

**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE
DOCTRINE OF MATERIALISM,
WITH REFERENCE TO
SELECTED AFRICAN
CONCEPTIONS
OF REALITY**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Materialism greatly influences paradigms of development in the world today. Yet, as an answer to the question of whether or not reality is a single substance or force, is less understood. Consequently, there is a need to examine and analyse this subject with the view of making it understandable.

Materialism raises many questions, for example, who is a materialist? Why do materialist philosophers seem to differ in their teachings? What are the implications of materialism to human society? Why do materialists disregard incorporeal things? And, should human beings concentrate on matter and stop paying attention to incorporeal things? This study addresses these questions and issues by analysing materialist teachings in various epochs of Western philosophy, the views of scholars that defend incorporeal things, and lastly, the ideas of traditional Africans regarding what is ultimately real.

After the examination and analysis, it is found out that materialism is basically a doctrine that takes reality to be made up of only one thing, matter. But because materialism attempts to answer a question of passionate interest that has no solid evidence, scholars subscribing to it tend to emphasise things characteristic of their times, societies, and civilizations.

Materialism shuts out incorporeal substances and because of this it is found out that it disregards explanations of phenomena founded on transcendental ideas. However, by disregarding spiritual things, the doctrine is found to be inadequate in answering certain key questions about nature, for example, how and where matter originated.

Generally, the study answers many questions and makes several clarifications about materialism. This is done in six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction of the study. Hence the problem at hand, objectives, justification, methodology, conceptual framework, and hypotheses are given in this chapter.

Chapter two focuses on materialism. Materialist teachings in three epochs of the history of Western Philosophy, namely, ancient, modern, and contemporary, are examined. This paves way for a definition of materialism, and the analysis of the implications of materialism to human society.

What emerges in chapter two is that matter is central to the doctrine of materialism. A question that could not be ignored is what the concept, matter, is. This question is discussed in chapter three by looking at the conceptions of matter. In doing so, focus is put on matter as taught and seen in the fields of philosophy and science.

Chapter four deals with incorporeal things, things that are dismissed by materialism as either not existing. Reasons why beliefs in incorporeal things are widespread and why materialists dismiss them (incorporeal things) are examined. Specifically, three examples of incorporeal things, namely, God, mind, and soul, are singled out for examination. The biggest issue and question is, "Under what grounds can one say that these incorporeal things are real and do exist?" Several efforts by scholars to show that beliefs in these things are not in vain are examined.

The theme in chapter five is African conceptions of reality. Five African thought systems, namely, Luba, Akan, Mende, Ashanti, and Banyarwanda are examined to give a picture of whether or not materialism is relevant to African worldview. The thought systems of the above mentioned communities as researched by various scholars are described and then compared and contrasted with materialism.

Chapter six is the conclusion of the work. In this chapter, the findings are stated and an attempt is made to show that the aims of this study were achieved.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The researcher is a keen student of Western philosophy especially how it attempts to solve human puzzles. He identifies "ultimate reality" as one puzzle that runs through this philosophy. For example, as early as 4th century B.C. Thales, Anaximander, and, Anaximenes were grappling with explanations of reality based on the idea of the underlying elements. After a deep reflection, Thales came to the conclusion that water (moist) was the underlying element of reality, and hence "the first principle and basic nature of all things was water"¹. To Anaximander, the fundamental substance had no specifically identifiable qualities, for, "the unlimited is the first principle of things that are"². Anaximenes saw air as the ultimate reality and hence, 'as our souls, being air, hold us together, so breath and air embrace the entire universe'³. Many other western philosophers followed suit and came up with their answers.

Materialism, the view that everything is material or results from matter is the most pronounced answer regarding what is ultimately real. It provides a framework within which humans are expected to comprehend the universe. It is more pronounced because of the scientific and technological advances. The advances seem to suggest that spiritual explanations of phenomena

are irrelevant and that living in a scientific and technological world makes one a materialist. Hugh Elliot in his article "materialism" makes this clear by asserting, "An age of science is an age of materialism and that because the present age is that one of science and therefore of materialism, we are all materialists"⁴.

A student of philosophy is bound to become curious, wondering whether there can be anonymous materialists as Elliot indirectly suggests. Out of this wonder and curiosity, the researcher developed an interest in wanting to find out more about materialism, for example:

- i) What is materialism?
- ii) Who is a materialist?
- iii) Why does materialism dismiss incorporeal things?
- iv) Can the answer materialism gives regarding ultimate reality be accepted in thought systems (for example African) that greatly embrace spiritual explanations of reality?

These are the questions and issues that this study dealt with. By so doing it filled gaps around materialism as a doctrine.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Materialism is a teaching widely subscribed to in philosophy. Directly or indirectly it influences thoughts and deeds of humans. However, as a principle or a system of belief, it is unclear, confusing and hence, there is a

general lack of understanding of it. A number of scholars recognize this fact. To quote but one, Bertrand Russell, demonstrates this problem thus:

The heated controversies as to its truth or falsehood have largely depended, for their continued vitality upon avoidance of definitions. When the term is defined, it will be found that, according to some possible definitions, materialism is demonstrably false; according to certain others, it may be true though there is no positive reason to think so; while according to yet other definitions there are some reasons in its favour, though these reasons are not conclusive⁵.

This system of belief that seems to be affecting and influencing people calls for one thing, clarification. This is why and how this study comes in, to give a comprehensive analysis of this subject with the view of finding out why the obscurity, why incorporeal things are dismissed, who a materialist is, what the consequences of materialism to human societies are, and, whether or not the materialist answer to what is ultimately real is acceptable to thought systems that embrace spiritual explanation of phenomena.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general aim of this study is to analyse materialism as an answer to the question of reality, and find out whether or not the answer it gives is acceptable to traditional African thoughts. Specifically, however, there are three objectives;

- i) To examine the origin, meaning, applications and implications of materialism as an answer to the problem of ultimate reality.
- ii) To find out why materialism dismisses incorporeal things
- iii) To establish whether or not materialism is acceptable to thought systems that embrace spiritual explanations of phenomena.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Numerous questions about nature confront human beings. "Ultimate reality" is one of them. The answer to this problem that one comes up with determines or shapes one's expectations in life, conduct, and in general, worldview. Materialism is a doctrine that provides an answer to this question. The answer it gives influences or affects human beings in general. It is yet recognizable that materialism is confusing and unclear. Materialism, therefore, calls for clarification. Because one of the central roles of philosophy is to clarify, this study gets a justification in this, that is, provides clarifications on a subject that requires it.

A further justification of this study is that it increases knowledge. The study fills the gaps surrounding the doctrine of materialism. For example, studies on materialism never give a historical development of the doctrine and often deal with a single case of a materialist philosopher. The approach of this study is different in the sense that it establishes a unity in various teachings of materialism.

No study on materialism attempts to link materialist answer to ultimate reality with thought systems that do embrace spiritual explanations of phenomena. This study does so. This increases knowledge, which is important.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is prompted by the fact that there is no treatise on the various materialist teachings and virtually no literature on how the doctrine applies to traditional African thought systems. This is a shortcoming that is evidenced in the available literature. Most of the literature deals with one or two of the many materialist teachings. In some books, materialism, as a subject forms only a chapter or two. The following literature makes this observation clear.

Guthrie W.K.⁶, a writer on the History of Greek philosophy traces the theory of materialism or atomism as he prefers calling it to the attempt to rescue the reality of the physical world from the "fatal effects of Eleatic logic by means of a pluralistic theory".⁷ Atomism theory, he states, originated in a reaction from those who held that "what is" must be one and immovable: void "is not" and without a void separate from it, reality cannot move, nor can things be more than one if there is nothing to keep them apart. The materialism of Leucippus and Democritus he asserts, restored the idea of motion as natural to matter and hence belonging to it from all time, but from this conception they removed the last traces of animism. The author hastens to add that these first two materialists saw motion as purely lifeless and mechanical. That, it happened "automatically" or "of necessity".

To Guthrie, the two philosophers gave a materialist account of the formation of the cosmos; as flowing from the action of the vortex and its effect on the subsequent motion of the atoms. From the inception of the cosmic system, the two argued, the atoms' motion was accounted for. Guthrie rightly doubts whether this really was the beginning of motion altogether. He therefore, contends that from Aristotle down to the present day, the question has been about what caused the original motion, and what sort of motion it was.

This book gives a good account of materialism as taught by Leucippus and Democritus. The author limits himself to the two and no mention is made on the later materialists. This leaves a gap as far as the progress of the doctrine is concerned.

Samuel Mintz⁸ focuses himself to what may be called the Hobbesian materialism. According to Mintz, Hobbes asserted that all that really existed was body. Those things, which were usually considered to be immaterial, such as space and time, thought or logical relations, were attributes of mind – “phantasms” of the mind. Mind to Hobbes was a material phenomenon, a complicated series of physical motions. He in fact saw whatever was in the universe as being material and, as all things were in the universe, all things were material, or else they were nowhere and nothing⁹.

According to Mintz, Hobbes considered magnitude and motion as the real attributes of the body, a body that comprised the whole external reality. Sounds, and colours were seen as secondary qualities, not inherent in objects. To Hobbes, space and time were accidents of the mind, space being the phantasm or imagination of a thing which exists outside the mind but which has no other attribute except that it appears outside the mind, and time being the phantasm of "before or after" in motion.¹⁰ This led Hobbes to consider the body as all that really existed, a body which he defined as that, which having no dependence upon thought, was coincident or coextended with some part of (imaginary) space. Hobbes therefore saw the two defining properties of body as extension (space) and motion (time).

Mintz presents Hobbes as a materialist who rejected or took away all incorporeal substances and, by so doing, rejected even God. What can be derived from this is that Hobbes rejected spirit and adopted a theory of matter as the ultimate reality. He identified matter with substance and on the basis of that, he was able to show that immaterial substance is a contradiction in terms.

This book gives a very good account of the materialism according to Hobbes and can be relied on when dealing with Hobbes' materialist teachings. But it falls short of saying more about the subject since materialism did not start; neither did it end with Hobbes.

Acton H.B.¹¹ deals with Karl Marx's materialist teachings. He states that in Marx's theory of Historical Materialism, the form assumed by human society is influenced by geographical and environmental factors but determined by "the material conditions of life, in which the legal relations and forms of state as well as religious, philosophical, and artistic ideas are rooted".¹² Marx saw humans as being differentiated from the other animals by the fact that animals entirely depend on the physiological equipment they are born with for food and shelter, but humans produce their food and shelter by the use of instruments, which are not part of their original physiological equipment. Even though some animals make shelters such as nests, hives, and webs, these works remain much the same from one generation to another. Human beings, he contended, produce works which permit of indefinite improvement by succeeding generations. The skills, experience, and tools thus received and used, to Marx were "productive forces". The productive forces are not individual products. Any improvement made by individuals is made on the basis of what is already current in the society to which the individual belongs. A person, who, for example, improves on a spade, is improving something, which is the result of many other people's works in the past epochs.

To Acton, this Marxian theory of Historical materialism is fundamentally a technological theory of history. This is because, the basis of any human society is the tools, skills and technical experience prevalent in it. Hence,

for any given set of productive forces, there is a mode of social organization necessary to utilize them, that is, the productive relationships. The economic structure was according to Marx the real basis on which definite forms of social consciousness corresponded. Radical changes in the basis eventually bring about changes in the superstructure, so that the prime cause of any radical political or moral transformation must be changed in the productive forces.

Human society therefore has a "material basis" consisting of the productive forces and associated productive relationships. This in turn determines the form that must in the long run be taken by the legal and political institutions of the society in question. In effect Marx saw the key to the understanding of law, politics, morality, religion and philosophy as being the nature and organization of the productive forces.

Acton contends that, what follows from Marx's line of thinking is that the material life of society is primary and its spiritual life secondary hence; matter is primary and mind derivative. To Acton, this means that matter existed first and mind evolved from it. It also follows that it is changes in the material life of society (the productive forces) that bring about the major changes in social life, and in art, religion, and philosophy.

Robert Davidson¹³ writing on Marx sees Marx as having held the view that human life and thought are shaped by the material conditions of production. This means, both economic and social forces determine the nature of any given culture. The material and economic conditions, Marx argued, shape not only every particular social situation, but also human nature as well, determining the thought and feelings of individual men and women. He says that Marx asserted that humans' consciousness (ideas, views, and conceptions) change with every change in the conditions of their material existence, social relations, and, social life.

He for that observes that Marx, though a materialist, rejected the more traditional scientific materialism of the day, which took human nature to be completely subject to the scientific laws that governed the physical and material universe. This materialism took man to be little more than a mechanism whose behaviour was reducible to physiological, chemical, and physical changes in the human organism. Marx's rejection of the scientific materialism points to one very interesting thing; that materialists do not agree.

Marx, observes Davidson, recognized only a natural process at work in human society and agreed that circumstances make humans as much as humans make circumstances. But he insisted that in all social development there is a genuine give and take relationship. It is a dialectical process in

which the conscious thought and activity of men shape external circumstances quite as genuinely as external circumstances shape human thought and conduct. To Marx, the distinctive character of social development as opposed to the natural processes of development laid in the fact that human consciousness is involved. Human beings, although conditioned by society are enabled by conscious activity to change both society and themselves.

Davidson says that in Marx's judgement, orthodox materialism (the materialism by earlier philosophers) failed to recognize the important part played by human consciousness, insight, and ideas, in shaping social developments. Marx called this point of view the new materialism, which Engels¹⁴ later called Dialectical Materialism". To Davidson, this position avoids the dangers of a complete philosophical determinism.

In the two books on Karl Marx, one thing comes out clearly; that the historical and dialectical materialism as taught by Marx focused on man's consciousness, unlike, for example, Democritus who focused on the cosmos. Marx saw man's consciousness as being at the centre of events. To him, man's insights and ideas shape social development. Men are, so to speak, not just products of circumstances but can also cause them.

From these books on Karl Marx, one comes to learn that Marx's materialism differs a lot from orthodox materialism. The books are quite useful when it comes to Marx's materialism. The differences between Marx's materialism and others, in these books, however, are treated very lightly, if at all. This could be mainly because the authors' aim was just to expound on Marx's materialism, not necessarily analysing the other materialist teachings.

Fiebleman James¹⁵, writing on materialism in the contemporary times asserts that historical evidence indicates that science arose as a product of materialism. He contends that there was the tradition of mechanical materialism in Democritus, and there was the dynamic materialism of Aristotle. He observes that from Aristotle's days to the present, matter has meant a gross stuff perceptible to the senses and resistant to change.

He further says that all scientists are formal materialists as they investigate matter in order to determine its formal properties. He however, hastens to add that the theory of materialism has always existed separate from the study of matter as conducted, for instance, by such sciences as physics and chemistry. With the advent of the scientific method and the consequent development of science, Feibleman says, has come an increased knowledge of matter. To him, a lot is today known about matter than what was known when materialism first became prominent. Matter, he contends is no longer considered a simple, inert stuff, which resists analysis. It has

been acknowledged to be a highly dynamic agent capable of sustaining the most complex activities. He observes that the properties of matter were once held to be few and known, but now they are understood to be many and largely unknown. He says that certain properties previously thought to be excluded from matter, are now considered as included. He characterizes these properties as the spiritual qualities – mind, consciousness, spirit, purpose, beauty and goodness, among others. This is in total contrast to the teachings of, for example, Hobbes that incorporeal things like spirits are not real. He says that from the general use of such a term as “mind”, it is difficult to know what is meant. He demonstrates this by referring to Descartes who, for instance, divided the universe into thinking things and extending things – matter. By the former he says, everything was included that was excluded from matter.

He says, certainly, the term “mind” is used to include memory and thought, the retention and manipulation of logical entities and their combination. To him, that the mind as so conceived can be shown to be connected with the brain is not difficult to demonstrate. In the traditional materialism there is no room and therefore no explanation for mental events. They were not supposed to be material and so were assigned to a separate though often-parallel series without interaction.

In the new materialism, he states, mental events take place in the brain, and consist in signals and signaling systems both of which are at the very least material. Experiments with the electroencephalogram, drugs, and ablation, he adds, "have indicated that an intimate relation exists between mind and brain".¹⁶ He observes that spirit, as the unknown is easy to understand but difficult to dismiss. This is because nature in any one of its many subdivisions seems always to be indefinitely larger than our limited formulations. As regards "purpose" or teleology, he says that for people, it means quite simply that which the people are for; their reason for existence.

This book is very important for it presents a totally different dimension of materialism; whereas it is commonly taken to exclude spiritual things this includes them. In the book, forms of materialism are mentioned without much discussion though. The author, for example, states that Democritus' materialism was mechanical, Aristotle's dynamic, and that of science is formal. But, he does not elaborate on what they are and what makes one differ from the other.

What emerges from the above literature is that a lot of clarifications and filling of the gaps amongst the teachings of materialism are needed. What materialism is, for example, is not clear, and who a materialist is also is not discussed. Terms like, dialectical materialism, dynamic materialism, and formal materialism obscures. Be that as it may, the major weakness that

makes this work an absolute necessity is the segmented nature of treating materialism. This work endeavoured to analytically treat various claims and forms of materialism and, therefore, provide a link, hitherto missing in all the forms of materialism.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This work operated under the conceptual orientation that philosophers have tended to express the mentality appropriate to their social and cultural milieu, to questions of passionate interest. This conception is an answer to the question about the conflict between the subjective and objective views of a philosophy. Bertrand Russell vividly expounds on this when he observes:

We may say, in a broadway, that Greek philosophy down to Aristotle expresses the mentality appropriate to the city state; that stoicism is appropriate to a cosmopolitan despotism; that scholarstic philosophy is an intellectual expression of the church as an organization; that philosophy since Descartes, or at any rate since Locke, tends to embody the prejudices of the commercial middle class; and that Marxism and Fascism are philosophies appropriate to the modern industrial state...¹⁷

The implication of this is that there is some level of bias in philosophy. This of course depends on "which philosophy?", for what we conventionally call "philosophy" consists of two different elements, namely: questions which are scientific or logical and hence amenable to methods and so no disagreements; and the questions of passionate interest that have no solid evidence either way. To the latter, differences that do exist amongst philosophers are caused by looking at things from different perspectives.

According to Titus Harold¹⁸ this is brought about by personal experiences and cultural backgrounds, especially when they (philosophers) live at different times and in different places.

In addition to the perspectives of particular individuals and special groups of people, there are general presuppositions characteristic of a society or a civilization. Every civilization rests on a number of presuppositions about human beings and their nature. These, it would follow; determine the ways in which things are viewed since they are like windows through which the world is viewed. As a way of elaboration, the presuppositions about human beings and the world show a marked contrast as one moves from the medieval age to the eighteenth century and then to the contemporary world. During the medieval age, it was assumed that institutions were static because God had ordained them to be that way. Life in the world then was thought to be a preparation for a future life. Faith was elevated above reason. By the eighteenth century, large numbers of people were thinking of 'natural law' as an explanatory notion, and 'nature' and 'reason' were two widely accepted concepts.¹⁹ In the contemporary world, due to the growth and influence of science and technology, the outlook is more secular and naturalistic.

There are certain beliefs, which, for a particular age, seem to be not mere beliefs but statements of fact or necessary categories. Titus Harold

observes that beliefs of philosophers too rest on certain basic assumptions and value judgments, which influence the direction of attention and points of emphasis. He states that systems or schools of philosophy can be easily understood once we recognize clearly the influence and the power of the different frames of reference or centres of attention.

