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GLOBAL PHILOSOPHY
OF
RELIGION PROJECT
BIRMINGHAM CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

JOHN TEMPLET

African Philosophy of Religion from a Global Perspective: Deities, Ancestors, Relationality and the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

In this essay, we explore what the African Philosophy of Religion would look like from both a mono-disciplinary and comparative perspectives. To do this, a few concepts such as Gods, ancestorhood, relationality, and the problem of evil that appear in the essays in this special issue will be highlighted. Our aim here is not to provide a lengthy and rigorous analysis of the field of African Philosophy of Religion or even some of its main concepts, but to offer a platform for continuing discussion and development of the field.
Keywords: African Philosophy of Religion, Gods, Ancestors, Relationality, Problem of Evil.

Introduction

The broad field of African metaphysics has yet to attract sufficient attention from African philosophers. Even though some African philosophers have been contributing ideas to develop the field in recent times, more is still required. This makes our effort here both timely and relevant. African Philosophy of Religion is one of the components of African metaphysics, which like the other components such as African Philosophy of Mind, African Ontology, etc., is still in its nascence. The aim of the Global Philosophy of Religion project is to develop the discipline of Philosophy of Religion from a multi-cultural perspective, and thus initiate comparative discussions on the subject matters of the discipline. Our contribution to that project has two arms: the first consists of two separate international colloquia we organized in November of 2021. The second is this journal's special issue to put in print the papers presented at the colloquia. Our expectation is that both the colloquia and publication would spur debates and reactions that can generate further research in the field.

In this short essay, we will take a panoramic view of the field of African Philosophy of Religion. We will touch on some of the main concepts and issues in the field. We will show the potential of a comparative exercise in

Philosophy of Religion between Africa and China to motivate healthy and fruitful intercultural exchange. Finally, We will provide a summary of all the articles that appear in this special issue and show their promises in extending the frontiers of knowledge.

African Philosophy of Religion from a Global Perspective
The decline of the epistemological empire of the West has been announced in several fields of philosophical inquiry (SANTOS 2018; CHIMAKONAM 2019; CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES 2021). For example, today, in normative fields such as ethics and political philosophy, it is crucial to approach issues from a global viewpoint rather than just through the straw lens of one cultural particular. Nonetheless, it seems that the more theoretical fields of philosophy, such as philosophy of religion and metaphysics, have not yet become as global as other fields. With the Global Philosophy of Religion Project led by Professor Yujin Nagasawa, it may be the first time in the history of philosophy that there is a global and serious engagement with philosophies from the South regarding philosophy of religion ("The Global Philosophy of Religion Project" 2021). This special issue results from two conferences that we have organized funded by this project and they try to look at philosophy of religion putting African philosophy at the center of a global debate. Both conferences were focused on African philosophy and the problem of evil, but with slightly distinct sub-focuses. Our first conference focused on the existence of deities, ancestors and other supernatural entities. Broadly speaking, the papers focused on exploring the meaning and nature of such entities. Thus, several papers were presented discussing what ancestors, deities, sacrifice, the devil mean, taking mostly a comparative view and exploring how these definitions relate to questions of evil.

The second conference more directly tackled the problem of evil in the African philosophical context. The problem of evil results from a specific understanding of God, but the way that Africans understand Gods may not be the same and different problems of evil may result from this. The result of these two conferences was a series of articles that either tackles the issue directly or contributes to its understanding by offering a comparative perspective with Chinese and Western philosophy.

Thus, our project centers on unbundling the field of African Philosophy of Religion from a global perspective. Why is such an approach important? It is one thing to theorize on a discipline and quite another to bring such theories to the global marketplace of ideas. Our focus is to explore what most of the ideas on the concepts and issue in the discipline would look like when considered comparatively from the viewpoint of another culture like the Chinese. What, for instance, are the similarities and differences between the African and the Chinese conceptions of God? Rouyan Gu addresses this concern in his contribution to this issue. In reading Gu, one can see that some of the ideas of God present in the Yoruba traditional religion are also present in some ancient Chinese religions.

The same is the case in Pao-Shen Ho essay that compares monotheism in Igala and Christian religions. Certain nuances abound that indicate that the concept of monotheism might not mean precisely the same thing in both religions. This speaks to how much cultures of the world share in common, but also how much differences exist between them. What is implicated here is the need for mutual respect and recognition of the validity of each other's epistemic standpoint. Part of the problem that engulf intercultural relations between diverse peoples is the error of each side, supposing that its epistemic formation is the best. In this way, epistemic marginalization (see CHIMAKONAM & DU' TOIT 2018) or even outright epistemicide (see SANTOS 2014) could become a serious problem militating against fruitful intercultural relations.

From the above, one can argue that veritable benefits of comparative exercises include testing one culture's ideas against another's, but also creating an avenue for fostering intercultural communication and understanding. For example, Wei Hua in his contribution on Augustine, Ancestors and the Problem of Evil discloses an interesting connection between Augustine's theory of evil largely accepted as Western and the various ideas latent in African traditional religions. He was able to demonstrate that Augustine may have seriously been influenced by various African cultural worldviews of his time. Part of the benefit of this discovery can be seen in colonial and decolonial discourses where arguments are rift on whether Africa has contributed any ideas to modern civilization or not. Comparative exercises, thus, enable us to learn about other cultures, what we share or do not share in common with others, and how such knowledge could be useful in forging healthy intercultural relations.

Further, even though artificial borders and presumed racial differences have widened the gap between cultures, digital technologies are demonstrating their capacity to make the world a "global village" (MCLUHAN 1962, 1967). But is it necessary that the world should become a global village? This is not a trivial question. It is easy for a careless observer to dismiss such a necessity, but what would life led in isolation be like? At the individual level, it can be poor, lonely and sad, perhaps, but it is the same at the group or cultural level. Human beings are social animals, in that they require the interaction of others to flourish. This is also the case for societies. No culture or people can thrive alone. Otherwise, many nations today would prefer to be isolated from the rest. In fact, after the construction of the global matrix of modernity that brings all cultures of the world together economically, socially, politically, and otherwise, isolation is increasingly being used as punishment.. The untold suffering and hardship in the countries that are isolated prove that it is as difficult for nations to survive alone as it is for individuals.

To substantiate the above, Naomi Thurston in her contribution, compares the ideas of communal relationships using ancestor commemoration in both the Akan and East Asian cultures. We can look at the common traits in both cultures, as things that underscore the importance of cooperative and

complementary living not just for human beings but for diverse cultures. Nowadays, people of diverse nationalities emigrate to other culture areas. The cultural shock that stems from such often leads to conflicts, xenophobic and otherwise. Sociologists often study ways of averting such conflicts, which mainly consists of disseminating knowledge on the things that unite people (TAVERNARO-HAIDARIAN 2021). Thurston uses the Akan and East Asian contexts to unravel the metaphysical, moral and social dimensions of communal living through ancestor commemoration.

Indeed, various forms of comparative exercises shed light on the significance of cultural diversity and uniformity. This point is made manifest in the contributions of Bony Schachter on the polythetic definition of sacrifice from the African and Chinese cultural worldviews; Jiechen Hu on the comparison on divinities and ancestors from African and Confucian perspectives; Jun Wang and Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues on the Problem of Evil from an Intercultural Perspective. These essays, in more than one way, demonstrate the shared values between African and Chinese cultures. The knowledge of these values has the potential to strengthen Afro-Chinese relations in a world beset by differences. These are the sort of things we can look at to promote comparative exercises such as the one in the area of Philosophy of Religion. In this project, our center-piece may have been the African philosophy of Religion, but an approach from the global perspective that allows philosophers from Africa and China to debate and share ideas remains critical in forging an intellectual basis for healthy intercultural relations.

Deities, Ancestors, Relationality and the Problem of Evil
The first eight articles of this special issue offer African perspectives on God and the problem of evil. Aribiah Attoe addresses the problem of evil by reconstructing an idea of God (grounded in African philosophy) as material and depersonalized. Amara Ani Chimakonam explores the evidential problem of evil taking on board African religions. By using the Igbo concept of Ejima, she contends that the evidential problem of evil does not necessarily pose a problem to African religions. Ada Agada criticizes two prominent philosophers (John A.I. Bewaji and Ademola Kazeem Fayemi) who have addressed the problem of evil from an African viewpoint. In his paper, he contests these philosophers' approach of endorsing a limited God in their discussions on the problem of evil, and then offers an alternative view. Although these philosophers amply disagree on the nature of evil, their views represent new intellectual platforms for debates in the burgeoning field of African Philosophy of Religion.

Emmanuel Ofuasia discusses the existence of the Devil in African religions using Yoruba and Igbo philosophies. He contends that there is no place for the existence of the Devil in these religions. His argument is that references to the Devil that abound in various African languages may have stemmed from the influence of the Judeo-Christian religion. Zubairu Bambale

explores the Hausa worldview and the idea of the death penalty by looking at the concepts of after-life through the prism of African relationality. Although he concluded that the death penalty is warranted for certain offences in traditional Hausa religious culture, it is abhorred. Jonathan O. Chimakonam uses the same relationality principle to look at the problem of tolerance from the viewpoint of Indigenous African Religions. He contends that the ideology of the African traditional religions is more tolerant than Christianity and Islam, and that this has to do with their concepts of God. L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya offers an account of the nature of God from an African metaphysical viewpoint. He contends that God is not pure spirit, but spirit and matter. This account challenges the dualist view that spirit is good and matter is evil. This is because if God is good and God has matter, then matter cannot be evil. These ideas generate questions for current and future debates in more than one way.

