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EDITORIAL

In the landscape of the philosophy of religion, the Western paradigm of discourse has been the mainstream voice, dominating the sphere. This has been a cause for invitation to be extended towards Western counterparts to enter into meaningful conversation with the contents of African philosophy of religion on such salient subjects as the possibility of immortality, the nature of the 'Supreme Being', the problem of evil, the interrogation of death and the afterlife, the meaning of life, the philosophic of repentance, the sleight of witchcraft, the cult of ancestors, and the implication of belief in spiritual agency on the antinomy of freewill-determinism. In recent times however, the sphere of African philosophy of religion has witnessed a massive dose of vitality with an interesting gamut of pace-setting views from established scholars such as Ada Agada, Aribiah David Attoe, and Jonathan O. Chimakonam, among others. Noting the shifting perspectives in the philosophy of religion on a whole, and the exciting range of outlooks replete in African philosophy, The Nuntius announces this special edition dedicated to extensive research on these inciting perspectives and discussions. This special edition vaunts of the span of discussions it encapsulates, devoid of any doubt of unresolved anonymities. These nine (9) articles presented in this edition reflect the contemporaneous discussions in their domiciliaries, and are sure to spark further inquiry.

This edition opens with an article by John Owen Adimike; his paper, which reflects on an African resolution to the logical variant of the problem of evil, proposes a paradigmatic shift from the Western bivalence of logical valuation, to a typically African trivalent logic. The system he proposes—Ezumezu logic—does not take the third course as a matter of

anonymity, but rather as value complementarity. With the status of the third course, it is possible to conceive logically, of a sound justification for something of seemingly contradictory status such as the matter of the problem of evil. The trivalent logic system he proposes assuredly possesses some merits that trumps the deficiencies of the inherent bivalency of the worldviews of African theism, and Limited God-view, and also the materialistic prospect of Predetermined Historicity. From this system, Adimike has argued alongside the proponents of Ezumezu, for the appropriateness of the 'Harmony God' view as a faithful representation of a broadly African understanding of the Supreme Being.

"Contributions of Charles Nyamiti to Catholic Theological Formation in Africa", is in method and praxeology, an African assessment of the theoretical and contextual frameworks that ground the meaning of Christianity for the African. In this paper, Emmanuel I. Obigwe presents the thought of Charles Nyamiti as an archetypal framework for investigating and conserving the African autochthonous character of religious belief as it pertains conversationally with the truth of Christianity. Emmanuel Obigwe accentuates the key features of Nyamiti's theological vision and pits them topically against crucial aspects of the African perspective of religion, discerning in so doing, the quintessential influence of Charles Nyamiti to Catholic theological formation in Africa. Obigwe asseverates the authenticity and relevance of Nyamiti's model on the grounds of its methodological and substantial fidelity to the African understanding of communion, spirituality, ancestor-ship, and anthropology; he harmonizes African tradition and magisterial instruction to result in a coherent African scheme of theology.

Barnabas Iliya's "Hausa Traditional Conception of God and Religion", succeeds Obigwe's paper. The central thesis that Iliya sets out to argue is that the Hausa as an ethnic group is not just ontologically distinct from Islam, but it possesses a very nuanced religious system of its own right. He analyzes the way God is addressed in Hausa religious thought and concludes that Allah is but a Muslim imposition; the appropriate tag for the Supreme is actually Ubangiji. However, for reasons of religious cohabitation, both names are often fused. Iliya reviews the possible roots of religious belief, and by implication, the roots of complex religious organizations, and traces them to the theories of primitive animism and primitive ancestor worship. He rejects the sufficiency of any single explanation but favours primitive ancestor worship as possessing more explanatory scope and power than primitive animism. From this background, he constructs his argument that what is often thought to be the equivalent of religion in Hausa land, Bori, is actually mistaken. He offers firsthand insight that the equivalent of religion for the Hausa is Addini; based on his argument on the origins of religion, he argues that Addini fits into this description, whereas Bori may pass for (an initiation) ritual.

In "A Comparative Analysis of the Traditional Yogbo Argument for Belief in God's Existence and William James' Experiential Argument", Stephen Tsaku Akende supplies us with an understanding of the idea of the Supreme Being upheld by the Yogbo people, a subset of the general Tiv populace. The crux of his argument is to decipher the points of interest between the Yogbo folk and the thoughts proffered by William James, with respect to providing argument-form justification for belief in the existence of an Immaterial creative essence. He argues however, that the nature of the arguments offered by both parties is

largely different, though in essence they are similar in that they offer arguments based on experience. While the former (i.e., the Yogbo folk) draw the basis of their argumentation from the seemingly mystical or 'supernatural' goings-on in their environments, those who would subscribe to James' version of the argument are likely to extrapolate from empirical data and physical processes to belief in a Supreme Being. From the understanding of God as 'Jov', the Yogbo form a formidable concept of the Supreme Being that permits the understanding of causality in relation to supernatural agency. In the final analysis, the ethereal events we experience form a cumulative case for belief in the existence of a God.

Benedict A. Akin-Omolafe's "Be and Being God: The Nature of Yoruba Deities", is a powerful essay that ventures afield the regular conversations that characterize discourses on the nature of deities. Benedict Akin-Omolafe argues from the Yoruba religious pantheon, that not just is the word 'God' nominal, it is also a verb. While in the context of grammar and syntax, it is not unusual for a noun to be verbed, the metaphysical implications that derive from Akin-Omolafe's arguments are quite profound. He argues that the functions usually thought of as being the exclusive right of God, may be performed by other beings: spiritual and human; it is the performance of these actions that warrant such an entity, pro tempore, to be thought of as being God. He thinks that this nuance of the performances of some of the actions of God are what markedly characterize the some of the dynamics of the Yoruba pantheon.

Evaristus Nwokeke provides an examination on "The Concept of God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought" which attempts a reconstruction of the traditional Igbo religious thought on the nature of the Supreme Being, prior to the advent of the Western colonialists. He

argues that there is a fundamental difference between the deities and the Supreme Being acknowledged by the Igbos and the 'God' campaigned by the Christian missionaries. He argues that if we conceive of the deities in the Igbo pantheon as ends in themselves, the resultant is a polytheistic religion. He argues that there has been some inevitable taint of Christian influence on the traditional Igbo conception of God. He furthers that the understanding of what makes for a 'supreme' being in Igbo religious thought is not a straightforward issue as each community has a deity it enthrones and which claims supremacy in relation to that community.

Ruby Bukola Ayodele writes in investigation of "The Mind-Body Problem, Afterlife, and Ethical Meaning in Life: A Yoruba Prospect". Her paper addresses from a philosophical angle, the question of immortality against the backdrop of Yoruba belief-system. The possibility of an afterlife as is construed in the Yoruba thought system births the Mind-Body problem as the body is seen as a material thing, capable of dying and the soul as a non-dying substance, both of which conjoin to give rise to a person. Her argument stems from the Yoruba understanding of death, life, human being, and life after death. From this spectrum, and against the investigations possible (epistemic, metaphysical, and moral), she engages the conception of an immaterial mode of life, essentially from the Yoruba perspective that life is not just material but also immaterial. However, from the projections of knowledge and belief, she argues that there is no magnificent epistemic support for this belief. She however maintains that the view has very significant ethical prospects, as it beckons on us to contemplate the quality of our living.

To wrap up this special edition, Raymond Chukwuebuka Okoro and John Owen Adimike provide a highly philosophical paper on the topic of "African Traditional Religion: Myth or Reality", in which they masterly consider the question of the justification of the reality of African Traditional Religion (ATR). They argue that ATR is a singular phenomenon instantiated in every cultural settlement; they further that as a singular religious identity, it is a special entity that does not possess a founder, a holy book, or a governing magisterial body, but operates with ministers. Notwithstanding, it passes for a religion because of the uniformity of its beliefs—most especially its belief in a single Supreme Being. Okoro and Adimike argue that the belief it sustains in a Supreme Being is not simply a matter of promiscuous teleology, but may be marshalled out in argumentation; to this effect, they articulate what they describe as the 'spirito-cosmological argument'. This argument is a form of the cosmological argument [i.e., arguments that begin with empirical premises grounded upon causality and observation], but which understands reality as inherently twofold: partly physical, partly immaterial. With this argument and with this basic understanding of reality, they press on that ATR is further affirmed as a religious reality for its provision of a theodicy that suits its needs and basic assumptions. Employing Ada Agada's consolationist ontology, Okoro and Adimike thus provide a system of theodicy for ATR.

The Nuntius proudly offers its readership in this special edition, a rich, comprehensive, and rigorous coverage of specific topical areas and thematic concerns in the vibrant and evolving field of African Philosophy of Religion. As hinted at in the foregoing paragraphs, these nine featured articles, explore the rich textual and non-textual formulae of philosophical knowledge in African Philosophy of Religion, satisfactorily embodying the broad and

diverse scope of African philosophy in general, and African religious thought in particular—all in the bid to exhibit the fertility and depth of the African philosophical tradition. It is therefore my pleasure to wish you, on behalf of the editorial crew of The Nuntius, a happy and fruitful encounter with the thought-provoking, ratiocinative, and impact-driven contents of this special issue.

JOHN OWEN ADIMIKE
Editor

Ezumezu Logic and the Problem of Evil

John Owen E. ADIMIKE
Lecturer, Don Bosco Training Institute (Tema)
Owenadimike15@gmail.com;

Abstract

My paper examines the problem of evil in its logical form, and along lines of African philosophizing. I construe the problematic nature of this problem [of evil] (hereafter, λ) as arising from a Western logical structure, which takes the valuation of propositions as being marked by a rigid bivalence of only truth (T) and falsity (F). By this structure, values and propositions are diametrically pitted against each other such that it appears that choice is only restrained to an 'either', 'or'. My argument transcends and dismantles this bivalence and subscribes to the African system of Ezumezu logic, developed by Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam which permits the pursuit of a trivalent logical course of 'either', 'or', in addition to 'and'. Employing the logical system of Ezumezu, I demonstrate a negative resolution to λ, showing via the 'principle of value-complementarity', that good and evil as observed and experienced, are not opposites, but rather complements. The conclusions I draw from my analysis bear some implication for the conception of the Supreme Being; for one, I argue that conceiving the Supreme Being in African philosophy through the categories of the superlative 'omni' properties is mistaken, and also, I argue that this Supreme Being is better conceived as a harmony of good and evil: an embodiment of balance.

Keywords: Problem of evil; logic; Supreme Being; harmony; logical argument; Ezumezu.

Introduction

In a paper authored by Isaac Agama, the problematic nature of evil vis-à-vis the existence of the Supreme Being[1] is articulated. He expresses it thusly: "To believe that God exists is simply to accept a proposition of a certain sort, affirming that there is a personal being who,

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[1] In this paper, I shall refrain from using the term 'God' in addressing the Supreme Being in African philosophical thought. The motivation for this consists in the fact that the term 'God' bespeaks some colonial legacy, an epistemological bias leaning towards the conception of the Judeo-Christian Supreme Being, and the lack of cultural sensitivity towards the various ways African settlements independently construe their Deity. To ensure neutrality and to avoid any occasion of unsettled anonymities and bias, I shall maintain the term 'Supreme Being' as a more adequate designator.

has existed from eternity, is almighty, perfectly wise, perfectly just, has created the world, and loves his creatures. How can we reconcile these lovable features with the fact of evil in the world?"[2] From Agama's formulation, the crux of the logical problem of evil (afterwards, λ) may be extracted: "Is the existence of a Supreme Being, marked by the categories of 'power and glory'[3] accessible to logical justification in the face of the evils replete in the world?" In response to this question, many philosophers of the Western tradition of philosophy have arisen with great perspectives on what may constitute a resolution, some arguing for the logical consistency of evil and an 'omni' Christian God[4] and others arguing for the logical impossibility of any such coexistence. My focus in this paper is to turn to the insights offered by the trivalent logics of African philosophy, particularly that of *Ezumezu* logic.

By employing a trivalent *Ezumezu* logic, I am arguing against the sufficiency of bivalent logic [i.e., two-valued Aristotelian logic], typical of the Western philosophy paradigms, and consequently, of its philosophy of religion, in addressing λ. The principal cause of the failure of bivalent logic in arresting the perennially occurring λ lies in its foundation upon the principle of non-contradiction which summarily forbids one entity from being true (T) and false (F) simultaneously, and within the same context. *Ezumezu* logic system postulates contrariwise; it allows for two widely divergent things to concomitantly express truth-valuations of T and F within the same context. As such, this expression generates a situation of values manifesting as one of three possibilities: 'either', 'or', plus 'and'. Thus these entities may be 'both/and'. This scenario is what Jonathan O. Chimakonam describes as the possibility of 'truth-glut inference'.[5]

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[2] Isaac O. Agama, "Alvin Plantinga on God, Freewill, and Evil", *The Nuntius: A Philosophical Periodical* 1, no. 2 (2023): 71.

[3] Ada Agada has argued that the categories that best represent the African conceptualization of the Supreme Being, are not those of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence; the African categories of the Supreme Being are those of power and glory. By the category of 'power', we can conceptualize the creative ability of this Being to causally necessitate the universe as we experience (physical) or intuit (spiritual) it. By the category of glory, we can conceptualize the majesty, splendor, and remoteness of this Being and *its* transcendence *in relation to* the universe. Note that I use the word 'it' for the Supreme Being; there is no philosophic basis that warrants the popular belief that the Supreme Being in ATR is male. This assumption largely obtains from the Judeo-Christian belief system in which their Supreme is considered male. On the African parlance, contradistinctively, there is no consensus on the manifest nature or gender of this Being: some places think of this Being as male, others as female, and others as something of both natures (cf. Luis Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Ada Agada, "African Philosophy of Religion: Concepts of God, Ancestors, and the Problem of Evil", *Philosophy Compass*, https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12864).

[4] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974).

[5] Jonathan O. Chimakonam, *Ezumezu Logic: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 61.

My paper will employ *Ezumezu* logic to resolve λ *in the negative*. This negative resolution has been attempted first by Amara Esther Chimakonam,[6] and furthered by Jonathan and Amara Chimakonam,[7] and also by Aribiah Attoe;[8] this kind of solution transcends attempts of theodicy and demonstrates the possibility of the non-existence of λ. I will show that good and evil are not diametrically opposed but are complementary, via the principle of value-complementarity. To accomplish this task then, I have ordered the progression of this paper into three sections in which the first section commits to an articulation of λ and its grounds; the second section will assess three concepts of the Supreme Being: the African theistic conception [which conceives the Supreme with the Judeo-Christian categories of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence], the 'Limited-God' view, and the 'Predeterministic Historicity' view. Finally, I shall present the case of the harmony that is funded by *Ezumezu* logic.

I. An Articulation of the Logical Problem of Evil

The logical problem of evil (λ) is one of the three possible ways of conceiving of the problem of evil, the other two being the evidential argument,[9] and the theodicy argument.[10] The central contention of λ is that it is impossible for an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent Supreme to coexist with any evil; to hold such contradictory views is in the words of J. L. Mackie, "positively irrational".[11] The eminent philosopher Antony Flew, expresses the character of λ when he argues that "[t]he issue is whether to assert at the same time, first that there is an infinitely good God, second that he is an all-powerful Creator, and third that there are evils in his universe, is to contradict yourself".[12] We can formulate λ essentially to be the

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[6] Amara Esther Chimakonam, "Why the Problem of Evil Might not be a Problem after all in African Philosophy of Religion", *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture, and Religions* 11, no. 1 (2022): 27-40.

[7] Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Amara E. Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", *Religious Studies*, 59 (2023): 326-339.

[8] Aribiah David Attoe, "Redefining the Problem of Evil in the Context of a Predeterministic World: New Conversations with the Traditional African Worldview", *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 11, no.1 (2022): 9–26.

[9] M. Tooley and A. Plantinga, *Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[10] N. Trakakis, "Theodicy: The Solution to the Problem of Evil or Part of the Problem?", *Sophia*, 47 (2008): 161-191.

[11] J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 64 (1955): 200-212; 200.

[12] Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 48.

conjunction of two premises: (A) A morally perfect Supreme Being is causally responsible for the creation of the world; and, (B) There is evil in the world.[13]

From the conjunction, λ arises when we consider that a Supreme Being possessing the superlative 'omni' properties would ultimately eliminate evil altogether; however, the fact of the continued existence of evil is a sign that either such a morally perfect Supreme Being is inexistent or is at most, not morally perfect.[14] The Chimakonams argue that:

> The God who is omnipotent is all-powerful and can stamp out evil from this world if He knows about it and desires it. The God who is omniscient knows everything and would not create evil in His world. And the God who is omnibenevolent is all-good and desires to end evil in the universe. But God has yet to respond or behave in this expected manner. Either God is not exactly what He is said to be or evil should not exist at all in the world. But evil exists, so, is God not what He is said to be?[15]

λ arises as long as we continue to conceive of the Supreme Being with the categories of the Western 'God'. Prior to an articulation of the solution promised by *Ezumezu* logic, I shall now consider some conceptions of the Supreme Being which may give rise to the occurrence of λ.

II. Three Conceptions of the Supreme Being

Three conceptions of the Supreme Being in African philosophy are worth reviewing here. The first is what is termed the 'African Theistic Tradition', the second is the 'Limited-God' tradition, and the third is what has been developed by Aribiah Attoe, in which the Supreme Being is conceived as a 'depersonalized force', a materialistic force of energy, lacking in consciousness.[16] I begin my order of criticisms with the African theistic tradition. This tradition ascribes the Judeo-Christian categories of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, to the Supreme Being in ATR. By employing these categories, the African theistic camp understands the Supreme Being as being 'maximally great' and 'maximally excellent'—terms that best fit the Judeo-Christian's 'God' when attempting a resolution of

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[13] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 327.

[14] A. Horowitz, "Intentionality, Evil, God, and Necessity", *Religious Studies,* 56 (2020): 436-446.

[15] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 327. I reiterate that I do not think of the Supreme Being as manifesting any homogenously identifiable gender: be it male, female, or something hermaphroditic.

[16] Aribiah D. Attoe, "Redefining the Problem of Evil in the Context of a Predeterministic World: New Conversations with the Traditional African Worldview", *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*,11 (2022): 9–26.

λ.[17] The implication of this argument, and I should add, an unwarranted annex of this argument is the belief in the moral perfection ascribed to the Supreme Being; given that this Being is construed to be 'all-good', then the nature of this Being is devoid of any vestige of evil. This raises the obvious inquiry: 'if the Supreme Being is superlatively knowledgeable, powerful, and benevolent, whence comes evil?'

There is no explanation founded upon any bivalent logical reasoning that sufficiently explains away this contradiction. Either there is no evil in the world, and there is in existence, a Supreme Being of superlative qualities such as goodness, knowledge, and power, or there is evil in the world and there is no such Supreme Being enjoying superlative qualities such as goodness, knowledge, and power. It is impossible to deny the truth of the facticity of evil in the world; if evil exists in the world, then it is logically inconsistent that a Supreme Being of the superlative qualities aforementioned should exist. The theodicy argument that evil is only *permitted* so as to necessitate a 'greater good', falls apart in the face of needless and senseless evils which have no benevolent purchase or bearing whatsoever.

Then there is the 'Limited-God' tradition of African philosophy of religion. This view understands the Supreme Being to be distinct from the Western 'God' who possesses superlative knowledge, power, and goodness. The 'Limited God' view however, believes that while the Supreme Being in African philosophy is the *most powerful* in its cosmology, there is no grounds to understand this Being as *all-powerful*. The former category permits this Being to do *a lot of things*, which includes creating the universe, while the latter permits this Being to do *all things*.[18] Those who uphold this view argue thusly on the grounds that in African philosophy of religion, deities and divinities are powerful, and they govern over certain districts of reality. As such, it is not uncommon to find one worshipping *Ogun* as the god of thunder, or *Ala* as the earth goddess, or other attendant divinities. The striking thing about the veneration offered to these beings is that some of these beings are taken as 'ends in themselves', and not simply as some means to the Supreme Being. If that is the case, then the Supreme Being is limited. Thus, the presence of other deities undermines the supremacy index of the Supreme Being.

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[17] Agama, "Alvin Plantinga on God, Free-will, and Evil", 76-78.
[18] John A. Bewaji, "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil", *African Studies Quarterly*, 2 (1998): 1-17; 8.

Limitation thinkers however, hold that while the Supreme Being is not omnipotent and requires the aid of lesser deities, this Being ranks as foremost in the hierarchy of divinities,[19] bestowing and delegating power and responsibility respectively on these lesser deities.[20] However, I think that some dubiety may be cast on this view as well. The suspicion lies in the substitution of 'all-powerful' with 'most-powerful'; if the Supreme Being is 'Most Powerful' in relation to the deities in the pantheon of ATR, then little is the difference it makes with the ascription, 'All Powerful'. The Chimakonams explain this aptly when they write that, "[b]esides, in the zone of existence where [the Supreme Being] is acknowledged as the most powerful, it is difficult, if not impossible, for any other being beneath to know that [the Supreme Being] is not all-powerful".[21] In the final analysis, there is no real distinction between the influence expendable by an All-Powerful Supreme Being and that expendable by a Most-Powerful Supreme Being. It would be hasty and foully unseasonable to arrive at the conclusion of the limitation of the Supreme Being simply because this Being has attendant gods in its assistance. It is equally plausible that the assistance rendered by these lesser gods only consolidates the command of the Supreme Being as something like a regnant monarch.

Furthermore, I fail to see reasons why the Supreme Being could not be contextually all-powerful. In a world where the Supreme Being transcends all else, then in the context of that world—or this universe that the Supreme Being is supposed to have created, to be specific—the Supreme Being is logically all-powerful, since the context of existence in which this Being is Supreme cannot be transcendent over this Being. Therefore, if the Supreme Being is in *this* universe, this *world scenario*, then it necessarily follows that this Being is Supreme in this universe. If that is established, then the supremacy of this Being in this universe means that this Being is potent enough to eradicate evil.[22] However inadequate this limitation view is, I think that its purchase lies in the fact that it abstains from granting the Supreme Being an omnibenevolent nature, thus allowing for this Being to be capable of committing good and evil. Thus, being limited in moral goodness, the Supreme Being is not obliged to eliminate evil.