Materialism as a philosophy addresses the question of passionate interest that has no solid evidence and hence, it may be argued that a materialist, interested in material things and the physical sciences, may be impressed by the stark reality to which men must adjust. Such a philosopher may interpret all existence according to the basic assumption that everything is matter. It is therefore probable that different claims of materialism and the rejection of the doctrine in certain systems is explainable by this understanding that ipso facto guides this study.

1.6 HYPOTHESES

The study had two hypotheses;

- i) Materialism is confusing and obscure because it attempts to answer a question that is not scientific or logical.
- ii) Materialism is unacceptable in the traditional African thoughts as the correct explanation of what there is ultimately.

1.7 SCOPE

Materialism as a philosophical topic covers a very broad scope. To ensure that this study did not derail from its objectives, it had to operate within a certain defined scope. This was in three ways. First was when it came to the doctrine of materialism itself. This doctrine is to be found in many philosophies. But it of this study is only materialism as taught in occidental world that provided. This means materialism as taught in oriental philosophies, for example, was left out. The reason for this is that it is in the occidental world that subscription to this doctrine is widespread and, therefore, consistently applied and resorted to. Right from ancient Greece to contemporary time, materialism has been taught and forms debates in philosophical circles in the occidental world. Hence, to address the issue of historical development of the doctrine, for example, the study had to focus on occidental philosophy. Materialism, therefore, as taught in ancient, modern and contemporary periods of occidental philosophy provided the scope.

Then there was the task of establishing whether or not materialism is acceptable to thought systems that embrace spiritual explanations of phenomena. To achieve this, the study restricted itself to specific thought systems in a specific world. The specific world was Africa, the reason for this being that Africa, especially traditional one, presents societies describable as spiritual and hence provide a fitting case in relating their

explanations of phenomena with an answer to ultimate reality that shuts out spiritual considerations and explanations. In regard to specific thought systems, five traditional thoughts and beliefs, namely; Luba, Akan, Ashanti, Mende, and Banyarwanda provided the scope. The five are singled out for consideration because researches done on them in view of the researcher are thorough, extensive and hence a landmark.

Lastly, there was the question of why materialism dismisses incorporeal things. In finding out why this is so, some specific incorporeal things namely, God, soul, and mind had to be dealt with. These three were chosen because reference to them is so widespread to the extent that they are like the epitome of incorporeal things. In considering these three incorporeal things, focus was put on why they are seen to be real, and the difficulties that surround proof of their reality. This means the aim was not to give a stand as to whether or not they exist, but to try and understand why materialists dismiss them. The point here is that when it came to incorporeal things it is these three that provided the scope of the study.

1.8 CONSTRAINTS

There were a number of constraints encountered. One of them was time. The researcher did the work without study leave. This means he did it while doing his normal work as a lecturer in the department of religion and

philosophy, Maseno University. Hence, whereas the study was to take three years, it took five years.

The second constraint was availability of literature. This research was a library one. Naturally it meant relying heavily on Maseno University libraries. More often than not, the libraries proved inadequate hence requiring that the researcher move out to other libraries, and bookshops to get relevant literature. It at times took long for the researcher to get relevant books and in some occasions he failed to get them completely.

The other constraint was finance. This emanated from the fact that the researcher was not on scholarship and that he had to rely on funding from the Institute of Research and Postgraduate Studies, Maseno University, the funding that was not adequate.

1.9 METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to how data is collected and how it is analysed.

1.9.1 DATA COLLECTION

In this study, literary method of collecting data applied. This means that the study was a library one. It involved collecting data from books, journals, dictionaries and encyclopedia. A lot of time was therefore spent in libraries notably those of Maseno University and University of Nairobi.

1.9.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Three methods of analysing data applied. These were: the descriptive method, method of criticism, and, logical/rationalistic method.

1.9.2.1. DESCRIPTIVE METHOD

Descriptive method involved presenting facts about materialism as they were. This method came handy in presenting the materialist teachings of various philosophers. Hence, teachings of Democritus, Epicurus, Hobbes, and Marx regarding materialism are presented descriptively.

1.9.2.2 METHOD OF CRITICISM

Criticism is a method that involves a deep examination and evaluation of a subject at hand. To succeed with this method, an attitude of questioning must be cultivated. By so doing, one is liberated from fanaticism and hypocrisy. This method also ensures that one does not run into contradictions. To meaningfully respond to questions like, what is materialism? Who is a materialist? And, why does materialism dismiss incorporeal things? This method had to be used.

1.9.2.3 RATIONALISTIC METHOD

Rationalistic method entails analysing issues systematically and logically. This involves either inductively or deductively coming to a conclusion for clear understanding of an issue. By so doing one eschews precipitancy and

prejudice, and also avoid arriving at conclusions that are more or beyond what is contained in the premises. This method applied most when it came to analysing African traditional thought systems and their position regarding materialist answer to ultimate reality.

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CHAPTER TWO

MATERIALISM

2.0 PREAMBLE

Two fundamental issues in this study are what materialism is, and who a materialist is. The answer to these issues should provide an explanation as to why there are many claims of materialism, and why some people thinking 'materialistically' may not want to be called materialists. The aim here therefore, is to put materialism as a system of belief in its correct perspective. Questions and issues concerning it are to be answered. In effect, a clear demonstration of how materialism offers solutions in the areas of social organization, political affairs, and economic pursuits is made.

Materialism is a view that falls under the general theory of monism. Monism is a theory asserting that ultimately there is one kind of reality, that is, the ultimate stuff of the world is one. Whereas dualism states that reality consists of two elements, monism reduces the manifold forms of experience to one final substance or being. The one final substance or being is either corporeal or incorporeal. Monism, therefore, emphasizes the unitary substance, physical or spiritual, to which all reality can be reduced. Two types of monism are prominent in the study of philosophy. These are, idealism and materialism.

Idealism is a theory that asserts that reality is one, the 'one' being mind or spirit. It considers the universe as grounded and rooted in mind. Hence, elemental things are found not in matter, motion, or force, but in experience, thought, reason, intelligence, personality, values, and in religious and ethical ideals. These mentioned properties are the world's realities and they have a cosmic rather than a mere human significance. Matter, physical bodies, and physical forces, to idealism are secondary, being perhaps a kind of externalization of mind, hence, a phenomenon or appearance to mind. This is another way of saying that mind is real and matter just an appearance. A central principle of idealism is organic wholeness. There is an inner unity, an unfolding series of levels from matter through vegetable forms, to animals, and finally, to mind and spirit.

Materialism on its part reduces reality to one element called matter. How is this done? The answer follows.

2.1 MATERIALISM IN ANCIENT TIME

Ancient time, in regard to philosophy in general and Western philosophy in particular, refers to the period from Thales (624-546 B.C) to Epictetus (96-55 B.C). It is divisible into three sub periods, namely, the pre-Socratic period, the period of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and third, the Hellenistic period. Materialism in ancient period is associated with Atomism and Epicureanism.

2.1.1 ATOMIST PHILOSOPHERS

Atomism is a philosophy founded by Leucippus (490-430 B.C) and Democritus (460 – 360 B.C). To Bertrand Russell, it is difficult to disentangle them (Leucippus and Democritus), and hence, they are generally mentioned together “and apparently, some of the works of Leucippus were subsequently attributed to Democritus.”¹ Collectively, the two are referred to as atomists, mainly because their philosophy was founded on what they called ‘atoms’. They are seen to have been the first systematic materialists as they were the first ones to hold the view that matter constitutes the basis of all that exists in the universe.

Nature, to them, consisted of only atoms, and, the void (space). Things accordingly consist of only atoms. “What are these atoms?” One may ask. An atom is a minute particle; an indivisible physical unit that atomists taught was always in motion. Each atom was seen as having fixed characteristics of form and shape which remained permanently and perpetually the same. Atoms had, therefore, an immutable property. All things were “ultimately reducible to the atoms, hence, the fundamental stuff was of just one kind, matter, and that the fundamental entities were material atoms.”² Atoms were seen as being characterized by indestructibility, eternity, and infinity. Each atom was seen as completely full, containing no empty spaces. They were, however, seen as not being the same. They differed in terms of shape and size and, as Russell observes, atoms also differed as “regards

heat and weight.”³ These were the only intrinsic differences between atoms, being differentiated by their shapes and sizes. But their substance was one and hence, as W. K. Guthrie observes, “just as if each were a separate bit of gold.”⁴ Atoms were seen to differ from a familiar substance like gold in that it lacked quality or, at least, being without sensible qualities. To the atomists’ understanding, that which serves as the underlying matter of all things, with every kind of colour, taste, and smell, must itself be without any of the various colours, flavours, or scents.

Owing to their small size, atoms were perceived to be invisible. And as it is already noted, they were infinite, both in number and shapes. Why should atomists, by advocating that there is in nature only atoms and space, be called materialists? It is because they reduced everything in nature to atoms, atoms being of material nature. They also made explicit the assumption that what has real existence must be corporeal. They thence proceeded in interpreting anything and everything in nature, including change, causality, and origin of the universe, in line with this understanding. Hence, every phenomenon was explained as the movement of atoms.

What then was their materialistic understanding or interpretation of motion? According to W. K. Guthrie⁵, atomists ignored the question of movement, whence or how it belongs to things. Motion was to be accepted as an inherent and eternal characteristic of matter. It was a confused and

irregular motion in all directions and since it was eternal and without a beginning, the collisions and rebounding of the atoms determined their direction. Atoms in motion is the only data required for producing the countless other systems, including the earth with its rocks, trees, people, and the sensations of sight, sound, smell and taste.

All perceptible bodies are produced because some of the atoms in their eternal jostling of each other do not recoil and separate. Being of suitable shape for combination, they cling together, and become entangled, thus generating perceptible bodies. As quoted by Guthrie, Simplicius elaborated on this thus:

These atoms separate one from the other in the void, which is infinite, and differing in shape, size, position and order, are in motion in the void, overtake one another and collide. Some rebound at hazard, others become entangled when their shapes, sizes, positions and order are favourable, and thus it happens that they bring about the generation of composite things.⁶

Since there is no limit, either to the atoms or the void, many and various systems have been formed, of which the cosmos is one of them. Some have dissolved, and others coexist with the cosmos. Democritus is quoted to have said the following about this:

... there are innumerable worlds of different sizes. In some there is neither sun nor moon, in others they are larger than in ours and others have more than one. These worlds are at irregular distances, more in one direction and less in another, and some are flourishing, others declining. Here they come into being, there they die, and they are destroyed by collision with one another. Some of the worlds have no animal or vegetable life nor any water.⁷

It can also be said that atomists are materialists because they completely emancipated the cosmos from any trace of animistic or teleological explanation. They taught that no mind came to order things. From all eternity, there were an infinite number of atoms of different shapes moving in infinite space with an irregular and aimless motion, and at irregular distances. Whereas a large interval of space happens to be empty of them, a whole lot of atoms pour in and, sets up a circular eddy. To Guthrie, atomists believed it might be simply that with infinity of space and of atoms and the eternity of movement, every variety of motion must have resulted from their conduct somewhere, sometime.⁸ Hence, when the eddy takes a circular form a cosmos results. To atomists, although all atoms are drawn into the general pattern of the whirl, they constantly tumble over one another and perform all sorts of gyrations within it. At this point, to them, the law of like tends towards like, and like acts upon like, applies. This law, originating in the motion of atoms, operates in both the organic and the inorganic worlds.

This law, according to the atomists, applied during the formation of the cosmos. Atoms of similar shape and size drew together and, as they crowded into the vortex, disturbances occurred. Those with less resistance were forced to the outer reaches and even beyond. The model for the vortex is an eddy of wind or water, in which heavier bodies gather in a heap at the centre while lighter ones are carried away.

To the atomists, therefore, the world is an un-designed combination of atoms subject to an apparently random motion, which happened to take certain directions under a purely mechanical compulsion. The various kinds of movement, which worked together to produce the universe, can be summarized as follows:

- i) Infinite number of atoms in an endless irregular motion in space;
- ii) A universal vortex to which movements were subordinate;
- iii) Irregular motions of individual atoms resulting in collisions and recoils;
- iv) A tendency of larger and heavier bodies to seek the centre of the vortex and smaller and lighter ones to be squeezed outwards;
- v) The attraction of like to like, a law applicable both to single atoms and to their compounds.

The above listed events took place out of 'necessity,' hence, Leucippus stated, "nothing happens by random, everything happens by law and necessity."⁹ In the teachings of the atomists, therefore, the four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, popular with the philosophers who preceded them, were illusions. True elemental bodies are the atoms and since the atoms are of infinitely different shapes and sizes, they cannot build up into four primary kinds of bodily substances.

As regards the crucial question of causality, atomists held that no force was required to set the atoms in motion, for the atoms' motion was eternal. If

there was a cause to this, then it was necessity. This view disallows a teleological view of nature that sees a first cause and purpose in nature. This has the effect of eliminating the popular notion that a spiritual force (God) created everything and that human behaviour should be based upon obedience and principles whose source is God. To the atomists, the origin, development, and decay of the world are due to necessity with which are equated all the myriad collisions and recoils of atoms among each other and, in particular, the cosmic vortex into which they are drawn. Everything is a product of the movement of atoms. There is no purpose or design. This materialistic reduction of all reality to atoms left no place and need for a creator or designer to create and design. Purpose was further obliterated by the ascription of eternity to the material atoms.

Atomists went further and explained knowledge as the movement of atoms. In particular, Democritus distinguished between two different kinds of perception. One was of the senses, and the other of the understanding, both of which being physical processes. Accordingly, when the eye sees something, the something is an effluence, or the shedding of atoms by the object forming an image. These atomic images of things enter the eyes (and other organs of sense) and make an impact on the soul, which is itself made up of atoms.¹⁰ According to Democritus therefore, there are two forms of knowledge; the true one and the fake one. To the fake knowledge belong sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The true knowledge depends

only on the object. Hence, fake knowledge can be affected by the particular conditions of the body of the person involved. The true knowledge is not. This is why two persons can agree that what they have tasted is say a mango (true knowledge) but still disagrees about its taste or smell (fake knowledge). Accordingly, Democritus is quoted as having said, "By the senses we know in truth nothing sure, but only something that changes according to the disposition of the body and of the things that enter into it or resist it."¹¹

Atomistic theory, according to Samuel Stumpf¹² was very formidable. It provided science with its working model for centuries that followed. To him, Isaac Newton (1642-1727) at his time, for example, still thought in atomistic terms. Having deduced the motion of the planets, the comets, the moon, and the sea, Newton is reported to have observed:

I wish we could devise the rest of the phenomena of nature by the same kind of reasoning from mechanical principles, for I am induced by many reasons to suspect that they may all depend upon certain forces by which the particles of bodies, by some causes hitherto unknown, are either mutually impelled towards one another and cohere in regular figures or are repelled and recede from one another.¹³

This theory of bodies in motion as the explanation of nature held sway until the quantum theory and Albert Einstein gave the twentieth century a new conception of matter, denying the attribute of indestructibility to the atoms. In the ancient times, however, atomism was greatly supported by Epicurus who extended it to cover the incorporeal things.

2.1.2 EPICURUS

Epicurus (341-271 B.C), the founder of Epicureanism, a school of philosophical thought, greatly supported atomism. He did this in an attempt to prove that philosophy should be an activity, which, by arguments and discussions, should bring about a happy life. He is quoted to have said:

Empty are the words of that philosopher who offers therapy for no human suffering. For just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not give therapy for bodily diseases, so too there is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul.¹⁴

Like Leucippus and Democritus, he held the view that everything that existed was made up of eternal atoms that were small, and indestructible bits of hard matter. Nature, to him, consisted of atoms that were infinite in number and a void that was infinite in extent. He also saw atoms as being in continual motion, falling with equal velocity through the void and also varying in size and shape.¹⁵

To D.W. Hamlyn,¹⁶ Epicurus introduced a curious argument by observing that atoms were composed of minimal parts that were neither capable of independent existence nor of being divided both in fact and in principle. Epicurus saw weight as another property of atoms. Weight was responsible for the motion of the atoms, but not for the velocity of that motion. To Bertrand Russell, Epicurus ascribed weight to atoms as a reason for their

incessant falling, not towards the centre of the earth, but downwards in some absolute sense.¹⁷

Epicurus observed that properties that characterized things in the universe were secondary since atoms in forming compounds produce them. By so observing, Epicurus was able to distinguish between those properties, which were permanent, and those, which were mere accidents. Because of weight and the void, atoms are in motion. When the atoms collide they set up systems within which the individual atoms rebound off each other, setting up a state of vibration. The compounds formed by such systems vary according to the destiny of the atoms. For example, in gases the atoms are dispersed, while in solids they are closely packed. Groups of objects form higher order systems, the highest being a world, of which Epicurus thought are of an infinite number. Apart from these clusters of atoms, to Epicurus, nothing else existed.

And as Stumpf rightly observes, the implication of this is that if God(s) or spirits exist, they too must be material things¹⁸. This means, if there is God, he is not the source or the creator of the universe. Everything comes about as a result of mechanical forces. Like the atomists, therefore, Epicurus looked at the universe as originating from atoms that had no beginning. Atoms have always existed in space. And due to afore-said motion, there was a whole series of collisions until all the atoms had been formed into

clusters. These clusters or arrangements of atoms are the physical things seen, for example, rocks, flowers, animals, and human beings. Because of the infinite number of atoms, there are an infinite number of worlds.

Epicurus interpreted sensation materially. How? Sensation, according to him, was due to thin films thrown off by bodies that traveled on until they touched soul atoms. These films may still exist when the bodies from which they originally proceeded have been dissolved. The soul is just a complex of atoms like everything else, but it is composed of very fine ones, which permeate the body and are held together by it.¹⁹ The main constituents of the soul are particles resembling breath and heat, which is responsible for sensation and other functions. He used atomism or materialism to solve what he identified as the major fears of humans, namely, God and death. How?

In formulating a materialist account of the origin and composition of things, and by stating that everything that there was, including gods and the soul, originated from atoms, he thought that he had liberated humanity from the fear of God and death. Humans were not to fear God because God did not control nature or human destiny. God was unable to intrude into people's lives. God and human beings are both a result of a purposeless and random event.²⁰ This means, there is neither providence, nor fate in any sense that implies retribution for human sins. To Epicurus, this teaching

provides a remedy for the fear of God, for if both humans and God are part of the nature of things, then there is no reason for one fearing the other.

To Epicurus, people should also not fear death. This is because only a living person has sensation either of pain or pleasure. After death, there is no sensation since the atoms that make up both the body and mind come apart, leaving some kind of a shell. Humans cannot experience its goodness or its pain. All that is known is the present body and the present moment of experience. There remain only a number of distinct atoms that to him "return to the primeval inventory of matter to continue the cycle of new formations."²¹ Hence, "death is nothing to us, for after death there is no us."²²

What Epicurus is saying is that in principle, the composition of human nature includes atoms of different sizes and shapes, the larger atoms making up men's bodies, with the smaller, smoother, and swifter atoms accounting for sensation and thinking. No other principle is needed to explain a person's nature, no God and, therefore, no after life. Hence, there was nothing to fear and nothing to be hopeful of.

