

THE AFRICAN META-MEDICAL SCIENCE OF UKPUGHO UKPONG (SOUL TRANSPLANTATION): A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT: *The human soul has been believed to be immaterial and immortal element which exclusively inheres in the human body. Ukpugho ukpong (soul transplant) is an ancient meta-medical science of the Annang and Ibibio people, which is hinged on the belief that the human soul is transcendent and it exclusively inheres in proxy animal; that the soul is mortal, and can be surgically transplanted in the likeness of somatic tissue transplant. This study aimed at carrying out a philosophical critique of this belief in order to determine its significance as a metaphysical concept. It also aimed at critically examining the philosophical as well as sociological discussions on the subject of ukpuho ukpong. The study was discussed on the framework of African concept of mind which holds that the soul has dual nature, namely – the Active Principle and the Quiescent Counterpart. The paper debunks the doctrines of metempsychosis and transmigration as alien to African metaphysics. The method of ordinary language analysis was employed to analyze the concepts ukpong and mbukpong. In conclusion, the paper made the following observations that: the soul is transcendent but perishable substance, the mind has dual nature, the soul does not transmigrate and the science of ukpuho ukpong is not a pseudo-metaphysical concept but was founded on African logic of dualistic mind. The paper notes that the science of ukpuho ukpong is bugged with a number of unresolved philosophical problems. Despite that the paper discovered that the science of ukpuho ukpong can contribute significantly to meta-medicine and sustainable environmental values.*

KEY WORDS: Soul Transplant, Ukpugho Ukpong, Proxy Animal, Metempsychosis, Mind, Annang, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, scholars have begun to reappraise the much-despised animistic views of primitive societies. One of such views is the idea of *Ukpugho Ukpong* which literally translates as “soul transplantation”. It is the belief that soul can be transplanted in the likeness of somatic tissue transplantation. This view can be contextualized within the theories of evolution and pansophism which hold that human beings and other animals belong to the same ontological order. The idea of soul is central to most religions of the world. We find the idea in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, African indigenous religions among others. The idea of soul is usually discussed when the nature and origin of man become an issue. In this article we discuss the idea of soul not only in relation to man, but in relation to the animals as well.

SOUL (UKPONG): A COMPARATIVE EXPOSITION

UKPONG OR SOUL (Western Perspective): In Western narratives, there are various definitions and descriptions about the nature of soul. The ancient Greek philosopher,

Pythagoras, defines the soul as the immortal element in man which transmigrates into another human body, even an animal, after the death of the individual (Lawhead, 2002:13). And that since the soul is imprisoned in the body, it seeks release from it which can only come as a result of *soul purification* through asceticism and philosophy. Plato also described soul as an immortal element which prior to its habitation in the human body, pre-existed in the world of gods to which it shall return after the demise of the man (Omogbe, 2005:160). Aristotle described soul as the principle of animal life; which exists inseparably and interdependently with the body (Aristotle, 1). Saint Augustine on his part described soul as “an immaterial substance which is superior to the body and cannot be acted upon by the body” (Omogbe, 1993:163). In the modern era Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant and Miguel Unamuno all argue in favour of soul as being the immortal element in man.

Aristotle’s conception of soul and body as being mutually dependent and inseparable leaves no room for an immortal soul. Epicurus rejected the idea that soul is an incorporeal substance; rather he contended that soul constitute of atoms and acts as sentience of the body, which dissolves at the demise of the man (Omogbe, 1993:173). Epicurus’ definition of soul seems to be an adaptation from Anaxagoras who defined soul as an integration of “fine” atoms and death as its disintegration. David Hume and Bertrand Russell denied the existence of such an entity called soul. According Russell, soul (which he identified as mind) is nothing but series of experiences bound up as memory in the brain; which is destroyed at death alongside the brain (Omogbe, 1993:175). Of course, most post-Darwin philosophers see no difference between mind and the brain. The terms mind and soul has been used interchangeable throughout Western history.

