

Is Destiny Determined? An Akan Perspective

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Abstract

Gyekye's position claiming the unalterability of Akan destiny is contrary to the Akan folk conception, moral cognition and social practice. Generally, Akan people believe in the idea that our entire life is predetermined (fatalism), yet they accept that we are capable of making responsible choices. This paper conceptually clarifies the interchanging expressions of *Hyebrɛ* (destiny) and *Nkrabea* (fate) and argues for the alterability of destiny based on epistemic resources from oral tradition, including an Akan song (Yaw Ampadu's *Yaa Amanuah*), Akan proverbs, and Akan literature (Efua Sutherland's *Edufa*). The argumentation resonates with the Akan folk conception of moral responsibility. This conclusively indicates that the Akan people philosophically identify with the compatibilist position, soft determinism, that despite being determined, individuals are capable of making moral choices which account for moral responsibility.

Keywords: Destiny, Moral responsibility, Person, Fate, Akan

Introduction

Recent conversations and debates in Akan discourse show substantive inclusion of social and technological change that revolve around moral capacities and awareness of both individuals and the community. Akan debate about AI inclusion in cultural life (INUSAH, 2025), anthropocentric tendencies (AMO-AGYEMANG, 2024; 2025), climate justice (GOLO, 2024), and agency (AGYEMAN, 2021) all centre on the moral capacities of individuals involved—moral responsibility. For instance, Anthropocene activities and their relation to environmental ethics are highly dependent on the human role: as such, the absence of moral responsibility remains no guide for the conscience to do good. Deeply embedded in the Akan social thought is the belief that persons are individuals who ought to be morally responsible for the decisions they make (MAJEED, 2015). This thought implies that individuals, to a large extent, have the ability to control what happens to them, despite the external constraints that oppose the control of their will. This belief is consistent with roles of values and moral upbringing of Akan people (ADDAI-MENSAH, 2020) and an integral aspect of becoming an

Akan moral person is tied to moral responsibility (WINGO, 2006). Current Akan narratives connote moral responsibility within Akan social thought, yet the uncontested third thesis of Gyekye is antithetical to moral responsibility. Gyekye asserts that destiny in Akan thought is unalterable (GYEKYE, 1995).

Moral responsibility is a philosophical offshoot from the debate of free will and determinism (MCKENNA & PEREBOOM, 2016). The conception of moral responsibility is premised on free will and the capacity of informed and responsible choosing. The free will position holds that humans have the capacity to be in control, to veto, alternate choices and determine what happens (KANE, 1996; CLARKE, 2003), while determinism is the view that humans are limited to merely observing as non-participatory elements in a deterministic world (PEREBOOM, 2004). Despite the contrasted views of free will and determinism, a middle ground called the compatibilist view holds that the concept of free will and determinism can co-exist and is not an impossibility (FOSU-BLANKSON, 2021). The compatibilist view, called soft determinism (opposed by hard determinism), asserts that the world and activities that happen in it are fundamentally determined, yet the determined future can be altered by choices of agents (FISCHER 2007). Strawson (1962) holds a strong position that a determinist standpoint is not adequate to deflate moral responsibility. The compatibilist view also includes proponents of free will who believe that human abilities to make choices and bear the consequences that accompany such choices. Hence, both proponents of free will and soft determinism accept human agency and responsible choices, which eventually leads to the idea of moral responsibility. Mckenna & Pereboom (2016, 6), a compatibilist and hard determinist, define free will as "the unique ability of persons to exercise the strongest sense of control over their actions necessary for moral responsibility."

Destiny should be understood as a phenomenon that is marked by a defined role of a certain character that is hypothesised to play out as designed. The idea of destiny connotes that the self is automatically precluded from determining the activities it experiences. Is it really the case that human agency is an illusion? Some schools of thought deny the existence of an unalterable destiny—fatalism; other schools hold that destiny can co-exist with active agency—soft determinism; and finally, the school of thought that thinks of humans as completely free and not restricted to any pre-determined occurrences (GWARA, 2017). Tillich is of the view that one's destiny is entangled with their free will: "Destiny is not a strange power which determines what shall happen to me. It is myself as given, formed by nature, history, and myself. My destiny is the basis of my freedom; my freedom participates in shaping my destiny" (TILLICH 1951, 185). There has been only one significant investigation into the alterability of Akan destiny that began with Majeed (2015). The outcome of his investigation was that destiny is more of a potentiality than a completely determined and unavoidable outcome.

...it is worth noting that what is believed to determine things in advance may or may not be God. In Akan thought, the idea that all human actions and experiences are pre-determined - whether by God or otherwise - is

absent. Rather, the human being has free will (*fa'hodie*). (MAJEED 2015, 116).

This paper corroborates Majeed's (2014; 2015) assertions of soft determinism—the position that, between our pre-earthly life and posthuman phase of existence, destiny is not a compulsion but a probability. We argue for the individual's moral capacity with evidence from an Akan song (Yaw Ampadu's *Yaa Amanuah*), Akan proverbs, and Akan literature (Efua Sutherland's *Edufa*) that human choices can alter destiny despite some underlying determining factors. The alterability equation of destiny will equal *Nkrabea* supervening on *Hyebrɛ*, such that what happens in *hyebrɛ* results in corresponding changes in *nkrabea*.

The Akan Discourse

Destiny, the belief that human life has a predetermined consequence, remains an existential problem among the Akan. The Akan, an ethnic group in Southern Ghana, conceptualise destiny on the belief of an unknown end, vis-à-vis the belief in responsible choices. Akan social life and philosophical thought are interwoven such that a surgical investigation into the concept of destiny cannot be done without reverberating the myriad metaphysical underpinnings of what the human person is. Various Akan scholars have extensively approached the issue of the human person from the Akan perspective, including Gyekye (1987), Wiredu (1992), Danquah (1995), and Sarpong (1974). They broadly agree that Akan personhood is a composite of the soul (*ɔkra*), spirit (*sunsum*), body (*honam*), environment, language, god, cultural institutions, and immediate society. In the discourse concerning destiny among African cultures, Lajul (2017) indicates that destiny is more of a prenatal establishment, implying a predetermined life that precludes human agency, responsibility and moralism. Contrary to this line of implication, when examined existentially, the Akan people adhere to deep moral values that are predominant and have no exceptions in their culture. In this line of reasoning, how does one reconcile the belief in a predestined life with the expectation of high moral pursuits? This issue arises because praise and blame, which are key principles in ideal Akan concepts such as ancestry and immortalisation, are antithetical to the idea of a predetermined life.