After what he looked at as liberation of human beings from the fear of God and of death, Epicurus came up with a materialist account of morality. According to him, one's way of life should be completely under one's own

control and determination. His moral philosophy, therefore, focused upon people and their immediate desires for bodily and mental pleasures instead of upon abstract principles of right conduct or considerations of God's commands and/or expectations. Hence, Epicurus advocated hedonism as the foundation of the system of morality. Hedonism is a theory that purports to offer a guide in making decisions and judgments about actions in particular situations. It holds that, pleasure is the only intrinsic good. Hence, actions have to be judged in terms of pleasure. The right actions are those, which produce the most pleasure. Just as the individual atom is the final basis of all being, so are people the final basis of their conduct. Epicurus therefore, did not deny people the ability and the responsibility to regulate their appetites and desires. In connection with this, Stumpf observes:

Although he portrayed the origin of all things in a mechanical way and placed humans into the nature of things as just another small mechanism whose nature led them to seek pleasure, Epicurus, nevertheless reserved for humans the power and the duty to regulate the traffic of their desires.²³

In summary, Epicurus, like Leucippus and Democritus, held the view that atoms produce all things, including thinking and sensation. Nature is made of atoms that are infinite in number, and the void or space that is infinite in extension. Hence, the genesis of everything in nature is atoms that are in the first place eternal. From this, then, other realities in the universe like humans, soul, gods and morality can be derived.

2.2 MATERIALISM IN THE MODERN PERIOD.

After Epicurus and his followers, materialism was completely eclipsed. Hence, come medieval period, also seen as the period of Christianity, and hence of Christian philosophy, materialism was totally ignored. In this period, the church brought philosophic beliefs into closer relation to social and political circumstances. To Bertrand Russell, various forms of dualism as contrasted with the ancient period, characterized this period. Hence, there is the dualism of clergy and laity, the dualism of Latin and Teuton, the dualism of the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, the dualism of the spirit and the flesh. All these are exemplified in the dualism of Pope and Emperor."²⁴ In this period, there was a general acceptance and recognition of incorporeal things, God and spirits included. Hence, St. Augustine talked and wrote of "The City of God", and Thomas Aquinas took a bold step in 'proving' the existence of God.

The modern period, began after the eclipse of the papacy and the start of the renaissance. The period saw the declining authority of the Church, and the increasing authority of scientific knowledge. The period, therefore, saw a culture that was more lay than clerical as states replaced the Church as the governmental authority. The opinions of Christian philosophers also diminished. Comparatively, in the medieval period the key issue was conformity to the Church doctrine that was founded on the idea of the existence of a non-physical being, God, and, the idea of teleology or

purpose in the cosmos. In the modern period there was the authority of science, which emphasized reason and practical solution of problems. It did not spell out the penalties to befall those rejecting it, nor did it use prudential arguments to influence those who were to accept it. It prevailed solely by its intrinsic appeal to reason.²⁵

It is in this period and environment that Thomas Hobbes emerged and revived materialism in the philosophic circles, after it had been ignored for almost a thousand years. Hobbes is selected for detailed consideration because he was a major exponent of materialism in this epoch.

2.2.1 THOMAS HOBBS

Thomas Hobbes was a Briton born in 1588 and died in 1679. He was an empiricist philosopher just like fellow Britons, John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. As a foundation to his materialistic teachings as quoted by Antony Flew, Hobbes stated:

The universe, that is, the whole mass of things that are, is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimension of magnitude, namely length, breadth, and depth. Also every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions. And, consequently, every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe. And because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere.²⁶

Accordingly, Hobbes viewed reality as consisting of body, defined as that which having no dependence upon human thought was coincident or coextended with some part of space. The two defining properties of body to

Hobbes are extension (space) and motion (time). In short, body was matter, and had certain attributes. Hobbes considered magnitude and motion as the real attributes of the body. Motion was the root of all causes and effects in nature. It is the occupancy in successive times at different parts of space, and rest is the occupancy of the same part of space during a time interval. Motion and quantity are therefore, the universal and genetic properties of bodies. According to W. Jones, this means that all actual bodies have some determinate magnitude and are at either rest or move at some determinate velocity.²⁷

According to Hobbes, all things are material or else they are nowhere and nothing. Immaterial things such as space, time, thought or logical relations are only attributes of the mind. The mind is not an immaterial thing but a material phenomenon – a complicated series of physical motions. Secondary qualities of bodies, for example, sounds and colours are not inherent in objects. Incorporeal things, for instance, time, and space, are just accidents of the mind, that is, imagination of a thing which exists outside the mind but which has no other attribute except that it appears outside the mind. The pressure of objects causes sensation. Colours and sounds are not in the objects. The qualities in objects that correspond to sensations are motion.

He held that perceptual experience is an appearance of the reality of matter in motion. All qualities called sensible, are in the object that causes them. This implies that hallucinatory percepts, for example, are in themselves motions, and as Antony Flew quotes him, "in the brain itself there is nothing but tumult, proceeding either from the action of the objects or from the disorderly agitation of the organs of our sense."²⁸ Such appearances are subjective and are caused by motions in the external world. This extends to empiricism as the conclusion is that the origin of them all is that which is called sense, for there is no conception in people's mind which has not at first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense. The rest is derived from this.

Hobbes held that the model of all behaviour is the falling body's conformity to mechanical law. He presented a universe in which everything that happens is reducible to the behaviour of material particles moving in accordance with simple mechanical laws. He, therefore, worked out ethical and social-political theories consistent with this materialistic account of nature or reality. How did he do this? He held that there is no such thing as utmost aim or greatest good. Reason is not innate, it is developed by industry. Endeavour is just a small beginning of motion, that is, if it is towards something, it is desire, and if it is away from something it is aversion. Love is desire and hate is aversion. Hence, people call a thing 'good' when it is an object of desire, and 'bad', when it is an object of

aversion. Hence, there is no objectivity to 'good' and 'bad', and therefore, if men differ in their desires, there is no theoretical way of adjusting their differences. He defined various passions, by basing on a competitive view of life. For instance, laughter is sudden glory. And, fear of invisible power, if publicly allowed, is religion; if not allowed, superstition.

Hobbes founded his social and political theory on materialism. How? Liberty or freedom, he held, signified the absence of opposition. By opposition, he meant external impediments of motion. A free person is he that in those things that by his strength and wit, he is able to do is not hindered from doing them. And when the words free and liberty are applied to anything but bodies, they are abused, for that which is not subject to motion is not subject to impediment. From the use of the words free will, no liberty can be inferred of the will, desire, or inclination, but the liberty of human beings. Liberty and necessity are consistent, as in the water that has not only liberty but also a necessity of descending by the channel. So are the actions, which humans voluntarily do.

He emphasised on motion and mechanics in his social political theory. His thesis was that human freedom is not necessarily incompatible with complete universal causality. He traversed the question of whether the universe is in fact completely deterministic, and the consequences of this. He defended determinism by stating, "Let the case be put, for example of

the weather. It is necessary that tomorrow it shall rain, it is necessary it shall not rain, otherwise there is no necessity that the proposition, it shall rain or not rain, should be true."²⁹ He proceeded to his political philosophy where he also invoked motions and mechanism. He began by considering what humans are like, and what they would be like if all the restraints of law and society were removed. People are not born adapted by nature for collective harmonious life. They have many sources of conflicts, the main one being natural lust. Every person is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is bad. One does this by a certain impulsion of nature just like a stone would move downward. This means, of the voluntary acts of every person, the object is some good to him or her. Without the opposition, social restraints, the restless, contentious, and grasping creature that a person is would be in a perpetual state of war. Hence, the natural state of human beings was characterized by perpetual war, a war involving every body.

To Antony Flew, this should be seen like the first law of motion in physics, which states not how bodies move, but how they would move if all impressed forces were withdrawn.³⁰ Hobbes looked at the state, as though it were a natural phenomenon, or as a billiard ball. The state, to him is just a vast, more complicated group of the same sort of material particles in motion. Theoretically, therefore, the behaviour of societies ought to be capable of the same rigorous prediction as the behaviour of billiard balls on a billiard table, and in accordance with precisely the same laws.³¹ His

contention was that, given the stupidity and selfishness that people habitually display, the only way to preserve the peace and prevent them from destroying each other was to concentrate all power in the hands of a single individual, the sovereign. By following the law of nature, which is all about sustaining oneself, people should be able to live together in peace and harmony. But, since they cannot follow the rules of their own volition, people need an all-powerful sovereign to enforce them. In short, the characteristics that forbid one from doing that which is destructive to his/her life leads to competition and dissension and hence, to anarchy. To eschew anarchy, there is a need for an absolute ruler.

2.3 MATERIALISM IN CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

Contemporary period in the history of philosophy refers to philosophy from J. J. Rousseau (1712 – 1778) to the present day. In this period, a number of philosophers and schools of thought allude to materialism. A school whose teachings on materialism are well known and is singled out for consideration is Marxism, which has its genesis in the teachings of Karl Marx.

2.3.1 KARL MARX

Karl Marx was a German Jew, born in 1818 and died in 1883. He is famous for his teachings about class struggle or conflict in society, his prediction of

the fall of capitalism, and, his theories on dialectical and historical materialism. All these teachings had materialism as the basis. Marx used 'materialism' in an attempt to understand the social problems that resulted from industrial revolution in Europe. The materialism characterizing Marx's thought, H.B. Acton rightly observes, consisted essentially in his view that human life and thought are shaped by nothing other than material conditions of production.³²

Marx used 'materialism' to describe and interpret the complex economic and social forces that determined the nature of societies. He placed emphasis on a view of historical development in which matter in the form of economic organization of society was regarded as basic. He identified reality with material nature and, hence, all human thought, he taught, was to be understood as reflecting the dialectic process of the real as it works in the world and in human history. Marx's starting point was human beings. He distinguished them from animals in that they produce their means of subsistence and thereby, their actual material life. Animals entirely depend on the physiological equipment they are born with for food and shelter, but humans produce their food and make their shelter by the use of instruments, which are not part of their original physiological equipment. Human beings, he contended, produce works, which permit of indefinite improvement by succeeding generations. The skills, experience, and tools thus received and used, are the productive forces. These are the labour

power, raw materials, tools, techniques, and organization of the working personnel, involved in the production of economic goods and services. The productive forces are not individual products. Hence, any improvement made by individuals is made on the basis of what is already there in society to which the individual belongs. Marx's materialist teachings are explicit in what he called dialectical and historical materialism.

2.3.1.1 DIALECTICAL AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM.

"Dialectic" was Hegel's notion that there is a process going on in history, a conflict of opposites. According to him, dialectic represented ideas in conflict. Karl Marx adopted the Hegelian dialectic but rejected its idealism. Marx believed that 'dialectic' represented conflict in history, located in the material conditions of life. He identified reality with material nature. All human thought, he held, was to be understood as reflecting the dialectic process of the real (matter), as it works in the world and in human history. The driving force is man's relation to matter, of which the most important part is his mode of production.

According to him, the various strata in the social order are separate and distinct, there being only a dialectical interaction between them. This means, all of nature, from the smallest to the biggest, is a ceaseless state of movement and change. History is the process of change from one epoch to another in accordance with the rigorous and inexorable laws of historical

motion. This change or movement is not the same as mere growth. A society does not simply mature the way for example, humans mature; and nature does not simply move in an eternally uniform and constantly repeated circle. It passes through a real history. Change, therefore, meant the emergence of new structures, that is, novel forms. What causes the change is the quantitative alteration of things, which leads to something qualitatively new. As the temperature of water is increased, for example, it not only becomes warmer, but it finally reaches the point at which the quantitative change changes water from liquid to vapor. Reversing the process, by gradually decreasing the temperature of water, one finally changes it from liquid to solid (ice). History displays this kind of change by which certain quantitative elements in the economic order finally force a qualitative change in the arrangements of society. This is the process that has moved history from one epoch to another – it is dialectic.

Marx's materialism, in practice, focused on economics (production). Hence, he viewed politics, religion, philosophy, and, art of any epoch in human history, as an outcome of its methods of production and, to a lesser extent, of distribution. This led him to a materialist conception of history or historical materialism. Marx's ultimate aim was to lay bare the economic law of motion. What history shows is that social and economic orders are in a process of change. History displays change whereby certain quantitative elements in the economic order finally force a qualitative change in the

arrangements of society. According to him, this is the process that moved history in the four epochs of European history namely, the primitive (communal), slave, feudal, and then capitalist. Therefore, dialectic was the law of motion explaining why and how history produced these various epochs.

His discovery was that this is brought about by contradictions introduced or that emerge between social relations and forces of production. This is a necessary process as, the forces of production, the state of society, and consciousness can and must come into contradiction with one another. On the basis of this discovery, he was able to make a prediction about the future. His prediction was that the fourth epoch (capitalism) would fall, since changes in the quantitative factors in capitalism would inevitably destroy it (capitalism) leading to socialism and communism. At this point, history would come to an end. A classless society would emerge where all the forces and interests would be in perfect balance and hence no emergence of contradictions. There would be no further development in history, as there would be no any conflict to impel history to any future epoch.

Marx's theory of the dialectic development of the epochs of history in Europe rested on the distinction between the order of material reality, on the one hand, and the order of human thought, on the other. Marx was convinced that the only way to achieve a realistic understanding of history

and, therefore, to avoid errors in the practical program of revolutionary activity, was to assess properly the roles of the material order and the order of human thought. Marx, therefore, made a sharp distinction between the substructure and the superstructure of society. The substructure is the material order, containing the energizing force that moves history, whereas the superstructure consists of men's ideas and simply reflects the configurations of the material order.

Karl Marx saw materialism as meaning the sum total of the natural environment, including all of inorganic nature, the organic world, social life and human consciousness. Materialism, therefore, meant that the world as seen is all there is. The materialist outlook on the world is simply the conception of nature as it is, without any reservations. This is a marked departure from materialism as earlier taught. Unlike Democritus, who defined matter in terms of irreducible tiny particles, atoms, Marx defines or looks at matter as objective reality existing outside the human mind. Also, unlike Democritus, who considered atoms as the bricks of the universe, Marx's materialism did not take this approach of trying to discover a single form of matter in all things.³³ Hence, Robert Davidson³⁴ observes that Marx, though a materialist, rejected the more traditional scientific materialism of the day, which took human nature to be completely subject to the scientific laws that governed the physical and material universe. This form of materialism took human beings to be little more than a mechanism

whose behaviour was reducible to physiological, chemical, and physical changes in the human organism.

Marx only recognized a natural process at work in human society and agreed that circumstances make people as much as people make circumstances. He, accordingly, insisted that in all social development there is a genuine give and take relationship. It is a dialectical process in which the conscious thought and activity of people shape external circumstances quite as genuinely as external circumstances shape human thought and conduct. The distinctive character of social development as opposed to the natural processes of development lay in the fact that human consciousness was involved. Human beings, although conditioned by society are enabled by conscious activity to change both society and themselves.

The chief characteristic of Marx's materialism, hence, is that it recognizes a wide diversity in the material world without reducing it to any one form of matter. The material order contains everything in the natural world that exists outside our minds. The notion that any spiritual reality, God, for example, exists outside our minds and as something other than nature is an illusion. That human beings possess minds means only that organic matter has developed to the point where the cerebral cortex has become an organ capable of the intricate process of reflex action called 'human thought'. The human mind has been conditioned by the labour activity of people as social

beings. For this reason, Marxism affirms the primacy of the material order and regards mental activity as a secondary by-product of matter. Marx is quoted to have asserted;

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental productions as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest form.³⁵

The earliest forms of life were, according to Marx, without mental activity until ancestors of human beings developed the use of their fore limbs, learned to walk erect, and began to use natural objects as tools, to procure food and to protect themselves against harm. The big transformation from animal to human being came with the ability to fashion and use tools and to control such forces as fire, which, in turn, made possible a wider variety of food and the further development of the brain. Even now, the complex material order is the basic reality, and the mental realm is derivative from it. Each epoch has its dominant ideas. Humans formulate ideas in the areas of religion, morality, and law, and the ideas of each epoch grow out of and reflect the actual material conditions of the historic period. For this reason, thinking comes after the material order has affected human minds. It is not the consciousness of people that determines their being, but it is their social being that determines their consciousness. The source of ideas is rooted in the material order. Hence, such ideas as justice and goodness, and even

religious salvation, are only various modes of rationalizing the existing order. Because he believed that ideas were chiefly a reflection of the material order, Marx attributed a limited role or function to them. Ideas are particularly useless when they bear no relationship to the economic reality.

Marx's materialism can be seen as an advocacy of naturalism that denies fundamental discontinuities in nature, for example, discontinuity between animal and human nature, or between the physical and mental aspects of man, and the denial of supernatural intrusions into the realm of nature. It can also be deciphered that, there are explanations of natural phenomena including human and mental ones, in terms of the organization and activity of matter and that, the basis of morality, politics or ideas should be sought in human experience.

2.4 ANALYSIS

After looking at the above materialist teachings, it is time to analyse and answer the questions what is materialism? And, who is a materialist? What becomes apparent is that materialism is usable and applicable in a myriad ways and that it is fairly ambiguous. From the teachings of materialism a clear picture of what materialism is becomes apparent. One notices two senses of materialism. There is the strict sense and the loose sense. The strict sense has two categories. The first category is that which is variously called mechanical, orthodox, or classical. To this category, materialism is a

view that falls under the general theory of monism. As such, it reduces reality to one element, the one element being matter. Materialism in this category is the assertion that there is finally one reality – matter. This is the ontological thesis where both mental and physical events are seen as just physical events. Hence, materialism is the belief and, therefore, the doctrine that, only matter exists, other phenomena and features of the world being explicable as manifestations of the organization and movement of matter. In this category, and as evidenced from various teachings, there are three principles or pillars of materialism, namely, the uniformity of law, the denial of teleology, and the denial of the existence of incorporeal substances.

Uniformity of law is the law of universal causation, affirming that nothing happens without a cause and that the same cause under the same conditions always produces the same effects. From this it follows that teleology or purpose is a phase of the normal process of redistribution of matter and motion under fixed and invariable laws. There exists no purpose in the universe, and events do not have any ulterior motive or goal to which they are striving. The denial of the existence of other substances other than the physical ones is the denial of incorporeal substances like spirits, God and minds. Mental manifestations and bodily ones are seen not as two different things, but as one and the same thing appearing under different aspects. Bodily organism is seen as a complex machine whose processes

and activities are attributable to physio-chemical forces, identical with those, which are recognised in the organic realm.

This implies that there is no spiritual interference in the normal physical sequences. Materialism therefore, means taking every event occurring in the universe, including those events known as mental processes, and all kinds of human action or conduct as expressible purely in terms of matter and motion. Hence, the universe and all things and events in it, have to be expressed in terms of matter and energy, undergoing continuous redistribution in accordance with the ordinary laws of physics and chemistry.

The second category of the strict sense of materialism entail taking materialism as a set of beliefs and attitudes that accept only explanations of reality that are based on material factors other than spiritual ones. Unlike the first category, it does not envisage a universe founded on, for example, atoms. It also does not emphasise mechanism, the way atomists, for example, did. It only stresses that spiritual factors don't apply in nature and hence should not be invoked in any sphere of man's endeavour. This sense of materialism may reject revealed religion, take the world as known only through human experience and thought, take the basis of morality and politics as things to be sought in human experience and reason, and, insist on explanations of natural phenomena in terms of the organization and activity of matter. Hence, to say that a person is materialistic in his or her

views, policies or practices may not amount to saying that the person proposes theories about matter being the only constituent of the universe, as Democritus and Epicurus did. It is just a way of saying that one's thinking has one or all of the following beliefs and attitudes:

- i) Rejecting supernatural or spiritual explanations of phenomena and accepting the natural one.
- ii) Preferring explanations of phenomena in terms of the structure and activity of matter;
- iii) Taking an empirical approach to matters of epistemology.
- iv) Believing in hedonism in ethical matters.
- v) Believing in the power of reason and government as the means through which human life can be improved.