Some regard the soul as mere consciousness, sentience, mental process, memory, etc. In fact, there have been series of arguments to determine whether the mind or soul is an entity as such. We do not intend to go into that argument because it is beyond the scope of this paper.

UKPONG OR SOUL (African Perspective): Now, how does the African, at least the ancient African, define soul? It is dangerous to assume that the various ethnic groupings in Africa have a uniform conception of soul. However, it is safe to claim that all African communities believe in the existence of soul. The African believes that man is tripartite being: body, soul and spirit. At death of the body, it is believed that the spirit is still present in the corpse. That is why, as noted by Pantaleon Iroegbu (2005), “the African man and woman would refer to a corpse of dead person as the person being buried, not just of the body” (p.437). This makes room for the spirit of the dead to maintain continual interaction with the community of the living. This can be explained further in the concept of *Afe Nkuku Ekpo* and *ufok nnwommo*. In Annang, it is usually said “*ekpo akpa ’nyin ikpaha utong*” literally translated as “the dead is only death in the eye and not in the ear.” This means that at death the dead person can still hear even though he cannot see. This is believed to be a proof that the spirit is still present in the corpse. This belief that – *ekpo akpa anyin ikpaha utong* – is therefore the foundation for ancestral consultation. In addition, Effi, the High Priest of Abam in Ukpab Ikot Udo Village is usually quoted to have often said to his body when he fell ill: “*nnkam ukere fien, aya ’kut ebu.*” (I’m only concern about you; you’ll see what termites would do to you). Here, the spirit is mocking the sick body, reminding it of the fate that awaits it. The spirit could do this because it is believed to be immortal and immune to corruption. This manner of conception of human nature provides the basis for the belief in reincarnation. For as E. E. Ekong, quoted in (Ojong, 1995) notes: “the Ibibio [a sister-tribe of Annang] believe that a human being is made up of ‘god spirit’ (*ekpo*) which is immortal and retires to the village of the spirits (*obio ekpo*) when the

individual dies and can reincarnate.” (p.85). We do not agree with Ekong’s interpretation of ekpo as god-spirit: which he apparently interpreted to reflect Christian myth of creation. In Annang, the concept “ekpo” refers to the dead or ancestor, and not spirit. In fact, there is no indigenous word for “spirit” as evident in the Efik, Annang and Ibibio Bible translations – it may be for this reason Gyakye (1981:67) argues that African concept of being is dualistic rather than tripartite.

Apart from that, ancient Annang in particular, believed that the *ukpong* of a man resides in a certain animal of his psycho-personality kind. Ekong (quoted in Ojong, 1995) collaborates this thesis thus:

The Ibibio believes that a soul (*ukpong*) which is the seat of personality is affiliated to other beings; and then the flesh and bones. A man’s soul is believed to inhere in animals, birds, fishes or trees (p.82).

Now, this animal is not impersonal or anonymous but particular identifiable animal species. For example, if it is a lion, it a particular individual lion; and not the conceptual lion. When my *ukpong* inhabit the lion ‘A’, for example, it acquires the personality of that animal; such that I begin to exhibit the psycho-personality of that particular lion.

A person who is believed to have a snake soul, particularly one that has the black snake (*ebre*) affinity, generally has unpleasant attributes including pungent body odour or fetid breath, long neck, slim jaws and constantly peeling skin. Some people are said to have affinity in birds, particularly like the forest eagle (*nturukpum*), parrot (*inim*) and such other birds as are reputed for strength or special intelligence. Bird affinity also offers long life and strength (Ojong, 1995:83).

As a corollary, therefore, man is made-up of both body and spirit; whereas *ukpong* is just an external quality of man, at least by proxy. The spirit is essentially conceived as wind which takes the form of the body. The spirit can go out of the body and return to it at will. It is this that Dagogo Idonboye (1973) described as “active principle” of the mind. *Ukpong* on its part inheres in proxy animal.

