the cause of thought, the owner of various states or the bond which unites them, etc., is to speak in metaphors, and such metaphors are a fruitful source of confusion if taken literally.⁴⁰

So what we are asserting is that, in the light of what we now know, we do not think by our minds or souls, but the organic person, we have feelings when under certain conditions. Therefore, soul must never be seen as the substance to which motions, feelings, and thoughts are attributed. We agree with Cohen when he asserts that the conception of soul as a substance or entity capable of independent existence apart from the body with its observable conscious phenomena is inherently

indescribable and beyond our knowledge.⁴¹ Surely, we do not know the soul as a different entity from the body.

Therefore, we cannot but agree with Peter Geach that:

It is a savage superstition to suppose that a man consists of two pieces, body and soul, which come apart at death; the superstition is not amended but rather aggravated by conceptual confusion, if the soul-piece is supposed to be immaterial. The genius of Plato and Descartes has given this superstition an undeservedly long lease of life; it gained some accidental support from Scriptural language, e.g. about flesh and spirit-accidental, because a Platonic-Cartesian reading of such passages is mistaken, as Scripture scholars now generally agree.⁴²

We should note that the Scripture scholars and all those who subscribe to the concepts of resurrection and even reincarnation, in essence, are discontented with and deny the Platonic-Cartesian conception of a person.⁴³ However, dualism in general has been shown, as well, not to hold. We have seen that the dualistic conception of a person has no logical basis. But if the theory of dualism is fundamental to the belief in immortality, and we have seen that the theory is logically nonsensical or fallacious, then can the belief in immortality hold? To elaborately answer this question, let us first analyse some of the commonly conceived possibilities of immortality.

3.2.0 Analysis of some possibilities of Immortality

We mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that the concept of dualism is fundamental to the understanding of the belief in immortality of the person. After having seen or discussed the theory of dualism, we would like to look at some of the

possibilities that are frequently advanced in support of the belief. In other words, we want to look at some perceived conditions which are often assumed to prove immortality of the person. In analysing these conditions, we are going to notice how the principle or soul or mind which is one of the basic aspects of immortality is involved in each of the conditions, hence showing that the belief in immortality is necessarily based on the dualistic conception of a person.

3.2.1 Reincarnation

This is the belief that on the death of a person (body), the soul transmigrates to or is born again into another body. Here, reincarnation is used in the sense in which Peter Geach uses it whereby it refers to a human mind (soul) successively animating two different bodies.⁴⁴ In other words, we are referring to a situation in which a soul of a dead person is believed to animate or enter another different body.

Some scholars have advanced the theory of reincarnation as a possibility of immortality or to show that there is the immortality of a person.⁴⁵ This belief for example, is found in some oriental religions especially as expressed by the concept of re-birth, and even in some African cultures as implied in the naming of children after the dead, that is, giving them the names of the dead people. However, in this work, we are only dealing with the conceptualization of the possibility of human soul inhabiting a human body. Already we have seen the apparent logical impossibility of conceptualizing the soul.

Reincarnation takes the soul for granted. But still this belief presents some serious logical difficulties. One of these problems is related to a possibility of multipersonality. If we assume that there is a soul or mind in the Platonic-Cartesian sense which animates a body, then whose 'person' is the now living body? Do we identify this living human person by the animating soul or in its own right? If we assume that the presently living person should be identified with the 'person' of the dead body or the soul, then we are logically implying that there are definite number of souls in the universe which only animate bodies, hence there is no possibility of population increment of people in this universe. But this would be absurd. And in this case we are not conceiving of the possibility of one soul animating more than one body at the same time since that would imply the division of the 'self' or soul which is inconceivable.⁴⁶

Moreover, if we grant that there is an animating soul and an animated body, then logically the soul and the body are different. But how do we then conceive of how the animated body came to be? Already this body or living person has its own identity which means that it has its own unique essential attributes by which it is identifiable. How then can we identify this person with the soul of a dead person? In the first place how can the soul be identified? If this presently physically living person is identifiable in its own right, then it is not the same with the dead person or its soul. The confusion is aggravated by the fact that this physically living person has his or her own soul and then there is also the animating soul. Logically this means that a person has at least two different souls at the same time. But this is nonsensical. There have

never been such people in the universe and it cannot even be conceivable. Therefore, reincarnation is logically *inconceivable*. There is no way of knowing, apparently, that a physically living person is necessarily animated by a soul of a person who had died. Therefore, there appears to be no logical justification that the dead is reincarnated.

But if we have to accept that the identity of the physically living person is different from that of the soul of the dead or whoever died; and only that they are somewhat merged into a life, then we would be saying that there is a possibility of a multipersonality which is illogical and makes no sense. For this would render meaningless the most basic principle of identity which is, so far, universally indisputable.

Probably reincarnation would be plausible if and only if there is a one-one relationship between soul and body of the same person.⁴⁷ But since death implies the dissolution of the body, the reincarnation of a person is therefore logically impossible or implausible.

However, some scholars like Lewis and Ian Stevenson⁴⁸ would probably argue that personal identity is not necessarily determined by the corporeal or material continuity, and would suggest that there is a possible non-corporeal way of identification. This non-corporeal way is expressed explicitly by Lewis⁴⁹ and implicitly by Stevenson⁵⁰ as self-consciousness through the memory. Cases have been cited of some people who once declared that they had lived earlier as certain particular persons. Take a case where X claims that he is the Y who once lived. Yet whoever knew Y cannot identify X as Y except that X claims to be Y. How can we understand such

a situation in which X and Y are physically different yet X claims to be Y? This seems scientifically and logically impossible. But to what extent can we agree with X's claim that it is Y? What we know is that X could not have had the memory of Y given that such memory is impossible where there is no body, especially the brain.⁵¹ Moreover, memory or self-consciousness alone is not sufficient for identification. And in the case of X we can never identify X as Y without any evidence particularly material continuity.⁵² It is very hard, almost impossible to accept the claim of X in the absence of material continuity.

But if we have to accept the claim of X, then we are faced with a number of questions: How many souls could have been reincarnated in the so many people who are living now? And how many people are conscious that they are reincarnates? Very few people, if any. But why should some people be reincarnates and others not? If there are some people who are not, then how did their souls come to be while others are simply reincarnates? How widespread are the instances of experienced reincarnations? All these questions if answered are most likely to disprove reincarnation. Probably we would not be unjust if we neglect the few cases that have been cited for reincarnation as insignificant evidence which cannot prove that there is possibility of reincarnation. And given their insignificant number, and their being isolated cases, we would be inclined to suspect foul play. This is because the belief in immortality is universally held, that is, is common among people of diverse backgrounds. But here we have only isolated cases of alleged reincarnation which are not universally experienced. Therefore, on what basis is the belief in immortality held

in the cases involving the majority of people who have never experienced similar alleged cases of reincarnation? The few alleged isolated cases of reincarnation cannot be a justification for holding the belief in immortality since this belief is held even among those who have never experienced any case of reincarnation. Therefore, what we are saying is that if reincarnation is to justify the belief in immortality, then the concrete cases of reincarnation should be as universally experienced as the holding of the belief. But since this is not the case, we cannot logically accept that reincarnation supports the belief, or is the basis of the belief in immortality.

However, so far, we have been discussing reincarnation under the assumption that there is a possibility of a disembodied existence. Yet we had seen that the assumption itself has no logical basis. Probably, the cited cases of reincarnation were fabricated to support the belief in immortality. Otherwise, why should such cases be so isolated and insignificant in number considering that death is a universal experience? It would have made sense if the experience of reincarnation is also a universal experience.

3.2.2 Resurrection

This is the belief in the coming back of life of a dead person in a body form. It has been argued by some scholars that for us to solve the problem of identity which faces the belief in reincarnation, the dead must be raised to life in its bodily form. For example, Christians believe that at the end of the world, all the dead would rise from their graves (cfr. the Apostles' Creed). The assumption is that at death, souls are

separated from bodies, but at resurrection they reunite with their bodies.

However, we would like to object to that contention, since given what death is, there is no reason for us to believe that the dissipated body can come together and be reunited with the soul. Actually it is logically impossible even if independent souls we logically conceivable.

Some scholars like Lewis would argue that in this case resurrection does not necessarily demand the resurrection of corpses, but a resurrection which, to them, is possible with God.⁵³ But, if we may ask; why should God who is believed to exist in a non-material form be interested in human beings having bodies? Why should he resurrect bodies? We cannot conceive of any reason why God, assuming that there is such a thing as God, should not allow people to remain as immaterial as he is perceived to be.

Still, if we may ask; why should people imagine that God can effect resurrection which is logically impossible from a human point of view? But, putting that aside, even if we grant that God can create an exact body or replica for a soul at resurrection as John Hick believes,⁵⁴ the problem of identity still remains unresolved. If I am identical to my present body, then the creation of a new body is by definition different from me or my 'former' body. The new body will be my replica but not my body. Moreover, these two bodies may be perceived as identical but not the same.⁵⁵ Furthermore, when we talk of God being able to create a replica or a new body, do we make any sense? Do we even conceive of a logical possibility of such a thing? Do we know of such a case? In fact, such an assumption, apparently, has no basis at all.

From what we know of human beings, we do not know of anything as to their creation by some God. Scientific knowledge attests to this.

Some scholars have nevertheless argued for some form of identity as a necessary condition for resurrection. For example, Aquinas has argued for substantial identity, and Dahl, for somatical identity.⁵⁶ However, we have to object, and say that such partial similarities are not sufficient for the identification of a person. One interesting thing to note is the apparent contradiction in the belief in resurrection. The believers seem to believe that there is something that persists death, but this thing is not a person if there is no body. What could this after - beyond thing be that remains dormant from the time of one's death until the time of resurrection which might be at the 'end of time'? Listen to what some of the believers are alleged to say: Aquinas said, 'My soul is not I, and if only souls are saved, I am not saved nor is any man ...' and Jerome said, 'The reality of resurrection without flesh and bones, without blood and members is unintelligible'.⁵⁷ It appears that the believers in resurrection hold the view that without it there would be no final judgement after death, hence the idea of divine justice would be rendered nonsensical. Tertullian is alleged to have said that justice demands that 'man must be judged as a whole.'⁵⁸

We should note that the view expressed above is contrary to Platonic-Cartesianism. The soul is not conceived as the essence of a person. But then in their view, what is the soul without a body? As they have said, the conception of the soul without a body is unintelligible. They are right. We agree with their contention. But since their belief in resurrection is based on the concept of soul as fundamental to it,

their belief therefore, is unintelligible. Moreover, we would also object to the conception of a divine justice as has been presented above. It would be very unjust for a temporal offence to be eternally punished; for 'eternal punishment must of necessity be infinitely out of proportion to any conceivable crime'.⁵⁹

Therefore, given that the problem of identity cannot be solved, and that the belief in resurrection offers a contradictory view of the soul - it believes in the soul and yet it presents the soul as unconceptualizable, the belief in resurrection is logically ruled out. Even the great christian apostle, St. Paul conceded that it cannot be known what body is resurrected.⁶⁰ In that case he was correct. But he was wrong to go ahead and hold the belief in resurrection. He tried to explain the possibility of resurrection by the analogy of the seed and the new plant. He argued that just like a new plant grows out of the seed-different from the seed, so will the new resurrected body be different from the former body. Only God knows the nature of that new body, Paul states. However, we would object to the analogy since the case of the new plant has an empirical basis while the belief in resurrection does not; we have not seen a resurrected body, save the alleged case of the Christian Jesus.

Furthermore, the belief in resurrection presupposes the existence of God who is capable of raising the dead to life, and even giving him or her the new body.⁶¹ But given that the arguments for the existence of God do not hold as far as our discussion is concerned, the belief in resurrection based on that presupposition does not hold either. And therefore as Williams says, immortality conceived through resurrection has no logical basis.⁶² For Paul, unlike Aquinas, Jerome and Tertullian, blood and flesh

cannot inherit the eternal glory. It would then appear that even among the believers themselves, there is no common understanding on what resurrection means. There is no logical basis on which the belief is based, otherwise, there would be some consensus apart from just the hope of it.

3.2.3 Reconstitution

This belief holds that the dead person's body can be restored to its former or natural state. In other words, the dead person's body can be reconstructed.

This doctrine is based on the principle that in order for one to be a true human being, one must have a body. Thus one must be corporeal. We should note that sometimes the doctrine of reconstitution is not wholly different from resurrection. Both seem to point out that for a real person to live again after death, that person must just be what he or she was before. However, in view of the physical and logical impossibility of such a process, reconstitution presupposes the existence of God, an Omnipotent being who has the power to reconstruct. But as we have argued, can a theory which is fundamentally based on God stand? It cannot.

This theory of reconstitution seems to presuppose that a human person is made up of certain definite particles which can be recollected and re-assembled up by the Omnipotent, thus reconstructing the same person.⁶³ But if God is interested in the physically embodied persons, why should he not just create them without reconstructing the dead, or stop the act of death not to 'kill' people? And as we had asked before why should God be interested in the embodied persons at all? But given that God has not told us that that is his interest, then it is clear that it is only we

(human beings) who have thought of him as so. But why should we attribute to God such an interest? It appears that it is we who wish for immortality. And given that we can only conceive of persons as embodied, we have wished for such a process that would enable us to live again as embodied beings.

The whole doctrine of reconstitution is absurd. The assumption on which it is based - that God is interested in embodied persons is also absurd. There is no reason why God who is spiritual should insist that people must be embodied to the extent of re-forcing 'people' back into bodies. This is like turning back the clock. But we cannot understand such a nostalgic act in the case of God. Moreover, at death the matter forming the body decomposes and recomposes into a body or form which cannot be recollected to be used in reconstruction of the former body. Our physical components are so complex and constantly changing that it is impossible to think of their recollection, leave alone reconstruction. Honestly speaking, can we think of reconstituted body having blood and flesh? The nature of flesh and blood necessarily negates the possibility of recollection and reconstitution after death. This also applies to resurrection. We cannot think of a resurrected or a reconstituted body having blood and flesh. It is scientifically impossible.

However, even if reconstitution were possible to conceive of, our perennial problem of identity would still haunt us. A reconstituted body cannot be the same with the former body, but it remains a reconstitution. This is so because a human body cannot be seen like a machine which is composed of parts that can be dismantled and reassembled, and it remains the same. But even for a machine, when some parts

are replaced, we cannot strictly say that it remains the same. Therefore, to hold the doctrine of reconstitution is to deny the principle of non-contradiction because it is a contradiction for a body to die and thereafter live, especially where death has been followed with the process of dissolution of the body. For death and life are mutually exclusive concepts.

Reconstitution is an exceptional case, given the nature of our discussion under this sub-theme because it alone does not involve, probably explicitly, the belief in some non-material thing that is not subject to death. It is only based on the presupposition of God and employs the common religious belief of creation. And given that the process of reconstitution is purely based on empirical fact, that is, the nature of matter which make up a person, this theory is easily refuted by an appeal to scientific knowledge. But first, the presupposition of God does not hold. We have seen in the previous chapter that the presupposition of God is fallacious and illogical, hence has no acceptable basis. It is more of hallucinatory.

Secondly, coming to the matter that make up a human body, we would observe the scientific processes involved. Given the processes of atomic composition of matter, the human conception (the union of the male and female reproductive cells), the biological growth and death; it is clear that the theory of reconstitution is scientifically impossible. Take as an example, a case where a person was mauled by some animals and eaten, or simply a case where one died and was eaten up by some living thing, be it animal or plant. The matter of the body of the dead person will have been integrated into the body of the living thing that ate it through some chemical reactions

in a way that it is impossible at all for the matter to be extracted in any way. Therefore, to think of the recollection and reconstitution of a dead person's body is scientifically nonsensical and it is absurd.

Moreover, even if such a process were scientifically possible, can we conceive of how the act of life would be restored into such a body? The scientific causes of death are such that it would be medically impossible to restore life back to that body. Some chemical processes involved in death are such that they are irreversible even for the body that has not dissipated and is still intact. Then how should we even think of the life restoration for an already dissipated body? Therefore, given the logical impossibility of God's existence, hence his action; and the scientific impossibility of reconstruction and restoration of life into such a body even if it were possible to reconstitute, the theory of reconstitution is illogical and thus unintelligible.⁶⁴ This makes the belief in immortality based on the doctrine impossible and baseless.

3.2.4 The World of Thoughts Alone

We shall have no world or environment in the ordinary sense. There will be only thoughts or a world of thoughts, and appropriate mental reactions to them.⁶⁵

H.D. Lewis believes or thinks that such a world can be conceived. He says that this idea is derivable from our normal intellectual activity that 'we become almost oblivious of our bodies and our surroundings and suppose that our bodies were whisked away and we continued with our train of thought'.⁶⁶ In other words, if we could have a physical separation between our bodies and thoughts, then we would have

a 'world of thought alone' which is conscious and is just the same like the thought 'within' a body.

We would like to object to the belief in immortality based on a possibility of such a world of thoughts alone. This is because the perceived possibility of immortality is based on an unwarranted assumption that there can be a world of thoughts alone without a body. And we would like to point out that there is no reason at all for us to think of a possible continuous thought without a body.⁶⁷ What we know is that there is no thought without a thinker. Thought is not an entity which can exist in itself. Therefore, those people like Lewis who think that such a world is perfectly intelligible and conceivable were actually mistaken:

All I will say now is that the situation I have just described seems very perfectly intelligible. It is a continuation of what in fact largely happens, and I submit that there is no overwhelming problem about the conceivability of our continuation in the bodiless state I have just noted. We would not be aware of what has happened. The content of our thought would be wholly the train of thought that absorbs us.⁶⁸

Later, Lewis admitted that it is actually hard to form a conception of what a 'world of thought alone' would be.⁶⁹ Apparently, Lewis did not just at first, want to admit that such a conception is an impossibility. Thanks for his change of view. Thought is not, or better still, appears not to be independent from the thinking organism. It is a characteristic of a living organism, human beings in particular, and it is almost impossible for us to think or imagine that thought can be without the living human organism. People like Lewis were apparently mistaken to believe that

when one is greatly engrossed in thought then one's body is not involved in the thought process.

Therefore, it would appear that the possibility of a 'world of thought alone' is not only hard to conceive, but outrightly inconceivable. Thus an immortality based on such a 'possibility' is impossible;⁷⁰ and even if it were possible, the world of thoughts alone is still faced with the problem of identity which would rule out the concept of personal immortality. If only it could be possible, such a world is mostly likely to be a thought continuum which would still be incompatible with the idea of personal immortality.

3.2.5 World of 'Dream Hypothesis'

This hypothesis has found its expression in the works of H.D. Lewis among others. This view holds that it is conceivably possible that we would 'live after death' in some embodied form but with a different kind of a body.⁷¹ According to Lewis, this sort of a body will not be in physical space. But where else could it be? Lewis presents a model for that sort of a body as the sort of bodies we have in dreams. During dreaming, we do not retain our physical bodies. In other words, we see that we retain them while in actual sense our 'physical' bodies are not the ones we seem to have in dreams. For example, if I am dreaming that I am walking or fighting, I would see myself as walking or fighting while in actual sense my body is not involved in any walking or fighting, save some cases of somnambulism or sleep-walk.

Therefore, the dream hypothesis states that immortality could be conceived in that sense of dream-body.⁷² After death we could have the kind of life as that of dream experience. In dream we feel ourselves as we actually are while not dreaming. But in dream we are not aware that we are simply dreaming. So if the body could be whisked away during dream without disrupting the dream, leaving it to go on continuously, then it would serve as a model for the sort of life after death that we may visualize.⁷³

However plausible such a presentation may appear, it has some problems which rules out such a possibility. Lewis and H.H. Price have argued so well as to how possible the case of a dream-world can be a model for understanding personal immortality. But can we transform dream experience into death 'experience'? Not possible. Dreaming is a part of natural experience of a living person while death is not an experience but an end, a dissolution of the body. We are saying that dreaming is part of life experience while death is not. One does not experience death, but one dies.

Secondly, we should not overlook the fact that dreams have something to do with memory or what must have crossed one's mind. And we are not saying that all dreams fall into that category, but most dreams are. Therefore, dreaming has some relationship with the functions of the brain. And if that may be the case, then there can never be dreaming without a body. Thus to imagine whisking the body away while leaving the dream to continue is mistaken and an impossibility.

Thirdly, dreams are not realities but delusions. But we would like to make it clear that when we say that dreams are not realities, we do not mean that dreaming is not a reality but only that the contents of dreams are not real. So the reality of the

contents of dreams are disproved by sense experience. Yet this is not the case with death. There is no possibility, for that matter, an evidence that can confirm the possibility of 'life after death'. Given that most dreams, if not all, have their foundations in reality, that is, their contents are extensions of what happens in real life experience, dreaming is like re-doing what had been done in waking experience, but death is a once-and-for-all event.

In the light of that argument, let us examine an example of one dreaming about the dead. That does not mean that the dead is alive. The dead is dreamt as he or she was known when alive, and not when he or she is dead. No one has seen either in reality or dream a living 'dead person' different from what he or she was known. Therefore, no one knows what is called a 'living dead'. This implies that to dream of the dead has something to do with what was known about the dead, and not what the dead is. But if a dream is about anything, which is not known in reality, then it is likely to be about what has been thought or imagined.

We should note that Lewis' argument is hypothetical, and it does not indicate why we should believe in 'life after death'. He knows that it is materially and logically impossible for the body of a person to be whisked away leaving the person dreaming. The question would be what do we conceive to have been whisked away, and what would be left dreaming? In other words, Lewis forgets to conceive of the person in relation to dream. It is undeniable fact that the sense perception or sensation is linked to the dream. So that one dreaming can have the dreaming being disrupted by sensation in the body. Therefore, it is impossible for the process of dreaming to

continue in the absence of the body. It would appear that it is the nature of the body that admits of dreaming. Thus it is impossible to conceive of immortality in the form of dream-body in the absence of the body.