Then there is the loose sense of materialism. This does not entail taking matter to be the ultimate reality. It is to do with the recognition that material things are necessary for one's survival. This recognition leads to the urge to accumulate, for example, wealth. In this sense, everybody, regardless of how he or she explains phenomena, is a materialist. This is not the type of materialism that philosophers are concerned with for it does not attempt to say what is ultimately real.

It is recognizable that materialism is a term designating doctrine or attitude. And because it designates doctrine or attitude, it is capable of many applications. Since it is applicable in virtually every sphere of human thought and, perhaps, practice, controversies over what it is cannot be

avoided. This makes it clear why one may claim that there are different kinds, or forms of materialism. This is basically because materialism is capable of many applications in whatever field of philosophical study. Hence, there are bound to be various teachings, some looking contradictory. It is also understandable why some people who may be materialists, in the sense that they, for example, allow no considerations other than the specification of tangible advantages to influence policy, may be shocked to be called materialists. But as it has become apparent, materialism is to do with having beliefs and attitudes founded on the view of matter being the ultimate reality. The bottom line to any teaching that is materialistic is that material is primary and spirit secondary or non-existent. This point can be elaborated further by considering what may be called "a materialist society".

Given what has been considered, it is possible to postulate how a materialist society can function or operate. To begin with, such a society would be devoid of religion as an institution. This is because the hallmark of religion is belief in spiritual or transcendental beings or ideas, things dismissed by materialists. Once religion is eliminated as a factor in day-to-day affairs of the society, it (religion) ceases to be an underpinning in morality, economics, and socio-political organization. In morality or ethics, there would be no demands or commands from God or other spirits. There would be no "Ten Commandments, or sharia laws to be adhered to". The

basis for everything would be reason. Epicurus did this by liberating people from the fear of God and death and presented a person's life as being completely under one's own control and determination.

Thomas Hobbes seemed to concur with this effort and observed that there was nothing as utmost or greatest good, meaning, there is no objectivity to 'good' or 'bad'. This is obviously stressing relativity in matters of ethics. The implication of this is that, in a materialist state, there would be no moral ideals. At the practical level, a pragmatist approach, where workability is the goal, could apply. And at the theoretical level, there would be no contradiction if two individuals were to differ over one moral issue. Hence, if two people, for example, differed over whether or not lying is bad, there would be no way of reconciling them since according to relativity, both can be right.

Dismissal of religion and religious beliefs would mean dismissal of belief in creation and teleology or destiny. Hence, talk of creation and life after death would be absent. Indeed, beliefs and attitudes that explain the universe as a great system of matter and motion undergoing redistribution according to fixed sequences, or laws, would obviously not entertain the idea that the universe was created by some supernatural being who has ascribed destiny to it. In a materialist society, therefore, there would only be talk of evolution that among other things states that organic materials originated from

inorganic materials and that the inorganic materials came forth after the big bang that was the genesis of the universe.³⁶ This would entail explaining life as having originated from the inorganic materials when self-reproduction started. Given the foregoing, punishment and reward, in this society, would squarely be in the realm of humans. The two would be given to suit specific purposes set by humans. Because there are no gods or spirits, there would be no punishments or rewards from a god or gods in another existence after death. This means there would be no talk of re-incarnation or resurrection.

In economic endeavours, the idea of man being in charge of his affairs and not thinking of God(s) would apply in this society. Karl Marx best demonstrated this when he took the real nature of humans to have been the totality of social relations. A person's moral ideas and attitudes were to him determined by the kind of society one lived in. People are not what they should be, not because of sin, but because they are alienated from the objects and social relations that they create. It is this alienation that leads to illusory ideas such as spirits or God. Salvation for humans is not about seeking God, but to make the society perfect, devoid of social and economic alienation. In short, in a materialist society, there would be emphasis on people as the only agent that can better social and economic life. This is basically because there are no divine interventions or influences. It is humans themselves to decide how best to live as biological beings.

When it comes to social and political life in a materialist society, socio-political life of people would be seen as a product of evolution and hence subject to the laws of motion just like anything else. There is, therefore, to be a deliberate organization of society without thinking of some divine intervention or guidance. Hence, social and political systems that give man full mandate to determine how best to live or be ruled would be favoured. In this regard, democracy would easily be embraced because to a larger extent it gives the power of deciding who should rule to the people. Dictatorship of an individual (as Hobbes would suggest) or that of a whole class (as Karl Marx suggested) would also be acceptable, so long as they are for the general good of society. But, theocratic leadership would be unacceptable as it is based on divine guidance.

In summary, it is correct to say that given the foregoing, a materialist society would operate without religious teachings and beliefs. In essence, reason but not religion would be the driving force in all aspects and spheres of people's operations. Whether or not such a society can be ideal or a "paradise" requires a totally different study, a study whose aim would be to address the issue of whether or not human societies can do without religion.

For our immediate discussion we turn to matter, which materialism considers to be the ultimate reality.

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CHAPTER THREE

MATTER

3.0 PREAMBLE

It has been noted that materialism gives primacy to matter. It reduces the world to material elements and their laws, and accepts only explanations of reality based on material factors. What is matter? This is what this chapter deals with. Matter is a physical object and hence, facts or circumstances about it can be studied and known. To discover more about "matter" requires finding out first the entities the term designates and then proceeding to analyse them by the appropriate empirical methods. In general, matter is a term conveniently used to apply to the substance of all possible physical things. In this context, all objects, which can be touched, or be pushed about, are supposed to be made of matter.¹

3.1 CONCEPTIONS OF MATTER

There are a number of conceptions of matter both in the world of philosophy and in the physical sciences. Reference is being made to these two "worlds" because it is in them that 'matter' has attracted a lot of interest. The study of 'matter' by philosophers is fundamentally different from that by physical scientists. Whereas physical scientists resort to experimenting on what they may call 'matter', with the aim of coming to understand nature and its laws, philosophy employs its age-old method of rational speculation in

not only understanding 'matter' but also the cosmos. In both, however, the notion of matter provides the basic idea with which nature can be made more intelligible to man. But what is the conception of matter in each of them?

3.1.1 MATTER IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORLD

In the world of philosophy, matter first appears in the context of the discussions of change and the constitution of things. And then it appears in making a distinction between two orders of being and constructing a theory of knowledge connecting the two orders. Lets examine Atomists and Aristotle in an attempt to explain this.

The earliest philosophical speculations that relate to matter were attempts to explain the origin and structure of the physical world.² The thinking was that there must be some entity from which all other things came into being and that this entity was some kind of material. To Bertrand Russell³, atomist philosophers were perhaps the earliest thinkers to come out with a clear conception of matter. They believed that everything was composed of atoms, which were physically, but not geometrically indivisible. To atomists, atoms are the ultimate reality and hence any physical thing is a combination of atoms. How did Aristotle view matter?

Aristotle approached the subject of matter from the point of view of his theory of nature. According to R.G. Collingwood, Aristotle conceived that which contains matter as that which is subject to the process of change, movement, or becoming.⁴ He looked at matter as a property in things. He saw it as being imperceptible and not possible to be known since that which one can have clear conceptions of is always form, and form to him was not matter. He looked at matter as indeterminate since it was that which "might be" but not organized into this or that specific form or structure. Hence, he identified matter with potentiality.

He hence observed that, "By matter I mean that which in itself has neither quality nor quantity nor any of the other attributes by which being is determined."⁵ Although matter is unknowable and indescribable, to Aristotle, it could not be banished from cosmology, because it is the limiting case or vanishing point at the negative end of the process of nature. Everything in nature is constantly developing, and hence, realizing itself or becoming in actuality what it always was potentially. Matter is the indeterminacy, which is the negative aspect of potentiality. For example, a chick is trying to become a hen, but it is not yet a hen. There is however, in it a *nisus* towards the form of a hen and also something in virtue of which that *nisus* has not yet reached its goal. The "something" is what Aristotle calls matter. Matter is thus to Aristotle the unrealizedness of unrealized potentiality. Because there is no such thing as a wholly unrealized

potentiality, a nisus that is altogether ineffective, there is no such thing as pure or mere matter.

Accordingly, there is always and everywhere matter in the process of organizing itself, that is, matter acquiring form. But matter completely disappears when form is fully realized and potentiality is resolved into actuality. Hence, whatever is pure actuality contains no matter. Thus, anything situated somewhere in space is material, because it might be somewhere else and still remain itself. But there is nothing, which God might be and is not. The things, which he is not, for example, a stone, are things, which he could not be without ceasing to be God. Hence, to Aristotle, God is pure actuality and contains no matter. He proposes that there are only three kinds of substances, namely, those that are sensible and perishable, for example, plants and animals; those that are sensible but not perishable, for example, heavenly bodies; and those that are neither sensible nor perishable, for example, God.⁶

In recapitulation, Aristotle saw things that one comes across as constituted into two things namely, matter and form. Each body is a composite of matter. But it is in virtue of the form that matter is a definite thing. This means, it is form that gives unity to a portion of matter and that this unity is usually teleological. Not everything has matter. There are eternal things, and these have no matter, except those of them that are movable in space.

Matter without form is no matter at all but only potentiality. But, form exists independently of matter in which it is exemplified. The concept of matter and form in Aristotle is, therefore, connected with the distinction of potentiality and actuality. As observed, bare matter is a potentiality of form. All change is evolution, in the sense that after the change the thing in question has more form than before. That which has more form is considered to be more 'actual'. God is pure form and pure actuality. Hence, in God, there can be no change. In a way, Aristotle saw the universe and everything in it as developing towards something continually better than what went before.

In the philosophical world, therefore, there is no consensus over what 'matter' is and the states it undergoes. Whereas atomists looked at it as a minute physical entity ever in motion, Aristotle looked at it as a mere potentiality, which disappears when it (potentiality) resolves into actuality.

3.1.2 MATTER IN THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD

The sciences, specifically the physical ones, basically study matter. The question to ask is whether or not matter has always meant the same thing in the world of science. The answer is no. Matter has not meant the same thing to all scientists. R. G. Collingwood for example, finds two different conceptions of matter in the sciences⁷. He calls them, the old and the new conceptions or theories of matter.

3.1.2.1 THE OLD THEORY OF MATTER.

The old theory of matter is the corpuscular or atomic theory of matter. The physical scientists inherited it from the atomists of ancient Greece. It reigned up to the nineteenth century as an expression of the fundamental truth about the physical world. The world of nature was taken to be made of solid particles moving in space. Each particle, physically considered, was atomic, physically indivisible and indestructible, and had a certain size and shape. It also had certain physical properties of which the most fundamental was impenetrability. The impenetrability of matter impeded it from occupying the same place as any other particle. Hence, at any given moment, it had a place of its own, in which it was entirely situated and in which no other particle was contained. Since one particle could move in any direction, it was always possible for the parts of two particles to intersect so as to bring both to the same place at the same time. They could collide and the impact could change the direction of their movements. To this theory, each particle possessed inertia, which enabled it to move with uniform velocity in a straight line when in motion, or remain forever stationary, when at rest. The uniform motion or rest could persist until interfered with by the impact of another particle.

This theory led to a number of notions. First and foremost was the notion which supposed that movement is merely an accident that happens to a body, and that the body enjoys its own proper nature irrespective of such

accidents. Hence, a body was seen to be what it was at every instant of its history, and nothing that could happen to it could alter its physical attributes. Similarly this theory of matter conceived motion as something external, added to matter, which already was enjoying its own proper attributes independently of such addition. To this view, an instantaneous photograph of matter would reveal its entire nature. This theory was subscribed to for over two centuries, until new and fresh reflections on matter revealed some new realities hitherto ignored. The new revelations led to a direct shift in the understanding of the concept of matter and hence the new theory of matter.

3.1.2.2 THE NEW THEORY OF MATTER

The new theory of matter, Collingwood observes, is embodied in the electron theory. To this theory, the chemical atom is not an ultimate corpuscle, but a constellation of electrons. Atoms with one set of chemical qualities can be changed into atoms with another set by knocking an electron off them. This theory brought forth a very important new conception of chemical quality. That it depended not upon the quantitative aspect of the atom, its weight, but upon the pattern formed by the electrons that compose it. The pattern is not a static one, but dynamic, a pattern constantly changing in a definite rhythmical way. The idea of rhythmical pattern as a link between quantity and quality is important in the modern theory of nature for two reasons. First, it provides a connection between those hitherto unconnected notions, and secondly, reveals a new

significance in the idea of time. If an atom of hydrogen possesses the qualities of hydrogen, not merely because it consists of a certain number of electrons, moves in a certain number of electrons, or merely because those atoms are arranged in a certain way, but because they move in a certain rhythmical way, it follows that within a given instant of time the atom does not possess those qualities at all. It only possesses them in a tract of time long enough for the rhythm of the movement to establish itself.

Motion and life were taken as examples. At a glance there is no difference between a body in motion and a body at rest. And for life, the only thing that differentiates a living body from a dead one is that in the living animal certain rhythmical processes and changes are going on which are absent from the dead body. Hence, life, like motion, takes time and has no instantaneous existence. To the electron theory, movement is not an accident that happens to a body. It looks at an atom as a moving pattern of electrons. It assimilated the chemical properties of matter to the moral qualities of a mind or the vital qualities of an organism in making them a function of time.

This is seeing matter essentially as a process, activity, or something very much like life. This solves the difficulty posed by the dualism between impact and attraction. It denies impact as a vera cause altogether and reduces it to a special case of attraction and repulsion. No particle of matter

ever comes into contact with another particle. Every particle is surrounded by a field of force, conceived on the analogy of the magnetic field. When, therefore, one body bounces off another, this is not because of an impact of body upon body, it is because of repulsion. There is, therefore, a fundamental alteration in the structure of matter.

In this theory, the energies belonging to material bodies do not explain the extension and the mass of each body by itself. For example, a cubic inch of iron only occupies a cubic inch because of the equilibrium between the attractive and repulsive forces of the atoms composing it, and these are only atoms of iron because of the rhythmical patterns set up by the attractive and repulsive forces of their constituent electrons. Chemical qualities as well as physical and quantitative properties are conceived as a function or activity. Matter is what it is because it does what it does, that is, its being what it is, is the same thing as its doing what it does. A similarity emerged between matter, on the one hand, and mind and life, on the other. Matter is not contrasted with mind and life as a realm in which being is independent of acting.

There is one major implication if matter, as is the case, is taken to be inherently and essentially activity. The implication is that what is called a particle of matter is a focus of activity. Its activity would necessarily have a double character. This is in relation to itself, and secondly, in its relation to

other particles. In its relation to itself, it is a self-developing and thus, self-maintaining process – something self-contained and enduring. Therefore, matter according to this theory possesses its own characteristics, whether chemical or physical, only because it moves. Time is, therefore, a factor in its very being, and that being is fundamentally motion. All bodies are in motion all the time, and since this motion is activity, it must display itself in the double form as immanent activity and transient activity, so that everybody must act both on it, as moving itself, and also act on others as moving them. To this conception, there are four types of matter, solids, which keep the same shapes unless acted on by large forces; liquids, which have molecules with weaker forces between them, hence it flows; gases and vapors, that fill all the available space, and, gas or pressure, which is explained by assuming that the molecules make elastic collisions with each other on the walls of the container, and objects inside the gas.⁸

In summary, the new theory of matter, like the old one, looks at material universe as essentially atomic or corpuscular in its structure and mechanical operations. There is no empty space. Where there is no physical property, there are light waves. Similarly, matter is not unchanging substance. It is a way of grouping events. Some events belong to groups that can be regarded as material things. Others, such as light waves, do not. Consequently, it is the events that are the stuff of the world, and each of them is of brief duration. This conception regards space as neither a

substance nor an adjective of extended bodies, but a system of relations. The explanation of the way in which the world works is entirely in terms of mass, shape, size and motion; these properties being seen as the primary qualities of matter. The implication of this is that secondary qualities, such as tastes, colours, and temperatures, that are ascribed to matter, are not in matter as such but in one that is tasting, perceiving, and feeling, although they are produced in people by powers in the external bodies.

From this, it is noticeable that matter can be analyzed into atomic and nuclear constituents, and that it can be integrated into higher structures. There are limits in both directions, but science has not yet arrived at them. Even the smallest physical entities possess structures, which are intricate, and the extent of the universe remains for all of astronomy's effects, largely unknown. There has not yet been a successful penetration inside the electron or outside the metagalaxy. The lower structures remain intact in the higher structures. Thus, chemical compounds and living organisms are equally material objects. A decomposition of a higher structure if carried sufficiently results in a material object with a lower structure. But at whatever analytical or integrative level, it is still the same matter; a static substance having, as its property, a potentiality of reaction. Hence the unity of the universe is a material unity.

3.2 CONCLUSION

Matter is one of the two ways in which nature presents itself to man. The second way is energy or motion. All physical objects therefore, consist of matter, although the objects themselves may differ widely from one another. But they have one thing in common; they all occupy space and time. According to science, matter is anything that occupies space. All matter has inertia, that is, it resists any change in its condition of rest or of motion. The quantity of matter in an object is 'mass'. The earth's gravitational attraction for a given mass gives matter its weight. Gravity's pull on an object decreases as it moves away from the centre of the earth. For this reason, objects that move from the earth's atmosphere into outer space 'lose weight' even though the mass, or quantity of matter, remains the same.

As regards energy, when one sees people, animals, or machines working, feel heat from fire, or see light from an electric bulb, one becomes aware of energy. All these processes involve energy, defined by scientists as the ability to do work, or to move matter. Heat is the variety of energy most familiar to man. All other kinds of energy may be changed into heat. Therefore, scientists also define energy as heat, or anything that can be changed into heat. Matter can be changed into energy and energy into matter. Such changes may occur only under unusual circumstances like when radium and other radioactive elements disintegrate and when atomic bombs explode.

An atom is the smallest particle of an element that can enter into chemical reaction to form a compound. When atoms combine with other atoms they form larger particles called molecules. But they may also unite by acquiring charges to form electrically charged atoms, or groups of atoms, called ions. Water, for example, consists of molecules, each of which contains two atoms of hydrogen and of oxygen. When two or more chemical elements unite, they form a compound. Compounds may be organic or inorganic. Organic compounds contain the element carbon. They are called organic because most of the compounds found in living organisms (plants and animals) contain carbon. All other compounds are classified as inorganic.

As far as states of matter are concerned, matter exists in three physical states, that is, solid, liquid, and gas. This is best demonstrated by water. Ice is solid water, when heated, it melts to form liquid (water), and when the water is heated to cause its temperature to rise to a certain point, the water boils, producing steam, which is a gas. All solids have form, hardness, and rigidity. Some solids, for example, salt or sulfur, are brittle and hence shatter when struck. Others have considerable tensile strength and resist being pulled apart. Still others, particularly metals, have malleability – the ability to be reduced into thin sheets, and ductility – the ability to be drawn into wires. Liquids have no shape of their own. But they have the ability to flow. They take the shape of any container in which they are placed. As for gases, regardless of the composition of their molecules, have almost

identical physical behaviour. Compared with liquids or solids, they have low density. They exert pressure equally in all directions, and all are compressible. When heated, gases expand greatly or exert a greater pressure when confined in a vessel or fixed volume.