Furthermore, Offiong (2008) states:

The Ibibio believe that a person has two souls, *ukpong*: one inhabits the body and is immortal, while the second, *ukp’o’n ik’on* [*ukpong ikot*] resides in certain kinds of animals such as leopard, lion, antelope, bush pig, python, among others (p.25).

At this juncture, it is important to point out that the idea of two souls is foreign to Annang and Ibibio ontology. Some literatures have confused *ukpong* with *mbukpong* – which is the spirit that inheres in man. It was as a result of this confusion, according to Evang. I. F. Umoh, that the concept of *ikot* (bush) was added to *ukpong* whereas it was not originally there (Personal communication, 3 July 2012).¹ *Ukpong-ikot* means the soul which lives in the bush; or for short, “wild soul”. And as we have argued, *ukpong-ikot* is a recently invented terminology.

Moreover, the soul is believed to be mortal. In other words, *ukpong* is not immune to destruction and death. Offiong (2008) notes, “when a person dies, his *ukpong-ikot* also dies while the soul either transmigrates to the world of the dead, *obio ekpo*... where it awaits

reincarnation”(p.25). That is to say, when a person dies his soul (ukpong) dies while his spirit (mbukpong) transits to the world of spirits. Ekong, quoted in (Ojong 1995), confirms the mortality and destructibility of the soul thus: “it is possible to invoke a person’s soul into plantain tree and when the tree is hewn down the person dies instantly” (p.83).

Apart from that, there is the concept of *Ukpong Ayen* embedded in the larger concept of *ukpugho ukpong*. *Ukpong ayen* translates as “child’s soul”. It refers to a particular animal called Wall Gecko. *Ukpong ayen* represent the soul of the child. A particular *ukpong ayen* is believed to host the soul of particular child. That is why *Ukpong ayen* was forbidden from being killed – because by killing it you have killed a child somewhere. Hence it was a taboo to kill *ukpong ayen*. (This taboo is still being held in some rural communities). In addition, it is here pertinent to mention that the ancient Annang believed that every animate thing including plants and animals have their individual spirits. For this reason it is often said by farmers “yak ika akpene ubakhu-usen mbak iwa ama adaka udua”; the spirit of the cassava is often said to go to market in the afternoon. Hence, the farmer has to go to the farm in the morning so as to meet the spirit of the cassava for the purpose of soliciting permission. The permission which the people believe “the plant is always willing to yield.” Ekwealo (2011) reports that Igbo people “first seek permission by incantations to the spirit of the tree” before cutting its bark for medicinal purpose (p.4). Leyten (2015:249-251) also reports that the Ashanti people first propitiate the spirit of the tree before cutting it down. The legend of Atim Okpo Ebot, original to the Efik tribe, also confirms the belief of “spirit-in-tree” in ancient Africa.²

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF MIND

African concept of mind has important consequences for the understanding of African view of reality. It can aid in explaining the belief of the dual nature of the soul held in Africa. Generally, the African believes that human beings have tripartite nature, namely: body, spirit and soul. While the body and soul are perishable, the spirit is immortal. As the body melts back to the universe, the spirit continues to live as ancestor (Essien & Umotong, 2013:175). This disintegration of body, soul and spirit – called death – is basically due to the fact that the body is no longer able to sustain the relationship. For as Gyakye (1981) argues, “the condition of the soul depends on the condition of the body” (p.67). The spirit has no prerogatory right to unilaterally call off the relationship. Like in the case of the soul, the body merely houses the spirit. When the house (body) crumbles, the spirit survives while the soul perishes in it. The personal spirit of the dead man survived because it an extension of, therefore participates in, the universal spirit which never perishes. The individual spirit is the microcosm of the life-force of the universe. Idoniboye states that the spirit is the “sustaining creative life-force of the universe”, the collective mind, the universal soul. Alexis Kagame in his *Bantu Ontology* describes it as “Ntu” – the force in its pure state, the common denominator of all beings, the force that permeates the universe and everything. The commonality of the spirit to all beings allows for beings to symbiotically interact, interpenetrate, interconnect and interlink with each and everything (Okoro, 2001:190). It allows for interactions between man and man, man and the rest of nature. It also allows for interaction between body and soul. For as Gyakye (1981) notes, “what happens to the soul takes effect or reflects on the condition of the body” (p.67). Ruch and Anyanwu (1984:90) opine that this kind of interactions between beings in nature is actually those between vital forces. And that this interaction is necessary to maintain a healthy relationship between man and nature as well as with other living forces in the universe.