Crucial for contemporary philosophy is that an intercultural approach is taken. Without such an approach, philosophical methodology is poor and incomplete. Hence, being inclusive of many world philosophies seems to be a necessary condition for good philosophical practice (WAREHAM 2017; MA & BRAKEL 2016). The second group of papers tackle comparative questions in philosophy of religion that are relevant for the problem of evil. Wei Hua offers a new interpretation of Saint Augustine's account on evil by considering the influence that African religions may have had on his thought. By doing this, Hua provides a new perspective on the problem of evil. Rouyan Gu compares concepts of God in Yoruba and Chinese religions (with a special focus on Buddhism). Through this inquiry, Gu clarifies the meaning of God and how we can formulate a more intercultural concept of God. Pao-Shen Ho looks at Igala religion and discusses, in comparison with Christianity, whether the Igala ought to be understood as monotheistic or polytheistic. Naomi Thurston tries to look at definitions of ancestors by comparing the concepts in the Akan traditions with East-Asian perspectives. These ideas constitute intellectual forder for further comparative reflections.

Bony Shachter looks at sacrifices for ancestors in Chinese (especially Daoism) and Igbo religions. By exploring comparisons, he then offers an intercultural way to define sacrifice. As Shachter notes, sacrifice is closely connected to how humans relate to ancestors. Given that ancestors are at the center of supernatural good and evil, to understand sacrifice is, therefore, crucial to understand good and evil in Chinese and African religions. Jiechen Hu reflects on the meaning of divinities and ancestorship by comparing African and Confucian cosmologies. He contends that classifications such as 'monotheism', 'polytheism' and 'animism' do not capture the meaning of deities and ancestors in Confucian and African traditions. Finally, Jun Wang and Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues offer pathways to a methodology to address the problem of evil. They contend that it is indispensable to address the problem of evil from an intercultural perspective in order to find a satisfactory solution.

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This rich special issue offers innovative views on the problem of evil, God, deities, ancestors, sacrifice, Saint Augustine, African and Chinese religions, the devil, and the methodology of philosophy of religion. It is, to our knowledge, the first special issue that addresses and compares in length African philosophy with different traditions. This is a great step to overcome epistemic injustices and to the formulation of new philosophical theories. Let the conversation begin!

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Redefining the Problem of Evil in the Context of a Predeterministic World: New Conversations with the Traditional African Worldview

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Abstract

Merciful, holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, spirit, unchanging, the first cause, *unknowable*. These are just some of the properties that some scholars of African religions have attributed to the being they call God. Setting aside accusations that some of these properties reflect the colonially imposed religions, it is almost taken as a given that these properties really do belong to some of the various versions of the African God. This, then, raises the question: how is it ever the case that the present world, filled with various forms of evil and terror, emanates from a God possessing these same properties? Thus, the African God joins the formidable list of deities for which the problem of evil is relevant. In this essay, I argue 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 (mentioned above) to God. To buttress this point, I begin by presenting a materialistic and de-personalised notion of God that sheds away those properties that are imperceptible and/or are not logically necessary. Next, drawing from this new vision of God, and from religious traditions such as the Luba and Bantu traditions, I provide an account of some properties that can be ascribed to God (such as: genderless, eternal, first cause, material and unconscious), and show how this notion of God enables a predeterministic world. Finally, I show that what we refer to as evil is compatible with the idea of a material, depersonalized and unconscious God, and with the context of a predeterministic world that is indifferent to human experience.
Keywords: Africa, Evil, God, Materialistic, Religion

Introduction

> *If God is omnipotent, omniscient, creator (causa sui or prima causa) All-loving, all-good, all-merciful, then how can we explain evil? Does God cause evil? If God does not cause evil, then who causes it? Who created this cause of evil? Was the creator of evil all-knowing, past, present, and future? Or, is God actually all-good, all-loving and all-powerful but unable to stop evil-- which is*

> *patently absurd? Or, does God not wish to stop evil.* (BEWAJI 1998, 6)

Above lies an ancient problem, as old as the first human encounter with tragedy and catastrophe. Just like the ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, humans all over the world have asked this question, and have also struggled really hard to grapple with it. Ancient traditional African philosophers (ATAPs) have also grappled with this problem, and it is their ideas that I grapple with here.

For most ATAPs, the dominant view is that God is Merciful, holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, spirit, unchanging, the first cause, unknowable, amongst other things. If their views reflected reality, then one would easily conclude that the problem of evil deeply undermines those views. While some soldiered on in order to hold on to those views by placing the blame on the feet of man, they only succeeded in accentuating the seeming contradictions they sought to uphold. Others took a more attractive route, weakening the more absolute attributes of God, and, thus, creating room for evil in the world. Here, I take their views/method even further by deconstructing the notion of God, with perception and logical necessity as my preferred wrecking ball. I then build and reconstruct a novel notion of God that considers God to be an unconscious, material and depersonalized first cause. In this view, evil, whether understood in the sense of a conscious apprehension of a harm (and therefore a category of the mind), or in the sense of an existing abstract thing (the more popular view), is not the responsibility of God since God is not a personalized and conscious entity. In this way, the view accommodates the comprehension of evil in the world and the existence of God.

To succinctly present this view, I begin by analyzing the notion of God and the problem of evil in traditional African thought, critically examining some important attributes of God, especially as they relate to the problem of evil. By deconstructing this view, I lead us to the notion of a material and unconscious first cause. Within this new context, the problem of evil fails to manifest as some of its basic premises no longer apply.

This article is divided into three major sections. The first section of the work deals with the traditional African idea of God and is divided into subsections that critically examine the relevant attributes of creator, omnipotent and holy/benevolent/all-good. The next section explores less dominant views in African philosophy of religion that weaken the absolute attributes of God found in the dominant view. The third section features my reconstruction of the idea of God as a material and depersonalized entity.

The Traditional African idea of God and the Problem of Evil
The problem of evil, as we know it today, is only as powerful as the notion of God for which it responds to. How may we understand God, or, should I say, how do a significant number of Africans understand God? The answer to this question is hard, incredible as that may seem, but the reason for this difficulty lies in the deliberate colonially motivated epistemicide, which sought to

extinguish traditional African thought, eventually placing a dark cloud of doubt on whatever emerges as an expression of the precolonial notion of x. It is this same dark cloud that hangs over African philosophy of religion, such that claims about the nature of God, by a scholar like John Mbiti (and, perhaps, even other African philosophers), is suspected as decidedly more Christian than it is African. To further bind the attempt to garner more "authentically African" notions of God from traditional societies, hands-on methods like philosophical sagacity, would not prove as useful, due to the undue influence of the major world religions that are present in Africa.

However, one must move forward with what one has – Mbiti's Christianity may have inadvertently or advertently influenced his written work, but we must move on with the type of resources produced by scholars like him and try to draw out the consistencies and inconsistencies that may be present in their work. I insert this sort of benign disclaimer here for the benefit of those who may be pedantic about the use of such resources and for the benefit of those who may be unaware of the situation.

Who is God or what is *It*? The question has been the concern of almost every human being, who has ever taken the time to contemplate his/her place in the world and the magnificence of that world in which s/he finds himself/herself. As human beings, there is a lot we can do, and our ability to manipulate nature is uncanny, but in all our creations and manipulations of raw resources, nothing compares to the sheer beauty and complex expressions of reality that we see – our manipulations included. Surely the architect of such complex magnificence would be a being that is both beyond the world and powerful enough to create it (ATTOE 2022).

However, one important question that this sort of thinking dreads to answer, is the question of why one should believe that this world requires an explanation – such that normally leads to a God. This is the question of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). For most traditional African thinkers, or more appropriately "anonymous traditional African philosophers" (ATAPs), there are a few reasons why such a question is often ignored. First, there is a non-debatable belief in the existence of God. Mbiti summarises this point as follows:

> All African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of African Religion and dominates all its other beliefs. But exactly how this belief in God originated, we do not know. We only know that it is a very ancient belief in African religious life. (MBITI 1975, 40)

Similarly, Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha is quick to point out that "…Africans have firmly regarded the existence of God as a self-evident truth" (NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009, 286). Like Mbiti, one wonders how this strong belief gained the type of rootedness that allowed the ATAPs to dismiss the question of God's existence (and by extension, the question of PSR) with a wave of the hand. Perhaps it is really the wonderment about nature's awesomeness that

dispelled any forms of disbelief about the existence of God, and if one was looking for a sufficient reason for the existence of things in the world, it would be the very nature of those things (the magnificence of those things) that pointed the ATAPs in the direction of God as the necessary creator of the world. As Nkulu-N'sengha notes:

> Contemplating the majesty of mountains such as Kilimanjaro and Nyiragongo and mighty rivers (Nile, Congo, and Niger), the beauty of the blue sky and the majesty of the stars, and experiencing the power of various spirits and interacting with the Dead through dreams, visions, or mediumship, Africans have firmly regarded the existence of God as a self-evident truth. (NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009, 286)

It cannot be, then, that it is the mere somethingness rather than the nothingness that evokes the need for an explanation of things in the world that leads to God. This is because, as I have said, the ATAPs of religion and metaphysics had already surmised that absolute nothingness is impossible. What allows us to require an explanation for things in the world is mainly the normative value of the relationality that exists among things such that what is understood as the universe, and the various beautiful and terrifying manifestations of that relationality (like mountains, lightning and even the human being), continues to retain its holistic complementary structure. It is the observance of this relationality that allows us to see what is often referred to as causal relationships, or what I have called interactive relationships elsewhere (ATTOE 2022). Thus pricking our curiosity whenever we encounter a thing, and demanding from our intellect, the desire to come to grips with the relational history that had brought that particular thing to bear in the world. In this way, it was the encountered relationality that allowed the ATAPs to wonder about the normative value of this complementary relationship among things in the world, and the marvellous expressions of that relationality, which eventually led them to God (since normativity and purpose required a being for which that normativity and purpose would make sense to[1]).