As understood by philosophers like Democritus, matter was simple and solid, small, irreducible bits of material, having the primary physical properties, such as mass, density and dimension. It lacked any of the sensible qualities, hence, it was inert and static, and did not contain within itself the principles of motion and change. Through the help of science many varieties of matter are recognizable today. Each variety possesses certain characteristics common to all samples of its special kind. The recognition is based on knowledge of these special characteristics or properties. These properties distinguish one kind of matter from others. Generally, matter has two main types of properties, physical, and chemical.

Physical properties are recognized by sight, smell, touch, taste, or hearing, that is, by the senses. Hence, one can recognize salt or sugar by taste, copper or gold by color and stench by odour. These are examples of some of the physical properties of matter. Another physical property of matter is density, or the amount of mass for each unit of volume. Because of the difference in density, a block of cork weighs less than a block of any common woods the same size. Other physical properties are solubility,

which is, the ability of one kind of matter to dissolve in another, and conductivity, the ability of matter to conduct heat or electricity.

Chemical properties of matter describe how a substance acts when it undergoes chemical change. For example, a chemical property of iron is its ability to combine with oxygen in moist air to form iron oxide, or rust. These changes in the composition of matter are, so to speak, chemical changes. Some changes alter the value of physical properties, such as weight or density, but produce no change in its composition. Physical scientists call these, physical changes. When, for example water changes to steam, it undergoes physical, but not chemical change.

What, therefore, is matter, which is seen by materialists to be the ultimate reality? According to the foregoing, there are basically two conceptions of matter. The first is the Aristotelian one that denies matter real existence. It takes matter as lacking independence and identity. Matter is hence not 'a thing' to be studied. It is merely potentiality, which ceases to be the moment actuality comes about. This is certainly not the kind of matter that materialists talk about. They talk of matter that is independent, and actual. This is the kind of matter first promulgated by atomists and then immensely propagated by physical science. It is a conception that looks at matter as a physical entity capable of various activities, for example, forming the

universe. Therefore, anything seen, touched, or smelt is a product of matter undergoing motion.

After examining matter, the way it has been done, an issue that arises is whether or not the world is composed of only physical, natural, or material things. More often than not, human beings conduct their affairs in a manner to suggest that there are non – material things. Idealists, for example, teach that it is the world of minds, non-material things, that is real and true. In the next chapter, therefore, the issue of non-material things is to be explored.

END NOTES

1. Ernan Mc Mullin; (Editor.), The Concept of Matter in Greek and Medieval Philosophy, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1965, p 5.
2. Done mainly by the pre-Socratic philosophers and specifically the Ionians -Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes
3. Bertrand Russell; A History of Western Philosophy, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1961.
4. R. G. Collingwood; The Idea of Nature, Oxford University Press, London, 1960.
5. Ibid. p 92
6. Bertrand Russell; Op. cit. p 177.
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8. Harvey Johnson & John Briggs; Notes and Problems in Physical Science, Heinemann Educational Books, Nairobi, 1977, p 9.

CHAPTER FOUR

INCORPOREAL THINGS

4:0 PREAMBLE

Belief in incorporeal things is widespread. It is therefore almost obvious to some people that there are minds, souls, spirits and gods. As a consequence, one may talk of mental states or mental capabilities, as being distinct from bodily states and bodily capabilities. There are elaborate narrations of how, for example, the soul transmigrates or proceeds to heaven or hell when one dies. Human beings have ascribed God with numerous attributes and even invoked Him in the conduct of national affairs.

Materialists dismiss belief in incorporeal things and insist that if they exist, then they are material and, therefore, subject to the wear and tear that all material things must experience. It is absolutely necessary to look at the "things" that are dismissed by materialists, with the view of finding out why the dismissal, and whether or not materialists are mistaken in their stand. The guiding question is, "how can belief in incorporeal things be justified, defended, or their existence proved?" Basing on three incorporeal things, namely, God, mind, and soul this issue is being addressed.

4:1 GOD

Throughout the history of mankind, people have believed that there is a reality or force in the universe greater than them and that their lives either directly or indirectly depend on this force. They identify this force, regard it with awe and seek good relation with it. This force, more often than not, become their God or gods. Generally, many early peoples were polytheistic as they viewed the world as full of gods representing the natural forces that they did not understand, such as the sun, the wind, and the rain. In Mesopotamia, for example, the Sumerians had An, the god of heaven, Enlil, the air-god, Enki, the water god, and Ninhursag, the great mother-earth goddess.¹ In ancient Greece, there were, among other gods, Zeus, the god of lighting, and Apollo, the sun god.

With time, polytheism took a different dimension, in the sense that all gods were not seen as equal. One of them could be regarded as the most powerful. In Egypt, for example, Aton was regarded as the supreme god during the reign of King Amenhotep (1370 BC-1350 BC), in Greek mythology, Zeus became the king of gods, and, the followers of Zoroaster elevated Ahura-Mazda as the supreme god.² Major religions today, for example, Christianity and Islam stress monotheism. To each one of them, all the world's powers are expressions of one single Supreme Being. To believers, the existence of God is the most certain of their convictions. Hence, there is God who is not only in charge of their affairs but also the

entire universe. There are, two traditions regarding God.³ First is the tradition that conceives God as an impersonal process. This involves seeing God as an empowering process, state of being, or liberating truth. In this sense, God may be conceived of as the “good”, “truth”, “beauty”, “absolute”, or the impersonal power that permeates all things. The second tradition conceives God as personal, forging an analogy between the divine and the human. It involves attributing the divine being or beings with personal names and features. Hence, one would talk of Jehovah, Allah, or Nyasaye in a personalized manner. He is thought of as being all good, all knowing, all-powerful, holy, and, above all, eternal.

4.1.1 EXISTENCE OF GOD

After noting the fact that God, as a supreme, transcendental, and non-material being is widely believed to exist, the question that follows is whether or not God, as an incorporeal thing really exists? Differently put, how can one go about demonstrating, showing, or proving that God, without physical extension and, therefore, beyond sense data, exists? The question of whether or not God exists has pre-occupied scholars for a long time. Frantic efforts have been made to prove and show that God indeed exists and that belief in him is not in vain. What are some of these efforts? Are they plausible?

Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, William Paley, David Hume and Rene Descartes, among others, are major demonstrators of the existence of God. St Anselm⁴ in arguing for the existence of God said that the reality of the existence of God is involved in the idea of God. He based his argument on the view that there is something unique in the idea of God, so that it cannot be a mere idea. To him, God exists as "He is that than which no greater can be conceived". To be real is thus involved in what is meant by God. Hence, one cannot think of God as it is done except as existing. In agreeing with St. Anselm, Rene Descartes⁵ saw the idea of God as that which one is born with (innate) and that God exists as the only possible cause of one's idea of him. This is the rationalist, or what is popularly referred to as the ontological argument for the existence of God. It looks for the evidence of God's existence in the idea of a perfect being.

Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the greatest demonstrator of God's existence. He formulated five 'proofs' or 'ways' of doing this⁶. He reckoned, knowledge about God begins with the experience of sense objects. For example, a major characteristic of all sense objects is that their existence requires a cause, for nothing comes from nothing. From this understanding, he came up with five proofs, which are as follows:

- (i) Proof from motion: Proof from motion states that things in the world are in motion; whatever is in motion must have been moved by something else. This cannot go to infinity; for without a first

mover, there would be no motion to be imparted from one thing to another. Hence, God exists as the first mover.

- (ii) Proof from efficient cause: According to the proof from efficient cause, everything that happens has a cause and this cause in turn has a cause. This goes on in a series that must either be infinite or have its starting point in a first cause. He dismissed the possibility of an infinite regress of causes and so he concluded that there must be a first cause, which is God.
- (iii) Proof from contingency of the world: According to this proof everything in the world is contingent, that is, it is true of each item that it might not have existed at all or might have existed differently. The proof of this is that there was a time when it did not exist. To Aquinas, if everything were contingent, there would have been no causal agency. Since there are things in existence, there must, therefore, be something that is not contingent, and that thing is God.
- (iv) Proof from the degrees of perfection: This states that one finds that some beings are more and some less good, true, and noble. But these and other ways of comparing things are possible only because things resemble in their different ways something that is the maximum. There must be something that is truest, noblest, and best. Similarly, since things have more or less being, or a lower or higher form of being, such as when a stone is compared

with human beings, there must also be something, which is 'most being'. Aquinas argued that the maximum in any genus is the cause of everything in that genus. Hence, there must be something, which is to all beings the cause of their being good. The something is God.

(v) Proof from the order of the universe: To Aquinas, one sees things, which do not possess intelligence, such as parts of the natural world, or parts of the human body, behave in an orderly manner. They act in special and predictable ways to achieve certain ends or functions. Because these things act to always achieve ends, it is plain that they achieve their end, not accidentally, but designedly. However, an ear or a lung cannot carry out a function unless they are directed by something that has intelligence. Aquinas concluded that some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their ends. This being, so the conclusion is, is God.

Rene Descartes and Bishop Berkeley agreed with Aquinas. Descartes⁷ asked a question of the possible causes of his own existence. The possibilities were three, namely, himself, his parents, and God. He could not have caused himself to exist, he reasoned, because he would not be limited, that is, nothing would be lacking to him, and he would doubt or desire nothing. He also dismissed the possibility of having been brought

into being by his parents for, if they caused his being, "who caused theirs"? This is bound to lead one into an infinite series of causes. Therefore, God exists as the cause of his existence as a thinking being.

On his part, Berkeley⁸ realized that he was given ideas of which he knew that he was not the cause. He could frame images, think of something, and then stop thinking of it, as he chose. That the ideas obeyed his will showed that his will was a sufficient cause and explanation of them. If he opened his eyes and looked in the garden, he saw a tree whether he willed or not. He realized that some of his ideas must have a cause other than himself. This cause could not be matter, nor could it be any idea or set of ideas, for ideas are passive and not causal agents. The cause must have been a spirit. Only a very powerful spirit could give him all the ideas of sense that he had, and only a wise and benevolent spirit would give him the ideas in such lawful and regular sequences. Such a spirit must be supposed. And since the spirit had some of the attributes assigned to God in Christian theology, Berkeley called it as the God. In other words, to Berkeley, God exists as the cause of people's sensations.

God's existence is also proved by the argument from design, also called teleological argument. This argument infers that a particular aspect or character of the world requires the existence of God as an explanation. The argument bases itself on the presence of what may be called order or

patterns in the universe, and the suitability or adaptability of things to various ends. According to this argument, God must be the source of that order or pattern. For example, the human body has a delicate structure of eyes, ears, nervous system, and the brain, among others. It looks like it was designed in such a way as to enable people live, see, and move about in the world.

The greatest exponent of this view is William Paley⁹ who saw the rotation of the planets in the solar system and the regular procession of the seasons and the complex structure and mutual adaptation of the parts of a living organism in the world suggesting design. These things cannot be happening out of chance. There must be a designer, and the designer is God. God, therefore, exists as the designer of the order in the world and the source of the suitability or adaptability of things to their various ends.

4.1.2 ANALYSIS

After looking at the above classical attempts at proving the existence of a spiritual being called God, the question that follows is whether or not the arguments provide enough evidence for the acceptance of God's existence. The verdict is that they do not. An adamant atheist may not be persuaded to change his/her stand. This is because of two reasons. First, these "proofs" do not lead to certain knowledge of God, and secondly, they are based on assumptions and on relativity, both of which, are difficult to

defend. How?. The ontological argument, to begin with, does not, for example, provide evidence of God's existence, but rather it only leads an already formed faith into a deeper appreciation of God. It is only relevant to a believer. Otherwise a non-believer can easily deny that there is something in reality 'than which a greater cannot be conceived'. Once this denial is made, it seems, the argument cannot stand. What is however analytically correct is that if there is an infinitely perfect being, that being must have existence. But there seems to be no contradiction in rejecting the perfectness and greatness of God together with his existence.

Proofs by Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, and Berkeley, that are called cosmological are also not devoid of assumptions difficult to defend. A postulation of a first cause, or mover is self-contradictory since, if it is the case that there are no uncaused causes, logically there cannot be a first cause. That is, it is fallacious to assert that there are no uncaused causes and then move on to assume the existence of a first cause. Hence, "first cause", is arrived at perhaps not by way of logic but by faith with the aim of precluding the infinite regress of motions or causes. But, infinite regress does not pose a contradiction and hence should be dismissed rationally.

When it comes to the proof from order or design in the cosmos, it is obvious that it is based on relativity and hence prone to dismissal as lacking objectivity. Order, suitability or designs are relative terms that tend to be

inductively arrived at. The problem with induction is that one contrary case invalidates the argument. And this is exactly the case with the argument from design. One may wonder what kind of order and suitability there is when virtually everything including seasons, eyes, the heart, kidneys, among others, fail, more often than not, in their purposes. If an all-powerful and all-knowing supreme being, God, designed the world with specific purposes and goals, it can be argued, all the hazards that are presently prevalent on earth would be absent.

The most incriminating criticism of these proofs, however, is that they do not make one come to experience God. It can be argued that the surest way of proving existence is for the thing to be sensed. Hence, getting someone to experience something is more convincing. The surest proof of the existence of God would be that which makes Him be sensed, that is, one based on a case of someone who actually experienced God. As much as there have been numerous cases of people who in all sincerity claim to have experienced God, either through dreams, revelations, miracles, or other mystical religious experiences, the claims are not beyond any reasonable doubt since, they, (claims) are relative and hence difficult to defend. The point here is that it seems impossible to objectively prove the existence of God. At best there are the subjective experiences that an individual may have of God, which one cannot prove to a doubting person,

and the kind of attempts presented as arguments for the existence of God, efforts that are worthwhile but can be dismissed.

The argument here is that God's existence cannot be proved objectively. But it would be fallacious to argue that because God's existence cannot be proved, He does not exist. This is because of a possibility of He existing but being out of reach, discovery and therefore, knowledge of people's objective proof or perception. Why is this so? This is because humans are limited beings, hence, they are not all knowing.

4.2 MIND

Anaxagoras (500-428 BC) was the first philosopher to examine mind.¹⁰ To him, mind was the primary cause of physical changes. As quoted by Guthrie, he observed:

... mind is something infinite and independent, it is mixed with nothing, but alone and by itself... it is the finest and purest of all things and has judgment at everything and greatest power; and everything that has life, both greater and smaller, all these mind controls; and it controlled the whole revolution, to make it revolve in the beginning... And the things that are being mingled and those that are being separated off and divided, mind determined them all. Mind set everything in order, what was to be, what was but is not now, and all that now is and shall be, and this revolution in which revolve the stars, sun, moon, air and fire that are being separated off ...¹¹

From this quote, it is clear that Anaxagoras separated mind, as the moving cause from the moved – matter, and he confined mind to the first step of initiating motion in what, to him, had been a motionless mass. Mind was conscious and intelligent, its knowledge and judgment having no limitations.

It governs itself and is ultimately responsible for all movement of matter. Therefore, it retains a form of control over the organic world. It is identical with the psyche or animating principle in living things. By observing the above, Anaxagoras began a topic that up to now still interests scholars. Idealists, insist that there are no bodies, that there are only minds.

Indeed it is observable that human beings do things that can be described as bodily and others that are non-bodily. For example, man can move himself; he can crawl, walk, cry, talk, and swim. These are bodily activities as they involve a part or parts of the body in action. As far as this is concerned, a human being has a body, in which many other bodily processes and events take place, like the functioning of organs such as the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver and the brain. There are, however, other things, which a person can do, that do not seem to be bodily activities. For example, a person thinks about things, decides on courses of action, hopes and desires. These activities seem to be different from bodily activities and processes, as they seem not to involve any part of the human body. They seem to involve a non-bodily and therefore non-material thing. Is the non-bodily thing that they seem to involve what is universally taken to be the mind? The question therefore is, "What is mind"?

4.2.1. WHAT MIND IS

'Mind' as a term finds usage in various ways. For example, it can be used to mean 'memory' as in, "I can't bring that to mind", or as 'decision' as in, "I have not made up my mind", or as 'opinion', as in "Peter has decided to marry a second wife which to my mind is wrong", or as a warning 'to be careful' as in, "Every driver should mind the potholes", or as to "take care", as in "Jane has offered to mind children while others are away". What is the definition of mind? Mind is definable as "that which thinks, feels and wills, exercises perception, judgment, reflection, as in a human or other conscious being."¹² This definition reveals that our language habits do much of our thinking for us. For, if there is thinking, the definition implies, there must be something, which does the thinking since, to think is a verb and a verb must have a subject. Hence, mind – a noun to serve as a subject of 'to think' is defined as that which thinks. What is 'that which thinks?' One may ask. That is, verbs describe activities, and subjects of verbs describe agents, so, what is the agent that 'does' the thinking? There are various answers to this question. The accepted scientific answer is that the brain is the thing that does the thinking.

In philosophy, a long tradition has demanded that a distinction be made between the brain as matter, and the supposedly immaterial mind. However, there is agreement that an organism lacking a brain also lacks a mind. But even though the mind may have its seat in the brain, it is not identical with it.

And, a person may retain a seemingly intact brain, for example, in an autopsy, but may nevertheless have lost his 'mind'. One may go further and attribute a mind to entities, which have no identifiable brain. One may speak, for example, of a group mind, for instance, as in "in the mind of Africans". Further still one may assert the existence of a mind or an analogue of a mind in an even more diffuse entity, say a nation, a culture, or a civilization. And lastly, as Hegel did, one may go to the extremes and assert the operation of a 'mind' – as an 'intelligence' or 'idea' independently of the existence of matter. This may lead to the assertion that a 'mind' existed prior to matter, it created matter and is guiding the evolution of the tangible world – the cosmic, the biological and the social.

Several efforts have been made to explain mind. An examination of these attempts shows that like other incorporeal things, mind poses problems concerning its existence, nature, and relations, problems that have preoccupied scholars. One theory of mind is that, mind is a metaphysical substance, different in kind from physical nature. Morris Charles,¹³ writing on substances, points out that there are empirical and metaphysical substances. An empirical substance is that which exists, has qualities, and is related, without being a quality or a relation. In this sense, substance is self sufficient and independent reality that is the bearer of attributes. A metaphysical substance, on the other hand, is when a substance is regarded as a substratum, which upholds and unites qualities without being

itself a quality or a combination of qualities. In this case, there are no qualities. The empirical use of the term 'substance' merely refers to the fact that there are things, which have qualities and relations. But the metaphysical use of the term postulates a substratum, which bears the attributes but which is not itself a part of the whole of the class of those attributes. Hence, the food that is eaten, the timber that is used, for example, in construction, plus many other empirical things, are a set of material substances, partly because they can be weighed and measured.

Mind, on the other hand, is an immaterial (metaphysical) substance, capable of continued and independent existence. It is analyzable in terms of qualities and a substratum, which has relations and supports these qualities without itself being a relation or quality or sum of qualities.¹⁴ The theory of mind as a metaphysical substance leads to the view that man is made up of two different substances, namely, mind (metaphysical) and matter (empirical/physical). Matter can be seen, felt, occupies space and has weight. But mind is a substance present in a person, but takes up no space and cannot be weighed, seen or touched.

