Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s position on atheism within the Marxist philosophical system occasions doubts in the minds of some revolutionary forces regarding his Marxist essence and credentials. But do we properly understand that position as it finally turns out to be in its evolution? That is, as a conception of the existence of an all-powerful natural but not a supernatural force subject to scientific scrutiny?

Setting out to unfold the scientific basis of religion, Dr. Nkrumah ends up in an absolute rejection of religion and transformation of the all-powerful supernatural force on the basis of which religion revolves into a natural force with impersonal properties akin to those of the force of gravity. Only the application of Marxist dialectical materialist principles, as Dr. Nkrumah does, generates such a concept.

***

Bob Brown of the All-African People’s Revolutionary Party (Guinea Conakry), a close associate of the late Kwame Ture (Stokeley Carmichael), reputed for his frank expression of convictions, recently states his doubts regarding Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s Marxist credentials, in a sharp response to a discussant in a Facebook discourse, in this way:

I am not religious, but do not share Marx’s view of religion or his atheism. Nkrumah, as June Milne and others point out, was a self-declared Marxist Christian. Nkrumah obviously did not share Marx’s opinion of religion; which challenges how Marxist he really was.

Certainly, Dr. Nkrumah does not initially share Karl Marx’s view on religion and perhaps at all times on atheism. But that does not at the time prevent him from simultaneously asserting that he is a Marxist. He does not renounce Marxism on those premises or impulses and has never done that.

And, how religious is he when he finally renounces religion but holds on to what he calls ‘an impersonal source of all power’? What is the nature of this power source? Is it God? This is a point of curiosity that needs to be addressed by Nkrumaists and should be of interest to Marxists and scientists across the world.

***

Surely, when Dr. Nkrumah declares himself to be a Marxist Christian in his book *Ghana: Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* he adds that he does not see any contradiction in that. The following are his exact words at page 12 of the book:
To-day I am a non-denominational Christian and a Marxist socialist and I have not found any contradiction between the two.

Hence, he does not see that being a Christian poses any imaginable challenge to his being a Marxist. All the same, while in Guinea, where, at least for once, he joins in the Islamic observance of Ramadan (the fast), though not in a Mosque, as June Milne reports, he ceases to be Christian. In this respect, he declares:

In my Autobiography I called myself a Marxist Christian. I think that was wrong. I am now simply a Marxist, with historical materialism as my philosophy of life. (See his letter of July 1, 1967 to June Milne at page 161 of June Milne's book Kwame Nkrumah: The Conakry Years)

From page 199 to page 200 in another letter to June Milne, dated November 28, 1967, Dr. Nkrumah explains his changed attitude toward Christianity in terms of his objection to organized religion as such. It is better to quote him at length when he tells June Milne in that letter that

You remember when you were here I tried to discuss religion with you. I did not go further than to say that I did not believe in organized religion. Religion, qua religion, and as a social and cultural phenomenon, evolving as it were through man’s aspiration to a higher self, is not incompatible with scientific socialism (Marxism) or Communism. As I say, it is the organised form of religion e.g. organised Christianity or Churchianity which I loathe. I loathe it because it destroys the freedom of man and turns him into a spiritual slave.

***

In another letter to June Milne, dated March 27th 1970, Dr. Nkrumah takes a step further and renounces not just organized religion but religion as such while insisting on being a Marxist Socialist. The interesting thing here is that he holds on to what he calls 'an impersonal source of all power'. Read:

With regard to Author’s Note I wanted to write for Allen, it refers principally to page 12 of my Autobiography. I quote: ‘Today I am a non-denominational Christian and a Marxist Socialist. And I have not found any contradiction between them.’ Since I wrote those lines, my ideas on religion have changed. Today, I am not only [not] a non-denominational Christian, I don’t believe in any religion, but the idea of an impersonal source of all power. I am still a Marxist Socialist, and much more so. (See page 370 of Milne’s book. Italics added)

So that essentially, Dr. Nkrumah does not depart from the idea of a source of power in the universe. In fact, going back to another letter to June Milne, dated August 7, 1967, at page 169 of her book, Dr. Nkrumah writes to the effect that despite Marx’s and Engels’ repudiation of divine influence he believes in a power that sustains all that there is in the universe. Read:

Then [comes] the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels which repudiates any divine influence in the affairs of men and in which truth is measured by the pressure of conditions and circumstances of a special situation. It is these [and others] which have been shaping my thinking and thoughts. But I also believe that there is a source of all power in the universe. I liken that power to, say, electricity or atomic energy, millions of times more powerful. This is the sustenance of all that there is. (All italics and square brackets added)
The question might be raised as to what he means by 'an impersonal source of all power'. In June Milne's note at page 197 she reports that in a discussion on religion, within the period November 15-22, 1967, Dr. Nkrumah similarly states his belief in some 'force' which he likens again to 'electricity'. Thus we can understand the 'impersonal source of all power', which he also refers to as 'power', to be a 'force'.