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[19] B. Dasaolu, "A Yorùbá Reflection on the Theodicy embedded in Prince's *Sign o' the Times*: Implications for Scholarship on African Theology", *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, 7 (2019): 26–33, 31.

[20] W. Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5.

[21] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 329.

[22] Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Agada, "African Philosophy of Religion", 5.

Finally, Aribiah Attoe's depersonalized materialism argument of 'Predeterministic Historicity'.[23] The claim of this argument with respect to λ is expressed as follows: that "the power of the problem of evil lies in the belief, in many major African traditional religions, that God is a personalized entity. This, in turn, ensures a blind misattribution of the properties… to God".[24] Attoe apprehends the Supreme Being as material, depersonalized, and unconscious: it is devoid of gender, eternal, and manifests in time as the 'First Cause'.[25] Attoe's version of this Being is by implication, lacking of any personal attributes and effortlessly collapses λ. Attoe's 'God', is simply a First Cause that puts an end to the infinite regression of causes; this being is simply the foundation of existence, which causes series of correlating events to set in motion.[26]

Attoe's 'God' possesses the characters of materiality, unconsciousness, and continuous becoming;[27] he adds that this being is not an *intentional* creator, since it lacks consciousness. I believe that Attoe's arguments too, are not without faults. While I think that, on a materialist basis, the description of any First Cause of existence, or for the preconditions of existence, appears unproblematic, I am unconvinced as to why we should not suppose that this being too, may be all-powerful. If this 'First Cause' is the source of all things, then to some degree, all other effects and causes that trace back to it, defer to it. I think alongside the Chimakonams that the First Cause is still causally omnipotent.[28] Apart from the question of how consciousness may result from mindless material, I also do not see reason why we should not suppose that this being is a creator: intentionally or unintentionally. If we were to neglect the intentional sense of the word, this First Cause would still be a creator in a purely metaphysical sense because it is the cause of every other being in the world. Also, if this First Cause has been existing eternally, and its effect only began to exist a finite time ago, that is a reason to suspect some form of consciousness, some intentionality (no matter how primordial, or incomprehensive it may seem). This is because, from the law of causality, we are informed that there is a necessary association between a cause and its effect such that a cause cannot exist removed from its effect and vice versa. Therefore, if the First Cause exists

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[23] Aribiah D. Attoe, *Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Predeterministic Historicity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

[24] Attoe, "Redefining the Problem of Evil in the Context of a Predeterministic World", 9.

[25] Attoe, 9.

[26] Attoe, 29.

[27] Attoe, *Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics*, 37

[28] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 331.

eternally, then the universe too, should have existed eternally. If the universe however, has not existed since eternity, it follows that the First Cause is an intentional creator.

Granted the success of the reviews of these conceptions of the Supreme Being in African philosophy, I shall now turn my attention to *Ezumezu* logic and its own conception of the Supreme Being in African philosophy and how this view supplies an enriching and promising prospect in dealing satisfactorily with λ.

III. *Ezumezu* Logic and the Problem of Evil

By *Ezumezu* logic, I refer to the African system of logic developed by Jonathan Chimakonam, in his groundbreaking work, *Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies*. The etymology of the word traces back to the Igbo language which means accretion; it combines three values: *ezu* (truth, marked as T), *izu* (falsity, marked as F), and *ezumezu*, which is depicted with a lowercase 'e', or denoted as 'C'. Chimakonam describes his system of logic as "a variant of three-value logic that is context-dependent which unlike the variants by Jan Lukasiewicz and Stephen Kleene, prioritises complementarity rather than contradiction".[29] Emmanuel Ofuasia and Uchenna Ogbonnaya present us with the character of this logic when they write that, "[e]ssentially, Ezumezu logic boasts of two seemingly opposed variables which are complemented in the third value. Unlike the mainstream and dominant bivalent logic system in the West where 'T' and 'F' are treated as contradictories, Ezumezu logic passes these as sub-contraries".[30]

Ezumezu logic accommodates three supplementary laws to the traditional laws of thought to strengthen its foothold: the laws of *njikọka*, *nmekọka* and *ọnọna-etiti*, which respectively correspond to "three metaphysical principles, relationality, contextuality, and complementarity, that explain realities involved in logical reasoning".[31] The Chimakonams interpret C as possessing a truth-value TF.[32] Jonathan Chimakonam explains the rationale for this based on the nature of C, which complements the contextual modes occupied by the individual propositions.[33] These supplementary principles as well as their logical expressions are explained thusly by J. Chimakonam:

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[29] Chimakonam, *Ezumezu Logic*, 160.
[30] Emmanuel Ofuasia and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, "Ezumezu Logic: A Clarification and Defense", *Journal of Contemporary African Philosophy*, 3 (2022): 45-53; 46.
[31] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 333.
[32] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, 333.
[33] Chimakonam, *Ezumezu Logic*, 99.

- *Njikoka*: An arumaristic proposition is true if and only if it is true in *Relation* to its opposite that is false.

  (T) Ax ↔ [(T) Ax » (F) ~Ax], which reads that 'Ax is true if and only if Ax is true in *Relation* to *Not* Ax is false'. The notation (») functions as a relationship indicator.

- *Nmekoka*: If an arumaristic proposition is true in a given context, then it cannot be false in the same context.

  (T) Ax $|$→ ~(F) Ax, which reads that if Ax is true in a given context, then Ax cannot be false in the same context. The notation wedged-arrow functions both as a material implication and a context indicator here.

- *Ọnọna-etiti*: An ohakaristic proposition is both true and false in a complementary mode of thought.

  [(T) Ax ∧ (F) Ax] ↔ (C) (Ax ∧~ Ax), which reads that Ax is true and Ax is false if and only if Ax and not Ax are complements.[34]

By 'arumaristic', Okeke designates a creatively critical solution of conjunctive mood, which rules out the anticipation of a synthesis; it is an argument structure proceeding from the periphery to the centre. An arumaristic proposition therefore is singular in content but which expresses two different truth-valuations depending on the context of assessment.[35] By an ohakaristic proposition, Chimakonam means a solution that is characteristically disjunctive but which excludes the anticipation of a synthesis, proceeding as its way of inference, from the centre to the periphery.[36] This proposition asserts that "two different thoughts that can both be asserted simultaneously in a complementary mode".[37]

On the nature of the supplementary laws of thought, the Chimakonams submit that:

> While *njikọka* and *nmekọka* ground relationality and contextuality, respectively, *ọnọna-etiti* grounds complementarity. In *njikọka*, we see the interaction of two opposites and the values T and F. Variables, truths, and values necessarily relate, even if they are opposed. While variables can change values from one context to another; values and truths can change in different contexts. In *nmekọka*, we see the uniqueness of contexts as the zone of identity. In a context, variables have definite values, but only in that context. Truth is fixed upon a fact within a context alone. The value T remains T and can never change to F in the same context, and vice versa. For *ọnọna-etiti*, opposed variables, values, and truths can converge and complement. There is a recognition of mutual self-insufficiency and the yearning for complementation among opposed variables. No value or truth is absolute. Each one is relative to some contexts.[38]

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[34] Jonathan O. Chimakonam, "On the System of Conversational Thinking: An Overview", *Arụmarụka: Journal of Conversational Thinking*, 1 (2021): 1–45, 24.

[35] Jonathan O. Chimakonam, "What is Conversational Philosophy? A Prescription of a New Doctrine and Method of Philosophy, in and Beyond African Philosophy", *Phronimon*, 18 (2017): 114–130.

[36] Chimakonam, "On the System of Conversational Thinking", 24.

[37] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 338.

[38] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, 336-337.

With this understanding of logic, it is possible to postulate a conception of the Supreme Being. The postulation which flows from *Ezumezu* logic is termed the 'Harmony-God' view.[39] This conception of the Supreme Being is founded upon the shaping principle of relationality and balance. From the understanding of the nature of forces in Igbo (and African) philosophy, wherein every being is capable of relating with other beings within and without its genus,[40] it is established that the Supreme Being has relational capacity. This Being is considered Supreme because the relational capacity of this Being supersedes that of other beings. As a result of this, the Supreme Being expresses itself as an embodiment of C, capable of maintaining harmonious balance between good and evil, thus earning it the worship and deference of other beings, humans and gods inclusive. The relational capacity of the Supreme Being extends to all beings such that this Being can powerfully relate to/with entities in the universe. This power does not make this Being 'all-powerful'; this Being "may not be the most powerful in all contexts; vastly knowledgeable but not all-knowing, and may not be the most knowledgeable being in all contexts; very good, but not all-good".[41] The implication of this argument is that the Supreme Being is capable of evil; as a Being that prioritizes balance, it implies that this Being knows when and to what extent, the deed of evil is warranted of it.

Notice the grounding for the Supreme Being; this harmony view does not ground the divinity of the Supreme upon its creation, or upon its eternity, or any other grounds, but upon its capacity for relationship. The significance of this motive is that it plots the Supreme Being as "a member of the existence family, who has more relational capacity than most of the others".[42] Given that the claim that the divinity of the Supreme Being is predicated upon its maximal relational capacity, it appears as a pressing challenge that one must assume the canonical task of proving that this Supreme Being possesses this capacity in such a way that is unmatched by any other being in the universe.

The view of the Supreme Being as motivated by *Ezumezu* logic understands good and evil to be necessary features of the world, since the elimination of the one would imply the

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[39] Chimakonam, *Ezumezu Logic*, 101-104.

[40] Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo, "An Epistemological Interpretation of Forces in Igbo Ontology", *Nnadiebube Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2021): 154-179.

[41] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 333-334.

[42] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, 334.

elimination of the other. To understand and experience any of good or evil, implies knowing and experiencing the other;[43] if that is the case, then:

> A morally wholesome world is impossible just as a morally perfect [Supreme Being] is impossible *in* and *for* the universe. Imperfection is one of the most important features of the world. Value-complementarity rather than value-contradiction and value-singularity is the character of the best possible world. We, therefore, argue that God [read as the Supreme Being] would not exist in and for a morally perfect universe.[44]

An imperfect universe requires an imperfect Supreme Being; so long as the Supreme Being is thought of to be perfect, there will not be a satisfactory resolution possible for λ. The harmonious Supreme represents the *Ezumezu* character of C, in that the seemingly divergent values of good and evil, just as those of T and F, are brought to a complementarity in this Being. As such, the principal feature of this Being is the balance it sustains with respect to the relational capacities of good and evil. Adopting a panentheistic cosmic outlook is helpful in conceptualizing the harmonious character of the Supreme Being since "(a) it shares the same attribute of imperfection with the universe and (b) it is in the universe that it finds its relevance".[45] Therefore, this view of the Supreme Being understands this Being as influential over the universe, and simultaneously, conditioned by it. The Chimakonams offer a final statement on the nature of the Supreme Being as a 'harmony-God'; they write that: "The harmony-God is the highest ontological manifestation of truth-glut valuation in that He is able to maintain the balance necessary for the sustenance of value-complementation without which humans might not be cowed into considering Him worthy of worship and praise".[46]

IV. Concluding Reflections

Perhaps, one objection to the concept of the Supreme Being as raised in *Ezumezu* logic is that the attribution of harmonious balance as the defining factor of this being is dismally inadequate for such a being as the Supreme. The argument that ensues from this criticism may construe the harmonious balance as the driving motivation of just about any other being and so does not make the Supreme Being any more outstanding than any being in African thought. The response I have to this criticism lies in the fact that the relational capacity, and the degree of balance found in this Being is of maximal status when compared to every other existent being acknowledged by African cosmology. Thus, I liken the argument to the

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[43] Grace Umezurike, "An Examination of the Concept of Good and Evil in Igbo Culture", *IDOSR Journal of Current Issues in Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2018): 31-39.

[44] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective", 334.

[45] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, 334.

[46] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, 336.

analogy that humans are not any more sentient or intelligent, or generally more conscious than beasts of burden simply because these animals too possess a brain just like the human being. However, while beasts of burden (e.g., horses, mules, donkeys) are sentient, primates such as the human being, are more sentient and intelligent than they are, due to the evolutionary history of these primates which has resulted in more complex brains and more advanced propensities. Similarly, since all beings have relational capacity, the Supreme Being measures in supremacy owing to its capacity for harmonious balance, and in such a way that commands veneration.

In the final analysis, my task in this paper has been the demonstration of the origination of λ in any bivalent logical system and the resolution of the problem by adopting a paradigm shift to a trivalent system of logic such as *Ezumezu* which permits for the conceptualization of the concomitant existence of good and evil as a necessary complementation, rather than a contradiction. Since the coexistence of good and evil is necessary, then the Supreme Being in such a world as ours, must be one that can harmoniously blend good and evil in such a way that maintains balance [in a way that the good is obvious and appreciated, and the evil is obvious and felt]. Only with such a view of complementarity can λ vanish. Thus, my usage of Ezumezu as proposed by the Chimakonams has offered a perspective towards the collapse of λ from an African philosophical point of view.

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Contributions of Charles Nyamiti to Catholic Theological Formation in Africa

Emmanuel Ifeanyi OBIGWE (SDB)

Department of Theology,
Veritas University, Abuja.
Emmanuelobigwe0@gmail.com

Abstract

Inculturation is appreciated for its ability to make the message or ideology of a particular culture culturally significant for another culture. In this process, the new culture is helped to improve and develop thereby gaining more insight to the worldviews of other culture. This is the case with the African culture in line with the Christian message brought into it. This regrettable situation makes the adoption of Christianity, akin to the adoption of the Western lifestyle. Therefore, there is a strong need to critically look at the Christian message and approach it in a way that is meaningful for the African. To do this, I present the thought of Charles Nyamiti as a possible model to be explored in preserving African indigenous character of religious belief, in conversation with the truth of Christianity.

Keywords: African religion; Culture; Inculturation; Christianity; Nyamiti

Introduction

One of the basic importance of the idea of inculturation is its ability to make the message or ideology of a particular culture diffused into another culture. In this process, the new culture is helped to improve and develop, thereby gaining more insight to the worldviews of other culture. This is the case with the African culture in line with the Christian message brought into it. Despite the genuineness and aptness of the Christian message, it is quite obvious to mention that the Christian message as we have it brought to Africa has a touch of Western culture and civilisation. Hence, it seems that oftentimes, African Christians are living a Western life on African soil. Therefore, there is a strong need to critically look at the Christian message and pursue a better way to culturally Africanise this message to suit the African person. This was the basic idea of Charles Nyamiti as he tried an African culturalization of the Christian message. Christianity however, is a loaded institution, with

more than 25,000 denominations laying claim to the term. I think it will not only be impossible to approach the inculturation I speak of from the perspective of all 25,000of these denominations [since not all have a defined theological stand], but it would water down the uniqueness of both the Christian stand and African religious stand. Therefore, my aim in this paper is to espouse and possibly analyse the contributions of Charles Nyamiti to Catholic theological formation in Africa. To carry out this task, I will first introduce a biographical brief on Nyamiti, and follow it up with his theological vision. The second part will then explore his contributions to Catholic formation, by highlighting his contributions to African theology, spirituality, and ecclesiology.

I. Biography and Theological Vision of Charles Nyamiti

Charles Nyamiti, 1931-2020, was the third of seven children, to devout Christian parents, Theophilus Chambi Chambigulu and Helen Nyasolo, who were members of the Wanyamwezi ethnic group in Tanzania. After completing his primary and secondary education, Charles Nyamiti embarked on a journey to priesthood by enrolling at the esteemed Kipalapala Major Seminary in Tabora, Tanzania. Here, he received a thorough education in philosophy and theology. One can say that, the fusion of Christian faith and African worldview, embodied in Charles Nyamiti's theological reflections, could be attributed to the cultural socialization he experienced growing up as a Wanyamwezi immersed in the Tanzanian philosophy of life and his parents played a crucial role in this process, nurturing a love for his cultural heritage that would later manifest in his academic pursuits and pastoral ministry.[1]

After his ordination as a Catholic priest in 1962, Charles Nyamiti embarked on an illustrious academic journey that took him to Louvain University and the University of Vienna. During this period, he earned multiple degrees including a Sacred Doctorate in Systematic/Dogmatic Theology, a certificate in Music Theory and Piano, and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Cultural Anthropology. He then pursued his studies in music composition at the Vienna High School of Music before returning to Tanzania to serve as a professor at his former seminary, Kipalapala Major Seminary, from 1976-1981.[2]

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[1] Patrick N. Wachege, "Charles Nyamiti; Vibrant Pioneer of Inculturated African Theology" in *African Theology in the 21st Century: The Contributions of the Pioneers,* eds. Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya, Vol. 2 (Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa, 2008), 149.

[2] Edward A Gboada, "African Christian Theology and Christology: A Study of the Contributions of Kwame Bediako, John S. Mbiti, Justin Ukpong and Charles Nyamiti", *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (March 2023): 319-320, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369229950

Charles Nyamiti's theological methodology stands out for its metaphysical, speculative, systematic, and deductive approach. These characteristics, evident in his scholarly works, earned him global recognition as a leading African Christian theologian and Christologist. His writings have become invaluable sources for authentic African Christian theology, providing valuable insights into the theological sciences of our time.[3]

Nyamiti's works are appraised for their scholarly influence. I shall look at some of them here. *African Theology: Its Nature, Problems and Methods* is a work in which he proposed a theology that blended the inculturation focus of liberation theology, with its emphasis on the oppressed and marginalized, while still maintaining an orthodox framework that was relevant to the African context. This combination of inculturation, liberation, and orthodox theology proved to be a powerful tool in the fight against oppression and marginalization in Africa, while staying faithful to traditional Christian beliefs. His approach provided a unique and valuable perspective on Christian theology that was sensitive to the African context and experience.

In his *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective:* he pioneered the concept of Jesus as the "Brother-Ancestor," where he proposed a nuanced understanding of the term "ancestor," limiting it to the immediate parent of an individual. By applying this anthropological concept to the inner life of the Trinity, Nyamiti demonstrated the kinship among the divine persons, drawing a parallel between human and divine ancestry. In this manner, Nyamiti not only reinterpreted a fundamental Christian belief, but also attempted to bridge the gap between the African worldview and Christian theology, aligning African ancestral relationship with the inner life of God. The innovative and unique nature of Charles Nyamiti's African ancestral theological system, has resulted in an African understanding of Christian mysteries that is both rational and faith-based. This method of combining African ancestral theology with Christian mystery has not only produced a unique theological perspective but has also generated tangible results that demonstrate the effectiveness of Nyamiti's approach in fostering a deeper understanding of Christian faith among African people.[4]

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[3] Gboada, 319-320.

[4] Clement Chinkambako and Abenguuni Majawa, "Charles Nyamiti As The Baobab of African Ancestral Christology: Legacy and Re-alignment of Nyamitology in the 21st Century Trends of Theology of Inculturation", The Catholic University of Eastern Africa – Nairobi, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358088994_PROF_CHARLES_NYAMITI_AS_THE_BAOBAB_OF_

Nyamiti's approach culminates in a theological vision which is rooted in African perspectival approach to religious belief, in a way that poses no mutual harm to either Christianity or African religious belief. Charles Nyamiti's vision for African theology was a holistic and systematic union of inculturation and liberation theology, while staying true to orthodoxy and adapting to the rapidly changing African society. He envisaged a type of African theology that would not only be rooted in the local African culture, but also be responsive to the economic, political, and cultural realities of the continent.[5] For him, the scientific recommendable definition of African Theology is double-pronged: African theology in its etymological sense and African theology in the technical sense.

In its *etymological sense*, African theology is a discourse on God and things related to God, grounded in the unique needs and mentality of African people. This includes African traditional theology, which is non-Christian and can be found in African traditional religions. African traditional theology, as Nyamiti argued, is characterized by the use of myths, oral traditions, narratives, and symbolism. These features reflect the unique African religious experience and worldview, which provides a rich source for African theology to draw upon.[6] Then, African theology in its *technical sense* is a systematic expression of Christian theology that draws from the Christian faith and incorporates the unique needs, aspirations, thought-forms, and mentality of African people. This approach incorporates Christ, the Christian tradition, and the Bible as fundamental sources of revelation, while also acknowledging the cultural and spiritual values of Africa as integral parts of Christian belief.[7]

Therefore, Nyamiti defined African theology as "the systematic and scientific understanding, presentation and elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs, aspirations, thought-forms and mentality of the peoples of the black continent"[8]. For him, this definition achieves a desired outcome of a theological framework that incorporates both the global Christian tradition and the distinct African worldview, resulting in a contextualized Christian faith that responds to the specific needs and realities of African people. This African Christian

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AFRICAN_ANCESTRAL_CHRISTOLOGY_Legacy_and_Realignment_of_Nyamitology_in_the_21_st_Century_Trends_of_Theology_of_Inculturation

[5] Obielosi Dominic and Ani Donpedro, "A Quest for a Unique African Christian Theology and Methodology in the Light of Charles Nyamiti", *Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies* 7, no.1. (2017): 15-16.

[6] Obielosi and Ani, 16.

[7] Wachege, "Charles Nyamiti" ,153.

[8] Obielosi and Ani, "A Quest for a Unique African Christian Theology and Methodology in the Light of Charles Nyamiti", 17.