3.2.6 Telepathy

Telepathy is the communication between people of thoughts, feelings, desires, and others, involving mechanisms that cannot be understood in terms of known scientific laws. It is sometimes referred to as Thought Transference.

The fact of telepathy has been advanced by some scholars to show that there is a possibility of thoughts, or consciousness existing alone independent of the body even after death.⁷⁴

In the field of parapsychology, a lot of psychic researches have been, and are still being conducted to investigate whether it is possible for the living to communicate with the 'dead', or rather to find out the possibility, if any, of communication between thought without the mediation of the body. Therefore, the possibility of apparitions - the spirit of a dead person in a bodily form; telegnosis - the knowledge about distant events alleged to have been obtained without the employment of normal sensory mechanisms; and clairvoyance - the alleged power of perceiving things beyond the natural range of senses, have been studied. However, in this work we would like to deal with telepathy alone since it appears that quite a number of researches have been conducted in that area, and because it has been advanced as an indication of the possibility of personal immortality.

Scholars are still divided on the reality of telepathy. Some of them would dismiss it as not-yet-established. For example, Francis Crick dismisses the researches on Extra-Sensory Perception (ESP), including telepathy as complete failures which have never produced any technique whatsoever which is scientifically acceptable.⁷⁵ C.E.M. Hansel, after having examined quite a number of the psychic experimentations, pointed out that every one of them had a possibility of either conscious or unconscious cheatings.⁷⁶

However, other scholars like Eysenck have strongly reacted against the view represented by people like Crick and Hansel. In the face of the massive researches that have been conducted, and most of which, to Eysenck are successful, there is no other possible logical conclusion but to accept the reality of telepathy:

...the only conclusion the unbiased observer can come to must be that there does exist a small body of people who obtain knowledge existing in other people's minds or in the outer world, by means as yet unknown to science.⁷⁷

We would like to suggest that Eysenck's use of the 'outer world' could be misleading. The fact of telepathy does not necessarily make it a matter of the 'outer world'. 'Outer World' is understood here to refer to non-involvement of the body. The possibility of telepathy being a matter of 'this world' is still open. Probably some scientific researches will establish the mechanisms of telepathy in future. However, Eysenck seems to be correct in pointing out that the telepathic means or process is 'yet unknown to science' which leaves room for possible scientific in-ways. Given our present scientific knowledge, the telepathic mechanism is not known but science might discover it later.

The Russian Professor L.L. Vasiliev undertook enormous researches on telepathy, researches which are generally considered successful in the scientific fraternity. He is reported to have conducted 260 experiments or trials of which only 6 were failures.⁷⁸ Apart from the experiments by Vasiliev there are over 85000 other experimentations carried by other parapsychologists all over the world, and which have been apparently noted with some success.⁷⁹

Therefore, in the light of his own experiments, Vasiliev concluded that telepathy is a fact that cannot be doubted any more:

The phenomena of telepathy can no longer be called into question.⁸⁰

And commenting on the findings of Vasiliev, Keith Campbell says that even the ingenious Hansel cannot find fault with the methodology employed by Vasiliev.⁸¹

Badham therefore concludes:

My conclusion therefore is that there is now sufficient evidence from many different sources to make it reasonable to accept the conclusion of the American NASA¹ and of the Soviet Academy of Sciences that telepathy is a reality.⁸²

It is very interesting to note that a number of scholars would think that the reality of telepathy rules out the materialistic explanation of mind. Badham agrees with the contention of scholars like Herbert-Feigl, Keith Campbell, D.M. Armstrong, among others who see telepathy as somehow negating the materialistic theory of mind.⁸³ It is apparent that these people who negate the materialistic view of mind

¹ NASA - National Aeronautics and Space Administration

would want us to believe that mind is different from the brain and can operate without brain. Yes, they could be right in the sense that mind is different from the brain, but they are wrong to think of mind as an entity or object just like brain which can operate independently. For example, Campbell says:

Parapsychological phenomena, by definition, demonstrate capacities of mind which exceed any capacities of brain... If some minds are receptive to the contents of the mind of another by some more direct means such as telepathy then those minds are just not brains ... If even a single example of paranormal phenomena is genuine, Central State Materialism is false.⁸⁴

It can be seen that Campbell has tried to compare mind and brain in terms of their capacities as if the two are independent and comparable. Campbell and those with whom he shares the view are dualists who follow in the Platonic-Cartesianism which can no longer hold. We have seen the major problem of Platonic-Cartesianism, it commits the category mistake⁸⁵ as has been precisely pointed out by Ryle and Wiredu. And we should note here that even materialism is faulty. We are not then accepting the materialist theory of mind. And we would be inclined to agree with Wiredu that even their theory too commits the category mistake:

Suppose materialism is interpreted as claiming that mind is ultimately a form of matter. Then, on the basis of our analysis, the verdict must be that the theory thrives, equally ultimately, on the category mistake, already explained, of confusing concept with object.⁸⁶

However, we would suggest that, so far, there is no reason to deny that telepathic mechanism is linked to the matter, or to be precise, to brain process. Though the link has not been discovered, we cannot rule out the possibility that the

two are connected. In fact, some scholars see a greater probability of this linkage being discovered. Vasiliev hoped that soon the physical foundation of telepathy would be established. In fact, 'He is quite confident that ultimately a satisfactory physical theory will be found'.⁸⁷ Armstrong admits that our present framework of science does not offer an explanation as to the connection between two central nervous systems as may be involved in telepathy. But he admits that there is a possibility of the present scientific framework expanding and therefore may accommodate an explanation of telepathy.⁸⁸ Hans Berger, a physiologist, appears to have attempted an explanation. He made a vital step towards a possible scientific explanation of telepathy. He is the one who discovered the use of electro-encephalograph as a technique of recording brain-waves. He advances an hypothesis that explains telepathy in terms of the transformations of electrical energy into a psychic energy, and vice versa. Therefore, Berger explains; in telepathy electrical energy in one's brain is transformed into psychic energy which is diffusible to any distance through obstacles without attenuation, and which on reaching another brain is transformed back into electrical energy that then produces neural patterns and experiences corresponding to those of the agent.⁸⁹ What Berger suggests is that the psychic energy which is involved in telepathy might just be a form of physical energy. If that could be so, then telepathy might be explained physically or scientifically. Thus grounding it in matter or brain process. But Berger's suggestion is still a hypothesis. It is still to be established what type of brains or nature of brains have a mutual telepathic communication.

However, this hypothesis of Berger appears more plausible and sensible. We know that telepathy takes place among living persons, and therefore there is no reason to deny that it is only possible due to the functionality of these persons. This then makes the transference of thoughts a mediated process, and without the persons (including their bodies) it would appear impossible. So what we are saying is that we cannot have or imagine to have thoughts in the absence of a thinker. In any way, the thoughts can only be transferred from one living person to another, and in the absence of the living persons, the thoughts are not there, and thus cannot be transferred. Therefore, as we had seen, thinking is a brain process, and therefore are thoughts. There can never be thoughts without brain and brain processes.

But to what extent can the reality of telepathy be used to support the belief in personal immortality? We should note that those scholars who strongly believe that telepathy might have a physical explanation, in principle deny the belief in immortality based on the fact of telepathy. This is because a physical explanation of telepathy anchors it on brain processes (matter) which implies that the dissolution of brain necessarily negates the possibility of any telepathic experience. And in this respect, Eysenck's warning is apt. Referring to the reality of telepathy, he adds: 'This should not be interpreted as giving any support to such notions as survival after death, philosophical idealism or anything else'.⁹⁰

It is also worth noting that our knowledge of telepathic experiences has been without exception, confined to living people. And on that basis we are not warranted to infer that such experiences are possible in the absence of living bodies (persons). We

have no reason at all to make such an inference. Moreover, all telepathic experimentations have been done through hypnosis which basically involves sensations. But in death there is no sensation, thus we do not expect any telepathy be it natural or hypnotized. Probably it would have made some sense if it were possible to experiment with the dead people. But that is, so far, impossible. Therefore, what we are saying is that the reality of telepathy cannot be a basis for the belief in personal immortality.

3.2.7 Dream Experience

Some people would also argue to reinforce the belief in immortality by appealing to dream experiences. Most people take dreams as sources of information. Therefore, some of them would take seriously any dream communications, particularly, communications with the dead. And it would be bad if such a dream becomes frequent and during which the dead is perceived as making some demands from the living. Quite a number of people often infer from such dreams that they actually meet the 'dead', and that the 'dead' lives. Thus such dreams have become the basis for the belief in personal immortality.

But a bit of reflection would throw some doubt on this dream hypothesis. It is an undeniable fact that the content of a dream is not real, but a delusion, and hence illusory. But then when and why is it that if the dream-image involves the dead, which is common in a number of African cultures, then it is taken seriously and to be real? However, one's view of dreams, in most cases, are culturally defined. If one comes from a culture in which some dreams are believed to convey real messages, then one

would view them as so.

Nevertheless, as we had pointed out, most dreams, if not all, do not express anything new but are simply 'mental revisitations' of the waking experiences which are either based on real happenings or thoughts. Therefore, dreaming is a sort of 'mental re-play'. Some dreams appear unique only because we sometimes fail to recollect or recall into memory the real events or thoughts which are their foundation. But if we could be able to recall into memory all our real experiences, both events and thoughts which could have crossed our minds, we might discover to our surprise that no dreams are unique and strange.

Probably one would protest and object to our analysis, and cite some cases where some dreams have turned out to be real, that is, their contents are realized. In other words, the dreams which are seen as informative, whereby some informations are got from them which turn out to be real later. This is a common view of some dreams involving the dead, especially where the dead is seen to make some demands related to, for example, certain rites. But as we have stated, such dreams would still fit within our framework. They too are based on real experiences. Only that that species of dreams is based on hopes, wishes and possibilities. We have some wishes and hopes which are realizable. Most of our expectations are possibilities. Take for example, in cases of death. Someone might discover later that a certain rite was not properly (culturally) performed, or was not performed at all. Such a person might be so much haunted by that idea and fear of reprisals from the dead (which is also a cultural provision) that he or she might have dreams in which the dead 'demands' that the rite be performed.

That person might take that dream seriously, and might see to it that that rite is actually performed with comfort or discomfort. In such a case some people normally claim that the dead wanted the rite performed while in actual sense, the dream was simply a sort of 're-play' of an expectation - a cultural expectation.

There are also certain cases whereby some 'information' are got in dreams related to lost or misplaced things by one before one died. Sometimes it is about a dead person 'revealing' the location of his or her corpse. The 'information' might give the location of the thing or the corpse which turns out to be real. The 'information' might have been offered by the dead. But since it turns out to be information, for some people, that is an indication that the 'dead lives'. But then, what could have been the case if the 'information' turned out to be false? Could the dead still be taken to be alive? If it is only the truth of the information that determines whether the 'dead lives' or not, then in the event of the 'information' being false, the dead being alive is negated.

What we are suggesting is that, referring to the case in which the 'information' turns out to be true, we cannot necessarily infer that the 'dead lives' simply because the dream-information becomes true. What we are suggesting is that the dream-information becoming true is a coincidence. It was a possibility that the lost thing (whatever it may be) or the corpse is in the location where it was found. It could have been found there had one thought of it without necessarily relying on the dream. And it is even possible that before the dream, the dreamer had thought of it, hence leading to the dream. The same could be said of a case where one dreams of meeting a friend, and thereafter one actually meets that friend. We should note that that meeting was a natural possibility which could have taken place without the dream. And therefore, the dream was just based on that natural possibility.

Therefore, as has been discussed by Sigmund Freud, dreams are part of our waking life experiences. They are derived from experiences. In other words, what forms the content of dream has simply been reproduced or remembered in dream, but which is basically a waking life experience. And probably that is why most dreams are 'most frequently of things on which our warmest passions are centred'. And also, as has been suggested, some dreams are fulfilments of wishes which can be analysed on the basis of intelligible waking mental acts; they are construction 'by a highly complicated activity of the mind'. But all in all, all dreams can be interpreted in terms of waking mental acts.⁹¹ Thus dream experience cannot be taken to indicate the possibility of personal immortality.

3.2.8 Mediumship and Haunting

Some scholars and other people have also argued that mediumistic communications indicate immortality of dead. Mediumship is the act of communication between the earthly world of the living and nontemporal spiritual realm of the dead. It is a means allegedly by which living people communicate with the spirits of the dead. To them, the act of mediumship is an evidence that spirits exist.⁹² But for such argument to be accepted, we must ensure that the information received by the medium could not be got from any other sources apart from the spirit or 'dead' person. But if there is a possibility of such information being got from other sources apart from the deceased, then we cannot assert or accept that the medium got it only from the 'dead'. And as Peter Geach points out, the mediumistic information

could as well be a result of the queer nature of the mind of the medium, and therefore, cannot necessarily show that the 'dead lives'.⁹³ As we have seen with telepathy, it is possible that the brain of the mediums are capable of getting such special information without showing that the 'dead lives'. The workings of the brain is still not exhaustively explored, and the possibility of mediumistic experiences being part of a brain process cannot be logically ruled out, thus the mediums would only be people 'apparently endowed with unusual psychical abilities'.⁹⁴

However, besides mediumship, cases of hauntings and visitations allegedly by ghosts might or could be cited to support the belief in personal immortality.⁹⁵ But we should not forget that hauntings or visitations are mental states, and therefore seem to have no objective referent. Haunting is an obsessional experience which is just a persistent idea or impulse consistently or stubbornly forcing its way into consciousness, and it is associated with anxiety and mental illness.

Most often the anxiety is due to a guilty conscience which is culturally imposed on a person. The culture defines what ought to be done and what should not be done. The violation of a cultural prohibition is often followed by a psychological disturbance due to fear of reprisals by the spirits. This is also a cultural provision. This psychological disturbance causes anxiety. The repercussions of the violation is often imagined to be in various forms; and where the violation is seen as an offence against the dead, the repercussions are normally imagined to be in the form of some interventions by the 'spirit' of the dead. The interventions are often conceived as some unknown undesirable events. The expectation of any such misfortune creates anxiety

which can become obsessional, thus is referred to as haunting. What we have been trying to explain here has been succinctly explained by a Kenyan psychologist Daniel Kabithe, in an article in a Kenya's newspaper. *Sunday Nation*, June 21, 1992:

Psychology teaches us that fear can turn into anxiety (neurotic fear). The difference between fear and anxiety is that fear knows what it fears but anxiety, although greater than fear, does not know what it fears. That is to say that when fear turns into anxiety, the victim is a neurotic patient who can be described as a victim of his own ignorance.

To illustrate the nature of ignorance as a source of craziness, consider the person who thinks he is so hated by his neighbour that he believes he is bewitched. He moves to a new neighbourhood only to begin suspecting that the new neighbours are in collusion with his enemy to bewitch him.

One day he looks on his side and thinks he has seen a stranger trying to get him and he runs for his life, crying for help. In the end, it is discovered that the stranger he was running away from is his own shadow. This is not an illustration of ignorance but also of craziness.⁹⁶

It would be interesting to note that almost all cases, if not all, of hauntings or visitations involve a non-objective being. The haunter or ghost is only visible to the one being haunted. If the haunter could have been objective, then it would be seen by other people other than the haunted. Furthermore, the haunter is often 'seen' as he or she was known in terms of appearance, or as is imagined suitable for haunting. But it appears to be a fact that the haunter remains subjective and a mental phantasy.

Therefore, what we have been pointing out is that haunting is precipitated by belief, especially one related to the taboos which when violated are believed to result into some catastrophes which then becomes a psychological expectation. This

expectation of some unknown misfortune creates a mental phantasy. But it would appear that there is no objective haunter. Thus without the belief which leads to a psychological expectation of some calamities, it seems there would be no haunting. But if our argument is granted, then haunting can never be used as a basis for the belief in personal immortality. Moreover, it would be a circular reasoning since the act of haunting is based on the belief that the 'dead lives' and can avenge for injuries inflicted on them by any culturally unacceptable behaviour.

3.2.9 Inference

In concluding our analysis of the argumentations commonly advanced in support of the belief in personal immortality, we should note that it has come out rather clearly that the belief necessarily has no logical basis. Almost all of the argumentations for the belief are fallacious and hence are necessarily objectionable. They, therefore, cannot support the belief. They are based, as has been observed by Phillips, on a number of mistakes and are therefore confused.⁹⁷

Most of the psychical argumentations for the belief in personal immortality are inadequate. They are experiences of the living people, and there is a logical possibility that they are simply extensions of natural experiences which are typical of living human beings, and cannot necessarily be extended to the 'life beyond'. This contention has been observed also by H.D. Lewis.⁹⁸ Thus they are not sufficient conditions or reasons for holding the belief in personal immortality.

Therefore, on the basis of our discussion, and in view of the objections raised concerning the possibilities of personal immortality, we can comfortably assert that there is no logical basis for the belief. Moreover, what the advocates of this belief refer to as 'life after death' is inconceptualizable,⁹⁹ and in view of our discussion, we cannot but agree with Ludwig Wittgenstein, that death is not a transition from one mode of life to another; it is not an experience in one's life, but it is the end of all experiences.¹⁰⁰

Despite the fact that the belief in personal immortality lacks substantial and logical basis, many people still adhere to it. They are unwilling to abandon it or become sceptical about it simply because it is consoling in the face of threat of total extinction posed by death. It makes them accept death with less fear, and it gives them hope which seems more illusionary than real.¹⁰¹ This is so because the belief is not based on any necessary evidence, but fear of total extinction.¹⁰² No wonder, after belabouring with philosophical argumentations which could shed some light on the belief, and after having failed in his attempts, Lewis resorts to religious belief. He states that it is only an enlightened religious faith that can 'in fact' prove the belief in immortality. This faith involves, according to H.D. Lewis, rational considerations of ourselves and sensitivity to available religious evidence.¹⁰³

Unfortunate for him, Lewis does not show us his so-called 'religious evidence'. He does not tell us, as well, what he calls 'rational considerations' which necessarily excludes the philosophical enterprise. However, as we had stated earlier, faith is not an epistemological hypothesis. It cannot offer any logical evidence for the belief

beyond its own presuppositions. Thus Lewis' last resort is useless too.

It would then appear that to hold the belief in immortality is like rejoicing over a sweet dream which is but an illusory rejoice. It has been argued that to deny personal immortality, no matter how illogical and baseless the belief may be, is to court despair.¹⁰⁴ This implies that we have become slaves to our own fancies or imaginations. But that would surely be absurd. The real happiness of man depends on the real positive experience of man. Real happiness cannot be based on fear since fear necessarily negates happiness. Therefore, for man to be happy, man must necessarily face the real life, try to solve as many life problems as possible, thus deriving maximum satisfaction in life. Man can achieve this only by fearlessly facing the reality. For what else could be man's ultimate aim in life!

By definition man is a rational being. This means that first and foremost, man's life must be rational. But given that the belief in personal immortality appears to be based on one's fear for one's extinction, the belief is based on one's 'own' belief and fear. Through the belief, man has chained himself to his own imagination which is a self-denial of one's freedom and essence; the freedom to be and remain what one is. However, this discussion should not be taken to mean that we assume the absolute knowledge of man's nature and life. What we are saying is only that, so far, there is no sufficient reason or any logical necessity for holding the belief in immortality. Moreover, it appears logically inconceivable that man can have the knowledge of what is assumed to lie beyond his knowable nature. It is even inconceivable that one can 'know' what 'life' is after death. One cannot even wait to see it after death.

Therefore, coming back to the issue of ancestral spirits, it can be seen clearly that on the basis of the foregoing discussion, there is nothing like ancestral spirits as existents. We have intellectually searched for any possibility which can logically indicate the possibility of such an existence. As we indicated in the opening remarks of this chapter, ancestors are by definition dead. But our analysis pointed out that there is no evidence, logical or scientific that shows that the 'dead lives'. We have also analysed the nature of man to see whether it is possible that man can persist death but to no avail. We have seen that the concept of spirit as an independent existent from the body is absurd. Therefore, on the basis of our analysis, there is no existent as an ancestral spirit. Moreover, the idea of it is simply an extension of man's wish for immortality in the face of death - a total extinction. Thus the idea appears, at best, to be a pure mental phantasy.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE LUO BELIEF IN SUPERNATURALISM

In the previous two chapters we have attempted an analysis of the general argumentations for the belief in God and spirits. We saw some of the logical implications of the belief in both God and spirits. In this chapter, we attempt to analyse the belief in God and spirits within the cultural framework of the Luo people, particularly the Kenya Luo. After having analysed the Luo belief in both God and spirits, we would then try to see how the issue of taboos could be related to the beliefs.

4.1.0 The Luo belief in God

4.1.1 Anthropomorphic Conception of God

A number of available works point out very strongly that the Luo people, that is, the Kenya Luo as well as the non-Kenya Luo, believed and still believe in God. This God has been presented by works of many scholars, both implicitly and explicitly as a dominant deity or supreme being. The scholars whose works express this contention include Paul Mboya¹, Bethwell A. Ogot², A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo³, G.E.M. Ogotu⁴, Henry Olela⁵, Grace E.A. Ogot⁶, B. Onyango-Ogotu and A.A. Roscoe⁷, J.S. Mbiti⁸ and Hans-Egil Hauge⁹.

