

## HUMANISTIC SUPERNATURALISM: WHAT SHAPE ELSE HUMANISM COULD TAKE

H. M. Majeed,  
Department of Philosophy and Classics  
University of Ghana

### **Abstract**

Many Western humanistic philosophers regard the concepts of humanism and supernaturalism as oppositional, and that nothing supernatural can be humanistic. The supernatural is made to fall outside the range of options that could foster realistic, reliable, or acceptable human relations and promote human well-being. This view is particularly held by philosophers who support scientific and atheistic humanisms. But, drawing from the indigenous religious and/or philosophical thoughts of the Akan people of Ghana, I argue strongly against the alleged anti-supernaturality of humanism, as it is understood by Western thinkers. I also examine aspects of Akan thought to come up with a comprehensive account of why supernaturalism could be humanistic. Ultimately, I advance that there exists in Akan philosophy an orientation that can properly be understood as “humanistic supernaturalism”.

**Key Terms:** humanistic supernaturalism; atheistic humanism; scientific humanism; Akan religious philosophy; supersensible world.

### **Introduction**

Humanism is best defined as any philosophy or disposition that aims at promoting the well-being of human beings. Thus, humanists who, for instance, stress the use of science to enhance human well-being (or to solve human problems) are said to be scientific

humanists; while those who find the elimination of both religion and belief in (a rather “non-existent”) God to be necessary for ensuring human centredness, this-worldliness, and the eventual promotion of human well-being are called atheistic humanists. These are some of the many strands of humanism which are found in Western philosophy. Regardless of such diversity, however, the aforementioned humanisms share the premise that considers humanism and supernaturalism as opposites – supernaturalism being the belief in invisible beings or powers; including those postulated by religion, such as God.

I reject the alleged non-humanistic nature of supernaturalism, from the perspective of Akan religious-cum-philosophical thought. By first arguing for the phenomenological if not empirically demonstrable reality of the supersensible world, I proceed to demonstrate that supernaturalism could be part of the philosophy of humanism – hence, humanistic supernaturalism.

### The Basis of the Alleged Opposition between Humanism and Supernaturalism

On the assumption that belief in God (or the supernatural) is other-worldly and inconsistent and even conflictual with humanism, Miriam Allen deFord advances that “Humanism....must be atheistic or it is not Humanism” (in Kurtz, 1973: 82). However, Lamont appears to supply what could be a more fundamental basis for the alleged opposition between supernaturalism and humanism: that humanism entails the use of science in the solution of human problems in *this* (physical) world (Lamont, 1957: 22; Kurtz, *ibid*:129). This choice of the scientific tool is partly due to his conception, and apparently to deFord's as well, of the human being in physical terms only. He also asserts of humanism: “this philosophy, of course, recognizes that vast stretches of reality

remain beyond the range of human knowledge, but it takes for granted that all future discoveries of truth will reveal an extension of *the natural* and not an altogether different realm of being, commonly referred to as *the supernatural*” (Lamont, *ibid*: 24). All this suggests that his rejection of supernaturalism is not only because humanism concentrates on the natural, the physical or the scientific, but it is partly because humanism wants to identify with reality, an attribute which the supernatural, in his view, does not have. This idea will be of much interest to me in the next section where I argue (to the contrary) that there is reality in a supersensible world system.

There is a preliminary issue to raise here: that while holding that nature, and for that matter reason, determines what is humanistic, Lamont also recognizes “that vast stretches of reality yet remain beyond the range of human knowledge.” At the same time, he conveniently takes it for granted that “all future discoveries of truth” will never reveal anything supernatural. Lamont does not develop any persuasive argument to justify why nothing supernatural can ever be discovered; instead, he takes it for granted. The difficulty is that, assuming one is not indeed aware that any truth related to the supernatural has ever been discovered, and at the same time, does not *know* all the things that the human being has not yet discovered, can he logically form an assumption out of these that only physical or natural truths *will* be discovered in future? The logic of his own argument does not lead to only “possible physical realities,” but, if he insists that it does, then, he could be said to be attempting to deny or limit the rational ingenuity of humans, by improperly claiming to indicate *what* humans *must* know tomorrow.