And so, the ATAPs, on the basis of the above, provided some ideas about the nature of God, which I shall bring to our attention in the next few subsections. At this point, it would be important to bring to your attention that for some ATAPs, God's nature is unknowable. According to Nkulu-N'sengha:

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[1] There is an interesting relationship between normativity and metaphysics in African metaphysical thought. We even see this in the way that relationality trickles down to African ethics with ideas such ubuntu and complementarity (with the metaphysical angle of these theories, seemingly grounding the ethics of that same theory). The difficulty has always been explaining why this is so, since an explanation of what is (metaphysics) ought to be different from an explanation of what ought to be (ethics). Perhaps it is in the idea of God and purpose that we may find this elusive link. But this is just my intuition about the matter.

> God is even called "the unknown" (by the Massai People), "the God of the Unknown" (by the Lunda people), "the Unexplainable" (by the Ngombe people), and "the Marvel of the Marvels" (by the Bakongo people). Numerous proverbs also point to the mysterious nature of God. (NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009, 286)

It is because of this unknowableness that the presence of artistic expressions of the supreme being, beyond Its own creations, is absent. That is, in as many African traditional religions that I am aware of, there are no depictions of the supreme being in idols or paintings or other such representations. The reason for this is the shroud of mystery that surrounds God's nature. This unknowableness has even morphed into the belief that perhaps God is so far away from human experience, that It is no longer unknowable but also non-responsive to human or worldly affairs. I shall deal with this particular view later on in this article.

So, how then is it the case that anyone would attempt to provide an explanation of the traditional African idea of God when, in the views of some ATAPs, God is unknowable? Well, the answer is simple. It is not that ATAPs claim absolute knowledge of the nature of God – indeed one can strongly argue that no one possesses such knowledge – it is that they claim that certain clues about certain aspects of God are decipherable and logically deducible from the existence of things in the world, as well as the relationality that binds it. Thus, it is possible for one to glean tidbits from available clues, which are at the very least, logically valid. Also important to note is the fact that what I present is not an exhaustive analysis of all the known attributes of God from an African perspective. I hone in on those attributes that are most relevant to the problem of evil.

Creator

The most obvious idea about the nature of God is the idea of God as a creator. If it is the very existence of things that demand an explanation that leads to God, then it is clear that God would be both independent of those things in the world, and also the reason why they exist. In other words, God would be the *creator* of things in the world. There are two ways in which most ATAPs imagine that God created the world. In the first instance, it is imagined that God created the world from certain raw materials, in much the same way that an artisan creates certain items from certain other raw materials (WIREDU 1998). This mode of creation nods at the idea that nothingness is inconceivable, and so creation out of absolutely nothing is a mistaken view.

In the second instance, ATAPs think about things in the world as emanating from God, or better still, an emergent property that necessarily proceeds from God. In this way, God is seen as the source of all things. Recall that John Mbiti (1970) commented that in some African religions, God is thought of as creating the raw materials, from which other things in the world

are made, out of nothing. Mbiti's characterization, here, is mistaken, at least logically speaking, since God already existed and must have existed within the confines of space or some other medium of being that we do not know about. In this way, following Akan anonymous traditional philosophers (ATPs), creating out of nothing would be impossible since God already existed and the primary "raw material", from which other raw materials were created, was God's will. By (at least) willing things into being, we see the eventual emergence of the universe as emanating from a part of God – at least God's will. If one were to imagine certain other special gesticulations as part of that willing process (like you might find in a magic act), then one can also conclude that things in the world generally emerge from that willing, and the sophisticated gestures of the relevant parts of the supreme being.

Whatever view one imagines to be the most plausible account of creation from an African religious or philosophical perspective, what remains true is that for most traditional Africans, God is responsible for the creation and sustenance of the world. Like the artisan, God is responsible for how the raw material, from which things in the world are made, are manipulated to create the present world. If one takes to the second view, then whatever present world exists today emanated from, at least, God's will.

Omnipotent

God's omnipotence, as far as the created world is concerned, first expresses itself in the idea that for some ATAPs, God is not only capable of creating things in the world, but also uncreating those same created things. Indeed, as Nkulu-N'sengha notes, God is "the Father Creator Who creates and uncreates" (NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009, 289). Thus, from the onset, we get the idea that no thing in the world, or (more aptly), no created thing in the world is beyond the destructive power of God. The possibility of *uncreation* can be reduced to a few possibilities – the reduction of a created thing to its raw material(s), the reduction of a created thing to nothing, or the transformation of a created thing back to the Godly essence.

From the power to reduce created things to their raw material or to non-existence or to the Godly essence, God's omnipotence flows through logically in other less powerful ways viz. in Its control of nature. For if it were the case that God could create and uncreate, it follows that God's due control over simple or complex situations, and/or beings, is also a reality since such beings, and the situations that emerge from the relationship among various beings, can be created or uncreated by God. It is this logic that grounds the idea by various ATAPs that it is possible for God to control the various forces of nature. It is also this logic that places God at the top of the hierarchy of being (MENKITI 2004), and allows individuals to pray for justice or a change in their fortunes – especially when lesser gods are of no help (given their limitations):

> A few examples will illustrate this. In two proverbs the Banyarwanda say that 'the plant protected by God is never hurt by the wind," and that "God has very long arms.' The Kiga refer to God as 'the One Who makes the sun set'; and when the Gikuyu make sacrifices and prayers for rain, they address God as the One Who makes mountains quake and rivers overflow. The wind, the sun and the rain are beyond human power of control, but not beyond God's power Who works throughthem and other natural phenomena or objects. There are those peoples, like the Akamba, Gikuyu, Teso, Vugusu and others, who see God's omnipotence in terms of His being able to deal with, or control the spirits—these being more powerful thanmen. (MBITI 1970, 41)

Does this mean that God is "all-powerful" as Mbiti (1970, 40) would have us believe? Well, elsewhere, Mbiti tells us that through the names given to God, some African traditional religion practitioners did believe that God was indeed omnipotent.

> In some African languages, we have names of God which speak of him as the All- Powerful, the Almighty, the Irresistible, the Powerful One, the Possessor (or Owner) of all strength, and so on. … Nobody would dare to oppose God, since all power, all strength, all might, belong to him. Because he created all things and governs all things, he must therefore be more mighty and more powerful than all that he has created. (MBITI 1975, 50)

For me, one would have to define the meaning and scope of the term "omnipotence". First, we must imagine God's omnipotence as the capacity and possession of a limited power to create and an unlimited power to uncreate, nothing more. Note, at this point, that this capacity is something different from actually showcasing said powers. In other words, while God is believed to have the capacity for said powers, It usually showcases such powers at Its own will.

Holy/benevolent

In most traditional African religions, God is also seen as holy and benevolent. This idea of holiness is domiciled in the more general understanding of God as a pure being for which goodness, righteousness and holiness are constituent parts of that purity. Consequently, for most African religions, the purity of God, translates to the requirement that the human being ought to be a pure being the moment it begins to approach God. According to Nkulu-N'sengha:

> This purification practice stems from the fundamental belief that God is pure, and therefore it is not suitable to approach God with a "dirty heart" or "dirty hands." The Baluba explicitly state that God is

> spotless, stainless, and blameless (*Vidye kadi katonye*). In the eyes
> of the Yoruba people, God is "the pure King who is without
> blemish." Here the Baluba and the Yoruba express a belief common
> to many other Africans. This notion of God's purity is translated into
> three other essential attributes of God: holiness, righteousness, and
> goodness. (NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009, 289)

The logic that grounds this thinking that God is pure, holy and/or good is hard
to pinpoint. One route that we might want to consider, again, draws us to the
grandeur of nature. The magnificence of things in the world and the intricate
relationship (towards harmony) that sustains the universe (ATTOE 2020). The
equilibrium the ATAPs must have experienced and the perfect synergy among
things in the world must have generated the idea that the curator of the world –
its architect – must be, in itself, a perfect being, perfect at least in the
knowledge of how the world ought to operate. If this was true, the ATAPs
would have concluded that various forms of disharmony, usually caused by
some evil or catastrophe, could not have emerged from God and Its perfect
blueprint for the world. Indeed, the sustenance of human life through nature,
could also only show that God was good and benevolent since it was the case
that rather than creating the human being to suffer in the world, It created the
human being and provided for the person, a means for which his/her life could
be sustained.

This answer is not penetratively satisfying for most contemporary
African philosophers such as myself. The earth, as created by God, is not
without its terrors and suffering. The hunger that comes with famine, the pain
of ill health, the viciousness of certain catastrophes like flooding, etc., and the
seed of evil available in every human being and cultivated by some, are just
examples of the fact that God's blueprint of the world is a blueprint of good
and evil. How did the ATAPs respond to this obvious problem? One way was
to lay all the blame on the feet of the human being. According to Nkulu-
N'sengha:

> Although many people raise complaints about misfortunes, no
> African religion considers God to be intrinsically evil. In some
> proverbs, God is called "the Father Creator Who creates and
> uncreates." He is considered as intrinsically good and
> the source of any good in human life. The Baluba, Bakongo, Igbo,
> Herero, and others say categorically that God does them only what is
> good. The Ewe firmly hold that "He is good, for He has never
> withdrawn from us the good things whichHe gave us." (NKULU-
> N'SENGHA 2009, 289)

He also notes:

> This belief in divine purity and goodness is enshrined in timeless
> cosmogonies. In their numerous creation myths, Africans have
> wrestled with the question of the origin of evil and suffering. The
> conclusion is that God is not the source of evil. The myths of the

origin of suffering stress the responsibility of human beings and present God as pure (Utoka). (NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009, 289)

There is an obvious gap in explanation as far as these ideas are concerned, for it is not merely enough to state that God is ultimately good (and only a source for good), despite the presence of evil in the world. The tactic of placing the blame on the feet of the human being – what Wiredu (2012, 36) calls the "free will excuse" – is an interesting one, and it is one that Kwame Gyekye uses handsomely (GYEKYE 1995). While human relationships foster the type of evil commonly referred to as "man's inhumanity to man", natural disasters are often viewed as expressions of wrath by God or other lesser spirits, over the actions of human beings in the world, which are regarded as evil.

