A Philosophical Exposition of Akan Conception of Rationality

by

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Abstract

The concept of rationality is broad and has attracted elaborate, critical discussions by numerous philosophers and social thinkers over the years. A paper such as this is thus incapable of dealing exhaustively with the concept. Nonetheless, it attempts to interpret the Akan conception of rationality. It begins with an explanation of how rational beliefs and actions are determined in Akan thought, arguing that logical rules including some of the rules that apply without exception to any subject matter of thought are respected in the assessment of beliefs and actions in Akan culture. From this practical dimension of rationality, the paper proceeds to the conceptual sense of rationality where all humans are deemed as rational (irrespective of the way they act). Here, the paper shows how Akan conception of rationality encompasses or revolves around morality, pointing out that this moral foundation of rationality makes the Akan perspective quite different from that of the West, as particularly expressed by Aristotle. In spite of the conceptual inseparability of rationality from morality, Akan thought recognizes a practical separation and possible clash between the two. In such a situation, the latter is preferred. Finally, this paper corrects some misconceptions concerning rationality in African thought that undermine the basic rational cum moral identity of the human being held in Akan thought, in favor of emotional identity.

On the Nature of Akan Thought

The Akan people constitute the largest ethnic group in Ghana, West Africa. Akan society, like most African societies, is non-scripturate. As a result, its core beliefs and values have survived (for generations) largely through oral transmission and constant, conscious efforts by the people to respect those beliefs and values in their practical lives; and to pass them on to successive generations.

By Akan thought I mean the indigenous intellectual perspectives of the Akan as found in or resulting from their heritage or customs. Such perspectives underlie the beliefs, values and practices of the people. Therefore, indigenous patterns of thought cut across different aspects of human life. They could, for instance, relate to the political, moral, philosophical and social lives of people. But, to some extent, thoughts related to these aspects of life are not mutually exclusive, because a philosophical thought may have moral or social or political underpinnings.

Overall, this presentation examines the philosophical concept of rationality as found in Akan thought. And more specifically, it examines some of the linguistic expressions and practices of the Akan with the intention of showing: (a) what, from the Akan perspective, a rational action or belief is, and how it is determined, and (b) how central morality is to a proper understanding of rationality. In addressing "(a)", some fundamental axiomatic rules that rational discourse is often considered to be based upon, and logical rules are discussed in connection with Akan philosophical thought, while "(b)" (which covers a greater portion of this piece) is discussed in a way that sets the Akan perspective on rationality apart from the Western, Aristotelian version (Aristotle 1992: i.7). The practical sense of rationality, as in "(a)", has been observed to relate to actions by Harold Brown (Brown 1988, 183-4), Charles Taylor (in Hollis and Lukes 1984: 105), while Richard Nozick (Nozick, 1993, 64) and Harold Brown once again (1988, 183) acknowledges rationality in terms of beliefs. Anthony Flew (1979: 298) mentions both belief and action in connection with practical rationality, and also discusses conceptual rationality (as in "[b]"). In Akan thought, however, Kwasi Wiredu (Wiredu 1980: 42, 217) identifies the practical and conceptual meaning of rationality, and Kwame Gyekye (Gyekye1995: 20, 125) does the same. This paper strengthens their views with an elaboration of the view that there is logic in Akan thought and that morality and rationality are conceptually inseparable. Senghor and his supporters, such as Sylvia Ba (Ba, 1973: 74-78), are noted here to play down the element of rationality in African thought, although emotion which they identify the African person with does not fundamentally identify the human being – as well as rationality and morality do. Thus, this work attempts a correction of this view, as Wiredu and many philosophers have sought to do in the past.

Evidence of Rationality in Akan Philosophical Thought: On the Notions of Rational Belief and Rational Action

With respect to this conception of rationality, the term "rational" is applied to the beliefs and actions of human beings.[1] And in this sense, a belief or action which is deemed to conform to logical procedure is what is described as "rational", in opposition to "irrational" which applies to a belief or action that contravenes logical procedure. But whether or not a belief or action contravenes logical procedure depends, to a large extent, on the quality of reasons that are offered for it.