Theology aims to reflect and harmonize with the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of African people, while preserving the core Christian doctrines and values.[9]

II. Contributions of Nyamiti to African Catholic Formation

Nyamiti's works can be said to be metaphysical, speculative, systematic, and in some cases, abstract in the deductive sense.[10] His methodological approach to African theology was not only inspired by the African cultural and religious context, but also guided by magisterial instruction, i.e., the teachings and authority of the Church. This harmonious combination of African traditions and magisterial guidance resulted in a unique and coherent theological perspective, grounded in Nyamiti's philosophical and religious worldview. His methodological approach is a testament to his commitment to reconciling the African situation with the broader Christian tradition, thereby providing a theological framework that is relevant and authentic to African societies.[11]

Furthermore, Charles Nyamiti's methodological approach to African theology was multifaceted, incorporating various disciplines and methodologies: He believed in the power of reason and its application through fields like social anthropology, philosophy, sociology, linguistics, and history to understand African religious, cultural, and social realities and he recognized the primacy of Christian faith and subordinated the findings of anthropological studies to its tenets.[12] He started off this journey by selecting a Christian mystery or topic as the subject of his study, followed by identifying African cultural elements or themes that can be employed for elaborating on the Christian mystery. While recognizing that any African theme or category can be potentially useful for this purpose, he limits his selection to those African themes or categories that are more relevant for theological or pastoral purposes. In the next phase of his methodology, Charles Nyamiti engages in theological reflection, delving into the meaning of the Christian mystery in its own context and in relation to the spiritual and material welfare of African people. To do this effectively, he employs what he terms 'intrinsic employment of cultural themes in theology', where African categories or themes are identified with Christian elements (mysteries) and integrated internally into the theological

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[9] Gboada, "African Christian Theology and Christology", 320.
[10] Wachege, "Charles Nyamiti", 153.
[11] Wachege, 154.
[12] Obielosi and Ani, "A Quest for a Unique African Christian Theology and Methodology in the Light of Charles Nyamiti", 17.

elaboration of revealed truth. This integration allows African themes to become an organic part of the theology, influencing its development, presentation, orientation, and progress.[13]

Charles Nyamiti attributes to Jesus Christ the unique title of 'Brother-Ancestor,' contrasting Bujo's designation of Christ as the 'Proto-Ancestor.' Nyamiti restricts the meaning of *ancestor* to immediate parents. He opines that there are five key qualities that highlight the spiritual and social relevance of ancestors in African communities: i.e., Ancestors are related to the earthly kin by blood ties; are associated with divinity; serve as intermediaries between earthly kin, and the Supreme Being; and are seen as role models whose behaviour exemplifies the ideal values of the community. These characteristics underline the importance of ancestral veneration in African cultures.[14] He applied this concept analogically to the inner life of the Trinity. In his view, the Father is the Ancestor of the Son, and the Son is the Descendant of the Father. For him, Jesus Christ came to earth as the 'Brother-Ancestor' to bridge the gap between humanity and the divine, restoring the lost primordial beatitude, or the divine adoptive state, that was damaged by sin. Christ's mission as a prophet, pastor, and priest all had the common purpose of re-establishing the divine connection that was lost due to sin.[15]

Furthermore, he emphasizes that Christ's role as our 'Brother-Ancestor' is not just theoretical, but also practical and ongoing. Christ's restoration of humanity to our original happy state and friendship with God is a gradual process that will reach its zenith at Christ's second coming. At that point, Christ will not only abolish the effects of sin completely but also restore our direct intimacy with God, becoming our 'Brother-Ancestor' in the most factual and complete sense. Charles Nyamiti further explains that God's *Ancestorship*, through the incarnation of Christ, has taken on human qualities, becoming both immanent (internal to God) and economic (active in the world). Through the redeeming work of Christ, God has become our 'Brother-Ancestor,' uniting humanity and bringing us closer to the Father as adopted descendants. He highlights the distinction between ancestral veneration, which is based on blood relationships, and the cult of the saints, which transcends such relationships.[16]

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[13] Wachege, "Charles Nyamiti", 15.

[14] Chinkambako and Majawa, "Charles Nyamiti as the Baobab of African Ancestral Christology", 15-16.

[15] Francis Anekwe Oborji, "Tribute: Legendary Pioneer African Theologian Charles Nyamiti" *Journal of African Christian Biography* 5, no. 3 (2020): 9.

[16] Oborji, "Tribute", 9.

I shall also provide Nyamiti's African construal of ecclesiology. In Nyamiti's view, the idea of *Ancestorship* Christology has significant implications for African ecclesiology. He proposes the concept of '*Koinonia in Ancestors*', emphasizing that the Church is inseparable from the idea of a tripartite Church (consisting of triumphant, suffering, and militant aspects), and therefore fundamentally incompatible with secular ecclesiology. Jesus Christ, as the 'Ancestor' of all church members, serves as the ancestral link between the three aspects of the Church.

Again, Nyamiti maintains that the implications of *Ancestorship* Christology are profound for the members of the Church. Through Christ's life, ministry, and Spirit, as well as the intercession of the saints, the Church is able to carry out Christ's ancestral function in a spirit of communion akin to the Trinitarian life. The Church, as the continuation of Christ's mystery in human communities, manifests his *Ancestorship* to humanity through her members' lives and functions.[17]

However, despite the intriguing insights offered by Nyamiti's *Ancestorship* Christology, critics argue that there are shortcomings in his theology, primarily citing the lack of attention given to the fundamental difference between the baptized in Christ and the African ancestors. While Nyamiti suggests that the ancestors can be considered part of the tripartite Church, his argument is not fully fleshed out in terms of how those who did not experience the Paschal mystery or receive Christian baptism could be included in the Church.[18]

Irrespective of this absence, Nyamiti's view accommodates African understanding of spirituality. His view is that all our supernatural activities, such as prayer, good deeds, and the reception of sacraments, serve as means to deepen the relationship between us and our heavenly Ancestor, similar to how human descendants maintain contact with their ancestors through rituals and prayers. The holier a person is, the more effectively they can nurture their divine *Ancestorship* and maintain filial relations with their ancestors. On the other hand, a person who is in a state of sin has lost this basis for divine *Ancestorship*, hindering their ability to maintain positive relationships with their ancestors. Nyamiti further stresses the importance of respecting Christian tradition and imitating the heavenly Ancestor, Christ, in line with the African ancestors as archetypes of nature and behaviour, and sources of tradition. In times of trouble, Christians should turn to God, their divine Ancestor, as a helper

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[17] Oborji, 11.
[18] Oborji, 12.

and protector, rather than relying solely on earthly means, which goes against African customs and neglects their duties as descendants.[19]

Conclusion

The pursuit of a distinctive African Christian theology represents an effort to embody Christianity in the African people's daily lives. Although the message of Christ was introduced by European missionaries in their own cultural context and mindset, the ongoing quest is to integrate that message with the richness of African cultures and traditions, transforming Christianity into an authentically African expression of faith. Hence, Nyamiti's prodigious research demonstrates the mutual illumination between cultural heritage and Christian wisdom, providing insight into our human nature and collective journey as members of God's Family. His work offers practical guidance in interpreting the signs of the times and living transformative lives.

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[19] Chinkambako and Majawa, "Charles Nyamiti as the Baobab of African Ancestral Christology", 15-16.

Hausa Traditional Conception of God and Religion

Barnabas ILIYA

Department of Philosophy,
Don Bosco Varsity Institute, Ibadan.
Iliyabarnabas360@gmail.com

Abstract

Human beings are inherently inclined towards religious beliefs. In scholarly discourse, various theories have been proposed regarding the origins of religion in society. While some argue that religion was divinely revealed, others suggest it originated as a way for ancestors to be remembered. The African continent exhibits a rich diversity in the expression of religious beliefs, with a belief in a Supreme Being central to many African cultures. African religions are characterized by a belief that spirits permeate all aspects of reality, leading to a wide array of theories and discussions on the subject. The study of African religions encompasses an extensive range of belief systems across the continent, making a comprehensive analysis challenging. Each society has its unique religious practices and interpretations of the divine, including the Hausa people. Despite common misconceptions associating all Hausa individuals with Islam, the reality is more nuanced, with traditional Hausa (Maguzawa), Muslims, and Christians coexisting within the Northern Hausa State in Nigeria. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on Hausa traditional conception of God and religion.

Keywords: God, Religion, Hausa, Maguzawa, Ubangiji, Hawan Bori, Totemism.

Introduction

Every society has its structure and religious systems on how it relates to the supreme reality since it is intrinsically part of human nature to incline towards a supernatural reality. Thus, most of the time, African traditional religions are associated with animalism, which, from its Latin root *anima*, connotes breath, 'the breath of life', and therefore relates to the notion of the soul or spirits. As pointed out by J. S Mbiti, the idea was attributed to African traditional religion by the English anthropologist E. B Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture*; he also defined religion as the 'belief in spirit beings'.[1] Thus, *animalism* does not only define African

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1. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), 9.

traditional religions but every other religion in the world in the first place. This is because the theory of evolution of religion that Tylor and his followers propagate was misguidedly postulations about the traditional African religion.[2] After all, every religion has the element of spirits. A collective description of African traditional religion with a single concept is also erroneous because, in Africa, we speak about African religions and not religion. After all, every African society has a distinct understanding of the Supreme Being and how they relate to it. To understand African religions means studying every religion in Africa, this is almost impossible. Furthermore, there is no theory that can accurately state the evolution of religion due to the fact that religion is as old as man and our generation is far away from the generation that might have started religion; however, the debate is whether religion is the construct of man in order to attend to his existential problems or it is the process of through which the supreme being reveals himself to man.[3] Therefore, in this article, we will be venturing into a part of the African Religions, in this sense the Hausa people in Nigeria and their Conception of the Supreme Being.

I. Etymology and Understanding of the Concepts

To begin with, we will be providing an etymology of the concepts to understand the subjects in this discussion better. This is to provide us with a clearer view of what religion entails in an original sense and of whether the elements of the understanding of the Hausa people on Religion and God will be regarded as what we will see to be the etymological meaning.

As a word, religion is from the Latin root *religare,* which connotes 'to bind fast'.[4] Thus, this is in the sense of a collective relationship of some existent realities in communion with one another, with certain beliefs or values binding them together. Hence, while the etymology posits a sense of communion of persons, the definition of the concept is not easily definable. However, through history and human experience, religion has been conceived in different ways, including the phenomenological perspective, interpretative or psychological, sociological, naturalistic and religious perspectives. This understanding is based on the view of the field of individual exposition. Thus, the scope of religion is extensive; regarding

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2. John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 9-10.

3. Johannes L Van Der Walt and Ferdinand J Potgieter, "The Origin of Religion as an Historical Conundrum: Pedagogical and Research Methodological Implications and Challenges" in *Comparative Education and History of Education*, accessed May 18, 2034, https://files.eric.ed.gov

4. Van Der Walt and Potgieter, 89.

developments of religion, it is often placed in the order of: totemism » animism » pantheism » polytheism » monotheism.

Subsequently, Totemism, entails the belief in a group of objects, which can be animals and plants. Animism 'beliefs usually by Dravidian tribes' who are usually chosen by the spirits themselves. Pantheism: the belief that all is God and that God is all in the sense that God is identical to the world and nature. Polytheism: the belief in and worship of many personal supreme beings. Monotheism is 'the belief in one Supreme Being and Monism is' the belief in one reality. Hence, totemism and animism are viewed as lower caste religions, while Pantheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, and Monism are viewed as higher forms of religions. These religious views are grouped in to institutionalized and un-institutionalized religions based on the historical evolution of a particular religion. This is due to the fact that the so-called institutionalized religion contains elements of all the categories of development, as highlighted above. As argued by Ojowuro and cited by Johannes and Ferdinand, "the very first human beings capable of rational thinking probably reflected about their own existence and would have probed into the nature of the power that gave them life."[5] This could have led them to the worship and reverence of the powers and wonders of realities. Therefore, as to the understanding of religion in Africa, it should be viewed in the sense of what binds a society or group of persons in relation to a supreme being, either in response to their existential questions or in appreciation of those higher realities.

The Concept of 'God'

The concept of God has recently been coined among English speakers, and it was introduced around the 4th century CE, as posited by Sam Kerr. Thus, the concept of God is from the Germanic word *Guda*, as first appeared in the Gothic Bible written by Bishop Wulfia. This word is from one of the natives of the Gothic tribes of Eastern Germany. Hence, before the 4th century, the word God was never used in any of the European languages.[6] Not until after the coinage of the word did the early Christians usually address God as 'Father'. Therefore, in a strict sense, God is referred to as the supreme deity of the Christians. It is important to note that most ancient religions did not call their supreme deities by names; instead, they referred to the deity through their acts of worship and religious rituals.

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5. Van Der Walt and Potgieter, 88.
6. Sam Kerr, *The Advent of the Word God*, Sydney, 01 May 2015, https://www.avesta.org

Thus, we push to ask how man can come to the conception of this Supreme Being. So far, in philosophical discussions, two theories have been upheld by different scholars: primitive animism and primitive ancestral or corpse worship (the school of the humanists and the school of the animists).[7] Primitive animism upholds in centrality, the belief in the origin of gods from all-pervading spirits, and primitive ancestral- or corpse-worship, as argued by Allen, is the belief in the deification of the dead by a particular group of people.[8] In his view, the evolution of the understanding of the Supreme Being began from the 'plane of corpse-preservation and mummification.'[9] The family or relatives of the deceased venerate and worship (respect) its body to keep the spirit close to them, so as to possess the deceased person's character, most especially when the person has lived an exceptional life. This also led to domestic rituals, in which sense, they view the deceased as god who is believed to be a powerful and friendly ghost who is of help to the family. Progressively, with the conception of kingship, the idea evolved from family ghosts to the conception of 'godhead'; usually the deceased kings who are considered great kings are venerated as gods of the kingdom as seen in the ancient Egyptian religion. As time progressed from primitive times, hierarchies of ghosts were introduced, and they were placed according to their importance from mere ghosts to fully developed gods and temples, idols, and priests followed later.[10] Allen believed that "corpse-worship' is the protoplasm of religion while admitting that folk-lore is the protoplasm of mythology and of its more modern and philosophical offshoot, theology."[11] Hence, the conception of ancient African worship as primitive animism by scholars is limiting; the explanation of African origin of Gods is better done in the sense of the belief in God through "ancestor worship or corpse worship".[12]

II. Hausa Understanding of Religion and God

Many scholars have tried to explore the understanding of the Hausa religion and have, in their ability, done well through reading and personal interviews of the Hausa people. However, as a native Hausa, I have some very excellent grasp of the native Hausa postulations and most of the time, *Bori* is said to be the religion of the Hausa people before the advent of Islam. While this notion might not be totally wrong, I think when we speak of religion in the strict sense, as

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7. Grant Allen, *The Evolution of the Idea of God: An Inquiry into the Origins of Religions* (Glasgow: Good Press, 2022), iii.
8. Allen, iv.
9. Allen, 72.
10. Allen, 74.
11. Allen, 438.
12. Allen, iv.

mentioned above, *Bori* does not fit in the scope of religion but rather, as one of the religious practices of the Hausas. Hence, *Bori* does not bind the whole society, group, or persons in the sense of religion, but it can be a cult of persons with related spiritual inclinations. This is because *Bori* is not a family affair; it is mainly carried out by women and the husband may not have any inclination to the *bori*. Religion in Hausa is called *addini*. The traditional Hausa society was classified according to family occupation in the sense that we had the ruling class, the slaves, and the commoners. This commoner includes families of hunters, drummers, blacksmiths, and so on. In this, every family has its own spirit they worship as passed on by their ancestors according to their family occupation and their totems of whom they offer sacrifices for the success and needs of the family, usually offered by the head of the family. Thus, the "spirit" of the family can possess any of the family members; most times, the woman either when a problem has happened to the family, and a solution is salt, or a problem is about to happen to prevent the problem, and that is when we can say a person *"ya hau Bori"* while the process or period of which the person was possessed is referred to as *"Hawan Bori."*

Hawan Bori

Bori is a traditional Hausa religious practice, often mistaken as the traditional religion of the Hausa people. This practice is found among the traditional Hausas, whom the Muslim converts refer to as *Maguzawa* (pl), *Ba-maguji* (m, singular) and *Ba-magujiya* (f, plural). The Hausa people adhered to their traditional way of worship even after the arrival of Islam. Hence, in a literal sense, "*Ba-maguji*" is derived from two Hausa words: *Ba-* meaning 'not or negation of'[13], and "*maguji"* (m) / "*magujiya"* (f) / "*maguda"* (pl) meaning fugitive.[14] This name could have been given to them by the Islamic convert as those who fled or escaped from situations to avoid the laws probably prosecuting them at that time in Islamic society. In another sense, *Ba-maguji* or *Ba-magudu* can be translated as 'we are not running,' which can also be related to a situational response to something negative following them. What is *Bori*? As highlighted by Bawa Balabare, *Bori* was more of an initiation ritual rather than a general practice.[15] However, I believe that *Bori* was not a family affair, as it only involves women

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13 . Nicholas Awde, "Ba-," in *Hausa: Hausa-English English-Hausa Dictionary* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1996), 9.

14. Awde, "*maguji,"* 110.

15. Bawa Aisha Balarabe, "Spirituality, Power, and Feminism: Historical Narrative of Bori Practice among the Women in Sabon Birni District of Sokoto State", *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)* 8, no. 1 (2019):46-55.

selected by the family spirit through their totems, as argued earlier. Hence, that is why we speak of *Hawan Bori*, which means possession of the spirit. The spirit is usually invoked or comes by itself to the person it chooses in the family. This can happen because it wants to communicate a message, prevent the family from danger, or provide a solution to existing problems. Therefore, this act of religious manifestation is not the religion itself but a part of the religious practice within the traditional Hausa religion, indicating that traditional Hausa religion is deeply rooted in family totemism.

Family Totemism

Family totems are common among traditional Hausa families (*Maguzawa*). Even after the advent of Islam and later Christianity, some converts still uphold their totems. The majority of the *Maguzawa* who survived the Islamic Jihad later became Christians, and we can still find them in the Northern States of Nigeria. Hence, families, according to their occupations as mentioned earlier, are related to their totems. This is why it is difficult to discuss a general totem for the Hausa people. More so, we find names of gods and spirits related to the family occupations, such as *Kuri* and *Uwardawa* (forest-mother) for the hunters, *Uwargona* (farm-mother) or *Uwardawa* (corn-mother) for the farmers, *Sarrikin Rafi* or *Kogi* (River-king) for the fishermen, and so on.[16] Thus, family members regarded the totems as sacred and were not allowed to kill such animals. Evil would befall the family if a member intentionally killed the totem, contrary to what A. J. Tremearne postulated about killing family totems.[17]

Ubangiji

The word "Allah" for God among the Hausa people came with the advent of Islam, even though both Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria use the name "Allah" to refer to God today. *Ubangiji* is sometimes used to refer to God, but always with Allah added to it, like 'Ubangiji Allah', usually by the Hausa Christians. The word "*Ubangiji*" is difficult to trace its origin, but as suggested by B. Balabare, it can be attributed to "the high god of the Hausas".[18] This may be because if we break down the word, it is composed of "*Uban*" and "*giji*". Literally, "*Uba*" means 'father' or 'head'[19] in the sense of the head of a family. "*Uban*" becomes a possessive noun meaning 'Father of' or 'head of', and "*giji*" means 'at

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16. A. J. N. Tremearne, Hausa Superstitions and Customs: An Introduction to the Folk-Lore and the Folk (New York: Routledge, 1970), 111.

17. Major A. J. N. Tremeaene, *The Ban of Bori: Demons and Demon-Dancing in West and North Africa* (London: Heath, Cranton and Ouseley Ltd, 1914), 32.

18. Balarabe, "Spirituality, Power, and Feminism," 48.

19. Awde, "*Uba,*" 162.

home'.[20] Hence, "*Uban-giji*" connotes 'father of the home' or 'head of the home', which is in the sense of 'the spirit head' or 'the highest god'. The understanding of God among the Hausas is monotheistic. They view the physical world as full of spirits. Therefore, to reach the Supreme Being, one must please the spirit associated with the specific aspect of reality.

Conclusion

The history of the Hausa people is complex due to the pervasive influence of Islam, which has significantly shaped their culture, traditions, and worldview. Thus, outlining the tradition of the Hausas as clearly as that of the Yoruba or Igbo is challenging. It is important to note that despite Islam's longstanding presence among the Hausas; there are still individuals who adhere to traditional beliefs and Christianity without any Islamic influence. *Bori* practice is carried out within traditional communities without any Islamic influence. Today, many people who practice *Bori* within the Islamic or Christian community often blend the two belief systems. They may attend the mosque on Fridays or church on Sundays, and then return to traditional practices to address their existential issues, all while maintaining their family totems.

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20. Awde, 53.

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A Comparative Analysis of the Traditional Yogbo Argument for Belief in God's Existence and William James' Experiential Argument

Stephen Tsaku AKENDE

Department of Philosophy,
Don Bosco Varsity Institute.
hyacinthsefanu@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper, we shall evaluate the conception of God held by the Yogbo people and how this conception of God reveals their idea of the existence of God. Similarly, the life and religious background of Williams James, as well as his experiential argument for God's existence will be assessed. The main idea of this paper is to see the compatibility of the Yogbo people's conception of God with William James' experiential argument for the existence of God; the reason for this is not to put James' argument as the measure of worth for the Yogbo's view but to rather show the universality of some certain concepts. In so doing, we shall evaluate the early concept used in representation of what is now called 'God', by the native people of Yogbo, and how their version of the experiential argument worked for them before its Christianization.

Keywords: Yogbo; Experiential Argument; Correlation; God's Existence; Universality.

Introduction

With the strong influence of the Western religions as the arbiters of truth, societal impact, and reasonable theology, the authenticity and rational merits of African Traditional Religion is under serious threat. Africa Traditional Religion does not only stand deprived of its due respect and reverence, but is also painted as irrational, primitive, and derogatory to the progress of development in Africa. Perhaps, one reason why this religious institution still obtains in Africa today, is the undeniable evidence of mystical experiences we encounter very frequently that I should dare to say 'on a daily basis'. If these experiences were not powerful

enough to at least, grant plausibility to the existence of the sort of divine power described by African Traditional Religion, the very concept of 'God' as preached in our traditional religion would have been long erased. Even now, many look upon our religious beliefs as unworthy of any critical assessment and feel that the traditional description deprives us of knowing God.

However, our forefathers knew that there was and there is something greater than mortal men and which they have to either appease or negotiate with, to obtain whatever they wanted. Our main focus in this work is to elucidate the idea of God in one of the traditional African localities before the advent of the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Islam. Records set that between the 10th to 14th centuries, the idea of *Aondo* (God) as upheld in Tiv society, [which is still the idea of 'God' we view nowadays] as one supreme being was preceded by the concept of *Jov*, which translates in English as "bang of power and wisdom". We shall look at this concept of God as upheld by the Yogbo people of the Tiv society. The conviction of the existence of God as derived from the affirmation of the concept of *Jov* as God, will be compared with the experiential argument for the existence of God articulated by William James. Looking at the religious background of Williams James, and his experiential argument, we find the basis for establishing compatibility for the Yogbo's belief in *Jov* with James' conviction for belief in God via an experiential argument. To do this, the first part of this work will look at the religious background of William James and his experiential argument. The second part will briefly expose the background of the Yogbos and then specify their belief in Jov. Finally, a third section will consider the experiential argument that the Yogbo put up for belief in *Jov*.