### **The Akan Perspective of Humanism**

I discuss the reality of the supersensible world, as a prelude to some further philosophical discussion of the relevance of the

supersensible world to the question of humanism in Akan thought. This will, then, lead me to the exposition of humanistic supernaturalism where I conclude that supernaturalism could be humanistic.

### ***On the Reality of the Supersensible World***

#### **(i) The Macro World:**

It is held in the Akan culture that in addition to humans, natural objects contain spirit. In their metaphysical thought, Akan thinkers also posit a world, which is both physical and spiritual. Technically, this supernaturalistic conception of nature and the world can be described as *panpsychism*. This is the theory that “everything” is or contains spirit (Gyekye, 1995:75). And, “in saying that natural objects contain *sunsum* or power, Akan thinkers mean to attribute to them an intrinsic property, namely, the property of activity or an activating principle” (Gyekye, *ibid*).

In Akan ontology, there is stratification of beings. For instance, the world of natural objects or phenomena is placed below humans; but immediately above humans are the living-dead (“ancestral” spirits), then the deities, and finally, God (Gyekye, *ibid*). It is also believed that a spirit or being of a higher level is more powerful and can affect other beings below it. For instance, since the living-dead are more powerful than humans, they could metaphysically cause something good or bad to happen to humans. Furthermore, the effect of such metaphysical action could extend to the physical aspect of humans too – as in physical prosperity or illness to a person. It can thus be said that Akan thinkers believe in the reality of a supersensible world.

There is a basis for the postulation of the supersensible world because, to begin with, it is impossible to have the kind of world presented above without there being a macro, universal world of spirit which various spirits exist in or belong to. In other words,

no existent can exist in nothing. By making up the macro spirit world, the spirits, therefore, gain a sort of common identity in the macro spirit being. The macro spirit world is thus a coherent whole consisting of individual spirits.

It may also be said that the spirits are, as distinct entities, naturally attracted to or drawn to one another, since they cohere to form the macro spiritual realm. What is meant by attraction is that they share a spiritual nature, and, as such, an entity easily identifies and affects another entity, or easily admits to get affected by another entity. The idea of attraction and coherence suggests a sort of “energy” that is present in the constituent spirits. The “energy” involved, thus gives an indication of the spiritual activeness of constituent spirits, although not necessarily of the source of their potencies. However, the fact that they fit together in forming a spiritual unit and are attracted to one another also gives the impression that as individual spiritual entities, they are inter-related; and that even if any of them is part of or is attached to a physical being, the interaction or contact between that spiritual entity and other spiritual beings, from any distance, must be a *direct* one. Moreover, an entity's relation with another, and its capacity to contact or be contacted by another is supposed to be *permanent*, by reason of the belief that no spirit (or that nothing spiritual) is perishable. All this, to my mind, shows a realm, and the way things systematically operate in it. This realm which comprises the spirits, their existence and activities, thus, constitute what can accurately be called “a supersensible world system”.

It is to be noted that the supersensible world is not a heavenly world as such, neither is it completely earthly. Part of it transcends the earth while the other part is earthly. In Akan thought, for example, the part that transcends the earth or “earthly world” is believed to be occupied by God, while the other part belongs to the deities, the living-dead, human beings and natural objects. However, this does not mean that God (*Nyame*) is cut off from the

earthly spirits because He is believed to have power (*tumi*) over all the other spirits, and can be felt in the “earthly realm.” Here on earth, although the deities (*abosom*) are believed to be completely spiritual, they sometimes inhabit natural objects, and can, just like the living-dead, reveal themselves physically to humans. This suggests that the deities and the living-dead (*nananom nsamanfo*) can be experienced in the physical realm. Moreover, the spirits of humans and natural objects are subsumed with their physical parts too. It is, thus, reasonable to maintain that issues about life here on earth, or even about nature, cannot just be physical issues only.

