The Making of Ancestral Persons

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Abstract: In this paper, I address a range of arguments put forward by Katrin Flikschuh (2016) casting doubts on a theoretical account of ancestral persons in the work of Ifeanyi Menkiti. She argues both that their ontological status is uncertain and that they are ontologically redundant. I argue that she does not succeed in convincing us to settle for a practical justification of ancestors. I then supplement Menkiti's life-history account of post-mortem persistence with Searle's account of social ontology with a view to theoretically justify belief in the existence of ancestral persons.

Keywords: personhood, ancestors, social ontology, theoretical justification, mind-independence, realism

1. INTRODUCTION

About four decades ago, Ifeanyi Menkiti brought to the attention of philosophical audience a view of person prominent among many sub-Saharan African cultures. On this view, one is not born a person or count as one simply in virtue of possessing some higher-order capacity like rationality. In fact, Menkiti is explicit that the existence of a conscious human being is not sufficient for the existence of a person (1984, 171-2; 2004b, 325). Instead, one becomes a person later on in life only after being formally incorporated

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in society by undergoing certain rites of passage, consistently participating in social life through the discharge of obligations linked to social roles and positions and recognised as such by others in community.[1] In short, to be deemed a person one must be incorporated, participate and be recognised by others in community. This is what Menkiti describes as the maximal view. It has the implication that linguistic, cultural and moral attitudes and practices are ontologically significant, in that they can constitute new kinds in social ontology. What Menkiti actually says is that they confer the "ontological status" of *person* on individuals, such that what was initially biologically given (i.e., a human being) becomes a person in the social world (1984, 173-4). It also implies that personhood is a social status. In particular, person-status may be acquired or lost depending on whether one continues to be socially recognised as a competent participant in social life (1984, 176).

Given these ideas, I believe that Menkiti is best interpreted as offering a view of persons as social entities in a social ontology. I aim to extend that interpretation to his remarks on ancestors who, although biologically deceased, are also seen and treated as persons in community.

Ancestral persons are, however, philosophically puzzling. On the one hand, they are believed to be immaterial entities, and thus to a significant extent unknowable (Ramose 2003, 278). On the other, they appear to be mere projections of a social structure. All they have going for them are various performances of immortalisation, including practices of naming, pouring of libation, story-telling, invocations, sacrificial offerings etc. undertaken by people in whose collective memory they are afforded a place. In the end, it is neither clear what they really are nor that they truly exist.

Katrin Flikschuh (2016) presents various arguments that cast similar doubts on the ontological status and significance of ancestors in Ifeanyi Menkiti's work. She does so as part of her broader interest in advancing intercultural dialogue in philosophy. Immanuel Kant is brought into conversation with Menkiti, each one shedding light on the other's work. We also get to see how, contrary to general cultural prejudices, their views converge in unexpected ways. For example, they both espouse moderate anti-Cartesianism. They reject introspective knowledge, and instead emphasize reflexive self-awareness, albeit for different reasons. However, Flikschuh has

1 This view of person features in everyday axioms such as, I am because we are, which Mbiti uses as a foil against a Cartesian model of self; a person is a person because of other persons, prominent among Nguni speakers in Southern Africa; and make me a person, an injunction to others to recognise one as person. For these ideas, see Mbiti (1970); Menkiti (1984; 2004b); Gyekye (1992); Ikuenobe (2006); Wiredu (2009).

other aims. Along the way, she hopes to persuade us to abandon a theoretical justification of ancestors, and to shift attention to a practical one. While I find the ensuing Kant-inspired moral justification somewhat compelling, I suspect that the decision to give up on a theoretical account is premature. In this paper, I explain why. I also attempt a theoretical account of ancestors, thus making good on Menkiti's explicit pledge to account for them as extended material agents.

Here is the plan. In §2, I engage with Flikschuh's reasons for going practical. One part of this would involve me explaining her distinction between theoretical and practical justification, including especially what she expects of a theoretical justification and why she thinks such a justification for ancestral existence is not forthcoming. The other part involves assessing her actual case. She offers two paths to access her arguments. One takes us through the lingering uncertainty regarding the nature of ancestors in Menkiti's analysis. The other casts doubts on their reality, thus deeming them ontologically redundant. I shall argue that both paths do not compel us to go practical. In §3, I bring Menkiti's maximal view of person into conversation with John Searle's account of social ontology, in the same spirit of advancing intercultural philosophical dialogue. I then supplement the resulting status account of ancestral persons with a life-history account of persistence. By showing that ancestral persons are social entities in social ontology, I hope to answer Flikschuh's worry about their uncertain ontological status.

Finally, in §4, I present two related strategies to address Flikschuh's concern about ontological redundancy. First, I briefly consider and then reject her assumption that mind-independence is criterial for realism. Second, I interpret Menkiti as proposing an alternative and more plausible way of construing realism. Together, they entail that ancestral persons are ontologically significant. By ontological significance, I aim to capture the idea that something exists genuinely in a general ontology. This means that it is not redundant, where redundancy implies that it is reducible and eliminable in a general ontology. I take a *general* ontology to include both natural and social kinds. When many philosophers talk about ontology, they typically mean the former. In other words, they deem mind-dependent social objects to lack ontological significance. Flikschuh not only has this view, but also denies the reality of ancestral persons because Menkiti construes them as mind-dependent kind. Contrary to her, I shall argue that mind-dependence does not impugn their reality.

Although primarily focused on Flikschuh's critical comments on Menkiti's view of ancestors, the conclusions of this paper have broader

implications. Belief in ancestors continues to be a central aspect of the metaphysical and moral worldviews of various peoples around the world. It is important to inquire into its philosophical status. Specifically, whether we can have knowledge of the object of such beliefs namely, ancestors; if so, precisely what are they; whether those who hold such beliefs are justified in doing; if so, what that justification might look like; or whether they should even care at all that others find their belief coherent, etc. By critically engaging with the ideas of Menkiti and Flikschuh, the paper aims to illuminate these larger philosophical questions.

2. GOING PRACTICAL: FLIKSCHUH ON ANCESTRAL PERSONS

The core of Flikschuh's case rests on the distinction between theoretical and practical justification. This needs clarifying if we are to fully appreciate why she thinks that a theoretical justification of ancestral existence is not forthcoming, and that a practical justification is more promising. Drawing on Kant, she characterises the distinction as follows:

> Notable is the insistence upon a theoretical proposition vindication through practical reason. Practically, it matters that we be entitled to affirm that the soul *is* immortal, that we *are* free, that God *does* exists. […] [P]ractical warrant for adopting that attitude also requires acknowledgment of its objective insufficiency: in affirming God's existence on grounds of practical reason we must simultaneously acknowledge our lack of knowledge in this regard. […] Ordinarily, we do not decide to believe; relevant available evidence usually determines our judgment as to whether or not X is the case. In the case of practical belief, we do in a sense "decide to believe." We do so non-arbitrarily, i.e. on the basis of non-evidentiary practical considerations (Flikschuh 2016, 21-2).