There is also the view that mind is nothing but a process. The greatest proponent of this view was Hegel¹⁵. To this view, mind is not a static thing, but a concrete actuality in its energy. And, the world as a whole is a single comprehensive process, which may equally well be called 'mind' or 'thought'

or 'self-ordering-spirit'. The essential feature of this process is that it is systematic, hence, instead of being a mere succession of change, the process is the development of a universal or identity, which persists throughout. This universal or identity is the Absolute mind or spirit, which attains its development or self-realization by appearing in forms which seem alien to it, but which are actually only those forms of it through which greater self-realization is obtained. Since the Absolute mind comes to itself in the production and assimilation of others, mind is, in Hegelian terms, a concrete universal. All of nature, for instance, becomes a manifestation of the Absolute mind by which this mind attains its fuller concreteness. As a self-evolving universal, mind has no objects, which Absolute mind knows are its own products, its own self in the form of 'otherness'. It is natural, then, that consciousness should be considered as ultimately self-consciousness, knowledge as self-knowledge, substance as self or subject.

Mind is just a relation, another line of thinking states. This view was paradoxically strongly advocated by David Hume.¹⁶ It is paradoxical because Hume first declared war on the conceptions suggesting that mind is a relation. In the end, it is he who provided some kind of a foundation head for relational theory of mind. Instead of regarding the contents of the experienced world as intrinsically mental, Hume suggested that mind is simply a grouping of perceptions. So interpreted, mind becomes dependent upon a non-mental field of content and experienced contents are no longer

dependent upon it. Since a mind is nothing but a heap of collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, for a content to pass out of mind it would merely cut off its membership with the group of perceptions, which constitute the mind in question.

Finally, there is the theory that mind is just a function. This is an approach distinctive of the pragmatic or instrumentalist movement as it developed from William James to John Dewey and George H. Mead¹⁷ This view involves taking function in two senses; as "purpose" and as a 'certain role'. The theory takes two main directions depending upon whether the term function is taken to mean "purpose" or "role". Hence, when function is taken to mean purpose, to the theory mind is an instrument in the service of organic needs, meaning, providing organic aid is the function of mind. And, when function is taken to mean role, the theory maintains that mentality is a characteristic of events in a certain role without holding that this functioning which constitutes mentality has as its purpose or function the furthering of organic behavior. This means, mind on the one hand, serves the purpose of furthering organic action, while, on the other hand, it is regarded as the functioning of events that are not intrinsically mental. Mentality then is similar to the status of being a paperweight, or better, an actor. Whether a specific material object is or is not a paperweight depends upon the role it performs.

4.2.2 ANALYSIS

If it is granted that there is a mind, the question that follows is “how does it relate to the body”? Is it distinct from the body or are they one and the same thing. As seen, most scholars view mind as a distinct entity divisible into several faculties, namely, will, reason, and memory. Hence, mind, like the muscles, develop through exercise, so that the way to strengthen the mind is to give the faculties work to do. This view poses a problem. It is to do with the seeming interaction between what is called ‘mind’ and the body. Mind seems not to be a distinct entity from the body. For example, it seems that drugs, illness or a blow on the head disturbs the ‘mental faculties’. Further, the mind, like the body seems to be affected by age, since the mind seems to fail, as people grow old.

A keen look at this problem can lead to two possibilities. The first one is that there is no such thing as mind, and therefore no mental states or processes. That is to say that, what is called mental, if keenly scrutinized ends up being the body. The second is that there is mind hence mental states and processes but these states and processes have some kind of symbiotic existence with those of the body. This second possibility would claim relationship or interaction between the body and the mind. For this reason, continuous headache can make one, for example, quarrelsome, and fear of heights can make one fail to climb a mountain. Also, the abnormal behaviour of persons can be explained by means of guilt feelings,

repressed desires, or neurotic fixations. Further, certain injections in the body can make one unconscious, and sometimes, brain operations can be performed in order to change the whole mental state and, therefore, the whole personality of a person.

This makes it seem that certain mental phenomena can affect the body and that certain bodily phenomena can affect the mind. The position being taken is that if there is mind, then it interacts with the body, meaning, each human being is composed of both body and mind, but both are incomplete until they form a unity called a person. Explained further, man is a single composite substance made up of two distinct principles. Hence, it is the person, who thinks and remembers, it is the person who walks and swims, but neither the mind nor the body.

Yet it can plausibly be argued that perhaps mind is just something that happens, and is not a separate, identifiable thing. It is just a quality. For example, it is known that water is wet, but atoms of hydrogen and oxygen are not wet, and neither are the energy charges that make them up. Wetness is a quality and hence, a product. When energy charges, organized in the form of hydrogen and oxygen atoms are brought together in such a way as to form water, and if one breaks water down into its separate parts, the wetness is gone and so is the water itself. In the same way, mind may be a quality that comes into being as people interact with the

world around them. Hence, mind, like wetness, so it can be argued, is something that emerges or comes into being when organisms reach a certain level of complexity in development.

The foregoing does not really answer our question of whether or not mind exists. There are no direct attempts to prove the existence of mind. Thinkers have been concerned with mainly what mind really is and how it relates with the body. This is because of the assumption, may be resulting from common sense, that because man is a conscious being and "mind" is the "custodian" of consciousness, then mind exists. It is therefore evident that it is very difficult to prove to a doubting person that mind truly exists as a separate entity from the body.

4.3 THE SOUL

In Longman Concise English Dictionary 'soul' is defined as "the immaterial essence of animating principle of an individual life; the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings, or the universe"¹⁸ According to this definition, the soul is immaterial and therefore spiritual. It is the 'anima', which gives activity to the body. And, it is embodied or tied to the body. The question follows, "is there an immaterial thing in living things called the soul?" If yes," does it endure or survive bodily death?" Answers to these questions vary. What is notable is that beliefs in

the reality of the soul are widespread, both in what may be called 'primitive societies' and in the 'civilized' ones.

Plato was the first philosopher to give a systematic account of the soul. He said that the soul is a simple and immaterial entity that contained no parts. The soul is a spirit that is an active principle, meaning that, the soul is what activates the body. Hence, to the human person the soul is the principle of motion as it is intrinsically active. Aristotle concurred with Plato by stating that it is the soul that differentiates living from non-living things. Living things have a soul and non-living things do not have it. This means, to living things the substantial form is the soul and hence it is the source of the functions and behaviours of living things. Consequently, plants have a vegetative soul, animals have a sensitive soul, and human beings have a rational soul.¹⁹ In short, the soul is the life of the body such that without it the body loses life and therefore activity. The soul is the life of the body because it is characterized by self-nutrition, sensation, feeling and motivity.²⁰

4.3.1 DESTINY OF THE SOUL

If there is the soul, "what is its destiny?" Differently put, "what happens to the soul when one dies?" An answer to this question is derivable from one's conception of the relationship between the body and the soul. There are notably two different views regarding the relationship between the body and

the soul. The first one is that which is greatly advocated for by Aristotle, that the soul is bound up with the body, its work being to move the body and perceive sensible objects. Hence, the soul is the 'form' of the body and makes the body an organic whole, having purposes as a unit. To this conception, it is not possible to separate the two as they are related matter and form. A view resulting from this is that the soul perishes with the body. There is no further existence beyond bodily death. Hence, Epicurus, at death the soul is dispersed, and its atoms, which of course survive, are no longer connected with the body. Death is nothing to a person, for that which is dissolved, is without sensation, and that which lacks sensation is nothing to a person. To Aristotle, however, what is eternal and therefore immortal is the mind, which he thought was higher than the soul, and less bound to the body. The mind, he observed, is an independent substance implanted within the soul and hence incapable of being destroyed. Mind alone is capable of existence in isolation, and its objects are timeless, and therefore it is regarded as itself timeless.

However, the soul is not without bodily nature.

The second conception, which is widely subscribed to, is that which supposes a dualism of the body and the soul. This conception considers a living thing as composed of two primary principles – body and soul. In other meaning, there are two 'things' or entities, which comprise each living thing. The main proponent of this view was Plato who even asserted that the soul was a 'prisoner' trapped in a body, and that the purpose of philosophy is

free the soul from its entrapment in the body, that is, to attain one's highest perfection.²¹ This conception, therefore, leads to the distinction between the soul and the body. To George Galloway, primitive people highly subscribed to this view and even took it that the soul "could detach itself from the body to roam at large in the world, and hence one would wake up where he lay down but in the interval his/her soul would have been abroad on strange adventures."²²

This conception therefore lays ground for the separation of the soul from the body at death and also the belief in the immortality of the soul. To Plato, for example, the soul is unseen but the body is seen. Things seen are temporal but things unseen are eternal. Hence, the soul is eternal.²³ If it is eternal then it cannot perish. So, the soul is immortal. What is the destiny of the soul under this conception? It would follow that the soul disembarks from the body, and moves on to the world of 'spirits.'²⁴ This means, the soul is separated from the body at death and then starts the journey to the world of spirits. However, the soul is not without bodily resemblances. To John Mbiti, the soul is believed to retain most, if not all, of the physical and social characteristics of its human life.²⁵ As far as traditional African conceptions are concerned, it follows that the human soul is destined to the ontological mode of the spirits.

Plato also held that the soul leaves the body and goes to another world. The soul of true philosophers (virtuous people) who liberate themselves from the desires of the flesh, he taught, will after death, depart to the invisible world, to live in bliss in the company of the gods.²⁶ But the impure soul, which has loved the body, becomes a ghost, or enters into the body of an animal, such as an ass, wolf, or hawk, according to its character. This conception regarding how the soul disembarks from the body is the genesis of the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. After a person's death, it is believed, the soul picks up another body. The pioneer of this view was Pythagoras and his orphic brotherhood²⁷ that held that the soul is transformed into other kinds of living things, and that whatever comes into existence is born again in the revolutions of a certain cycle, nothing being absolutely new. Hence just as a person casts off worn-off garments and puts on others that are new, the embodied soul casts off dying bodies and takes on others that are new. This view is mainly expounded in religious belief of re-incarnation, found, for example, in the Hindu-Buddhist cultures.

4.3.2 ANALYSIS

After looking at the elaborate beliefs and ideas concerning the soul, the question that follows is, "how can one convince a doubting person that indeed there is a soul?" This question can be approached from both rationalistic and empirical points of view. From the rationalistic viewpoint one may be tempted to say that the soul is that which makes a thing active.

Two things are observed in nature, namely, living things and non-living things. What living things have and non-living things lack is activity or life. When this activity or life vanishes the body becomes a non-living thing. One may, therefore, argue that if this thing that gives activity or life to the body is what is called the soul, then "soul" is a reality and hence it exists. It is as simple as follows; living things are differentiated from non-living things because they contain life or activity. Living things therefore contain one thing more than non-living things. If "that" thing in living things is what called 'soul' then the soul exists. On the empirical front, there are reports that not only show that there is a "soul", but also that there is life after death. Resuscitated cases have yielded reports from people who had been declared dead²⁸.

The implication of this is that the soul is capable of independent existence from the body. Further, in Hindu and Buddhist cultures, it seems self-evident that people have lived many times before and must live many times again in this world²⁹. Evidence for this is that some people, claim to have certain memories of people and events experienced in a previous life. Some impartial investigators end up confirming such occurrences. Again this may reinforce the view that indeed there is a soul. Are these explanations convincing about the existence of the soul? The answer is no.

It can be argued that the rationalistic reason already advanced assumes that things were created. Otherwise if taken in the context of evolution, one may argue, living things are not special, they are only a step ahead in this natural process and hence 'non-living' things today may be 'living' tomorrow. What this means is that 'living' is just a capacity not really a substance (soul) that can depart from the body at death. Hence, there is no soul but just the capacity or activity that is inseparable from the body. When it comes to the reports from those resuscitated and re-incarnated, one major blow about them is that they present two different things about the same thing. Doesn't it sound awkward that the same thing (soul) should be re-incarnating in one culture and in the other moving straight to the "world of spirits"? Differently put, does one's soul transmigrate because one is born in say Hindu culture and that the other goes to heaven/hell because one is born say in a Christian culture? One may come to the conclusion that either only one of these is true or both are false. The possibility of both being false would inevitably mean that there are no souls.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Immense intellectual investment has gone into various attempts to demonstrate that incorporeal things, namely, God, mind, and soul exist. Philosophy recognizes two ways in which human beings may come to know what there is. One way stressed by empiricists is experience, and the other stressed by rationalists is reasoning. It is obvious one cannot come to

sense incorporeal things unless through extra-sensory devices. This means, from the empiricist's point of view, it is absurd to assert the existence of incorporeal things as they are beyond the scrutiny of human senses. What follows is that it is impossible to empirically prove that an incorporeal substance exists unless one turns to its perceived effects. And yet when one turns to its perceived effects or extensions, relativity comes in as say in revelation, or reports from resuscitated or reincarnated cases. To an empiricist, therefore, there is no way the existence of incorporeal things can be proved 'beyond any reasonable doubt'. Hence belief in God, mind, or soul is subjective and therefore empirically difficult to defend. This is where materialism comes in, for when it comes to epistemological issues, materialists are empiricists. One, therefore, would understand why materialists dismiss incorporeal things. Their existence cannot be objectively proved.

It is, however, through rationalism that 'proofs' of incorporeal things can be demonstrated. That is exactly what was seen in regard to God, mind and soul. But rational 'proof' has its own pitfalls, so much so that when it comes to proving existence, it does not lead directly to the thing to be proved. Rather, it calls in the aid of 'assumption', which was noted is a major weakness indeed. For instance, to say that God exists because there is pattern and order in the cosmos, or because there must be a first cause, has the kind of weakness or problem that is being talked about. As

observed earlier, it appears like the surest way of proving the existence of something is for the thing to be sensed, and in this case, seen. Hence, to say that animal 'A' exists is to say that it can be sensed. The conclusion here is that 'rational proofs' of the existence of incorporeal things remain mere arguments that do not lead up to the perception of the thing(s) to be proved.

Supposing that indeed the incorporeal things are a reality, what problem would this posit? The problem would be in regard to the composition of living things, especially human beings. The question would be, "does it mean that human beings are a tripartite being (body, soul and mind)?" If yes," how do these components relate and function?" As seen, to Aristotle the answer is in the affirmative, for, the soul and the body, are so close that both perish at death. But the mind is above the two; it is not perishable and hence immortal. This means that there is the body and soul as one thing and the mind as the other. This is, however, not universally acceptable. A school of thought that looks at the soul as immortal and with a capacity to either move on to the "world of spirits" or enter another body to continue with its life is bound to down play the mind and elevate the soul. This would mean that at death, the soul leaves but the mind remains to perish with the body.

It appears plausible not to draw a distinction between the body and the mind since each human being seems to be composed of both body and mind, but either of them is incomplete until both form a unity called a person. If this were the case then it would follow that the mind perishes with the body. This is looking at the person as being with a perishable side (body and mind) and then immortal one (soul).

The examination of what materialism is and the implications the doctrine can have on human life has been done. Looked at is the idea of incorporeal things and why materialists dismiss them. It is therefore prudent at this juncture to look at what may be called 'spiritualized thoughts' with the goal of establishing whether or not materialism can offer them a solution to the question of ultimate reality. Attention is therefore, on the African conceptions of reality in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER FIVE

AFRICAN CONCEPTIONS OF REALITY

5.0 PREAMBLE

The question of whether or not the selected African conceptions of reality have room for the doctrine of materialism, dominates this chapter. One can justifiably talk of African conceptions of reality because African philosophy is divisible into two; traditional African philosophy, and modern African philosophy.¹ Modern African philosophy is the philosophy of trained African Philosophers who are literate and are, therefore, writing philosophy that can be traced and attributed to them as individuals. This philosophy is still in the making. Like the Western one, it will be found in texts and should have topics of universal nature like, justice, truth, and say, knowledge. African philosophy thence will cease being found in myths and beliefs and above all, it will be defined in such a way that it will not mean that it is a lived philosophy by the general mass. This is still developing.

Traditional African philosophy is what may be called African culture philosophy, a philosophy that is lived and practiced. This includes the indigenous thoughts that were and are still in existence. This is the philosophy that is still reigning in Africa. It is found in thought systems. It contributes a lot to various development paradigms in Africa and is very

influential. This explains why focus is put on the traditional African philosophy.

In Africa, philosophical ideas are not to be found in documents, but in proverbs, songs, and even myths.² In a way, therefore, one can genuinely talk of "African conception of reality" to refer to how various African thought systems have come to interpret and understand reality. These have been researched on both by philosophers and non-philosophers. The researches are premised on the view that a philosophical idea may be found, openly or concealed, in the African ways of life, especially in religious language and practices.

5.1 AFRICAN CONCEPTIONS OF REALITY

As aforesaid both philosophers and non-philosophers have researched on and presented a number of African thought systems as regards cosmology, ontology and generally, reality. Luba, Akan, Ashanti, Mende, and Banyarwanda, are selected for examination. These five are singled out for consideration because in the view of the researcher, works done on them vividly captures what may be called African conceptions of reality.

5.1.1 THE LUBA CONCEPTION OF REALITY

Fr. Placide Tempels, a Belgian Catholic priest in Congo, captured the ideas of the Luba, found in central part of Africa. He wrote Bantu philosophy in

which he presents the Baluba's conception of reality. He found out that the Baluba had elaborate ideas about the cosmos, ideas that seemed to give them solutions to myriad problems in life. These ideas, passed from one generation to the other, were so strong that even people who had become Christians, or what he refers to as evolue reverted to them whenever they encountered problems in life. Out of this, Tempels observed;

The persistence of these attitudes through centuries of simultaneous evolution can only be satisfactorily explained by the presence of a corpus of logically co-ordinated intellectual concepts, 'lore'. Behaviour can neither be universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, of man and of things, which surround him, of existence, of life, death, and of the life beyond.³

What then were the Baluba conceptions of reality? To Tempels, the Baluba's conception of reality revolved around the concept, vital force. He says:

Certain words are constantly being used by Africans. They are those which express their supreme values: and they recur like variations upon a leitmotif present in their language, their thought, and in all their acts and deeds. This supreme value is life, force, to live strongly, or vital force.⁴

The Bantu practices, strange or otherwise, have with them the purpose of acquiring life, strength, or vital force. Hence, force, the potent life or vital energy, are the object of prayers and invocations to God, spirits and the dead. In every Bantu language, there are words or phrases denoting a force, which is not used in an exclusively bodily sense, but in the sense of the integrity of "our whole being". Vital force is, therefore, the reality, which, though invisible, is supreme in man. Man can renew this vital force by

tapping the strength of other creatures. Names are given to each thing, but the inner life of these things presents itself to their minds as such specific forces and not all as static reality. All being is force and exists only in that it is force. 'Force', therefore, includes of necessity, all beings. All beings in the universe possess vital force of their own. Hence, humans, animals, plants and inanimate things, have a vital force endowed by God. At the level of humans, Tempels observes, the Luba see every illness, wound, disappointment, suffering, depression, fatigue, injustices or failures, to be a diminution of vital force. And, they see illness and death not as emanating from one's vital power, but result from some external agent that weakens people through its greater force. It is therefore by fortifying one's vital energy, through the use of magical recipes, that one acquires resistance to malevolent external forces. People, therefore, have to renew their vital force by tapping the strength of other creatures.