I. The Life, Religious Background, and Experiential Argument of William James

William James was an American philosopher, born in 1842 and died in 1910. William James was born into a prominent and intellectual family. His father, Henry James, was a Swedenborgian theologian and his brother, Henry James Jr., was a famous author, making him one of the most influential philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was known for his contributions to the field of pragmatism, which emphasized the practical consequences of ideas rather than their abstract truth. He was also known for his work on the nature of consciousness and the self, including his concept of "stream of consciousness."

James was also a respected psychologist and contributed to the field of experimental psychology.[1]

James began to question his faith during his adolescence. He struggled with the idea of predestination and the concept of an arbitrary, impersonal God. This crisis of faith led him to explore various religions and philosophies, including transcendentalism and the teachings of Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg. James eventually found spiritual solace in the philosophy of pragmatism, which emphasized the experiential and practical aspects of belief. He rejected traditional religious dogma in favor of a more personal and subjective approach to spirituality. This influenced his belief in the importance of individual religious experience and the power of faith to transform one's life.[2]

Long before James, argumentation on the grounds of belief or unbelief were already ongoing in the sphere of philosophy. Perhaps the finest arguments could be traced to the Medieval era of philosophy [even though these arguments had begun long before the medieval era] as very brilliant scholars used the tools of Philosophy in different perspectives, to validate their religious beliefs. The medieval era was succeeded by the enlightenment age; this was the era that preceded the modern era, the era of scientists, the era of James. Metaphysical claims were discarded by scientists as absurd and meaningless. This also threatened the idea of God since God is not a concrete substance that could be available for scientific research.[3] James understood that no abstract reasoning would very much satisfy the modern scientist who was obsessed with testability; without scientifically physical explanation, the idea of God was also useless, and absurd. William James thus resorted to a different form of argumentation: arguing about spiritual experiences and their relevance and relation to God's existence; the underlying assumption that James maintained was that people's personal experiences, including religious experiences, could be used as valid evidence for the existence of God.[4]

The central claim of James' argument is that it is impossible to subject experience to empirical testing to be proven as either true or false. Though experiences could not be proven through empirical means, they could still have a significant impact on a person's worldview and belief system. He highlighted the power and intensity of these mystical experiences, and

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[1] Richardson D. Robert, *William Jams: In The Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 12.

[2] Robert, 25.

[3] James William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans Green and co, 1902),7.

[4] Olupona K. Jacob, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, (New York: Paragon House, 1991),34.

suggested that they could provide a direct connection to the divine. With this formulation, James believed that one who has a genuine experience of God, and not simply a hallucination is very much justified for the belief in God that results from that experience. Hence, that experience is justification enough for belief in the existence of God. This is what constitutes the heart of James' experiential argument.[5]

II. The People of Yogbo Town and the Belief in *Jov*

Yogbo Town, is located in Guma Local Government Area, in the northern part of Benue state, Nigeria. The town shares boundaries with Makurdi LGA, from the east part of Benue state and to its north, with Nasarawa state, Nigeria. They are mainly into agriculture and have as their major farm produce, yams, rice and maize. As typical of every *native* African people, the great people of Yogbo Town believe in the existence of God. As William James explicated in his experiential argument for the existence of God, the primitive people of Yogbo, wondered about the mysterious events that occurred on daily bases in the land; they concluded that these events must not have been from eternity but must have sprung into being and the cause of such existence must be a being of unfathomable power. The idea of a higher being appeared as inevitable to them. The name JOV was the name given to the supreme being, and the name was very common among the people; the origins of the name is somewhat unclear and it cannot be determined who, how, or why the name *Jov* was the most befitting for this being. [6]However, with the unfathomable power Jov is believed to have, the worship and veneration that is given this being was a logical consequence of the power and sovereignty of the being. Our culture (i.e., Yogbo) believes that life is more spiritual than physical; everything began with the spiritual and even the ultimate cause of everything is a spirit. Hence the physical is subordinate to the spiritual. [7]

Furthermore, names served as a reminder of the superiority of the spiritual and the reminder that there exists something greater. This explains why there are names among the larger Tiv, like *Tyohemba*, *Igbana*, *Tyozenda*, *Igbawua*, and others. Some names which also express this concept are as a result of Christian influence since the concept of *Aondo* as God was mainly due to contact with the missionaries. These names Aondongu, and Aondohemba, express this bias. The younger generation of the Tiv society took shields in the new religion that had

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[5] Justin Iorchugh, ''Mystical Experiences'' *Oral Interview*, April 18, 2024.
[6] Akiga Akiga, "The Tiv Concept of Jov". *Journal of African Studies*, 20, no. 2 (2005), 45-58.
[7] Iorwuese Tersoo, "Understanding Jov: A Cultural Perspective." *Benue Journal of Anthropology*, 15, no. (2010), 112-125.

brought 'salvation'. Today, A good number of Tiv people do not know anything substantial about their culture. Nowadays, the Western religions are presented as the perfect ones that teach about God while our traditional religion is fetish and devilish, that has no connection with God. However, the salient question should be "knowing God according to who?" This is because, in the same way, African Traditional Religion can also marginalize Abrahamic religions as being heretical according to its standards, blasphemous, barbaric, and ignorant of our own religious truths and far from our own supreme. What we shall now do is evaluate the concept of Jov as the native Yogbo understanding of the supreme.

Jov (Higher Being) Among Yogbo People

The concept of a higher being or supreme deity in African society is a fascinating topic! In many African societies, the idea of a higher being is deeply rooted in the belief in a creator God or gods. This deity is often seen as the source of all life and the provider of sustenance, health, and other good things. Among the Tiv people of Yogbo, the deity that was revered as a life-giving god, which today we call *Aondo* (God), was viewed as *Jov*, standing as supreme being in Yogbo mythology.[8] *Jov* surpasses physical embodiment and is frequently linked with the sky, whereas sky was regarded as the abode of this supreme deity. According to the mythology, Jov communicated with them through natural occurrences, thunderstorms, rain, and other astonishing events that passed messages to the society, either as a sign of warning or blessings to the people.

Jov, possesses omnipotence and omnipresence. With these qualities, Jov oversaw to human needs and the course of nature; bestowing Jov with sacred cattle, portended protection and favor and was considered sacred. The deity is also attributed with the ability to both cause and cure diseases, wielding power over life and death. Governing the natural cycles, Jov influences phenomena such as rainfall, seasons, and the well-being of farm produced. Beyond the act of creation, Jov assumes the role of a moral arbiter, dispensing rewards for virtue and punishments for transgressions against the natural order. Spiritual leaders and elders hold crucial roles in interpreting signs and omens believed to convey Jov's will, guiding the community in accordance with divine principles.

III. Mystical Experiences for The Existence of God

The term mysticism typically denotes a complex of beliefs and practices related to the personal experience of the divine. This is a universal belief for the people of Yogbo, that

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[8] Klostermaier, Klaus K. *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3rd Ed. (New York: University Press, 2007), 123.

mystical experiences occur because there is a higher being that cares for human beings. In this society, as William James stated; mystical experiences are often seen as direct encounters with the divine and are thought to provide insight into the will of God. The belief in mystical experiences as manifestations of God is deeply ingrained in the traditional African worldview not just only among Yogbo people, where the physical and spiritual realms are believed to coexist and influence each other. One of the main reasons mystical experiences are believed to be manifestations of God in primitive African societies is the profound impact they have on individuals.[9]

The question on the mystical experiences arises. If there is no God then, how do we explain certain experienced phenomena that are ordinarily impossible? In Africa, and among the Yogbo, the usage of thunder strike by spiritual leaders to eliminate their enemies is very common. The people of Yogbo, on the basis of certain extraordinary events and phenomena which belong to the realm ascribed as the 'spiritual', have extrapolated that reality is not wholly physical and as such, there is more to this world. The spiritual world too is full of causal agents and some of this causal power can be tapped into by humans; hence, it is common to see people obtain powers to control beasts and natural phenomena. Some even possess the power to disappear and also, to be impervious to gunshots; how does one explain these on purely physical terms?

Yogbo people believe that, life is sacred and we must protect it since Jov, has given mortal men ways by which life will be protected. Even with the Western influence on our religious teachings and beliefs, other people still hold onto the ancestral philosophy: "cook yourself spiritually, that is the way of Jov (God) and our ancestors". It is not uncommon to be exhorted that 'God's plan for us is always great, but do you know the plan of the man or woman sitting next to you?' I shall look at some experiential data that comprise the Yogbo's reason for belief.

Gun Protection: We point out this mystical experience as one of the ways by which the people of Yogbo, viewed Jov as a higher being which controls the universe. 'Gun Protection' is a traditional bulletproof method of protection which is very common among the people. By preparing yourself traditionally, for Yogbo people, you are only trying to protect what was given to you free of charge by Jov, which is the life given to humankind. They also believe

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[9] Akiga Akiga, (2021). "The Role of Jov in Tiv Culture". *African Cultural Heritage Review*, 10, no.2 (2021), 75-88.

that fortifying oneself traditionally, is fulfilling the will of Jov. If these strategies of mixing potions and concocting herbs work, in complementation with chanting incantations, this means that the creator of these herbs must be one of supreme power and wisdom. If then, the creatures (the herbs and natural ingredients) exist, it is logically absurd to eliminate the existence of the creator. Thus, if these herbs are believed to be the handiwork of a magnificent creator, then Jov exists since that description as creator coheres with Yogbo worldview.

Authority Protection: Some traditional African societies believe in mystical forces that can protect and enhance a ruler's authority. These can take the form of protective spirits, powerful talismans, or special ceremonies and rituals. Similarly, the concept of authority as a form of protection is seen in the Bible, where it is stated in Romans 13:1-4 that "there is no authority except that which God has established" and that rulers are "God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer"[10] In some cases, a ruler's power and authority may be linked to a particular object or place. For example, in Yogbo Town, the throne was believed to have a spiritual power that could only be harnessed by a rightful ruler. And the ruler was believed to be the "*kyenge Jov*" visible head of Jov. With those objects, there is no one capable of hurting the ruler. This traditional rituals, practices and belief in the protective power of Jov over the rulers still obtains among the people of Yogbo.

Fire/Thunder Protection: Also, the deity Jov manifest as god of thunder and is associated with justice and vengeance. People who are devoted to Jov may believe that they can use his powers to protect themselves from their enemies. The Tiv people of Yogbo Town believe that Jov controls the weather and can protect them from lightning strikes and other dangers associated with thunderstorms.[11]This power often drive from certain herbs, stones, or animal parts can be used to protect against the dangers of lightning. For the fact that this works for the people of Yogbo, this constitutes a reason to believe in God on pure experiential grounds.

Conclusion

We maintain that the existence of a belief in a higher power or spiritual entity is evident across various indigenous African cultures. This pre-existing spiritual framework among primitive African societies laid the foundation for the assimilation of Western religious norms and practices. The terminology used to describe these spiritual entities may

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[10] Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, Trhe Tiv of Central Nigeria, (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 78.

[11] Evans-Pritchard, 123.

differ from the monotheistic concept of God found in Western religions, the underlying essence of a supreme being or divine presence is evident in the myths, rituals, and cosmogonies of indigenous African societies. Therefore, it can be argued that the idea of God existed implicitly within the spiritual fabric of primitive African communities, which Yogbo Town as one of the African society before the advent of Western religions already held to a concept Jov (God) which till date traditional leaders of Yogbo Town believe that the worship of Jov align with the western world concept of "God".

Be and Being God: The Nature of Yoruba Deities

Benedict A. AKIN-OMOLAFE

Department of Philosophy,
Don Bosco Varsity Institute, Ibadan.
benedictakin@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of some African deities within their pantheist environment and their intricate relationship with other beings in nature from an ontological perspective. This study will approach the topic from two primary angles. The first will explore the essence and existence of the African (Yoruba) deity as God and the categories that validate the transition of a historical being into the Yoruba pantheon of deities. This study holds immense significance in unravelling the unique theological perspectives of African theological cultures, a crucial aspect for scholars and researchers in theology, African studies, and anthropology.

Keywords: Be-ing; Essence and existence; Gods, Deities, Orisa; God; Historicity; Cultures; Transcendence.

Introduction

It is high time we wrote African Philosophy independent of the Western and avoid writing in response to their criticism. Hence, I venture in this paper, to explain the religious element of African philosophy, specifically in its Yoruba manifestation regardless of the critique, and to prevent a back-up from any Western school of thought. By this, I mean that my exploration of an African philosophy of religion does not derive its content-sway and factual significance from any Western philosophical take; if it did, it would lose its right to be addressed as African. This paper will not make any comparative spell with the Western counterpart of God.

The African[1] concept of God is not static but rather dynamic. Their (Africans') relationship with God is also dynamic, reflecting a unique aspect of their culture. In this parabola, some

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1. It is very difficult to talk generically of Africans' holistic belief about God before the advent of the Christianity and Islam. These foreign religions have immensely influenced the modern idea of God and Deity. However, in this paper, the aim is to delve as much as possible into core Yoruba belief about God, as a specific instance of African belief.

Africans believe in the transition of certain spectacular human beings into gods, we shall discuss this transitory process in the later part of this work. This belief sets their theology apart. This *Theistic mode*[2] is attained often through deification, an act of public acceptance and reverence conferred on individuals of spectacular and noteworthy existence on earth, transforming 'ordinary' human beings into a deities. Deification is a crucial aspect of Yoruba religious belief. So, in this short essay, the being of the Yoruba deity will be investigated and analysed.

The African deities are not mere figures of worship but embodiments of unique characteristics and attributes. Each deity carries a distinct narrative, a story that reflects Africa's rich and diverse cultural embroidery. Within their theistic existence, their incorporeal nature is a universal phenomenon. So, this study will also explore these standard features, inviting readers to delve into the fascinating world of African deities.

Hence, to achieve this aim, we shall divide this work into two large parts: the first part will take care of the essence and existence of God, in other words, the nature and understanding of the concept of God in a Yoruba sense;[3] while the other chapter will discuss the nature of deification, and identify that some gods in the Yoruba pantheon, being gods, once share the human nature, and while they may not have necessarily 'become gods' in themselves in some sense, the Yorubas hold a strong believe in those individuals as deities and popularly revere them to be god-like, and a manifestation of special divine attributes that make them Orisas.[4] This is to explain how the people relate to God.

I. Clarification of the African-Yoruba[5] and their Conception of God

This section is not interested in historical or chronological analysis of the African people. It is a section to examine who the Africans are. Consequently, it is essential to note that Africans, and by implication, the Yoruba peoples' essence is not bonded to the colour of their skin.

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2. Theistic mode is attain as a *meta* (after) effect of an extra ordinary life spent on earth. This *meta* effect is usually begun through the people's effort to immortalize a great hero.

3. I am careful to state that this paper delves into the understanding of the nature of the concept of God for the Yorubas. This is different from establishing that it studies God. The study of God may be a subject of discuss for another time. This paper will just expose how some specific people understand the concept God.

4. At the very beginning, I think it is necessary to clarify that throughout this paper, except otherwise stated, I shall continually interchange the word Orisa with deity. While deity does not necessarily comprehend the understanding of orisa, it has to a considerable extent some beautiful connotation of it. Orisa for the Yorubas can conveniently accommodate Olodumare, but it is not generally accepted that for example, the Christian God is a deity. Some may see it as belittling God, but it is not so.

5. The writer is aware that some Yorubas are not Africans. Some of those who practiced *isese* (loosely translated as 'Yoruba religion') are not Africans also. Yet, a good portion of the claims in this paper accommodates all who share a belief in *isese*.

Their identity is not a matter of blackness. Even though aesthetics and climatic conditions have made the humans living on that side of the globe dark, the 'being' of an African man is beyond the skin colour. It is not limited to their ideological belief style or choice of individual life. It is embedded in their ontology.[6] For an instance, the Yoruba ontological degree[7] provides a minimum criterion required for them to be transited to (be) gods. I insist on clarifying that although this practice is rampant on the continent, it is not practised in all the environments and across all cultural milieus in the continents. Even among those who practice the same tradition, the procedures and mode of operation still differ. So, the 'being' of an African is his/her being African. It flows from the cultural dictates on each person down to what individuals become of themselves through various factors.

God[8] for African-Yorubas

To establish some knowledge of the ineffable God, Africans consciously choose the oral form of transmission of the knowledge of God. So, these articles articulating the understanding of God for Africans was unwritten and was passed down orally throughout the ages by dignified and noble people of wisdom called sages.[9] These sages' experience and panoramic view of nature and God became embedded and transmitted in proverbs, folklore, parables, etc.[10]

The origin of the supreme God for African is largely unknown, however, it is common that God was not created, thus must have been self-created.[11] This fundamental conception of God is evident in the indigenous names attributed to him.[12] Some of these names regard him

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6. African ontology is the nature of reality, the nature of being-what is, and by extension what 'not is' in the milieu of Africans. This ontology permits the movement of extraordinary humans, after death to become deities. Some deities were sent by Olodumare ante-creation and still possess human history later in Yoruba conception, some others moved from being historical human beings into the pantheon in discussion.

7. Firstly, the underlining perception of this paper is from a Yoruba perspective, and since Yoruba by being part of Africa is a subset of the continent, this paper is African. Therefore it can be considered an African way. Second, the Yoruba ontological degree holds that there is the category of being(s) in the Yoruba existential reality. It categorizes (what is) beings according to different grades and degrees. While it holds that the highest of all beings is Olodumare, it explains that there are two basic kinds of being, the spiritual and the physical which are not really separated but complementary and intertwined. This ontology avers that the world is necessarily good and evil, physical and spiritual, and it cannot be only one at a time, it is both and will always be *ti bi, ti re,* (for evil and for good), for that is how the world was created. Hence both are interconnected and inseparable.

8. Where God appears as having a Proper noun form, it will refer to Olodumare-or any other (African) God with the same status as (it) Olodumare.

9. Ushe Mike Ushe, "God, Divinities and Ancestors in African Traditional Religious Thought," Igwebuike*: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3 no 4 (2017): 156.

10. Ushe, 156.

11. Ushe, 155.

12. Ushe, 159.

as the source of all that exists.[13] Furthermore, for the African, God is transcendent as well as an immanent being.[14] Africans sees God as one whose presence is felt by people within the natural world.[15] Africans present attributes showing God as dwelling among and within them. So, God is a dispenser of justice.[16] God is widely believed to be the people's protector and as an actual personal entity.[17] While, they also see God as the eternal and immortal one who lives forever to satisfy the human soul, traditionally, the eternity of God is not a contested notion. It is clear to many Africans that God is that being who is eternal and will never be effaced.[18]

In some communities there is no organised, direct and public worship of God since the divinities (deities) are regarded as the messengers of God.[19] For instance, the Yorubas apply the name *Orisa* to the Supreme Being,[20] even though it (Orisa) generally came to be used for the highest heavenly beings who were said to have been with the Supreme Being (Olodumare) when the Supreme Being created all things.[21] It is these Orisas that have shrines and cults of worship. Conversely, other environments have direct worship of the supreme God. In the Akan culture, there is a much-organised form of worship of *Onyame,* the Akan name for the Supreme God.[22] So, God as a being to be worship is not contested as it is a widely accepted fact.

The Yoruba culture predicates omni-sapiens to God/Olodumare.[23] They contend that God sees both the ins and outs of men.[24] The Yoruba describe God as the mighty, immovable rock that never dies.[25] The problem of gender is not visible in the ontology. There is no pronoun 'he or she' in the Yoruba syntax as well. So, the address to the supreme God, Olodumare, is

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13. Ushe, 162.

14. Ekeke and Ekeopara, 212.

15. Ekeke and Ekeopara, 212.

16. Ushe, 163.

17. Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike A. Ekeopara, "God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology," *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 1 no 2 (2010): 211. doi:10.5251/ajsms.2010.1.2.209.218.

18. Ekeke and Ekeopara, 213.

19. Ushe, "God, Divinities and Ancestors in African Traditional Religious Thought," 165.

20. This is evident in their customary attribution of the king being the second in command to the Orisa. The Orisa in this context is the supreme God. Then, if we translate Orisa to mean deity, it implies also that God is a deity for the very fact that God could also be called Orisa in the Yoruba context. So, one can argue that Orisa can be the common name for dieties, while Olodumare, Ogun, Sango are proper names. Still, Olodumare is the highest manifestation of Orisa, meaning is the highest Orisa.

21. S. Adebanji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar: Amalion Publishing, 2014), 48.

22. Ushe, 165-166.

23. This is clear from the Ifa literacy corpus.

24. Shafiul Islam and Didarul Islam, "African Traditional Concept of God: A Critical Analysis," *Green University Review of Social Sciences*, 2, no 01 (2015): 4.

25. Islam and Islam, 6.

on a neutral base. Even gender-laden *Orisas* are also addressed on neutral terms for the same reason above.

One should also note that God is real and felt by Africans; Africans do not perceive God as an abstract entity, which is having an existential frame of reference in the mind alone. So, the supreme God, the creator of all things, being a transcendent being is immanent and close to the people.

II. Be and Being God

Gazing in awesome wonder and admiration is an essential attribute of an African commoner. In this wonder, he reverences forces and the powerful potency in nature.[26] The wonder he perceives is translated into the probe of the spiritual realm, and into the quest for the attributes of the divine. Analysing be and being God in Yoruba ontology is not new to a typical Yoruba, holding on to the emphasis that their cultural heritage puts on the possible transition of mortals to immortals, human beings to pure spirited beings and then holding few as deities. Thus, in their gazing into nature and their excitements on natural phenomena they design a system of deification to be a process of transferring the attributes of God and the function of divinities to natural phenomena or to mortals who have become ancestors.