When the term "rational" is used in opposition to the "irrational", the implication is that since the behavior of a person, his or her activities and commitments do change from time to time, a person's belief is not always rational; neither does a person always act or behave rationally. In fact, a person can behave rationally today but irrationally tomorrow, or behave rationally earlier in the day but irrationally later the same day. So, a person's rational status is always situational. For the purposes here, then, the relevant issues to deal with – specifically in this section – has to do with the kind of actions or beliefs that Akan thinkers would regard as rational, and those they would not. I will attempt to show what, from the Akan perspective, a rational action or belief is, and how it is determined.

There is enough evidence to suggest that in telling whether an action, desire, or belief of a person is rational, Akan thinkers do take into account the person's reasons for doing whatever he or she did. Indeed, if it were to be the case that they did not examine the reasons, they would not be able to decide whether the action, desire, or belief in question is rational or not; and, even if they claimed to have determined rationality on some other grounds, their decision would be arbitrary; or that they could be said not to be really interested in rationality at all. But, as an Akan philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu (1980: 217), indicates "…as a psycho-epistemological fact, a basic sensitivity to the demands of rational inquiry is part of the mental make-up of any creature that can be called a human being." Thus, Akan philosophers can't be said to not be interested in the question of rationality, because they have language; and rationality is a "concept necessary to the existence of any language: to say of a society that it has a language, is also to say that it has a concept of rationality" (Peter Winch, 1977: 99).

It is appropriate now to address the question of reasons as a determinant of rationality in Akan thought. This can be done by, first, considering Kwasi Wiredu's analysis of the concept of superstition in Akan thought. Arguing in a manner that shows him as portraying a skeptical attitude toward the factual status or reality of some widely held beliefs in the Akan community, in fact, describing them as superstitious, he first brings in the question of rationality. He, thus, expresses his doubt as a member of the Akan ethnic group:

> That our departed ancestors continue to hover around in some rarefied form ready now and then to take a sip of the ceremonial schnapps is a proposition that I have never heard *rationally* defended (Wiredu, 1980: 42).

A casual look at Wiredu's above comment may reveal that he is merely expressing doubt – about the Akan practice of libation (Opokuwaa 2005: 53, 58, 63) or, as preferred by Bempah, *Nsa Guo* (2010: 205) in reference to the involvement of those whom he refers to as 'departed ancestors'. However, his statement is significant in terms of rationality (of belief or action) because a rational attitude or the idea of rationality is shown not to be alien to the thinkers of Akan since somebody, like Wiredu, could expect to have a rational response (how could somebody expect something if he did not believe in and know it?), and, secondly, how could he have expected to have something when that thing did not exist?

What is needed here to accomplish my task is to indicate whether by rational belief, desire or action, Akan sages have in mind the idea of considering the nature of the justification offered in support of the belief, desire or action. In this direction, Wiredu will be of some help again with reference, once more, to the Akan belief in the reality and activities of the living-dead (as Mbiti puts it), he remarks that:

> Indeed, if one were to ask a traditional elder, 'unspoilt' by the scientific orientation, for the rational justification of such a belief, one's curiosity would promptly be put down to intellectual arrogance acquired through a Western Education (1980: ibid)

Wiredu seems to think that in their normal, natural selves, 'traditional elders' of the Akans are not inclined to science. This is why an elder who has a scientific orientation is seen as "spoilt" or corrupted. However, it is incorrect to claim that an indigenous elder has to encounter science and, thus, acquire a scientific orientation if he or she is, most likely, going to tolerate critical questions regarding his or her beliefs, particularly those concerning the living-dead. This is because what is really needed to deal with such questions is philosophical orientation, an orientation which some 'traditional elders' possess (this issue will not be discussed further because it is presently beyond my focus in this exercise). With regard to the question of reasons, however, Wiredu's statement is useful. This statement and the earlier one expressed by him seem to imply that the rationality that he was concerned about in the first statement was to be achieved by the justification for the belief in the living-dead, which, he thought, had not been "rationally" told to him yet, but perhaps explained in superstitious terms to his dissatisfaction.