This dominant deity in which the Luo people are claimed to believe is also presented as the creator and sustainer of the universe. In Paul Mboya's book *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi* (Luo Customs and Practice), probably the first book of its kind by a Luo on the Luo culture, the following is said of God:

Luo nong'eyo Nyasaye nyakalaga; negiwacho kaka Nyasaye lak mana e ringre dhano, kendo en e mochweyo ji. Ne ok ging'eyo kar dakne e momiyo giparo ni odak e ringre dhano.¹⁰

The following is the English translation of the above quotation:

The Luo knew God *Nyasaye Nyakalaga* whom they said 'flowed' in the human body. He was the moulder of human beings. They did not know where God lived, that is why they thought he lives in the human body.¹¹

The Luo people, it is claimed, believe in a deity which is not only the creator of human beings but also of the whole universe. And this view has been explicitly expressed in the works of Ocholla-Ayayo, G.E.M. Ogutu and Henry Olela. On this view, Ocholla-Ayayo writes:

The creation of the universe is variously elaborated in Luo mythology (oral tradition) which describes how *Nyasaye-Jachwech* made the sky (*polo*) and the earth (*piny*), and how he equipped these two spheres with all the natural attributes that are variously useful for man and particularly for the pastoral Luo ...¹²

Furthermore, in the same book mentioned, the Luo people are presented as holding certain fundamental premises one of which is that "The entire universe was created and continues to be sustained by the Supreme Being".¹³

G.E.M. Ogutu, still on the Luo belief that God created the universe, writes:

An examination of the Luo indigenous religious practices reveals that to them Nyasaye was no fiction. Any doubt on the existence of Nyasaye was to them absurd. Nyasaye was ultimately responsible for the entire universe, maker of all things, their primary and initial condition, and constantly involved in their continuation.¹⁴

And on the same topic, Henry Olela writes:

The Luo of Kenya refer to the principle of unity as *Nyakalaga* or *Nyasaye*. He is divine, and is sometimes identified with God. *Nyakalaga* or *Nyasaye* is a force behind the universe and is the source of vitality. It is a major force without which the possibility of life would be inconceivable.... The implicit assumption that lies behind the concept of *Asisi*, *Nyasaye*, or *Onyame*, is that they are intelligent forces that determine the course of the universe.¹⁵

From the few examples given above, it would appear that the Luo people believed in some sort of supreme being and a kind of a Thomistic belief. This is a belief that all that there are in nature or universe must have been created; and the creator is God (*Nyasaye*). This belief seems to accept the argument which infers God's existence from the fact of nature. This has been observed by Ocholla-Ayayo when he analyses the Luo religious beliefs:

There are the questions of the origin of man and of his destiny; what will become of man after his death? ... These complex questions call for answers which are based on man himself since it is only man among all animals that can imitate the art of making ... The one who created them so must in some way be in the form of man himself. In many languages we find this man as "God"; in the Luo language he is known as *Juok* or *Nyasaye*.¹⁶

According to the above argument, it seems that the Luo have, in some sense, an anthropomorphic concept of God which is derived from the very nature of man, and particularly man's creative nature. Apparently this would mean that the being of God is deduced from nature. But such an inference seems to be based on a fundamental assumption that the universe must have had a beginning, and it must have been created. The creator is God. That argument therefore, seems to deny in essence the possibility of the eternity of the universe. It would appear that the idea of attributing eternity to anything is absurd except to God. But as we have argued somewhere in this work, such an argument is in itself absurd. It has no logical justification. It is invalid since there is a logical possibility that just as God is conceptualized as eternal so it is possible with the universe. Furthermore, as we have seen, there is no logical necessity that even if the universe had a beginning, then that beginning must be God as it is often presented.

4.1.2 Historical approach to the Luo Belief in God

We would like to point out that the Luo belief in God as has been presented has not been without some controversies. We have seen that various works tend to show that the Luo people believed and still believe in a dominant deity which they call either *Nyasaye* or *Juok*, and that their conception of *Nyasaye* or *Juok* (sometimes written *Jok*) tends to be anthropomorphic which on a critical evaluation shows some defects.

It should be pointed out that not all scholars who have studied the Luo belief system subscribe to the view that indigenously the Luo believed in a sort of a supreme

being, especially in the monotheistic sense. Scholars like Okot p'Bitek and G.E.M. Ogotu have made some observations which explicitly or implicitly seem to show that the idea of a dominant deity as found among the Luo or believed by the Luo today is borrowed or an offshoot of some historical incidents. That is, it is a belief which resulted from some interactions between the Luo people and some non-Luo in the course of their history; and on this G.E.M. Ogotu observes:

By the time they got to Nyanza, they had spent nearly a century of migratory mode of life. Their concept of the moulder deity had developed from *Jok* who protected the homestead to Nyakalaga who led them to the new land.¹⁷

Ogotu seems to be saying that the idea of a dominant deity as is found in the Luo belief is not an inherent or authentic Luo belief, but a development over a long span of time. He admits that *Jok* is a Nilotic concept which signified a deity who looked after homesteads. Probably, *Jok* is an ancestral spirit. But the notion of a dominant deity who is ubiquitous is a later development in the Luo belief system. Therefore, Ogotu agrees with the view of Okot p'Bitek that the idea of the supreme being is an alien notion which got incorporated into the Luo belief.

Okot has argued that the Nilotic Luo had no concept of dominant deities and that what some of them have today are importations due to influences from other belief systems. For example, he singled out the Kenya Luo whom he argues have borrowed the words *Nyasaye* and *Were* (*Wele* is sometimes used by the Luhya people instead of *Were*) from some Bantu speaking people, particularly the Luhya. He also observes that the Central Luo of Uganda have also borrowed the concept *Jok Ruhanga* from the Nyoro people.¹⁸

The word or term *Nyasaye* which is widely used today among the Kenya Luo to refer to some supreme being or dominant deity has become a subject of great intellectual dispute. As we have seen, Okot has stated that it is borrowed because, among other factors, the term is not found among the Central Luo, a view which is also supported by G.E.M Ogotu.¹⁹

4.1.3 An Examination of 'Nyasaye'

An examination of the term or concept *Nyasaye* as used by the Kenya Luo today throws some doubt as to whether the term, strictly speaking, refers to a supreme deity. On critical analysis of the concept as used in Paul Mboya's book *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi* which is probably one of the oldest, if not the oldest comprehensive book on Luo customs and practices, the term *Nyasaye* is used in a way that does not necessarily imply the supreme being or dominant deity. Its contextual analysis seems to show that the term does not mean only a supreme deity. This is rather clearly reflected in Chapter Three of this book which is entitled *Nyiseche Milamo* which is ordinarily understood, and has been translated as 'Gods worshipped'.²⁰ But we would like to warn that this idea of 'gods worshipped' does not necessarily imply polytheism, hence should not necessarily be interpreted to mean so. This is so because polytheism seem to imply the acceptance of supreme deities which are equally powerful in their own rights and their perceived domains. Furthermore, polytheism seems to admit unquestionably the existence of the deities in question which we do not think is necessarily implied by the *Nyiseche Milamo* as used in this book.

Among the gods worshipped by the Luo as given out by Mboya are *Nyasaye Nyakalaga* (*Nyasaye* the ubiquitous one); *dwe* (moon); *godemadongo* (mountains or big hills); *Luendini madongo* (big rocks); *yathe madongo* (big trees) under which either a clan elder was buried or elders used to assemble; *joma otho* (dead people) and *thuonde madongo* (big snakes).²¹ From this presentation, *Nyiseche* is the plural form of *Nyasaye*. And it seems that *Nyasaye* does not necessarily mean some deity, but some object which commands some solemn or awesome attitude. Some scholars have indicated that the word *Nyasaye* simply means 'that which is beseeched or worshipped or approached with humility.'²²

Apparently, from the term *Nyasaye*, the existence of some deity cannot be logically inferred. Moreover, if the analysis of the word *Nyasaye* be granted, that is, in the non-deified understanding or sense, then probably we would understand why Mboya used the term *Nyiseche* which refers to many objects which cannot be deified like a big rock, a big snake, and a big tree. If we understand each of these objects to be a *Nyasaye*, then *Nyasaye* necessarily refers to neither a supreme being nor a deity. Moreover, the Luo word *lamo* which is currently used to mean the worship of a deity, means other things as well. It should not be taken to mean only some interactive process between a human being and some deity. The word means worship, or earnest begging, or adoring, or beseeching a fellow human being for some help. It could also mean a strong desire or wish, for example, *alemo mondo arom gi ng'ane* (I wish or desire to meet so-and-so). Therefore, *lamo* does not necessarily have a sacred implication, and hence should not necessarily be interpreted to signify a worship of

some deity.

From the foregoing analysis of the words *Nyasaye* and *lamo* or concept *Nyiseche milamo*, we have seen that they do not need to imply some deification or deity. But they could have purely temporal and non-religious interpretations. Therefore, from the word *Nyasaye* as found among the Kenya Luo, we cannot infer that they had a concept of supreme being or a dominant deity. *Nyasaye* does not necessarily mean some god or God. Thus there is no logical justification for inferring the existence of a deity or the belief in some deity from the word *Nyasaye* or *lamo*.

Apparently, the things which have been presented as being worshipped by the Luo do not seem to have some link with the conceptualization of some deity but are things which probably the Luo perceived as having some aura of awe or reflecting some mysteries of nature. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain why the objects mentioned are, for example, big tree, a big rock, a big mountain and a big snake, to be big or huge in order to be worthy of worship.

The foregoing analysis seems to point out that the Kenya Luo do not use the word *Nyasaye* necessarily to refer to some deities but to various things.²³ Therefore, it appears that the Kenya Luo believe in collectivity which is referred to as *Nyiseche*. This has been pointed out by Okot p'Bitek as well:

One curious aspect is that the word *Nyasaye* has a plural form *Nyiseche*. If, as the missionaries claim, *Nyasaye* is the one true God, how come that the word has a plural form?²⁴

The question that Okot has raised should be treated with some great care. Some scholars like B. Onyango-Ogutu have argued against the use of *Nyiseche* to mean plural of *Nyasaye*; hence sub-gods. However, it should be noted that the objection registered here by Onyango-Ogutu and the other protagonists seems to be based on a supposition that *Nyasaye* refers to the 'Luo High God'²⁵. And on the basis of that supposition it is asserted that *Nyiseche* refers to spirits and not gods:

The *Nyiseche*, then contrary to what seems suggested by their name - which is the plural of *Nyasaye* - are not sub-gods but spirits.²⁶

Let us try to look at some of the possible implications of the view represented by Onyango-Ogutu relating to the terms *Nyasaye* and *Nyiseche*. If granted that *Nyiseche* refers to spirits, then it would appear that *Nyasaye* refers to a spirit. But only on condition that *Nyasaye* is accepted to be the singular form of *Nyiseche* as Onyango-Ogutu and those who hold the same view would want us to accept. This argument logically points out to the idea that *Nyasaye* then refers to both the Luo High God and spirit. However, given that the so-called Luo High God or god, as assumed in general, and spirit are usually perceived as essentially and categorically different, then logically it seems impossible that the term *Nyasaye* refers to both of them. And therefore, to argue that *Nyasaye* refers to both does not seem to make sense.

4.1.4 'Nyasaye': An Ambiguous Concept

We have seen that *Nyasaye*, in some perceived sense, is an ambiguous concept. The argument advanced by Onyango-Ogutu and the protagonists of the view is an

evidence of the ambiguity. However, looked from another different perspective, the term *Nyasaye* does not even indicate some form of a deity. This view has been aptly observed by A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo:

None of the earlier attempts at etymological explanations depict *Nyasaye* as originator, creator or source of life. However, the Luo concept, which seems fundamental, conceives in fact of *Nyasaye* as the originator of life. In the Luo sacred usage, *Nyasaye* means womb or uterus, i.e. the locus where life begins and grows.²⁷

It can be argued that in a case where *Nyasaye* is equated with a womb or uterus, *Nyasaye* is understood simply as a fountain of human life. This appears to have no notion or implication of a supreme being who is the creator of life, and universe. In this case *Nyasaye* does not imply a form of a deity. As we will argue later, the use of *Nyasaye* to refer to some deity seems to be a later development in the history of the Luo people.

Paul Mboya has presented what seems an ambivalent view of the concept *Nyasaye*. He states that the Luo people knew *Nyasaye nyakalaga*; *Nyasaye* the omnipresent. But at the same time he says that the Luo people did not know *Nyasaye*'s 'residence' and that was why they thought that he resides within the human body:

*Luo nene ok ong'eyo kar dak Nyasaye ema nene omiyo
giparo ni odak e ringre dhano.*²⁸

What Mboya says seems to portray the Luo people as having believed in *Nyasaye* which is locatable in time and space. Hence, they thought that it lives or resides within the human body. But if we accept this view of *Nyasaye*, then it appears incompatible with the view that the Luo people believed in an omnipresent deity -

Nyasaye Nyakalaga. Ubiquity or omnipresence of an existent seems to negate the possibility of locating that existent within a physical space which is confined to a temporal point.

G.E.M. Ogutu has made a very critical observation of the idea of *Nyasaye*:

... the Luo traditions are silent on what *Nyasaye* looks like. Nobody has seen Him.²⁹

This quotation can be understood to mean that nobody knows the nature of *Nyasaye*. This means that nobody understands *Nyasaye*. But if nobody knows the nature of *Nyasaye* then it seems that there is no justification for believing that there is *Nyasaye*. Therefore, on the basis of this argument, the idea of *Nyasaye* seems to be a baseless human construction, and is not even what it is usually claimed or presented. Could it therefore not be that *Nyasaye* as it is ordinarily claimed is an alien idea?

Besides, for those who hold that the Luo people believed in some sort of a supreme being, we would like to ask: How could the Luo have come to know of such a being? What justifiable evidence is there to support their view?

Interestingly enough, there appears to be only one case that has been given so support that *Nyasaye Nyakalaga* (God) exists. This evidence is presented in the work of Paul Mboya *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi*:

*NITIE ngero momiyō ging'eyo ni Nyasaye nitie: 'Dhako moro nomako ich, to chieng'nyuolne nyodo mochande; to kochandore jakuo moro nobedo e pier ot kowinjo gik matimore e ot. Ka dhakoni nogoyo nyathi piny eka owinjo ka Nyasaye wacho, 'Nyathini koro onyuole, onego waik thone bende...'*³⁰.

This quotation as has been translated as:

There is a story which made them believe that *Nyasaye* existed. Once upon a time, a woman got pregnant and on the day of giving birth, she had an extended labour pains and while she was in labour, an eavesdropper was hiding behind the house listening to what was going on. As soon as the woman delivered, the eavesdropper heard God saying the following 'Now that this child is born, let us decide how his death will come about as well...'³¹.

Before we attempt an analysis of this evidence, we would like to point out some few areas which are apparent mistranslations. In the first case, it appears incorrect to say that the story made the Luo 'believe' that *Nyasaye* existed. From the Luo word *ging'eyoit* it is appropriate to say that the story made them 'know' that *Nyasaye* existed. Secondly, to translate '*Jakuo*' as 'eavesdropper' seems incorrect. *Jakuo* is ordinarily understood to mean 'a thief' whose primary aim is to steal and not to eavesdrop. And it only appears correct to translate '*jakuo*' as 'a thief' and not an eavesdropper.

After having made those corrections, let us try to analyse the alleged evidence itself. In the evidence *Nyasaye* is presented as talking to or with some persons. However, whoever that or those persons were is not revealed. Therefore, we are left wondering that if it is true that there was *Nyasaye* (God) and who talked, then with or to whom was it talking? Secondly, it is strange or odd that there is only one instance in the Luo tradition during which *Nyasaye* has been heard talking. Even more strange is the fact that it is only a thief who has ever heard *Nyasaye* talk.

Furthermore, on closer examination, this evidence presented to support that *Nyasaye* exists seems to echo the biblical creation language which portrayed God as talking to or with some person during the creation process. God is reported in the

Bible to have said: 'Let us make man in our image ...'³² This biblical - like presentation of the Luo *Nyasaye* should not be surprising given the fact that Paul Mboya seems to have been converted into christianity by the time he wrote the book *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi*. Mboya is reported to have been born in around 1899; he was converted into christianity in 1930, and his book *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi* was first published in 1938.³³ Therefore, there is a great possibility of christian influence on his work mentioned above.

In the evidence, it is said that the thief heard, *Nyasaye* talk, trying to fix the time of the death for the child that was born then. But it is objectionable that the evidence shows that *Nyasaye* exists. Logically, if the thief could identify that whoever was talking was *Nyasaye* (God), then it means that the thief knew *Nyasaye* before. The recognition of *Nyasaye* presupposes the prior knowledge of *Nyasaye*. Yet it is this assumed knowledge that requires a justification or an evidence. Therefore, the story that has been advanced to show that *Nyasaye* exists appears to beg the question and hence fallacious.

It would then appear that the evidence that has been presented to support the Luo belief in the existence of *Nyasaye* is invalid and hence does not justify the claim that *Nyasaye* exists. This story, therefore, appears to be a creation of the person who claim to have heard *Nyasaye* talk; and in this case, it is the thief; and it is the thief if and only if, it is a fact that the thief told the story. But if the thief is simply a fictitious character in the story, then the idea of *Nyasaye* is an invention of whoever invented the story. But all in all, the story, apparently, remains a myth which was

constructed by some human being to create the idea of 'Nyasaye'.

4.2.0 *Jok (Juok): A Metaphysical Construct*

When we put aside the concept of *Nyasaye* and we come to the concept of *Jok* or *Juok*, the ambivalency that we have seen to surround the concept *Nyasaye* also surrounds the concept *Jok*. Quite a number of works have portrayed *Jok (Juok)* as another word for the Luo supreme deity (God) or what the Kenya Luo refer to as *Nyasaye*. Bethwell Allan Ogot has written the following about *Jok*:

The term *Jok* or *Juok* is found in various forms in all Nilotic languages. It usually means God, Spirit, witchcraft, ghost or some form of spiritual power.³⁴

In one of the books by A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo it is claimed that the Luo people believed in a creator of the universe which they called *Juok* or *Nyasaye*:

In many languages we find this man as "God", in the Luo language he is known as *Juok* or *Nyasaye*.³⁵

And B. Onyango-Ogotu and A.A. Roscoe state as well that *Juok* is a name for what the Luo people believe to be a high God:

Juok, a title common throughout the Nilotic world though with slight orthographic variation, is the Luo High God.³⁶

However, on analysis of the concept *Jok* as used in some cases, we encounter an apparent ambivalency which is of some similar kind as the one we have seen with the concept *Nyasaye*. To what extent can the concept *Jok* be accepted to stand for more than one existent or being? We would like to ask together with B.A. Ogot:

What then is the connection between *Jok* the creator, *jok* as a universal neutral force, and the particular manifestations of *jok*? Are we dealing with a single conception or with several different conceptions with the same name? If with the single conception, how can we harmonize these apparent contradictory interpretations of *jok*? And if with different conceptions, why do the Nilotes use the same term for all of them? Is it merely a question of a limited abstract vocabulary?³⁷

Ogot seems to believe that the apparent contradictions in the understanding and use of the concept *Jok* is due to disjointed interpretations of the concept.³⁸ He thereafter presents what we would tend to believe is the result of his 'systematic study' of the concept *Jok*:

It would appear that the 'life-force' among the Nilotes is *juok* or *jok*. God himself is *juok par excellence*. Then there are celestial and terrestrial *juogi* (plural), human, animal and even inanimate *juogi*. The spiritual part of man, the only part which survives death, *jok* and it is the same power which is responsible for conception as well as for fortunes and misfortunes. Hence to the Nilotes, *jok* is not an impartial universal power: it is the essence of every being, the 'force' which makes everything what it is, and God Himself 'the greatest *juok*', is 'life-force' in itself.³⁹

Looking at the presentation of Ogot, it would appear that *Jok/Juok* is an essence of a thing. Being an essence, *jok* is then a quality of a thing. But God himself is *jok*. If we take the first meaning of *jok*, then logically it means that God is an essence, and therefore not an existent or a thing, that is, not an existent in itself but a quality of some existent. Ogot argues that *jok* is a spirit as well. So when talking about *Juogi* (plural), one would simply be talking about the spiritual elements of different things or objects. Therefore, Ogot seems to say that on an ontological level, *jok* is simply a

spirit:

In spite of the hierarchy, it is quite evident, therefore, that we are here dealing with a simple conception. Much of what Evans-Pritchard says about *Kwoth*, spirit, could be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to *Jok*.⁴⁰

However, it would appear that the apparent contradictions referred to in the interpretations of the concept *jok*, and which Ogot set out, at least, to solve is yet not convincingly worked out. He writes:

The conception of *Jok* thus presents a Nilotic *Weltanschauung*, which is primarily concerned with the relationship between *Jok* (God), the creator and sustainer on the one hand, and on the other hand, the created forces (*juogi*)...a world-view I must now examine.⁴¹

Therefore, Ogot goes ahead in his examination and concludes:

To the African, on the other hand, the being is 'the force which is'. And since force can vary in magnitude, the African sense of the being is therefore dynamic. One can be more or less of a person, depending on how much 'vital force' one possesses. And, the more 'vital force', or in terms of Nilotic parlance, the more *jok* one has, the more human he is, and therefore, the happier he is also.⁴²

Ogot is more exact on his conception of *jok* when he states:

When we turn to African Philosophy, we discover that this basic distinction is lacking. The Nilote, for instance, distinguishes between mere appearance and essence. But Reality, to him, is represented by the metaphysical world of *jok*. This subject world is the only world that exists, and it is the only one we need to worry about both in this life and in the next; for it is shared by God, spirits, man and nature. All matter, to the Nilote, is force ... With this important difference: that God and spirits are included in the category of force⁴³.

On the basis of Ogot's examination of *jok*, we would like to ask the following questions; if *jok* is the reality behind every matter, then what is its nature? In other words, what are its essential attributes by which it is comprehended? The answers to these questions have not been forthcoming. But, again, if *jok* is a force, and force is an attribute of matter, then can it exist independent of matter? Here we are tempted to answer in the negative. If granted that force is an attribute of matter, then apparently, it cannot exist in the absence of matter. Thus the idea of *jok* as God who is the creator seems to have no justification especially if God is perceived to be devoid of matter.