Further on, Milne reports him to consider this force, the impersonal power, as, in the wording of her reportage, 'motivated by “natural laws”'. The impersonal nature of that force or power is indicated in the fact that it is not benevolent and breaking its natural laws attracts dire consequences (probably like the force of gravity). On our part, we can surmise that the converse is also true; that is, observance of the natural laws serves to one's advantage. This is her report of their discourse:

Came to the office one evening, after his rest, saying he had been considering religion. Didn't believe in any formal religion; Christianity particularly had done immense harm. Believed in some 'force' rather like electricity, which was motivated by 'natural laws'.

I asked if he thought the 'force' was benevolent.

'What do you mean “benevolent”?'

'Well-disposed. Kind.'

He laughed. 'No. It's not benevolent. If you break the natural laws, then that's the end of you.'

This appears to us to project the impersonal power or force as a natural but not a supernatural power. The implication here is that the impersonal power is seen as a phenomenon that can be studied in science. This is supported by Dr. Nkrumah's statements in a letter to June Milne, dated September 27, 1966, to the effect that

We must break through religious superstition. Religion can be given a scientific basis, and it can be made scientific if devoid of its mumbo-jumbo devices. (See of June Milne's Kwame Nkrumah: The Conakry Years p.73)

These 1966 statements appear to us to be the basis of his July 1, 1967 statement that differentiates Christ from Jesus. In that statement, made in another letter to June Milne of that date at p. 161 of her book and before his 1970 total rejection of religion, Dr. Nkrumah appears to us to equate Christ with the impersonal power and Jesus with man or humanity. Consider this:

To me there is a difference between Christ and Jesus. Christ is mystical and impersonal, and Jesus is historical and personal. The two are not one and the same thing. Christian theologians have messed up the world with this confusion. Jesus is the biological son of Joseph and Mary. He was, however, a wise man in many things, like Buddha, Socrates, Confucius, Mohammed etc. (Our italics)

With his later absolute rejection of religion, whether organized or not, Dr. Nkrumah leaves us not with a mystical but an impersonal and all-powerful natural
phenomenon that is animated by its own natural laws. As a subject of science, this phenomenon is capable of being studied and explained by humans. He does not explicitly call it ‘God’ and we can only infer; but calling it so does not take away from it its materiality and nature. It subsists ‘inside’ the world but not ‘outside’ it. Marxists are bound to be interested in researching into this material force.

In his book *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-colonisation*, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah uses philosophical concepts like ‘categorial conversion’ and ‘cosmic contrast’ – which are derivations from applications of the principles of Marxist dialectical materialism – to explain how impossible it is for such a powerful phenomenon to subsist ‘outside’ the world; a world, that he argues, has no ‘outside’ but only ‘inside’ in accordance with African cosmogony; that is, African understanding of the origin, evolution and structure of the universe.

***

In the derivation of those concepts Dr. Nkrumah adds to Marxism. This is the point that Habib Niang makes during the launching of *Consciencism* in 1964 at the University of Ghana in his speech bearing the caption *The Concept of Cosmic Contrast In “Consciencism” – A Contribution To Marxist Dialectics*. Niang particularly focuses our attention on the prevalence of magic or superstition in the traditional African mind and how Dr. Nkrumah seeks to combat it. Find that speech below for our study of the centrality of Marxism in Dr. Nkrumah’s thought.

***

If Leninism is the short form of Marxism-Leninism that categorizes Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s application and development of Marxism in Russian conditions then Nkrumaism is the short form of Marxism-Nkrumaism that categorizes Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s application and development of Marxism in African conditions. In Africa, just like in Russia, there are thinkers whose thoughts are not in significant conflict with those of the foremost thinker of the realm. Hence, we have Ahmed Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral whose thoughts resonate with Dr. Nkrumah’s.