Thus, it can be theorized that in an African culture like the Akan, philosophers give consideration to evidence or reasons like the people of any other culture. This also implies that it is not possible to think of evidence as a matter for the West (or perceived "scientific" cultures) alone. Indeed, it is indisputable that "…the principle that one is not entitled to accept a proposition as true in the absence of any evidential support is not intrinsically Western" (Wiredu, 1980: ibid). The principle is human; and this is what I would like to stress. However, offering of justification is not by itself enough to determine the rationality or irrationality of an action or a belief. The nature, especially, the quality of the justification is very important. It is only when the justification does not meet the standard of rationality (which I am about to mention) that an argument for a belief or action is said to be irrational; otherwise, it will be regarded as rational.

The standard of rationality can be met in different ways. One is that statements or reasons offered in support of a point are consistent with each other. Another is that a person does not behave in ways inconsistent with his or her beliefs. There are a few others, but I will focus on the ones I just mentioned. The first one can, in the least formal sense, be met by observing any of the philosophical 'laws of thought', which are the law of noncontradiction, the law of excluded middle, and the principle of identity. For such laws never lead one into producing inconsistent and contradictory thoughts. For this reason, one can also advance that the 'laws of thought' could also be relevant to the second criterion, since it also requires the avoidance of contradictions.

There is, to start, evidence of the intolerance of the Akan culture of contradictions. For instance, a maxim of the Akans "*aso mu nni nkwanta* ('there are no crossroads in the ear') indicates that one cannot accept truth and falsehood at the same time." (Gyekye1995: 20). Thus, if in giving reasons for belief, a person gives one reason that affirms something and another that denies it at the same time, then the whole set of reasons (and thus, his/her statement) will be rejected, because they are irrational.

In the 'law of noncontradiction', contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time – and is symbolized as "~(A·~A)" – which implies that nothing can be, and at the same time not be; or that it is not possible for one statement to be true and at the same time, not true. However, a similar pattern of thought can be found in the Akan maxim "*nokware mu nni abra*"[2] which literally means "in truth there is no deceit." The philosophical implication of this maxim is that when a statement is true, it is not possible to have some falsehood in it, or better, it is not possible for that same statement to be false.

In addition, there are aspects of indigenous Akan thought that seem to suggest that inconsistency in general is not tolerated. For instance, there is a saying "*woso adaka a, na woso ne mu ade*"[3] that literally means "when a box is carried, what is inside the box is carried." The logic in this saying is that it is not possible for one to make a statement to justify a belief or action and refuse to accept (or portray to be denying) its implications. The need not to affirm something and deny its implications is also captured in the saying "*obi nkyi [a]koko na onni ne mma*"[4] which literally means "no one makes a fowl a taboo and then eats its chickens." When there is inconsistency in the reasons offered in support of an action or belief, they are therefore rejected, because it is irrational. Also these two philosophical sayings could be used against anyone who acts in ways inconsistent with his or her own asserted beliefs.

Finally, the 'law of excluded middle', symbolized as "A˅ ~A" implies that any statement is either true or not true; or that for anything X, X is either one thing or not that thing. A statement that operates with this law is this: "either a sheep has life or it has no life". This statement logically implies that no matter how close a sheep is to dying, and no matter how weak it is, so far as it has life, it cannot be considered lifeless. On the other hand, if it is lifeless it is illogical to say that it has life.

However, this reasoning in the 'law of excluded middle' is exhibited by the Akan maxim *"oguan bewu, na onnya nwui a, womfre no guanfunu"*[5] (literally: "when a sheep is going to die, but it is not yet dead, it is not called a dead sheep"). A statement made by a person justifying his or her belief or action must either be true or not true – as implied by "either a sheep is dead or it is not dead" – otherwise his or her statement is illogical, and would be rejected.