Having begun the second part of our work with the introduction above, we shall establish in following subsections the nature and some historic narrations of some deities, looking at key elements of transcendence and deification from a closer range. This will give some characteristics of the deities and how they have been fitted in into the Yoruba pantheon as orisa.

African Deities as Historical Beings

In the Yoruba legend, it is believed that Olodumare sent down some heavenly beings to create solid land, plant and animal life on the earth. One version of these myths named Obatala as the leader appointed by Olodumare to head the expedition.[27] However, there are pretty credible shreds of evidence that Obatala existed in the 10th century as king of Ideta, a Yoruba town; during this time, it is arguably true that he doubled as what we can refer to as 'the chairman of the alliance of kings' in our modern language construction. He was in charge of the arrangements for general negotiations towards permanent peace in that territory. Obatala is also said to be the founding king of Iranje, another Yoruba town, even though his

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26. Ushe, 158.
27. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 18.

origins may also be traced to Ife, the sacred ancestral home of the Yoruba. Obatala is referred to as a king, indicating that he must have founded the monarchy.[28] However, Obatala was incompetent and unstable (often getting drunk), and his excessive claims to authority alienated many during his reign.[29] A goddess named Odudu was regarded as the wife of the Orisanla[30] and mother of the gods.[31] Obatala is an example of a being who enjoyed the deified state; he is now identified with *Orisanla*, the most senior of the Yoruba deities, though non-identical to Olodumare.[32]

Oduduwa is another paramount deity in the Yoruba pantheon. He appears to have made a significant contribution to trade in his lifetime. He was a contemporary of Obatala. Scholars believe he contributed to founding a central market for the new city[33] and establishing royal messengers to keep peace in it. By doing this, he established the tradition of *Oja Oba* (the king's market)[34] situated close to the palace.[35]

Oduduwa is also an example of such hero deified after death. Oduduwa's shrine, worship and commemoration still exist in Ile-Ife, the heart of Yoruba heritage. After Oduduwa completed his life on earth, his aura continued to glow over everything and everybody, because in the small pre-Oduduwa kingdoms, nobody had seen a king with such stature and glory as his. Chiefs and priests took steps to worship him, but the collective imagination of the masses began to represent him as larger than life. Before his existence, there was a creation story about Olodumare sending some heavenly beings to establish life on Earth. Moreover, due to the majestic influence of the historical Oduduwa, the peoples' imagination could not serve them better if Oduduwa was not part of the creation story. So, they re-narrated the story and contended him to be the leader of the heavenly beings that came to the earth. In the following centuries, the Yoruba nation amplified and embellished Oduduwa's part in the creation story, especially the part that Oduduwa had taken over and completed the mission, thus becoming the first man on the planet and the progenitor of the Yoruba nation.[36] Among the various

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28. Cornelius O. Adepegba "Associated Place-Names and Sacred Icons of Seven Yoruba Deities" in *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture* ed., Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 113.
29. Akintoye, 70.
30. Commonly interchangeable with Obatala.
31. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 48.
32. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 71.
33. Ile-Ife.
34. Oja Oba, very prominent in the modern-day society. The king remains the principal patron of this market.
35. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 77.
36. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 82.

professions and pursuits that flourished during his reign, some professional men and women acquired the city's prominence. An example is Ogunladin, the master blacksmith; another of such figures is Elesije, the great physician. Orunmila is not left out, he was the master diviner, while Olokun[37] was the wealthiest woman trader.[38]

Orunmila has gained a broader audience in the Yoruba religion, and some thinkers contend that the exact time frame of his presence on earth is difficult to determine. However, it is said to have been about 2000 B.C.E.,[39] instead of the 10th century, alongside Obatala and Oduduwa. Orunmila is more than a polyglot divinity. He is what one may call an omni-linguist.[40] He represents God's omniscience and knowledge in the Yoruba cosmology.[41] As the historical Orunmila matured, history has shown that he travelled across Africa sharing wisdom. Although the potency of Orunmila's thought was directed to the Yoruba people centred in Ile-Ife, there is evidence of Orunmila's influence in ancient Khemet (Egypt) and pre-Christian era Judaism.[42] It was there in Ile-Ife that Orunmila gained heavenly status. His name, Orunmila (*orun mo ila*), means "only Heaven knows the way to salvation."[43] Some legend has it that he was present (in conscious-divine form) when Olodumare made all beings. Hence, he knows the truth and destiny of all beings.[44]

In sum, the evolution of Yoruba religion was over a millennium. Most deities and leading spirits were given their final form and personality in the post-Oduduwa era, first in Ile-Ife before spreading to the rest of Yorubaland. Some of the deities even preceded Oduduwa.[45] An example is the patron god of iron and workers, which might have been known as Alakaaiye but was given Ogun (the name of an Ife king) in the post-Oduduwa era. The same goes for the deities of wealth and the sea, to whom the Ife kingdom named Olokun, a woman and contemporary of Oduduwa, as mentioned earlier. Other examples of senior Yoruba gods includes Orisanla, who became Obatala, Oduduwa's eminent contemporary; and the ancient God of divination Ifa named after Orunmila, the name of the most excellent Ifa priest of all

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37. Also an Orisa, a sea deity.
38. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 79.
39. Baba Ifa Karade, *The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts, Orunmila and the Ifa Corpus* (Newburyport: Weiser Books, 2020).
40. An individual who possess the ability to communicate in all language fluently.
41. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, In, 1970), 99.
42. Karade, *Orunmila and the Ifa Corpus.*
43. Karade, *Orunmila and the Ifa Corpus.*
44. Karade, *Orunmila and the Ifa Corpus*.
45. The acknowledged father of the Yoruba.

time.[46] Lastly in this section, we can note Oya who is popularly envisioned as the wife of Sango. This alliance (as Sango's wife) is one of the reasons for her deification.[47]

Having established some basic knowledgeable claims about some Yoruba deities being historical men and women, we shall, in the next section study the cause of deification.

Orisa[48]: Ontology and Deification

Olufemi Taiwo contends that people who do not manifest the consciousness of a being higher than themselves cannot possess a religion.[49] Therefore, since the Yoruba people have religion as part of their 'being', they possess a conscious belief in the manifestation of higher beings existing in purely 'heavenly' domains. They believe that the heavenly domain closer to the world of humans, is the home of all the other gods (deities). The pantheon of this domain is referred to as *imole*.[50] They are categorized in grades, so, in descending order. The *Orisas* occupy the highest grade among the *imole*. The *Orisas* are: the *Orisanla*, the arch divinity; *Ifa*, the Orisa of wisdom and divination; *Ogun*, the dreadful Orisa of workers and iron; *Esu*, the messenger of the senior gods or Olodumare, etc.[51]

In the Yoruba ontology, *òrìṣà* are 'divinities'[52] that were either descended from the invisible world (heaven) and lived as humans on earth or were famous individuals deified as gods or goddesses after their death due to supernatural and outstanding displays of wisdom and cardinal virtues prominent among their time.[53] Those orisa not part of these categories are personified natural features, such as (Iroko) trees, hills, rivers, or other natural forces.[54] Generally, these divinities connect humans with the Divine, the Supreme Being.

Having established a base for the understanding of the orisas, we can now explore their deification process which can be in any of these three categories: First, the Yoruba, in a quest to preserve their national heritage, enable settlements and lineages to deify spectacularly

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46. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 83.
47. Adepegba, "Associated Place-Names and Sacred Icons of Seven Yoruba Deities," 119.
48. A Yoruba translation for Deity.
49. Olufemi Taiwo, "Orisa: A Prolegomenon to a Philosophy of Yoruba Religion," in *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture* ed., Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 90.
50. *Imole* could be said to be the combination of two Yoruba words: '*Imo*', knowledge and '*Ile*', land. Therefore, based on this etymological understanding, *imole* could mean those who have the knowledge of the land.
51. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People*, 48.
52. Divine entities or divine attributes/powers/manifestations. Also, in relation to God. Divinities are those attributes possessed by deities, especially when they are performing actions based on God's dictate.
53. Fálọlá and Akínyẹmí, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*, 84.
54. Fálọlá and Akínyẹmí, 354.

departed members and set up shrines of worship for them as 'special' friends and protectors in the spirit world. Orunmila and Obatala among others are in this category. Second, various occupations and trades were made to develop patron gods and goddesses as point of reference and a model for their specific works. Ogun is in this category. And the last, specific phenomena (such as lightning and thunder, and the sea) and certain diseases all came to have gods or goddesses associated with them, for instance Sopona, the patron god of pandemic/epidemic. Arguably, the deity later known as Ogun (originally patron god of all working people) seems to have been the first of such pan-Yoruba gods, hence the reason for his salutation as *Osinmole*, first, or king, among the earliest spirits or gods.[55]

In special cases, there are instances where mortals before their death assume a place in Yoruba pantheon for a limited period. These cases however is within a particular time frame and cannot last after that considerable measure of time. The Egungun[56] is one instance, another is the Olorisa,[57] and even being a king gives some privilege in this regard as well. We shall limit ourselves to the last two in this section.

Olorisa refers to one who offers his or her body as a vehicle to a particular orisa to be possessed by it. He or she allows the *orisa* "to mount the head". For the *Olorisa* to become 'permanently' the personification of *Orisa*, it is for him/her to become *Orisa*. Thus, the best that the *Olorisa* can hope for and needs to experience is to become, for brief moments, the personification of the *Orisa*. In those instances where possession occurs, the *Olorisa* is *Orisa* at that time. In that state, he or she participates in that *mysterium* that defines the religion, and he or she is taken out of the circle of mortal humans, free from finitude and the shackles that limit the human form for those moments. His/her voice, movement, and the likes are adjudged to be those of the *Orisa* and are marked by the authority of the *Orisa* by whom he/she has been possessed. Even the mighty priests cannot "really represent the *Orisa* all the time". If one were to personify an *Orisa* permanently,[58] death is always a requirement for one to qualify to become *Orisa*. The *Olorisa* are also invoked through worship, invocation, rituals and strict sacrifices according to the demands of each Orisa.[59]

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55. Akintoye, 47.
56. Loosely translated as Masquerades. Even though they are more than being just "mask-querades", they are oftentimes gods, or *Oro*.
57. Two words here, '*olu*' or '*oni*' and then '*orisa*'. '*olu* plus *orisa*' means the prince of the *Orisa*. '*Oni* plus *Orisa*' means the owner of *Orisa*; 'the owner' in this context is the embodiment of *Orisa* for the Yoruba people.
58. Taiwo, "Orisa: A Prolegomenon to a Philosophy of Yoruba Religion," 98.
59. Taiwo, 99.

The Oba (King), the last category in this paper, is seen as a semi-divine ruler during his earthly life. His eulogy put it more clearly as he is called *Aláṣẹ èkejì òrìṣà* or *Igbakeji Orisa,* which in essence means the commander and companion of God,[60] or second in command of (to) God, respectively. Even though he is not regarded as a full-fledged God during his reign, some mode of worship is reserved for him for being the king. Since a basic qualification to become an ancestor or a permanent *Orisa* is death/ 'vanishment',[61] the king is not an *orisa* until when the physical entity of the being will no longer limit the spirited nature of the human being and is judged worthy to be an Orisa.

Lastly, deification, which we have somehow exposed during the cause of this essay. It is loosely a process of immortalizing humans for the next generation, but more to that, it is an integral part of the Yoruba worship to accord some space in their pantheon to some characters who must have objectively met some notable criteria. Deification of mortal follows an epoch contingent on some arguable characteristics: first, itinerant teaching of exogenic skills; second, passive provisions for the well-being of people; and lastly, intimidation of humans using terror.[62] Oduduwa is an example of such hero deified after death as we have seen in the previous section.

On The Nature of Yoruba Deities: Deities as Transcendent Beings

In this section, we shall consolidate our understanding that (i) while there is a being that *is* God, there are also other beings (which from the outset, we have called deities) that have the capacity to carry out actions that are typical of that being called God. In this regard, by their actions, they are *being* God. (ii) We shall also expose what counts for transcendence and permissible extension of transcendence to these beings (deities). All of these put together constitute the nature of Yoruba deities and of mortal beings capable of being gods.

On the origin of African deities, J.S. Mbiti argues that the supreme God created the deities. These deities are also subordinate to him in the category and order of beings. Bolaji Idowu on the other hand contends that deities were not 'created' but brought out into being by the Supreme Being hereby sharing some metaphysical attributes of Olodumare.[63] More so, based on Sophie Oluwole's factual claims in her *Socrates and Orunmila*; she argued that Orunmila being one of the deities with a historical record; had lived almost the same time as Socrates of

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60. Tóyìn Fálọlá and Akíntúndé Akínyẹmí, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2016), 5.
61. Some orisa do not have death records, and some have been said to have disappeared from the earth.
62. Adepegba "Associated Place-Names and Sacred Icons of Seven Yoruba Deities," 110.
63. Ushe, "God, Divinities and Ancestors in African Traditional Religious Thought," 166-167.

Greece and has been deified among the Yoruba.[64] I may as well opine a third category on the origin of African deities as proceeding from the people's consensus as we have argued earlier. Therefore, while the third category may be similar to the first, it pronounces the earthly physical existence of the deities, and based the nature of the deities more on human reflection and insight (judgment). This reflection serves as a means to immortalize such individuals and worship God. Mbiti further avers that these deities personify God's activities and manifestations.[65]

So, all these three categories are importance to speak about the nature of Yoruba deities especially with regards to the functionality of the deities. And, it is mutual to them that African deities are pro-justice, even though claims of manipulation exist. The instances of manipulation here contend the claim 'that African belief in an omniscient God'.

In the Yoruba tradition, ancestors hold an extraordinary place of reverence because they are believed to keep a wakeful and watchful eye over the living. Belief in ancestors reserved some benefits mutually shared between the physical and the spiritual world. Firstly, the dead person is capable of transcending into an ancestral realm. Simultaneously, since the Yorùbá believe in reincarnation, transcendental existence is actual, and these transcendent elements can be embodied again. This belief is primal to Yorùbá life.[66] A phrase, *Baba mi ma sun ni orun*, asks the ancestors (father) to remain vigilant and not 'rest' or 'sleep' in heaven. It serves as a reminder to the ancestors of their responsibility to safeguard the living and watch over them. Dreams of a deceased relative are a unique and significant form of communication with the ancestor. It is also considered to be proof of their presence. While the ancestors hold this significant place, they can also have a direct physical influence on natural phenomena like rainfall, good harvests, prosperity, and the relationship between the living and the dead.[67]

Conversely, since Yoruba believe that at death, a person's soul is not cut off from its human relatives and can be approached through prayer, libation, and offerings,[68] therefore an ancestor who remains in the spirited environment and is not reincarnated has transcended and may become an *òrìṣà* to his or her own family, capable of receiving prayers, worship and

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64. Sophie Bosede Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy* (Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2017), 42.

65. Ushe, "God, Divinities and Ancestors in African Traditional Religious Thought," 166.

66. Fálo.lá and Akínye.mí, 218.

67. Simeon Abiodun Ige, "The Cult of Ancestors in African Traditional Religion" *An Enclopeadia of Arts,* 10, no 1, (2006): 27.

68. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 210.

offerings, if he/she satisfies the requirements.[69] Yoruba's idea of death is not an end to life but a change in its form, perhaps not in essence. This ontology has some implications: the first is that life is a continuum; the second is that man is not his body and the soul is immortal.[70]

Many Yoruba deities were like any other human being in transcendence, now ancestors, and have become transcendent[71] through popular acclamation and by the people's consensus as we explored in the earlier sections. Yoruba societies give particular regard to these deities that were once historical figures but have now been elevated to a status higher than that of ordinary spirits.[72]

Therefore, some of these ancestors who have been found worthy to be orisas, have been assigned major roles in the Yoruba ontology. They have been consciously chosen has protector of the people, as an orisa to particular profession and believed to possess powers to bless and curse, attributes which were reserved to Olodumare. In fact, Obatala is widely accepted as the creator of human corporeal form, Orunmila is regarded as one who sees in and out of everything, even though he and other forms of orisa are subjects to Olodumare. Implying from the above assertion, performing God's actions is being God for the moment of the specific act. For instance, humans are still being created daily, this creation implies that Obatala is still at work creating. Therefore, he is still "Goding", that is, being God or performing God's 'creating' actions.

Conclusion

In essence, this research work has argued to present just one stance which is the fact that in the ontology of the Yoruba, which is the basic understanding about reality in general and including all what we have argued out in the context of this work, the 'be' and 'being' God follows thus: first that the Yoruba believe that it is in the nature of human persons to have possess the ability to be gods, in order words, every human being has the inherent ability of being deified. Second, but, only few humans are able to attain that status of gods in their relation with man. Third, they achieve this height only after their death which symbolizes the overcoming of their mortal nature and a transition to a complete pure spirit form, and through

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69. Fálọlá and Akínyẹmí, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*, 83.

70. Akomolafe, Mohammed Akinola, "Yoruba Ontology: A Critique of the Conceptualization of Life After Death," *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9, no.6 (2016): 33. (33-54).

71. Yorubas have Considered its deified ancestors to have reach the peak of being and now beyond the physical, and in the same realm (though lower) of operation with Olodumare. Hence they have been privileged to be attributed the some features as Olodumare.

72. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 214.

a popular consensus of the living that wish to regard, revere and worship those notable figures as deities and a means to worship God.

In addition, the preservation of the Yoruba's cultural heritage is not debatable for the ancient people, so as a medium of transmitting the tradition and history, shrines were established to worship and commemorate heroes through periodic rituals. These heroes were men who had transcended beyond being mortals, and the Yoruba cult has found them worthy of worship.

Humans can be deified and have a significant place in Yoruba pantheon but cannot attain the same status as the supreme God, Olodumare. Being God is evident in personifying some of the supreme God's potency and permitted attributes such as knowledge, works of creation and others, as mentioned in this work. The nature of African (Yoruba) deities is subsequently built on this understanding.

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The Concept of God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought

Evaristus NWOKEKE (SDB)

Department of Philosophy,
Don Bosco Institute, Ibadan.
cevaristus70@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of God in traditional Igbo-African religious thought, before the advent of Western religion, to show that the idea of a God or deity who is supreme in every area of life and sphere of influence and who "creates out of nothing," like the God of the Christians or Western missionaries, is unrecognized in the Igbo-African traditional religious thought. Even though the Igbo conceive of strong and powerful deities that can only reign supreme within their respective sphere of influence where they are in charge, none of these deities is identical to the supreme God promoted by the Christian missionaries. The Igbo traditional religious worldview maintains a polytheistic religious view, unlike the monotheistic outlook of the Christian religion. To achieve this goal this paper adopts the method of historical hermeneutics and textual analysis.

Keywords: God; Igbo Traditional Religion; Creation out of nothing; Theism; Chi; Chukwu;

Introduction

This paper undertakes an in-depth analysis of the conception of God within the traditional religious framework of the Igbo people of Africa, focusing specifically on the period preceding the advent of Christianity. It aims to show how the Igbo view of God differs from the idea of God introduced by Western missionaries when they arrived. According to the thoughts of some African scholars and theologians collected in the compendium *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought, and Theology*, in reflection on Igbo religious practices, the Igbo believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. In addition to this, they claim that the concept of God, in Igbo religious

thought is identical to the Christian or Western religious concept of the supreme God. This God according to them, possesses special attributes and powers like supremacy over other gods or deities. He is further described as the ultimate cause of the universe, which he created out of nothing (*creatio* ex *nihilo),* and as the eternal and perfect Being. The above picture of God, painted by the Christian theologians and the Western missionaries, does not tally with the Igbo traditional religious view of God. In traditional Igbo belief, the existence of god is directly connected to having a dedicated shrine for that god, rather than through the mediation of other gods. Therefore, if there is no specific shrine established for worship, the Igbo do not recognize that god's existence and such a god is not active in their thoughts.[1] In this paper, we shall examine whether the supreme God, as propagated by the Western missionaries and Christian theologians, is identical with, or the same as the Igbo God. Thus, our paper is divided into two sections. The first analyzes the Western and Igbo-Christian theologians' ideas of God, while the second explores the authentic traditional Igbo idea of God as it differs from the Western idea of God.

I. Western and Igbo Concepts of God

We must understand that slavery and colonialism played crucial roles in the distortion of the Igbo African traditional religious thought. The slaves taken from Igboland and Africa, by extension, were subjected to various forms of inhuman treatment. We must understand that when Western slave traders acknowledged that Africans were human, had souls, and could feel pain, they shifted from directly enslaving them to controlling their lands and resources through colonialism. This means they established colonies, imposed their rule, and exploited the people and resources of Africa in a more indirectly but still oppressive way.[2] So many African societies were easily won over by the colonialists as a result of the centralized religious and political structures. However, because of the egalitarian structure of the Igbo society, the colonialists found it extremely difficult to penetrate the Igbo heartland.[3] The Western missionaries, with the help of the Igbo Christian theologians, began to project their idea of God into Igbo traditional thought: firstly in the aspect of Education: Missionaries established schools where they taught

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1. Aja Egbeke, *Doing African Philosophy* (Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 2015), 135.
2. Njoku Francis, *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology* (Owerri: Snap Press, 2002), 142-143.
3. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann 1958), 50.

the Christian concept of God alongside other subjects, making education a vehicle for religious conversion.[4] Furthermore, in the aspect of church and service: Western missionaries built churches in Igbo communities and held regular worship services. These services included prayers, singing and sermons about God. By attending these services, the Igbo people learned about Christianity and its practices.[5] This distorted Igbo view of God is based on Greek philosophical ideas dating back to Plato and Aristotle, developed by Aquinas, and eventually became dominant in Western philosophy and theology. In this Western religious tradition, God is conceived as the supreme Being, the creator of the universe and all that is in it.[6] He is the ultimate cause of the universe, which he created out of nothing.[7] He is further described as the eternal being as could be seen in Aquinas' cosmological arguments.[8] In the Western view of God, he is also conceived as a perfect being, who is omnipresent and beyond the influence and control of man. These attributes of God, in the Western tradition, do not apply to the traditional Igbo African idea of God. The Igbo God does not create out of nothing. instead, each god or deity is responsible for specific aspects of life, such as rain, fertility, or heath.[9] The Igbo religious thought is originally polytheistic, with the Igbo universe boasting of a multiplicity of gods with none of them adjudged as supreme, in other words, what we meant here is that the Igbo do not have one single god that is considered supreme over all others. instead, all gods are important within their specific domains, and people worship them according to their needs and situations.[10] However, arguing from the ritual life of the Igbo, Christopher Nze asserts:

> There are no single instances where the Igbo perform sacrifices to or worship a single being of the Christian concept. This is so because the Igbos perform sacrifice as an act of appeasement or worship and because there exists no occasion when a supreme being of the Christian description is appeased or worshiped. It can be said that this being does not exist at all or exist but is not recognized because he is passive. Our fathers worshipped gods and not a God.[11]

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4. Emenanjo, E. Nolue, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Mission* (Ibadan: University Press, 1969), 45-78.