Destiny, according to Gyekye, is unalterable. Gyekye presents *three theses*: “God imposes destiny; destiny is always good; and destiny is unalterable” (GYEKYE 1995, 116). The argument championed by Gyekye seems to translate some form of purity (as a supersensibly ordained phenomenon) into the conception of destiny, and this purity is inferred from God's perfection. The first thesis, ‘God imposes destiny’, unarguably surrenders all powers of will to the ultimate and supreme force that created the universe; this then leads to a preclusion of any question on why God makes an imposition on humans. In the Akan tradition, there is the belief that one can consult diviners to know why a certain person bears a particular destiny, but the mightiness ascribed to the creator of the universe offsets any idea of any human questioning God's right to impose variegated destinies on

individuals. One cannot argue that there is a hypothetical ethical displacement for God imposing on us; yet, we are perpetuated to our destinies without questioning because the universe is believed to be owned and willed by God, so all of God's creation is open to his puppetry.

The second thesis, "Destiny is always good", is highly refutable in several existential contexts due to the moral vagueness it connotes. Consider this: when wishes do not align with reality, the situation is not pleasurable for humans, and so, such a life (destiny) is judged to be evil. In real-life situations, there are unpleasant destinies that come with bad omens, yet if God is believed to create good destinies, what causes evil destinies? Is there another powerful being capable of imperilling God's creation by forging evil destinies? This idea of a necessarily good destiny suits the view that destiny is, arguably, necessarily of God's creation. Morally evaluating destiny as good or bad is problematic because the criteria for evaluation are unarguably subjective. From the Akan perspective, during the prenatal existence of human souls, the souls wish for themselves a life upon joining the physical world. At the point of physical embodiment, the prenatal soul is physically appreciated depending on biases that can be traced to human and biochemical natures. Thus, variations like humanness are consequences of decisions, the environmental state, and the lifestyle of a person, derived from an aggregation of their ancestral lineage. For instance, when babies are born in Akan homes, grandmothers bathe babies and practice some form of physical structure shaping to give better looks and postures for the baby during early formative stages (OPOKUWAA, 2005). The contention here is that while the Akan people think that destinies are set by the maker (that is, the consequential outcome of one's life and existence is contingent on God's determination), the Akan concurrently expect people to live responsible and morally worthy emulating lifestyles. Destiny does not require a moral evaluation, and it is not always a good one. If the absence of evil in everyone's destiny was an indicator for the claim that 'destiny is always good', then it may be a misrepresentation of a realistic Akan belief.

The third thesis presents the contentious issue that sparks the argumentation of this writing. Gyekye's third thesis indicates that "the Akan conception of destiny is unalterable". This paper argues a view contrary to Gyekye's acclamation.

Aside from the third thesis being one of the critical concerns motivating this writing, another concern is that Gyekye may have misappropriately stated that God *imposes* destiny. Impose here connotes a forceful and somewhat *unwilling* assignation of something; perhaps a better word should be 'assign'. God merely assigns without any intention of overriding one's will about their destiny. If 'impose' should be the appropriate diction, then it implies that humans could have willed for a destiny they can desire, yet God necessarily attached them to a destiny that was unwilled. This will further mean that human destiny is unalterable. However, if a person's destiny is planned and already determined, then destiny is a given and not an imposition. Imposition precludes the power of choice. The thought that Akan's destiny is an imposition has the power to make people feel so

unlucky when unpleasant events befall them, killing the spirit of creativity and instilling docility against hard and smart work. To make it clearer, thinking that destiny is divinely given excludes moral responsibility, and so, some social practices such as gifting the needy, naming, deliberations towards marriage, and many other major as well as minor reflective decisions will be heavily laden by one's inability to control the pattern of their life. Would we reason that one's inability to gift or support a friend in need due to limited or a lack of resources is a destined situation? In further ensuing arguments, there will be an issue of how a supposedly imposed destiny will be conceptually antithetical to a morally accountable Akan world.

Making of a Person–Akan

***Honam* (Body)**

Honam (body) is the overtly perceptible part of a person, which, in Akan science, is categorically classified as the part of a human made of material stuff. In a literal sense, the Akan hold that our bodies are earthly things. The body replicates through foetal formation during conception; nonetheless, at death, it is believed that the *Ɔkra* (soul) and *sunsum* (spirit) depart from the *honam* (body). This view is validated by the Akan proverb *w'aye Onyame dea*, which translates as s/he has become the *Onyame's* own, implying that while the individual was alive, they owned their will, but now they belong to *Onyame*. From this stage, the *honam* is unable to sustain itself, and it starts perishing. This further implies that *honam* is an ontologically emergent stuff from the earth at the point of conception (foetal formation). However, when *honam* is integrated with *sunsum* and *Ɔkra*, its survival and dependency are contingent on its composite association with them. *Honam*, then, is not an entity that has sufficiency for its independent survival.

If the *honam* is an emergent property of an earthly material stuff, an enigma of creation, “what culls the need and keeps the sustenance of the human body (*honam*) as part of its integration of the human person?” In search of the primal human substance, in the coming-to-being of humans, either a force culls for the embodiment of earthly material stuff (a duality) or only the earthly material stuff constitutes human. Akan beliefs are conceptualised in a duality of the physical and nonphysical world. There is a dualistic interaction between the invisible force of human life and the earthly material stuff. This interaction requires the earthly material stuff as an embodiment for the human life force. This nature of interaction during conception is nonrational; however, the fusion of the sperm and the ovum brings forth bodily formation (*honam*). Now, the question remains: despite the conception that ontological primacy is given to the *Ɔkra* (soul), which makes the cull in need of the other, the *Ɔkra* or the *honam*? A more plausible explanation would be that the *honam* may cull for the need for *Ɔkra* at conception since *honam* needs the *Ɔkra* for conscious living. Otherwise, instantiating this will be where a bodily formation may start in the mother's womb, but the *Ɔkra* not honouring the invitation to join this *honam* will bring forth

a nonconscious baby at birth or abortion. The *sunsum* (spirit) then is an emergent property whose existential participation of humanness is yet to be. It emerges from the material stuff of humans. This constitution spells out the *honam* as that vessel that holds the *akra* and actualises the *sunsum*.