Rationality, Morality and Akan Philosophical Thought

The moral foundations of rationality find expression in another context of rationality. It is in the context where rationality is identified as the basic feature of humans and, thus, contrasted with non-humans or things that are deemed as not subject to rational description (a rational).[6] Although here I seek to show how such a contrast is made in Akan thought, I will also look at whether rationality is regarded as the sole distinguishing feature of humans – as claimed by some Western philosophers, such as Aristotle (Aristotle 1992: i.7).

In Akan thought, it is not denied that a person is a rational being, in the sense of the person being an intelligent creature, capable of taking his or her own decisions regarding what is good and what is bad, what he or she must do or must not do. There is enough evidence that points in this direction, but for the purposes of this work, one good example will suffice. Hence, Akan philosopher Kwame Gyekye, gives an account of the conversation he had with his numerous Akan sages during his research into African philosophical ideas. Among these sages, the contribution of one of them as presented by Gyekye is something we should be interested. Both the researcher and his discussants were interested in the problem of evil (clearly not the subject of concern in this work), however, the sage, J.A. Annobil, suggested that:

> …a human being has what he called *tiboa*, conscience (moral sense, that is, a sense of right and wrong), which enables one to see the difference (*nsoe*) between good and evil. Putting it bluntly, he said, 'man is not a beast (*aboa*) to fail to distinguish between the good and evil (Gyekye, 1995: 126).

One can see from the above that Annobil did not mention the word "rationality". However, "conscience" was used to describe the human being. This is not to show that conscience is the same as rationality, but that they are undeniably closely related. Conscience is limited to humans because the capacity to decide on the morality or immorality of an action is a consequence of the possession of a thinking capacity. Somehow, it can be said that a sense of right and wrong is only a part of the sense of judgment or deliberation that is possessed by humans. So, a talk about conscience may properly be taken as a talk about rationality. Thus, Gyekye rightly infers from the argument of his discussant, that:

> The comparison between man and beast is intended as a distinction between moral sense and amoral sense on the one hand, and between rationality (intelligence) and irrationality (non-intelligence) on the other hand.[7]

To the Akan sage, therefore, rationality is a distinguishing characteristic of human beings. Furthermore, Gyekye reveals that Akan sages do not in any way deny that non-humans are not rational.

Hence, what makes the Akan position quite distinct from the categorization provided in Western thought – particularly by Aristotle – is that in Akan thought, rationality is not the sole distinguishing mark of a person. In other words, a person is not only rational. It would, on this basis, be objectionable for Aristotle or any philosopher to identify the human only with the rational. This is because other basic features of humans (which I will discuss shortly) as recognized in Akan thought, would be downplayed, or would not be accounted for or would appear to be denied altogether.

Sometimes rationality is interpreted in a way that suggests that it has moral connotations. The idea behind such a stance is that *a rational person is moral and a moral person is rational*. The first half of the portion of the preceding statement in italics may be explained this way: To say that only humans, among all creatures, are rational is to imply that they are beings who can be said to have the capacity to exercise their mental faculties such that they know, among other things, what is good and that which is bad. What then, one may ask, does it mean to say that a person is moral or has a moral sense? Is it not essentially the capacity to distinguish good actions from bad ones? If the latter question can be answered in the affirmative – which should be the case – then, it appears that to be concerned about the basic rational feature of a person is indeed to be concerned about his or her moral feature, since the latter feature is implied by the former. In this sense, it becomes appropriate to link rationality and morality, by claiming that a rational person is a moral person.

A moral person, on the other hand, is a rational person. Earlier on, reference was made to a 'traditional Akan thinker' who contended that only the human being has what he called *tiboa*, that is, moral conscience. His statement was interpreted by Gyekye to partly imply that the human being is a rational animal. All this tells us that the human being is a moral being. However, to say that "the human being is moral", while seeking distinctive features of humans, is not to be concerned specifically with the issue that a person can be moral, or even be immoral, based on the way he or she acts, but it implies that only a human being is capable of moral behavior. Aristotle might be aware of this fact, but it is quite erroneous on his part to isolate rationality (thinking capacity) as the only distinctive feature of the human being.