Idoniboye posits that spirit is capable of being in three states, namely: unembodied, embodied and disembodied.

In its pure state, it is unembodied. Spirit is the animating, sustaining creative life-force of the universe. In human bodies, it becomes the mind or soul so that the individual mind or soul shares in the collective mind – or soul-stuff of the universe (Idoniboye, 1973:83).

This means that the spirit in its pure state is unembodied. It is the universal spirit, the Ntu, the life-force, the vital force that permeates everything. Yet the spirit can be embodied. When it is embodied in the human body, it becomes the mind or soul. Idoniboye (1973:83) also asserts that the human mind has dual nature, namely: the Active Principle and the Quiescent Counterpart. The active principle of the mind can be disembodied leaving the quiescent counterpart to animate the body. When the spirit is disembodied, the mind/soul can transform into or take up the form of animals and plants. It is obviously for this reason the Azande would declare during initiatic ceremony wherein the young ones are reminded:

Your relatives are animals, your father is an elephant, your father's elder brother is the red pig, your wives are cane-rats, your mother is a bush-buck, your maternal uncles are the duckers, your grandfather is a rhinoceros (Evans-Pritchard, 1976).

Idoniboye (1973:83) avers that when a witch changes into a bat, an owl, or other animals, it is the “active principle” of the mind that is implanted into the host animal leaving the “quiescent counterpart” to animate the body.

ORDINARY LANGUAGE ANALYSIS OF MBUKPONG AND UKPONG

Mbukpong is translated as immortal-soul. It has affinity with another term *mbukpo*. *Mbukpo* is used to designate an ancestor. (We have found such usage in the page 25 of Offiong's book *An Introduction of the Ibibio of Nigeria*). *Mbukpo* also means immortal-spirit. The prefix “mbu”, attached to *ukpong* and *okpo*, means immortal, eternal, divine and incorruptible. So when the prefix *mbu* (immortal) is attached to *ukpong* (soul) it becomes *mbukpong* (immortal-soul). It is this one that inheres in the human body.

It is important to note that the analysis above only reflects the ordinary usage of the terms employed here. A literary, therefore technical, usage of the terms appears slightly different even though it connotes the same meaning. Literarily (and technically), *mbukpong* designates the “active principle” of the soul. (Here we borrow the technical term invented by Idoniboye). In the same vein, *mbukpo* designates “active principle” of the body. Literarily, *okpo* means the biological body. In ordinary usage *okpo* means dead body. But *okpo* also means whole, complete. Literarily, the prefix “mbu” refers to active part of a thing. So literarily (and technically) *mbukpong* designates active principle of *ukpong*. Based on the description above it appears that both *mbukpong* and *mbukpo* refer to the same thing. Indeed, it seems so in ordinary sense. However, it appears to me that the seeming problem is linguistic rather than conceptual. The picture shall be become clearer as we go on. Meanwhile, it appears safer to seek an understanding of the concept of *mbukpong* from both its ordinary and literary (or technical) sense. In addition, Idoniboye's concept of the “active principle” of the mind may

prove helpful. Meanwhile, a further study of the following terms shall give a better understanding. The relating terms include: *okpo*, *ekpo*, *okpo-owo*, and *mbukpat*.