I take three distinct but related ideas from the above. The first is that a theoretical justification should set out the conditions under which a proposition such as, ancestral persons exist, is not merely rationally acceptable but a candidate for knowledge. In other words, it must be such that we can make judgments regarding its truth or falsity. By contrast, a practically justified proposition is not a candidate for knowledge. Our reason for holding it is not due to knowledge of its truth or falsity. As we shall see, part of the reason Flikschuh is doubtful of a theoretical justification of ancestral existence is that she thinks that their ontological status in Menkiti's account is uncertain. For

her, we simply do not know what sort of things they are or in what mode they exist, and Menkiti does not shed light on the matter. I read Menkiti differently. Not only is there certainty on the ontological status of ancestors, but also we can make knowledge claims regarding their existence.

Second, a theoretically justified proposition must satisfy the requirement of objective sufficiency. This means that there is compelling evidence for assenting to it. The details of Flikschuh's arguments also suggest that the object of such a proposition, in this case, ancestral persons, must exist mind-independently, i.e., independently of our conception or representations of it. By contrast, a proposition might be practically justified even if it is objectively insufficient. As we shall see, part of Flikschuh's reason for thinking that belief in ancestors cannot be theoretically justified is that she thinks Menkiti offers no compelling evidence for it, but instead construes them as mind-dependent kinds. Again, I have a different view. Specifically, I shall argue that belief in ancestral existence is objectively sufficient and that although *part* of what ancestors are depend on minds, this does not make them any less real.

Third, a theoretically justified proposition is not under the direct control of the will. We do not merely *decide* to believe it; instead, assent to such a proposition is grounded on epistemic reasons. By contrast, a practically justified proposition is under the direct control of the will. Flikschuh's reason for going practical on belief in ancestral existence is that she sees it as part of a species of beliefs we merely decide to adopt "on the basis of non-evidentiary practical considerations" (Flikschuh 2016, 22). Again, I offer a different view. We do not simply decide to adopt belief in ancestral existence since that belief is subject to empirical constraints about which we have no control.

Thus, my promise to offer a theoretical account of ancestral persons will involve me showing that the proposition, *ancestral persons* exist is a candidate for knowledge; has objective sufficiency; and is not altogether voluntary. Flikschuh's practical justification denies all three claims.

Now, to the details of her case. The first path to accessing it concerns her assessment of Menkiti's commonsense approach to metaphysics. Her verdict is that no light is shed on the nature of ancestors. The second path actually breaks into two distinct concerns. One asks whether ancestors qualify as persons on Menkiti's "maximal" view. The other assesses his remarks on personal persistence. Both of them lead her to doubt mind-independent ancestral existence. In the following sub-sections, I consider the two paths in turn, and argue that they do not compel us to go practical.

2.1. Flikschuh on ontological uncertainty

Right at the outset, Menkiti (2004a) sets out the issues he wants to address. On the one hand, commonsense belief in supernatural entities populating an immaterial universe is rife and on the other, the prevailing scientific view is of a materialist universe. Rather than privilege either, he puts forward various considerations in favour of a metaphysics that reconciles commonsense and scientific understandings of the world. In doing so, he has in his sights the role of supposedly supernatural agency, typically invoked in folk, or as he prefers it, "village" causal explanations. Along the way, he appears to denounce reductive-type explanations, in part because they conveniently leave out "uncomfortable data" (2004a, 121). For example, the belief that some entities are supernatural or immaterial. As I explain below, this is not because he endorses immaterialism but merely to underscore the epistemic task before him; namely, to make sense of commonsense belief in nonphysical agency within the context of materialism. Yet, while holding on to commonsense belief regarding nonphysical agency in the universe, Menkiti strongly resists the Cartesian impulse to posit an immaterial realm.

As Flikschuh correctly observes, this has the implication that ancestors have a this-worldly nonphysical presence in the world. Yet, it also leaves open the possibility that they are immaterial entities, albeit in the same universe as us. She is not convinced. While she thinks it is reasonable, as Menkiti says, "that metaphysical explanation be guided by ordinary experience, such guidance cannot equate to acquiescence in unreasoned common-sense" (Flikschuh 2016, 18). Her point is not just that some commonsense beliefs are unwarranted, but also that there is no evidence for the belief that ancestors are non-material entities. Moreover, rather than offer reasons in support of the belief, she says that Menkiti uncritically accepts it. As such, she adds, Menkiti's attempt to clarify their nature "is hampered by his acquiescence in unreasoned common sense" (2016, 18). Put differently, since it is not due to evidence, Flikschuh is doubtful of Menkiti's apparent endorsement of the commonsense view that ancestors are non-material entities.

She is also not convinced by Menkiti's characterisation of them as material agents. She gives two reasons. First, since Menkiti is committed to the commonsense view that ancestors are non-material, he would have to offer a reductionist explanation if he is to plausibly account for them as material agents However, according to Flikschuh, this would involve him doing precisely what he explicitly cautions against (2016, 16, 19). Second, since he is not able to offer a reductionist explanation, Flikschuh says that

characterising them as material agents would involve "a contradiction in terms." For context, Menkiti proposed, as part of his attempt to reconcile scientific and commonsense worldviews, what he describes as an "extended notion of materiality"—roughly, a notion of materiality that accommodates aspects of the commonsense belief in non-materiality without positing an immaterial realm (Menkiti 2004a, 117). More clearly, then, Flikschuh's second point is that Menkiti either mischaracterises materialism or is expressing a contradiction in terms, since "however one specifies materiality, it cannot contain its negation" (Flikschuh 2016, 18-9). Thus, she concludes, there is no plausible sense in which Menkiti can construe ancestral persons as material agents.

Ancestors cannot be quasi-material entities either.[2] In addition to claiming that Menkiti's anti-reductionist stance threatens that view, Flikschuh offers two other considerations against it. One is that Menkiti does not clarify the extent to which ancestral persons are *like* material entities. As such, the deployment of quasi-materialism is not helpful in illuminating their nature. The other concerns the alleged implausibility of quasi-physicalism. Specifically, she points out that Kwasi Wiredu, from whom Menkiti apparently borrowed the term, not only doubts that "there is adequate evidence that [quasi-material] entities exist," but also says "the plausibility of quasi-material existence claims tends to dwindle in the face of advancing scientific knowledge" (Wiredu 1996, 53–4).