Indeed, it is conceptually impossible to be a rational being without being a moral being, and vice versa. The moral and rational criteria of personal identity are conceptually co-equals and deserving of equal mention. Unlike Aristotle, Akan thinkers do not diminish the moral criterion.

In indigenous Akan thought, a person is defined in terms of moral beingness. It is thought that each individual is fundamentally moral as well. Although the individual is capable of both good and bad deeds, the African belief in the good-naturedness of a person (Gyekye, 1996: 24) seems to suggest that how consistently good (or moral) one acts, indicates how closely one could be said to have acted (or been) in line with one's (moral) nature. Thus, morality is given a positive characterization, if it is used to describe the basic nature of a person. This can be explained further with a vivid elaboration by Gyekye:

> The judgment that a human being is 'not a person,' made on the basis of the individual's consistently morally reprehensible conduct, implies that the pursuit or practice of moral virtue is intrinsic to the conception of a person held in African thought…The evaluative statement opposite to this is, 'he *is* a person' means, 'he has good character,' 'he is peaceful - not troublesome', 'he is kind', 'he has respect for others,' 'he is humble'. The statement 'he is a person,' then, is a clearly moral statement. It is a profound appreciation of the high standards of the morality of an individual's conduct that would draw the judgment 'he is truly a person [*oye onipa paa*] (Gyekye,1997: 50).

Also, in regards to rationality, we might consider the possibility of some philosophers (who regard rationality to be the distinctive feature of human beings) to recommend that humans settle for rational options in all they do. This indeed could be a basic requirement of rationality – but only in practical terms, not in conceptual sense as stated above, hence, moral beingness and rational beingness are inseparable. But, there could be some difficulty in actualizing this recommendation, given the Akan position just explained above by Gyekye. In a practical sense, it is quite possible, some may argue, that in order to achieve a certain goal it would be irrational to act morally – especially, if the person involved knows that acting morally is not the logical way to achieve that goal. But, from the Akan point of view, one can question why we ought to prefer rationality in this case – that is, when it clashes with morality. And, since an immoral approach adopted to achieve a goal is not actually going to be in the interest of society, there is the likelihood that the communitarian Akan society will not approve of a purely goal-oriented evil action. [8] Thus, in practice, the moral implications of rationality need to be taken into account, especially in actions that relate to the human community. Again, considering that if a rational being acts immorally, he or she cannot be regarded as a (true) person – in the Akan sense – it is, indeed, inadequate to discuss the rationality of a person without involving his or her moral attribute.

Finally, the Akan people believe that each person was created good, he or she would naturally seek goodness and have a capacity to do what is good (or moral); and thus, it is difficult not to assume that humans need to be rational to be able to on one hand, distinguish between good and evil, and on the other, know what they are required to pursue in connection with their beliefs. This suggests that in a practical sense, rationality may, in many respects, serve a moral end. So, although both rationality and morality are not shared by non-humans, it is quite understandable in Akan thought to claim that without the ultimate (the moral), and the need for the ultimate, human beings would probably not have been rational. It will therefore not be inappropriate to, at least, classify moral sense as a core feature of humans, as against non-humans.

However, this is not to say that there have not been some wrong interpretations of the concept of rationality in African thought, of which Akan thought is one. This particularly relates to the attempt to make rationality look like an attribute that fails to distinguish humans from non-humans or like an attribute that does not cover all human beings. This line of thought is evident in the works of the Senegalese poet, politician, and cultural theorist Leopold Sedar Senghor.[9] He went to the extent of saying that "Emotion is Black as reason is Greek" (Ba, 1973: 75), suggesting that Westerners could claim the credit of holding on to the tenets of rationality in everything they do, and that even if African people are not, they can boast of being incomparably emotional, since emotion is equally a very important quality of people. But the question is this: Is rationality a characteristic only of Greeks and is emotionality a characteristic only of the African? In order to answer this question sufficiently, the establishment of the true relation between rationality and emotion should be examined, followed by the intersection or diversion between morality and emotion.