Furthermore, Ogot uses the concept *jok* ambiguously. He uses it to mean both a being, as in the case of God, and as an essence as well.⁴⁴ For instance, when he says that *jok* is the part of man that survives death, he seems to imply that it is an essence of man, a quality of an object but which is capable of independent existence from the man (object). Such a kind of presentation and argument seem to be both factually and logically inconsistent. However, we are inclined to agree with Ogot's observation that the conception of *jok* is simply a metaphysical theory:

In short, the Nilotic conception of *Jok* is nothing, but a metaphysical theory about the 'creator - Created' relationship.⁴⁵

4.2.1 *Jok(Juok):Ogot's Creation*

It should be noted that in the Ogot's Nilotic ontology, *Jok* is used in two senses, viz; (a) as a dominant deity and, (b) as an 'essence of every being, the 'force' which makes everything what it is'.⁴⁶ In the case of a human being, *Jok* is that 'immortal' part of a person. *Jok* as a dominant deity of the Nilotes, and particularly of the

Central and the Southern (Kenyan) Luo is indeed an invention of Bethwell Allan Ogot. Okot has pointed out how, for example, some anthropologists and missionaries contributed to the invention of dominant deities for Africans in general and Nilotic Luo in particular.⁴⁷

Ogot seems to have been so impressed by Tempels's Bantu Ontology (Philosophy) that he desired a creation of a parallel one for the Nilotes:

While accurate and detailed descriptions of the different aspects of *jok* power have been provided by these scholars, little attempt, in my view, has been made to carry out a systematic study of the basic philosophy which underlies most of what anthropologists and sociologists describe. What is required is a world-view, a *Weltanschauung*, of the Nilotes similar to that provided for the Bantu by Father Placide Tempels in his *La Philosophie Bantoue*..⁴⁸

According to Tempels, the central idea in the Bantu philosophy is the idea of the 'vital force,' which permeates all the categories of being, starting with God through the spirits, men, animals, plants to inanimate objects. Having desired a Nilotic ontology similar to the Tempels's Bantu Ontology, Ogot went ahead and constructed one for the Nilotes, a Tempelsian Ontology, as is shown in one of the previous quotations.

Ogot seems not to have set out to investigate the 'Nilotic Philosophy' in itself, but to search for Tempelsian philosophy of the Bantu among the Nilotes which indeed he created with *Jok* as an equivalent of the Tempelsian 'vital force' or 'life-force', permeating the exact Tempelsian categories - God, spirits, human beings, animals and inanimate things.⁴⁹

However, Ogot appears to have fallen victim of Tempels's trap. This is so because, apparently, he did not understand the major objective of Tempels's 'philosophical' investigation of the Bantu world-view. Tempels's basic preoccupation was the laying down of a condition for the dichotomization process which was to justify the colonization and christianization of Bantu or Africans under the illusion of civilizing them.⁵⁰ This dichotomization process was based on the myth of unilineal evolutionistic progression of human societies and mentality which gave birth to the myth of western ethnocentrism.⁵¹

Coming back to the 'Bantu Ontology' which impressed Ogot so intensely, we would like to ask together with Okot p'Bitek, 'Do the Baluba and other Bantu peoples believe in the Supreme being?'⁵² For Tempels, they did. And this is because since all the primitive peoples believed in the Supreme Being, and the Baluba and Bantu peoples are primitive, therefore, they necessarily believed in it.⁵³ Here we see the application of the baseless or the myth of the evolutionary theory by Tempels.⁵⁴

However, we should note that the 'Bantu Ontology' was Tempel's own construction and he admits it:

We do not claim, of course, that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. *It is we who will be able to tell them in preciseterms what their inmost concept of being is.* They will recognize themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, "You understand us: you know us completely: you "know" in the way we "know". [the italics is my emphasis].⁵⁵

Now that it is evident that Bantu Ontology (Philosophy) was a creation of Father Placide Tempels, and that there is no evidence that Tempelsian Ontology has any resemblance with the Bantu Ontology, in case there is such a thing as Bantu Ontology,⁵⁶ Ogot simply transplanted Tempelsian Ontology into the Nilotic belief system. Therefore, the idea of *Jok* as a 'life-force' in general and supreme deity in particular is Ogot's own creation under the inspiration of Tempels's Ontology.

4.3.0 Historical Analysis of the Luo Belief in Supreme Deity

At this point we would like to make some comments about *Jok* as God in which the Nilotic Luo are alleged to believe. Not all Nilotic Luo believe in a *Jok* as God or a Supreme Being. Okot p'Bitek has argued rather very convincingly that the concept *Jok* or *Juok* does not refer to any one particular being as God or supreme Deity. Moreover, he has pointed out that in the Luo belief, particularly the Central and the Southern Luo, *Jok* is never believed to refer to a Supreme Deity:

The *Juok mal* that Ogot places at the top of the hierarchy of forces is derived from the Shilluk; but the Central Luo do not have a *Jok Malo*.⁵⁷

B.A. Ogot has argued that *Juok* or *Juok mal* is the Shilluk word for God.⁵⁸ But Okot, in his book *Religion of the Central Luo* has argued out what appears to be a historical development of the concept *Jok* into a concept of a dominant deity. It was, Okot argues, the creation of the missionaries who were trying to look for African equivalents of their God.⁵⁹ We are inclined to agree with Okot's contention since given that the Kenya Luo, despite being Nilotic Luo, do not understand and use the

term *Jok* or *Juok* for the Supreme Being. But they understand it to mean the spirit of a human being, that is, ontologically speaking. And given that the use of *Jok* for spirit seems common for all the Nilotic Luo,⁶⁰ we therefore, cannot but agree with Okot that the idea of a high god/God was 'smuggled' into the concept *Jok*. Okot writes:

The idea of a high god among the Central Luo was a creation of the missionaries. The Central Luo did not believe in a high god who formed the universe out of nothing and then retired.⁶¹

Okot therefore, concludes that the concept *Jok* does not imply supreme being and therefore, the equation of *Jok* with the high god or supreme being is unacceptable and must be abandoned:

Claims that *Jok* is the Supreme Being do not seem to be based on any concrete evidence, and must be rejected.⁶²

As we have argued, so has Okot; that there is no evidence showing that *Jok* is a dominant deity in the Nilotic Luo belief. Okot's contention that the idea of a dominant deity was a foreign introduction into the concept *Jok* has been supported by G.E.M. Ogutu:

It could be argued therefore that the concept of dominant deity developed among the Nilotic Luo in the course of their movement away from the vicinity of the 'cradleland'.⁶³

Ogutu also agrees that among the Southern Luo, *Juok* means only a spirit, and probably some act related to spirit if we may add; but not a dominant deity:

The term *Juok* on the other hand, was not discarded but remained to be used only in reference to spirits...⁶⁴

However, despite the fact that the historical analysis of the dominant deity or God show that the Kenya Luo did not believe in one God or a dominant deity, today quite a good number of Kenya Luo believe in it, though as we have seen it logically appears that the idea of God is due to some foreign influence or probably a later development from within themselves.

We should recognise that human life is a dynamic process which influences the social institutions of a community. The social institutions are therefore dynamic as well and continuously undergo changes and adjustments. The world-view which these institutions represent subsequently change too. Thus, the belief system of the people constantly change. The Luo people are no exception, and therefore, their belief system has changed which implies, among other things, that some tenets of the system have been abandoned or modified and some new ones incorporated. Therefore, it should not be any surprise to find that the Kenya Luo who appear originally to lack the concept of a supreme deity, have incorporated that belief into their belief system.⁶⁵

4.4.0 Analysis of the Present Luo Belief in Supreme Being

It is very interesting to realize that Africans in general and Luo in particularly seem to have unquestioningly accepted the gods that were created for them by foreigners, particularly the Christian and Muslim missionaries. Christianity and Islam imposed on Africans their gods. This was necessary for them in order to convert

Africans into the religions.⁶⁶ This imposition of their gods was necessary for the perpetuation and entrenchment of the myth of civilization or civilizing Africans.

At some point in history, Africans and other so-called "primitive" or "savage" or "uncivilized" peoples were denied the possibility of belief in some sort of deities, leave alone the so-called High God.⁶⁷ And this was in line with the now outmoded or the myth of evolutionistic theory. Later in history, most Africans, in order to dispel the tag of "uncivilized" imposed on them, launched a vigorous campaign to show or claim that Africans believed in a dominant deity. These are the likes represented by J.S.Mbiti, B.A. Ogot, E. Bolaji Idowu and Busia.⁶⁸ And as Okot p'Bitek has observed, "They are busy introducing Greek metaphysical conceptions into African religious thought. The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God, are, in the main, creations of the students of African religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside."⁶⁹

Now if we have to turn to the present Luo belief in some god, we should not be surprised to realize that most Luo who believe in God seem to believe in the Christian sort of God or they tend to describe their God with some attributes or simply with attributes of the Christian God. That means that, presently, the Luo believe in a "Supreme Deity or God". Already we have seen some names that are used in referring to the deity like *Nyasaye* and *Nyakalaga*. We have seen that *Nyasaye* means one who is petitioned while *Nyakalaga* is often interpreted to mean one found everywhere. The meanings of these names and others which are used in reference to God or Supreme Being are most likely to throw some light on the present Luo

conception of it. This has been observed by G.E.M. Ogotu as well:

Their idea of God on the other hand rests with the meaning of the names by which they refer to the Supreme Being.⁷⁰

Various names have been used by the Kenya Luo to refer to this dominant deity among of which are; *wuonwa* (our father) or *wuon ji* (father of all people), *Ruoth* (King), *Hono* (the incomprehensible), *were* (the blameless one or one who is certain to grant requests), *jahera* (the loving one), *jang'uono* (the kind one), *jamrima* (one with a bad temper), *Ratego* (the powerful one) and *jarit* (protector).⁷¹ From the names that the Kenya Luo use in reference to this Supreme Being, it can be seen that their conception of this being is anthropomorphic. This anthropomorphic conception of God has been explicitly asserted by G.E.M. Ogotu:

The Luo conception of the nature of Nyasaye is anthropomorphic.⁷²

However, we had analysed the possible logical implications of such a conception of God. We argued when analysing the general argumentations for the existence of God that the anthropomorphic conception of God or *Nyasaye* in this case, indicates that God cannot be conceptualized in-itself. This has been aptly explained by John S. Mbiti when trying to justify why African peoples in general use the anthropomorphic language for what they call God:

African peoples do not consider God to be a man, but in order to express certain concepts, they employ anthropomorphic language and images about him as an aid to their conceptualization of him whom they have not seen and about whom they confess to know little or nothing.⁷³

We have seen that God seems to have no objective referent. It does not exist outside the mind of human beings. We have also argued that God has no attributes or essential qualities by which it can be intellectually grasped. This means then God is a human imposition on what is metaphysically constructed, as we have seen with the case of Tempels' Bantu Ontology and Ogot's Nilotic Ontology.

As we have seen, the Kenya Luo admit that nobody has seen God (*Nyasaye* or *Jok*), and probably has experienced it. They accept the fact that nobody knows the nature of God. This lack of experiential knowledge has contributed or forms the basis of the unintelligibility and incomprehensibility of God or the Supreme Being. Ocholla-Ayayo confirms that: "It is unknowable and invisible".⁷⁴ G.E.M. Ogotu also expresses the same contention:

Though incomprehensible, the Luo believed that *Nyasaye* was aware and was knowledgeable.⁷⁵

But we should note that if we admit that *Nyasaye* or God is unknowable, invisible and incomprehensible, then it would appear a contradiction, if not indeed a real contradiction to attribute anything or quality to God which may indicate or presuppose the knowledge of it. Therefore, it is not logically justifiable to attribute to God any quality save its unknowability.

However, as we have argued before, the anthropomorphic conception of God (*Nyasaye*) which, as we have hinted out, is an imitation of the Christian conception of God, shows that God is a projection of human qualities to a level transcending the human nature. It has been argued that human nature is rather imperfect, and human

abilities are limited. Therefore, human beings seek consolation to their imperfections and limitations in a metaphysical and psychological construct. This construct cannot be anything but one surpassing in human qualities. Therefore, it would appear that 'God' is man-made. It is made in such a way that it mirrors human nature, but a perfection of human nature. Logically it follows that God is made in the image of man or human beings which is contrary to the biblical presentation that man was made in the image of God. Biblical-like presentation of God has no logical basis, and was probably intended to subject people to a human invention but which is presented as unchallengeable by any human being in terms of abilities and perfections.

What we are saying is that God appears to be an idealization which encompasses all that man wishes but which he does not possess. It is a myth that is intended to offer an explanation to all the fundamental questions of human life but which man cannot explain using his brains and reason at particular times in man's history. Most of these questions tend to be cosmological and relate to the nature and the so-called destiny of a human being.

In concluding this analysis of the Luo belief in *Nyasaye* or 'God', we would like to emphasize that it seems that the Luo idea of *Nyasaye* or a dominant deity, as is known today, is a borrowed conception particularly from the Christian conception and belief. And as we have argued, it cannot be established, logically, that there exists an objective existence of such a being, that is *Nyasaye* or *Jok*. At the moment there is no justifiable basis for the belief in the objective existence of such a being. Thus, at best, *Nyasaye* or *Jok*, like the Christian God, remains a myth, a human creation.

4.5.0 Luo Belief in Spirits

Among all races, folklore and anthropological studies confirm that the belief of ghosts exists, even if they have never been proved by physical research.⁷⁶

The belief in ghosts or spirits seems to be a universal one. Most races and cultures seem to believe that there is a 'person' or better put, some part of a living human being that is not subject to death. Death is often believed to affect only the human body (matter) but not the other part which is often reflected in most beliefs as the real person. We are not saying that the body is not real, but it is temporary in the sense that it dissipates with the advent of death. Whatever, then is done with the body is determined by the intended life or the well-being of the 'immaterial person', that is, in relation to the so-called destiny of man, which is believed to be everlasting.

This apparent universal belief in the immaterial immortal 'person' is reflected in most of the world religions.⁷⁷ Most of these religions seem to be founded on some fundamental belief; a belief that there is 'life after death'. Therefore, the death of the physical body is not essentially the death of a person. It is the promise of the better side of this 'life' which seems to be attractive in these religious systems.

If the apparent universality of the belief in spirit is accepted, then the Luo people also believe in spirit. We have seen already that *Jok* or *Juok* is a common concept among all the Nilotic Luo, and that all of them believe that it is the immaterial or the spiritual part of a person that is not a subject of death. Okot p'Bitek says the following about *Jok*:

... the voices of the ghosts of the dead ancestors can be

heard and identified as belonging to so - and - so ... The free hostile spirits can be heard arguing with the diviner and when captured and killed, their blood can be seen on the blade of the weapon.⁷⁴

Okot has expressed the belief of the Nilotic Luo. They believe in the existence of *Juok* or *Jok*,⁷⁵ the spirit which can be either friendly or hostile. However, given that *Jok* is a non-material being, in other words, it is a pure spirit, the claim that it possesses blood has no factual and logical basis, and hence seems nonsensical.

The idea that the Luo believe in the existence of some spirits seems to be a widely held and accepted view. A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo has written:

With this concept of *Juok*, it is believed that there are two worlds: the world of the living, "Upper World" *piny man malo*, and the world of the dead or the world of the spirits ... According to the Luo belief concerning afterlife, everyone goes to *piny juok*, "the land of spirits" to join the ancestors of his clan ...⁸⁰

G.E.M. Ogutu, writing on the Luo belief in the existence of spirits, says:

Belief in spirits is a very important aspect of Luo traditional religion. The Luo conception of the soul and its future condition is vague. Yet, undoubtedly there exists an idea of the soul and belief in future life. The Luo hold that when a man dies, the *tipo* (shadow or soul) leaves the body of the dying person ...⁸¹

And on the same topic of the belief in spirits, Hans-Egil

Hauge writes:

Although it seems that a great many people, especially among the younger generation, have lost their faith in

Nyasaye, this does not seem to be the case with the belief in the spirits of the dead. Practically all the Luo people - including those who are christians - appear to believe in the existence of these spirits.⁸²

The above quotations suffice as illustrations of the general Luo belief in the spiritual beings, especially the human spirits. Moreover, a good number of authors have also expressed this belief, among them are Odera Oruka,⁸³ Grace E.A. Ogot,⁸⁴ B. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe,⁸⁵ Henry Olela,⁸⁶ Paul Mboya⁸⁷ and John S. Mbiti.⁸⁸

However, this belief in spirits logically demands a discussion of the Luo conception of a person.

4.5.1 The Luo Conception of a Person

Scholars like Ocholla-Ayayo, G.E.M. Ogutu and Henry Olela have presented what is believed to be the Luo conception of a human being or person. They have given the elements which are believed to constitute a person. For example, Ocholla-Ayayo has given the following presentation:

In the same manner they form part of man in the belief that every living organism (including man) has its three properties: 1) *Del* because the Luo say "*dend dhano*" (human body); 2) *Chuny* - soul 3) *Tipo* (shadow) which can move away from man. We say "*ineno tipona*" which means, "you have seen my shadow." These elements of the spiritual entity of man are also collectively called *juogi* (pl) and *juok* (sing).⁸⁹

He goes ahead and says:

Every individual has his own *Juogi* (spirits) and it is noteworthy that both malevolent and positive *Juogi* exist in the same individual. The evil *Juogi* assumes the name

of *Tipo* or *Jachienif* a man is dead, while *chuny-marach* if he is still alive. The good is *chuny-maler* which means "good spirit."⁹⁰

The quotations seem not to present a very clear picture of the elements constituting a human being as conceived by the Kenya Luo. From the first quotation, one may be misled to think that all three, that is, *Del*, *Chuny* and *Tipo*, are included in the collectivity of *Juogias* as the last sentence in the quotation seems to imply. But it would appear correct to talk of only *Chuny* and *Tipo* as constituting the spiritual whole of a person or what Ocholla-Ayayo calls the spiritual entity of a man.

Secondly, the second quotation appears ambiguous. It seems to be stating that there can be more than one spirit constituting a person. It can be understood to mean that a person is composed of many spirits. But unless it is a case of spirit possession when one is believed to be invaded by more than one spirit influencing one's behaviour. We cannot talk of many spirits as forming part of a person as essential constituents of that person.

Furthermore, we would like to make it clear that there is no essential difference between *Chuny* and *Tipo* as components of a person. Both are simply different words for spirit except that *tipo* as has been rightly pointed out by Ocholla-Ayayo refers to a haunting spirit. Therefore, when a spirit haunts, then it is normally referred to as *tipo*. But this difference in terms is simply based on variation in behaviour of a spirit. In the Luo belief, when a spirit or the 'dead person' reappears to a living person or becomes evil, then it is often referred to as *tipo* of so-and-so, so-and-so has become *jachien*. But it is still a spirit which disturbs, in some sense, an harmonious life of

either an individual or a group of individuals. G.E.M. Ogutu seems to allude to that contention as well when he writes:

Whenever a departed person visits his living kith and kin what is seen is neither *ringruok* nor *chuny* but *tipo*. It is *tipo* which goes to the world of the departed. *Chuny* and *tipo* are both psychic while *ringruok* is physical thus the individual becomes a psychophysical being.⁹¹

It would appear correct to say that when a departed person visits, then it is *tipo* which is seen and not *ringruok*. But it seems incorrect to deny that *tipo* is *chuny*, hence when *tipo* is seen, then *chuny* is not seen. But as we have tried to explain, *tipo* is *chuny* (spirit) but only an evil or a haunting spirit. It is the reappearance of the dead to the living that makes *chuny* be referred to as *tipo*. Therefore, it is basically the reappearance of the dead that makes the spirit *tipo*. Hence, when *tipo* is seen, then *chuny* is seen as well.

It should also be noted that in the Luo belief, it disturbs when a departed person (dead) reappears unless probably when supplicated to intervene. Therefore, when the departed person 'visits', it is often taken negatively to mean that it is seeking something from the living. In such cases, there is often some fear and apprehension that the living could have failed in one way or the other to carry out some social obligations. Thus the possibility of spirits reprisal is often expected immediately the dead reappears. Therefore, the reappearance is often seen as an interference, and that probably is why Ogutu says that it is *tipo* that visits the living not *ringruok* or *chuny*. But as we have pointed out, it is incorrect to say that when *tipo* visits then it is not *chuny*. And as we are going to show, *tipo* and *chuny* is one and the same thing; the spirit or soul, or

rather, that which is believed to be immortal.

On the conception of a person, G.E.M. Ogutu writes:

The individual is made up of *ringruok*, *chuny* and *tipo* meaning body, mind/will and spirit respectively. *Ringruok* is biological and is no more than a mere capsulating sack.⁹²

Ringruok or *del* as has been pointed out is simply the body, the material aspect of the human being, and hence it does not pose any difficulty in understanding. Probably *chuny* and *tipo* pose some difficulties in understanding. On *chuny*, Ogutu writes:

Chuny is variously used and means both liver and spirit. In relation to the individuality of a person it is regarded as the centre of man's character and manners hence makes up the self of an individual. Sometimes it is used to mean heart...⁹³

Sometimes *chuny* is described as the seat of consciousness hence it is seen to direct the human behaviour. Therefore, in terms of human conduct, a person with *chuny maler* or pure heart is simply one who is virtuous in some sense. But in some sense *chuny* is understood as spirit. For example, in a case of an impending death, it can be said *Ng'ane chunye pod gudo* which simply means that so-and-so's heart is still beating. This is in the case where one is seen as almost dying but still breathes. And whether one's heart still beats is tested by feeling the heart-beat. Immediately one's heart stops beating, one is declared dead and is often referred to as *Nga'ne chunye ochot* which literally means so-and-so's heart is broken, but which probably imply that one's spirit has broken away from one's body or has simply separated.