At death, this unification faces discontinuity. A typifying is when an ailment blemishes the *honam* (nearing death experience) and diviners or medicine men investigate to proffer spiritual healing through the quasi-physical approach in the reach of sustaining the unity between the *honam* and *akra*. The diviners or medicine men admit to a degree of detachment between the *akra* and the *honam*. Attempting all rituals to reconcile the *honam* (body) with the *akra* indicates the soul as a vital force at the seat of human existence. The *akra* (soul) is believed to be the essence of the integral relationship between *honam*, *sunsum*, and *akra*.

Sunsum (Spirit)

The issue in dispute about *sunsum* revolves around its form, whether it is quasi-physical or nonphysical or physical. While Danquah (1995) accounts for the fact that the *sunsum* is physical, Wiredu (1983) considers the *sunsum* as quasi-physical and Gyekye as immaterial (MAJEED 2014). Gyekye feels an attempt to address a blunder on the concept of the *sunsum*. To him, the *sunsum* was presented by some anthropologists and sociologists as originating from the father. At death, according to Gyekye (1987), *sunsum* survives with the *akra* in an ontic unity, while Wiredu (2010) claims that *sunsum* is incapable of any fatal escape. Gyekye's conception, which, as a result of the dualistic framework, makes the defence of *sunsum*'s posthumous survival unclear. Despite the popular Akan belief in this, the folk justification given to the general account of the *sunsum* resides with the notion that for the conception and birth of an individual, the giving of *sunsum* is done as the man gives a part of himself for the fusion and creation of a human in the woman's womb. The woman is then considered the giver of the flesh due to the baby's full formation in the womb. This belief is not objectively identical and conceptualised in line with any thought of DNA; however, the question of *sunsum* is how the personality of an individual takes a certain resemblance and sometimes character traits of immediate relatives or an ancestor. In earlier civilisations, before scientific evolutions and developing concepts such as DNA, which in recent years could marshal viable explanations of why the individual may have a personality resembling a relative, the Akan were capable of giving a feasible account of the origin of character traits that inform our personality (MAJEED 2017b; BREWSTER 2019).

Deeper than science, metaphysical understanding is a belief tying the idea of an individual's personality to the concept of *sunsum*. In furtherance to Gyekye's counter to the popular belief on *sunsum*, he targets Danquah on his claim that at death, the *sunsum* dies with the *honam*. Here, Gyekye claims that since the *sunsum* dies with the *honam* (which is affirmed to be physical), then the *sunsum* is also physical. Danquah's claim that the *sunsum* perishes at the point of death does not inferably attribute *sunsum* to any physical characteristic, as Gyekye states. A clue from Omoregbe on the integrative nature of the human person indicates that the

sunsum, *honam*, and *Ɔkra* are unpaired during death. However, unlike the body (matter), which perishes, the perishability of *sunsum* is beyond verification. Since it is popularly believed to be earthly and likened to its function, contrary to Gbadegesin's mortal denial of *sunsum*, it can be strongly inferred that the task of the *sunsum* has expired and will discontinue. Just as the imperfection of a person (originating from the individual's genetic makeup) only remains a physical embellishment, it does not participate as a constituent character of the individual's *Ɔkra*, and not in the afterlife. The *Ɔkra* is a distinct entity that attaches itself to other properties, such as *sunsum* and *honam*, to form the human person; thus, the *sunsum* has no defining character for the *Ɔkra*. *Sunsum*'s physical observability and its intangibility connotes that it is a quasi-physical entity (given the personality and character trait as an emergent feature).

The terms *personality*, *personhood*, and *personal identity* might collectively seem identical; they are not the same, yet they all concern the nature of a person. Ontologically, personality and personhood are tied to the physical part of humans, while personal identity has relations to the immaterial aspect of humans. The Akan refers to an individual's personality as *su*. Identifying the *su* (personality) of the individual, the idea mentioned is the character traits the person expresses in their own unique way. *Su* is so unique to everyone that although someone can mimic it, it would be temporary. The *su* is ontologically an emergent character that is projected from a person's *sunsum*, and typifying instances communicate a reasonable degree of sameness with a person and their father—*ntorɔ* (MAJEED, 2017b). The degree of resemblance of a child and a father's *su* validates the belief that the *sunsum* is ontologically passed to a person from the father. Some of these personality traits could be body gestures, sociability, humility, smiles, and even hospitality towards other individuals.

Personhood is highly recognised as a person's social identity; it is ascribed and an intentional posture to moral worthiness. Majeed (2017a) iterates in his comparison of personal identity with personhood that the question of personal identity is one of ontology, while that of personhood is moral (MENKITI, 2004). The individual's social functioning in his immediate Akan community is what identifies them as a 'person'—*onipa*. The individual is considered *onipa* when they put up a high response to communal support and remain a morally responsible participant of society, which Gyekye describes as being communitarian (GYEKYE, 2004). The social support of an individual is essential for being a person. Thus, a person without conscience, a deviant, or an outcast cannot be considered a person due to their inaction in supporting communitarian activities, and neither would they be revered as ancestors (MENKITI, 2004). Understandably, personhood remains a socio-physical and participatory phenomenon subjected to decisions, actions, and inactions of the individual (JECKER & ATUIRE, 2024).