For these reasons, she says Menkiti does not coherently account for the nature of ancestral persons. They are neither plausibly non-material, material nor quasi-material agents. As such, their ontological status remains uncertain. This leads her to conclude that we cannot have knowledge of them and can only adopt belief in their existence on the basis of non-evidentiary reasons.

However, I think this conclusion is too quick. Let us begin with her doubts regarding Menkiti's attempt to account for ancestral existence in non-material terms. Clearly, Flikschuh is making a fair demand. Some commonsense judgments are plain false, and not all of them have warrant. If commonsense is to serve as a reliable anchor for metaphysical explanations, as Menkiti claims, it should at least pass some test of reasonableness. Otherwise, we risk assuming that a specious ontology suggested by commonsense is

2 By quasi-material, I have in mind Wiredu's view of a category of objects that conform to the condition of being physical, but nonetheless appear to exhibit properties not typically had by physical objects or properties not fully understood. According to him, the Akans not only attribute to ancestors many of the same properties possessed by everyday physical objects but also properties that appear not to conform to known laws of physics or appear to be understood by those with certain gifts and training (Wiredu 1996, 53–54).

the correct one. The question, then, is whether Menkiti's commonsense metaphysics acquiesce to "unreasoned commonsense." Contrary to Flikschuh, I think he requires that commonsense beliefs pass some test of reasonableness. Consider the following, involving a hypothetical Londoner who believes that

> […] planting onions during the full moon, convinced that they would come out of the ground full of magical powers, so that he or any other Englishman who eats them would be three times as strong as a Frenchman and ten times as strong as an African. […] it would not be up to him to have the last word on the matter. […] (Menkiti 2004a, 115)

In such a case, Menkiti says we should join "other Englishmen in defending old England from the hallucinations of the Londoner." And the reason is that, "There is such a thing as *evidence*, such a thing as a fact, or facts, of the situation" (2004a, 115, emphasis by OAO). But what precisely does "evidence" amount to? Menkiti explains:

> His belief is judged aberrant because not too many other Londoners share it. […] [T]he belief measured against the background of other beliefs held by contemporary Englishmen is a noncompliant item. Being noncompliant, it has no way of establishing its credentials either by appeal to what is generally believed or by appeal to what is scientifically known to be the case (Menkiti 2004a, 115).

In other words, Menkiti is distinguishing between "unreasoned commonsense" and "reasoned commonsense" by offering some criteria for identifying the latter. Roughly, the latter is such that it must be grounded on shared experience, cohere with other shared beliefs, and/or conform to the prevailing scientific understanding. Moreover, Menkiti argues by analogy for the evidentiary role of experience in ordinary life, noting an equivalence between it and experimentation in science. He writes, "experiment holds the power it does because it makes things come within the grasp of experiential reality. It is experience that gives experiment its weight in scientific gold" (2004a, 114). I also take him to be comparing collective assent to commonsense beliefs with scientific consensus. In this regard, Menkiti countenances the possibility that like scientific consensus, collective assent to commonsense could be challenged. But although one can do so "from a vantage point that is removed in time or space," that's not to say that the relevant beliefs are held uncritically by those

who hold them (2004a, 114–5).[3]

It is, of course, open to Flikschuh to deny the equivalence between experience and experiment, and that experience counts as or provides evidence for commonsense beliefs. However, those are different points to the one she actually makes, namely, that Menkiti acquiesces to unreasoned commonsense. Far from it, his point is that there is a strong presumption in favour of commonsense experience. When things are brought within the grasp of experiential reality, we have a prima facie evidence for their existence. To call into question our experience of the world—the world as encountered—is to question all the evidence we have of a universe.[4]

Where does that leave ancestors? Unlike Flikschuh, my reading of Menkiti is that he is vehemently opposed to the commonsense view that ancestors are "immaterial," "nonmaterial" or "supernatural" entities. After offering some conjectures about why the "village" holds on to this commonsense view, he explains that whatever these terms describe are usually grounded in the material world. In other words, he is inviting us to abandon the "village" view that ancestors are immaterial entities, in part because it simply does not pass the test of reasonableness. More clearly, it is at odds with the prevailing scientific worldview. He instead takes up the task of offering a materialist explanation of what the "village" uncritically describes as immaterial. Importantly, citing Horton (1967), he notes that in traditional African thought so-called immaterial phenomena are typically understood in material terms. For example, "thinking, conceiving, saying, etc. are described in terms of organs like heart and brain, and actions like the uttering of words" (Menkiti 2004a, 125). Emotions are characterised in terms of body parts and mind is, in Wiredu's sense, a functional capacity of the brain (2004a, 111, 118–9). This implies, as earlier noted, that there are no sharp Cartesian lines between immaterial and material worlds. This is line with Flikschuh's observation that Menkiti rejects a two-world dualism. It also underscores a "down-to-earth empirical persuasion," characterised by belief in the primacy of the senses. For example, Menkiti says, the *dibia* or *onisegun* who claims to have special knowledge of nonmaterial agency appeals to the "primacy of sight" (2004a,

3 One might ask why it should matter to peoples who believe in ancestors whether philosophers find their accounts coherent or plausible. One sensible reply might be that these demands become especially necessary when a people's view is intentionally set in philosophical dialogue with others. Both Flikschuh's demand for evidence and Menkiti's point about reasonableness are set within the context of cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

4 See Baker (2007) for a similar view.

123).[5] The point being that because these specialists in African traditional beliefs who ostensibly have first-hand understanding of nonphysical agents, like ancestors, report "seeing" them with their (albeit medicinally enhanced) eyes and often describe them in material terms, there is no rational compulsion to think of them as immaterial entities.

So, here is another reply to Flikschuh. Menkiti neither endorses the commonsense view that ancestors are "nonmaterial" or "supernatural" nor explicate their nature in these terms. Whereas she thinks that Menkiti is unable to account for them in immaterial terms, my view is that he jettisons the characterisation of them as immaterial or supernatural. For him, the only plausible way of accounting for them is in material terms. "These actors," he writes, "possess their powers in a publicly recognized manner and exercise them in an action field that is understood to be a durable part of the material world" (2004a, 129). As he sees it, the challenge is to strike a balance between the commonsense nonmaterialism alleged by the "village" and the scientific materialist worldview. Even so, he cautions, on the one hand, that "trying to procure the physical basis of mental functioning" does not entail physicalism—that is, that everything in the universe is reducible to physical (including biological and chemical) properties and relations. On the other, commonsense claims regarding the "nonmaterial nature of mental functioning" does not compel immaterialism (2004a, 120–121). Both extremes are eschewed in favour of what Menkiti describes as extended materialism, which to me essentially points to nonreductive materialism.