When it comes to *tipo*, Ogutu writes:

Tipo has various shades of meaning including shadow, shade, soul or spirit. According to the Luo tradition, it also means the immortal part of man.⁹⁴

Ogutu goes on and says that it is *tipo* which is sometimes called spirit or *juok*.⁹⁵ From the presentation of Ogutu, it appears that *chuny* and *tipo* represent one and the same thing on the plane of ontological belief. He has said that ontologically, *chuny* means spirit. He has also said that *tipo* means spirit or soul, among other things. Therefore, logically and ontologically, the Luo believe that *chuny* and *tipo* mean one and the same thing, the 'person' which is not subject to death. It is what they believe to be the immortal 'person' or the aspect of a person that 'survives death'.

Still on the Luo conception of a person, Henry Olela writes:

The Luo distinguish clearly between *del* (body) and *chuny* (soul or spirit). Between the two is an intermediary *tipo* (shadow). *Tipo* is partly material and partly immaterial. *Del* is the physical body in which resides *chuny*. The latter is the seat of consciousness and conscious activities. *Chuny* can be identified with life. When a person dies, he meets bodily destruction. His soul survives and either joins the home of good souls under the ground, or if the soul was evil wanders about. A person's shadow is not as ordinary a thing as it appears. Shadows have been thought to cause nocturnal dreams.⁹⁶

Olela's presentation supports the view we have advanced, that *chuny* is the soul or spirit which is believed to be immortal. We should also note that it is not only Olela who has presented *chuny* as soul or spirit, but as we have already seen, Ocholla-Ayayo has also stated that *chuny* means soul. Moreover, Paul Mboya also seems to be alluding to that position; the contention that *chuny*, as believed by the Luo people, refers to the immortal aspect of a person. He therefore has written:

*Luo ne wacho kendo giyie ni chuny ng'ato motho neno;
giwacho bende ni ka ng'ato onego ng'ato kata mane otimo
ni ja tuo marach, ng'at motho lokore jachien kendo chieno
ng'atno mane onegekata mane otimone marach.*⁹⁷

The above quotation can be translated to mean that "The Luo used to say and believe that the spirit (*chuny*) of the dead person sees; they also say that if one murdered another or mistreated a sick person who finally died, then the dead person turns into a haunting spirit (*jachien*) and haunts the victim." In addition to the works we have mentioned which explain the concept *chuny* as an aspect of a person, Onyango-Ogutu and Roscoe write:

Having left the earth, the soul or *chuny* of the Luo rise to the sky where they meet in joy ...⁹⁸

Therefore, a critical analysis of what has been presented as the Luo conception of a person shows rather clearly that the Luo believe that after the dissolution of the body, or the death of the body, there is something immaterial and what can be called either spirit or soul which persists death.⁹⁹ Whatever the Luo word for it, be it *chuny* or *tipo*, it remains an immaterial and immortal part. And as we have said, this belief is simply an ontological belief - it is a belief that presents spirit or soul as an independent existent from the body, hence a being for that matter. Therefore, logically it follows that the Luo conception of a person is dualistic. Ocholla-Ayayo has explicitly stated this:

From the concept of *juok*, we can observe that the Luo spirits belong to a dualistic world-view which assumed that dual characteristics of man exist, i.e. his spiritual element, and its bodily counterpart were created as such and grow in the same ratio.¹⁰⁰

But before we proceed further, let us make an observation in relation to Henry Olela's explanation of the Luo conception of a person. Olela has attempted to explain *tipo* as a constituent of a human being. He has said that *tipo* is partly material and partly immaterial. Conceptually, the two, materiality and immateriality, are exclusive polarisations. Yet, logically Olela implies that *tipo* is both material and immaterial. But this is logically nonsensical. It cannot be conceptualized since it is contradictory in definition.

However, we would be inclined to agree with the further observation he makes when he says "shadows have been thought to cause nocturnal dreams." We have pointed out that *chuny* and *tipo* is the same thing. The spirit is called *tipo* only when it haunts. So it is the basis of the difference in the use of terms *chuny* and *tipo*. It should be noted that in the case of haunting, it is claimed that the image or shadow of the dead is seen. Therefore, it is the reappearance of the shadow of the dead which very much disturbs. It is a fact that in such a case, what is seen is not a factual object but the mental shadow or image of the person that ceased to be some times in the past. Therefore, *tipo* could be understood from that angle of interpretation - the mental image or shadow that appears to the mind. This negative perception of the spirit can be seen in the use of the word *tipo* by Paul Mboya. He has used the word *tipo* severally to express the negative behaviour of the spirit.¹⁰¹

Coming to the issue of haunting, we would like to state that the Luo people believed and still believe in haunting by the 'dead person'. We have seen that the Luo people believe, for example, that whoever kills a person or maltreats a sick person who

eventually dies is often haunted by the dead. Quite a good number of scholars have written about this belief as found within the Luo belief system. Ocholla-Ayayo writes:

Jachien is the troublesome ghost. *Jachien* may be aggressive when it is unhappy among other *juogi*** and may come to punish those who wronged it in life. He may come to demand his rights, to punish or avenge those who wronged him.¹⁰²

B. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, on the same topic of haunting, write:

It is probably neglect which causes the spirits of certain ancestors, no longer identifiable, to roam in anger through the world, haunting individuals, and even whole clans.¹⁰³

Still on the issue of haunting, G.E.M. Ogutu writes, concerning the death of a virgin nubile Luo girl:

When a nubile girl (*nyako ngili*) died at her father's home she was buried outside the homestead. After preparing the grave a woman who had stopped menstruating (*dhako ma pim* or *dhako moa e ria*) was asked to break her virginity ... If this was not done, the Luo feared her spirit would haunt the remaining girls.¹⁰⁴

Ogutu goes on and gives another illustration:

However, when a woman who had lost her husband but not been remarried (*tero* or *lago*) died, her death was not published until the remarriage ritual was performed ... If this was not done the fear was that the spirit of the dead might haunt other women in the clan and make them die before they were remarried in case their husbands left them behind.¹⁰⁵

** *juogi* is misspelt. It should be *juogi*

Apart from the few illustrations given above, there are other works that express the Luo belief in haunting by *Jachien*, the evil spirit (*tipo*).¹⁰⁶ Some people may be tempted to use the fact of haunting to argue that it is an indication that spirits exist independent of the human bodies, and can be made happy or angered. To them, therefore, haunting is an indication of immortality, showing that not everything is dissolved by death, but that something, the spirit, is not subject to death, and continues with the act of life. But as we argued before, haunting has no logical link with the belief in the independent existence of the so-called spirit from the body. We have seen that there is lack of logical justification for the dualistic view of a person based on the fact of haunting.

Probably, the perception of *chien*, the act of haunting may illuminate the argument we are advancing. It would not be easy to deny that in most cases, if not all cases, haunting is experienced through visions and dreams. On this, Hans-Egil Hauge writes:

Very often a *jachien* appears at night when people are asleep. The sleeper will see him in a dream, and hear him speaking to him ... The arrival of *jachien* gives the person visited the feeling that he is being strangled.¹⁰⁷

T. Abe has also made a similar observation during his research on *jachien* among the Luo of South Nyanza. He also stated that haunting is usually experienced in dreams and visions.¹⁰⁸ The dreamy and visionary nature of haunting is very important for the understanding of this phenomenon. It implies that the experience is subjective and is mostly, if not only, experienced by the one being haunted. T. Abe writes:

Jochiende can be seen very clearly in the day time. Normally only haunted persons see the figures of *jochiende* and hear their voices, while other people who are with them at the spot neither see nor hear *jochiende*.¹⁰⁹

We have argued somewhere in this work against taking objects of dreams as realities. We have seen that contents of dreams are delusions and hence illusionary. They are drawn from waking experiences, be they real events or thoughts. They have nothing therefore, to do with after death. We have also argued that haunting is an obsessional experience which is associated with mental illness. This mental illness can degenerate into overt madness.¹¹⁰ Therefore, haunting would appear to be based on imagination and memory, hence purely psychological. These imaginations are culture-provoked. But it appears that there is nothing outside an individual, the haunted person in this case, that comes and disturbs. There is no logical justification for claiming that it is a dead person who 'lives' and comes back to disturb the living person.

Spirits generally are not visible. This is the Luo view of them.¹¹¹ But if we grant that they are not visible, then we are not logically justified to claim that they can be seen, that they live with us, that they eat with us, and do most of the things we do. If they are disembodied, then they cannot eat, cannot even talk, they cannot hear, and hence, they are incapable of being annoyed or appeased.

Some scholars have argued that though the spirits are invisible, they can manifest themselves in visible forms like snakes, human beings, and others.¹¹² But we should note that there is not even a piece of evidence that show that these objects are

inhabited by some spirits. Probably, the awesomeness of these objects especially due to their size and structure could have made Luo believe that they had some mystic powers, in this case, they were inhabited by some spirits. Otherwise, spirits being what they are perceived to be, are not knowable and experientiable. And to claim that they can manifest themselves in some forms is to presuppose their knowledge which is logically unacceptable.

Owing to this dualistic view of a person in the Luo belief, they have viewed death not as an end, but as a means. Death is simply a transitional process by which the body and the spirit get separated.¹¹³ However, we have seen that such a conception of death is logically inconsistent and hence nonsensical.

We have also seen that the dualistic conception of person as portrayed by the Luo people has no scientific and logical basis. The main issue here is that we know the body but we do not know the spirit, assuming that it is knowable. So the question we are faced with here is, what is spirit? We should also note that spirit so far is a concept which apparently refers to no object. Therefore, it seems impossible to think that spirit can exist in-itself independent of the conceptualizer. We should not forget that 'what is spirit?' has not been offered; that is, no proper definition of it has been given. And as Kwasi Wiredu has put it hypothetically:

... but any theory of souls or spirits can only be an empirical theory. If a determinate and coherent definition of spirit can be given, the question whether such things actually exist can only be answered by empirical research.¹¹⁴

But given that such a definition of spirit is not available, hence no empirical

research has established its existence, we cannot infer that spirits do not exist. This means that the dualistic view of a person is, logically speaking, baseless. It is a belief which apparently is based on a category mistake. Spirit is believed to be the principle of life of the human body. If that maybe granted, then it would appear that it refers to the condition of the body (object). And if that may be the case, then it seems not to make sense to think that the spirit can exist independent of the body. We tend to agree with Kwasi Wiredu that to infer the independent existence of spirit from the fact (or belief?) that it is a principle of life leads to absurdity. He argues that if a living being must have a principle of life as an entity, then even the spirit must have its principle of life, and the inference becomes *ad infinitum*:

Thus, while it is tautologically true that if there is life, there must be a principle of life, it is logically disastrous to construe the principle of life as itself an entity. In general, to convert something abstract, such as a principle into an object or entity is to commit an error of hypostasis.¹¹⁵

We therefore, point out that there is no justifiable evidence that shows that spirits are either entities or beings capable of independent objective existence from the body as assumed by the Luo belief. It would appear that spirits are not ontological beings with essential characteristics by which they are understood or comprehended. They are, apparently, simply mental phantoms which can only be imagined in the form of human bodies as known before dissolution by death.

Therefore, the Luo belief in the existence of spirits as possible independent objective existence apparently has no factual and logical foundation. The belief seems

to be a psychological protectionistic mechanism of the human ego to cope with the threat of the inevitable extinction by death. At best, the belief remains an institutionalized wish.

4.6.0 Inference

However, coming back to the issue of taboos, the question that should be asked at this juncture is whether or how the belief in the existence of 'God' or human spirits, as analysed in the previous chapters, both in general and with respect to the Luo people in particular, can possibly be perceived to be involved in the taboo operations. But, so far, on the basis of our analysis, it is apparent that logically or conceptually it is senseless to either argue or claim or believe that either 'God' or human spirits are involved in the taboo operations. Our examination of the concepts of 'God' and spirit seems to imply that neither 'God' nor spirit can sensibly be argued or believed to be the instituter of taboos hence can be offended by any taboo violation. They are, on the basis of our analysis, not objective existents which can edict and safeguard such norms as taboos. Thus, there is no rational basis for such a belief.

NOTES

1. Cfr. Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* (Kisumu: The Advent Press, 1938), p. 24.
2. Cfr. Bethwell A. Ogot, "The Concept of *Jok*", *African Studies* Vol. 20, No. 2 (1961), pp. 123, 127.
3. Cfr. Andrew B.A. Ocholla-Ayayo, *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976, p. 168.
4. Cfr. Gilbert E.M. Ogutu, *A Historical Analysis of the Luo Idea of God* (M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1975), pp. 67, 70.
5. Cfr. Henry Olela, *The Rationale for an African Philosophy: A Critical Examination of African Cosmological Views with some Reference to the Luo Beliefs* (Ph.D Thesis, The Florida State University, 1971), p. 50. (A microfilm).
6. Cfr. Grace Ogot, *Land Without Thunder* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988), pp.27, 146, 149.
7. Cfr. B. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *Keep my Words* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988, 1974), pp. 12-13.
8. Cfr. John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), p. 66.
9. Cfr. Hans-Egil Hauge, *Luo Religion and Folklore* (Oslo: Universitet sforlaget, 1974), p. 75.
10. Mboya, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
11. Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* trans. by Jane Achieng' (Unpublished work, University of Nairobi, 1986), p. 20.
12. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
13. *Ibid*, p. 166.
14. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
15. Olela, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

16. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
17. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.
18. Cfr. Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1971), pp. 74-75.
19. Cfr. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 73.
20. Cfr. Mboya, *op. cit.*, (English translation), p. 20.
21. Cfr. Mboya (1938), pp. 24-27.
22. Cfr. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 77. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
23. Cfr. Mboya (1938), chapt. 3. Ocholla-Ayayo *op. cit.*, p. 167. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
24. p'Bitek, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
25. Cfr. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, p. 12. H. Odera Oruka, *Ethics* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1990), p. 135.
26. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
27. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
28. Mboya (1938), p. 24.
29. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
30. Mboya (1938), p. 24.
31. Mboya, *op. cit.*, (English translation), p. 20.
32. Genesis 1:26 (*The Holy Bible* RSV).
33. Cfr. Hauge, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
34. B.A. Ogot, *op. cit.*, p. 123. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
35. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

36. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
37. B.A. Ogot, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
38. *Cfr. Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
42. *Cfr. Ibid.*, p. 128-129.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
44. *Cfr. Ibid.*, p. 126
45. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
46. *Cfr. Ibid.*, p. 126.
47. *Cfr. Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Chapt. 8, p. 76.
48. Ogot (1961) p. 126.
- Cfr. Okot p'Bitek, Africa's Cultural Revolution* (Nairobi: Macmillan Books for Africa, 1973), p. 58.
49. *Cfr. Ogot, op. cit.*, p. 126.
- Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Kampala; Nairobi; Dar-es-Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), p. 55.
50. *Cfr.*, Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), pp. 23-25; chapt. 7.
- V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1988), pp. 136-141.
- Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1983), pp. 34-37.

Okot p'Bitek (1973) pp.59-61

Okot p'Bitek (1971), p. 104. (*African Religions in Western Scholarship*).

51. Cfr. Okot p'Bitek (1971), chapt. 3. (*African Religions in Western Scholarship*).
Mudimbe, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20, 67-72.
52. Cfr. Okot p'Bitek (1973), p. 61.
53. Cfr. Tempels, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
54. Cfr. Okot p'Bitek (1973), pp. 60-61.
55. Tempels, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
56. Cfr. p'Bitek (1973), p. 63.
57. p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, p. 55.
58. Cfr. B.A. Ogot, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
59. Cfr. Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, p. 49.
60. Cfr. p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, p. 78.
61. p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, p. 50 See also Odera Oruka *Ethics* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1990), p. 135.
62. p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, p. 79.
63. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
65. Cfr. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
66. Cfr. Okot p'Bitek, *Artist, the Ruler* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986), pp. 14-15; 42-45; 57; 106.
67. Cfr. George Welhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 93.

- p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, pp. 42-43.
- p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, chapt. 8.
68. Cfr. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London; Nairobi; Heinemann, 1969), pp. 29-30.
- _____, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London; New York: S.P.C.K., 1970), Preface xiii.
- _____, *Introduction to African Religion* (London; Nairobi; Ibadan: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 48-53.
- E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (New York; London: Longmans, 1962) chaps. 5, 6.
- Kofi Abrefa Busia, *The Challenge of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1962), pp. 11-15.
69. p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, p. 88.
70. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
71. Cfr. *Ibid.* pp. 71-73.
72. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
73. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, p. 91.
74. Cfr. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
75. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
See also p. 77.
76. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
77. Cfr. Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 36.
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- Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Customs*. 2 Vols. (New York: Gordon Press, 1974), vol. 1 Chapt. XI and Vol. 2 Chapt. XII.

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See also p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, chapt. 6.
79. Cfr. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
Hauge, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
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82. Hauge, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
83. Cfr. H. Odera Orika, "Traditionalism and Modernisation in Kenya: Customs, Spirits and Christianity", in *The S.M. Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya*, p. 85.
84. Cfr. Grace Ogot, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 91, 141-158.
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86. Cfr. Henry Olela, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
87. Cfr. Mboya (1938), pp. 126-128.
88. Cfr. Mbiti (1970), pp. 232, 268, 269.
89. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
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91. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
94. *Ibid.*

95. *Cfr. Ibid.*, p. 116.
96. Olela, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
97. Paul Mboya, *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House Ltd., 1978), p. 20.
98. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
99. *Cfr. Ocholla-Ayayo, op. cit.*, p. 109.
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101. *Cfr. Mboya (1978)*, pp. 1-2, 3, 7, 10, 13, 14, 16.
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102. Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
103. Onyango-Ogutu and A.A. Roscoe, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
104. Ogutu, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
106. *Cfr. Hauge, op. cit.*, pp. 112-114.
- Grace Ogot, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-158.
- T. Abe, *op. cit.*, pp. 3ff.
107. Hauge, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
108. *Cfr. T. Abe, op. cit.*, pp. 1-7.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
110. *Cfr. Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
111. *Cfr. Ogutu, op. cit.*, p. 108.

Hauge, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

112. Cfr. Hauge. *op. cit.*, p. 114.

Ocholla-Ayayo, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

113. Cfr. J.B. Ojwang' and J.N.K. Mugambi, (eds), *The S.M. Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1989), p. 85.

Ogutu, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

114. Kwasi Wiredu, "The Concept of Mind with particular reference to the Language and thought of the Akans", in *African Philosophy* Vol. 5 edited by Guttorm Floistad (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff; 1987), p. 170.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROOTS OF TABOOS

In the analysis of the concept of taboo, we saw that central to it is the belief in the supernatural involvement in its operations. We saw that specifically God and ancestral spirits are believed to be involved. The issue here is how does either God or the spirits get involved. We saw that it is believed that taboos originate from either God or ancestral spirits. The taboos were therefore given to people to guide their conduct in society in line with either divine will or the will of the ancestral spirits.

Since the supernatural involvement in the taboo practice seems to be very fundamental to the meaning and understanding of taboo and the taboo institution, we have tried to analyse the nature of the supernaturalism, that is, the nature of God and spirits in order to have an intellectual grasp of taboo and the taboo institution in general.

5.1.0 God and Taboos

Our examination of God and its nature reveals that, logically God cannot give out codes of behaviour as taboos. It can clearly be seen that it is not logically possible that taboos originate or could have originated from God. We have seen that logically the idea of God is unintelligible and inconsistent. We have also seen that, so far, what is generally claimed to be God is more of nothing but a human creation.

The analysis of God and its nature shows that logically, God is not an objective existent outside the human mind. In that case, it is logically nonsensical to claim that a human being can communicate with God and more so receive some instructions from it. Therefore, it logically follows that what is attributable to God is nothing but a construction of a human being and is basically attributed to the human being since God is logically a purely human invention.

It follows therefore, that the claim that taboos originate from God, and that their violations is an offence against God is factually not true. The nature of God is incompatible with temperamental, emotional and psychological experiences. It cannot be pleased or annoyed or otherwise.

5.2.0 Ancestral Spirits and Taboos

Spirits in general are logically not objective existents either. In our argumentations over the nature of spirits, we have seen that spirits are nothing but purely subjective. They do not exist except as mental fantasies, they are mainly mental fantasies, hence they are mainly mental imaginations.

On the basis of the logical nature of spirits, they can neither give instructions on codes of behaviour such as taboos, nor can they be annoyed by the violations of taboos. As we have seen to be the case with God, spirits too cannot be subject to such experiences as psychological, emotional and temperamental ones.

It therefore follows that spirits can neither be appeased by complying to the taboo requirement nor angered by taboo violations. Probably, the belief that they can

be angered or appeased derives from the fact that taboos are generally passed on from ancestors to the successive generations. As the progenitors, some people may think that their spirits can be either appeased or angered by compliance or violations respectively. But, as we have seen, this belief is based on a logically unacceptable assumption that spirits exist objectively and continue to possess qualities similar to the human ones.

We have seen a strong belief that ancestral spirits are the custodians of customs in general and taboos in particular. Subsequently, there is the belief that a violation of taboos is a direct offence against the spirits and god. However, it should now be clear that logically, this contention does not hold.

5.3.0 Culture and Taboos

Taboos could also be understood in the light of cultural analysis. This perspective is desirable because taboos are one of the cultural constituents. Therefore, the general understanding of culture is necessary for the understanding of the concept taboo.

In order to understand one's behaviour, the understanding of one's culture is very necessary since culture is a framework within which one operates. It directs and limits one's behaviour and activities in general. It is a world-view within which one's experiences and activities are explained and interpreted.

Attempts have been made to understand culture, and they have led to various definitions offered by various scholars. They are numerous, but we would only look

at a few of them which seem to bring out some of the essential characteristics of every culture. One of the earliest definitions was advanced by Edward B. Tylor. In his book *Primitive Culture* (New York: Brentano's, 1924, Seventh Edition), Tylor says:

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capacities acquired by man as a member of society.¹

It should be noted that "any other capacities" as used in the above quotation include the material products of man which may be individually or socially produced and are socially consumed.