It is important to note that there have been casual usages of the terms *mbukpong* and *mbukpo*. For example, *mbukpong*, as slang, has been used to denote shadow. (The original and literary term for shadow is *mkpogho* or *mfogho* which means the “the shedded one”). Ekong (quoted in Ojong, 1995:83) notes that “it is believed that the shadow is a projection of the soul, hence it is called *mbukpong*.” I have already noted that *mbukpong* used colloquially to denote shadow does not contain its original meaning. In the same vein, post-colonial usage of the word *mbukpo* has distorted its literary meaning. For example, *mbukpo*, as slang, is used casually to designate lifeless thing. Chief Bassey Ekott notes that the term *mbukpo* was later used by early African Christian converts in a contemptuous manner when they referred to the ancestors (Personal communication, 8 December 2010).³ Our emphasis, it should be noted, is on *mbukpong*. There are other conceptions of man in Africa of which we have not considered; but we lay emphasis on Annang conception which is native to this author.

UKPUGHO UKPONG: DEFINED

What is *ukpugho ukpong*? We noted at the outset that the term *ukpugho ukpong* literally and literarily translates as “soul transplantation”. It connotes that the soul can be transplanted in the likeness of the body tissue transplantation. Hence, the term *ukpugho ukpong* connotes surgery; at least of a spiritual type of surgery. We also noted earlier that the term *ukpong* is translated as soul; while *ukpugho* refers to the act of changing, transferring or transplanting. Transplantation is essentially used in medicine and agriculture, particularly in surgery and genetic engineering. Transplantation, in surgery, means “to transfer an organ or tissue from one body to another or from one place in someone’s body to another” (Encarta Dictionary, 2009). For example, we have kidney transplant, heart transplant, bone-marrow transplant, etc.

Ukpugho ukpong is meta-medical science which involves spiritual surgery of transplanting man’s soul from one animal to another. We said earlier that *ukpong* is said to inhere in proxy animals. Now it is believed that if the proxy animal is physically assaulted unto injury, the person would experience physical pains in proportion to the injury sustained by the host animal. For example, if the host animal is shot by the leg and that leg begins to decay the man’s leg too would also begin to decay; and would not respond to any kind of medication except his soul have been transplanted from that animal to another. If the host animal dies in that condition, the man too will die. This process of surgery, which is usually done at night, is called *Ukpugho Ukpong*. Meanwhile, it is worthy of note that a person (usually seeking to elongate his life) may voluntarily seek soul transplanting into a more preferred animal.

The peculiar thing about the soul is that if it is harmed or destroyed somehow, the person to whom it belongs also suffers the same fate unless a quick step is taken to change the soul from that which has been harmed to another. This process is known as metempsychosis, i.e, *ukpong* *ukpong*. (Ojong, 1995:83)

A DENIAL OF METEMPSYCHOSIS AND SOUL TRANSMIGRATION IN AFRICA

It is very important to note that Ekong E. Ekong and Kyrian Ojong wrongly interpreted *ukpugho ukpong* to mean metempsychosis.⁴ It is wrong to designate *ukpugho ukpong* as metempsychosis. There is a clear and distinct difference between *ukpugho ukpong* and metempsychosis. It is a wrong interpretation which is based on Pythagoras' concept of *soul transmigration*. *Ukpugho ukpong* is not the same thing as soul transmigration, rather it is soul transplantation. It is a deliberate act of spiritual surgery.

Metempsychosis, according to Encarta Dictionary (2009), designates the description in which somebody's soul transmigrates, after death, into the body of another person or animal. It is "a doctrine introduced into Western tradition by Pythagoras. It claims that soul, which has an essential kinship with the divine and immortal, is a temporary sojourner in the body and may live through successive incarnations in various animal and human bodies" (Bunnin & Yu, 2004:701). Joseph Omoregbe notes that Pythagoras adapted his concept of transmigration from Orphism.

According to Orphism... the soul is the divine element in man... It formerly lived in the other world and was sent into this world as punishment for an offence committed. Now in this world, the soul is imprisoned in the body... After death, the soul will transmigrate into another body, thus leaving one prison for another. The next prison may be worse, because it may be the body of an animal, for the soul could transmigrate from human body to animal body (Omoregbe, 2005:74).