Seen from this perspective, Menkiti's stated belief in a "system that is fully committed to material agency but that trades on an extended notion of what is embraced by the material universe" (2004a, 117) is neither a mischaracterisation of materialism nor a "contradiction in terms," as Flikschuh claims. Too see why, consider that Menkiti held that higher-level domains in the universe are not entailed by lower-level ones. One such domain involves conscious phenomena; the "mind-part" distinguishable from the "body-part" in the material world (2004a, 129). He also notes that the domain of social relations is "matter-silent," in that it is not entailed by physical properties and processes. Nor is it eliminable from a complete ontology. He criticizes reductionist explanations because they almost always exclude them as "unpleasant data," aspects of the universe that do not neatly fit into a purely physicalist model (2004a, 120–1). Extended materialism thus captures the

5 "Onisegun" and "dibia" refer to herbalists or someone with expertise in traditional medicine, in Yoruba and Ibo respectively. For the idea on primacy of sight in the reports of Akan medicine men, see also Wiredu (1992, 139–140).

sense that some things in the universe are neither reducible to the physical nor immaterial. Another way to put the point is that Menkiti's stated commitment is to a material universe not entirely reducible to physical properties and their relations. The implied *extension* in his construal of materialism is not intended to capture nonmaterialism, but irreducibility.

In reply to Flikschuh, then, Menkiti's extended materialism is not a mischaracterisation of materialism. This is because while materialism may not be compatible with nonmaterialism, as Flikschuh rightly notes, it is compatible with irreducibility. There is no contradiction either, since irreducibility does not negate materialism but merely points to Menkiti's rejection of a purely physicalist universe.

Given the impulse toward nonreductive materialism, it is natural that Menkiti refers to quasi-physicalism (2004a, 117, 129). The *quasi* becomes a placeholder for the irreducible aspects of the material universe. As such, it is not clear to me at all why, as Flikschuh argues, Wiredu's doubts about quasi-physicalism detracts from whatever appeal the notion may have for Menkiti. Recall that Flikschuh dismissed Menkiti's characterisation of ancestors as quasi-physical because Wiredu, from whom Menkiti apparently borrowed the term, deployed it in order to question the existence of such entities. However, Wiredu may be mistaken. In any case, Flikschuh is getting too much out of the alleged doubt. To be sure, I am not persuaded that Wiredu abandons the idea of quasi-physicalism. One reason is that he appeals to it in explaining the status of ancestors, and even clarifies exactly its sense. It is meant, he says, to denote the "reduced materiality," involved in the dynamics of interacting with ancestors (Wiredu 1992, 140). In other words, quasi-materialism is shorthand for the obvious fact that ancestors now lack a bodily presence, even though they remain objects of interaction with living men and women and are described in physical terms (1992, 139). Further, the passage Flikschuh draws on in support of her claim that Wiredu abandons the idea of quasi-physicalism only suggests that Wiredu is concerned about the waning of public commitment to traditional beliefs quite generally, in an increasingly technological and globalised world. It says nothing about *why* quasi-physicalism is implausible.

Since the notion plays an explanatory role in Wiredu's account, aiming to demystify what often passes uncritically as immaterial agency, I am inclined to disagree with Flikschuh that he abandons it. It seems to me instead that Wiredu is asking whether it, along with belief in ancestors, will survive rational investigation in the modern world. It is precisely this task that Menkiti takes up—to offer a materialist view of ancestral existence. My interpretation of Menkiti furthers this goal of explicating the nature of ancestors in a language

compatible with modern scientific knowledge. It is a challenge to address any lingering uncertainty regarding their ontological status. Acknowledging that they are neither nonmaterial nor reducible to physical properties and relations are crucial first steps. So, too, clarifying, as I do later, the sense in which they are material agents or "extended natural agents," as Menkiti describes them.

2.2. Flikschuh on ontological redundancy

The other path to appreciating Flikschuh's decision to go practical concerns her doubts about mind-independent ancestral existence. For Flikschuh, only mind-independent entities truly exists. She assumes that Menkiti shares this commitment about realism. She appears to infer this from his characterisation of ancestors as persons. Her reasoning seems to be that to the extent that paradigmatic (i.e., human) persons exist mind-independently, so too must ancestors, if they are indeed persons. She then goes on to show that even on Menkiti's "maximal" view, ancestors fail to be persons on two counts.

First, they do not meet the biological requirement. "In the case of ancestors," she writes, "that biological connection is severed" (Flikschuh 2016, 6). For her, death undermines their personhood. Second, they are unable to satisfy the condition of reflexive self-ascription. They cannot, as Menkiti requires, regard themselves as *self* from a first-person perspective. "To the extent to which he is a person, the ancestor must be able to say, 'I am because we are,"' writes Flikschuh, "yet … [the ancestor] no longer is" (2016, 6, 7; see also Menkiti 2004b, 324; 1984, 172).

In fairness, Flikschuh entertains the possibility that "a biologically live person who looks forward to her future status as an ancestor might be able to say: "I will be because we are," thus self-ascribing ancestral personhood by way of anticipation. Nonetheless, for her, even if we get ancestors through the self-ascription hurdle, we would still not have accounted for their "mind-independent, spatio-temporal though non-physical existence" (Flikschuh 2016, 7–8). As she explains, it is not clear that ancestors "can be any 'thing' at all." She adds, "We are owed some account of how ancestors' this-worldly nonphysical presence is possible" (2016, 17). But, as I explain further in §3, such an account is possible, if we think of ancestors as social entities. And although Flikschuh does not think that social entities are real, I shall argue that they are. For now, it would suffice to say that Menkiti's "maximal" persons are social kinds and as such their continued existence is not interrupted by cessation of biological life.

In reply to the two considerations above, the charge that ancestors are not persons is premised on a mistaken understanding of what "maximal" persons are. Of course, Flikschuh is right that for Menkiti only psychologically competent members of the human species can be persons.[6] However, "maximal" persons are neither biological nor psychological kinds. Menkiti is quite explicit that the class *person* is not defined by the possession of intrinsic biological and psychological properties essentially (Menkiti 1984, 171–2). So, in principle, it is quite possible for ancestors to retain their personhood even if they do not now meet those requirements. The reason is that retrospective considerations, including that one was once a psychologically competent human being, enter into the decision regarding who counts as a person. "The more of a past one has," says Menkiti, "the more standing as a person one also has" (Menkiti 2004b, 325). Put differently, since ancestral persons were once humans they meet the biological requirement albeit retrospectively.[7] Moreover, as we shall see shortly, ancestors are persons insofar as that status is conferred on some persisting feature of a deceased human being.