There is, however, a hierarchy of forces. Hence, beings are differentiated into species according to their vital power, or their inherent vital rank. At the apex is God, who is also the creator. This God has force or power in himself. He gives existence, and power of survival to other forces. In relation to other forces, God is seen as the one who increases force. He knows all forces, their ordering, their dependence, their potential and their mutual interactions. After God, comes the first fathers, founders of the different clans. To the Baluba, these were the first to whom God

communicated his vital force with the power of exercising their influences on all posterity. The first fathers constitute the most important chain, binding humans to God. They occupy so exalted a rank in the Luba thought that they are not regarded merely as ordinary dead. They are, in Tempels' view, spiritualized beings, beings belonging to a higher hierarchy participating to a certain degree in the divine force. Next in the line are the dead of the tribe, following their order of primogeniture. They form a chain through the links of which the forces of the elders exercise their vitalizing influence on the living generations.

After these three types of beings that are so to speak incorporeal, there come the corporeal/physical things. First in the category of physical things are humans who are the sovereign vital force, ruling the land and all that lives on it. The Luba, according to Tempels, value a lot the eldest people in families and clans. They are seen by divine law to be the sustaining link in life, binding ancestors and their descendants. The elders are seen as reinforcing the life of their people and of all inferior forces like animals, vegetables, and inorganic things, that exist, grow, or live on the foundation, which the elders provide for the welfare of their people. After human forces, come the lesser forces; animals, plants, and minerals. But within each of these categories is found a hierarchy based on vital power, rank and primogeniture. These forces are inferior. They exist only and by the will of

God, to increase the vital force of people, when on earth. See 5.3 for analysis.

5.1.2 THE AKAN CONCEPTION OF REALITY

The Akan community, found in West Africa, has attracted considerable philosophical and non-philosophical studies. Focus is being put on Akan conception of reality as presented by Kwame Gyekye. To Gyekye, the religious language, attitude, and practices of the Akan people provide a great deal of insight into their conception of reality, that is, the sorts of entities considered to be real or existing.⁵ This reality provides for an entity or object of worship since, an object of worship must be presumed to exist. To him, the language of the religious rite of libation reveals the entities that are considered real in Akan metaphysics. The prayer runs as follows;

Supreme God, who is alone great, upon whom Men lean and do not fail, receive this wine and drink. Earth goddess, whose day of worship is Thursday, receive this wine and drink. Spirits of our ancestors, receive this wine and drink.⁶

From this libation prayer, it becomes clear that to the Akan people, there is a Supreme Being (Onyame), deities or smaller gods (Abosom), and ancestral spirits. All these are in one category, the category of incorporeal things. The Supreme Being, the deities and the ancestral spirits are spiritual entities. They are hence invisible and unperceivable to the naked eye. They are mystical, unempirical, and non-physical. After the spiritual entities, there is the category of physical world of natural objects and phenomena.

Gyekye, however, observes, there is a general belief that at least part of nature or the physical world is animated, and that humans too are partly spiritual. Hence, the Akan ontology is essentially spiritual. The Akan universe, for example, is a spiritual one, in which beings play significant roles in the thought and action of the people. What is primarily real to the Akan people is spiritual. However, the world of natural phenomena is also real, although in ultimate terms the non-perceivable, purely spiritual world is more real, for upon it, the perceivable phenomenal world depends for sustenance. There is, therefore, no distinction between the sensible world and the non-sensible world in the sense of the latter being real and the former being unreal. The distinction lies entirely in the perceivability of one and the unperceivability of the other. But the perceivability of the world of nature does not in any way detract the reality of the non-sensible world.

From this perspective, it would seem that reality in Akan conception is one and homogeneous. But to Gyekye, this is not the case. The characteristics of the physical world are different from those of the spiritual world. Hence, the Akan metaphysical world is a dual one, notwithstanding the fact that the activities of the inhabitants of the spiritual world extend to, and are felt, in the physical world. In a way however, the Akan ontology, he observes, is pluralistic. In the broad comprehensive ontology, there are categorical distinctions, and, these entities are not on the same level of being. Hence, Akan ontology is hierarchical. The Supreme Being, as aforesaid, is at the

apex and is seen as the ultimate ground of all beings. He is described as the creator, absolute, and eternal, to indicate that he is the origin of all things and the sole and whole explanation of the universe. Because he is absolute, he is beyond and independent of the categories of time, space and cause.

Gyekye states that the Akan consider a human being to be constituted of three elements namely, soul (Okra), spirit (Sunsum) and the body (Honam). The soul is seen as that which constitutes the innermost self, the essence of the individual person. It is the individual's life, hence, it is identical with life. It is the embodiment and transmitter of the individual's destiny. The Akan see the soul as a spark of the Supreme Being in humans. It is thus seen as divine and as having an ante-mundane existence with the Supreme Being.⁷ To Gyekye, the presence of this divine essence in a human being may have been the basis of the Akan proverbs that "all men are the children of God", and that "no one is a child of the earth". So conceived, Gyekye, observes, the soul can be considered as the equivalent of the concept of the soul in other metaphysical systems. The Akan, see the spirit as the constituent element of the person as the activating principle in the person. It is that mystical force in person. It is not identical with the soul, as they do not refer to the same thing. And lastly, there is the body, which is the physical element of the person. Unlike the soul and spirit, the body is perishable. Given the Akan conception, a person is divisible into two; material part, and

the non-material part. The non-material part is that composed of Okra (soul) and Sunsum (spirit), and the material or physical part has Honam (body). Obviously, this conception gives a dualistic, not a tripartite interpretation and understanding of the person, for principally, a person is made up of two entities or substances; spiritual, and material.

The Akan sometimes speak as if the relation between the spiritual and the body is so close that they comprise an indissoluble or indivisible unity, and that, as a consequence, a person is a homogeneous entity. The Akan, for example, say that Okra is blood (Mogyia) or that Okra is in blood. This simply means that there is some connection between the soul and the blood, and that ordinarily the former is integrated or fused with the latter. This may imply that blood is the physical or rather physiological medium of the soul. This doctrine serves as a basis for a theory of the unity of soul and body. Akan thinkers, Gyekye observes, cannot strictly maintain a theory logically involving the impossibility of the doctrine of disembodied survival or life after death, which they tenaciously and firmly hold. 6

The Akan's postulation of some kind of connection between the soul and blood is a response to the legitimate, and indeed a fundamental question as to how an entity (soul) supposed to be immaterial and separate, can enter the body. The Akan conception of a person leads them to the belief that every human being has a destiny that was fixed beforehand. The soul is

thought to be the bearer of the destiny of humans. It is held that before the soul sets out to enter this world, it bids farewell to the Supreme Being. It then receives from the Supreme Being, the message that will determine the course of the individual's life on earth. There is a close link between destiny and the soul. Hence, there are proverbs that underline this belief, for example, that "there is no bypass to God's destiny"; "No living man can subvert the order of God"; and that, "Unless you die of God, let living man attempt to kill you and you will not perish".

The Akan's belief in destiny, Gyekye observes, derives from a belief that humans are the product of a creator. Hence, if humans were fashioned, they were fashioned in a way, which would determine their inclinations, dispositions and talents, among others. Hence, an Akan can say that "all men have one head but heads differ", to mean that all people are basically the same since they are all created in the same way, but they differ in their fortunes, luck, and capacities, among other things. And to Gyekye, just as the maker of a car can determine its speed, size and shape, so the creator determines a number of things about human beings.⁸ And, the notion of a pre-appointed destiny might not have arisen if man was supposed to have evolved and not been created.

The basis of the Akan concept of destiny, like those of most of their concepts and thoughts, is essentially experiential, observes Gyekye.

Human life, therefore, provides the setting for their thought of destiny. Hence, it is in life itself that one sees that there is destiny. Patterns of individual lives, habitual or persistent traits of persons, fortunes and misfortunes, successes and failures, the traumas and enigmas of life, the ways in which propensities, inclinations, capacities, and talents show themselves in individuals suggest to the Akan that there is and must be some basis or reason for this individuality. To him, that basis is destiny

5.1.3. THE ASHANTI CONCEPTION OF REALITY

Ashanti, is a subtribe of the Akan in West Africa. K.A. Busia⁹ presents its conception of reality. To Busia, the Ashanti look at the universe as full of spirits.¹⁰ There is the Great Spirit, the Supreme Being, that created all things, and manifests his power through a pantheon of gods. Below the Great Spirit are the lesser spirits, which animate trees, animals or charms. There are also the ever-present spirits of the ancestors (Nsamanto), whose constant contact with the life of man on the earth brings the world of the spirits so close to the land of the living. To the Ashanti belief, the gods (Abosom) derive their power from the Supreme Being. Hence, a god is but a mouthpiece of the Supreme Being; they are servants acting as intermediary between creator and creature. There is a whole pantheon of these gods. Their number keeps on increasing. Some acquire a countrywide fame for a season and then pass into oblivion, and others

become tribal gods, having elaborate annual festivals held in their honour. Of these deities, the most powerful are those that are the spirits of rivers.

Deities in most cases require temporary abode and a priest. The temporary abode may be a tree, river, a rock, and a mountain, among other things and places. A deity is not always present in the temporary abode which he enters at will or when called there by the priest. These deities have priests through whom the spirit of the god speaks, sometimes by displacing the personality of the priest, so that he becomes a mere medium, behaving and speaking as compelled by the spirit that possesses him. When this occurs, a trained spokesman interprets the utterances and gestures of the priest. Below the deities, the Ashanti hold that there are minor deities (Asuman) that derive their power from the Abosom (major deities). These deities may be in the form of beads or medicine balls carried on strings or in a sheep's horn or a gourd. Some of them are no more than charms or talismans that could be regarded as impersonal forces acting in obedience to secret formulae and operations. The belief however is that ultimately all Asuman derive their power from some other supernatural beings.

To the Ashanti, nature is spiritual in that it is filled with the spirits of rivers, trees, rocks, animals, and the spirits of fairies and forest monsters. The earth is seen as having spiritual power. It is, for example, the spirit of the

earth that makes the plants grow, and there is the power or spirit of fertility. The forests are believed to be inhabited by 'the little folk', and forest monster. To them it was the little folk that taught medicine men the art of healing and also taught them black magic. All these spirits are however subservient to the Supreme Being, from whom ultimately they all derive their power.

People are held as being both biological (physical) and spiritual (spirit). This is recognized by the Ashanti in the myth that "a human being is formed from the blood of the mother and the spirit of the father". This is reflected in their social organization whereby two sets of bonds exist in their organization. There is the mother-child bond, and the father-child bond. The two bonds are derived from the Ashanti conception of procreation, and determine two sets of groupings and relationships. The link between one generation and another is provided by the blood, which is transmitted through the mother. An Ashanti therefore traces his/her descent through the mother. The mother-child bond makes one a member of the mother's kin group. The father-child bond on the other hand is a spiritual one. Besides the blood, which a person inherits from his or her mother, the Ashanti believe that every man receives a spirit and also a soul. One's spirit is one's ego, or personality, that is, distinctive character. It is not divine, and it perishes with the man. But one's soul is a life force, the small bit of the creator that lives in every person's body. It returns to the creator when the person dies. It is

the Supreme Being that directly gives to a person this spirit or life when he or she is about to be born, and with it one's destiny. Hence to the Ashanti, a human being is formed from the blood of the mother and the spirit of the father.

A close link exists in Ashanti cosmology between the physical world and the world of spirits. They believe that there is a world of spirits where all their ancestors live a life very similar to the life on earth, and this conception is implicit in their funeral rites. For example, the dead are given food, drinks, and gold dust to help them on their journey to the world of spirits. And, receptacles, bedding, ornaments, and clothing, which it is believed the dead will require in the world of spirits, are buried with them. The newly dead are even asked to convey messages to the ancestors. Because of this, the living Ashanti have in their thought and deeds the ancestors. At meals, an older member of the Ashanti family offers the first morsel of food to the ancestors. Libation to the ancestors is given daily. It is believed that success and prosperity in this life depends on the favour of the ancestors.

At the graveyard, before the coffin is finally covered, an elderly member of the lineage, expressing dependence on the ancestors, addresses the deceased. The ancestors are believed to be constantly watching over their living relatives. They, according to the Ashanti, punish those who break the customs, or fail to fulfill their obligations to their kinsfolk. To such people

they send misfortunes and illness or even death. Hence, stories are told of deaths caused by the intervention of ancestors, and of the priests of the gods who declare that an ancestor, because of some guilt or misconduct on the part of the sufferer, has caused sickness. On the other hand, those who obey the laws and customs and fulfill their obligations receive the help and blessings of the ancestors. The latter see to it that the crops of such people are plentiful, that children are born to them, and that they generally prosper. As a result of these beliefs, Busia concludes that the Ashanti cosmology is predominantly animistic.

According to them, however, the Supreme Being is remote; he is nevertheless conceived as a spirit and a person. The gods (children of Supreme Being) are also spirits, animated by the Supreme Being, temporarily inhabiting a tree, a rock, a river, or a shrine. People are endowed with blood and twofold spirit; one's own personality, and, the soul. The latter lives on after death in the world of spirits whence the ancestors watch over the living and protect and guard them. Animals and inanimate objects too have spirits and are to be propitiated according to the strength of their spirits.

5.1.4 THE MENDE CONCEPTION OF REALITY

Mende is a community found in Sierra Leone, West Africa. Kenneth Little¹¹

researched on their cosmological and ontological ideas, views, and conceptions. The Mende, Little observes, have an essentially practical attitude to life. They prefer to concern themselves with the problems of today rather than those of tomorrow. They extend a practical attitude of mind to their relations with what he terms, the supernatural world.¹² Their ontology is that of spirits. The super spirit is God – Supreme Being (Ngewo). Ngewo is believed to have created the earth and everything in it. In addition to creating human beings, animals, plants, and inorganic matter, Ngewo is also responsible, apparently, for the existence of a certain non-material kind of power or influence. Below the Supreme Being there are other spirits lesser in power. These spiritual beings fall broadly into two categories, ancestral, and non-ancestral spirits.

The ancestral spirits are the spirits of former living members of the community – both former members of the various cults as well as individual families. The non-ancestral spirits comprise certain widely known spirits or genii (Dyinyinga) associated quite often with natural phenomena such as rivers, forests and rocks, but not confined to any one locality. After the genii there is a host of nameless spirits associated with specific local features, such as mountains and rivers. Last are the spirits associated specifically with certain cults. Both categories of spiritual beings are much nearer than Ngewo. The ancestral spirits and the better-known genii are worshipped and propitiated by the Mende, because, they personalize supernatural power,

and, are a means of communicating with the ultimate source of power, Ngewo. The Mende worship, therefore, is organized in different ways by the various cults. The cycle of an individual ancestor lasts as long as the dead person is remembered in prayers and sacrifices. To the Mende, the relationship between the living and the dead is expressed in a fairly regular system of rites. The spirits expect their share of whatever prosperity comes to their living relatives and the latter's households.

Nature spirits are also propitiated. But the sacrifices made to them are usually limited to some important seasonal events. These spirits are encountered in lonely places, such as the side of a mountain or in the heart of the forest. Sometimes, they appear to a person when he or she is sleeping. The spirits are specifically recognizable in anthropomorphic terms and possess well-marked human tastes, emotions, and passions. Like human beings, they can be approached and can be flattered. However, their favour is not won in the same ordered way as that of the ancestral spirits.

5.1.5 THE BANYARWANDA CONCEPTION OF REALITY

T. J. Maquet¹³ presents the cosmology of the people of the Kingdom of Rwanda, in Central Africa. To Maquet, the Banyarwanda view reality in two perspectives. The first is the material world, and the second is the non-material world. The material world is the world in which people are placed.

They know it through their senses. They believe that the world was created ex-nihilo by Imana (God). And the whole of the material is not seen. The world of experience is flat; its limits are far away and made of fences like the ones seen around kraals. On these fences, there is a big rock, which is the sky that is seen. Beyond the rock, there is another world (Ijuru), similar to the one seen around. Hence, Ijuru, to them, has hills, trees, and rivers. This world is not a paradise but rather a richer duplicate of the known physical world. Under the soil there is yet another world (Ikuzimu), conceived as being similar to the physical world.

The material universe is thus a kind of three-storied construction. To them, it is not impossible to go from one floor to another as, some people and animals came from the world above to the intermediate world and, according to some legends; some people went to the lower world. It is Imana who maintains these three material worlds, without him, the universe cannot continue to exist. Imana necessarily maintains life. His action, however, is not manifested in particular interventions. It is conceived rather as an underlying force, which sustains the whole universe, but does not interfere in the development of the life of nature.

The non-material world is composed of categories. The first category is that of God – Imana. Imana is seen as the creator and extremely powerful. His action influences the whole world, “but Rwanda is his home where he

comes to spend the night.”¹⁴ The spirit of the dead (Bazimu) constitutes the second category of non-material beings. They continue the individuality of living persons and have the same names. Though non-material, they are localized by their activity. This is in contrast to Imana who having a much wider range of action, cannot be so precisely localized. The Bazimu are viewed as not drinking, eating, or mating, but their existence in other respects is similar to that in the world of the living. The Bazimu, they believe, sometimes come back to this world, returning to the places where they used to live. These spirits may stay permanently in the hut where their descendants live or in the small huts made for them in the enclosure around the homes. Whatever their temper was when they were in this world, the Bazimu are bad. In order not to irritate them, various observances and interdicts must be complied with. Hence, there is the ‘cult’ of the Bazimu, which among other things, aims at appeasing them.

To Maquet, the age old problem of evil in the world, where there is a belief in the existence of a being as powerful and good as Imana is solved in this community by putting the responsibility for all evil and all suffering on agents other than Imana.¹⁵ These are human, especially sorcerers (Barozi). Events in the thought of the Banyarwanda are explained in natural and unnatural terms. When causes are discovered in the sphere of human phenomena, events happening according to these recurrences or following these causes are considered as intelligible without any reference to the

supernatural world. But, when events cannot be explained by reference to natural antecedents or causes, or are surrounded by peculiar circumstances, the intervention of ghosts or sorcerers is suspected and a diviner is consulted. For example, if somebody has tuberculosis and none of his forebears or the people with whom he lives has suffered from that disease, it is thought that sorcery is the cause. And, if somebody dies from an illness usually considered 'natural', but the death occurs a few days after a theft of which the dead is a supposed culprit, he or she is said to have been magically stricken at the request of the robbed person. When the natural cause is known, the event is attributed to it, when it is not known, or appears extra-ordinary on account of the circumstances; the explanation is given in terms of beliefs concerning the non-material world.

5.2 ANALYSIS

It is now time to analyse these conceptions. It can be said that to Tempels, central to the Luba thought is the concept of power, potent life, or vital force. What is real is the vital force, for it is present in every being; living or non-living, physical or non-physical. This force is invisible but it is evidenced in day-to-day occurrences. Behind this force is God who has force or power in himself. He is the mover of all other forces. And, he knows all forces, their ordering, their dependence, their potential and their mutual interactions. This means that God is the source of the vital force that is in all things. This brings one to the Luba conception of the things that exist. To them, things

are of two types. The first type is the non-physical that includes God, the forefathers and then the dead of the tribe. The second type is the physical one that has human beings at the centre, the others being animals, vegetables and minerals. In terms of power or the vital force, the non-physical have more power, and in a way determine or direct the physical things.

To the Akan and the Ashanti ideas and thoughts, their religious practices, language and attitude presents their conception of reality. Religious rite of libation, for example reveals that to the Akan there is a Supreme Being – God, deities or small gods, and then ancestral spirits – all of them non-physical. These three are believed to have a lot of power or force hence they can reward and punish. They are, as a result of this, venerated. Besides the non-physical world, there is recognition of the physical world, that is not however independent of the spiritual one. Part of the physical world is animated and even man is partly physical and partly spiritual. This implies that these people tend to look at everything as being primarily spiritual and hence to a large extent, what is real to them is spiritual, the physical being just an extension of the spiritual.