There is a good case of order in the (macro) supersensible world. For, through spiritual means, spiritual beings influence or affect *directly* only the spiritual aspect of nature – the human being inclusive. With their idea of the partial spirituality of nature and having such “a strong sense of unity with the rest of nature,” indigenous thinkers thus come to postulate that, through appropriate spiritual means, “the vital force which permeates all things can be manipulated for either good or ill” (Turnbull, 1986: 16). What is normally claimed by them is that this spiritual force can either work on its own or be manipulated by humans for good or ill. This is contrary to the idea held by some people that “traditional Africans invest objects, animals and plants with supernatural powers...” (Ibid: 40). This implies that while many Western thinkers and anti-supernaturalists perceive nature to be just physical, in African thought, nature is seen in both material and spiritual terms. Both realms, contrary to Lamont's view, are considered real.

### **(ii) The Micro World:**

Hereunder, the discussion is limited to the spiritual aspect of the person. Akan thinkers speak of humans in spiritual terms too. Thus, they seem to discuss the supersensible in a micro sense. The Akan concept of a person, generally, is either dualistic (where exponents

*sunsum*[spirit] on one hand, and *honam* [body] on the other) or tripartite (with *okra*, *sunsum* and *honam* taken to be different entities) – Gyekye, 1995: 85, 94. But all we need from Akan thought is that the human being is both material and immaterial. Thus, humans also have a place in the macro spirit world.

The reality of a person's place in the macro supersensible world and of the said relationships which the entities therein have with one another can be explained with the example of magic. It is believed that a person can be harmed or fortified, even from a distance, with magic – especially, *contagious magic*. It is also believed that a cheated person can get the culprit *seriously* harmed by the vengeful powers of the deities – also from any distance – through imprecation (*dua bō*, in Akan).

### **The Relevance of the Supersensible Realm to the Question of Humanism**

What the above implies is that in the macro supersensible world, a person can be reached via his spiritual component, using the appropriate spiritual method. This is postulated to rationally account for some of the problems of humans, on earth. It is to indicate that some of humankind's problems are spiritual because apart from the fact that some ordinary persons may seek the help of spirits or of people believed to be in league with evil spirits, it is thought that in the position that they find themselves, sorcerers and witches are capable of killing or causing misfortunes in the lives of humans. The human being is, therefore, encouraged in Akan culture to relate ethically to fellow humans in order to reduce the risk of getting harmed by those he or she could hurt. Relating well with others also fosters good relations with such higher beings as the revered-dead who will in turn protect the individual from harm. The Akan worldview is similar to that of the Azande where it is believed that the sorcerer “may make magic to kill his neighbours. The magic will not kill them but he can, and no doubt often does make it with

that intention” (Parrinder, 1963: 14). And, with this idea in view, it becomes extremely difficult to reject, or deny the accuracy of, the assertion that “the sorcerer is an evil magician, who deliberately and consciously makes harmful potions against his fellows and is duly hated for it” (Ibid). In addition to magic, the activities of witches are postulated in the metaphysics of the Akans (Gyekye, 1995: 75).

The Akan conception of the natural world is physico-spiritual. This conception, therefore, makes it possible for the human being to have a broader view of where the problems that he suffers come from, and how best they could be tackled. In so far as a spiritual means, for example, is not confusedly sought for the solution of a rather physical problem, the Akan thinker would argue that this approach is intelligible. He is also able to explore or deploy the supernatural to his advantage. For, he understands that his ability and potency is limited in the sphere of the structured macro-world; and, that superior forces in *this* world could protect him.

### **Humanistic Supernaturalism**

Humanistic supernaturalism is the idea that humans could look forward to the promotion of their well-being on earth, and not in the afterlife, through supernatural powers or entities. This is a natural consequence of the Akan worldview, as elucidated above. Since the natural world, just like the problems of humans, consists of both physical and spiritual dimensions, one wonders how effective and appropriate it would be to carry out Lamont's suggestion that we use only “science” in promoting human welfare. A difficult situation would arise mainly because it is just impossible to solve the spiritually-caused problems of humans in *this* world through science. But by solving such problems too (as it will become clearer in the course of this article) a person enhances his well-being. Such solutions would, in some cases, involve miraculous healing.

I am aware that miracle would be rejected outright by some philosophers, such as Hume. In his view, one cannot attribute the



solution to one's problems to miracle from a spiritual being/power because miracles do not even exist. Hume argues that "...no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact which it endeavours to establish" (Hume, 1893: 115-6). Thus, since denying an "extremely" unusual event is easier than accepting or establishing it, it seems that nothing will be accepted by him as a miracle. However, the argument for the existence of miracle is in some sense not really shaken by the concerns raised.