Before then, it is worth noting that Flikschuh examines Menkiti's positive view of ancestors. According to him, "at the stage of ancestral existence, the dead still retain their personhood." This happens because they are "addressed by their various names very much as if they were still at center stage" and they continue to exist "in the memory of living men and women who continue to remember them." When they are no longer "remembered by their personal names," he says, "they slide into personal non-existence…" (Menkiti 1984, 174). However, all of that further confirms Flikschuh's suspicion that they lack mind-independence. The case for their existence, she says, "cannot be made with reference to either communal memory or a person's projected future existence as an ancestor" (Flikschuh 2016, 17). The conclusion for her is that ancestral existence is in grave predicament. Since they lack mind-independent reality, they are ontologically redundant. Simply, they do not exist.

Underlying Flikschuh's latest argument is the assumption that mind-independence is criterial for realism. I think this assumption is mistaken, and I shall explain why in §4. In the meantime, it is worth stating that by

6 I do not have the space to engage with the large body of literature on the criteria of personhood, but it is important to note that unlike Menkiti's some such criteria eschew the psychological requirement, allowing that all human beings, including children and severely mentally impaired individuals, are persons. See, for example the *Person Life View* in Schechtman (2014). For a comparison between Schechtman's PLV and Menkiti's *Maximal View* on who counts as person, see Beck and Oyowe (2018).

7 Here, I am proposing an expanded reading of the psychological requirement.

characterising ancestral existence in terms of collective attitudes, behaviours and practices (e.g., naming, ritual invocation etc.), ancestral persons are shown to be mind-dependent social kinds and thus might continue to exist even if their human associate ceases to do so. However, I shall show that being a social kind does not undermine their reality. Before then, I want to briefly highlight two significant divergences in metaphysical sensibilities between Menkiti and Flikschuh. This is because they lie behind, and to a large extent illuminate, the latter's criticisms. In setting them out, the goal is not to resolve them, but to contextualise the disagreements between them and explain why Flikschuh thinks Menkiti does not fully account for the nature and reality of ancestral persons.

Both Menkiti and Flikschuh seem to favour a generous ontology, in that they both accept that human and person differ or that one might be one and not the other. One difference, however, lies in how they think new ontological kinds are constituted. For Flikschuh, it would seem that all that is needed are intrinsic properties. This is seen in the fact that her criticisms presupposes a strong *de re* essentialism. In thinking about ancestral persons, she is looking for the *thing*, a substance, to whom one or more higher-order, intrinsic properties (e.g., a first-person perspective) may be attributed. Not finding any, since ancestors are biologically dead, she concludes that there is no evidence for their existence. Menkiti takes a different approach, insisting instead that entities exist and can be individuated on the basis of their relational and causal properties. In particular, some*thing*, like ancestral person, might exist even if it is not a substance.

Another difference has to do with how they conceive metaphysical inquiry. It would seem that for Flikschuh, a neat and precise incision can be made between metaphysics and practical considerations—i.e., between what *truly* exists, on the one hand, and human attitudes and practices, on the other. Here, too, Menkiti's commitments differ. Such a neat and precise incision cannot be made, and in any case, is not desirable. For him, reality is "experiential reality," that is, an understanding of the world anchored on the "original sense of things" (Menkiti 2004a, 113–4). Part of what it means for something to exist involves our attitudes and practices. This is why he does not think, as Flikschuh appears to, that mind-dependence undermines the reality of ancestral persons.

Ultimately, Flikschuh answers her question, "at what level of experience do ordinary Africans affirm ancestral existence?" as follows: "From what Menkiti says, ancestral existence matters morally." She concludes, "attempting a theoretical vindication of ancestral existence may then be misguided; what

matters is practical vindication" (Flikschuh 2016, 21). Yet, many interactions with ancestors are nonmoral. The practices of naming and pouring of libation, for example, are social acknowledgments of ancestors. Ancestral presence is also embodied in art, music and dance. It is far too limiting to characterise the interactions and relations with ancestors solely in moral terms.[8] In any case, this is what Menkiti actually says: "Although the moral domain admittedly contains a ubiquitous reference to ancestors, the ancestors […] are extended natural agents" (Menkiti 2004a, 131).

Going forward, my strategy is to clarify further the sense in which ancestral persons are extended natural agents with nonphysical presence in the world. More clearly, I elaborate on an account of them as social entities belonging in a social ontology (§3). Afterwards, I argue that they are nonetheless ontologically significant—that is, mind-dependence does not undermine their reality (§4).

3. STATUS AND LIFE HISTORY ACCOUNT OF ANCESTRAL PERSONS

The status account of ancestral persons is an extension of the status account of persons.[9] Appealing to John Searle's three building blocks for the construction of social reality, it explains how human beings become persons in the social world. By the end, we should get a clearer sense of the ontological status of ancestral persons. Later, I supplement the status account with the life-history account of personal persistence. The combination of the two will not only shed light on the dynamics involved in the making of ancestral persons in the social world, but also underpin my theoretical justification of the existence of ancestral persons. It will illuminate the sense in which belief in the existence of ancestors is epistemic, objectively sufficient and involuntary.

Searle's first building block is collective intentionality. It exists when two or more conscious agents share intentional states and on that basis engage in cooperative activity. (Searle 1995, 16). It is present, for example, when an orchestra performs a symphony. Importantly, Searle thinks that "we-intentions" are not reducible to "I-intentions" or that the two do not have the same content (Searle 1995, 27; 1997, 449). Collective intentionality is a fundamental presupposition in Menkiti's analysis of person. This is seen in

8 See McCall (1995). See also, Uchendu (1976, 295).

9 See Oyowe (2022). For similar interpretations to my status account, see Wingo (2017). Gyekye (1992) also understands Menkiti's "maximal" personhood as a status account, in that he explicitly criticizes Menkiti for holding the "status" view (1992, 108–110). For different interpretations of Menkiti, see Ikuenobe (2006) and Molefe (2016).