Personal identity of a person essentially includes consciousness, memory, and rationality. The physical and biochemical definition of the individual will add

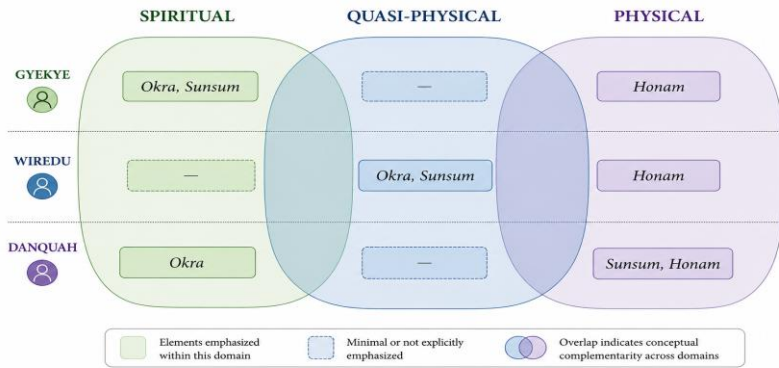
to these criteria when it is about the human phase of existence, but earlier defining criteria are constant when discussing a person as pre-earthly, human, or posthumous. Majeed (2012, 77) is of the view that the issue of personal identity leads us into an ontological problem of tracing the life origin of a person. Whether the true identity of a person is the earthly being, or there is a supersensible part of the human that transcends the earthly person, but remains the agent/self that bears the identity. *Ɔkra* (soul) in Akan belief vaguely answers the question of personal identity because it is believed that the *Ɔkra* exists in the prenatal world before conception, and it remains a composite aspect of humanness but survives death.

***Ɔkra* (Soul)**

The *Ɔkra* (soul) in Akan socio-philosophical thought is pinned as the essence of the human person. Despite *Ɔkra*'s intangibility and inaccessibility to allow further investigation for many, its abstract nature, our belief of what it is, and the role it plays have made the *Ɔkra* not a strange phenomenon in Akan thought. Several debates on what *Ɔkra* (soul) seems to identify are in either the domain of spirituality or quasi-physicality (KWAME 2004, 346). *Ɔkra* is a vital force that centralises the being of the human person. Such a vital force as believed by Gyekye cannot be identical to a materialist thesis. The spirituality of the soul, as Danquah also agrees, is that part of the human person which is the self and communes with the real. In Akan socio-philosophical thought, the immaterial world is considered to be the fearsome one rather than the physical. The human person's inability to have a comfortable grasp of the nonphysical realm makes humans very limited in potential in it. However, it is also believed that much can be done in the nonphysical realm without any physical interaction. Thus, a spiritual interaction with a person's immaterial part is a reality. Such beliefs are conveyed in the Akan way of life because happenings in the spiritual realm have corresponding causality in the physical realm. Then, what happens to a person in the spiritual realm will correspond to what happens in the physical realm over time. This niche, as an interactionist medium between the spiritual realm and the physical, is one of the ideas that also influences Wiredu's view of the *Ɔkra* as a quasi-physicalist entity rather than a spiritual one.

Gyekye (1987) identifies the spiritual entailment of a person to include *Ɔkra* and *sunsum*. The *Ɔkra* is the transmitter or bearer of the destinies of men. For him, these psychological (nonphysical) qualities are derived from the Supreme Being and are therefore divine and immortal. Gyekye's conception of a person gives credence to the assertion that God is the author of destinies among the Akan society.

Conceptions of the Human Person in Gyekye, Wiredu, and Danquah



Hyɛbrɛ or *Nkrabea* are the most common *Twi* words denoting ‘destiny’ in Akan societies. The Akan believe that every man has a destiny to fulfil. Human life is entangled with a destiny, but the veracity of an unalterable (Akan) destiny, as Gyekye professes, is what this paper is gradually constructing a proof of invalidity towards. In addition, if the destiny of the Akan can be altered, how is this change: physical, metaphysical, or a dualistic change? *Hyɛbrɛ* is believed to be orchestrated by the creator of the universe and life, but is considered for possible alteration by other forces in the metaphysical realm. The modification to one’s destiny by other forces (ancestors, deities, and some supersensible people like diviners, medicine men, or priests) disobeys the natural order set by the supreme being, and hence, such change happens at the expense of something – sacrifice. Evidence of such an Akan reality can be found in *Edufa* (SUTHERLAND, 1967).

Akan, similar to many other indigenes of other traditions, believe that one’s destiny could change through their deliberations and the consequences of their decision-making. To assess the possibility of change to one’s *hyɛbrɛ*, the metaphysical issue of what *hyɛbrɛ* is has to be well outlined and discussed; hence, our next phase of demystification.

The Akan Concept of Destiny *Hyɛbrɛ* (Destiny)/ *Nkrabea* (Fate)

Several works on Akan philosophy (GYEKYE 1995; MAJEED 2015; 2017) have interpreted destiny as either *hyɛbrɛ* or *nkrabea*. This popular notion of destiny seems to be intertwined with the idea of fate (OGBUJAH 2008, 413). There may be some misinterpretation or misrepresentation of ideas; in Akan discourse, is fate the same as destiny? The origin of the words and the conceptual cultural vocabulary is likely to indicate a difference in meaning. Fate is believed to be an inevitable, predetermined life. With fate, there is a never-changing outcome of

one's predestined life, similar to the life of Oedipus or Odewale. Destiny, despite its synonymy with fate, is the predetermined series of events in an individual's life. Synonymously, both destiny and fate are predetermined, but while destiny is believed to be alterable due to several physical and metaphysical factors, fate remains inevitable. Predeterminism in human life creates a colliding fusion of fate and destiny. Fate is a predestined life with inevitable actualisation. Destiny, then, is the life an individual is predetermined to live. The descriptions given to the differences above are quite generic, and for the purpose of the argumentation later on, the premise on the cultural contextual perspective ought to be set as precedent.