We can now see that in metempsychosis, the soul can transmigrate from man (where it originally inhered) to another man or animal. But in *ukpugho ukpong*, the soul did not reside in the man in the first place; and it can only be transplanted from one animal into another animal. *Ukpong* never inheres in the human body.

Suffice it to state that *mbukpong* does not transmigrate at all. It should be recalled that Offiong (2008) had stated that "when a person dies, his ukpong ikot also dies while the other soul either transmigrates to the world of the dead, *obio ekpo*, *obio Abasi*, that is, heaven" (p.25). It is important to note that Offiong's position is a clear distortion of the belief of Annang and Ibibio people. The concept of *obio Abasi* (abode of God) is foreign to Annang ontology: The ancient Annang believed in pantheism which was evident in their polytheistic practices. A separate abode for God (which exists outside nature) is incompatible with pantheism. In fact, the concept of *obio Abasi* is Judeo-Christian rather than African; and it is based on Plato's idea of world of gods. In addition, during libation, when the ancient Annang man uttered – "abasi enyong, abasi isong..." – he did not mean there is a separate but higher God in heaven, he meant the God that inhabit the sky is the same God that inhabit the earth and everything else – the universal spirit as such. This left him with the idea of pantheistic God. Furthermore, in Annang ontology, *mbukpong* remains in the body when the corpse is buried. When a person dies his spirit, *mbukpong*, do not leave the dead body. It is for this reason it is said: *ekpo akpa enyin ikpaha utong*. It is also on the basis of this belief that the corpse of *idiok ekpo* (wicked ancestor) could be dug out to face punishment for causing trouble in the community of the living. It is on the basis of this belief that the room where a dead body is kept is knocked (a way of seeking permission) before entering because the spirit is believed to be intact. It is due to this belief evil is not spoken of the dead because "ekpo akpa 'nyin ikpaha utong". Iroegbu (2005) confirmed this belief thus: "the African man and woman would refer to a corpse of dead

person as the person being buried, not just the body” (p.437). Chief (Dr.) Etim Umo Nnan had argued that the idea of transmigration of soul of the dead is held by African Christian converts, and it is alien to Annang ontology (Personal communication, 20 December 2015).⁵ Chief (Dr.) Nnan rightly argues further that *obio ekpo* is not a place as such. Annang people believe that *obio ekpo* exists in the community of the living and do not lie outside it. Of course, *obio ekpo* supposed to be a place of rest for the dead, yet the dead do not rest except in *Ufok Mmwommo* which exist only in the community of the living. It is the belief of the Annang that *mme Nkuku Ekpo* are always present at the village meetings, that is, the royal ancestors are always present at community and family meetings. The general saying in Annangland that *udua ade owo ayam ekpo ayam* (market is transacted by both the dead and the living) further strengthens the position that there is no binary or dichotomy between *usaak anyin* (community of the living) and *uda 'ya idap* (community of the dead). So as we can see, in Annang ontology, the dead and the living share the same community.

A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

No doubt, *ukpugho ukpong* is a lofty metaphysical concept. It has advantages but it is also burdened with philosophical questions. One of the significance of *ukpugho ukpong* is in the area of healing, that is, medicine. Today medical science is replete with cases of undetermined riddles about the diagnosis and treatment of many illnesses. This is due to the fact that modern medicine is essentially an empirical science. This goes to mean that it does not consider the concept of soul as lying within its scope; hence it cannot research into the reality, interaction and problem the soul as it relates to the body. So the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* provided an alternative means of resolving some of the issues which empirically-oriented Western orthodox medicine could not handle.