The stringing of names to associate the foremost thinker with others in the manner of Nkrumaisn-Toureists and Nkrumaisn-Cabralista could surely be a daunting task indeed in Africa if every developer of Marxism in Africa should have their names reflected in the general ism for an African ideology. The superfluity of such a practice becomes immediately plain when we construct Nkrumaisn-Lumumbaism and Nkrumaisn-Sobukweism into the bargain and box all these into an Nkrumaisn-Toureist-Lumumbaist-Cabralista-Sobukweist mouthful. Certainly, that is too much.

Not even Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who work closely as if they are Siamese twins, christen their resultant ideology and philosophy as ‘Marxism-Engelsism’ but simply as ‘Marxism’ to reflect the fact of Marx being the leading theorist or thinker. And that never fails to acknowledge Engels’ contribution to the development of Marxism. Why then this emerging superfluous scenario in Africa where we now even hear of ‘Puritanical Nkrumaisn’ that destructively seeks to impose a so-called independence of an Nkrumaisn free of its Marxist content?

‘The path I have taken is a lonely path, full of thorns and thistles, but it must be traversed.’ Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, September 27, 1966

November 29 – 30, 2014
1. What is the most problem now facing the under-developed countries in general and Africa in particular, but the satisfaction of the material and spiritual needs of the masses.

2. Faced with this imperative, the leaders of the countries just referred to, have come to the conclusion that these needs can be met only by socialism.

3. The first obstacle facing these leaders who believe that “practice without thought is blind”, lies in the statement which claims that it is the contradiction between capital and labour which alone produces socialism. Indeed, the economic weakness, which is a characteristic feature of the under-developed countries, means that as far as they are concerned, the contradiction between capital and labour has not as a rule succeeded in reaching its critical peak of development.

4. The leaders who then turn to their societies to discover in their own tradition “an original method” of socialist development, encounter another obstacle which is even more serious, namely, the predominant part played by magic in the thought processes of those societies which Dr. Nkrumah has described as “communalist societies.”

5. It is these two obstacles which Dr. Nkrumah has set himself to remove, in order to make it possible to achieve a rapid and harmonious development in the under-developed countries generally and in Africa in particular.

6. Obviously, such a task can only be conceived theoretically. And it is this which justifies the rigorous theoretical method employed in Consciencism, a Philosophy and Ideology for decolonisation and development.

7. Apart from his own intuitions, Dr. Nkrumah had to rely on the raw material inherent in the representation of communalist thought and the concepts of existing theoretical practice.

8. As regards the representations of communalist thought, the theory already defended by Dr. Nkrumah in “MIND AND THOUGHT IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY”, submitted as a doctoral thesis at the University of Pennsylvania, USA in 1943, is as follows:-

   “It is “pre-logical” to regard the mind of one people as magical and another’s as rational. Magical (pre-logical) and rational thinking are all mental behaviour” (page 119 of the Manuscript deposited in the Ghana National Archives.)

9. From this dialectical analysis, the task of the theoretician 20 years later has been to raise communalist thought to the level of modern science, by producing
the methods whereby the rationalist aspect of this thought could pass from a secondary to a dominant position.

10. When it comes to considering existing theoretical practice, a little reflection makes it possible to pin the obstacle down to the well-known simple process of two contraries: “the duplication of THE ONE and the knowledge of its contradictory facets, is the substance (an “essence”, a feature, a basic peculiar peculiarity, if not the absolute fundament) of dialectics”. (Lenin: “Obiter Dicta”.)

11. This concept of the simple process of two contraries is also the very matrix of Hegelian dialectics.

12. Theoretical practice (which here concerns us), unlike Lenin’s political practice, has erected this Hegelian concept into a basic factor of Marxist dialectics.

13. “When one lacks the initiative to fight, and the fight ends in a series of defeats, mechanistic determinism becomes a tremendous force for moral resistance, cohesion and patient, stubborn perseverance.” (Gramsci “Oeuvres Choises”, Editions Sociales, Paris, pp. 33, 34). This passage from Gramsci not only throws light on the probably subconscious reasons which have led many people to move away from the lessons of Lenin’s political practice, and seek refuge in the Hegelian dogma of the simple process of two contraries, but also demonstrates how very closely allied MECHANISTIC DETERMINISM is to the magic shield which is one of the forces making for the “moral resistance, cohesion and patient, stubborn perseverance” of communalist societies when confronted with imperialism.