Another definition of culture is given in the book, *Man, Culture and Society*. Herein, the meaning of culture is presented as "the integrated sum total of learned behaviour traits which are manifest and shared by the members of a society."² Apart from the attempted definition of culture, more information is given in this book which hints at source of culture. It is explained further that culture is a product of social conventions which is transmitted to each generation as social heritage. And it is explicitly stated in this book that culture is a human creation:

The human capacity for culture is a consequence of man's complex and plastic nervous system. It enables man to make adjustments in behaviour without going through a biological modification of his organisms.³

In his article entitled "Ideology and Culture" presented at the 2nd Afro-Asian Philosophy conference in Nairobi, 1981, H. Odera Orika defines culture as follows:

Culture is man's contribution to the nature of environment. It is a general way of life of a people which, among other things, demonstrate their celebrated achievements in *thought, morals and material production*. These three summarize the content of culture which in

totality is a people's body of knowledge, belief and values, behaviour, goals, social institutions plus tools, techniques and material constructions.⁴

D.A. Masolo, in his paper entitled "Philosophy and Culture: A Critique" presented at the same conference mentioned above quotes H.R. Niebuhr's definition of culture which is given as:

The artificial and secondary environment that man has placed on the natural one. It includes language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, hereditary products, technical procedures, values, etc.⁵

And as a follow up interpretation, Masolo gives an apt definition of culture:

Culture is therefore the whole of the network of human activity - spiritual and material. It is the world of man, built by him in accordance with his interpretation of the primary reality or nature which surrounds him as the objective "other". It is the process and fruit of man's own self-creation, of his search and moral obligation to cultivate and fulfil himself.⁶

Okot p'Bitek, in his book *Artist, the Ruler*, also gives the following definition of culture:

Culture is philosophy as lived and celebrated in a society ... And all these institutions are informed by, and in fact built around the central ideas people have developed, ideas about what life is all about; that is, their social philosophy, their 'world-view'.⁷

From the above few definitions given, it can be seen that culture is a product of man's thought.⁸ It is produced by human beings within some time span.⁹ But given that the thought process is dynamic, whatever results from it is necessarily dynamic, that is, is subject to change. This therefore, means that culture is dynamic. Whatever is incorporated in culture is time-specific, dictated by the demands of a particular point

in time as perceived by man.

We can therefore, see that in the general sense culture is the socially transmitted and changing system of idealized ways and practices along with all the man-made objects that human knowledge produces and maintains in time. All of the cultural components are products of individual thought processes which have become mass habits. After whatever is individually produced is integrated into the practice of most members of a particular society, it becomes part of that society's culture.

Human origin of culture has been observed by quite a number of scholars apart from the few we have mentioned. For example Alfred L. Kroeber explicitly explains this:

Cultural values, along with cultural forms and cultural content, surely exist only through men and reside in men. As the products of human bodies and minds and their functionings and as a specialized extension of them, cultural values thus form a wholly "natural" part of nature.¹⁰

We should note that there is a big danger in not realizing the human hand in culture formation. Why we say that is because culture would be seen as a static phenomenon which is simply to be transmitted from one generation to another with human beings reduced to simple conveyor belts. This danger is possibly brought about by the fact that most of cultural components have a very long historical past, hence most people lose sight of the human involvement in their formation. This lack of insight into the phenomenon of culture is very dangerous because it creates and perpetuates cultural anachronism and authoritarianism.

Alfred L. Kroeber has clearly pointed out this danger we are talking about:

The inquirer, if his interest is really in culture, tend therefore to omit the human agents. He operates as if individual personalities did not have a hand in cultural events.¹¹

It would appear that such a view of culture has greatly contributed to the mystification and deification of culture in general and taboos in particular which often enhances cultural anachronism and authoritarianism. In such a view, culture is seen as an imposition from outside human experiences, some sort of sacred system about which human beings have nothing to do except to obey its prescriptions.¹² Thus culture is viewed as sacrosanct, particularly the immaterial culture. This is so because the dynamism of the material culture needs no mentioning; it is less disputable if not absolutely indisputable.

The non-natural or non-human origin of culture as a whole and its values has been explicitly and succinctly dispelled by the very definition of culture. And as Alfred Kroeber puts it, it is a thing of the past:

In the past the trouble has been that values were claimed and regarded as direct products of deity, which stood outside nature and above it, or as emanating from the soul, whose spirituality, first protected by separation from the body, was further preserved by exclusion from the domain of nature and nature's matter and energy. But surely those days are over.¹³

Now coming back to the issue of taboos, we have seen in our analyses of concept and the definition of taboo that taboos are part of a culture. They are one of the cultural constituents. But if culture is a human creation, then logically all its constituents are human creation. And if taboos are one of the cultural constituents,

again it follows logically that taboos are human creations, or rather human formulations.

5.4.0 Taboos and Change

We have pointed out that culture is dynamic. This means that both material and immaterial culture are dynamic.¹⁴ Taboos being part of the immaterial culture, have not been spared the effect of change. They have been subjected to change though gradual. Some of them have been abandoned while others have been modified to suit the prevailing changing situations.

But while taboos have been changing, the change has been very sparingly effected. This had made some people think that they have not been subject to change at all hence the sacrosanctic view of them.

We would like to support this contention by showing some taboos from the Luo culture which have been altered or abandoned in tune with the changing situations. For example, the following were taboos in the Luo culture but have ceased to be:

- i) It was a taboo to bury a dead person while not lying on either one of the hands or sides.
- ii) It was a taboo for a spouse to continue staying in a house or hut after some time following the death of one of the spouses.
- iii) It was a taboo to bring home and bury the body of a person who drowned.

- iv) – It was a taboo for an unmarried nubile girl to be buried with her virginity.

According to the Luo customs, if a male owner of a home died, then it was to be buried on the right side of his first wife's house or hut as one enters the house or hut, or the right of the house as viewed from the gate. He was also to be laid on his left hand. The grave was dug in such a way that his head pointed to the gate or West.¹⁵ In case of the burial of a wife, she was to be buried on the left of her house or hut as one enters the house or hut. The grave was dug in such a way that her head pointed away from the gate or faced the back of her hut or house. The woman was laid on her right hand.¹⁶

The children were buried on the verandah of the main houses or huts of their respective mothers in case of a polygynous families. But a son was buried on the left verandah while a daughter was buried on the right verandah. A son was laid on his left hand while a daughter was laid on her right hand:

A son was buried in the verandah *korka chiena* (on the left as you enter the house) and laid on the left hand while the daughter was buried on the verandah *korka atung'* (on the right as you enter the house) and laid on the right hand.¹⁷

If these burial procedures were not strictly observed then serious misfortunes were likely to befall the respective family. Paul Mboya has stated that an improper burial or wrong burial procedures finally leads to suffering for the family:

*Ka ok anyuola oneno maber ka ichano kunyo nyathi mos mos, gini chandre, kendo gini kuny nyathi oko giloke e bur kata dobedo choke!*¹⁸

What Mboya says is that the suffering resulting from an improper burial is so much that the family members would finally exhume the body, even if it is only bones, and rebury it properly according to Luo custom. It should also be noted that though Mboya talks of the burial of a child (*nyathi*), he categorically states that the procedure of lying a dead on either sides or hands applies to the adults as well, "*Jomadongo bende ipielo mana kamano e bur.*"¹⁹

However, we would like to point out that these burial procedures have been altered. How the dead is laid, that is, whether on its left or right hand, is no longer an issue in burial among the Kenyan Luo, and probably all Luo and other non-Luo communities. Nowadays all the dead human beings are laid in the coffins on their backs with their faces facing up. Probably this is to allow for the viewing of the dead which has become a common phenomenon these days.

On the location of the grave within the home, we would like to state again that it has also been affected. Although it is still a common practice among most Luo to observe the customary prescribed location of the grave, some Luo have abandoned it and have resorted to a new phenomenon of setting aside a piece of land or an area either within the homestead or outside the fence of the homestead - a sort of domestic cemetery for common burial of the dead family members. This is a practice which is gaining some currency within the Luo community. This practice implies that to some Luo, whether the grave is dug on the right or left side of a main house, and whether the head of a corpse faces the main gate or not, are no longer issues. Therefore, it means that the more many people adopt this practice, the faster the custom of

observing the burial procedures dies.

This latter change is again probably due to the changing attitude of some people towards death. They probably do not want to brood upon the loss or grief caused by the death for a long time. Hence, the reason why bereaved members do not want the grave near the house to constantly remind them of the deceased relative.

The above illustrations, so far, indicate that what was or had been a taboo has ceased to be due to the demands of a time. The changes that have been taking place militate against adherence to that taboo requirement.

Again, according to the Luo customs, it was or is still a taboo for a bereaved spouse to continue living in the house in which both the spouses had lived after a certain time following the death of one of the spouses. In the case of the death of a wife, the bereaved husband must not live in their former house from the very night he dreams of having a coital union with his late wife. The event is a sign of a clearance from the former wife for the man to have coital union with any woman or if the man had no other wife, then he can go ahead and marry another wife if he so wishes. From that very experience he is not supposed to spend any night in their former house, but to have it demolished and a new one must be built as a sign of a new life in the absence of the late wife.

Upon the death of a husband, the Luo custom requires or required that whoever 'inherited' the widow builds for her a new house as soon as possible. She had or has to start a new life with her levirate husband in a new house. The old house had to be demolished as well.

This customary practice was probably due to the fact that traditionally or earlier in the past, the Luo people used to bury deceased husbands in the houses of their first wives. The deceased husband was buried at the centre of the house in the sitting room. This has been pointed out by Paul Mboya in his book *Luo Kitgi go Timbegi*:

*Ka kunyo ogik yuore maduong' e mayweyo kar kunyo go okinda; kendo gikunye e od chiegemadung', e dier ot tir, ka gibaro chiw.*²⁰

The above quotation literally means that when the male owner of the home dies, the deceased's sister-in-law who is older enough cleans or sweeps the place for digging the grave which should be at the centre of the deceased's first wife's house, directly below the tip of the roof.

It should be noted that the above quotation implies that even what we said earlier to the effect that the grave was to be dug on the right side of the house or hut as one enters the house was just a later stage in the dynamic process of the culture.

However, we would like to point out that the custom of changing the house "loko ot" after the death of one of the spouses is still practised by the Luo. Most Luo cannot even imagine not carrying out this customary requirement. Though it is also very important to note that in the face of the changing times, this rite has been modified. Given the advent of either semi-permanent or permanent houses, this rite cannot be carried out as in the past, that is, demolishing the hut or house and constructing a new one. Economically this would not be reasonable. Therefore, the Luo have devised a way of carrying out the rite particularly in the case of either a semi-permanent or permanent house, that is, removing some iron sheets from the roof if it

is made of iron sheets just directly above the bedroom, and replacing it or them with some new iron sheets. It is believed that the replacement signifies a change of the house. This new practice somehow indicates that what was or is important in the changing of the house was simply a symbolization of a new life after the demise of one of the spouses.

It was also a taboo among the Luo to bring home and bury the body of a person who drowned. As Ocholla-Ayayo had pointed out, the deceased was buried near the river or lake where the body was retrieved:

Among the Luo, a person who drowned in a river or lake was buried by the river bank or lake shore, as the case may be.²¹

This taboo was based on the belief that the spirit (*Juok*) of the dead lives within the vicinity where death occurred. This has been pointed out by Hans-Egil Hauge:

Jachiens are to be found wherever people have died or are buried ... The *jachien* of a drowned person is to be found in the river or lake in which he lost his life. These beings, however, are in no way bound to the place where death occurred. They are free to move about, and they often return to their relatives.²²

First and foremost, we would like to correct an error in the use of the word *jachien*.

We would like to point out that there is no such a word as *jachiens* in the Luo language, but instead is *jochiende* as plural form of *jachien*. However, as a concept, *jachien* is also used incorrectly by Hauge though his intended meaning is correct. He uses it to mean the spirit of the dead:

...they all tended to translate the Luo word *jachien* by the English 'devil', which is not correct, since *jachien* signifies the spirit of a dead person.²³

It is clear from the above quotation that Hauge uses *jachien* or understands it to signify generally the spirit of a dead person. But as we have pointed out in this work, *jachien* refers only to a category of spirits, that is, the haunting spirit, and this has also been observed by Ocholla-Ayayo, "*Jachien* is the troublesome ghost".²⁴

On the burial of the drowned person, Ocholla-Ayayo has explained:

When this occurred it was considered that one's *Juok* had preferred to live in the water ... It was therefore proper to bury a body of a person who has died in the water quite close to the water concerned. This is still being done. The soul of a person who dies in the water is considered to have chosen to live in the world under water, and it would be offending his *Juok* to bring his body back to the earth. It is therefore necessary that the body of a person who dies in the water, *Japi*, must be buried by the lake or river side.²⁵

It is argued that if the body of the drowned person is taken home for burial then it is like bringing home his or her spirit. But as we have seen, such a spirit prefers to live in the water hence bringing the body home is actually welcoming the spirit home, it is believed. It is feared that such a spirit would always influence the death of the family members through drowning. Therefore, it is seen as appropriate that the spirit of a drowned person must be cut off from the family and from all the spirits who reside around the family or who often visit and care for the living family members. The spirit of a drowned person is seen as anti-social. That *Juok* has chosen to stay away from the family, hence must be left there. By bringing the body hence the spirit home is like accepting his or her choice of abode, that is, in the water or rather the act of having chosen to cut himself or herself from his or her kins. Thus

it is feared that some members of the particular family in question would die through drowning if the members of that particular family buries their drowned relative at home.

But we would like to point out that the practice of burying the bodies of drowned people on either the river or lake side is no longer practised among most Luo if not all Luo. The present society in general including the Luo society in particular has accepted death in waters as police cases and that is the legal position. This is a legal requirement because the mere fact that a dead body is found in water; be it river, lake, sea or ocean, or by either side does not necessarily and sufficiently mean that the person drowned *per se*. There is some possibilities that the person could have been killed and thrown in the water. Hence the legal requirement of post-mortem or autopsy to determine the scientific cause of the death. But even if it is found that the person drowned *per se*, it is no longer a practice that the body must be buried by the waterside. These days the bodies of drowned persons are buried at homes. From wherever either post-mortem or autopsy is performed the body is simply taken home for burial or to the cemetery. This has become the custom of the present day.

Lastly, again for purposes of illustration, we would like to state that it was also a taboo for an unmarried nubile girl who died to be buried with her virginity. As we have pointed out, the Luo custom required that if a virgin marriageable girl died then the hymen had to be broken by an old woman before she was buried. It was believed that a violation of this requirement leads to a serious misfortune to the family particularly the unmarried girls left behind and those born later. Mboya says of the

violation:

*Ka ok otim kamano ...kendo kitundu nyalo chieno nyiri modong', ni giyudo chuo to en otho ngili mak oyudo dichuo: iye nyalo wang.*²⁶

This quotation means that if the hymen is not broken, then the dead girl can haunt the remaining girls from that family who get married. The dead girl would feel annoyed because she died without a husband while the other girls get husbands.

However, it should be noted that the present time with its moral levity is hardly conducive to the compliance with the above Luo customary requirement that a girl ought to be virgin at marriage time. The virginity had to be ascertained at marriage time. Therefore, girls were strictly brought up to preserve their virginity until they get married. The loss of virginity before marriage was strongly disapproved of and condemned. Thus it was hard, though not impossible, to find a non-virgin girl at marriage. In such a society it was much easier to determine whether a girl was virgin at death. It was therefore, easier to carry out the rite. But, probably due to a change in people's attitude towards the rite together with other changes that the Luo community has been undergoing, the rite of breaking a girl's virginity before burial has been abandoned. In the present Luo community if an unmarried girl dies, she is just buried without much ado as to whether she is virgin or not at death.

From the few illustrations given it can be seen that despite the sacrosanct view of taboos, they have not absolutely withstood the effect of time. Some have been either modified or abandoned to suit the prevailing situations. But if taboos were to have supernatural origin, then human beings would have got nothing to do with either

their alteration or discard. This is because even if taboos were to have a non-human origin, once they are modified they become human creations. Therefore, the mere fact that human beings can either alter or abandon some particular taboos logically shows that taboos originate from human beings.

5.5.0 Inference

So far we have tried to analyse taboos from various perspectives. We have tried to look at them in relation to God, ancestral spirits, culture in general and change. All these perspectives logically indicate that taboos originate from human beings. Therefore, any claim that taboos either originate or could have originated from some supernatural source or any other mystical source is logically unacceptable. But we had seen earlier that the involvement of mystical or spiritual beings (God or spirits) is very central to the meaning and operations of a taboo institution. This then means that without the supernatural involvement aspect of taboos, they cease to be taboos. Logically, we have argued, and we hope validly so, against the supernatural involvement in the meaning and operations of taboos. Therefore, we can assert that logically there are no real taboos. In this assertion, we concur with Wiredu's observation of the Akan Sages' view of taboos with reference to the prohibition of having sex in the bush:

It is this: that the reference to the retributions of the 'gods' is superfluous in the sense that the reason why people should not have sex in the bush is not because the earth 'goddess' cannot stand it - or, more accurately, cannot support it - but because there are naturalistically

undesirable consequences. If, as I maintain, this is the way in which the sages of the Akans conceive these matters, then we have to say that for them there are in fact no real taboos at all.²⁷

Therefore, it can be logically inferred that the so-called taboos are but simply social conventions. They are either rules of customs or morality. But there is nothing mystical or supernatural about them. They are socially produced for the welfare of a community within a particular stage of that community's development. They are subject to modifications and abandonment depending on a community's rational interest and perceivable ways of fulfilling the interests in question. In other words, we are saying that, logically 'taboos' are rules of conduct which have been formulated by human beings, especially the philosophic sages²⁸ for the creation, preservation and promotion of the social good as commonly perceived within a particular community at a certain time in its life.

NOTES

1. Edward N. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* 7th ed. (New York: Bretano's, 1924), p. 1.
See also William F. Ogburn and Meyer F. Nimkoff *A Handbook of Sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 29.
2. Harry L. Shapiro, ed., *Man, Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 168.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
4. H. Odera Oruka, "Ideology and Culture" in H. Odera Oruka and D.A. Masolo, eds. *Philosophy and Cultures* (Nairobi: Bookwise Ltd., 1983), p. 57.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
See also H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: 1956), p. 32.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Okot p'Bitek, *Artist, the Ruler* (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd., 1986), p. 13.
8. Cf. Hans Haferkamp, *Social Structure and Culture* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 20-21.
9. Cf. Robert Wuthnow, *et al.*, *Cultural Analysis* (Boston; London; Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 35.
10. Alfred L. Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture* (London; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 129.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
12. Cf. Haferkamp, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
13. Kroeber, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
14. Cf. Ogburn, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
15. Cf. H. Odera Oruka, ed., *Sage Philosophy* (Nairobi: African Centre for

Technology Studies (ACTS) Press, 1991), p. 79.

16. Cf. *Ibid.*

See also A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo, "Death and Burial: An Anthropological Perspective" in J.B. Ojwang and J.N.K. Mugambi, eds., *The S.M. Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1989), p. 33; G.E.M. Ogutu, *A Historical Analysis of the Luo Idea of God* (M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1975), p. 106.

17. G.E.M. Ogutu, *A Historical Analysis of the Luo Idea of God* (M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1975) p.105.

See also Paul Mboya, *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978), p. 25; *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* (Kisumu: The Advent Press, 1938), p. 105.

18. Paul Mboya, *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978), p. 25.

19. *Ibid.*

See also Ocholla-Ayayo, "Death and Burial: An Anthropological Perspective" in *The S.M. Otieno case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya, op. cit.*, p. 33-34.

20. Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* (Kisumu: The Advent Press, 1938), p. 113.

21. Ocholla-Ayayo, "Death and Burial: An Anthropological Perspective" in *The S.M. Otieno case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya, op. cit.*, p. 31.

22. Hans-Egil Hauge, *Luo Religion and Folklore* (Oslo: Universitet sforlaget, 1974), p. 112.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

24. A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo, *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976), p. 179.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

See also Grace Ogot, *Land Without Thunder* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988),

p. 148.

26. Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi go Timbegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

See also G.E.M. Ogotu, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

27. Kwasi Wiredu, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought" in H. Odera Oruka and D.A. Mosolo, eds. *Philosophy and Cultures*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

28. Cf. H. Odera Oruka, *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy* (Nairobi: Shirikon, 1990), pp. 38-39; Kwasi Wiredu, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought" in *Philosophy and Cultures*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER SIX

NEXUS AND RATIONALE: AN EXAMINATION OF TABOOS

The previous discussions have shown that the belief in taboo and taboo institution presupposes that a violation of a taboo prohibition leads to a misfortune(s). It is the fear of the resulting misfortune which is the basis of taboo compliance. People who believe in the taboo institution are unwilling to infract any taboo prohibition due to the fear of the presupposedly misfortune(s) that is believed to follow the violation. This chapter examines the nexus between the taboo violation and the misfortune which is believed to follow. What is the nature of the nexus? This chapter also attempts to offer possible rationale for some selected Luo taboos, in other words, it examines the possible social values of some taboos.

6.1.0 Resultant Misfortune

In the analysis of the concept of *chira* (misfortune) in chapter one, we stated that the nature of the misfortune which is believed to follow the violation of taboo is fluid and amorphous. It is not possible, as it is believed, to pin down its nature and give its specifications, that is, its various specific manifestations. It has been seen that in the Luo belief, the resultant misfortune can befall an individual (the violator), his family, clan, and even the whole community of which the infractor is a member. The supposed misfortune takes as numerous forms as can be perceived or believed by the members of the ethnic community.