In the practical life of a person, there are several instances where he or she acts on the basis of emotion, aside from reason. Again, when one is very emotional about a point, or is made by one's emotions to feel that a certain action is what is in one's interest, one will be pleased (under such influence) with that action as the best thing that will make one's wish materialize. At this moment, one may not consider the rationality of one's action. Kwasi Wiredu argues that, generally, "in various spheres of thought and action, men will throw away rationality to the winds and… [believe] things as they please."[10] This is a fact about humans.

In examining the concepts of rationality and emotion, my problem with Senghor is not necessarily about emotion,[11] or about his attempt to draw some attention to emotion. Indeed, there are cases where it is difficult to tell whether an emotion-driven action really lacks any sort of rationality. It would also be inappropriate to assert that in practical matters actions done purely on the basis of emotion are less preferable to those that are a product of rational deliberation. [But for compassion and fellow-feeling (and thus, love), so many benefits would not have come to the world community, although some major benefits (through scientific and technological progress) are achieved through rational procedure. In these ways, a person shows both his or her emotional and rational beingness.]

On close examination, however, one can also see that the good thing about emotion is realized when it (emotion) leads one to do what is good (moral), thus drawing some "energy" from morality. So, emotion in its desirable state has everything to do with morality, although emotion is also a human quality. However, this calls for some clarification as to whether because morality, as a basic feature of humans, is intertwined with rationality, there are reasons to relate emotion to rationality in a similar manner. Does a rational nature presuppose an emotional nature? It appears that a person's rational nature does not entail emotion because reasoning is completely deliberative while emotion is largely instinctual or impulsive. The fact that one of the two concepts is strictly used to describe one culture and not the other somehow indicates that they are not the same. The problem, then, is why Senghor would want a people to be identified with only one of the two, given the fact that rationality, for example, is supposed to be universal. Is he justified in saying that "emotion is Black, as reason is Greek"?

Contrary to Senghor, the African is not so emotional as to be regarded as un-analytic, neither is it right to suggest that the African is devoid of rationality, and should thus leave "reason" for the Greek. Senghor's position also conflicts with the thinking of Akan sages in that rationality is a basic feature of all persons. Indeed, Senghor could have rather said, "…reason is Black and Greek" and he could have probably said the same about emotion. Yet, this critique of Senghor's statement "emotion is Black, as reason is Greek" has been challenged by some followers of Senghor. For example, Sylvia W. Ba advances that this statement, together with the one that "European reason is analytical through utilization, Black reason is intuitive through participation," (Ba, 1973: 75-76) have been misconstrued to mean that Senghor denies the African of rationality. But Ba is still not correct because her reason that Senghor wanted to show that (enormous) differences exist "in personality and temperament that influence the way in which the occidental and the Black African relate to the external world" is philosophically untenable. Indeed, her argument only tells us that by their distinct ways of relating to the external world, what reason means (to the Westerner) is analyticity, while to the African reason is centered upon intuition.

This is not a running away from the fact that emotion is an important quality which humans – and possibly other creatures as well – have a capacity for. But when its relationship with rationality is not examined with some degree of care, one will either understate the rational or overstate the emotional. Wiredu, for example, found Leopold Senghor a culprit, in the light of the former's remark that Senghor "…has tended to exaggerate the role of emotion in the thinking of Africans" (Wiredu, 1980: 12). And the worse is to deny or attempt to deny the universal character of rationality; this is completely erroneous.

Some serious questions can be raised regarding Senghor's understanding of "emotion", as a he seems to limit the rational capacity of the African. For instance, he uses the following poem to illustrate that the emotive sensibility of the African person is shown in genuine comradeship:

> Comrade,
> I want to break out of my Black skin
> And have it follow me
> I want to cross over your
> Harsh welcome, your mocking barbs
>
> Comrade,
> I want to go beyond your tunned, chafed skin
> And your hands
> To drive into your heart, down to your entrails
> Where there is feeling (Ba, 1973: 77-78).