5 . Kalu Ogbu U, ed., *The History of Christianity in West Africa* (London: Longman, 1980), 123-150.

6 . Jane Doe, *The Nature of God in Western Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 72.

7 . Doe, 105.

8 . Anthony Okonkwo, *History of medieval Philosophy: Lecture Notes,* (Ibadan: Don Bosco Institute of Philosophy, 2015), 82.

9. Edmund IIIogu, *Christianity and Ibo Culture* (New York: Nok Publihers, 1974), 50.

10. Isidore Chika, *The Concept of the Supreme Being in Igbo Traditional Religion: A critical analysis for better understanding* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2016), 121.

11. Chika, 125.

In West Africa, men believe in great pantheons of gods which are as diverse as the gods of the Greeks or Hindus. Many of these gods are the expressions of the forces of nature, which men fear or try to propitiate: These gods generally have their temples and priests, and their worshippers cannot justly be called animists, but polytheists, since they worship a variety of gods.[12]

II. God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought

The Igbo society, just like many other human societies is a deeply rooted religious one. The African traditional society exhibits, in various dimensions, its beliefs in powers beyond the human reality that are believed to control the universe. Within the Yoruba religious worldview, *Olodumare* is recognized as having superior powers over other deities. This notwithstanding, the Yoruba religious worldview is dominated by a multiplicity of gods. Each significant aspect of life has a deity assigned to it. To make a bountiful harvest, for instance, a typical Yoruba person will sacrifice to the god or deity in charge of agriculture- *Orisaoko* and to be fertile or wealthy, he or she sacrifices to the gods of fertility or Wealth-*Osun.*[13] This same thing is applicable when protection is sought by the Yoruba man, where he sacrifices another deity in charge of protection- *Ogun.* IIe Ife, the spiritual abode of the Yoruba, is described as having only one day within the entire year that is not dedicated to any deity.[14]

Traditional Igbo society is religious like other traditional African societies. A reasonable percentage of the Igbo are still stuck to their traditional religion, despite the advent of foreign religions. The Christian religion, no doubt, has some effects on the Igbo traditional religion both conceptually and practically. Consequently, some authors have doubted whether a supreme deity exists in Igbo religious thought.[15] This doubt has led to the expression of divergent opinions about the Igbo religious worldview. It is to be noted that every particular Igbo community has an acknowledged deity that reigns supreme over that particular community.[16] We must understand

12. Chika, 122.

13. Olaniyi Banwo, *"On Divinities: A comparative Analysis of Selected Yoruba and Chinese Divinities,"* Vol 8, No. 2. (IJOHIS, 2018), 115.

14. Gbadegesin Segun, *Africa Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 75.

15. Nze Chukwuemeka, "Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Conception of God in Africa." Vol. 5, No. 1. 15-31.

16. Aja Egbeka, *Doing African Philosophy* (Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 2015), 142.

that the concept of *Chi-na-eke* as the "creator God" should be accounted as an attempt to yoke onto the Igbo religions through the category of creation *ex nihilo* in the bid to claim that the traditional African religions are also monotheistic, just as the Judaism and Christianity are. The ordinary meaning of the Igbo word *okike* is not to make things out of nothing- characteristics easily and readily attributed to the supreme God propagated by the Christian missionaries.[17] The above view, expressed by Aja, attests to the point that using Western religious schemes to study the Igbo traditional religion is only an attempt at futility which does not show the authentic nature of the traditional Igbo religious view. Additionally, from the perspective of the Igbo natural egalitarian and democratic make-up, Nze counters the idea of monotheism and the notion of one supreme God in the Igbo worldview. He posits that the Igbo have no idea of any one supreme god but a multiplicity of gods that reign supreme in their respective Igbo localities or functional areas of life:

> They (the Igbo) assume the existence of numerous gods… There is a supreme Being that created man; there is a Supreme Being that created trees; there is a supreme god of the Earth. The Sun is a God… There is no single instance when the Igbo perform sacrifice to the worship of a single Being of the Christian concept… there exists no occasion when a Supreme Being of the Christian description is appeased or worshipped, it can be said that this Being does not exist at all or exists but is not recognized because he is passive. Our fathers worshipped gods and not a God.[18]

The above view, as enunciated by Chukwuemeka Nze, expresses the polytheistic and egalitarian nature of the Igbo religious view, what we meant here is that in the aspect of community participation: In Igbo society, religious rituals and ceremonies are communal events that involve the participation of all members of the community, this inclusive approach fosters a sense of equality and shared responsibility among the people.[19]

Conclusion

This research work defended the idea that the Igbo religious conception of God is different from the Christian or Western missionary concept of God. It shows that the authentic Igbo traditional idea of God is not identical to the idea of the Supreme God propagated by Western missionaries and Igbo Christian theologians. The paper noted that the Igbo religious view of God is primarily polytheistic as it recognizes a multiplicity of gods, unlike the monotheistic outlook of Western

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17. Egbeka, 147.

18. Chukwuemeka, "pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Conception of God in Africa", 21-30.

19. Emefie Ikenga, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation* (Enugu: Ejiofor Press, 1985), 45.

religion that acknowledges only one Supreme Being. It further submitted that certain attributes of the Western God, like the ability to create out of nothing an omnipresence, make it unrecognized in the Igbo religious tradition. This submission is made because the Igbo god does not create out of nothing but from already existing materials. Furthermore, each particular god or deity in the Igbo culture has a shrine dedicated to it as its place of worship and reigns supreme only in such area and does not extend its supremacy to other Igbo localities where it is not in charge and where it is not worshipped. Thus the paper invites African philosophers to focus on examining, distilling, and sieving original and authentic traditional Igbo religious ideas separate from the concepts, ideas, and teachings of Christianity, to bring about an enlightened understanding of both the Christian worldview and the Igbo traditional religious worldview.

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The Mind-Body Problem, Afterlife, and

Ethical Meaning in Life: A Yoruba Prospect

Ruby Bukola AYODELE

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Dominican University, Samonda.
ayodeleruby9@gmail.com

Abstract

My paper shall reflect on the question of an afterlife and shall venture to philosophically contemplate the consequential purpose of life in the face of the reality of death. The Yoruba folk typically believe that life extends beyond the grave; such a claim deserves metaphysical, moral, and epistemic investigation. In investigating this, I shall circumvent the Yoruba philosophy of death (*iku*), life (*iye*) and life after death (*aye atun wa*). The concept of life after death appears to some, as absurd since the idea of life as we experience it is intricately tied to a material body; if this body experiences corruption, how else shall we conceive of life? Are we to legitimately ascribe what we conceive as 'life'? For the Yoruba, corporeal life is transient, and through the event of death, one passes on to a renewed life. My paper argues that the Yoruba's idea of death is not as a cessation of life but as a change in its form. If this is true, then upholding such thought implies that: (a) life is a continuum and, (b) man is not his body, (c) hence, a theory of immortality of the soul is implied. If life is beyond the physical, a certain ethical standard is expected of one, to enjoy the renewed life.

Keywords: Afterlife; Death; Yoruba; Ontology; Man; Ancestor.

Introduction

Among the discourses prevalent in the philosophy of religion today include the presumptuous belief in the afterlife: that is, the idea that somehow, the person [or some part of the person] survives the corruption of death and experiences some immaterial life. This belief in some immaterial existence or immaterial form of life is the basis for other beliefs in the sphere of African philosophy [of religion], as well as other traditions engagements. Some of the beliefs

it grounds include: the belief in the existence of God, the problem of evil, and the existence of other forms of spirits, be they benign or malignant.

In this paper, my goal is to interrogate what is involved in the belief or at least, the concept of life after death. My major aim is to decipher whether we can endorse such a belief; by endorsement, I do not necessarily mean whether we can prove or disprove it. I shall consider the ontology of the person and such questions of identity between the person and their body, between a person and their soul, and also whether life equates the body or the soul. I find it of interest to interrogate the nature of the belief in life after death: whether it is an epistemic, ethical or metaphysical claim. If it is not an epistemic or metaphysical kind, then of what relevance is it? Is the religious claim to such belief useful if it cannot be validated?

I approach the aforementioned questions from a Yoruba perspective. Thus in this paper, the status of the Yoruba ontology, ethos and epistemology of such a belief are examined. To achieve this, this paper is ordered into three subsections. In the first segment, we conceptualize the meaning, types and causes of death in a bid to contemplate the purpose of life. The second segment looks at the status of the Yoruba belief in life after death—therein, we discuss why the belief follows from the traditional Yoruba metaphysics of man. In the third part of this paper, we consider the nexus between *imo* (knowledge) and *igbagbo* (belief) and show the implications of the Yoruba belief in life after death.

I. Life and Death: Conceptual Analysis

The concept of an afterlife implies at least two things: (i) a previous life, and (ii) an end to the previous/before-life. As such, I commence my deliberation by attending to the following questions: What is life? And, what is death? I should immediately concede that no privileged answer to the questions can be offered here; by this, I mean that any proposed answers would have to pass the gamut of philosophical reflection (be it metaphysical, epistemic, logical and/or ethical grounds) if we are to accept them.

Notwithstanding, *The Cassell Concise Dictionary* tells us that, life is "(i) the state or condition which distinguishes animate beings from dead ones and from inorganic matter and involves the ability to grow, change, respond to stimuli, reproduce, etc., (ii) the period from

birth to death, (iii) the period from birth to the present time, (iv) the period from present to death, (v) any other specified period of a person's existence..." [1]

From the above definitions, two things are clear: (i) life stands in contrast to death, and (ii) the period of life is distinguishable from death. With respect to (i), something that is not alive is dead in the same way that something that is not dead is alive. Hence, a thing can't be both alive and dead at the same time. That is, it is either A is alive or A is dead; not both. (ii) connotes that life, in this physical world, is ephemeral. Hence, there is a change in life-form at death. In this respect, the distinction between life and death has come to be shown, over the years, through the cessation of breath, consciousness and irresponsiveness of the biological organs.

The above paragraphs are however silent, in providing a precise sense of what life is; however, they show us the dialectical nature of life and death—as opposing concepts. This demarcation is essential because, through it, one will be able to confront issues such as the belief in the idea of a living dead' (*akudaaya*) or that of 'life after life' (*aye atun wa*).[2] I however invite the reader to note here, that the case of 'a living dead', which I intend to demonstrate later, is flawed, whereas that of 'afterlife' seems controversial though, is not purposeless.

In providing possible meanings of life and death, I consider some varying scholarly backgrounds. I will begin with looking at death in the sense of the absence of those characteristics of animate matter which are identified as motion, respiration, nutrition, irritability, growth, excretion, and reproduction. What then constitutes the nature of death? Robert Kastenbaum offers three senses in which meaning could be attached to 'death'. They are: 'death as an event', 'death as a condition' and 'death as a state of existence or non-existence'.[3] He argues that "as an event, death occurs at a particular time and place and in a particular way."[4] Again, he avers, "Death is the nonreversible condition in which an organism is incapable of carrying out the vital functions of life".[5] As a state of existence, Kastenbaum opines that death is thought of "…rather to whatever form of existence might be thought to

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[1] *The Cassell Concise Dictionary*, s.v. "Life", 2nd ed. (London: Nigel Wilcockson, 1997), 848.

[2] *Igbe aye leyin aye*

[3] Robert Kastenbaum, "Definitions of Death", in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*, ed. Robert Kastenbaum (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 204.

[4] Kastenbaum, 204.

[5] Kastenbaum, 224.

prevail when a temporal life has come to its end."[6] The first definition establishes death as the event that ends the life of a person; the second looks at the functional description. The last definition considers whether life continues at death or it terminates at death. This third view is what has, and continues to, spark debates.

African approaches to the phenomenon of death are not lacking as well. According to Andrew F. Uduigwomen, "…death is the beginning of a permanent ontological departure of the individual from mankind to spirithood."[7] He further contends that, to the Africans, "…death is the end of a real and complete man."[8] In this case, the dissolution of the physical nature of man from the spiritual nature of man is what constitutes death. This conception of death has also been expressed in the Western ontology of man. Kastenbaum writes that "The definition in the 1768 edition of *Enclyclopedia Britannica* is faithful to the ancient tradition that death should be understood as the separation of soul (or spirit) from the body."[9]

The interest of the philosopher, therefore, is to ascertain the grounds for maintaining that a soul exists in the body. Attempts of this kind have resulted in quite a number of views, all in resolution of the 'mind-body' divide: or the material-immaterial divide. Descartes advanced this ontological divide between the soul and the body very notably in the modern era; however, Gilbert Ryle argued against Descartes' distinction between the mind and the body. "What Ryle is saying is that Descartes represents the facts of mental life as if they belong to one logical category, whereas in the actual sense they belong to another. That is, he misrepresents the substance responsible for conscious or mental activities".[10] Despite Ryle's critique, the demarcation of mind from body is as lively as that of life and death in most metaphysics of man. For Akhtar Salman, people have a strong and unmistakable tendency and convincing belief to "…regard life and death as categorically separate. The absolute, final, and immutable nature of death has made us accustomed to this view."[11] Another African philosopher, Izu Marcel Onyeocha, accentuates that, "death is recognised as the point

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[6] Kastenbaum, 255.

[7] Andrew F. Uduigwomen, *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (Lagos: Oraboh & Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd, 1995), 80.

[8] Uduigwomen, 80.

[9] Kastenbaum, "Definitions of Death", 225.

[10] O. S. Samuel, "Cartesian Dualism: An Evaluation of Wireduan and Gilbert Refutations", *Kritike Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2011): 156-165, 159.

[11] Akhtar Salman, *Matters of Life and Death: Psychoanalytic Perfections* (London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2011), 183.

when the spirit separates from the body. Because the spirit is closely associated with breathing, people know that the spirit has gone when a person stops breathing."[12]

Therefore, death is either the annihilation of consciousness or breath, or the passage of the soul or mind into another world. Peter Berta maintains that, "The fear of death and the belief in life after death are universal phenomenon."[13] Given that this assertion is true, we will now look at how these phenomena of life, death, and afterlife have been expressed in the belief of the Yoruba.

II. Yoruba Outlook to Life, Death, and Afterlife

First of all, I shall briefly expose the ethnography of the Yorubas. The Yoruba, as taken in this paper, are the native inhabitants of the South-west region of Nigeria, Africa. This conceptual limitation is partly due to the fact that (i) there is an existing compendium (*Ifa* Corpus) that cogitates the philosophical understanding of the people, and (ii) the worldviews of 'Yoruba in Diaspora' might have been greatly influenced by the growing Western culture when compared to their counterpart in the South-west Nigeria. According to Tunde Onadeko, "Today, the Yoruba live in three distinct regions: at home in Western Nigeria; in other West African countries, such as the southeastern Benin Republic and Togo; and outside of Africa, especially in South America, the West Indies, and Cuba (Diaspora)".[14]

Having said this, let us now consider their belief in life after death. Recasting the question, 'What does the afterlife entail?', we entertain the belief of the traditional Yoruba that, the human person is composed of two specific and distinct entities: body and soul. While the body is a physical and ephemeral entity, the soul is believed to be spiritual and immortal. This belief entails that at the separation of the body from the soul at death (absolute death), the soul moves into a new world or returns to this world, where it continues its existence again. To this, Pantaleon Iroegbu remarks thus: "Life is one. But it is lived in different phases. Thus this life is one phase, life after this is another."[15]

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[12] Izu Marcel Onyeocha, "Towards an African Christian Anthropology," *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 93.

[13] Peter Berta, "Afterlife in Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*, ed. Robert Kastenbaum (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 13.

[14] Tunde Onadeko, "Yoruba Traditional Adjudicatory Systems," *African Study Monographs* 29, no. 1 (2008): 16.

[15] Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Spirituality and Metaphysics: Their Relationship in African Worldview* (Owerri: Enwisdomization & Eustel Publications, 2003), 23.

Bolaji Idowu also maintains that, "The life of the ancestors in afterlife is a reality. It does not depend on the remembrance of them by those who are living on earth."[16] This prompts us to carefully discuss the Yoruba idea of life after death, in relation to their ontology of the person man and their system of belief systems that are held in conjunction with their understanding of the hereafter.

In West African thought, the belief in God, divinities, and ancestors, among other forces is often emphasized. God is known as *Olodumare* in the Yoruba belief. He is the creator of both human and non-human beings. While being the creator, *Olodumare* is believed to have helpers who assisted Him in the task of creation. Olusegun Oladipo points out that, "In Yoruba culture, for instance, *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being), who stands at the apex of the theoretical entities in terms of which the Yoruba explain human experience, is regarded as the creator (*Eleda*) and maker (*Aseda*) and the origin and giver of life (*Elemı*)."[17] As the creator, *Olodumare* is the giver of life. To the Yoruba, therefore, a person's life comes from God. Being an all-powerful being who knows the beginning and the end of life of each one, death is not something that is alien to God, *Ifa* testifies to this.

The death of the person is marked by the return of the soul. The nature of the soul is captured by Moses A. Makinde thus: "Immortality in Yoruba language means '*aiku*'; '*Emi*' (soul) is immortal. The creator of *emi* is *Olodumare* (*Ajalaorun*, *Olorun*, or God etc.). Thus while *emi* (soul) is immortal, its creator, *Olodumare* is also immortal. Both are also spirits. While the soul as an immortal spirit is known as *aiku*, *Olodumare* is known as *Oba aiku*, i.e. the deathless or immortal king". [18]

It is clear that, for the Yoruba, the soul cannot die. Only the body does. Hence while contemplating the human personality; the Yoruba often discuss about three to four parts of the person. The metaphysical parts of a person, according to the Yoruba, will throw more lucidity on the belief in life after death among the people. The person, for the Yoruba, has as part of his compositions: *ara* (body), *emi* (soul) and *ori* (destiny), *ese* (journey/path) and *okan* (heart or mind). Makinde supports this, affirming that, "…in the Yoruba conception of human personality, a person may be said to consist of three parts viz, *ara* (body), *emi* (soul) and *ori*

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[16] Bolaji Idowu, "African Traditional Religion," in *Issues in African Christian Theology* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publisher, 1998), 134.

[17] Olusegun Oladipo, "Religion in African Culture: Some Conceptual Issues," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 359.

[18] Moses Akin Makinde, *African Philosophy: The Demise of a Controversy* (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2007), 150.

(inner head)."[19] Segun Gbadegesin submits that in the worldview of the traditional Yoruba, "*Emi* is a non-material force responsible for life. Its presence ensures life and its absence means death. But the *emi* is itself immortal, and it may reincarnate in another body."[20]

On the subject of human personality, Kwame Nkrumah notes that at the philosophical level, anything that separates mind and body creates room for antagonism, conflict and contradiction. In his opinion, the traditional African mindset rejects this inharmonious dualism. Nkrumah firmly upholds the unity of mind and body, stating that, "The philosophical perplexity which darkens this interaction is removed by the demonstration of the possibility of a 'Categorial Conversion' in which matter is humanized".[21] Nkrumah furthers: "The key to the solution of the mind-body dualism; the spirit-matter problem lies in categorial convertibility… By categorial conversion, I mean such a thing as the emergence of self-consciousness from that which is not self-conscious; such a thing as the emergence of mind from matter, of quality from quantity".[22]

Nkrumah's position, therefore, is that of harmony between matter and spirit: mind and body. This view also applies to the Yoruba. In the Yoruba worldview, the person's life is in corporeal and spiritual phases; the journey that a person will undertake in this corporeal/material world is determined by the *ori* (destiny) and *ese* ('leg'/path). This destiny may be good or bad, depending on whether one is allotted a good or bad *ori*. Upon coming into this world, one's *ori*, according to the Yoruba, leads one through life. Every *ori* decides the number of years one will use in this world before returning to *Olodumare* via death. It is then believed that one must die before one can join *Olodumare* in the hereafter. While it is *ori* that determines whether one is successful or not, as well as the number of years one will use before his/her death; it is *emi* (the soul) that determines whether one is alive or not. In other words, *ori* determines the time a man will live on earth, whereas the departure of the *emi* determines when the time has been used up. If one consults the cult of the *Ifa*, the Yoruba believe that *ifa* can foretell how long one will live before returning to *Olodumare* to give an account of one's deeds on earth.

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[19] Makinde, 54.

[20] Segun Gbadegesin, "Toward a Theory of Destiny," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 134.

[21] Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development* (London: Heinemann, 1964), 87.

[22] Nkrumah, 20.

When a man dies, the Yoruba believe that the *emi* returns to *Olodumare* to account for the quality of life led. The quality of the afterlife to be enjoyed is dependent upon the quality of life led here in the physical/corporeal realm. Thus, if one lives a life of poor conduct (*ese*), there are consequences attached to it. The poor conduct spoken of refers to disregard for the commands of *Olodumare*, including the disregard for the dictates of the divinities and ancestors, or acts against humanity. Thus, "In the Yoruba language *ese* refers not only to religious infractions against the Supreme Being, the deities, and the ancestors, but also to infractions against fellow human beings. Indeed, the religious cases are *ese* only because the infractions are ultimately against fellow human beings".[23]

According to the Yoruba, anyone characterized by *ese* will not experience a fruitful afterlife. To expatiate what 'a fruitful afterlife' consists of, it is apposite to consider different canons in Yoruba cultural religious beliefs that inform this belief. These include: (i) immortality of the soul; (ii) reincarnation; and (iii) theory of transmigration of the soul.