the fact that the existence of persons require a community of minded beings, engaged in cooperative activities toward realising shared aims: a "thoroughly fused collective 'we"' which, for him, is at the heart of the African saying, "I am because we are." He is also explicit that the collective is not just the sum of the individuals (Menkiti 1984, 179). In fact, in another place, he alludes to an "extended self" over and above particular individuals, thus capturing the sense of the irreducibility of the collective (Menkiti 2004b, 324). Perhaps, even more interesting, the mode of collective intentionality that Searle emphasises is central to Menkiti's account. Like Searle, his focus is on collective acceptance or recognition. Whether or not there are persons depends on whether a community "accept" that "fact" (2004b, 330; 1984, 176).[10]

The second building block involves the assignment of status functions. Here, Searle distinguishes two ways objects have their functions. Diamond, for example, has its industrial cutting function in virtue of its intrinsic properties (i.e., its chemical structure). A piece of paper, by contrast, has the status money because its function is collectively assigned (Searle 2006a, 17–18). Crucially, status functions carry deontic powers—that is, rights, obligations, permissions etc. In other words, they create "desire-independent reasons for action" (2006a, 19; 2006b, 456; 2010, 7–9). If you accept a dollar bill from me in exchange for a philosophy textbook, I now have a right to it and you are obliged to hand it over. Again, these ideas are deeply entrenched in Menkiti's view of *person*. He construes *person* as a conferred status. Much of this is presented as a foil against Western conceptions of person, but what comes through clearly is that "person-status" is not defined in terms of intrinsic properties, but in terms of social roles and responsibilities (Menkiti 1984, 171–2, 176). It is true, of course, that these roles, as well as what Menkiti calls "moral function," depend on rational and moral capacities. Even so, Menkiti insists that these capacities are social, because developing and utilizing them require a human community. But that is not all. He also explicates the normative aspects of "person-status." Like Searle's deontic powers, the normative aspects involve obligations, responsibilities, expectations, commitments and rights. More clearly, on the maximal view, to be a person is to occupy social positions with corresponding expectations to participate in social life and carry out specified obligations (1984, 176). This also involves desire-independent reasons for action. That is, it is central to the assignment of "person-status" that one is being guided by higher motivations, as opposed to raw "appetites" (Menkiti 2004b, 325–6, 330).

10 Here, I understand Menkiti to be specifying a necessary condition.

The two building blocks we have considered are intimately linked, in that the assignment of status functions is made possible by collective intentionality. In concrete terms, something has the status of money, or person-status, because it is collectively accepted that it does. About this, Menkiti is explicit (2004b, 330; 1984, 176). According to Searle, however, it is the third building block of social reality—i.e., constitutive rules—that manifests the collective intention to assign status functions.

Unlike regulative rules, which merely regulate antecedent behaviour and facts, constitutive rules creates new ones. It takes the logical form, *X counts as Y in C.* In football, for example, the rule "receiving the ball from a teammate when one is nearer than both the ball and the second last opponent to the opposition goal line counts as offside" is constitutive, in that without it there are no offsides.[11] In other words, offside exists because it is represented as existing. To represent in this way requires language. As Searle explains, "The move from *X* to *Y* in the formula *X counts as Y in C* can only exist insofar as it is represented as existing," and requires a "vocabulary" (Searle 2006b, 93–4; see also his 1991, 342–3).[12] As before, there are strong parallels in Menkiti's analysis of person. According to him, linguistic practices have a constitutive role in the making of a person in the social world. His example takes the logical form of constitutive rules, and involves the use of "it" to represent some human beings, specifically children, as nonpersons in social reality. More clearly, *X* (human beings designated as "its") count as *Y* (nonpersons) in *C* (in the context of deontic interactions and practices). Menkiti appears to think that an explicit vocabulary may not always be required. He implies that when certain attitudes and practices become entrenched, they also manifest collective intention to confer person-status. In particular, differences in cultural attitudes and practices towards the dead—young and old—indicate that the latter, *X*, but not the former, counts as person, *Y*, in the social world, *C* (Menkiti 1984, 174).

We are now in a position to fully state what is involved in the making of a person in the social world. In other words, what Menkiti means when he says what was initially biologically given becomes a person in social reality. It involves the assignment of status functions (i.e., entailing deontic powers and relations) by collective intentionality manifested in a constitutive rule. In Menkiti's terminology, it involves the community conferring a social and normative status on human individuals, who habitually carry out specified

11 Searle's other example of constitutive rules involves the game of chess (Searle, 1969).

12 For the contrary view that linguistic representation is not necessary, see Hindriks (2009) and Baker (2019).

responsibilities linked to social roles and positions, by means of linguistic and non-linguistic devices. To put it differently, many of our established linguistic, cultural and moral attitudes and practices are strategies for representing some human beings as persons. By representing them as such, we constitute them as social entities, i.e., persons, in social reality. This, it seems to me, is what is at the heart of the well-known Zulu and Xhosa sayings, "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" and "Khawundenz' umntu" (respectively translated as, "a person is a person because of other people" and "make me into a person").

My reading of Menkiti is that he extends this view of person to ancestors. This means that the status of account of ancestral person entails that a community confers the status of person on its deceased members. That is, Menkiti grounds ancestral personhood in the collective acceptance of the status in accordance with constitutive rules. In their case, it is enacted in shared attitudes and practices of memorialisation, including naming, pouring of libation, story-telling, invocations and sacrificial offerings. This explains why Menkiti says that ancestral persons cease to exist when they are no longer remembered and regarded by living humans. Ancestral personhood is a conferred social status. As such, without a collective mind to regard and remember them, ancestral persons cease to exist.

Notwithstanding its explanatory edge, the status account still has to respond to three related problems, all of which recall aspects of Flikschuh's argument. First, it may be countered that unlike other social objects, ancestral persons lack any material basis. Money may be a social object, but it is constituted in part by a piece of paper. Precisely what constitutes the existence of ancestral persons? Let us call this the "constitution problem." Second, unlike other social objects, it is plain hard to make sense of nonphysical ancestral presence. Call this the "immanence problem." It differs from the constitution problem in that it concerns whether that on which ancestral existence is grounded is indeed material (after all, a nonmaterial substance might constitute a thing). Lastly, other social kinds are distinctive. Ordinary persons are normally distinguished, that is, individuated, in virtue of their human associate. It is unclear, however, what distinguishes ancestral persons, one from another. Call this the "uniqueness problem."