Akan proverbs, myths, legends, and folk music are some of the traditional epistemic repositories that could provide clues to help settle the conceptual issue of destiny and fate. The destiny and fate of an individual in Akan are inferred to be given by God, and such inferences are supported by the belief in an *Onyame*, the creator and the source of our essence. On this, Rattray is quoted as saying "[E]ach human being's destiny is preordained, and the spirit sets out to enter its mother's womb already knowing its destiny. This has been given to me by *Onyankopɔn*, ... and is known to no one else, though it may perhaps be ascertained by consulting the fetish priest... The reincarnated soul then takes its way to this world with its destiny already arranged" (2016, 26). Thus, in traditional Akan society, the belief that *sunsum* is given by the father and blood is given by the mother, but that *Onyame* is the giver of the *akra* is very popular. Some Akan proverbs indicate the same thoughts, and these include "*Nnipa nyinaa yɛ Qnyamɛ mma and obi nnye asaase ba*" (RATTRAY 2016, 28), which translates as all human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth. In addition, the Akan believe that no one has a priori knowledge of another person's destiny in the prenatal world with God; this is validated by the Akan proverb "*wokra Onyankopon no, na obi nnyina hɔ*" (RATTRAY 2016, 26), which literally translates as when one is taking leave of the Supreme Being, no one bears witness.

Furthermore, the Akan believe that no one can exchange someone else's fate, and this is supported by the proverb "*Onyame nkrabea nni kwatibea*", which means destiny assigned (to one) by God cannot be changed (OPOKU 1997, 4), or the more explicit *asem a Qnyamɛ di asie no, oteasefoɔ ntumi ndane no*, meaning the fate that the Supreme Being has ordained beforehand a human being does not alter. On this, Rattray (2016, 27) reiterates that

[T]he legend about destiny referred to above is as follows. *Onyankopɔn* gave a soul which was setting out for earth two bundles, a large and a slightly smaller one. The soul was told to hand over one of the parcels, the larger, to another soul which it would find on reaching the earth. The soul to whom these destiny parcels were given changed them, taking as its own the one it had been ordered to give up to another. On coming to the world, the soul, now an incarnated one, found its parcel contained only rubbish, whereas the one (the wrong one) it had handed over to the other soul contained nuggets and gold dust. In other words, the destiny of one was poverty, while the other was born a rich man. Nor does the story

end here, for when the person died and returned to *Onyankopɔn* and complained of the fate that had been assigned to it in life, *Onyankopɔn* blamed it for having changed these destinies, its own and that of another entrusted to it. This myth is of value as showing that the *ɔkra* is supposed to come from *Onyankopɔn* before the person is born and returns to him after death.

Despite the preceding quotation being a typical case where fate is interchangeably represented as destiny, from the quote, three deductions can be made: first, God is the giver of the *ɔkra* (soul). Second, the *okra* knows of its destiny before embarking on its journey to this world since destiny has been preordained, preestablished, and orchestrated by *Onyame*. Third, the *okra* is immortal, survives death, and returns to *Onyame* after the body perishes. Even so, Rattray's legend above is appropriately about fate and not destiny, as he indicates at the beginning. Destiny is decision-inclusive, and decisions are alterable based on deliberations, while fate is not. Let us see another account from a well-known Akan song.

In one of his well-known songs entitled *Yaa Amanuah* (Parts 1 & 2), the popular highlife musician, Ampadu (1970a, 1970b), known for his deep-thought music (often his songs are referred to as philosophical highlife), narrates a story depicting the Akan conception, the creator, and the destiny of the babies (souls) that find their way into this world. *Yaa Amanuah* (name of the main character in this narrative) meets *Onyame* in a trance after several years of blaming Him (the creator and giver of life) for not blessing her womb with children. *Onyame*, upon meeting *Yaa Amanuah*, denies blame for her bitterness and barrenness. *Onyame* tells her to bear witness as the babies (souls) in the supersensible world ask for permission, indicating the home they intend to join in the world and the life they purport to live.

Yaa Amanuah eventually witnessed three souls ask for *Onyame's* permission to come into the world; one of the souls requested to be birthed by Yaw Boateng and *Yaa Boatemaa*, but in its early life, it would be a rascal and worry its parents; it would even defy their guidance and stop schooling, but would have a strong desire to learn a vocational skill. If its parents permit this, it will excel at the chosen vocation and take good care of its parents till they die, and when it gets around sixty years, it will also die and return to Him (*Onyame*). The next baby was requested to be conceived by *Yaa Amanuah*. In the life it intends to live, it purposes to end its mother's (*Yaa Amanuah's*) long-awaited childbearing lamentations. However, during its infant stage, its mother will leave it (*Kweku*, the name given to the soul in this narrative) in the care of a neighbour to go and fetch water, and as it advances to play with the neighbour's mirror, she (the neighbour) will insult *Kweku*. This insult will hurt its soul (*ɔkra*) and make it want to leave this world, and as a result, it will eventually die. Even so, if its mother can avert this situation and save him (baby *Kweku*) from the neighbor's adversary, it will grow and later request that its father buy it a gun since hunting is the vocation it

(Kweku) will pursue. One day, it will return home with a kill. However, it will share the meat with the immediate neighbours and bring to the mom only the entrails of the kill. If its mother (Yaa Amanuah) becomes discontented with the entrails, it will hurt its soul (*Ɔkra*). It will, with sadness, go wash off the blood on its hands in a stream near their home, where a big snake will attack and kill it. The soul, still addressing its life's journey to *Onyame*, claims that if it can survive these dreadful events, then it will grow to take care of its parents very well till they die. In the second part of Nana Ampadu's philosophical highlife, Yaa Amanuah regains consciousness, after which all the events that were revealed to her happened, but she was very fortunate to have known, so she successfully manoeuvred all the pitfalls. In this instance, the chosen pattern of a destiny has successfully been altered.