Re-echoing this point, Mbiti notes that:

> It is strongly believed that God rules in perfect justice. Therefore he is also referred to as the Judge. People say that he judges all things justly, distributes all things justly, rescues the oppressed and punishes the wrongdoer. For this reason he is also called the Arbiter of the world. At times he punishes wickedness by means of sickness, disease, accident, famine, drought, storm, war, calamity or even death. Yet people may pray to him to forgive and take away punishment. (MBITI 1975, 46)

In other words, what we call *natural* evil, is nothing more than God's attempt at perfection. By doling out calamities (or perhaps by allowing it), God creates balance. This answer is just too convenient for me, especially seeing that a perfect human being is hard to come by, more so a collection of perfect human beings for whom collective perfection would also be required, if regular bouts of judgment and catastrophe should be avoided. Perhaps this tale of crime and punishment is nothing more than a hidden vestige of colonial religious thinking, or maybe a reflection on the difficulty that abounds in trying to explain an unexpected evil in the light of God's benevolence and holiness.

Furthermore, as a being that is pure, and at the same time all-powerful – especially in relation to created things – it would seem more palatable if God in his power uncreates the evil, and the free will (at least) that spawns evil (and an evil response to evil), and instead creates a world devoid of pain, suffering and sin. One can further argue that perhaps uncreating free will is a more drastic solution, maybe removing evil as a possible option that can present itself to the free being is the more palatable option. There are many options that are unavailable to the human person (for instance jumping up to 5 metres unaided) that does not undermine the popular view that we possess free will. It is unclear how the removal of one more option (the possibility of evil choice) undermines that free will. Indeed, most ATAPs themselves consider God to be incapable of doing evil, but this does not seem to undermine God's free will. These are options that are available to God, and one would think a pure and

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brilliant God would prefer the best possible world for the beings that it creates. Unfortunately, the world as we know it cannot be the best possible world if God remains the type of God that most ATAPs have described.

A New Vision of God, and the Problem of Evil
Perhaps God does not possess all these attributes, after all. Babajide Dasaolu hints that in traditional Yoruba thought, "A perusal [of] Ifá[,] the repository of traditional Yorùbá thought system discloses Olódùmarè, the Higher God in Yorùbá world-view as lacking in the attributes of Omnipotence, Omnibenevolence and Omniscience" (DASAOLU 2019, 31). Incredible as this claim may seem, John Bewaji slyly says the same thing but in a different way. God is the most powerful being, the most knowledgeable being. This is agreeable, but it does not mean the same thing as omnipotent or omniscient, respectively. For one can possess the most power in the room, but that is not synonymous with being all-powerful or possessing omnipotence, or, in the case of possessing the most knowledge, possessing omniscience. Indeed, Bewaji warns, "Having avoided the usage of the classical and neo-classical diction of omnipotence, it is also advisable to avoid the nomenclature of omniscience in the description of the over-arching knowledge and wisdom of the Supreme Deity among the Yoruba people" (BEWAJI 1998, 8). Bewaji goes further to submit that the Olodumare is a good judge, perfect in Its decision making. This claim subtly suggests two things. (1) The power to create a society that is bereft of evil does not reside with God (and by extension, any other being), for if that power were in God's hands It would not need to be a judge; or (2) that God may not be all good[2], if we suppose that such powers did reside in It. Bewaji appears to tilt to (2) when he says:

> There is no doubt that God is the most powerful Being and that He has all the superlative attributes one can consider, but the Yoruba do no[t] think that such a being cannot do evil or cause evil. It is part of the attributes of the Supreme Being to be able to utilize all things. (1998, 11)

Either way, what is being called into question is the absolute goodness, power and knowledge of God. No wonder Ada Agada says, "But we are suspicious of the categories of omniscience and omnipotence which bring into question the goodness of God in relation to the undeniable evil in the world. Ours is not a perfect universe but a yearning universe" (2013, 263). Even beyond the Yoruba resistance to the dominant view, Wiredu (expressing Danquah's thoughts), also suggests that some Akan ATAPs do not only recognise the non-absolute nature of God but that they also place It within the domain of ethical struggle. In his words:

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[2] In a note contained in his treatment of the Ifa Corpus, Wande Abimbola, claims that the malevolent powers of witches were "given to them by **Olodumare** himself and that is why human beings find it so difficult to overcome the menace of the witches" (ABIMBOLA 1975, 315)

> But, throwing all theodicy to the winds, Danquah (1968: 88–9) claimed that the Akan view (which he seems to have supported) is that, far from God being omnipotent, he, as the 'Nana,' is himself a participant in the struggle to overcome 'physical pain and evil.' (2012, 36)

While, for Agada, God has overcome this ethical cum existential struggle, it seems clear that for the ATAPs that Wiredu and Danquah are talking about, the struggle continues since evil has not left this world. Thus, the absoluteness inserted in our imagined attributes of God, may not represent reality after all. So, if we assume that what Dasaolu says is true of God, then we no longer have a being who can create and uncreate everything in the world, who is all-good and who has supreme knowledge of every actor and factor in the world, as well as the relationships among those actors and factors. This new vision of God reports a God who is powerful, at least more powerful than the human being, but not the most powerful being possible. Beyond the threats and possibilities inherent in a being more powerful than man, and the fact that this being is responsible for our existence, there is no reason to view this God as worthy of worship beyond the way a little child worships her parents.

Such a weakened version of God easily accommodates the problem of evil by dismantling a fundamental assumption that prop up the problem itself – that is, that God is all-powerful and/or all-good. In this light, we no longer have a God-in-control but God-in-partial-control. And so, when King Leopold of Belgium oversees the massacre of millions of Africans, or when a tsunami kills thousands of undeserving children, men and women, one cannot hold God responsible since such things are, in this current vision of God, beyond its control. Indeed, one could further argue that in creating the world, God (as represented in Dasaolu's Yoruba vision of God) may have had good intentions, but by lacking omniscience, it may have been impossible to envision the evil that this world would produce. One could even argue that this world of some good and many evils, may have been the plan after all since, in this vision of God, the property of omnibenevolence is absent. Thus, the question of why evil is sustained in a world created and governed by a necessarily holy, good and all-powerful God is answered by the simple retort that the God that governs this world is neither all-good (holiness disappears here) nor all-powerful. Thus, in this vision, one can imagine contexts in which God is good and contexts where God is bad. Even goodness and evil could even depend on individual contexts – colonialism being a bad thing if one is African, and a good thing if one is racist and imperialist. This vision, thus, aligns with the three-value logic that is dominant in African thought.

Thus, one can say that in one African view, the problem of evil loses its potency since some of the crucial assumptions of the dominant vision of God are discarded in favour of a leaner vision of God that fully accommodates the possibility of evil within its purview. But what about the dominant view, and how does one successfully accommodate the presence of evil in the world with the vision of a necessarily good, holy and all-powerful God? Can our

three-value logic work in this particular instance? I do not think it works, since the vision of God in the dominant view, is a vision of an absolute God, and so even within the purview of Ezumezu logic where *context upsets fact* (CHIMAKONAM 2019), it is rather the case that *God upsets contexts* since God is absolute (necessarily holy, all-powerful and all-knowing). Hence, the answer to the first question is simply that we cannot accommodate the dominant vision of God. Thus, rather than contort the dominant vision of God and evil in unremarkable and painful ways, just to sustain all the variables in that vision, perhaps we must take a cue and listen to what that contradiction is telling us: we must search for another vision that tells a more plausible tale. Here, the Yoruba vision is instructive, for, in the face of the problem of evil, they refused to contort but rather weakened their notion of God, shedding away those attributes of God that they found to be at odds with reality. What this tells me is that to properly tackle the problem of evil, we must properly examine the idea of God, perhaps redefine It, in order to discover the extent to which the problem of evil is actually a problem. We know that there is evil in the world and we can point to various instances of it, but the idea of God has been so left to the human imagination that the ideas we have about God have now become, for the most part, a figment of our imaginations.

Redefining God

Let us try to bring down the African notion of God from the lofty heights of absolutism, which we have placed it, to the surgical table of criticality and try our best to excise the imaginative from the critically speculative. So far I have shown moments of doubt, where the Yoruba ATAPs have, according to Dasaolu's reading of the Ifa Corpus, questioned the idea of God's omnibenevolence, omnipotence and omniscience. We have also seen how that one stroke of ancient genius has normalised the problem of evil and, quite really, made it a non-problem. I believe we can go a few steps further and in ways that are important to the discourse on the problem of evil from an African perspective. But why is this revision important? As philosophers, when we say a thing exists, we prefer to refer to ideas and entities that are either concrete or logically necessary. And so we decide that God exists because it is logically necessary for a first cause to have always existed since alternative explanations like an infinite regress, do not explain the reality of things in the world (See for instance: ATTOE 2022, Chapter 2). However, this first cause, this God, is largely beyond the purview of our senses, and so we have no sensual relationship with It beyond its creations. What about the other attributes we gladly assign to God? If we cannot correlate them sensually, can we do so logically, and in a necessary way? When the ATAPs of the Massai, Lunda and Ngombe schools of thought opined that God was unknowable, these were the sorts of questions that allowed them to make that conclusion. One particular assumption is what I tackle here.