Another major advantage of that concept is in the area of environmental management. As Ekwealo pointed out, the ecological crisis in Africa is traceable to the disappearance of African indigenous values and concepts which were central to environmental management.⁶ In fact, the conflict in the world today has been traced to climate change – a fundamental fallout of environmental abuse (Odoemene, 2011). For example, the 2008 food crises and the violent riots that greeted it were due mainly to our ill-nurtured environmental orientation (Gregory & Ingram, 2008). In ancient Africa, the concept of *ukpugho ukpong*, for example, inspired the ancient African to recognize and respect the rights and values that all beings possess. It encouraged the attitude of *ndummilinduazo* (live and let live).

Beginning with man, although he is composed of the physical and spiritual natures, the belief is that he is fundamentally ‘spirit’. It is this primary definition of his nature that connects him to other beings and things in the universe. Whatever that exists is in relation to the other and this connection accounts for the defined relationships that is geared to harmony (Ekwealo, 2011:5).

In other words, Ekwealo is arguing that the pansophistic orientation which the concept of *ukpugho ukpong*, for example, inspired was based on the greater conception of nature as being possessed of spirit; which is the connect point between man, other animals and plants.

From the foregoing, we can see that the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* is significantly lofty; however, it is also burdened with unresolved philosophical problems. One of such problems is

the question of the origin of the souls. Unlike Western philosophical doctrines, the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* has no explanation to the question about genesis of the souls. Is it that the soul has always been in the world or it migrated from the spirit world? We have already shown in our argument the impossibility of soul transmigration in Annang ontology. In spite of that, the question of the origin of souls lingers.

Another problem that could be associated with the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* is that of the host animal. It is a widely held belief that human beings live longer than most animals. Since the soul does not inhere only the animals with longer life span; what happens when a host animal with a shorter life span, for example, *Ukpong Ayen*, dies.

The concept of *ukpugho ukpong* also raises the traditional problem of interaction between body and soul. The idea of dualistic conception of the soul as well as the idea of transcendent soul inherent in the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* makes the concept even more complicated. How does *ukpong*, *mbukpong* and *ikpokidem* (body) interact? What is the relationship between *ukpong* and *mbukpong*? What is the relationship between *mbukpong* and *abukidem*? Do harm to the human body have parallel effect on the host animal in the manner *ukpong* instigates when the host animal is endangered? What is the relationship between *ukpong* and the proxy animal? Indeed, the concept has a fundamental problem which bothers on interaction between the different entities.

Besides, the concept seems to raise the issues of interaction between the soul of the host animal and *ukpong*, as Ojong (1995:83) asks, do the souls of the host animal and that of man co-exist or clash? This possible problem arises from the idea of pansophism which seems to suggest that animals and plants do have their individual souls. It seems to me that the problem above does not arise in this case. It is an issue which ought to be raised regarding the concept of soul transmigration. In Annang ontology, in particular, the view that man is consist of soul, body and spirit does not include the animals and plants. It is only man that has tripartite nature, whereas plants and animals have dual nature. In other words, plants and animals are believed to consist of only matter and spirit. So the issue of two souls seems not to arise at all. Nevertheless, the question that arises from this issue is: Does animal spirit and *mbukpong* share the same nature; and if they share the same immortal nature, does the animal and plant have a place in obio ekpo?

Apart from that, I want to note that the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* itself is narrow. My argument is that since the spiritual surgeon is capable of identifying and locating the host animal that is involved in danger, the concept should have empowered him with ennobling ecocentric values rather than with the prevalent self-centred anthropocentric objective. That is, rather than transplants the soul and leaves the host animal to die after bearing the brunt of the soul, why not heal the host animal instead such that it would be unnecessary to transplant the soul – thereby killing two birds with one stone. Or even if it was still necessary to transplant the soul, why not heal the proxy animal as well. This suggestion, if taken, can contribute more to biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

CONCLUSION

It is important to conclude this study by highlighting the salient features of the concept. One of the remarkable ideas which the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* has brought to our attention in this study is the idea of *transcendent soul*. Another fascinating feature of the concept is the idea of

soul transplantation. There is also the idea of the *mortality of the soul (ukpong)*, that the soul is destructible and perishable. And finally, there is the idea of *dual nature of the soul*. These are the characteristic features of the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* that markedly distinguish it as a novelty in the science of metaphysics.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is a similar, though distinct, practice of *ukpugho ukpong* which is a common practice among witches and wizards. It was that one Ekong, quoted in Ojong (1995), referred to when he stated: “The soul can be projected during sleep so that the individual takes the form of his or her affinity” (p.82). That one is called soul projection. A study in that area is beyond the scope of this work.