Hume refuses to look at the reality or otherwise of the testimony itself but only makes us content with that which we already have or know, and can explain by the laws of nature or by scientific theory. And, since Hume argues as if there can never be something true whose occurrence we are not entirely familiar with, and which science, now and in future, cannot explain, he could be understood as implying that "a miracle is an event whose great improbability of occurring makes it impossible in principle for it to occur." I agree with Hume on the "improbability" of certain events if, he thinks, that is what people perceive them to be. However, the actual occurrence of a miraculous event is not tied to the perception or wishes of human beings. Nor does it compete with "regular events" – which one readily affirms because of one's "psychological attachment" to them – for credibility. Its truth is not affirmed or denied without recognition of its scientific unaccountability or of its permanent preternatural nature, else it ceases to be miracle.

It is not my intention to make an empirical case for miracle, except a logical one. In an event where, say, a person who is affiliated to or serves a spiritual being, after calling on his master, is able to make the pencil one is holding turn to a lizard, and is able to perform "a dozen or so other feats of an equally bizarre and 'impossible' nature" (also through the same process), as well as ask other present witnesses to indicate some things of anomalous nature

intervals after his death, which accordingly materializes, then, if such abnormal events happen only when known spiritually powerful men dedicated to the service of such spiritual beings make such requests, then, “it would be unreasonable to look for some ways of modifying scientific theory to accommodate and 'explain' such events.” Indeed, “By far the simpler and more rational thing to do would be...to posit the existence of some personal or quasi-personal being who had the capacity to understand certain human requests and the power to bring about the occurrence of certain events (normally regarded as physically impossible), in response to those requests.” Thus, miracle, whether from the deities or God, contrary to what Hume and other anti-supernaturalists might wish, is a possibility, at least, logically.

However, if miraculous healers, diviners or medicine men attribute their spiritual powers to higher beings, then, I foresee a situation where someone might – in an attempt to avoid the conclusion that these people are, as Lamont puts it, “working for the welfare of humanity” (Kurtz, 1973: 129)– claim, logically, that the credit for their successes should rather go to the higher beings or spirits. The reason could be that on their own, such people are powerless; and, unless they successfully get into the spiritual world, so to speak, or be filled with the necessary spirit, it is not always possible for them to observe or communicate with the spirit of any person in order that they find him some relief. In other words, that even though they are equipped with special powers, they cannot (by themselves) have access to the inner happenings or spiritual states of humans. This is a fair objection; but in the manner that we do not immediately give all credit to the teachers of an orthodox medical doctor who has worked round the clock to save the life of a dying patient, so could be considered these people who are believed to be told what to do and how to get rid of problems by the spiritual beings. They could have chosen to be sorcerers, murderers and armed robbers. But for managing to be in association with good

superior powers – and taking the time, sweat and pain to respect and obey the sometimes difficult and complicated rules of these beings, performing all sort of rituals just for other humans to have some sound sleep – these people cannot be discounted. Moreover, the spiritual problems to which they try to provide solution normally leave their sufferers emotionally disturbed so much so that the disturbance often affects negatively their physical balance. So, the medicine men, diviners, miraculous healers, among many others, are all individuals who use supernatural methods to solve emotional and spiritual problems that, in some sense, also affect the physical part of humans.

Indeed, if these spiritualists provide solutions to some human problems in a way that people continue to ask for more, in a way that many Akan and, according to Gyekye, African converts to Christianity (and perhaps some converts to Islam too) “continue to consult traditional religious shrines in times of need or of personal or familial crises in expectation of some mystical way of fulfilling their needs or dealing with the crises” (Gyekye, 1996: 16) – despite the clarion call of science and Western-styled formal education to do just the opposite – then, at least, it seems that some humans somehow gain by their belief and encounter with the supernatural, in this world. There is a logical reason for this. Given that the human being is intelligent and thus knows when and by what his well-being is enhanced, it can be assumed that he would not choose and demand more of that which he knows jeopardizes his interest. Thus, so far as he gains from these spiritualists and supernatural powers, supernaturalism can be said to have a place in, and not opposed to humanism – or in this case, to Akan humanism. Consequently, humanistic supernaturalism is an intelligible, useful concept.