This philosophical highlife tries to provide an account of the fate and destiny of a soul. The essential events that make the various changes in one's life, according to the above, are preestablished by the soul and recounted to *Onyame*, and this is referred to as *hyebre* – literally meaning 'the arranged life'. After the soul outlines their *hyebre* (the pattern or outline of their life), its purpose of coming into the world, upon all variations, is now harnessed and compounded by *Onyame* as the child's *nkrabea*. By this, *nkrabea* to the elderly/authority is what the child/subordinate has requested permission to execute, and upon the child's return to *Onyame*, the soul necessarily should have done that. The child's *nkrabea* necessarily becomes a guide and beam of one's consciousness in their passage through the world. The fated life is beyond option and requires a necessary execution; however, the destiny of the individual is open to some variations. The Akan concepts of soul and destiny are consistent with the beliefs of other popular traditional African communities, such as the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups of Nigeria. These societies believe that reincarnation is a means for a soul to return to this world to fulfil its destiny. The Igbo believe that younger ones are more likely to return than the older, and they name souls (especially children with sickle cell genotype) that supposedly make these returns *Ogbanje*, meaning to make several trips to and from a place. Epistemic evidence of such souls has popularised the belief in reincarnation and the notion that these children take an oath in the discarnate realm to die when they are reborn (AJAYI, 2021). The consistency of accounts in this belief seems to be harnessing some idea of prenatal consciousness, which eventually is not clear to the person's memory after being born into the physical realm. The idea of an opaque knowledge of the prenatal realm is also identical to the Socratic depiction of the intelligible realm (in the *Meno*) that the soul belongs to before the fall and entrapment in the physical body. Socrates indicates the blemish of the body that prevents the soul from clear knowledge. From this, we form a concrete belief that the same soul from the discarnate realm inhabits the body in the physical realm, but the unclear memory of a former realm makes one sceptical of the soul and consciousness of the person. In both the discarnate and physical realms, the soul is active and conscious, but one may be doubtful of the consciousness of the person because consciousness in the physical realm does not seem to be a continuation from the discarnate realm.

The *ɔkra* is believed to be the part of the human person that has prenatal consciousness and is aware of the request of purpose (*nkra*) before *Onyame* seals it as the *nkra-bea* of the *ɔkra*; however, the order of happenings as predestined is what becomes the *hyɛbrɛ*. Eventually, when the *ɔkra* joins the *sunsum* with *honam* in the physical world, the series of events (*hyɛbrɛ*) predestined for the individual outplays. Nonetheless, the *nkra-bea* (fate) of the individual is inevitable.

Keeping in view that the *honam* (body) has its appellations that form a distraction for the individual in the social course of life. These distractions from the body are usually physical pleasures that may not be consistent with the *ɔkra*'s *nkra-bea*. Thus, it is believed that there are certain circumstances where there is an urgent feeling to do something, but within oneself, one will intuitively know that they are not to do it. Then, they will be following the path set according to their *nkra-bea*. The *ɔkra* is believed to know no bad but has purity only, so if one can develop the ability to intuitively know and understand the predestined purpose of one's life, then the individual may have a smooth life. However, a failure to follow the predestined path of one's life may bring about some misfortunes that cannot be evaded and eventually lead to a misfortune. However, self-growth in line with the desired purpose of the *ɔkra* will happen to end in good fate predestined by the *ɔkra*. For instance, a person's life may be on course until some wrong decisions and mistakes put the individual into situations that are life-changing, unfortunate, and uncomfortable until some hopeful intervention redeems them and puts them back on their *nkra-bea*'s chosen pattern of life.

Alterability of *Hyɛbrɛ* (Destiny)

The assignation of destiny is a metaphysical determinant that is usually associated with the creator of the universe and its entities, such as humans. The idea of having a given destiny is an example of things having their corresponding purposes. However, humans, devoid of any purpose, are still believed to have a destiny. The indeterminacy of a person's purpose is a complex and perennial problem, but the identification of an individual's destiny, which is often known at the end of their life, is inferred and identified as the individual's purpose in life. Since the conception that destiny could be the defining factor for human purpose, people have wished to know the entailment of their lives and how much they can be in control of their future. The following conceptions are some of the traditional Akan thoughts on the sources and possible means to alter a person's destiny.

Onyame

The traditional worldview of the Akan conveys faith in a Supreme Being known as *Onyame* or *Onyankopɔn*, among other names. *Onyame* is an intelligent, everlasting, and all-powerful entity (DANQUAH, 1995). There has never been a need to argue about *Onyame*'s existence in Akan conceptualisations; the difficulty has always been discerning *Onyame* at work. *Onyame* is not and has never been considered a tribal god by the Akan people. *Onyame*, on the other hand, is seen as

the highest entity, whose goodness spreads to all individuals. *Onyame* is credited with the creation of the cosmos and is considered the universe's ruling principle. Some Akan believe that destiny is given by *Onyame*. Their conception of this *Onyame* is that of an omnipresent, benevolent, and omnipotent being, regarded as the creator; as such, he is the source of life and the giver of human destiny.

Becoming an Ancestral Person

Ancestral belief is a revered phenomenon in most Akan and African societies, and this is a clear indication that the mortification of humans is not the end of life (MBITI 1990; MENKITI 2004; WIREDU 2010; OYOWE 2022; FLIKSCHUH 2024). As stated earlier, the popular Akan belief is that the soul has to be unified with the body and the spirit for the human person to come into existence. However, at death, there is an unpairing, and the *Ɔkra* (soul), which is the essential part of the human person, finds its place with the ancestral society among the hierarchy of forces. This hierarchical placement of the ancestors gives them some power of spiritual agency (GYEKYE 1978, 280; MAJEED 2017a, 133; INUSAH & OMABOE 2023, 48) to make some changes in human life that are beyond human control but favourable and ethically good for their descendants. To be an ancestor, there are some qualities an individual ought to possess (including having lived a life worth emulating, having given birth, and having been of social and moral benefit to society). During Akan funerals, deceased loved ones are sent off with the desired wishes of the living to help cause changes in their lives. This prayer is premised on the belief that in the spirit realm, these ancestors could help change destinies.