There are many attributes that African scholars and/or ATAPs have attached to God. But all these attributes all come together in, and are all tied

to, one grand attribute. It is on this grand attribute that current ideas about God are woven together. This attribute or idea is the idea that God is a personalised entity – a conscious Subject. God is thought of in much the same way that we think about human personalities, only much more powerful. So we believe that God can choose to be bad or good, has free will, can punish, can love, can know, can distribute vitality, can create and uncreate, can heal and perform miracles, etc. Only a *personalised* entity with a level of consciousness that is, at least, at the human level, can perform these sorts of actions. Rocks, presumably, can't (unless you are an extreme panpsychist or an extreme vitalist). That much is clear, but is it really a logically necessary claim to make? I do not think that it is.

We often like to trace the world back to a first cause, which would then be responsible for things in the world, and like I alluded to earlier, this is the most plausible route to God as far as the limits of our minds are concerned. Why is this route plausible or possible? The answer is that we implicitly or (as for me) explicitly pay homage to a deterministic outlook in our discussions about reality. By tracing reality back to a first cause, we are both saying that the world could not have been the way it is without a first cause and that it is because of that first cause that the world is exactly the way it is now. A different world governed by different laws of nature, and we have a different God, who would most likely not be viewed strictly in terms of a first cause.

If what I say is true, then we can deduce a few things. First, this world is a predeterministic world. Predeterministic in the sense that the full spectrum of existence is set in motion solely by the nature of the first cause itself, and necessarily so[3]. Second, that this world is the way it is because of the first cause (God) immediately suggests an enveloping influence of God on the material world. Now influence on things in the world is a defining feature of material things, whether this influence is direct or indirect (especially of logical/mathematical necessity). I know that a fist is material, especially when it directly influences the arrangement of another person's cheekbones, and I know that gravity is material because even though I do not sense it, it follows logically as the reason why my body remains grounded on earth and not floating in space. This necessarily invites us to think of God as a material being since God's influence in this world lies at the very core of the way the world is.

If we now have a material God, need that God be conscious? To answer this question, we must return to the creation process. In much of African metaphysics, relationality is necessary, since being alone is impossible (IROEGBU 1995, ASOUZU 2004, ASOUZU 2007). What this means is that God, in African thought, must bow before the necessity of relationality. How does a relationship begin? First, you need at least two actors or factors to be

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[3] Elsewhere, I provide the framework for an Afican predeterministic metaphysic. I explore this point in some detail there. See: Attoe (2022).

present. One would imagine that interaction between those (f)actors require a direct entanglement, but I have come to discover that immediately two (f)actors are present, a relationship becomes necessary – they do not need to entangle themselves. The very presence of two peas in a pod implies a new state of affairs (two peas in a pod) that did not exist before (one pea in a pod, just the pod, or nothing). A new state of affairs, or a new creation, can only be a product of relationality, and it is a necessary product. I enjoin you to hold these present thoughts for a moment, I will get back to it.

While African religions have supplied us with various stories about the creative process, these stories are mostly myths and a few of them are metaphors that require deep thinking. Today, we have scientific stories about the origin of the world, and more and more, while these scientific stories are backed up by evidence, the chances that certain stories (like a cockerel being part of the creation process) are more and more unlikely. The most prominent of these stories is the big bang theory (SMITH 1994, SEIBERT 2001), and this story is evidenced by the supposedly real accelerated expansion of the universe and the presence of background radiation left behind by that most critical expansion. As the story goes, the Universe began from a condensed point of energy and rapidly unfurled into the world we have today.

When we combine this story with our thoughts about the power of relationality, we immediately see that creation need not be a conscious affair. It only needs to be a matter of relationality. In what ways was the first cause relational? We can think of the first cause as either a singular reality or a complex combination of singular realities (ATTOE 2022). In the first instance, we see that such a singular being, still a being in the world (albeit a formless world) since absolute nothingness is impossible, is a being that is in a necessary relationship with the formless world. And since relationships necessarily create, the relationship between that singular being and the formless world creates a new state of affairs – (at the very least) the first cause in a world. The regressive eternality of the first cause[4] ensures that prior to the existence of other things in the world, there was a constant state of relationality (the first cause and its environment) and creation (the state of affairs of a singular reality in an environment). This combined state is at once complementary and contextual, the absolute expression of Ezumezu logic. It is complementary in that it all fits to describe that particular state of affairs, and it is contextual in the sense that one could see the relationality among things or the state of affairs, depending on what one was looking for. Thus, the reality of the first cause, reflected, at once, the creator and the created. The new state of affairs of singular reality + environment/formless world, could not have been an idle one, because it was a relational state of affairs, one that had to

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[4] It is regressively eternal because as a first cause it must necessarily exist, but we cannot know for certain if the first cause necessarily continues to exist since there are now other things in the world. Does it stay on or does it morph and dissolve into the newer realities, is a question for another project.

necessarily produce a new state of affairs. One can then imagine that it was from this tension that other states of affairs, involving other things, had to emerge. In all this, what necessitated creation was not a consciousness but the necessity of relationality among things. Even if one conceived God as a complex being, that complex God would have had to be made of singular realities. Admitting that those singular components were the same as God would be wrong if the fallacy of composition means anything. If God is a complex conscious being, then God would have found its origin in the true first cause – singular realities. Those component singular realities would have expressed a more potent relationality, one that would have produced God, as a new state of affairs, or the big bang, as scientists tell us (altogether bypassing a conscious God as the first cause).

If all this is at least plausible, then we must aggressively revisit the notion of a conscious first cause. The fact is that consciousness first requires relationality, and relationality, itself, requires singular realities. If singular realities constitute the first cause – our God – then it becomes moot to also talk of a gendered Supreme Being that is all-powerful, all-knowing and necessarily good. For what we call the Supreme being is nothing more than being in its most ancient, unconscious and its simplest form.

This revelation, if plausible, implies a lot. First is the obvious suggestion that the idea of a general overseer of the world, who is necessarily holy, all-powerful and benevolent, is an implausible one. And so the idea that it is somehow the responsibility of God to mitigate evil, and that It either fails to do so or fails to exist, is a moot one. This new African vision of the Supreme being does not include, as a property of God, consciousness or personality. Second, that we find and encounter evil in the world is simply because evil is a by-product of different levels of relationality, historically traceable to the first cause. And what really is evil? Evil is harm, and the concept of harm is an anthropocentric concept that simply reflects our understanding that a certain event, occurrence or encounter is not to our benefit or not to the benefit of those to whom we are empathetic. Our ability to understand what state of affairs some relationships potentially hold (what some would call causality), we have the terrifying capacity[5] to also predict what would not be of interest to people we do not like, so we can also fantasize about causing harm or pain to others. This is evil. So it is not only that the supreme being is not a personalised entity, it is also that the idea of evil is itself a construct of the human mind, brought about by our relationship with other things/people in the world. As Bewaji notes:

> Nothing is intrinsically evil. We call something evil because it does not favor us or because it causes us distress. We may not know or

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[5] Ada Agada (2013, 258) calls it a "fearful capacity of thought".

understand the reason for the event or action, but ultimately it forms
part of the overall design of Olodumare [God]. (1998, 11)

Thus, Epicurus' challenge to those who look up to an Olympus of some sort, is
built on unrealistic expectations – the expectation of a type of God that
possesses the capacity to intervene (especially in a world that is already
predetermined), and the expectation that a category of the human mind can
manifest as a concrete reality in the material world, such that another being
can eradicate it[6]. Outside the movement of impulses through nerve cells that
tell our brain that an event, situation or act is not to our benefit, there is no
evil. And so to eradicate evil, one must eradicate the human species, and every
species that is capable of isolating, in abstract terms, the idea of "what is not in
my interest". What the ideas of our African philosophical ancestors have
inadvertently taught us is that we live in a world that is necessarily indifferent
to our feelings of harm, if it must remain a predeterministic world. For the
trajectory of the world is set, and historically traceable to the first cause. And
we are part of a world whose relationship with us is not dependent on our
whim or our preference, but is/was rather dependent on the very nature of the
first cause. Thus, my African-inspired response to the problem of evil is this:

*In a predeterministic world that is indifferent to our plight, evil is fully
captured but only as a category of mind/brain in its encounter with things that
do not benefit our survival. While evil is lodged in our brains, God can do
nothing about it for God is just a simple being. A singular reality whose only
power lies in Its being a first cause, and by extension, a determiner of the
trajectory of the world. This simple being cannot alter this predetermined
world in a bid to exorcise the concept of evil from our minds, mainly because
it is a being without consciousness.*

Conclusion
What have we learnt so far? One takeaway is that as thinkers, we must
constantly re-evaluate our views, and converse with them, lest they become so
logically stale that we begin to consider them to be truths. The problem of evil
applies only to those notions of God that speak of God in morally absolute
terms. While thinking of God in absolute terms remains the dominant view, it
is soothing that some ATAPs did not let the conversation die, and in their
struggle with the notion of God, they weakened their notion of God. This
weakening began the journey into accommodating the idea of God and the
notion of evil, without controversy. What I have attempted to do, in this
article, is to further the conversation by weakening our ideas about the nature
of God and deriving, from that weakening, a novel notion of God that better

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[6] Perhaps, the problem itself was not the point. Perhaps the problem of evil was
articulated as a means of drawing our attention to the mischaracterization of God
by human, and not as a means of merely pointing to some cosmic contradiction.

accommodates our ideas of God with the notion of evil. What I look forward to is how (African) philosophers react to my present notion of God, and how the conversation can continue even further.