To the Mende, it is the spirits that are real. In their ontological conceptions, the spiritual beings; God, ancestral spirits, and non-ancestral spirits, are much pronounced. This is because of the nature of the relationship

between the physical world and these spirits. The physical world and all in it depend on the spirits for their survival. Hence, man who realizes this due to his rational nature resorts to worshipping these spirits in the hope that his power will be enhanced. Hence, to them, spirit is more real than the physical. Ultimately therefore, spirit is what is real.

According to the Banyarwanda, in reality there are two worlds. The first is the material one, which is in itself dividable into three-storied construction; the world of man's experience, the world above the skies, and lastly the world under the soil. The second world is the non-material world that is composed of God at the top and then the spirits of the dead. God is almighty and hence people worship Him. The spirits of the dead also contain a lot of power but less that of God. But because their power is more than that of humans, they are also worshipped. In terms of superiority therefore, the non-material world is superior to the material one. This has with it the effect of looking at the non-material things as more real than the physical ones.

In summary, three main teachings are discernible from these thought systems, namely, teachings about the world of spirits, the physical world, and, creation and destiny.

5.2.1 THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

The conceptions considered give a lot of prominence to the world of spirits. The world of spirits is taken to be ultimately real. The categories of spiritual beings in this world differ from one thought system to the other. But, what is apparent is that there is the category of God or the Supreme Being, and then the category of “other spirits”, that is, small gods (deities), ancestral spirits and then “the spirits of the dead.”

5.2.1.1. SUPREME BEING (GOD)

As seen, in the conceptions the Supreme Being or God is recognised. To the Akan, for example, he is Onyame, to the Mende he is Ngewo, and to the Banyarwanda he is Imana. This being is expressed in myths (especially those of creation) and practices of worship. Sources for understanding his character and nature are prayers, songs, and rituals. His nature can be gathered from the qualities attributed to him. First and foremost, he is seen to be almighty – all-powerful. He is seen as having power and also as giving vitality to other beings. The Luba, for example, view God as one who endows other beings with the vital force. And to the Akan, “he is alone great”. It is because of this ultimate power that he exists by himself and he was able to create things.

The other attributes are that he is all knowing and hence he is the ‘wise one’ or the all-seeing, and he is ever-present and hence, he is the ‘one who is

met everywhere'. He is able to be all these things because he is omnipotent and above nature. In a way, these attributes may point to the fact that God is seen as being both transcendent and immanent. As a transcendent being, he is mysterious hence nobody can understand him, he is infinite, unchangeable and generally, his ways are beyond human beings. Hence, he cannot be fully understood or known. In his immanence, God is conceivable more physically or naturally. Hence, he may be found in or on big trees, thickets, mountains, rocky places, rivers, and lakes. He can spend nights, like for Imana, 'in Rwanda'. But God exists by Himself; He is not a creature, but the cause of everything else.

The character of God appears in more humane and moral qualities. Although seen as supremely great, mysterious, and irresistible, he is also seen as kindly disposed towards human beings in the sense that he provides for them, and generally, he is good and loving. God's natural attributes, it can be said, come from his primary function as creator. He made the world and established the laws of society. Obedience to him has to be maintained. He, therefore, sustains the universe and hence, people turn to him when things go wrong. His relationship with human beings is in the sense that he created them and hence they are to conduct themselves according to principles, which God gave to the founding fathers. He punishes and rewards men. He can give and take away prosperity or even life. There are diseases, poverty, drought, locusts and above all death.

suggesting that they have some power to assist the living. Above all, there are talks of Angels as messengers of God, or Satan as an evil spirit. The conception of deities, ancestral spirits and generally the spirits of the dead should be taken in light of this. To the thought systems considered, these spirits have more power than humans, but have less power than God. Hence, they may be seen as dealing with compartmentalized duties like fertility, war, or rain. Some may be seen as having places of abode while others seem to be wandering in the wilderness. Because they have more power than humans, they are capable of diminishing or increasing his power. To avoid the diminishing and to enhance the increment of power, humans placate them through prayer or other practices like naming the newborn ones after departed relatives, or burying the dead with pomp and funfair. In short, these entities are taken to be so real as not to be left out of the African ontological conceptions. African thoughts recognize the spiritual world more than they do the physical world. It may be taken that the universe for the Africans is spiritualized in the sense that they see spirits even in purely physical entities.

5.2.2. THE PHYSICAL WORLD

The physical world is equally real, although subordinate to the spiritual one. It is subordinate because it derives its beginning and sustainability from the spiritual world. Beings in this world have power derived from God but this power is very low although enough to sustain them. The power can

diminish or be increased. Humans are at the centre of this world and hence have more power than other beings in this world. Apart from this, they look for ways and means of increasing their power and avoiding its diminishing. These ways are, namely, worshipping God and other powerful beings, and consulting diviners for advice on what to do and not do. As much as this world is real, it is quite temporary to humans since their destiny is in the world of spirits. Hence, when one dies, he or she turns into a spirit and consequently moves to the world of spirits, where one permanently lives, this time, with greater power.

5.2.3. CREATION AND DESTINY

The theory of creation is subscribed to. The universe and all that there is are taken to have been created by the Supreme Being. For example, Mbiti found out, "over the whole of Africa, creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God."¹⁶ Hence there are widespread myths of creation across the continent. These myths differ over how, where, and with what this creation took place. However, the myths do not imply that everything was created. At least the creating being was itself not created. The belief that God created the universe and that it is he who provides and sustains it, obviously presupposes the existence of God. As seen already, God is seen as the absolute reality. He is the origin of all things and also the sole and whole explanation of the universe. Such a being must definitely be beyond and above the categories of time, space and cause.

This means that God must have caused his own existence, he is eternal and that he has no beginning and no ending. Because of the belief in the creation of things by God, virtually every African society has a myth or myths detailing how God created the universe and human beings.

These myths differ in the exact methods of creating, for example humans. Mbiti points out that the Shilluk and Bambuti pygmies, for example, hold that God used clay to make human beings, "the way a potter does with pots."¹⁷ And in societies like Akamba, Basuto, Herero, Shona, and Nuer, there are myths, he observes, to the effect that God brought human beings out of a hole or marsh in the ground, or from a tree. The Akamba for example, have a rock at Nzau which has a hole believed to have been one through which God brought out the first man and woman.

The idea of creation brings in the notion of destiny. For God who is taken to be eternal, almighty and omniscient, in creating things, must have had a plan or purpose, beneficent or otherwise for the world in general, and to humans in particular. Hence, everything is destined for certain things on this earth and beyond (after death). This brings in the idea of life after death, which is obvious to the thought systems considered. When one dies, he or she immediately becomes a spirit and moves to the world of spirits where spiritual powers are acquired and hence starts to positively or negatively affect the living.

5.3. CONCLUSION

What can be said about the original investigation, namely, whether or not African thought systems could embrace materialism as explaining what is real, and what should happen in the areas of morality, governance and economics? From the elucidations made above, it becomes almost clear that African thought systems and worldviews, at least those considered here, cannot embrace materialism as explaining what there is. As seen, materialism emphasizes the physical world and rejects the spiritual world. It rejects supernatural or spiritual explanations of phenomena, preferring to give such explanations in terms of the structure and activity of matter. It takes reason but not spiritual forces as the guide of life. It also advocates for the power of education and of government in the possibility of deliberate improvement of human life.

To the contrary, the thought systems considered subscribe to supernatural or spiritual explanations. They present human beings as depending on such forces for their livelihood. Hence, prayers or libations are directed to God and other spirits in the spiritual world. Consequently, success or lack of it is explainable in terms of one being able or unable to get blessings from these spirits. This has the implication that in the sphere of morality and governance it is not just reason and other mundane factors that have to prevail, but to a larger extent, spirits, have to be put into serious consideration. Taking punishment as an example, a system that accepts

God and other spirits is bound to leave some room for divine punishment, meaning that some offences can be left to these spirits to administer. But that which does not recognize spirits, like materialism, will not have this provision. To it, punishment has to be meted here and now. In the area of economics or prosperity of someone, in a system that accepts spiritual beings, prosperity may be seen as partly rewards from the spirits and partly good planning and hard work. But to a materialist system, prosperity is looked at as arising purely from mundane activities like shrewdness, hard work, and good planning, with total disregard of transcendental or spiritual assistance.

It therefore follows that, because African thought systems are in such a way that every explanation is given a spiritual dimension, materialism cannot be embraced. It would therefore be impossible to convince someone operating in say the Mende or Akan worldviews that "the Supreme Being or the ancestral spirits are not real and therefore they do not intervene in this physical world which is in the first place, the only world that there is". It would also be unacceptable to such people to be told that "death marks the total end of someone", and that, "there is no any other life to hope for" or that "the world now and here provides the arena in which to display all that one has to display". The conclusion, therefore is that given the foregoing, African thought systems, which are generally laced with religious explanations, cannot take or adopt materialism as an answer to the question

of ultimate reality and as offering solutions in the areas of social organization, political affairs and economic pursuits.

END NOTES

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13. J. J. Maquet; "The Kingdom of Rwanda" in Daryll Forde (Editor), Op.cit.
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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this work to establish two things, namely:

- i) The origin, meaning, applications and implications of materialism.
An attempt has been made to find out what materialism is, who can be said to be a materialist, and why materialists disregard incorporeal things.
- ii) Whether or not Africans that subscribe to the selected thought systems can embrace the answer materialism gives regarding ultimate reality.

6.0 MATERIALISM

It was found out that materialism is a doctrine, as it forms a system of belief. It is widely subscribed to in Western philosophy. It is traceable to the ideas concerning whether or not reality is one, that is, a single substance, force, or principle. Materialism offers a solution to this problem by asserting that reality is a unity, that is, a single substance. This single substance or principle is matter. Hence, everything is material or results from matter. This assertion, which is basically the foundation of materialism, has had many different applications due to different frames of reference and interest. Because of this, it appears as though there are different materialist claims.

For example, materialist teachings of Democritus are different from those of Epicurus only in application. Whereas according to Democritus every phenomenon was explained as the movement of atoms, and therefore he was only interested in presenting nature as mechanical, Epicurus, though agreeing with Democritus that everything that existed must have been made up of eternal atoms that were small and indestructible bits of hard matter, stretched materialism to the moral sphere. He stated that one's way of life was completely under one's own control and determination. This meant that morality was about the immediate individual's bodily and mental pleasures, instead of being about principles of right conduct, or considerations of God's commands and restrictions. He was by so saying advocating hedonism as the foundation of the system of morality, and making human beings the only and final basis of their conduct.

Thomas Hobbes, after agreeing that matter was the ultimate reality, presented a universe in which everything that happened was reducible to the behavior of material particles moving in accordance with simple mechanical laws. He however worked this out basing on a materialistic account of nature, and, ethical and social-political systems. On ethics, he observed that there is no such thing as utmost aim or greatest good. Things are called good when they are objects of desire, and they are bad if they are objects of aversion. He invoked motions and mechanism in social-political set ups. He observed that 'free' and 'liberty' should be applied only to

bodies and that a man is free when in those things which by his strength and wit, he is able to do, is not hindered. Human beings are not born adapted by nature for collective harmonious life for they have all sorts of conflicts, the major source being natural lust. Hence, society requires an all-powerful sovereign to enforce law.

Karl Marx's materialism was founded on the view that human life and thoughts are shaped by nothing other than material conditions of production. He used materialism as a tool of describing and interpreting the complex economic and social forces that determined the nature of societies. He took materialism to such a realm obviously because this was a period of industrial revolution and hence capitalism. The two had posed numerous problems that he was attempting to solve. He took materialism to mean the sum total of the natural environment, including, organic nature, organic world, social life, and human consciousness. To him materialism meant that the world as seen is all that there is. Hence, the material order contains everything in the natural world that exists outside people's minds. The notion that any spiritual reality exists outside people's minds and as something other than nature is an illusion. Hence, to say that human beings possess minds meant only that organic matter has developed to the point where the cerebral cortex has become an organ capable of the intricate process of reflex action called 'human thought'. Generally, he saw the basis of morality, politics, and ideas, as things to be sought in human experience.

From these teachings it became apparent that each materialist philosopher uses materialism to explain the prevailing issues and circumstances of his/her time. This therefore is the reason for various materialist teachings.

It was found out that there are two senses of the term materialism. First is the strict sense that takes matter to be the ultimate reality. In this sense events are given a natural explanation. It takes all reality to be matter. This strict sense is in two categories. Category one consists of thinkers who reduce everything in nature to matter. This is reductionism. They accept the existence of things like soul and mind but consider them as matter. This category is derived from the atomists' assertion that matter constituted the basis of all that existed in the universe. It involves looking at all reality as matter, which is divisible into small substances called atoms that are permanently in motion, and hence undergoing change. All events in the universe are reducible to a mathematically describable motion of extended solid features of the cosmos. This is about taking every event occurring in the universe, including those events known as mental processes as expressible purely in terms of matter and motion. This teaching can be said to have produced science, an enterprise that basically involves investigating matter in order to determine its formal properties.

The second category was identified as that, which involves the belief that everything in nature can be explained in natural intra-mundane terms. As a

result, humans and experience are the basis of knowledge, morality, politics, and economics. Supernatural or spiritual explanations of phenomena have no room or accommodation in those aspects. This category dismisses religious beliefs, advocates for hedonism and egoism, and therefore lays ground for a society that operates socially, economically, morally and politically without reference to spiritual or transcendental beings. The only difference between it and the first category is that it ignores the teaching about the mechanical nature of things.

The second sense of materialism is the loose one. This is when one simply seeks material things for whatever purpose. This sense arises from the fact that people need material things for example, food, shelter, and clothing among others, to live. Everybody seeks these things. But the degree of seeking them differs. Those who over do may loosely be called materialists, not in the sense that they look at matter as the ultimate reality.

Who then is a materialist? As found out, there are two types of materialists. There is the strict materialist and a loose materialist. A strict materialist, like Democritus, Epicurus, Hobbes, or Karl Marx looks at the universe and all things and events as expressible in terms of matter and energy, undergoing continuous redistribution in accordance with the ordinary laws of physics and chemistry. He or she stresses the primacy of material things in social, political and economic endeavors of people, with total neglect or disregard

of spiritual factors He or she does not give explanation of phenomena basing on spiritual consideration. And, one is a loose materialist when he or she seeks physical or natural things. Everybody it seems is a loose materialist in that in one way or another everybody seeks material things. It is only the degree that differs.

6.1 INCORPOREAL THINGS

One teaching that both materialists agree on is that incorporeal things are either non-existent or that they are just physical. It was found out that this stand emanates from the problem of proving the existence of such things as God, mind, or soul. As a doctrine that puts primacy to the physical world and the physical things, materialism advocates empiricism, emphasizing practical verification of a cognitive statement. It was shown that it is absolutely difficult to objectively prove the existence of incorporeal things. They exist subjectively and at belief level, hence they may require faith. There was a caution though. The inability to prove the existence of incorporeal things is not in itself a proof that such things do not exist. Because of an obvious limitation that faces human beings, it is possible that humans have failed to objectively discover these things because they lack the 'sixth sense' that would enable them do so. In spite of the materialist dismissal of incorporeal things, the belief in them is widespread. For example, God, soul and spirits, are the hallmark of religions. Unfortunately

to materialism, religious beliefs greatly dominate and influence people's thinking and actions.

Chiefly, human beings recognize incorporeal things, because they manifest to people on the inside and from one's behaviour to others, from the outside. However, spirits in the supernatural sense can be considered as a search for ultimate security through super-identification with the largest, most powerful, and most permanent of far-away objects believed to be the sustaining force. This brings in the idea of how the universe came to be. Materialists' failure to allow spiritual explanations of phenomena easily take on the evolution theory which inter-alia ascribes energy and therefore motion as the beginning and development of the universe and all that there is. This is contrary, for example, to the creation theories that have a supernatural being as the cause. It is an interesting point to note that myths or tales of how things were created are widespread especially in Africa, and perhaps in every society. But evolution, subscribed to by materialists does have a number of weaknesses, the major one being "how did atoms originate".

A conclusion to draw from this is that it is misleading for materialists to dismiss incorporeal things just because they are not physical and hence beyond human senses. On a practical level, stability is not guaranteed by

envisaging a world and human societies organized along the line of material things with total disregard of the incorporeal things.

6.2 AFRICAN CONCEPTIONS OF REALITY

One major objective of this study was to establish whether or not the doctrine of materialism has room in thought systems. As explained, the reason of choosing 'Africa' is that it presents societies that are describable as 'spiritual' and hence 'notoriously religious'. It was therefore of intellectual interest to find out what materialists' teachings would mean to such societies. After looking at the Luba, Akan, Ashanti, Mende, and Banyarwanda's conceptions of what ultimately is, it was deciphered that indeed African societies strongly recognize incorporeal things. Two worlds, are recognized, namely, the physical world and the spiritual world. Forces in the spiritual world are the sustaining power of the physical world. In other words, the physical world is dependent or subservient to the spiritual world. Focus is put on the spiritual world, where the Supreme Being (God), small gods and many other spirits reside. These spiritual beings are seen to be intervening in the day-to-day affairs of the physical world that was in the first place created by God. Hence, when there is a drought the spirits can be appealed to for the rains to come, and if a woman is barren spirits or a specific deity of fertility can be invoked for the woman to conceive. At the level of humans, in some communities, human beings are seen as being made up of the physical and spiritual parts. To the Ashanti, for example,

humans are held to be both physical and spiritual. Hence, there is recognition that a human being is formed from the blood of the mother and the spirit of the father. And to the Akan, a human being is constituted of soul (Okra), spirit (Sunsum), and the body (Honam).

After noting the foregoing, it became apparent that conceptions of what there is have made African societies operate in a manner that highly recognizes spiritual things. This is the direct opposite of what materialists would expect. In the thought systems considered, success or failure, for example, can partly be attributed to the spirits, and some punishments can be left to the spirits to execute. This is contrary to what materialists would say about success, failure, or punishment, for the spirits are out of question. The conclusion here therefore is that materialists' teachings are alien, absurd and therefore not acceptable to Africans still upholding what is contained in the thought systems examined.

6.3 FINDINGS

In recapitulation, the following are the findings of this work.

- i) Materialism is traceable to atomist philosophers, Leucippus and Democritus, who asserted that matter constituted the basis of all that existed in the universe. But by expressing the mentality appropriate to their social and cultural milieu and to questions of

passionate interest, philosophers, to every aspect and sphere of human life, have stretched this observation.

- ii) There are two senses of materialism and therefore, two types of materialists. The first one is the strict materialism that is founded on the teachings of atomists that matter constitutes the basis of all that exists in the universe. The second is the loose materialism where one is seen as a materialist because he or she takes part in the physical world.
- iii) Materialism rejects incorporeal things mainly because they are not objectively verifiable. Knowledge of incorporeal things is subjective and hence very difficult to defend.
- iv) Materialism finds ready acceptance in the physical sciences because like materialism, physical sciences emphasise matter, or physical things as the ultimate reality.
- v) Materialism has no place in a spiritual/religious set up mainly because it shuts out spiritual explanations of any event in the world. Hence, it has no room in traditional African thought systems since they emphasise the 'spiritual world'.

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