Reincarnation

Reincarnation is a popular concept that has been extensively argued by many scholars in African philosophy, especially Majeed (2017a). The folk idea is that the body does not reincarnate; rather, the soul is what undergoes reincarnation. That is, the soul that has once lived in this world may return to the world by choosing and inhabiting a human body. Once a person's presence, bodily features, and activities remind others of a particular deceased individual to the brim of their conviction, the individual will be labelled a *kosanba* (gone and returned) or a reincarnated person. Reincarnation in Akan society will invite the possibility of judgment (praise or blame), where people may judge neonates who are embellished with some bodily signs to be deceased persons who either lived a good or bad life. A possible rebirth after an accidental death - *atofoɔ* (MAJEED 2014, 11) is conceptualised in Akan social thought, and as Azenabor (1988) reiterates, reincarnated people are popularly believed in African social thought to have returned to complete their destinies. Hence, the destiny assigned to particular persons remains a physical necessity of the life they will live, such that until their destined death, their soul may not rest and/or will return to the world to fulfil the assigned destiny and pass away the destined way.

Priests, Diviners, and Medicine Men

Diviners and traditional medicine men are special people in the African cultural setting; this is due to their ability to observe, apprehend, and interact with immaterial realities. Some of these people may be priests/priestesses, and their ability to communicate with supernatural or other immaterial beings aids them in capturing futuristic realities and events. Their ability to tell futuristic events is premised on the notion that higher immaterial beings are ontologically positioned to know beyond the present; thus, these deities, gods, or ancestors can communicate with the diviners and tell them things that are yet to happen. By this special ability, these special people are able to see through people and know their destinies. Thus, diviners are able to inform and advise their consultants on what their destiny or that of another related person (could be a family member or friend) holds. A person's natural desire to survive will elucidate their wish to avoid pain, death, and misery; hence, when individuals become aware of what is likely to happen in their life in the future, they may want to change it. The diviners have the ability, through the deities, to change future events in one's life. This altering of destiny does not just occur in emptiness; just as there are forces in the physical world, the spiritual world has forces and operates in a certain order, such that a sacrifice of something is to replace any alteration to appease the disorder caused in a person's interest. A typifying case is by a well-known Akan writer, Efua Sutherland, in her novel *Edufa*. The story is plotted in an Akan setting. As the story unfolds, Edufa (the name of a father and a husband in the novel) consults a diviner to inquire about his future (SUTHERLAND, 1967). Upon learning of his impending death and not wishing to die soon, he convinces his wife to switch places with him and dying for him in the name of love. Not to ignore, the phenomenon of witchcraft is an intricate aspect of the spiritual world of the African (Akan) (PARISH, 2003); one thing witches or wizards are known for is the ability to mess with (invariably, altering destinies) the life of their victims.

Naming culture

The naming culture is also an important component of the traditional African cultural system and a pointer to one's destiny (ARKO-ACHEMFUOR, 2018). Among Africans, it is a popular belief that names have an impact on their bearers; hence, children should be given good names. Good names may include those of known ancestors or living elders who have had high positive impacts on society. Every name has a meaning, and it is a commonly held belief that either the meaning of the name or the original bearer of the name's life will serve as an exemplary replication in the child's life (AGYEKUM, 2006). For this reason, traditional Akan names are not just given. There is some form of intentionality in the naming culture of the Akan; it is a pretext to determine the destinies of individuals. Some Akan names, such as *Agyemang*, which means came to save a nation, and *Bediako*, meaning born to fight, are instances of names that tell a lot about the past, the present, and the future of a child. Certain Akan adages depict

how well a person has lived up to his name. For instance, a saying such as *ne din ne ne honam se*, which means the name befits the body or the person; however, this does not necessarily mean that the person is living a good life or has a good name. Even when a person is supposedly named after a chief or royal person, in spite of their nonroyal affiliation, just the name alone has a tremendous effect on the lifestyle of the individual.

The (Akan) Community

The Akan community contributes significantly to the destiny of its people. The communitarian way of life widely practised in African societies (MENKITI, 1984), such as the Akan, places the community's interest above that of the individual. The common weal of society ought to remain the ultimate concern of every individual belonging to that community. However, it does not logically imply that individuals' rights or concerns should be subjugated. Gyekye (1995) makes a justifiable case in his moderate communitarianism by asserting that the individual has duties to the community, and in turn, the community also secure the rights of its people. The Akan, as Gyekye maintained, have a strict sense of communitarian values, and their people are named villains and heroes as to how well they conform to societal rules and norms and how much they contribute to the development of the community. Despite the critique by Matolino (2009) and Famakinwa (2010) alluding that Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is no different but an iteration of Menkiti's communitarianism, which Gyekye called radical. Majeed (2018) makes a defense of the peculiarity of how moderate communitarianism is an appropriate description of the communitarian principles the Akan people practice. The communitarian picture, particularly for the Akan, moderate communitarianism connotes that the destiny is agential and a consequence of emerging intentional interactions within the community.

Human decisions/choices

Human decisions play a vital role in mapping out a person's destiny. The choices one makes also determine the path they chart. Human decision-making is frequently examined as the result of a comprehensive assessment of various possibilities in terms of their likelihood and the worth of outcomes. It is believed that certain factors, depending on decision-making, may determine the life expectancy of an individual. For instance, habits can go ahead to determine the likelihood of what may happen in a person's life. Bad habits with foods, drugs, a wild and spontaneous lifestyle. A typical case is the one that addresses the dressing style of women. In Akan culture, women dress decently and do not expose sensitive parts that may be appealing to other persons. Therefore, a lady in Akan is called *akatasia*, translated as 'cover to hide'. That is, a lady who engages in improper dressing by exposing some sensually appealing parts of her body may attract some unwarranted sexual advances and may lead to rape. Another example may be the wrong choice of friends: not being particular in one's selection of friends may lead one to an

association with people engaged in social vices. The underlying implication is that the choices we make are relevant to the life we live.

The possibility of altering a person's destiny is not an unreality in Akan society. The destiny of an individual could be what it will be, and could also be to the determination by the individual or closely related people. These aforementioned factors and their roles in Akan individuals' lives are determinants of a person's destiny.