Uduigwomen argues that, "[i]mmortality is sometimes interpreted to mean that the identity, the consciousness, the memory of the individual persist after death."[24] This view is distinct from the transmigration of soul and reincarnation; thus:

> Immortality is different from transmigration which is the belief that the soul of the deceased is capable of transferring into the body of another person, animal or any other lower creature. It is also different from reincarnation abode, some of his physical and/or character traits are manifested in the grandchildren. This newborn baby is sometimes seen to possess some of the essential features of the departed grandfather, and sometimes both possess more or less similar characteristics.[25]

Alongside the belief in the immortality of the soul, the Yoruba also believe in reincarnation. Reincarnation forms another basis for the justification for the belief in life after death. Commenting on this belief, Iroegbu stresses that, "…death is as importantly celebrated as life because death is not the final, but a transition to life yonder, and sometimes to life-again (via reincarnation) here in the world."[26] The belief in reincarnation is evident in the Yoruba metaphysics of man. Particular children who are born immediately after the demise of aged grandparents are given names such as Babatunde, Iyabo, Yetunde, Yejide, etc., depending on

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[23] John Ayotunde and Isola Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in African Culture," *in A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 399.

[24] Uduigwomen, *Footmarks on African Philosophy*, 75.

[25] Uduigwomen, 75-76.

[26] Iroegbu, *Spirituality and Metaphysics*, 26.

the circumstance, to show that these dead ones are once again united with them. It is believed that, they have come back to look after their families and continue tasks they are yet to complete in this world. Thus, Idowu avers that, "The life of the ancestor in after-life is a reality."[27]

The belief in afterlife is expressed in the Yoruba belief in the transmigration of the soul (*akudaaya*). This position intermediates Yoruba cultural belief in immortality of the soul on the one hand, and reincarnation on the other. In a simple sense, transmigration of soul is simply the belief that a person that is dead is capable of re-appearing in another place (not in the heaven, but in this physical world). This dead person goes to this new place with his/her body and soul. One thing that seems fundamental, here, is that the Yoruba believe that a person can live, die, live again, die, and live again in a continuum, even in this world. A glance at Yoruba cultural movies and myths would clearly affirm a version of transmigration of life which they call *akudaaya*. This belief, to be clear, is quite dissimilar from the Yoruba believe in *abiku* (born to die). While the former is a claim of life after death, the latter appears not to. Whatever the case is, it is not our intent to discuss *abiku* in this paper. Having explored the discourse on afterlife from the Yoruba philosophical background, it seems fundamental that we consider the epistemic, normative and metaphysical relevance of this belief—in its varieties. This is what I think through in the next section.

III. Yoruba Perspective of Afterlife: A Critique

It appears that the belief in life after death is primarily a metaphysical and epistemic claim. As a metaphysical claim, it presupposes that there are two worlds—heaven and earth. That is, beyond this physical earth, life continues in an eternal place. This presupposes, also, that the soul lives on in the non-ephemeral world. Moreover, as an epistemic claim, the belief in life after death suggests that it is not only true that an external world exists, it implies also that such a world (heaven) is knowable and that the human soul resides in the body before and after death via reincarnation, transmigration or eternal rest. Whereas these claims are debatable as a matter of philosophical cogitation, I seek to argue that the status of this belief leaves us rather to rethink its moral import, than to validate its metaphysical and epistemic hypotheses. Let us now consider some of the bases why the belief cannot pass the gamut of epistemic and ontological justifications, before delving into what I consider to be the

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[27] Idowu, "African Traditional Religion", 134.

appropriate framework to reflecting on the Yoruba belief in an afterlife. To do so, I shall introduce a demarcation between knowledge (*imo*) and belief (*igbagbo*).

The subject matter of metaphysics is being: that which is. We cannot doubt the existence of the body since evidence attest that it can be divided, it can occupy space and it is visible. The Yoruba grant that the body exists. They also believe that the soul and *ori* are part of human nature, and that they leave the body at death. While death is taken to be the separation of these metaphysical entities, the soul continues in existence when the human body decomposes. While one cannot deny the claim that the body decays, one wonders what evidence Yoruba have to infer immortality of the soul if we mean by 'the soul' what is non-physical. The defence of this metaphysical postulate is the crux of the epistemic dimension of this paper. We question then: Is belief the same thing as knowledge in the Yoruba epistemology? Does Yoruba culture have an epistemology that can resolve the contradiction or logical challenges in the cluster of beliefs lump up by the traditionalists in their belief in life after death? And, if Yoruba cultural belief is non-static as well as non-restrictive to only traditionalist account, then how can the contemporary philosopher resolve the challenges at the core of the Yoruba belief in 'life after death'?

To begin with, an address of Yoruba epistemology is apt. The concepts of *imo* and *igbagbo* are fundamental in Yoruba cultural description of epistemology. Someone who has *imo* is believed to know. How does one know? Yoruba believe that it is only someone that has *imo* that has sourced for the evidence of a given claim. To them, only what one experiences can give one knowledge (*imo*). Hence, like Western empiricists, the Yoruba rely on the senses of touch, taste, sight, smelling and hearing as the basis for knowing. In this respect, it is only a person that perceives things himself that can claim to have firsthand knowledge of an event. However, someone who does not have direct experience of events cannot be said to know if he only hears second-hand information about the events. Rather, what he only has is an opinion or belief (*igbagbo*) about the events.

There is similarity between Western and the Yoruba usage of the terms 'knowledge' and 'belief'. It is then informative that when one considers what the nature of knowledge is, to the Yoruba, it must be capable of being known. Since the object of thought must be opened to experience, any discourse or subject that is not possible to be verified falls in the realm of *igbagbo*. *Igbagbo*, herein, does not mean faith. Rather, it means mere opinion or belief which

may or may not be substantiated beyond reasonable doubt. So, the Yoruba still give room for a belief to be corroborated with evidences. Barry Hallen (2004:299-300) notes that:

> If and when *igbagbo* is challenged by another person, again the best solution would be to arrange some form of empirical test. In this case, since this is information I myself only know secondhand, the most reliable solution is for concerned would be to test it directly, so that information progress from being *igbagbo* to *imo* for all concerned, myself included. Next again would be to call all relevant witnesses who may have heard the same or similar secondhand information (*igbagbo*) or, even more definitely, have firsthand (*imo*) experience of what I can say claim to know on a secondhand (*igbagbo*) basis.[28]

From the Yoruba epistemology as cogitated above, one may seek to find out on what basis is the belief in life after death erected. Is the belief based on *imo* or *igbagbo*? It is vital to note that the traditionalists and their contemporary counterparts are divided on whether they have 'knowledge of the belief' or they have 'opinion of the belief'. As a matter of fact, to have the former is to claim that there are empirical evidences available to prove that life after death is a fact. To hold the latter, is to attempt to use belief to justify belief. In other words, it would mean that one is using opinion in justifying another opinion. In this case, the two metaphysical claims are 'constructed opinions'. That is, for instance, if one holds that the soul exists in an external world, this is the first claim (or belief) that requires a justification.

If this first position has not been validated, and the person again argues that this belief is true on the basis that people (other than the arguer) have noted that such belief is true, then two unjustified claims have emerged. Rather than basing the truth of a belief on another belief, one 'ought to' make good the argument by advancing instead an epistemic defense through *imo*. But we need to ask: Can this defense be made in the case of life after death? As Ogungbemi rightly argues, "There is no way we can empirically know or ascertain what goes on in the hereafter. All we can do is either speculate that something is there for man or simply confront the problem of death with an existential-humanistic spirit which does not believe in life after death."[29]

Inasmuch as we are skeptical that such epistemic defence can be provided, we consider it significant that those who make such claim should at least entertain a little bit of tolerance to counter positions since neither side of the argument has conclusive evidence. My paper does

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[28] Barry Hallen, "Yoruba Moral Epistemology," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 299-300.

[29] S. Ogungbemi, *A Critique of African Cultural Beliefs* (Lagos: Pumark Nigeria Limited, 1997), 78.

not pursue an epistemic resolution to this contentious metaphysical cum religious debate in afterlife. As a religious belief, one can only believe it since we do not have indubitable facts to corroborate this belief.

While epistemic justification of claims may be harsh as a standard of testing the customary beliefs of the traditional Yoruba, at least, for the sake of argument and improvement of the cultural values of the Yoruba, one needs to stress that there are diverse incoherencies and contradictions in Yoruba cultural beliefs. It is such that if one belief is true, the other may be false, whereas others may be somewhat baseless. For instance, if one takes the Yoruba belief in *ori* seriously (that is, if *ori* means fixed destiny, whether the one given to us or selected by us from Ajala's court before coming into this world as the Yoruba myth suggested), then the claim that a child that dies before his time—experiences an unnatural death—does not arise. If this is taken, then the claim that the spirit will be wandering because it has not fulfilled its allotted time (in the case of *akudaaya*) becomes unattractive. To corroborate our argument here, Ogungbemi writes that, "How do we know that every man chose several years he wanted to live on earth or in heaven? Why is it that the death of a child or young adult is not attributed to natural cause of death since he might have chosen to die young? Is this not a bizarre assumption which attempts to confuse imagination with reality? Perhaps, it is."[30]

Is the issue we are discussing a mere rhetorical problem that does not have any import? Of course, our answer is in the negative. The discourse on life, death and afterlife, in fact, is a crucial one that requires more urgent attention than ever before. In this paper, I urge a contemplation to espouse its normative significance having shown that its metaphysical and epistemic imports are problematic. To cogitate on the normative strength of the belief in life after death, it seems crucial to note that some associated concepts are used in Yoruba metaphysics. These concepts include: man, destiny, death, life, ritual, God, soul, sin, heaven and so on. These concepts are used to certain normative ends, dissimilar from the epistemic and ontological ends they were used for.

For instance, the Yoruba believe that man is a composition of body and soul. The soul is what leaves the body to heaven to account for his deeds on earth. If the soul sins, then the Yoruba believe that the soul will be punished by Olodumare in the life after death. Herein, they strike the point that the soul should wash itself clean from *ese* (sin) before leaving this ephemeral world. To wash one clean from sin, the Yoruba socio-normative concept of *iwapele* (patience

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[30] Ogungbemi, 75.

and good character), *omoluabi* (well-trained person) and *suuru* (patience) are encouraged. People need to develop these traits if their souls are to be freed from punishment. Hence, one could see why the Yoruba often emphasize that one should patiently, peacefully and carefully live a good life so that when one dies, he/she will become an ancestor. The fact of being an ancestor is tied to living a good life after death; the moral import of the belief in life after death becomes evident. This, indeed, is crucial for social togetherness that the Yoruba communitarian ethics seeks to project.

Moreover, the fact that ritual and sacrifices are injected into the Yoruba belief in hereafter seems to suggest that not only that the Yoruba desire the well-being of the deceased but also the good of the community. Sacrifices are meant for social and spiritual cleansing, and for seeking unity and cooperation among the people and the supernatural world. The effectiveness of the notion of sacrifice cannot be overemphasized in aiding and promoting the common good. During ritual rites, 'dos and don'ts' are explained. People are then properly integrated into the community, where taboos are highlighted and frameworks for resolving social abominations are narrated. All these help to confront problem of vices that have pummeled contemporary society.

The discourse on death therefore enables us to reflect about our lives. While *ori* reminds us that we have a specific time to use on earth, death probes us to be mindful that we are mortal beings whose life is ephemeral. In the midst of everyday reflection of our individuality and our death, 'life after death' thus helps everyone to be self-conscious of the implications of his/her actions, thereby helping persons to reshape their nature since sin is empirically punished in this world. This reward/punishment dichotomy is what provoked the Yoruba belief in life after death.

Conclusion

This paper has reflected on the Yoruba belief in life after death. The notion of life and death are discussed, taking into consideration different segments of the Yoruba cultural account of life after death. We showed that life is ephemeral in this world, whilst death is a transitory process to a new life via (a) immortality of the soul; (b) reincarnation; and (c) transmigration of the soul. These provoked a philosophical reflection on these metaphysical cum religious beliefs.

We went on to deliberate on the belief in life after death, thereby raising ontological, epistemic and normative arguments. The paper demonstrated through the exploration of concepts of *imo* (knowledge) and *igbagbo* (belief) that the Yoruba idea of life after death falls short of logical and systematic explorations. While we maintained that this illogically does not translate to the claim that the Yoruba are irrational, we noted that there exist some conflicting claims in cluster of beliefs upon which the belief in life after death was erected. The implication noted was that, if one of these beliefs (say, for instance, belief in *ori* (destiny) collapsed; then other beliefs erected on it are likely to collapse. Hence, the paper demonstrated that contemporary Yoruba scholars should begin to develop a defense for some of the ill-equipped and/or ill-thought-out metaphysics on life, death and, life after death, among other Yoruba beliefs.

However, we did not claim that the Yoruba philosophical analysis of life after death is useless even if we claimed that it lacked a well-articulated logical defence in its epistemic and ontological status. The liveliness and imperativeness of the discourse is shown on what we considered to be the normative imports of the belief. Hence, the moral imports of the belief were shown, wherein, we posited that it was aimed at social and spiritual cleansing, cooperation and at moralizing human nature. This makes the discourse crucial for contemporary reflection.

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African Traditional Religion: Myth or Reality?

Raymond Chukwuebuka Okoro, OFMCap.

John Owen E. Adimike

&

Department of Theology, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu.

Okorojunior3@gmail.com

Lecturer, Don Bosco Training Institute (Tema)

Owenadimike15@gmail.com

Abstract

The target of our paper is to articulate the grounds that legitimize the foundation of an African Traditional Religion as a distinct religious enterprise with its own philosophical fundamentals as well as its own tenets and framework. In this paper, we engage the relevant concepts that are crucial to the success to any paper that attempts to demonstrate the reality of African Traditional Religion (henceforth, ATR): specifically, we will engage the questions of the existence of a Supreme Being and provide an argument in favour of belief in its existence, the problem of evil, and the structure of a properly ATR theodicy.

Keywords: Supreme Being; Evil; Theism; African Traditional Religion; Theodicy

Introduction

African Philosophy of Religion (for short, APR), just like its parent discipline—African Philosophy, is still a dynamic pubescent academic venture. This field is replete with numerous perspectives on a host of emergent and crucial topics that centre on the religious perspective, articulation, and experience from an authentically African perspective. While we may argue as to what constitutes as a criterion for considering a thought system as 'authentically' African, we however do not call into question, the fact that there have been

quite original perspectives in the field of APR, such as the philosophies of vitality,[1] force,[2] life-enhancement,[3] and conventionalism.[4] However, these philosophies all work with some basic assumptions in mind. One of such assumptions is the fact that APR is an entailed consequence of African Philosophy. This entailment is seen in the fact that philosophy is an overarching umbrella which encapsulates every district of reality: either as a key pillar of its field, or as a meta-perspectival study[5] of first-order disciplines. Another assumption is the entailment of African Traditional Religion (ATR) from APR. This entailment is somewhat curious. One may argue that if there is an APR, then its subject matter would have to be ATR. We think that while this may be correct, it could also be that the subject matter would be any form of religious organization, but the analysis would be methodologically African.

Though the assumption of the existence of ATR is transitively deduced from the existence of an African Philosophy,[6] the job of providing thorough justification for ATR is not as rigorously pursued as the contents of ATR itself! However, any subject matter whatsoever which is pursued actively and fastidiously, devoid of any justification whatsoever, is akin to a myth. The point is not so much that this thing does not exist, but that it lacks explanatory basis that warrants the active pursuit it enjoys. Thus, our concern is to present in this paper, the necessary articulation that grounds the existence of ATR. To do this, we argue that the existence of ATR is justified if we can articulate a defense of the major tenets that distinguish ATR as a religious template of its own right. To that end, this paper is structured into three; the first is marshalled by Raymond Okoro, and the last two by John Owen Adimike. The first concerns itself with an articulation of ATR and the survey of prerequisite discussions in this regard. The second section will address the question of the existence of the Supreme Being in

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[1] Olusegun Oladipo, *Philosophy of the Supreme Experience: An Introduction to African Religion* (Ibadan: University Press, 1997).

[2] R. E. Nwobodo, "An Epistemological Interpretation of Forces in Igbo Ontology", *Nnadiebube Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2021): 154-179.

[3] Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. R. Wright (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981), 171-181.

[4] Kwasi Wiredu, "African Conceptions of God", *Dialogue: An International Journal of Philosophy* 20, nos.3-4 (1981): 370-388.

[5] Meta-perspectival subfields of philosophy are much more replete and functionally relevant than the traditional pillars of philosophy. From these second-order studies from a philosophical point of view, the relevance of philosophy today is still feasible. Examples of such meta-perspectival subfields include philosophy of law, philosophy of technology, philosophy of development, philosophy of feminism, philosophy of medicine, and philosophy of science. The characteristic feature of the meta-perspectival fields is the formulation: 'philosophy of *X*' where *X* represents any first-order discipline.

[6] The existence of African Philosophy is no longer a point of disputation in academic circles. However, the question which pertains to African philosophy, as argued by John Owen, is now that of the methodology and impact of this field. See, John Owen E. Adimike, "On the Nature of the Debate on the Existence of African Philosophy", *The Nuntius: A Philosophical Periodical* 1, no. 2 (2023): 33-49.

ATR. Why we single out this aspect is that a religious organization is only recognized as a cult of worship if/when there is an object of religious veneration;[7] this in turn implies belief in a Supreme Being [otherwise called God].[8] The final section of this work will dedicate its length to the articulation of an African theodicy that defends the concept of the Supreme Being it upholds from any defeater that aims at collapsing the transcendental and immanent character of this Being. By articulating these, we demonstrate a defense/justification of ATR as a reality.

I. The Idea of African Traditional Religion

The definition of African Traditional Religion is a difficult one. For one, the very nature of its nomenclature is problematic; some scholars contend that the religious practice common to African peoples before the advent of colonialists is a singular 'African Traditional Religion', while others argue on the same basis, for African Traditional Religions (ATRs), since religion is contingent on socio-cultural factors and, Africa is not one homogenous, monolithic cultural context. Hence, the very first task we are burdened with is to justify why the term 'African Traditional Religion' is preferable to 'African Traditional Religions'. Only after this can we precisely articulate what we mean by ATR.

The debate as to the appropriateness of ATR over ATRs and vice-versa, is a longstanding one in the landscape of APR. There are some scholars like John S. Mbiti, who argue that traditional religion in Africa is a phenomenal miscellany and as such, it is improper to group this assortment as one singular unit. In his 1969 opus, he writes that "we speak of African traditional religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system. These religions are a reality which calls for academic scrutiny and which must be reckoned with in modern fields of life…".[9] Mbiti's claim that the factuality of the differentia in religious beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies, suffices to ground the practices of each native group of Africans as independent religions, is further supported by J. Booth. Booth argues that:

> Our reading and observation turn up a profusion of phenomena to which we may attach such labels as supreme gods [sic], nature spirits, ancestor rituals, initiation practices…and demons

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[7] Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), chaps. 2, 4, 6.
[8] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902).
[9] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

with considerable variety from place to place. Perhaps we will decide that there is no such thing as 'African Religion', but 'African Religions'.[10]

In favour of the singular description, i.e., ATR, Laurent Magesa argues for the oneness of ATR from a historical point of view. He maintains that since the time of the Le Zoute Conference of missionaries in Belgium, back in the 1920s, the homogeneity of ATR has been acknowledged. He argues that there is, as evidence for the singularity of ATR, "an essential unity: 'underlying all the divergence that marks the pagan… Negro tribes, there is a certain fundamental unity of belief and outlook upon the world… Africa is a unity—a unity in diversity".[11] Aylward Shorter, in citational concord with J. V. Taylor, argues that:

> a careful look through actual observation and comparative discussions with Africans from various parts of the continent will show, first and foremost, that there is a common factor which the coined word negritude will express aptly. There is a common Africanness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices of Africa. This common factor may be due…to the fact that most Africans share common origins to race and customs and religious practices.[12]

J. S. Mbiti himself, in a later edition of *African Religions and Philosophy*, came to admit the singular nature of ATR. The African scholars who argue for the singularity of ATR today, maintain that ATR as a singular religious entity, possesses one fundamental worldview, spread out in the various cultural settlements of Africa. ATR is a single religion with variations in expressions;[13] in other words, as expressed by Felix T. Olamide, ATR is "monotheistic/singular in essence and plural in liturgical expressions".[14] The later Mbiti argues that ATR ought to be treated as a singular unit. The later Mbiti is convinced that ATR is firmly rooted across Sub-Saharan Africa and is identifiable by its basic religious worldviews, which remarkably is consistent over this wide expanse.[15] We too, are strongly convinced of the singularity of ATR and contend that just as there are varieties within other religions (such as the great Abrahamic religions), which do not pass for separate individual religions, so also the presence of variations of expression of ATR is no legitimate basis for

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[10] J. S. Booth, "An Approach to African Religion", in *African Religions: A Symposium*, ed. J. S. Booth (New York: NOK Publishers, 1977), 3.

[11] L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 6.

[12] Aylward Shorter, "Concepts of Social Justice in Traditional Africa", *Pro Dialogo Bulletin*, 12 (1977): 32-51; 48.

[13] Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973).

[14] Felix T. Olamide, lecture series on African Traditional Religion, Department of Philosophy, Don Bosco Varsity (February-June, 2023).

[15] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991).

postulating ATRs. Given that we have satisfied this clarification of ATR vs ATRs, we shall now look at a working definition of ATR.

There are two possible ways of defining ATR. The first is by offering a positive description of ATR and the second is by defining it *via negativa*. The logician would immediately object by stating that defining a thing by showing what it is not, both defies one of the five rules of definition, and at the same time is a very obscure way of definition. For example, if I describe the colour purple as the residue of the elimination of everything that is non-purple, I have not really provided a definition because I have presumed the existence of the colour purple and used that in defining the colour purple. Thus, I have provided a circular definition. Moreover, that definition, if granted, does not explain what it is to say something is a colour, nor does it define purple. However, this means still has some merit as it shows one the path that one needs to pursue in tracing a precise definition. If I am to define a human being, knowing that it is not a piece of furniture, an electronic gadget, a weather forecast, or an inanimate object helps to clarify my thinking. Thus, in the same way, by stating what ATR is not, we can clarify what we want to think around. However, we shall positively define what ATR is.