## **Science, (Humanistic) Supernaturalism, and the Question of Humanism**

An objection to humanistic supernaturalism could be the charge that since science is a yardstick for determining what is humanistic, nothing supernaturalistic could be humanistic (for, supernaturalism is not scientific). In the way that this objection stands it appears to be a peripheral view of the resort to science in humanism; for, it means more. The deeper sense of the objection seems to be the following: Given that reason is a person's main tool for the advancement of his well-being, it is assumed by scientific humanists such as Lamont that it is science that is rational or consistent with rationality while supernaturalism is not (Kurtz, 1973: 129). Thus, if science, and for that matter reason, is made a yardstick of humanism, then, supernaturalism would have to be rejected. But, the scientific humanist is mistaken. First, when there is a talk of the *irrationality* of an action, the statement is made on the assumption that reason does not provide a basis for it. On the other hand, a *supernatural* action is the one that cannot be explained by the laws of nature or science. On the face of it, one would observe that the former action is defined in terms of rationality and the other of science – suggesting that the supernatural is only *unscientific* (but not *irrational* as the scientific humanist claims). It is agreeable, though, that the laws underpinning scientific actions are to a large extent rationally made, and thus the *scientific* is reducible to the *rational*. But the scientific humanist appears to confuse the parasimilarity or closeness in meaning between the “rational” and the “scientific” for their being the same, and, thus, for being the opposite of supernaturalism. This underscores his mistaken view that humanism excludes supernaturalism. Kwasi Wiredu, an Akan philosopher, holds a view which, if not well explained, may lead one to object that he shares the view espoused by the Western anti-religionists. From Wiredu's claim that humanism, as opposed to

supernaturalism, is the basis of Akan morality (Wiredu, 1980: 5-6), one would wrongly infer that he entirely eliminates supernaturalism from Akan humanism.

Indeed, reason is not always expressible in scientific terms. It is possible for a person to know something by the activity of his own mind without being able to describe what he knows in scientific terms, or translate it into concepts consistent with scientific theory, or explain it with scientific laws. Sometimes, it becomes even difficult for some people to make adequate linguistic expression of what they experience or of what they know because they cannot find precise conventional words to do so. An African anti-supernaturalist confesses: "I am disposed to suspect that the mystic is impregnated by a type of orientation that is extremely difficult to articulate conceptually on account of the dissociation of his experience from the conditions of ordinary thought and action." If all this is true, then, we cannot help concluding that a thing may be rational without it being scientific, although scientific laws are rationally made. One must also admit that science is only one of the things that are based on reason. This, of course, does not rule out the fact that science also has some assumptions that are taken from non-scientific sources.

Science should thus be distinguished from rationality which drives and is the object of science. If this is not done, scientific humanists will continue to make the mistake of denying supernaturalism of rationality, while arrogating rationality to science, either because, they would think, science is interchangeable with rationality itself or that only the scientific could be rational.

**On the other hand, a humanistic supernaturalist must not commit the following mistakes:**

(A) He must not advocate the acceptance of the humanistic nature of supernaturalism by arguing for its being scientific. He must avoid

justifying his position by attempting to claim that it is rather “Western science that cannot explain supernatural phenomena” or refer, inappropriately, to science as “Western science”. This sort of justification is often influenced by the situation that, in terms of achieving results, science, to some degree, shares with supernatural practice (particularly, in relation to rituals) characteristics such as repeatability as well as occasional failures. Consequently, it is concluded that supernaturalism is scientific only that Western science does not understand it. But, scientific status, I think, is not attained by results but by how a result is achieved; specifically, it is a matter of methodology. For a method to be scientific, and thus make the outcome too scientific, it is absolutely necessary that the object under investigation be subject to repeatable laboratory or physical testing, experimentation, and, most importantly, be a physical object or phenomenon. On the other hand, that which is supernatural, by definition, should not admit of any such method. It is wrong, therefore, to suggest that something could be scientific about belief in the supernatural. Thus, when science wrongly arrogates rationality to herself, anyone arguing for the rationality of supernaturalism should not ignorantly wallow in science trying, in mathematical parlance, to sub-set science with supernaturalism.