In the Luo community, the resultant misfortune takes any form which is seen as undesirable or disruptive either to the individual or social well-being. It can take the form of a sudden deaths as in accidents, some sicknesses which are perceived as mysterious, madness, multiple deaths of some members of a family, lameness, leprosy, ulcerated wounds, recurrent fits, sudden deaths of persons otherwise seen as healthy, frequent deaths of family members within otherwise perceived short intervals, childlessness; inability to get a husband or wife or to maintain either, frequent loss of children through death, and any other form of socially undesirable life as may be the case of the failure of members of a family to achieve a reasonable good living standard or live a prosperous life as seen from the community's view point, alcoholism, and drug addiction which results in inability to maintain a family or discharge one's social obligations well, being bed-ridden with sickness for a long time, and any other form of calamitous event that affects an individual or one's family. But as had been stated earlier in chapter one, no justice can be done by attempting to exhaust the various manifestations of the resultant misfortunes that follow taboo violations.

It should be noted that the consequent of taboo-breaking is always left indeterminate. The resultant misfortune is never specified. The vagueness of the misfortune can be seen from what has been presented of the Luo belief, just as from the view of the natives of Solomon Islands:

The natives of Solomon Islands ascribe sickness, difficult parturition for women, lack of success in fishing and gardening, misfortune in war, and in short, most of the ills of life to the ceremonial defilement resulting from the violation of taboos.¹

The vagueness of the resultant misfortune for taboo-breaking, if granted, seems to pose some great difficulties in understanding the nature of nexus between the taboo violation and the presumed misfortune. However, for the believers in the taboo institution, the mentioned difficulty does not exist. To them, there is almost an obvious causal link between the violation and the misfortune. In this, Hutton Webster seems to have made an apt observation:

The consequence of taboo-breaking are not always described in detail. They may be left to the excited imagination of the taboo-breaker who believes as firmly in the sequence of cause and effect (violation followed by punishment) as does the modern man in the inevitable action of natural laws. The taboos (*sabe*) observed by the Mowat or Mawatta tribe in the district of Dandai, British New Guinea, have for their sanction the dread that "something unpleasant" will happen either to the community or to the individual transgressing them.²

But how is the belief in this causal connexion between the taboo infraction and the resultant misfortune compatible with the vague nature of the latter? An attempt to answer this question requires an understanding of the law of causality.

6.2.0 Taboo and the Law of Causality

The law of causality states that similar causes produce similar effects. The law shows the connexion between causes and their effects. This connexion is fundamental in understanding the operation of taboos. It is often believed that a violation of a taboo causes some misfortune. Therefore, the belief claims a causal connexion between the violation of a taboo and some resultant misfortune.

Basic to the understanding of this law of causality are the ideas of sufficient and necessary conditions. A sufficient condition is the sum of all the necessary conditions for an occurrence. A necessary condition is any of the factor without which an occurrence cannot be. However, when dealing with "cause" in relation to cause-effect, cause is identified with a necessary and sufficient condition. A necessary condition is not necessarily a sufficient condition and a sufficient condition is a necessary condition. To illustrate this, when C causes E, then it means that C is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of E. In other words, if C is present then E must also be present (occur). This also implies that the absence of E is a sufficient condition for the absence of C.³

However, central to the understanding of "cause" whether in the scientific sense or the ordinary sense, is the idea of invariability. This idea refers to the uniformity of the connexion between cause and effect. So that if C causes E, then all similar circumstances to C should cause similar effects to E.⁴ In other words, the law of causality holds that for every class of events, say E, there is a class of conditions, say C, such that whenever there is an instance of C it must necessarily be followed or accompanied by an instance of E. Therefore, when talking about causality (cause), we talk about determinate situations, that is, a particular class of circumstances causes a particular class of phenomena. This implies that cause and effect are uniformly connected.

But, can this understanding of cause be compatible with the nature of taboo operations?

We would rather answer this question in the negative. We have said that the nature of the resultant misfortune is vague. The taboo institution does not state that a violation of a particular taboo results into a specific or particular misfortune. There are so many taboos in each culture, but it is hardly stated, if absolutely not stated, which specific misfortunes follow a violation of which particular taboos. We have seen that the use of the concept "cause" demands specificity and determination which is lacking in the institution of taboos.

Looked at from a logical standpoint, there is no necessary connection between a taboo violation and any misfortune which is usually believed to follow:

For a *tabu* is something to be avoided because of an ineffable, unlimited danger, with no necessity for the logical connection in the foregoing.⁵

But is the feared danger a reality? No, the danger is a pure imagination, but can be termed real only in-so-far as it remains an imagination.

If granted that a violation of a taboo causes or necessarily results into a misfortune, then logically every instance of a taboo violation must necessarily result into a misfortune or harm. To say that a violation of a taboo causes a misfortune means that a violation is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of a misfortune, thus whenever a violation occurs, a misfortune must occur necessarily. But an instance of a taboo violation without a resultant misfortune logically negates the contention or belief that a taboo violation causes misfortune. This is so because if a taboo violation causes misfortune then every instance of a taboo violation must necessarily, without exception, result into a misfortune "unless a preventive cleansing is done". This

argument can be symbolically illustrated as follows:

Let us take V to stand for 'taboo violation occurs', and M to stand for 'misfortune occurs'. Therefore, the belief in taboo can be expressed as:

If V then M.

V is the case.

Therefore, M must be the case.

This argument can further be expressed as:

$V \rightarrow M$

V

$\therefore M$

But, as we have said, any instance of "V and not-M" logically negates that "if V then M". We have asserted that any instance of taboo violation without a misfortune logically means that it is not the case that a taboo violation causes misfortune. This can be expressed symbolically as:

$(V \cdot \sim M) \rightarrow \sim (V \rightarrow M)$

OR

$V \cdot \sim M$

$\therefore \sim (V \rightarrow M)$

Logically, given $(V \cdot \sim M)$ we can infer $\sim (V \rightarrow M)$ as follows:

1. $\sim (V \rightarrow M)$ Assertion
2. $V \cdot \sim M$ Premise

3. $\sim \sim (V \sim M)$ from 2, By Double Negation
4. $\sim (\sim V \vee M)$ from 3, by DeMorgan's Theorem
5. $\sim (V \rightarrow M)$ from 4, by Implication

However, one may object to our use of "cause" in the above analysis. We have argued that the belief in taboos is based on a fundamental assumption that a violation of a taboo causes a misfortune. And we have expressed the assumption as 'If V then M'. We have further argued that any instance of 'V and not-M' logically negates the above fundamental assumption, that is, 'If V then M'. In our discussion, we have also referred to some documented instances of 'V and not-M' which therefore, even in practical life, logically negates that basic assumption.

But we can imagine a possible temptation to interpret our first premise or the basic assumption 'If V then M' to mean that V is not a sufficient condition for M but only a necessary condition for M. If such a temptation be granted, then it would appear that the belief in taboos should be expressed as, 'If V and some other factors then M', which can further be symbolized as, ' $(V + n) \rightarrow M$ ', where n can be one or more factors. Assuming that we grant this possibility, then we can have 'V and not-M' without logically negating the premise 'If $(V + n)$ then M'. This means that for M to occur, there must be V and n, which further implies that M would not occur in the presence of one and the absence of the other. This example may be seen as a counter-example to dispute our disputation of the belief in taboos and the alleged 'causal' connexion between taboo violation and the resultant misfortune. This possible

counter-disputation would then imply that our disputation never falsifies or destroys the believed basic causal connexion between a taboo violation and the resultant misfortune. Hence, it would appear to assert that the belief in taboos still logically holds and that there is a necessary causal connexion between taboo violation and the resultant misfortune. Therefore, our disputation does not invalidate the belief in taboos.

But we would like to raise some objections to that possible counter-argument. One of the objections relates to the use of sufficient and necessary conditions regarding our first premise, that is, 'If V then M'. This proposition is derived from the very definition or meaning of a taboo as seen in chapter one of this work. On the basis of that analysis, the belief in taboos presents the violation of a taboo as a sufficient condition for the occurrence of some misfortune. And any attempt, therefore, to deny that could not be based on the belief as it is, but on a redefinition of the belief.

Furthermore, our premise 'If V then M' cannot logically be interpreted to mean that V is only a necessary condition for M. That is logically unacceptable. The acceptable logical understanding of the premise is very important because its misinterpretation seems to be most possible basis for the above counter-argument. 'If V then M' logically means that V is a sufficient condition for M, and M is a necessary condition for V. V can never be interpreted, logically speaking, as a necessary condition for M. Let us take, for example, when it is said that oxygen is a necessary condition for fire, this cannot logically be expressed, 'If there is oxygen then there is fire', but rather, 'If there is fire then there is oxygen'. This logically means that

oxygen is necessary condition for fire, and fire is a sufficient condition for oxygen which can be further expressed, 'If fire then oxygen'. Therefore, in our disputation V can never be taken as only a necessary condition for M, but as a sufficient condition for M.

But even if the above counter-argument were logically tenable, that is, with V as a necessary condition for M, the issue of the other necessary condition(s) which when coupled with the violation of a taboo then forms a sufficient condition for some misfortune to occur, still remains unresolved. At the moment, we cannot conceive of any other condition(s) for misfortune apart from the violation of a taboo. Moreover, the belief in taboos does not give any other condition(s), leave alone alluding to, other than the violation of taboo.

Therefore, our analysis still appears to hold given the general understanding of taboos, that there is no necessary connexion between the violation of a taboo and the alleged resultant misfortune. If there is any connexion at all, then logically it appears to be only contingent.

In the previous chapter, we said that some taboos have been violated without any perceived resultant misfortune. There are also some documented instances of taboo violations in some cultures without any resulting misfortune. King Pomare II of Tahiti is reported to have violated a taboo without any perceived misfortune resulting:

One day when a turtle had been presented to him he ordered that this sacred animal, which had always been cooked over a sacred fire within the precincts of a temple and a part of whose flesh had been invariably offered to the idol, should be baked in the royal kitchen and served without the sacrificial act. "The king cut up the turtle

and began to eat it, inviting some that sat at meat with him to do the same; but no one could be induced to touch it, as they expected every moment to seem him either expire or writhe in strong convulsions. The king endeavoured to convince his companions that their idea of the power of the gods was altogether imaginary and that they had been the subjects of complete delusion; but the people could not believe him ... This sacrilege, which the gods failed to punish in any way, shook the faith of the people in them.⁶

It is also interesting to note that the lack of necessary connexion between a taboo violation and any misfortune is further demonstrated by the common attitude of people whenever a taboo is violated. People often expect no specific misfortune to follow the violation, and are often left bewildered only with the attitude of 'let us wait and see'. This attitude leads to an arbitrary attachment of anything perceived as a misfortune that may happen to the transgressor to the violated taboo, as seems to have happened to some Spaniard:

On one of the trails between Tarlac Province and Zambales Province in the island of Luzon there is a huge black boulder which the Negritos believe to be the home of a powerful spirit. No Negrito and, in fact, no Christianized native of Zambales or Tarlac ever goes by it without leaving a banana, camote, or some other article of food. Failure to do so could mean that bad luck in one form or another would mark the journey. A Spaniard, who afterward became governor of Zambales, once passed the rock and, to the horror of his companions, kicked it with his feet, and to add insult to injury, he ate part of a banana and threw the rest away. The natives were much concerned over the incident; they said something terrible would happen to him. Sure enough, before he had gone very far he got an arrow through both legs from savage Negritos who could have known nothing of the occurrence.⁷

It would seem that instances of coincidence have been used to develop and bolster the belief in taboos. Like in the case of the Spaniard, it was possible that even if he had not violated the mentioned taboo, he could still have been shot with an arrow by some wild Negrito.

We have seen that there is no link between a taboo violation and assumed misfortune that follow it. And it would appear the assumed misfortunes are simply encounters (met by chance) which are dictated by the nature of the life of human beings at some time. Hence the following observation seems agreeable:

Some peoples find in the assumed consequences of taboo-breaking a sufficient or nearly sufficient explanation of the accidents and other misfortunes to which human flesh is heir; other peoples assign much greater importance to witchcraft or to demonic agency as an explanation. All these "superstitions" reflect man's ignorance of his surroundings, whether natural or what we call supernatural. They are rooted in the fear of the unknown and the unknowable.⁸

6.3.0 Psychological Nexus

However, some people may object to the foregoing analysis of the relationship between a taboo violation and the misfortune believed to follow it. They may be tempted to point out certain instances during which taboo violations seem to have resulted into indisputable misfortunes. They could be right. However, we would like to look at such instances from another different level, and not from the general level of causal analysis. Before we embark on the analysis of that other level, let us look at

some instances in which misfortunes have been seen to result from a violation of taboo.

In Malay, a Mr. Skeat who went ahead and examined tabooed drums and trumpet against people's advice not to, had the following to say:

"I thought nothing more of the matter at the time, but, what was really a very curious coincidence, within a few days' time of the occurrence, I was seized with a sharp attack of malarial influenza, the result of which was that I was obliged to leave the district, and go into hospital at headquarters". The news of what had happened much impressed the Malays.⁹

The above example is another case of a coincidence. It shows how possible it is to mistake a cause of an event, especially a harmful event in a society guided by taboos. It is an instance of a *non causa pro causa* or simply a false cause. Such cases of coincidence have contributed to the holding of the belief in taboo institution.

Webster gives another instance when a Kurnai black boy seemed to have died of a taboo violation:

He explained that he had been doing what he ought not to have done, that he had 'stolen some female *'possum'* before he was permitted to do it; that the old men had found him out, and that he would never grow up to be a man. He lay down under that belief, so to say, and never got up again, dying within three weeks.¹⁰

In the same book by Webster, another instance is given in which a man seemed to have died of a taboo violation:

The unfortunate man had eaten food set apart for the chief but carelessly left by the wayside after the war party moved on. When the man was told that he had devoured the chiefs' unfinished dinner, "he was seized by the most extraordinary convulsions and cramps in the stomach, which never ceased till he died, about sundown

the same day. He was a strong man, in the prime of life

11

Another very interesting example given in this same book is about a young man who died within twenty-four hours after realizing that he had violated a taboo almost four years earlier:

A certain young negro, being upon a journey, lodged in a friend's house by the way: his friend before he went out the next morning, had got a wild hen ready for his breakfast, they being much better than the tame ones. The negro hereupon demanded, 'If it were a wild hen?' His host answered, 'No'; then he fell on heartily, and afterwards proceeded on his journey. About four years after these two met together again, and the aforesaid negro being not yet married, his old friend asked him, 'If he would eat a wild hen?' To which he answered, 'That he had received the *chegilla*, and therefore could not.' Hereat the host began immediately to laugh, enquiring of him, what made him refuse it now, when he had eaten one at his table about four years ago?' At the hearing of this the negro immediately fell a-trembling, and suffered

himself to be so far possessed with the effects of imagination, that he died in less than twenty-four hours after. ¹²

A woman also died after having eaten some fruit from a tabooed place:

After his return home a woman asked for some of the fruit. He gave it to her and, when she had eaten it, told her where he got it. She declared that the spirit of the chief, whose sanctuary had been thus profaned, would kill her. Die she did, the next day.¹³

The few cases given above strongly point to some relationship between taboo infringement and resulting deaths or harm. However, given that a necessary link

between a taboo infraction and any resulting danger has been ruled out, the question to be asked is, what is the nature of this other connexion? It should be noted that in all the instances referred to above, death followed a feeling of a psychological guilt. When the infractors realized that they had violated taboos, they were seized by a psychological guilt. The guilt was followed by fear of an inevitable danger of no known specific nature. The inevitability of danger of unknown nature killed their will to live which resulted into a state of hopelessness which killed them. The kind of stress produced by the psychological guilt and fear, as psychosomatic studies attest to, can produce some physiological disorders which can result in death. And this seems to be what happened in the mentioned cases. W.B. Cannon has explained this scientifically:

The most dramatic result of a taboo violation is voodoo death. Voodoo death, according to Cannon, results from excessive sympathetic activity, which produces vasoconstriction and damage to the capillary endothelium of the visceral blood vessels, loss of blood plasma volume and pressure, and ultimately death.¹⁴

Psychosomatic medicine has established that emotional conflicts and stress can cause disorders of bodily functions due to, for example, some cases of respiratory reactions, cardiovascular reactions, gastrointestinal reactions, and other disorders due to sympathetic innervation (related to autonomic nervous system that controls involuntary actions). These disorders, depending on the health condition of a person, can cause death.¹⁵

The foregoing analysis indicates, therefore, that those people who die of taboo

violations are cases of psychosomatic or psychophysiological disorders which are psychologically precipitated deaths. These psychological aspects of the deaths therefore, shows a psychological link between taboo violations and the resulting deaths. Being psychological, the connexion between taboo violation and the resulting death cannot be necessary because different people have different psychological dispositions which means that some people cannot be victims of psychosomatic disorders in the same way. This is shown by the fact that some people could violate taboos with impunity, a case we have seen.

Therefore, the analysis shows that taboos do not have inherent dangers. But whatever the perceivable danger is due to either a mistaken association of ideas; that is, a case of *non causa pro causa* or psychological disposition of an individual. To illustrate this point, take the case of incest in Hawaii. Hawaiian chiefs were allowed to marry their sisters while it was a taboo for any ordinary Hawaiian to commit incest with his sister:

To all people, primitive or otherwise, the idea of incest is shocking and the act a sin - in Polynesia, a tabu thing. An ordinary Hawaiian who committed incest with his sister would have polluted himself so completely, and rendered himself so enormously tabu, that there could be no hope at all of purifying him ritually, and he could therefore only be put to death. A Hawaiian chief, however, married his sister, because the capacity of the chief for mana and tabu was equal to the danger, the tabu quality, and so he simply became more tabu than ever.¹⁶

But given that one does not essentially become superior or different from others due to the royal descent or position, there is no philosophical basis for the Hawaiian

culture to treat its chiefs and ordinary people differently when it comes to incest. If incest could have been inherently harmful, then even the Hawaiian chiefs could be harmed by it.

6.4.0 Social Values of Taboos

One could wonder, following the foregoing analysis, whether taboos do not have some social values. Despite being social conventions or human inventions, do taboos not serve the society positively?

We would like to answer in the affirmative. This is because if we answer in the negative then we would be saying that the institution of taboo is or was not based on any social necessity. It would be strange indeed for any society to develop the taboo institution which is not focused on some social values. Therefore, the very fact that taboos should be observed shows that compliance to taboo prescriptions have some social values, at least to the compliant.

Taboos have some moral implications. They are moral rules indicating which acts are good and evil, right and wrong, as adjudged by the society.¹⁷ An act which is either good or right enhances and preserves the social well-being of a community and vice versa.

Generally, taboo institution gives a moral direction to a society. It shows that some conducts are socially good while some are socially harmful. It therefore, instils a sense of discipline and responsibility in society:¹⁸

If taboos are communally observed, their disciplinary function is still more manifest. The violation of them by

anyone is believed to entail misfortune for everyone; as the Congo natives say, "One man becomes the curse of a hundred." Hence a duty devolves on each member of the group to see that his neighbour obeys the law. The general effect of rules of taboo is, therefore, to provide a powerful sanction for all those altruistic sentiments which bring about the co-operation of a man with his fellow. That such rules tend to establish and maintain social solidarity is attested by many of our authorities.¹⁹

Coming to the Luo society, the taboo institution forms an essential constituent of their moral code.²⁰ The institution deals with a particular category of behaviour which is seen to result into greater adverse social effects. Given the value of the social order in any society in general, and Luo society in particular,²¹ any behaviour which has a propensity to greatly disturb this social order was strongly abhorred and every effort was made to avoid it at all cost. It seems, therefore, that most human behaviour, if not all, in all societies in general, and Luo society in particular, are judged socially desirable or undesirable depending on the nature of their effects on the members of society. The desirable behaviour must be consistent with a particular society's social good and vice versa.

In the Luo society, the degree of compatibility of any behaviour with its social good determined whether the behaviour was tabooed or not. Therefore, in the Luo society, any behaviour which could greatly hinder the enjoyment of the social good was tabooed. This social good in the Luo society was based on positive interpersonal relationship. This has been aptly observed by G.E.M. Ogotu:

The ancestors had discovered that certain activities or levels of behaviour disturbed inter-personal relations. To protect their descendants from behaving or acting in such

ways, they enacted prohibitions and whoever violated the interdictions was cursed. The living lineage heads took it upon themselves to make sure that members of their lineage did not offend the ancestors by acting contrary to the conventions. Thus there existed a close relationship between the code of ethics upon which the peaceful co-existence of the people depended and the authority of clan heads and ancestors ...²²

6.5.0 Possible Social Justification of Some Luo Taboos

In the Luo society in particular, and in any society in general, there are numerous taboos which coerce compliance with some particular behaviour. The following are some selected Luo taboos and their attempted rationalizations:

6.5.1 *Nek*²³/Killing of a Person

- a) *En kwero nego ng'ato ma oringo kendo odonjo ei ot* - It is a taboo to kill a person who runs and enters a house or seeks refuge in a house.

This was probably to prevent seeing the horrifying act of taking away human life, particularly by women and children who often spent most of their times in the house/home. Children were to grow up respecting human life, and should never be exposed to the destruction of life which could influence them to disrespect human life. Furthermore, the horrifying sight could haunt and hence bring suffering in the home.

- b) *En kwero nego ng'ato ma oting'o kata ofwayo bade* - It is a taboo killing a person who raised up his/her hands.

This taboo was to instill in people the sense that it is wrong to kill any person who is not fighting or who is harmless or advocating for peace. Generally, raising up

the hands is a gesture for peace.

- c) *En kwero nego ng'ato ma oringo kendo okwako dhako* - It is a taboo killing a person who runs and embraces a woman for protection.