In order to address these problems, we have to supplement the status account of ancestral persons with the life-history account. It takes its cue from Menkiti's characterisation of the life of individual persons in terms of an unfolding history spanning a past, present and future (Menkiti 1984, 172; 2004b, 324–5). One obvious implication is that the life of a person has the structure of a story, with experiences at various points integrated into

a complex whole. Moreover, although he does not offer an analysis of what constitutes a life, what is crucial is that in making the point he is not concerned with mere biological life. One reason is that Menkiti envisages that such a life can be forged through anticipation. Specifically, living human persons can first-personally regard themselves as ancestral persons, thus anticipate the continuation of their lives beyond biological death (2004b, 327). Another reason is that the continuation of this life form depends on its "embeddedness in an ongoing community" (2004b, 328). This means that only individuals who are enculturated and socialised as full members of community can exhibit the relevant life-form. The case of a feral child perhaps illustrates the point. Although the child is human, and so has the *biological* form of life characteristic of the species, it lacks the form of life embedded in community.

According to the life-history account of personal persistence, ancestral persons exist as life histories. We can think of a life-history as the (auto)biography of an individual. Understanding ancestral person this way, enables us to respond to the three aforementioned problems. The "constitution problem" requires us to say what constitutes ancestral persons. The life-history account entails that they are constituted (at least, in part) by their particular autobiographies, which survives their biological death. While the status account tells us that ancestral persons are social kinds, the life-history account sheds light on precisely *what* sort of social entities they are. The "immanence problem" requires an account of their nonphysical presence—specifically, an account of the material basis of ancestral existence. After all, Menkiti insists that so-called nonphysical realities, including ancestral persons, must be grounded in the material universe.

While the status account explains the sense in which they are nonphysical (i.e., they are social kinds), the life history account explains the sense in which they continue to be materially "present" in human communities. And they do so by virtue of (aspects of) their life-histories continuing to inhabit social consciousness and spaces. For example, McCall (1995) notes that ancestors continue to be present in human communities to the extent that utensils, compounds, events etc. are named after and in relation to them. I take this to mean that (aspects of) their (auto)biographies are linked to these physical objects. Moreover, (auto)biographies are thoroughly material phenomena, thus ruling out the idea that they remain "present" in immaterial form.

These responses to the constitution and immanence problems may not satisfy one who thinks that status functions must be imposed on physical object. However, they are in line with the consensus view in social ontology that

status functions need not be imposed on any particular physical object. Indeed, these two problems and the replies bring to mind the discussion between Smith (2003) and Searle (2010). The former pointed out that there can be free-standing status functions, i.e., status functions that do not seem to be imposed on any particular physical object. Searle's response was to update his view to allow for free-standing status functions. In particular, he mentions electronic money, such as cryptocurrency, and corporations as examples of free-standing functions (Searle 2010, 20, 101). What comes out clearly in my discussion of the problems of constitution and immanence is that ancestral persons are also cases of free-standing status functions.

Finally, the "uniqueness problem" is easily dealt with since (auto)biographies are distinctive. In fact, the life history account of personal persistence has the implication that an ancestral person is one and the same as her human predecessor if they both share a unique life-history. What we have then is not just a generic social kind, but instead the *personal* histories of individuals who were once human persons and now persist as ancestral persons. Their continuation over time is a function of collective intentionality conferring person-status on their (auto)biographies.

Notice that the foregoing is not a practical justification of the existence of ancestral persons. Unlike Flikschuh, I have given an account of ancestral persons as material, i.e., social, entities. In her account, what is really doing the work is the *belief* in ancestors, in that holding that belief may cause one to act in certain ways although one does not know whether they truly exist or not. For me, ancestral persons are the "things" the relevant attitudes and practices are *about,* in the same way many financial and economic transactions are about something called money, rather than simply our belief in money. But there are other ways in which our views of Menkiti's approach to ancestors differ.

Earlier I claimed that her decision to settle for a practical justification of ancestral persons is too quick, and promised to offer a theoretical justification. We are now in a position to see why my account is just the sort of theoretical justification she says is not forthcoming. First, on my view, unlike Flikschuh's, the proposition that ancestors exist is a candidate for knowledge. Since it consists in the more basic claim that ancestral persons exist as (auto)biographies of deceased *human* persons, it is certainly not one about which we must withhold judgment about its truth or falsity. It differs epistemically from propositions, like those concerning the existence of God and freedom, with uncertain epistemic status. Only those who view them as immaterial entities, as Flikschuh appears to, would insist that there is something more about them that we cannot know.

Second, the proposition that ancestors exist is objectively sufficient. On the one hand, there is independent evidence in support of the proposition. The evidence for the belief is the existence of (auto)biographies of the dead in our universe. There is a fact-of-the-matter to the claim that the life-history of a some previously living human being continues to exist. This also means that something about the dead, i.e., their respective (auto)biographies, survives their death. This aspect of them does not depend on any one in particular. It is not up to anyone of us that there are life-histories of previously living human persons and that these continue to exist beyond their death. Thus, (at least, part of) what ancestors *are* is an objective fact about our world. It is mind-independent.

Third, on my view, and unlike Flikschuh's, the belief that ancestors exist is not under the control of the will. More clearly, that belief is subject to broad empirical constraints and generalisations, including especially that there must have been some actual *human* person whom the (auto)biography is about. Such life histories and (auto)biographies are characteristically linked to human persons and survive their death. Like the belief that the sun exists, the belief that that there are (auto)biographies and that they survive the death of their human authors is not subject to our decision.

One loose end still needs tying. Recall that my status account of ancestral persons implies that they exist as life-histories *in part* because of collective intentionality, i.e., in virtue of being regarded and remembered by their living human relatives. This means that they are partly mind-dependent, and one of Flikschuh's contention is that mind-dependent kinds lack reality. In the next section, I tackle this aspect of her case.

4. MIND-INDEPENDENCE AND REALISM

So, what about mind-independence? As I have already intimated, we cannot reliably distinguish between real and non-real kinds by simply using mind-independence as a criterion. One reason, as Khalidi (2016) has noted, is that it is unable to cope with a range of problem cases. Consider, for example, "artificial kinds," including synthetic chemicals like *Roentgenium* and genetically modified kinds like *Canola*. Their existence depends on human minds, i.e., attitudes and current scientific practices. It seems odd, as Khalidi notes, to say, for example, *Uranium,* but not *Roentgenium,* is real or to take a non-realist stance towards *Canola,* and not *Rapeseed* from which it is derived. In some sense, ancestral persons construed as (auto)biographies are ontological derivatives of *human* persons. Since there would be no post-mortem life-

histories if there were no human persons in the first place.