The making of immoral agents (non-persons)

A person stands in relation to his community bearing qualities that comprise a constructive and well-meaning posture towards the well-being of the community. That implies that the person is a moral agent acting in line with the communal consciousness of their community. The constructive build-up of attitudes and values that inform decisions is what breaks the tension and forms a person. No matter how obsolete the relationship that emerges, a person may be, it is still an action involving one's participation. That fundamentally establishes the fact that one could have chosen not to appeal to the communal concern or attitudes. Oftentimes, deviant, immoral individuals in society are noted as non-persons for their non-alignment with communal decisions, attitudes, and well-being (MENKITI, 1984). It could be argued that the communal attitudes or consciousness may be determinants set to preclude other person because their nature, fundamentally, is not in line with the cultural thinking of their community. The case is, however, different when the individual has been oriented to the communal framework, yet their perspectives, based on the relativity of interpretations, afford them the capacity to think in alternative ways to their immediate community. Such an individual is outrightly not acting with inspiration from communal consciousness, but their action is not resulting in a behaviour that the individual expects of them within the community. That is to say, being a deviant, whether with the right justifications or not, is because their actions do not follow the conventional moral standings; hence, they earn the status of non-persons (immoral agents). This is not identical to what Menkiti calls lesser persons. Lesser persons are individuals who lack moral development in terms of moral responsibility.

The Rationality of Akan Free Will

As mentioned above, the phenomenon of being free and determined seems contradictory. Despite the polarisation of issues of having free will, there seems to be some predetermined outcomes depending on one's choices.

In Akan thought, however, some things, especially moral decisions and how quickly one moves toward one's given profession (or succeeds in that profession) - and for that matter, succeeds in life - are not predetermined. Thus, one may be destined to be a successful mason, but if one does not identify one's masonry talent early enough, one's success

may be delayed. Some things in life are therefore within human control. Consequently, the human being is encouraged to lead a good moral life and to strive for the betterment of his or her own life here and now, but not to think or behave as if his or her whole life or moral choices are determined. (MAJEED 2015, 117)

This is to suggest that the fate (*nkrabea*) of the individual is contingent on the *hyebre* of the individual. For instance, in the prenatal existence of the *Akra* before they depart and assume human nature as babies, the soul claims some permutations of fate that may be. The conditionality guiding one's fate is contingently conceptualised as *if this happens, then that will be*. Thus, depending on one's destiny and its alterability on earth, one's fate will be determined.

Across the debate of how *nkrabea* and *hyebre* may differ, *nkrabea* – which is believed to be prenatally stipulated but has its actuality dependent on the outcome of *hyebre* – is actually unknown at the inception of one's life. No one ever knows the *nkrabea* of a person unless it is outsourced via some supersensible skills like the diviners possess. The inability to access truths on a person's *nkrabea* is an epistemic problem. A major concern in this problem is whether *nkrabea*, the unknown and abstract phenomenon, is a prenatal or an earthly orchestration. The ordinary Akan perception is that *nkrabea* is prenatally orchestrated and that *hyebre* will be the milestones of earthly life that lead to one's *nkrabea*. However, it turns out that the actualised *nkrabea* will depend on the outcome of *hyebre*. An explanatory account in support of moral responsibility could be that in the absence of an absolute epistemic truth concerning what one's *nkrabea* is, *nkrabea* supervenes on *hyebre* such that the choices and their corresponding consequences define their *nkrabea* (fate). Here, *nkrabea* will not come to be an imposition or preestablished event; rather, this conception fits the understanding of a definite end, depending on the choices made.

Insisting on an unalterable destiny will imply the following argument:

1. If *nkrabea* and *hyebre* are prenatal and predetermined with oughtness, then they will preclude praise and blame from Akan social life,
2. Praise and blame in Akan social life is a deception but may be purposeful,
3. Therefore, moral responsibility and justice have no place in Akan social life.

Knowing that the Akan social life is not based on double standards—having its people know that humans have a predestined life that will happen despite their will, intentions, and choices, yet still go ahead to blame and judge them for their actions, the unalterability of destiny will not be widely accepted as Akan. The Akan social life is a network of associations that upholds praise and blame by singing, renaming, and paying ancestral reverence to morally upright life and justice seekers. Hence, the prenatal conception of *hyebre* (destiny) and

nkrabea (fate) may not, fit into a deterministic description, while the earthly orchestrated conception of *hyɛbrɛ* (destiny) and *nkrabea* (fate), antithetical to Gyekye's postulation, remains sound because the actuality of *nkrabea* is contingent on *hyɛbrɛ*, while *hyɛbrɛ* is also actualised depending on one's spatial awareness and participation of events. At this crossroad, what seems befitting for the conceptions of *hyɛbrɛ* (destiny) and *nkrabea* (fate) is more of a supervenient relationship where the micro-constituents (such as the chain of events in a person's life - *hyɛbrɛ*) determine the macro nature (total outturn of one's life - *nkrabea*). Meaning, the *Ɔkra* (soul) upon its composition with *sunsum* (spirit) and *honam* (body) has a potential *nkrabea* (an unactualized fate) and a possible *hyɛbrɛ* (a destiny opens to variations); however, the *hyɛbrɛ* takes form through the physical nature of the person, their conscious participation and deliberations on earthly things such as society, economy, psychology, and environmental determinants.

Conclusion

The Akan have the capacity to account for moral responsibility, and destiny remains alterable within human capacities. Our analysis of the difference between fate and destiny in the Akan perspective emphasises the intelligibility of moral responsibility in an alterable destiny. Fate and destiny do not have to be used interchangeably anymore after their definition in this work. *Nkrabea* (fate) is often considered to be a broader concept than destiny because it encompasses the total outcome of one's life. Nonetheless, *hyɛbrɛ* (destiny), which is the forecasted life event, is subject to change by several determinants like diviners, *Onyame* (God), our life decisions, or even through the names that are given to us. Although the Akan can forecast or inquire into the destiny of an individual, it is not bound to happen. In the absence of predestination in Akan thought, the Akan live in a soft-determinist world, where individuals have some control over events through their decisions and actions. The Akan concept of destiny is rather in sync with agency and conscious cognitive awareness than any form of hard determinism (fatalism), as long as the Akan firmly believe that humans are not outrightly determined but are an embodiment of their decisions and moral values in the community.

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