(B) He should not argue that everything supernatural is humanistic, for that is factually and conceptually pestilent. Otherwise, in a manner that sets humanistic supernaturalism against the basic tenets of humanism, the scientific humanist may object that the humanistic supernaturalist readily takes in anything supernaturalistic, revere and just cling to supernaturalism as if the only place from where he looks for valuable things is in the supernatural realm. The scientific humanist might even extend his criticism to the traditional system and argue that (from the traditional conception of the supersensible world) traditional thinkers appear to have lost real touch with the physical world, blaming other beings and people for their problems,

and demonizing their own environment instead of taking steps to make the physical world their happiest home. And, this situation, if accepted, can only mean that it is illegitimate to talk of humanism in Akan thought.

In reality, however, what this article has sought to do is to present an analysis of the world outlook as contained in Akan thought; that is, the Akan conception of nature which, indeed, is accommodative of supernaturalism. And, it is not as if this position was reached thoughtlessly, because, in addition to what have been said so far, “while at one level Africans [including Akans] treat the world of nature as 'natural' in the Western sense of the word, at another level, because of its inherent order, nature is invested with symbolic meaning and becomes truly supernatural. What in the old days Westerners took to be superstition and ignorance, seen in this light proves to be a highly sophisticated philosophy” (IA, *ibid*; my square brackets). Against this background, the possible objections of the scientific humanist would crumble for two reasons:

First, the Akan belief in spiritual beings does not lead to the demonization of the environment. For, the existence of good spiritual entities, including God himself, is recognized. This recognition can, for example, be inferred from the Akan saying: “goodness is the prime characteristic of God”. And, according to Gyekye, “in saying God is good,” Akans “identify God with goodness itself” (1996: 9). Even individuals such as sorcerers and the spirits affiliated to them cannot, by the rules of logic, be seen as, strictly speaking, necessarily or permanently impish. This is because they can, but do not all the time, harm. So, they are evil only when they harm, and cannot therefore be branded as anti-goodness or anti-human. Otherwise, if Akan thinkers equate, for instance, “witch” to “evil”, how shall they term a “known” witch who leaves the goods she is selling at the market to rush a stranger who has been knocked down by a car to the hospital? “An evil good?”, “a good evil?”, or what? The logic of life is clearly

understood in Akan thought. Sorcerers and witches would be seen in the above light because it does not make sense to classify as worthless a good thing that comes from a source that could have equally visited one with a bad thing. Magic can be used in a good way or a bad manner, in which respective cases the user becomes a good magician or a sorcerer. So, a belief in magic will not necessarily lead to the demonization of magicians, or to a world situation in which magicians (and for that matter, spirits and their possessors) determine the human being's life – a situation which no humanist will tolerate.

Secondly, by believing in spiritual beings, Akan thinkers are not also attempting to blame others for their problems or behaving like people who can do nothing other than refusing to face their life challenges. The issue is that “people cannot afford to neglect any power that can influence their lives...” (Parrinder, 1967:66). The influence can be positive or negative, spiritual or physical. This is why the human being does not show indifference but takes steps to solve his spiritually-caused problems in *this* physico-spiritual world with the assistance of spirit beings – that is, seek solution in the spiritual context where they most effectively are handled.

This leads me to another possible objection by the scientific humanist. That, by the resort to powers of spiritual beings, the human being is presented as having lost confidence in himself, or at least, as having underrated his own capabilities as an agent with the potential of solving his problems through the use of his reason. And that, by the denial of the human being of this privilege which he alone enjoys among all creatures, the human being is “debased” in African humanism and ontology. This objection can also be raised in the form of a question: why, for example, is it that the human being is not placed at the summit of the Akan ontological ladder? To answer this, I should reiterate that with regard to the solution of human problems, Akan thinkers would not deny that by his reason, the human being endeavours to solve his problems. What they



would add is that since scientific or physical means are not just capable of solving some particular kinds of problem, the human being has *rationaly* discovered and is making use of the supernatural method too. Rationality, thus, leads him to both supernaturalism and science.