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Why the Problem of Evil Might not be a Problem after all in African Philosophy of Religion

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Abstract
For decades, the problem of evil has occupied a centre stage in the Western philosophical discourse of the existence of God. The problem centres on the unlikelihood to reconcile the existence of an absolute and morally perfect God with the evidence of evil in the universe. This is the evidential problem of evil that has been a source of dispute among theists, atheists, agnostics, and sceptics. There seems to be no end to this dispute, making the problem of evil a perennial one in Western Philosophy of Religion. In this essay, I will contribute to this discourse from an African perspective. This essay, therefore, explores the evidential problem of evil within the African philosophy of religion. I argue that it is unlikely for the evidential problem of evil to be a problem in African philosophy of religion. I invoke an Ejima-based argument to support this claim. I conceptualize the Igbo word Ejima to metaphysically mean the inevitable coexistence of two opposite variables as complements to argue that God could be both good and evil within the African Traditional Religion, which explains why good and evil exist in the universe.
Keywords: God, evil, religion, African philosophy, Ejima

Introduction

The problem of evil seems to centre on reconciling the existence of an All-powerful, All-knowing and Morally perfect God with the presence of evil in the world. If God is All-knowing, he would know about the evil in the world. If God is All-powerful, he would be able to prevent or eliminate all the evil in the world. If God is morally perfect, he would desire to eliminate evil. Why, then, do evil exist if there is an All-powerful, All-knowing and morally perfect God? It has been argued that the evidence of evil poses a significant challenge to the existence of an All-powerful, All-knowing and morally perfect God.

In this paper, I will focus on one form of this problem of evil- 'the evidential problem of evil'. Its argument claims that the facts or evidence of evil in the world makes it improbable or unlikely for an All-powerful, All-knowing and morally perfect God to exist. I will argue that the evidential problem of evil is unlikely a problem in African philosophy of religion. To

strengthen my argument, I will propose an Ejima-based argument to establish that both good and evil are complementary in the being of God, which, in turn, accounts for the existence of evil in the world. I will invoke the concept of "Ejima," to show that God is construed as a complementary being within the African traditional religion in whom both good and evil inevitably co-exist as complements. I further ascribe Ejima-attributes to God as being powerful, knowledgeable and morally good.

The paper begins with a conceptual clarification of the problem of evil and various formulations of the problem. A special attention is given to the evidential formulation of the problem. Finally, it will offer an Ejima-based argument to defend the unlikelihood of the problem of evil in African philosophy of religion.

Conceptualizing the Problem of Evil

Within the Western theistic tradition, it has been argued that God must be a morally perfect entity or being or deity who is All-powerful (omnipotent), All-knowing (omniscient), and Morally perfect (omnibenevolent). In this sense, God denotes a being that is wholly and unlimitedly powerful, knowledgeable and good, all things considered. However, it has been argued that if such a being exists, then it becomes very unsettling that evil exists. For the world contains so many evils that could be eliminated or prevented by a merely powerful being. As it has been argued, a good person, given alternative possibilities to create the world, would choose the possibility that is best for the world, or would create a good world, as far as he could know the best course of action. In the case of a morally perfect God, whose attributes embrace absolute or maximum power, knowledge and moral goodness, and who knows the best course of action, given alternative possibilities, would inevitably choose the best for the world or create a good world. It then raises the question of why does the world contain evil if there is such a morally perfect God. This is the philosophical problem of evil.

The problem of evil in Western philosophy of religion centres on justifying, or reconciling, the existence of morally perfect God with the existence of evil. It entails that the world contains evil that could have been prevented or eliminated by a morally perfect God, where such a God exists. In the problem of evil, evil is seen as comprising both moral evil (those evils that result from human free will) and natural evil (those evils that arise from natural occurrences like earthquakes, diseases, hurricanes, floods) (see MADDEN & HARE 1968, 6). It attempts to prove that the existence of moral and natural evils makes it unlikely or impossible for a morally perfect God to exist. In his book, [God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issue] (1998), Michael L. Peterson chronicles some of these evils in human history thus:

> Something is dreadfully wrong with our world. An earthquake kills hundreds in Peru. A pancreatic cancer patient suffers prolonged, excruciating pain and dies. A pit bull attacks a two-year-old child, angrily ripping his flesh and killing him. Countless multitudes suffer

the ravages of war in Somalia. A crazed cult leader pushes eighty-five people to their deaths in Waco, Texas. Millions starve and die in North Korea as famine ravages the land. Horrible things of all kinds happen in our world—and that has been the story since the dawn of civilization. (PETERSON 1998, 1)

In the above, Peterson claims that the history of human civilization is replete with horrific evils that provide some grounds that makes it reasonable to question the existence of a morally perfect God. He argues that the problem of evil is a form of "moral protest," which poses the questions of "[h]ow could God let this happen?" and "[i]t is not fair that God has let this happen" (PETERSON 1998, 9). Such a 'moral protest' implies that the world is a product of an absolute and morally perfect being, yet the world contains evil.

Indeed, an absolute and morally perfect God can create a world free of any evils. An ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, conceptualizes this problem when he asserts that "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" (quoted from HUME 1779, 186). Epicurus' assertion suggests that either the God who exists is a morally perfect being or He does not exist. While the first disjunct would commit the theist to admit that God is limited in power, knowledge and goodness, the second disjunct would commit them to deny the existence of an absolute and morally perfect God in the face of evil. It has been argued that admitting either of these disjuncts would allow the theists to avoid the problem of evil. But for the theists, as H. D. Aiken (1958) pointed out, to admit either of these disjuncts would be to require them to "renounce [their] profoundest loyalties, to cease, that is, to be the very person [they are]." Yet, failing to admit either of these disjuncts would be an "offense to reason and thus to the human spirit itself" (AIKEN 1958).

Furthermore, reflection on the problem of evil does suggest that it has been formulated in two different ways: either as an evidential (or inductive or probabilistic) formulation that posits that the fact of evil in the world makes it unlikely for a morally perfect God to exist; or logical (or deductive) formulation that asserts that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of a morally perfect God. In the rest of this paper, I will concentrate on the evidential formulation of the problem of evil. It posits that if the world contains evil that God would neither create nor sustain, it seems unlikely or improbable for a morally perfect God who exists to create such a world. Consequently, the evidence of evil we find in this world would seem to justify the belief that God does not exist (see PIKE 1963; MARTIN 1978; ROWE 1979, 1991,1996; WYKSTRA 1984; ADAMS & SUTHERLAND 1989; DRAPER 1989; ALMEIDA & OPPY 2003; TOOLEY 2008; VAN INWAGEN 2014; BENTON et al. 2016; PERRINE 2021). According to the strongest sense of evidential formulation, the mere existence of evil in the world makes it unlikely or probable for God to exist. Michael Martin has argued that "[t]here is no positive evidence for belief in God that could

outweigh the negative evidence" (MARTIN 1978, 430). The assumption here is that there is something in the world created by a morally perfect God that is evil, making it unlikely for such a being to exist.

However, the weak sense of the evidential formulation of the problem attempts to establish that the world contains some quantity or intensity of evil that provides evidence to doubt the existence of a morally perfect God. Rowe (1979) argues that the intensity and great frequency of human and animal sufferings provide evidence against the existence of a morally perfect God. While he agrees with the theists that some suffering is tied to the greater good, which could not be realized without such suffering, he argues that the severity and great plenitude of human and animal suffering make it unlikely that all instances of evil are connected to greater good that would be lost without such evil. As he argues:

> (1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

> (2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

> (3) [Therefore] there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being. (ROWE 1979, 336)

From the above, Rowe seems to argue that the probability that a morally perfect God does not exist, given the existence of evil, is higher than the probability that he does exist. The evidential argument raises three issues. The first is whether the severity and prevalence of evil is comparable with the quantity of good the world contains (or does evil outweigh good in the world). The second is whether the evil the world contains provides contrary evidence for the existence of a morally perfect God. The third is whether there are evils that would have been eliminated or prevented by a morally perfect God without losing a greater good or allowing an equal or greater evil.

The evidential formulation of the problem of evil has long been debated by theists, atheists, agnostics, and sceptics, which makes the problem of evil an enduring one in Western philosophy of religion (See for e.g., MCBRAYER & HOWARD-SNYDER 2013; PETERSON 2017). However, I do not intend to philosophically engage with the numerous arguments on the evidential formulation of the problem of evil within the Western philosophy of religion because of the paper's limited space. Instead, I will focus my attention on showing that the evidential formulation of the problem of evil might not be a problem in the African philosophy of religion. In the next section, I will employ a new idea of Ejima-based argument teased out of Jonathan Chimakonam's (2019) Ezumezu logic to justify this claim.

An argument for the unlikelihood of the evidential problem of evil in African Philosophy of Religion

In this section, I claim that it is unlikely for the evidential problem of evil to be a problem in African philosophy of religion. So, an argument for this claim is needed. I will argue that the complementary role played by both good and evil in African traditional religion renders this claim true. To explain precisely why this is so, I will introduce the concept of "Ejima." Ejima is an Igbo word meaning 'twins' (see AWDE et al. 1999, 37; ECHERUO 2001, 45). This is, however, the ordinary meaning of the term. I will conceptualize the word "Ejima" to metaphysically mean the inevitable coexistence of two opposite variables as complements. The logical basis for this conceptualization is the Ezumezu logic (CHIMAKONAM 2019). Ezumezu logic grounds the harmonious coexistence of seemingly opposed variables like good and evil. Given this technical use of the term Ejima, the necessary and sufficient condition for a being to be God is that it is a complementary being in whom both good and evil inevitably co-exist as complements. What is implied here is that good and evil systematically contribute to the being of God within the African religious context. Another way to put this is to say that a complementary being is the origin of both good and evil. Examples are the trickster gods Ekwensu, Esu and Marcardit found in Igbo, Yoruba and Sudan Dinka traditional religions that are both good and evil (see ABIMBOLA 1982, 27; OPATA 2005; WETHMAR 2006, 257). As a first approximation, we may say that a God C is a 'complementary being' just in case for some action Y that C plains to will, a broad range of both potential good and bad outcomes might arise depending on the context of his action. We can observe that to be a complementary being in this sense does not entail being morally perfect. Notice also that the being of God is made up of both attributes of good and evil.