Finally, this study will be incomplete without making the following observation that the concept and practice of *ukpugho ukpong* among Annang people was inspired by the Annang ontological thesis that: “agwo aduk ukpong unam”. My literal understanding of the thesis leads to the interpretation that: “Human beings are participators in animal nature”. The thesis can also be literarily interpreted thus: “Human beings have animal nature”. (I believe the former is what was intended). A literal interpretation or translation of the thesis in English language may be rendered as: “Human being participates in animal soul” or “Human beings share animal soul”. It can as well be literally interpreted as: “Human beings have their beings in the animal” or “Human soul inheres in the animal”. It is my opinion that the word “ukpong” in the thesis statement should not be understood in literal sense; because of the preceding word “aduk” which literarily means “active participation”, and literally as “enter”. A literal understanding of the thesis might have led to a further concept – *ukpugho ukpong* – which has incurred many philosophical problems.

However, it will be premature to dismiss the concept of *ukpugho ukpong* as “irrational” even though it may appear “unscientific”. It is true that “the substantiation of such beliefs requires verifiable evidences on the grounds of which the veracity of such beliefs would remain tenable, especially in this modern time of rational inquiry” (Ojong, 1995:85). It may be obvious that “certain occurrences defy the explanatory scheme” of the traditional Annang society. But such positivistic outbursts hardly constitute enough reasons to dismiss a claim as Kyrian Ojong did.⁷ The belief in the idea of soul is hardly a object of scientific inquiry. We should rather ask: What problem did the ancient Annang man try to solve with the concept of *ukpugho ukpong*? And what is the ontological grund norm that inspired the belief? Then what values did the concept inspire? Finally, what practical lessons can it suggest to the contemporary society? *Ukpugho ukpong* may be an ancient traditional practice but the characteristic features of the concept suggest another broad area for research.

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NOTES

1. Evang. I. F. Umoh made this claim during an interview I conducted in his residence on July 3, 2012 in Ukpab Ikot Udo Village, Ikot Ekpene L.G.A, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
2. The story of Atim Okpo Ebot is in the book called Mutanda Oyom Namondo.
3. Chief Bassey Essien Ekott made this assertion during an interview I conducted on December 8, 2010 at his residence in Abiakpo Ikot Essien village, Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
4. The concept, ukpuho ukpong, first appear in print in the *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1985, under the title “The Concept of Metamorphosis and Metempsychosis in Ibibio Society” by Ekong E. Ekong.
5. Chief (Dr.) Etim Umo Nnan asserted the claim during an interview I conducted on December 20, 2015 at his residence in Ukpab Ikot Udo Village, Ikot Ekpene L.G.A, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
6. The issue here is discussed in detail in a paper titled “Tackling the Problem of Climate Change: Using the Theory of Environmentalism as a Philosophical Method” which I presented at the *International Conference on Climate Change, Environment and Sustainable Development*, organized by Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos, Nigeria – from 20th to 21st November, 2012.
7. Ojong (1995) had argued: “Beliefs of this type as J.S. Mbiti points out cannot be devoid of fear, falsehood, exaggeration, suspicion, fiction and irrationality” (p.85). The reason, he claims, is due to “lack of scientific knowledge” on part of the Annang and Ibibio people. I believe that Ojong, like Ekong, fundamentally failed to understand the concept. Hence, one of the objectives of this study is for the purpose of correcting the erroneous representation of the concept by Ekong, Ojong and Offiong.

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