As for the specific charge of giving the human being an inferior status on the Akan ontological ladder, it may not be wholly correct because the stratification is just as a matter of potency, and neither a depiction of order of importance nor a declaration of levels of things that humanists should be concerned with. Akan thought does not make, or expect anybody to make the human being a less valuable being, only that his interest is best determined by a consideration of himself within his “environment”. It does not also suggest that his environment dictates the way he behaves but that without a life situation in which the human being is surrounded by, and is thus presented with, the opportunity to maintain his goods or improve upon himself, there will be no point in talking about human well-be-ing. The issue is just that the human being exists not in a vacuum. He exists in and interacts with nature; he is in the universe with other things and beings that he could greatly benefit or suffer from, depending on how intelligently he relates to these non-human existents. This, the concern of humanists should be, and not who occupies what position on the Akan ontological hierarchy. After all, what matters most in humanism is ensuring that the human being is not denied what good things he can or should have, or prevented from doing what he is capable of.

(C) In the attempt to distinguish anything African from that which is not, particularly from that which is Western, it appears understandable to look for the main feature that ideologically differentiates the two cultures. In terms of humanism, for example, this could be the idea that Akan humanism accommodates supernaturalism while Western humanistic thought, for the most

part, does not entertain it. Consequently, when it comes to the solution of human problems, there is a great tendency for the humanistic supernaturalist to push more for supernaturalism because, he might think, the more he does this the more recognized or successful the Akan case will become. Without much care, one can thus easily “overuse” supernaturalism: that is, apply or attempt to apply supernaturalism in areas it should not.

In truth, however, humanistic supernaturalism only sees a person as a physical and spiritual being, making it possible for his interest to be served in both realms. This is how it brings supernaturalism into humanism, confuting the supernaturalism-humanism opposition thesis. However, what it never does is to give the impression that supernatural means should be adopted to solve physical problems – that is, those that can be explained by science – and vice versa. For, the human being hardly gains any good result by doing this. It is undeniable that it is sometimes difficult to tell which problem of humans is spiritual and which is not. But, if it is presumed by the troubled (because of the extremely anomalous nature, in terms of science, of a personal experience) and it is confirmed by someone who has knowledge of the spirit world that the problem which he personally physically suffers is caused spiritually, the person involved takes the most intelligent approach. He does this by seeking supernatural solution, in which he believes he is more successful. This is the farthest supernaturalism can go. You do not employ it or mention it when seeking the most effective means of achieving the material advancement of humans. This latter means is the preserve of science.

### **Conclusion**

In order to live a life worthy of a human being, it is suggested by some Western humanists that the human being needs to concentrate on *this* world, by developing a good relationship with other humans and the environment (both of which are deemed by them to be

purely physical) and, more importantly, work towards the promotion of one's well-being and the welfare of others through empirical means. This article has attempted to argue for the reality of the supersensible world, and suggested that the partial spirituality of the human being and of his world, makes it possible for the human person to have spiritual problems. Since, as held in Akan thought, such problems can only be solved through spiritual means, the scientific method proposed by Lamont as the only method to rely on in solving human problems is shown to be inadequate. The reality of the supernatural solution of human problems in *this* world further suggests that contrary to the claim made by some Western humanists that humanism opposes supernaturalism, humanism can indeed accommodate supernaturalism. This is the basis for the Akan concept of humanistic supernaturalism.

**References:**

- Colwell, Gary. "On Defining Away the Miraculous". *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, 57 (221). 1982: 327-337.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, New York: The Clarendon Press, 1937.
- Feyerabend, Paul. *Science in a Free Society*, London: Verso, 1978. Henceforth cited as SS.
- *Against Method*, London: Verso, 1975. Henceforth cited as AM.
- Gjertson, Derek. *Science and Philosophy: Past and Present*, London: Penguin, 1989.
- Gyekye, Kwame. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.
- , *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sankofa, 1996.
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, and an Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893.
- Kurtz, Paul (ed). *The Humanist Alternative: Some Definitions of Humanism*, Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1973.
- Lamont, Corliss. *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. New York: Philosophical Library, 1957.
- Parrinder, Geoffrey. *African Mythology*, London: Hamlyn, 1967. Henceforth cited as AM.