Additionally, the complementary being of God has what I call "contextual utility." I will say that the complementary being of God is contextually useful just in case that he casually contributes to the preservation of the best interest of humans. It has been argued that African traditional religion is human-centred. In other words, God and other primordial divinities have the sole purpose of safeguarding humanity. Dominic Zahan has shown that "…all of African spiritual life is based on this vision of man's situation and role." He has also shown that "[i]t is not to please God or out of love for God that the African prays, implores or makes sacrifice but rather to become himself and to realize the order in which he finds himself implicated" (ZAHAN 1970, 5). This point is very forceful in the work of Udobata Onunwa, who emphasizes that:

> The African traditional religion affirms that the human life is superior to any other created in the cosmos. Man is the Supreme irreducible reality. The divinity itself enters human affairs in the same way as do other beings which man is close to and uses. This underlines the importance of the Homo sapiens in the religious

context. Even the deity is meant to serve human interests. (ONUNWA 2011, 43-44)

In the above quotation, Onunwa stresses the role of humans in African traditional religion. He acknowledges that God and his divinities exist to serve human's purpose on earth. Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2015, 281) have also argued that "…the worship of deity among the Igbo is rooted or linked to the well-being of the human being or the preservation of human life. Humans strive to appeal to other spiritual beings, such as Chukwu and other deities in order for these beings to serve their own needs." Thus, it can be argued that many Africans worship God insofar as He guarantees their best interest. The point thus far is that God's complementary being is contextually useful when he casually contributes to the good of humanity. Consider, for example, a scenario where a brother-in-law Q unjustly takes his late brother's widow P piece of farmland to cultivate it in the next farming season. During the farming season, P sacrifices to Ala (Igbo goddess for fertility) to plead that the farmland becomes unproductive as justice to the injustice she received from Q. At the same time, Q offers sacrifices and prays to Ala to make the land very fertile and more productive. Imagine also that during the harvest season, Q found out that insect pests have destroyed all his yams in the field. Q's suffering, in this case, was contextually useful. For it casually contributed to P's best interest, namely, justice. Both good and evil within the African traditional religion are contextually useful in this sense. Given the contextual utility of God's complementary being, the claim that the mere existence of evil in the world provides evidence that makes it unlikely for God to exist would be defeated. Thus, since God's being is such that both good and evil inevitably co-exist harmoniously, then the good and evil in the world are various manifestations of his complementary being for the best interest of humanity.

One might want to question why such a complementary being would not want to eliminate evil, making the world a most pleasant place to live. While it might be argued that the world would be better off without some evils, one begins to doubt whether it would be the same with the absence of all evils. Thus, it might be argued that absolutely eliminating all evils would still not make the world a better place, for evil complements good required to preserve human's best interest. Some actions that seem to result in evil outcomes are also the same ones that would result in good outcomes. As John Harris (2010, 104) observes, "the sorts of traits or dispositions that seem to lead to wickedness or immorality are also the very same ones required not only for virtue but for any sort of moral life at all."

To further address the evidential problem of evil, we need to distinguish between what can be called 'absolute attributes' and Ejima attributes. While absolute attributes are qualities from the extreme side of the spectrum, Ejima attributes are the complementarity of attributes from both sides of the spectrum. What is implied is that while absolute attributes present God as possessing only the positive qualities to an unlimited degree, Ejima attributes present God as harmoniously possessing both positive and negative

qualities. For instance, Absolute attributes ascribe to God qualities of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence. Omnipotence is essentially the ability to do whatever one wills without external constraints. Thus, in speaking of God as omnipotent, one is saying that God possesses unlimited power to accomplish whatever he will. Omniscience signifies that God is an infallible being that would know everything, including yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And as omnibenevolence, God would be a morally perfect being that inevitably does only good. God becomes an inevitable perfect being possessing an absolute maximum of power, knowledge and goodness, and so incapable of limitation with the absolute attributes.

In contrast, Ejima attributes present God as being powerful, knowledgeable, and morally good. First, in African traditional religion, the power of God is understood not as being able to do everything but as the expression of the complementary being of God. Indeed, granting that the power of God is the expression of his complementary being, it is not all power that is ascribed to him. There is separation of powers between God and other primordial divinities in African traditional religion. This separation of powers does not imply that the divinities exercise their powers independently, rather it implies that they exercise their powers in conjunction with God's approval. According to Oguntola (2000, 16), each of these divinities "has wielded power in his or her own area of competence and jurisdiction. They act as agents of social control and by which conducts of individuals and the community is regulated. This they did in conjunction with Olodumare [God in Yoruba traditional religion]. Thus, we can say that there is a sort of harmonious interaction between Olodumare and his ministers." God is seen as having the highest power followed by his divinities and other entities such as ancestors, man, and material objects. For instance, in Igbo traditional religion, the divinity Ala has the power of fertility, and in Yoruba traditional religion, the divinity Obatala exercises the power of creation.

Second, in the African traditional religion, God is not All-knowing conceived as knowing everything, but he is knowledgeable. This point has been captured by G. S. Sogolo (1993, 14), who maintains that "[God] knows more than we do, but unlike the Christian God, He does not know everything. He is more powerful than we are, but He is not all-powerful. God, in Africa, is more benevolent than we are but He too can do evil and therefore not omni-benevolent." In this sense, God in African traditional religion could be both knowledgeable and ignorant since he does not know everything.

Thirdly, African traditional religion regards God as morally good and not morally perfect. By being morally good, God does not inevitably do what is good. Moreover, as a morally good God, he is liable to moral praise and blame. Moral blameworthiness is shown through what I call religious abandonment ─ construed as forsaking a

god(s) that falls to act in the best interest of humans. In African traditional religions, worship and sacrifice are often withdrawn from a god who fails to deliver. Ogbu Kalu succinctly explains that through worship, Africans 'variously plead with patron gods, placate the angry and evil spirits, and end up by threatening any deity that if he failed to perform, his grove and shrine will be overgrown with weeds" (KALU 1978, 42 quoted in ONUNWA 2011, 46). However, moral praiseworthiness is expressed through continued worship, sacrifice and adoration of God. This insistence on distinguishing the absolute attributes to which extreme qualities apply from Ejima attributes to which complementary qualities apply takes us a step further in understanding why the evidential problem of evil might not be a problem in African philosophy of religion.

My conception of God is in terms of Ejima attributes rather than absolute attributes. Moreover, the Ejima attributes entail the complementary being of God. Fundamentally, this shift from absolute attributes to Ejima attributes implies that the evidential problem of evil is unlikely a problem in African philosophy of religion. This is contrary to the popular position held by some scholars, like John Mbiti (1969, 1970), Bolaji Idowu (1962), John Bewaji (1998), Ebunoluwa Oduwole (2007), who ascribe absolute attributes to God. For instance, while Bewaji avoids the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence, he employs other absolute attributes such as "greatest knowledge", "most powerful" to describe God. He claims that these qualities account for the coexistence of such a being and evil in the world. The apparent implications of these attributes, which Bewaji tends to deny, is that God having the greatest knowledge would mean that he possesses unlimited knowledge of whatever there is, and God being most powerful would mean that he possesses unlimited power and that nothing else has power over him. When these attributes are seen in this light, it becomes difficult for one to fully understand the force of his conclusion that the problem of evil is non-existent in African traditional religion.

Similarly, Oduwole presents God in African traditional religion as a "Supreme" or "Ultimate" Deity who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent (ODUWOLE 2007, 5). By ascribing absolute attributes, Oduwole generates the problem of evil in African philosophy of religion. She then concludes that "the philosophical problem of evil is a   universal one. Regardless of race, culture, or tradition, as long as one believes in a Supreme or Ultimate Being who has the attributes earlier mentioned and as long as we accept that evil is not an illusion, the problem exists" (ODUWOLE 2007, 13).

Why Oduwole claims that the problem of evil is a problem in African philosophy of religion is because she ascribes absolute attributes to God. And there is a problem attached to absolute attributes in which God is construed as being totally and inevitably perfect. But her conception of God with absolute attributes is clearly Judeo-Christian rather than African in structure. This error is likely due to her Judeo-Christian upbringing and

influence. If absolute attributes entail that a being is All-powerful, All-knowing, and Morally perfect, then the coexistence and interdependence of God and other divinities in African traditional religion would be otiose. This harmonious relationship between God and other divinities, exemplified in terms of interconnectedness and interdependence, shows that God is not omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect. Instead, as Ejima attributes show, God is powerful for he admits weakness, knowledgeable for he admits ignorance, and morally good for he could be morally evil. Besides being African in structure,[1] there seems to be a genuine advantage of accepting the Ejima attributes of God in preference to that of the absolute attributes. Ejima attributes do not rule out God's powerfulness, knowledgeableness, and goodness but rule out the absoluteness of these qualities, thereby making God capable of limitation that complements his being.