14. With Consciencism, the simple process of two contraries, the theoretical foundation of mechanistic determinism, and the dominant magical aspect of communalist thought disappear in one fell swoop, if only because Consciencism gives us a new concept in cosmic contrast.

15. “There can be no material grounds on which the adjectives, “caused”, “uncaused”, or “finite”, or “infinite”, can be descriptively applied to the universe. No empirical discourse can logically constitute material ground of any of the epithets. It is only left that they should be postulates.”

“If, however, one postulates a cause for “what there is”, one is thereby committed to the conception of an “outside” and “inside” of the world. This need not lead to any irreducible contradiction, for whether the world is finite or infinite depends ... upon the mode of conceiving of the world. Hence the opposition is strictly dialectical. Beyond mere formal dialectics, however, one significance of the cosmic contrast of the “inside” and “outside” of the world is that it implies an acknowledgement that there is a conversion of a process which commences “outside” the world into the world and its contents”. (Kwame Nkrumah, Consciencism, Heinemann, London.)

16. As will be seen, the concept of cosmic contrast is opposed to the theory of the identity of contraries, provided we conceive of “the simple process of two contraries”, as “the basic peculiarity if not the absolute fundament of dialectics”.

In other words, the concept of cosmic contrast is fundamentally opposed to the Hegelian concept of dialectics.
17. The opposition between the concept of cosmic contrast and the Hegelian concept of dialectics can be appreciated even more clearly when we view Hegelian unity and totality from within: “THE ONE which is duplicated into its contrary” implies a totality of substance, which is fundamentally contrary to the concepts of “the inside” and “the outside” of the world.

18. Since he has condemned Hegel and his dialectics even “in an upside down position”, Dr. Nkrumah could not possibly borrow Hegel’s concepts. Hence in Consciencism you will not find the concepts of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis, affirmation, negation and negation of a negation etc….

19. With Consciencism new concepts have appeared: action, positive and negative, categorial conversion etc. The concept of action satisfies the complexity of the process, whereas categorial conversion implies a definite structure which makes it possible in given conditions to pass from one category to another, the transition itself being determined by the unequal development that exist as between positive and negative action.

20. The relationships between “the outside” and “the inside” within the cosmic contrast are governed by categorial conversion. A “positive category” is regarded as one stemming from categorial conversion having its origin from “outside” (out-in), and enriching the “inside” and its contents. As regards the negative categories, these are constituted by the illusion that there is a possibility to achieve a categorial conversion stemming from the “inside” and moving to the “outside” of the world (in-out), the result of which is to impoverish the “inside” and its contents, to the advantage of the “outside”. The categories which would arise from the categorial conversion “in-out” are theoretically null. However, in practice, they must be accounted for as negative, because in actual fact the decisive factor in their production as in the case of everything produced, in other words the precise moment of production and the methods used, constitutes a real loss for positive action, and consequently a genuine gain for negative action.

21. Cosmic contrast also implies that between the former category and the new one, there is never any identity of essence, since the categorial conversion brings about a real transformation.

22. Categorial conversion is also the theoretical foundation of the real existence of the multifarious categories which are mutually determined within the complex whole, dominated now by the negative aspect of the dominant contradiction, now by the positive aspect of the new dominant contradiction, after a categorial conversion.

23. The dismemberment of the structural pattern of the unity of the principal category and the reconstruction by means of the categorial conversion of a new structural pattern, that is a new principal category, do not imply the automatic disappearance of all of the former secondary categories which in a large measure are of a specific and autonomous character, one of which becomes the main contradiction within the reconstituted unity. Here is where we meet with one of the theoretical foundations, if not the real theoretical foundation of the possibility of the survival of the ideology of the primitive community in spite of the changed cultural pattern within the communalist society.
24. With the introduction of the concept of cosmic contrast which rids us of MECHANISTIC DETERMINISM and MAGIC, Dr. Nkrumah opens up to the under-developed countries in general and Africa in particular, the path to socialist development, whose index is represented by the formula \( d = \frac{pa}{na} \), the theoretical basis of the ultimate determination by the economic factor.

Thursday, 2\textsuperscript{nd} April, 1964