Senghor claims that this emotional integration of "the one" to "the Other" expresses a human attitude characteristic of only African people, but as Paul Ansah (1971: 438-9) rightly noted in his critique (specifically in connection with the second half of the above poem), no scientific, genetic or physiological proof, except for some unpersuasive "isolated empirical observations" is provided by Senghor to back his claim that only the 'Black' African is capable of intense feeling. And it is even suggested that it is rather Senghor's personal "psychological or emotional reactions" which he interestingly generalizes as African.

In addition, Senghor implies that the Black person's "close contact" with nature gives him a "heightened sensitivity and strong emotional quality." However, on factual grounds, it can in no way be accurate to suggest, as he appears to do, that all African people have equal levels of emotive sensitivity because "the urbanised African" will most likely lose some contact, or almost every contact, with "primordial nature."[12] On the contrary, emotion is a human quality. It is not a special feature, which, unlike morality or rationality, can be restricted to humans – let alone to the people of any society.

Conclusion

My argument on the Akan – and to some extent, African – perspective on rationality is that in Akan thought there is a concept of rationality. It is also believed that rationality is not a univocal word, and in regard to the beliefs, actions, and desires of a person, rationality is determined by giving the necessary or adequate consideration to the justification that the person gives in support of whatever he or she did, and why he or she did it the way it was done. On the other hand, rationality is classified as something that distinguishes humans from non-human animals and plants, for instance.

And finally, this paper has moved to excogitate the Akan position that the basic nature of humans is not to be seen only in terms of rationality; but in terms of morality as well. It is also held in Akan thought that morality even underlies rationality in some respects. Morality and rationality are, however, distinguished from emotion which although significant, is not a distinguishing feature of the human being. It has also been observed that some conception of "rational action" makes it possible for one to justify an action or method on the grounds that it falls in line with the method which one considers effective in achieving a certain goal. And even though this was not entirely dismissed as a criterion of rationality, it was seen as potentially harmful to the human community because it could encourage the pursuit of actions that are morally wrong in themselves. Such a view, it has been stated, also downplays or ignores the moral demands of our existence. This is why it is held in Akan thought that rationality should at least go hand in hand with morality in terms of personal identity and behavior.

Notes

1. Flew 1979, p. 298 understands this sense of rationality as "opposed to irrational". Although he does not elaborate, he seems to imply the way I conceive it.

2. Rattray, 1916, p. 155, philosophical interpretation mine.

3. Rattray, ibid p.187, my philosophical interpretation.

4. Rattray, ibid p.190, my philosophical interpretation. Square brackets added.

5. Rattray, ibid, p. 90, my philosophical interpretation.

6. This sense of rationality is also recognized by Flew (1979, p. 298).

7. Gyekye, ibid p. 126. Although Gyekye describes beasts with the term "irrationality", I have made use of him because our common concern is the non-intelligence of beasts, a characteristic which makes me regard beasts as the "arational". In my discussion of the "rational" versus "arational", I use the word "nature" advisedly. It is to be understood only in terms of the "basic characteristic" of the specific beings discussed.

8. Gert (1999: 773) also sees a similar problem with the definition of "rational action" which advances that one acts in a way maximally efficient in attaining his or her goal.

9. Many scholars including Wiredu (1980: 12) and P.V. Ansah (1971: 438ff) have commented on the work of Senghor, but a few things could still be said, given especially that some have also attempted later on to defend Senghor.

10. Wiredu 1980: 177, my square brackets.

11. By emotion, Senghor generally means one's "affective participation in a universe that is constantly acting upon his senses," and his "tendency to immerse himself in his experience and to react to it with every fibre of his body" (Ba, 1973: 77). Thus, a human being is literally stimulated from without, "whether [by] person, object, or force." An example of person stimulation is shown in Chaka's experience, where "at the sound of his Beloved's voice Chaka says '…I rejoice in the marrow of my bones.'" (Ibid, my square brackets in former quotation).

12. Ansah, ibid: 439. This however does not mean that the source of the Black African's sensitivity is nature. According to Ansah, Senghor claims that this quality is hereditary.

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