Women, in the Luo society, are generally seen as physically weak when it comes to fights. Generally, they hardly fought men back. Hence they could not be killed in fights. Therefore, any man who runs and embraces a woman has humbled himself to the status of a woman and should never be killed. This taboo was probably to prevent any possibility of hurting a woman in the attempt to kill the man. Women have a vital social role of offering most needs and who could be pregnant or having young dependants. Thus they need utmost protection.

- d) *En kwero nego ng'ato ma oting'o nyathi* - It is a taboo killing a person who is carrying or holding a baby/child.

A baby or child is innocent, harmless, defenceless and needs protection. A baby or child is the seed of a society, the hope for its continuation. Thus a baby or child should be cherished and protected. Whoever therefore, carries a baby or child offers the needed care and protection, and should not be killed.

If any person runs and picks up a baby or child for protection, then that person has humbled himself to the status of a baby or child and must never be killed. Furthermore, any attempt to kill such a person is likely to hurt the child, but the child should never be hurt.

NOTE:

Human life is sacred, according to the Luo culture, and should never be

destroyed. One of the worse things that can befall a person or one's family is for one's hand to destroy a human life.

The above taboos show that there was no capital punishment in the Luo society. They offer exceptional cases which has no room for capital punishment since they show conditions under which the human life must be preserved regardless of the offence one may have committed. They also show that a person who is harmless or who does not threaten one's life or who advocates for peace or who is remorseful should never be killed.

It seems that one could only kill when one's life was in danger, which would be in the form of a self-defence or during war,²⁴ or in the case of sorcery, or in the case of protection of his property from a thief, or in the case of a man caught having a coital union with one's wife; and the following statements say exactly that:

*Ka ng'ato oyudo jajuok kaido e dala, ka onege, mano onge bura. Ng'ato koyudo jandagla okelo ndagla gotieno, konege, mano onge bura. Ka ng'ato oyudo jakuo kakwalo, kendo onege, mano bende onge bura. Ka ng'ato oyudo ng'ato terore gi chiege, konege, mano onge bura. Ka ng'ato onego ng'ato mokedogo, mano onge gi bura.*²⁵

However, it should be noted that in the Luo culture, killing a person is generally bad, and even under the mentioned exceptional conditions, the killer must be cleansed because, as the Luo believe, the spirit of the killed person necessary haunts, or is bound to haunt the killer.²⁶

6.5.2 *Tho/Death*

- a) *En kwero mondo jadohokata dichuo moro amora onind ei od dhako moro amora ka dipo ni chiege more odhi a liend wuon kata min*¹⁷ - It is a taboo for a polygynist or any other man to spend a night in any other woman's house or to "sleep" with any other woman when one of his wives or his wife has gone to attend her father's or mother's funeral.

The Luo culture requires that if one's wife has gone to attend her father's or mother's funeral, then her husband must or should spend all nights only in her house until she comes back.

This taboo was probably to instill empathy in a family particularly in the husband. It was to make the husbands show togetherness in bereavement and grief with their wives. This attitude is necessary in society because it consoles the bereaved, in this case, the wife, since she knows that there is somebody who cares for her and shares with her in the grief. She is not alone. This knowledge enables her to get over the bereavement and grief, and reinstate her into normal social life.

- b) *En kwero ketho lemo mar ng'ama otho, kata rucho, kata loko, kata medo ka itimo dwareni iwuon*²⁸ - It is a taboo to ignore the will or "prayer" of the dead, or to delete, or alter, or add anything as one may please.

It should be noted that most of the "prayers" of the dying were often made in good faith to older members of the family, and for the good of the family and community in general. Therefore, this taboo was probably to curb any possible selfish and individualistic tendencies, particularly when it comes to the distribution of wealth

and caring for the young members of the family, particularly young widows and children.

The Luo believe that the spirit of the dead lives and can harm when offended. This taboo was probably also to prevent conflicts over property left behind by the dead, and taking advantage of death for one's own interest. It could also prevent any temptation to kill a person in order to rob or attach whatever could be left behind regardless of his/her dependants' welfare. One should not kill in order to covet whatever is left behind by the dead.

c) *En kwero golo migogo motho oko gi dhoot, kata rangach, kata iike ei dala, to ipowone kor katung' mar ot kendo ipowone kor chiel ema igolegooko kendo iike oko mar dala e bat koracham⁹* - It is a taboo for a married woman who dies at her parents' home or clan to be removed out through the door or the gate, but through an opening on the wall and the fence. The openings should be on the left when facing the door or gate from inside the house or home and should be buried outside the home to the left.

An incident of a married woman dying at her parents place was socially undesirable in the Luo society, and the treatment accorded her corpse was also socially undesirable. It was desirable that a mature girl should get married and settle down in marriage. Therefore unmarried life or unstable marriage was undesirable, and was discouraged.

Therefore the taboo was supposed to encourage mature girls to get married and to maintain stable marriages. No mature girl or members of the society in general,

would like to imagine her body or some of their kins subjected to the treatment accorded the corpse or a "migogo".

d) *En kwero mondo ik dhako gi kode*³⁰ - It is a taboo to bury a corpse of a widow if she had not been 'inherited' after the death of her husband.

If a widow dies before she had been 'remarried' or 'inherited', then a symbolic "remarriage" must be performed before her body is buried. This symbolic act in itself was socially undesirable.

Therefore, it would appear that this taboo was to encourage widows to avoid any conduct which could lead to such a symbolic act. It was to encourage "remarriage" of widows as soon as necessary after the death of their husbands. This was to reinstate them into normal social life as soon as possible following the death of their husbands.

6.5.3 *Terruok*/Sexual Intercourse

a) *En kwero mondo ng'ato oterre gi min, kata gi nyare, kata gi nyamin*³¹ - It is a taboo for one to engage in sexual intercourse with one's mother, or daughter or sister.

This is one of the widely observed taboos by quite a good number of societies. This taboo was probably, and most likely, meant to prevent the likelihood of rivalry over sexual partners in the family due to the close proximity of the people involved. That kind of rivalry could create lack of consanguineous respect which is necessary for a harmonious family and social life. The rivalry could create fights and even killings within a family.

Moreover, today it has been established that in-breedings, that is, breedings between people with close genetical make-ups could result into children with genetical abnormalities. Probably, that scientific aspect had been observed, at certain times in the Luo society.

- b) *En kwero mondo dichuo kata dhako oterre gi ng'ato oko, kendo ka otimo kamano to nyathigi nyalo muorore*³² - It is a taboo for a married man or woman to engage in extra-marital sexual intercourse, otherwise their child could suddenly die.

It should be noted that in the Luo society, the character or personality traits mattered a lot when it comes to child bearing. The culture does not allow getting a child with anybody regardless of one's social and genetical backgrounds. The Luo culture does not allow getting a child with someone known for anti-social acts and behaviour like a murderer, a sorcerer, and one who is being haunted, "...onyaloterore gi ng'ato moro amora ma oyundorego e kor lumbe mit ogamo kode ich, kara ng'atni oa e tielo marach, tielo mochachni, tielo man gi tipo; kara ng'atni ema tol madalagi mochachni cha oluo."³³

This taboo was therefore to prevent possible conception of a child with a person of such undesirable background, conception of a child out of wedlock, and possible killing when a man is found with one's wife.³⁴

6.5.4 *Kweche moko mag dala*/Other Taboos related to a Home

- a) *En kwero mondo wuoi ka goyo dala to oketo dala wuon kanyime, kata ka ogedo*

*gi chien matin. to ok otim kamano*³⁵ - It is a taboo for a son to establish his home behind his father's, even if he is to build it a bit far away, he cannot do that.

That taboo should probably be understood in line with the other rule governing construction of houses in one's parents' homes. In the Luo home, sons must build their houses in front of their parents' house towards the gate with the youngest son's house being nearer to the gate.

This order was to provide for defence against attackers or invaders. The young men were seen as more active and strong, and should therefore be in the forefront. This explanation could also apply in the making of homes. Because most homes were fenced, any invasion was likely to be launched from the gate, hence the need for the sons or the young to be towards the gate.

b) *En kwero mondo jaduong'pachoogolpur, komo, doyo, kata keyo ka mikayi onge, kata nindo e od dhako moro amora ma ok mikayi ka onindo ni kiny othi golopur, komo, doyo, kata keyo, kendo bang, timo magi to od mikayi ema odok onindoe*³⁶ -

It is a taboo for the male owner of the home to inaugurate the yearly ploughing, sowing, weeding, or harvesting in the absence of the first wife from home, or to spend a night in any other wife's house apart from the first wife's house if the next day any of the above activities is to be begun, and he must go back and spend the night in the first wife's house after any of the above yearly activities has been begun.

This taboo was probably to assert the central role of the first wife in the

management of a home, and how she must participate in the vital decision-making and maintenance of a home. This rule was to curb the possible sidelining of the first wife and her possible replacement by any other wife in matters of vital importance to the home. Thus this rule ensured that the first wife was/is not chased away or "divorced" and that home continues to operate well in her absence. There would be no food for such a home. Hence the rule ensured respect for the first wife. It was to establish unity in a family.

6.5.5 *Dhawo/Quarrels*

- a) *En kwero mondo janyuol okwong' nyathine ka ogoloreneduk, ka ogumone*⁷⁷ - It is a taboo for a parent to curse his or her child and showing the child his or her nakedness (showing the child his/her genitals) during a quarrel.

This rule was probably to ensure that children were continuously admired, and that they (children) avoided behaving to their parents in any way that may be a discouragement from desiring children.

Therefore the rule seems to have been meant to instil in the children the sense of respect to parents, particularly due to the fact that parents were bound to grow old and weak, and would necessarily need care from their children.

- b) *En kwero mondo mon mathodho omak amen ka gi dhawo kata kare gi lekegi*⁷⁸ -

It is a taboo for suckling mothers to wrestle or bite each other when fighting.

If this rule was violated, then the transgressors had to drink herbal medicine together for cleansing. However, this rule was probably to prevent any injury to the

breasts which could affect adversely the secretion of milk for the child, or that could cause general problems to the suckling of the child and which could lead to serious problems to the growth of a child.

6.5.6 *Kweche moko/Other Taboos*

- a) *En kwero timo majino a lowo*³⁹ - It is a taboo to grab land or extend the land boundaries.

This rule should be understood in the light of the importance of land. Land is very essential for survival and hence is vital for everybody. Therefore, according to the Luo culture, everyone should have an access to the use of land. Any attempt, therefore, to block this access is like an attempt to kill one. The Luo say that any person who tries to deny one any access or use of land cannot prosper. His descendants must finally become social misfits and must finally disappear. "Luo *wacho ni lowo en jajuok, to ka ng'ato temo majino e lowo, to ng'atno osiko kare kendo jomosetimo kamano kuondegi ok ne.*"⁴⁰

Therefore, this rule was to prevent some selfish tendencies in some people which could cause landlessness to others, or leave others with inadequate land that could not support them.

- b) *En kwero timo michieri kata chamo gir michieri*⁴¹ - It is a taboo to catch one's animal or chicken (domestic animal) in the field and kill to eat, or to eat such meat or chicken.

Any commission of such an act was seen as so serious that it destroys people's

homes, and therefore had to be ritually cleansed, "*kendo nyaka odwar jamihoso hoso richono. Chamo michieri osesikokuonde ji mang'eny.*"⁴²

Again, this taboo should be interpreted within the social framework of the traditional set-up of the Luo society. There was a time in history when the Luo people kept livestock, and in most times these livestock could be left alone in an open land or grazing land without shepherds. There were also instances when shepherds could lose track of these livestock. Therefore, the taboo was to prevent any temptation to catch and kill anybody's animals one could come across in the field. Therefore, the taboo protected people's livestock in the grazing fields.

NOTE:

Our attempt to rationalize some of the Luo taboos shows that there were or are some social values which taboos reinforce in the Luo society in particular but which could apply to taboos in other societies as well.

We cannot attempt to exhaust all of them. There are numerous taboos in the Luo society, and in other societies in general. And it is possible that most taboos, if not all, could be socially rationalized. Their social significance could be discerned just as we have done with some of the Luo taboos. But the exercise needs a very penetrative, critical and systematic, that is, a philosophical mind.

NOTES

1. Hutton Webster, *Taboo: A Sociological Study* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), p. 18.
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. Cfr., Irving M. Copi & Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic* 8th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1990), p. 379. See also Patrick J. Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 4th ed., Belmont: Wadsworth, 1991), p. 470.
 4. Cfr. Copi, *op. cit.*, p. 380. See also John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 289, 308.
 5. William Howells, *The Heathens* (New York: The American Museum of Natural History, 1962), p. 42.
 6. Webster, *op. cit.*, pp. 366-7.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
 14. Ari Kiev, *Transcultural Psychiatry* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 79.
 15. Cfr. Ephraim Rosen and Ian Gregory, *Abnormal Psychology* (Philadelphia; London: W.B. Saunders Co., 1965), pp. 258-281.
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16. Howells, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
 17. Cfr. Malcolm J. McVeigh, *God in Africa* (Cape Cod: Claude Stark, 1974), p. 95.
 18. Cfr. Howells, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.
 19. Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 373.
 20. Cfr. A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo, *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976), pp. 146-147.
 21. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
 22. G.E.M. Ogutu, *A Historical Analysis of the Luo Idea of God* (M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1975), p. 112.
 23. Cfr. Paul Mboya, *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House Ltd., 1978), p. 1; Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* 8th Publication, (Kisumu: Anyange Press Ltd., 1983), p. 33.
 24. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 16.
 25. Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 19.
 26. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 16; Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 19-33.
 27. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 23.
 28. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 29. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
 30. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 4; Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126.

31. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, 15; Mboya (1983) *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
32. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 3; Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.
33. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 3. See also p. 4.
34. Cfr. Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.
35. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 24.
36. Cfr. Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 66, 63.
37. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 6.
38. Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
39. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 12; Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, 16-17.
40. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 12.
41. Cfr. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 9; Mboya (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 14.
42. Mboya (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This thesis shows that taboos are conventional interdictions. They are rules of behaviour which are formulated by human beings at particular times in a people's history.

Taboos are products of particular social experiences. In other words, each society has created taboos which correspond to the nature and level of its social experience and development. Taboos were or are supposed to reinforce certain social values. These values are based on either the universal experiences of human beings or the nature and level of a particular societal organization and experience. This explains, probably, why certain values seem to transcend particular cultural boundaries. Examples of such values are, value of human life, value of marriage, value of children, and value of peace. These are some of the values that tend to be universally experienced by 'human' beings.

Taboos are just a means of reinforcing some social values. The nature of taboos reflect the nature of a particular societal environmental needs. This environment embraces the prevailing geographical, economic, religious, political and social conditions. In a way, all the mentioned conditions can be subsumed under social environment, that is, looked at from how they affect the personal interactions or interpersonal relationships. The social environment is time-specific, that is, it is bound to change with time. Hence, the nature of taboos must also change with time.

Some actions or behaviour that tend to disturb harmonious living in any society, and not only in a particular one, seems to have been incorporated into modern civil laws of most countries. For example, behaviour such as killing a person, stealing, incest and adultery have provisions in most modern civil laws of most countries. However, all those values which are culture-specific must change as the cultures change. Take, for example, a Luo taboo prohibits a son from establishing his home behind his father's home. In the present time, some areas in Luoland experience acute land scarcity. If there is a family that has only some small piece of land behind their home in such an area, then a son in that family may have no option but to violate the taboo and construct his home on the only piece of land they have, that is, behind his father's home.

Another taboo which is worth examining in the face of the present changes in that which prohibits an unmarried elder girl from visiting her younger sister who gets married before her or from carrying her baby until she gets married and has her own baby.¹ Let us assume that an older unmarried sister decides not to get married at all or to become a nun; the possibilities which are possible in the present age. Then, it would not make sense for her to be prevented from visiting her younger married sister or even carrying her baby.

There is another taboo, that is, which prohibits a widow from staying unremarried or 'uninherited'. Assuming that a middle aged widow who has enough number of children she would like to have, and who is formally employed, and who stays with her family in an urban centre. Assuming that she does not want to get

remarried according to the Luo custom, or probably get married at all, perhaps because she wants to commit herself wholly to the upbringing of her children and would not want a mere figurehead husband. We should also note that the Luo culture tends to discourage a young unmarried man from 'inheriting' a widow who has children. That then means that even if the woman were to be 'inherited' it must only be by a married man who has children and preferably has his own home. This kind of a man is only most likely to be living in the rural Luoland. And assuming that the woman decides to establish a permanent residence within the urban area, then it would make no sense to expect that woman to be 'inherited' according to the Luo cultural requirement.

What we are saying is that taboos, being mere means of reinforcing some social values, are bound to change with the changing times. Some of the social values may change as well, but some may not. However, taboos are not necessarily the only means of reinforcing these social values.

In the present age, almost no ethnic community can maintain a pure cultural identity. There is an intensive and extensive cultural interaction which demands that most exclusive cultural traits must be abandoned and a more wider embracing cultural traits, some sort of a universal culture must be developed.

Taboos are at the surface level of any culture. This surface level is the one most affected by change. The surface cultural change does not necessarily affect the deeper cultural level, the level of social values. This means that taboos may change without a necessary corresponding change in the social values the taboos are to reinforce. In the face of change, therefore, these social values need a new approach, a new means of

reinforcement. Most values lie at the deeper level of culture. Some of these values are more easily subject to change than others. But the surface cultural level inevitably must change with time, that is, the level of taboos.

Taboos tend to operate well in a rather closed and homogeneous society. But not in a rather open and heterogenous one, which is the state of most, if not all, present human societies. In most of today's societies, most taboos do not appeal to most people basically because they are out of tune with time. Thus most people tend to feel that they are unnecessary bother, and hence dread them. People long for their discard. They want to be free from them. However, the association of taboos with some mystic or supernatural forces makes people helpless before them. They do not know how to avoid the supposed mystic or supernatural beings, hence they feel chained to taboos.

But as we have found out, the idea of supernatural involvement in the taboo operations is a delusion. There is nothing as supernatural involvement in taboo operations. This idea of supernatural beings participating in the taboo institution was probably 'smuggled' into this institution to compel people, through threat, to adhere to the taboo prescriptions. There are often some people in any society who often have some inclinations to engage in some anti-social conducts. These people may want, consciously or unconsciously, to sacrifice the social values which their anti-social behaviour violate. For such people, the threat of supernatural sanctions tend to check their undesirable inclinations. In this observation, we cannot but concur with Wiredu in his observation on the Akan taboo institution:

May it not be that the stories of the dire reactions of the 'gods' to certain forms of behaviour may originally have been intended by our ingenious sages of old as a way of concentrating the minds of those of moderate understanding on the straight path of acceptable conduct? ... On the other hand, this sort of procedure as a pedagogic method is not unknown in Akan society in other contexts.²

Therefore, it comes out very clearly that there is no sound basis for the dread of taboo violation. The fear of spiritual or supernatural reprisal when a taboo is violated is a mistaken and hence baseless fear. There is no external supernatural reprisal. It should be noted that logically, not honouring a taboo prescription does not necessarily imply that the social value the taboo was intended to reinforce is sacrificed. The value may have ceased to be a value or may require a new approach other than through a taboo. This is so because taboos are just one of the means of reinforcing the values.

The present human societies which are less closed and less homogeneous have acquired or evolved some new values. The present social environment requires new approaches to these new values, and even to the values that tend to be perennial. The present societies are non-receptive to taboos as a means of reinforcing the social values. The social values for the present societies tend to be more universal due to non-closeness of the present human societies. Thus these values of the present societies require a rather universal approach. But what does this approach entail? It would appear that this approach must be rationalistic. It appears that only reason can guide the present societies, and not the threat of supernatural reprisals. The norms for the present societies should only be rationally justified if they are to serve the present

societies rightly.

When we come to the Luo society, there are still many taboos which are observed. Quite a number of them cannot be observed comfortably today. Most people are not happy to observe them. But if people who may find it unreasonable to comply with them due to some reason(s) or the other are threatened with the supernatural sanctions, then they would have no alternative but to grudgingly comply. Let us take, as an example, the rule that prescribes that a widow must be 'inherited'. It is therefore, a taboo for a Luo widow not to be 'inherited'. But with the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) scourge around, if a husband dies of AIDS, then it would be disastrous if his wife (widow) is to be 'inherited' or remarried. In that case, the taboo must or should be violated. But this violation should be graceful without any psychological guilt which is often, in such cases of violations, caused by the threat of some mystic or supernatural reprisals.

In the face of the present social changes, quite a number of taboos cannot be adhered to. But to get over them, people's attitude to and view of them must change. People must be informed and encouraged not to see taboos as having been received from outside the human domain, but as a product of human society at certain times in its history. And just like other human practices and habits which are acquired and abandoned as time may demand, so are the taboo practices. However, the exercise requires a rational evaluation of taboos in order to see which ones ought to be abandoned and which ones ought to be preserved not necessarily as taboos but probably as moral precepts.

There is need of throwing overboard the supernatural explanations of taboos which only creates fear in people and sometimes suffering instead of making them happy. The present social changes do not require supernatural threats but rational explanations or justification for social norms. It would appear that it is only reason that could enable the present societies in general, and Luo society in particular to manage and cope with the social changes that any open society often experiences. We need reason to liberate us from fear of the unknown or unknowable or our threatening imaginations. Therefore, we recommend that people be educated on the rational approach to taboo institutions. It appears that for any present society to have happiness, it needs a rationalistic courage - the courage that produces social principles by which a society is governed. Reason creates creators who carry society over the inevitable changes. For a human society should be guided by REASON and nothing else.

NOTES

1. Paul Mboya, *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House Ltd., 1978), p. 24.
2. Kwasi Wiredu, "Morality and Religion in Akan Thought" in H.O. Oruka and D.A. Masolo, eds., *Philosophy and Cultures* (Nairobi: Bookwise Ltd., 1983), p. 10.

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