ATR is a religion that originates from within the people of the continent, not outside. ATR has been defined by Stamer as: "…a global framework of life, encompassing every human situation and governing the whole of society. It is closely linked to the ancestral soil and places each African both in the succession of generations (his ancestors), in his [sic] relationship with his fellow creatures and in his productive activities. Everything is religious!... it offers an overall framework of security…".[16] Also, Emefie Ikenga-Metuh offers a definition of ATR drawn from African practices and beliefs; he codifies ATR as the "institutionalized patterns of belief and worship practiced by various African societies from time immemorial in response to the 'Supernatural' as manifested in their environment and practice".[17] As a religion, ATR proposes that everything [i.e., the whole of reality], features in the religious landscape. It holds belief in a Supreme Being assisted and attended to, by other deities; the relationship with this Supreme Being is hardly explicit but it is nonetheless real with the other deities who intervene directly in the quotidian affairs of this world while the Supreme remains quite aloof. These divine intermediaries may be dialogued with, and commanded, through ritualized ceremonies, formalized rites, sacrificial offerings, and the

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[16] J. Stamer, *Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Estella, 1995), 121, 125.
[17] Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions* (Onitsha: IMICO Publishers, 1987), p. 17.

mediation of ancestors and personal gods. The social impact of ATR is its guaranty for group survival and the transmission of cultural forms of life to later generations through the institution and observation of rites, taboos, ceremonies, folklores, and cults, which ensure total solidarity and foster group identity.[18]

J. S. Mbiti formulates five elements that ground a religion: beliefs, ceremonies [practices, festivals], sacred items and places, values and morals, and holy people as well as officials. In relation to ATR, the item of belief refers to that vital part that expresses the African cosmic outlook, existential philosophy, doxastic leaning towards the Supreme Being, spirits, nature, life forms, and themselves, and also, the sense of meaning and eschatology. The way these beliefs are expressed—in prayer, sacrifices, rituals, and customary observances—constitutes the ceremonial aspect of ATR. In executing these ceremonies, special objects are used and at specific times, and in specific places; these objects—be they manufactured or natural—are *holy*. The aspect of morals and values expresses the religious ideas that guide social interaction, personal worldview formulation, and engender a sense of 'ethos' for navigating matters of moral delicateness. Even though ATR has neither a scripture nor a founder or central figure like the Abrahamic religions, it sure does have officials who oversee the performance of rites and the celebration of ceremonies and sacrifices. In ATR, there is also veneration for those adherents who have lived worthy lives and have passed on; these are called ancestors.[19] ATR is thus characterized by its belief in a Supreme Being, deities, ancestors, and other spirit entities/forces. Negatively defined, ATR *is not* ancestor worship, fetishism, and animism.[20]

The ontology of ATR is largely anthropocentric. In ATR, humanity is placed as the metric for the functional analysis of everything in the cosmos. We may say that the Supreme Being is the *Creator* of humankind, and its *Sustainer*; the god *Igwe* for the Igbos, is the sky-god, responsible for sending down rain for the benefit of humankind, etc. As Mbiti writes:

> this anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one is to destroy the whole [of] existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another.[21]

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[18] Stamer, *Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 122-125.
[19] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, 11-13.
[20] Mbiti, 15.
[21] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), 16.

The whole idea of potency in ATR revolves around the concept of *force*. In ATR, force is accessible to all levels of being, varying on the cadre of existence that each entity occupies.[22] The Supreme Being wields a great deal of force which is unmatched by any in the universe; by being transcendent in relation to the universe, and thereby contextually all-powerful,[23] this Being is able to command great influence of force over any and every other being in the universe. This force which permeates the universe is also accessible to the spirits, to humans, and to other animate forms. The mechanisms by which this force may be accessed or manipulated is not a homogenous affair as different cultural backgrounds have their own ways of conceptualizing this; to dilate on this matter would be a complete veering off the course of the present discourse. While we admit that inanimate objects do have force in them—given that force is a transcendental of being in APR—we do not think that these objects may manipulate force in any meaningful way that the former categories of being may. This is owing to the fact that these inanimate beings are devoid of consciousness. However, vegetative and [lower] animal life forms may not be said to meaningfully manipulate force in any *intentional* sense as would be executed by humans and spirit beings.

Among human beings, the manipulation of forces varies in strength. The 'native doctors', priests, and priestesses possess otherworldly knowledge which enables them to access divine force and greatly manipulate the force in nature and more so, the forces in people. Also, there are the 'divine rulers'. In some parts of the continent, the rulers are understood to possess some form of divine power; they are seen to be in connection with nature such that their bodily movements connote some act of nature (e.g., the genuine smile of this ruler brings about rainbows, etc.). These rulers are looked upon with some religious veneration. For example, the Yoruba of Nigeria accord their central monarch with honours of quasi-divinity. These rulers are invested with great deal of spiritual power and exposed to heavy doses of rituals such that they are akin to mortal gods. With such amount of spiritual power bestowed upon them, they are able to manipulate nature in a manner that is not ordinarily accessible to the human being.[24]

The idea of ATR as discussed in this section of our paper concludes with a word on humankind, and spirits; the discussion on the Supreme Being will be the focus of the next

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[22] E. Ikenga-Metuh, "The Concept of Man in African Traditional Religion: With Particular Reference to the Igbo of Nigeria", in *Readings in African Traditional Religion: Structure, Meaning, Relevance, Future*, ed. E. M. Uka (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1991).

[23] The paper of John Owen will clarify the sense in which contextual omnipotence may be meaningfully ascribed to the Supreme Being.

[24] G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), 66-69.

section. When we consider humankind, we think of a rational, moral, agentive, spirit-body species that develops in processes. This idea of processual growth is reflected in the rites of passage that mark the transition from one phase of life to the other: from childhood to puberty; from puberty to young adulthood; from young adulthood to marriageable-ness, etc. These rites are symbolic of the conception of the person in ATR—a unity of spirit and body. Hence, as the person registers bodily advances, so also must the spirit engage in transitions too. With this, the person enters fully into society and may assume social responsibilities. When we consider spirits in ATR, we are loosely referring to a category of being with an ontology that rests in between that of the Supreme Being and that of humankind, though not identical to either.[25] These spirits are grouped into two main categories: the nature spirits and the human spirits. The former group are spiritualized personifications of natural objects and forces and are bifurcated into earth spirits and sky spirits.[26] The latter group refers to the spirits of human beings who lived morally and socio-culturally upright lives, died happily, and were accorded with funerary honours appropriate to their stations of life. These spirits are accorded with reverence and are venerated. They are called the ancestors or 'living-dead'.[27] These beings are guardians over their survivors and they can be entreated for help, blessings, or placated in aversion of their rage. With the foregoing, the discussion may now turn to the discourse of the Supreme Being in ATR.

II. The Idea of the Supreme Being in ATR

In the context of African society, the existence of a Supreme Being is suggested in the names people bear, and the exclamations made. In ATR, the existence of the Supreme is taken for granted and hence, there is no effort expended at producing an articulate argument that demonstrates the plausibility of the existence of this sort of being. As H. M. Majeed offers, the existence of the Supreme Being in the context of ATR, "is not based on pure reason (a priorism) but on reflections regarding this partly empirical world and/or human experiences".[28] From the navigation of the world, together with the acquisition of spiritual experiences, the individual is brought to the conclusion of the existence of the Supreme Being and the real presence of this being in the world (immanence). Ada Agada argues that

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[25] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1990 edition).
[26] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Traditional Religion*, 71.
[27] Mbiti, 75-77.
[28] H. M. Majeed, 2016, 80.

"[f]or Africans, God is at once transcendent and immanent, remote in His ineffable majesty, yet near to humanity in His benevolence towards His creation".[29]

African philosophers are divided into two major camps on their views of the Supreme Being with respect to his transcendence or immanence. These two camps are those of the African Theism and the Limited God (further notes on this are provided in John Owen's submission). The former conceives of the Supreme in the categories of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. The latter, thinks of the Supreme as not-all-good (but sufficiently good), not-all-knowing (but incomparably knowledgeable), and not-all-powerful (but incomparably potent). From these views, African philosophers specializing in APR and metaphysics draw conclusions on the transcendence or immanence of the Supreme Being. The tradition of African theism is more favourable towards the view of the Supreme as transcendent since the zenith of these qualities [i.e., of knowledge, power, and goodness] suggests that it is at a height not reachable by others down the rungs.[30] Conversely, the Limited God camp is more attuned towards the immanence position.[31]

As said at the outset of this section, the fact of the existence of the Supreme is extractable from the names people bear—e.g. Chukwuebuka (an Igbo name meaning the Supreme is great), Oluwatobiloba (a Yoruba name meaning that 'the Supreme Being is a great king), among others—and the exclamations and ejaculatory remarks. These provide a basis to maintain a view of the transcendental and immanent properties of the Supreme Being. It is our conviction that upholding any at the expense of the other results in a problematic situation—transcendence without immanence results in a very removed Supreme Being and consequentially leaves us no longer with classical theism but with deism: the view that a Supreme Being exists and is causally responsible for the creation of the universe but is uninterested and uninvolved in the lives and affairs of the world that it causally necessitated. Furthermore, if we were to adopt immanence at the expense of transcendence, we would be not just limiting this Being, but rendering it causally redundant; if this Being is causally redundant in the face of material processes/physical explanations, then this Being is as good

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[29] Ada Agada, "God's Existence and the Problem of Evil in African Philosophy of Religion", in *Handbook of African Philosophy*, eds. Elvis Imafidon, Mpho Tshivhase, and Björn Freter (Cham: Springer, 2023), 560.

[30] J. L. Kosky, "The Birth of the Modern Philosophy of Religion and the Death of transcendence", in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, And Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. R. Schwartz (London: Routledge, 2004).

[31] O. A. Balogun, "The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil", *Lumina* 20, no. 2 (2009): 1–20.

as absent.[32] Hence, careful attention to the conception of traditional African societies (such as the Akan[33] and Yoruba[34] societies) demonstrates the dual character of this Being.

If this Being is both transcendent and immanent, then there is good basis for the existence of this Being. Here we offer our own reflections on how the conclusion of the existence of the Supreme Being may be reached from the African perspective and the context of beliefs of the African society. As Majeed excogitated, belief in the Supreme Being "is not based on pure reason (a priorism) but on reflections regarding this partly empirical world and/or human experiences".[35] Hence, we offer our reflections sourced from 'this partly empirical world'. Our argument is a spirit-cosmological argument for the existence of the Supreme Being. It is a cosmological argument because just like any other form of cosmological argument provided in the sphere of Western philosophy, it begins with an empirical premise. However, noting the characteristic outlook of APR that this world is a continuum of material and immaterial dimensions, this empirical premise is injected with an ethereal coefficient. This is why we consider our argument to be spirit-cosmological in nature. The argument runs as follows:

The Adimike-Okoro Spirito-Cosmological Argument

I.   African cosmology habitually describes the universe as a vibrant and interconnected continuum, where everything (matter and non-matter) is interdependent and imbued with spiritual significance.

II. In the context of African cultures, there exists a pervasive belief in spirits and deities, suggestive of a deeply ingrained spiritual worldview.

III. The spiritual worldview holds irrespective of the diversity of religious beliefs across Africa.

IV. From this spiritual worldview, African societies have established rituals, ceremonies, and traditions which centre on worship, supplication, appeasement, and communication with spiritual beings.

V.   These spiritual beliefs are the subject of narratives that attribute the origins of the world and humanity to the actions of divine beings.

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[32] Agada, "God's Existence and the Problem of Evil in African Philosophy of Religion", 560.

[33] Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. ed. (London: Temple University Press, 1995).

[34] J. A. I. Bewaji, "*Olodumare*: God in Yoruba belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil", *African Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1998): 1–17.

[35] H. M. Majeed, "God and the Demon in Cartesian and Akan Philosophies: A Comparative Analysis", *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 6 no. 2 (2016): 75–90; 80.

VI. These beings, to be causally potent, must possess some form of vital force which is believed to saturate all existence.

VII. All existence, coordinated therefore by this infiltrating force, displays remarkable order and harmony: spiritually and materially.

VIII. The order identifiable in this world is the result of either a committee of deities or the mental architecture of a single being.

IX. **Either** a committee of deities will have to be headed by a leader/chairperson superior to others, who commands and superintends the process of harmony and unity in the continuum of reality, **or** a single being is powerful enough to execute the creation and harmony of the continuum of reality singlehandedly.

X. Therefore, either way, *it is plausible* that a Being exists who is Supreme above all else in African cosmology.

Concerning the claim of premise VI, that these beings must possess some vital force may be understood in the light of the theory of forces which is largely homogenous across native African settlements; this view briefly suggests that all things are composed of force and that force is synonymous to the mitochondrion of being. Perhaps, also the claim of VIII appears problematic; if the order identifiable in the world is the product of a committee of deities, is the conclusion of the presence of a leader logically sequitur? Can we really arrive at the idea of a leader, even in the face of the possibility that the committee could be composed of stakeholders with equal status? The paper maintains that this conclusion is warranted. Consider the following argument structure:

1. A committee is a cluster of people convened for the execution of a specific function or the arrival at decisions on particular matters.

2. Effective decision-making necessitates the fixtures of mechanisms for the management of discussions, conflict resolutions, and the orderly facilitation of tasks.

3. These mechanisms are typically catered for by a leader or chairperson who organizes the activities, oversees participation, and guides the committee towards the accomplishment of its objectives.

4. Therefore, from the conceptualization of a committee in its functional sense, the logical deduction of the presence of a leader or chairperson is warranted.

This argument begins with the definition of a committee on the basis of its purpose; from this point, it introduces the necessity of structured organization for the effective execution of the

purpose of the group. To justify this introduction of necessity, the grounds involve practical observations such as: the role of structured organization in the avoidance of chaos, incoherence, the facilitation of efficient decisions, historical and empirical evidence from organizational behaviour, sociological and psychological bases and theories (e.g. Tuckman's theory of group development)[36]. The third premise asserts that the most straightforward and 'typical' way of achieving this structure is through the role of a chairperson/leader. If this is the case, we are informed that in making analysis by way of abductive thinking, the conclusions to be favoured are the conclusions that are more typical, and more simple. If that is the case, then the conclusion that such a committee of deities is typically headed by a chairperson, is most warranted than the opposite of a committee of members of equal statutory regard. Thus the nature of this argument favours the existence of a Supreme Being.

Thus, on the grounds of the cultural, religious, philosophical, and metaphysical data existent within the context of African thought and experience, we can collate the information to erect a possible argument that serves to affirm belief in the existence of a Supreme Being as conceived by African peoples. However, this argument is silent on the moral qualities of this Being and on the other qualities usually ascribed to this Being; there is no reason to not suspect that this Being is the same god believed in by the deist. However, as will be argued by John Owen, harmony is a characteristic feature of this world. From this property of harmony, we can understand and resolve many problematic features of the world. One of these is the problem of evil. This problem will not be discussed here, but we shall attempt to construct a genuinely African theodicy in the attempt to understand how ATR fares in this regard and what insights it may offer us.

III. The Idea of an ATR Theodicy

When we speak of theodicy, we refer to a defense of the goodness of the Supreme Being, or God as the case may be, in the face of the existence of evil. The Western paradigm of philosophy also construes theodicy to capture fundamentally, a defense of the omnipotence of God. This, however, is not necessarily so for the African, given that the idea of the Supreme Being in ATR does not always feature omnipotence as a necessary trait of this Being. The outline of theodicy that we shall propose in this paper, is largely sponsored by the framework provided by the ontology of consolationist philosophy. From the spirit-cosmological

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[36] B. W. Tuckman and M. A. C. Jensen, "Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited", *Group & Organization Studies* 2, no. 4 (1977): 419-427, https://doi.org/10.1177/105960117700200404 .

argument, premise (IX) is worded in such a way that supports either the African theistic tradition or the limitation view. From these perspectives, it is possible to take up positions with respect to the problem of evil; the theistic view basically takes the occurrence of moral evil to be the natural consequence of the freewill of human beings and physical evil as a consequence of the mechanisms of nature, without which the beauty of nature would be incomplete; the limitation view understands the Supreme Being to be short of absolute omnipotence and moral perfection and as such, is not obliged by character to eliminate evil in the world. These two views are inadequate in resolving the problem of evil and as such, cannot be independently pursued to construct a theodicy for ATR. We suspect that we can make recourse to the philosophical system of Consolationism in this regard.

Consolationism is a philosophy which fundamentally understands reality as deriving from a principle which is a unity of emotion and reason; the object of this philosophical system is to articulate a metaphysical basis for the balance between sentimentality and rationality in the investigation of the grounds of being. This consolationist framework understands the individual to be a 'melancholic being'—a *homo melancholicus*—defined by this sentimentality-rationality interplay, in which sentimentality is more primary than rationality.[37] Given that rationality is secondary to sentimentality by this frame of reference, Agada postulates the doctrine of *mood* to explain this mechanism. He takes mood to be an 'originary' intelligence and the ground of sentimentality, and simultaneously, the primitive precursor of rationality (proto-mind) which sets off the evolutionary course for more advanced forms of mental activity. In the human person, not only are sentimentality and rationality harmoniously fused, both aspects manifest with some real efficacy in the physical world without the one infringing on the value of the other.[38]

Agada's theory is epistemologically panpsychist. The theory "posits the fundamentality of mood, or primordial mind, which informs the basic constitution of all things, both what is alive in the sense of possessing mobility, sentience, and internal purposiveness and what seems not to be alive but which has the potentialities of aliveness, for instance, a stone".[39] The understanding of *mood* is fundamentally panpsychist as it is construed to be the cause of mentality. Agada even goes further to ascribe to *mood*, the implication of all unities and

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[37] Ada Agada, "A Truly African Philosophy", *Aeon* (2018), https://aeon.co/essays/consolationphilosophy-and-the-struggle-of-reason-in-africa. Accessed 9 May 2024.
[38] Agada.
[39] Agada, "God's Existence and the Problem of Evil in African Philosophy of Religion", 572.

opposites (good and evil, freedom and determinism, chaos and order).[40] As a fundamental entity prognosticating mentality, Agada characterizes its intrinsic principle/logic and outward orientation, to be what he calls '*yearning*'. *Yearning* is "the perpetual quest for the realization of freedom conceived as perfect willing, perfect acting, and perfect realizing".[41]

In relation to the Supreme Being or 'God', Agada takes this Being to be contemporaneous with *mood*: neither anterior to it, else its transcendence would obscure its immanence, consequently rendering this Being immune to *yearning*; nor is this Being posterior to *mood* otherwise it would "not have transcended the dialectic within its intellective-emotional unity that makes possible the emergence of personality out of the impersonality of *mood* as first principle, nor will this ancestor-God be able to transcend the yearning of its own fatalistic essence to become a being of power and glory precisely by reason of this God being a creator".[42] Hence, the Supreme Being is the first principle of *mood*.

ATR theodicy, building up from the consolationist ontology, construes the Supreme Being as essentially, *mood*. Since mood is essentially comprised of unities and opposites, and the Supreme Being is essentially *mood*, we cannot expect a perfect world: the fact of having a world manifesting evils of sorts is proof enough of the sort of Being construed in consolationist thought. Hence, ATR theodicy exonerates the Supreme Being from the blame for the evil in the world since everything is *mood*, and evil is part of the constitution of *mood*.[43] In fact, the theory of mood disposes of the idea of amorality for anything; "[s]ince *mood* defines every existent thing, nothing existent is utterly guiltless, not God, not humans, not animals, and not even inanimate things".[44]

Consolationist thought with respect to APR is still under development and one is sure to discover areas of improvement that ought to be pursued in the theory (for example the question of why the Supreme Being ought to even create at all). However, understanding the fact of the existence of the Supreme Being is largely unchallenged by APR and is a necessary component of ATR, we need to propose a genuinely African outline of theodicy that satisfies the authentic voice of ATR and African philosophy, without suffering grave harm to the African conception of the Supreme Being as a being who is both transcendent and immanent. This is what we believe the consolationist doctrine provides in service of APR.

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[40] Agada, 570.
[41] Agada, 570.
[42] Agada, 570.
[43] Agada, 572.
[44] Agada, 571.

Conclusion

Our task in this paper was to articulate the grounds in which ATR may be considered as a valid and valued system of religious thought and beliefs in which one may find present, certain tenets of belief and social impacting factors. The reason behind this lies in the challenge that is often smeared in the face of African philosophers, namely that the proposals of African thinking are either indistinguishable from those offered by the West, or they are so radically different that they ought to be looked upon with suspicion and with the analysis of mythical data suitable for any work of cultural anthropology. Against the purchase of this misconception, we have born this task of articulating the ways in which ATR would be affirmed as a reality, against the charge of the mythical character of ATR. To do this, we explored the content of ATR as a religious tenet and concluded that ATR is indeed a religious establishment which is at least, widespread in the Sub-Saharan Africa. We argued for the appropriateness of the description, ATR, over ATRs and showed that ATR possesses some distinctive features and makes central religious claims in the same manner as those of the Abrahamic religions.

To further ground ATR as a single religious establishment, we offered some analysis of the concepts of the Supreme Being present in APR and how these largely inform the approach to this Being and the proclamation of the transcendence or immanence of this Being. To legitimize the conception of the Supreme, we articulated what we called the spirit-cosmological argument for the existence of the Supreme Being in African thought. While we acknowledge that this argument does not capture the security of the essential characters of the Supreme being customarily ascribed by the African peoples, we are convinced that the articulation is necessary to show that belief in the Supreme Being, is just as rational as belief in the Judeo-Christian's God. To further elucidate the validity of ATR as a reality and not just mere mythology, we have presented an ATR theodicy outline, one in which a panpsychist worldview is fundamentally assumed as a way to understand the primitive substance of *mood*. This *mood* is present in all things and inheres within itself all pairs of things such as good and evil so that it is meaningless to ascribe amorality to anything or believe even inanimate objects have no moral standings. Thus, by this view, the Supreme Being is also seen as a unity of good and evil, and so also is the world. By this view, the problem of evil loses its menacing threat and the reality and strength of ATR is thus demonstrated.

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