Flikschuh might protest. She might insist that while it is true that artificial kinds are *causally* dependent on human attitudes and practices, ancestral persons seem to be *constituted* by them.[13] In the former case, once the new entity has been brought into existence by human ingenuity, it goes on to exist independently of them. Ancestral persons, however, seem to depend on mind on an ongoing basis for their existence. Recall that for Menkiti their existence and persistence depend entirely on human beings continually remembering them, such that if they were not so regarded they would cease to exist. Yet, if we rule out ancestral reality on the basis that they depend on minds on an ongoing basis, we are also forced to rule out psychological kinds like beliefs and pains as non-real. Since they too are constitutively dependent on mind.

As far as I can tell from my reading of Menkiti, the pressing question is why something that depends on mind should be deemed non-real, if "mind-part" is a genuine domain in the material universe. Mind, like life, is a fact about our world. Just as social entities depend on mind for their existence, so too naturally-occurring biological kinds depend on there being life. However, it is not up to any of us that there is life or mind in the universe. But no one thinks that life-dependence undermine the reality of biological kinds (Khalidi, 2015). So, it is really unclear why mind-dependence would undermine the reality of social entities, like ancestral persons.

Taking these ideas seriously, I want to now argue that mind, in particular collective intentionality as a species of mind required for constructing social reality, is ontologically significant. If that is the case, dependence of ancestral persons on collective intentionality does not undermine their reality.

The argument runs as follows:

1. Collective intentionality is not ontologically reducible.
2. Collective intentionality is not eliminable.
3. If (1) and (2), then collective intentionality is ontologically significant.
4. Thus, collective intentionality is ontologically significant.

The argument is valid. Let's consider each of the premises.

One way to understand the first premise is to consider that collective and individual intentionality do not have the same content. For example,

13 Khalidi (2015, 2016) also discusses and offers a reply to this strategy for distinguishing between artificial and social kinds. Like him, I doubt that the distinction between causation and constitution is able to salvage mind-independence.

their truth-contents differ. Statements of the form, "We intend to *X*" are not entailed by statements of the form, "I intend to *X*." It is quite possible that the former is false, while the latter is true. But even in cases where they are both true (or false), they are not true (or false) in the same way. Perhaps, more importantly, as Margaret Gilbert argues, shared intention to do something exhibit properties that individual intention does not. One such property is their *directedness.* This means that the structure of shared intention is such that its content is appropriately addressed to parties other than oneself. Another is their normativity. In other words, because it is so directed, collective intentionality entails joint commitments, which cannot be rescinded unilaterally (Gilbert 2009, 175, 171–2; 2006, 38–41). We each have a right to expect each other to show up for a meeting at an agreed time, and can justifiably condemn the other for being stood up, based simply on our shared intention to do so. So, then, collective intentionality is not ontologically reducible since it is characterised by deontic properties and relations that are not entailed by individual intentionality.

Premise (2) states that collective intentionality is ineliminable in a general ontology. In other words, without it not only would our social behaviours and practices be inexplicable, but also many shared obligations. Ordinary collective activities like weddings, signing contracts, drafting constitutions, legal obligations, etc. as well as, cultural and ritual practices linked to ancestral persons, would be unintelligible. Moreover, social facts and entities, like recession, racism, money, nations, corporations, etc., would have no place in a complete ontology. Indeed, the entire domain of social reality would be redundant, and its existence in our material universe miraculous. The cost of eliminating collective intentionality is simply too high.

Implicit in the third premise is the idea that irreducibility and ineliminability are useful ways for deciding what is ontologically significant. In other words, rather than mind-independence, we are better off determining what is real by asking whether it is reducible and can be eliminated from a complete inventory of what exists. On this latter criterion, ancestral persons have a place in a general ontology. My contention is that since collective intentionality is not redundant, the dependence of ancestral persons on it does not impugn their reality.

One who is not yet persuaded by the foregoing considerations might find the following more compelling. Consider that on a causal (as opposed to a mind-independence) criterion of realism, according to which something genuinely exists if it makes a causal difference in the world, ancestral persons get a place in ontology. This is because their causal properties and the effects they

produce in the world are not arbitrarily written into them or invented, but are discovered by us and are subject to empirical generalisations.[14] In order to bring out the point clearly, compare a bogeyman and a recently deceased Grandpa. Although both are not biologically alive, there are important ways in which Grandpa, and not bogeyman, might be said to exist (beyond death). It is that despite his physical absence, Grandpa's *will* continues to make a causal difference in the world. It can determine how his estate is administered, including who administers it, and can cause his children to undertake certain kinds of actions towards each other or behave in particular ways, say resent Grandpa for the rest of their lives for not bequeathing certain properties to them.

Notice that in making the case for Grandpa's continued existence, I am appealing to something objective about him that survives his death, rather than the mere *belief* that he continues to exist or our legal practices concerning wills and estate management. These are obviously important, but not enough by themselves. One might believe that bogeyman exists and this belief might cause one to act in particular ways, but that's not my point. Unlike the bogeyman, Grandpa exists in some objective way in virtue of his will existing and this *fact* makes a causal difference in the world. I have been arguing that some aspect of deceased human beings, specifically, their life-histories, survives biological death, and that belief in their continued existence as ancestral persons is grounded on the fact that their human relatives confer the person-status on their life-histories or autobiography by adopting certain attitudes and practices toward it. Now, I have added that the reason why they truly exist is that this aspect of them, their life-history, which might even incorporate their *will,* can make a causal difference in the world.

5. CONCLUSION

One who insists that ancestors are immaterial entities would be disappointed with the outcome of my analysis. However, its merit is that it shows that ancestral persons are not just entities given in commonsense understanding of the world, but also part of non-redundant reality. To motivate that view, I have asked us to think about them, along with Ifeanyi Menkiti, as social entities belonging in a social ontology, rather than other-worldly immaterial entities. This is one way of making sense of them as extended material agents. It is also the most plausible way of rendering their nonphysical presence in a material universe. I have also asked that we regard social entities as genuine entities in

14 Here I draw on ideas from Khalidi (2015, 106–107).

a social ontology. We implausibly exclude mind-dependent, social kinds, like ancestral persons, that make a causal difference in the world as non-real. Mind, like life, is something we discover in our universe and there is no reason to think that dependence on mind, but not life, impugn the reality of a thing.

These considerations support my earlier suspicion that giving up on a theoretical justification of ancestral persons, and turning to a practical one instead, as Flikschuh does, is a little too quick. Given that ancestral persons are social entities, we know everything we need to know about them. In addition, since their existence is empirically grounded on the existence of life-histories or (auto)biographies of deceased human beings, belief in them is epistemic, objectively sufficient and not hostage to arbitrary decisions.

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