An objection might be raised here that if God is stripped of all absoluteness, he will no longer be an appropriate object of worship. It might further be objected that omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence are "necessary and sufficient conditions" for a being to be God (see DRAPER 1989, 331), and that conceiving God outside these absolute attributes raises the problem of "sustaining religious attitude of worship and adoration for a being who is imperfect" (MCCLOSKEY 1962, 188). However, this objection would be significantly flawed considering that God construed with these absolute attributes reflects our limitation. From our suffering and pain springs the idea of a morally perfect God; from our ignorance, we conceive an All-knowing God; and from our weakness, we idealize an All-powerful God. As Henry D. Aiken remarks:

> The point is that "omniscience" primarily represents the overcoming of our own deprivation of knowledge or, rather, the ideal overcoming of this deprivation. As such it signifies an ideal of knowledgeability to which we ourselves conceivably may aspire and which we may endlessly approach. Similarly, "omnipotence" represents an ideal of power or puissance, of ability to do and to accomplish whatever one may will, without external interferences of any kind. Both characteristics are ascribed to God as inverse symbols and measures of our own imperfections and limitations. (AKEIN 1958, 81)

Moreover, when God is construed without these absolute attributes, he would not cease to be an entity that is appropriate for worship. If one understands God as a complementary being, then worshipping him would not be a problem

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[1] Both the logic and ontology of African lifeworld have been articulated as complementary and harmonious rather than divisive and hylomorphous (see CHIMAKONAM 2019; CHIMAKONAM & OGBONNAYA 2021).

since his being is the harmonious embodiment of power and weakness, knowledge and ignorance, moral goodness and evil.

Let us now return to the evidential problem of evil and reconsider it in light of Ejima attributes. If we grant that God is powerful, knowledgeable, and morally good, would we make any progress on the evidential problem of evil? My answer is in the affirmative. As outlined above, the evidential problem of evil is based on the unlikelihood or improbability of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God to co-exist with the fact of evil in the world. It has been claimed that the suffering and pain experienced in the world make it improbable for a morally perfect God to exist. This problem persists in western philosophy of religion because God is understood in absolute attributes as having unlimited power, knowledge and moral goodness. However, this problem would likely not be a problem in the African philosophy of religion. Since God is understood with Ejima attributes as having power, knowledge and moral goodness, he harmoniously co-exists with evil. Evil is not understood as a negation of good but as a complement of good. This is what I call "complementary moral value." For instance, in Igbo traditional religion, it is believed that Chukwu (God) created humans with Chi (a spirit being), which could be good (oma) and evil (ojo) depending on the possessor (see CHUKWUKERE 1983; EJIZU 1992). Within the Yoruba traditional religion, it is also believed that the creator (Obatala) created the world with both good and evil (Tibi tire ni adaniwaye da ile aye), which explains why humans live with both evil and goodness in the world (Tibi tire ni eda nri ni ile aye) (See ODUWOLE 2007; FAYEMI 2012).

Another objection that might be raised at this point is that in traditional African religion, it is believed that divinities, spirits and humans are the cause of evil in the world and that evil does not originate from God. This point is clearly stated by Oduwole (2007, 7) thusly; "[T]he Yoruba will not feel comfortable to accept that evil is a creation of God, it will even be inconsistent with his attributes, especially with his goodness. They may want to accept, however that evil is a creation of the deities and various supernatural forces, such as of magical forces and witches." A plausible response to this criticism would be that since God permits these divinities to run the affairs of the universe with him, their actions are in consonance with his. I have established above that there is a harmonious interaction between God's highest power and those of the divinities in the sense that God approves the actions of the divinities. God's approval of their actions can entail that both evil and good inevitably co-exist in him as complements.

Conclusion

In this paper, I invoked an Ejima-based argument to claim that the evidential problem of evil might not be a problem in African philosophy of religion after all. With the Ejima-based argument, I have shown that African philosophy of religion establishes the following plausible claims: (a)   There is a complementary being in whom good and evil co-exist as complements; (b)

such a complementary being is powerful, knowledgeable and morally good; (c) there are instances of evil in the world which a complementary being could allow; (d) a complementary being would allow those instances of evil since both good and evil inevitably and harmoniously co-exist as modes of his being; (e) therefore, there can exist a complementary being called God whose existence is not vitiated by the evidence of evil in the universe.

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Bewaji and Fayemi On God, Omnipotence and Evil

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Abstract

This paper explores the contradiction of positing the existence of a God who is at once omnipotent and not omnipotent in respect of his power that arises in the thought of two African philosophers of religion, John A.I. Bewaji and Ademola Kazeem Fayemi who accept the limitation thesis that projects a limited God and deny the legitimacy of the transcendence view in Yoruba and, by extension, African thought. I demonstrate in this paper that the contradiction arises from the fact that while Bewaji and Fayemi explicitly deny the legitimacy of the transcendence view in Yoruba and, by extension, African thought, they implicitly accept the view and unwittingly and illegitimately attempt to reconcile the conflicting views through the analysis of the notions of God's creatorship, co-creatorship, and controllership. I conclude by recommending that instead of attempting to reconcile the antinomy of God's existence in African philosophy of religion, African philosophers should acknowledge the legitimacy of the two conflicting theses constituting the antinomy and, accordingly, sustain logical consistency by strictly thinking within either the framework of limitedness or the framework of transcendence.
Keywords: God, Omnipotence, Power, Evil, Creatorship, Controllership, Bewaji, Fayemi, African philosophy of religion

Introduction

This essay explores the logical contradiction that arises in the thought of Bewaji and Fayemi as a consequence of the two scholars failing to clearly recognise the antinomy of God's existence in African philosophy of religion that consists of two conflicting propositions, one asserting the existence of a transcendent God and the other asserting the existence of a limited God. Early scholars of African traditional religion (ATR) and African traditional thought projected a perspective of God that presented the deity in the traditional monotheistic sense as an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent being. These scholars reached this conclusion through the analysis and interpretation of ATR and traditional African cultural and linguistic phenomena such as oral literature, proverbs, indigenous African languages, African worldviews, and names given to individuals at birth (see, for example, IDOWU 1962, 1973; MBITI 1969, 1970; AWOLALU & DOPAMU 1979). This framework of transcendence naturally legitimises the problem of the compatibility of the existence of an omnipotent God with evil in the world.

However, there is an emerging consensus among contemporary African philosophers of religion that the problem of omnipotence and evil does not arise in African philosophy of religion because ATR and traditional African thought conceive God basically as a limited deity (see, for instance, SOGOLO 1993; BEWAJI 1998; WIREDU 1998, 2010; OLADIPO 2004; BALOGUN 2009; FAYEMI 2012). The later critical group of African scholars relies on the very traditional African cultural and linguistic phenomena that furnished the earlier group with the data that informed their conclusion.

The plausibility of two opposing interpretations of ATR and traditional African thought or worldviews naturally creates a logical trap into which African philosophers may fall, thus leading them to implicitly assert of God that he is both omnipotent (all-powerful) and not omnipotent (limited) in one and the same respect (power). The possibility of such contradiction arising becomes real in two notable articles written by John A.I. Bewaji and Kazeem Ademola Fayemi titled "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil" (1998) and "Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E.O. Oduwole" (2012). While arguing in favour of the claim that the problem of omnipotence and evil does not arise in traditional Yoruba and, by extension, African religion and thought, Bewaji and Fayemi unwittingly find themselves contradicting their favoured limitation thesis and describing God in terms all too familiar to the traditional theist who believes in the existence of a transcendent God.

This essay has the following specific objectives:

1. Demonstrate that the contradiction highlighted above arises from the fact that while Bewaji and Fayemi explicitly deny the legitimacy of the transcendence view in Yoruba and, by extension, African religious thought, they implicitly accept the view and unwittingly and illegitimately attempt to reconcile the conflicting views through the analysis of the notions of God's creatorship, co-creatorship, and controllership.
2. Show that the ATR and African philosophy of religion literature clearly establish two opposing theses concerning the nature of God, namely: (a) There exists a Supreme Being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, (b) Only a limited deity exists and this deity is neither omnipotent nor omniscient and not wholly good.

The first and second sections of this essay will highlight the thoughts of Bewaji and Fayemi on God, omnipotence, and evil in the world. The third section will critically examine the coherence of the thoughts of the two scholars within the limitedness framework that they explicitly adopt. I will conclude by recommending that instead of attempting to reconcile the antinomy of God's existence in African philosophy of religion, African philosophers should acknowledge the legitimacy of the two conflicting theses

constituting the antinomy and, accordingly, sustain logical consistency by strictly thinking within either the framework of limitedness or the framework of transcendence.

Bewaji's Position
Bewaji sides with African philosophers like Sogolo (1993), Wiredu (1998), and Oladipo (2004) who insist that analysis of the religious norms and oral traditions of most African ethnic groups reveals an understanding of God as a powerful deity indeed but by no means the all-powerful, all-knowing and benevolent God of Christianity. The main reason for the adoption of the thesis of a limited God follows from the fact that most traditional African societies conceive God as so remote that lesser deities become worthy intermediaries deserving reverence since these lesser deities directly influence human life (see ACHEBE 1994). If God is a *Deus absconditus*, or hidden God, and the lesser deities efficiently deputise for him, it is reasonable to think that God must be limited, either in power as a result of being preceded by pre-existing matter (WIREDU 1998) or in knowledge since he relies on the wisdom of the lesser deities (BEWAJI 1998) or in both power and knowledge (FAYEMI 2012). Since this is the case, God is incapable of stopping the evil in the world and, in fact, capable of evil since a deity limited in knowledge can make mistakes that cause harm.

Bewaji reaches the above conclusion based on his analysis of traditional Yoruba religion and oral literature. Having rejected the categories of omnipotence and omniscience and the idea of an infinitely good God, Bewaji attempts to avoid the temptation of reverting back to the framework of transcendence which earlier theistic scholars like Idowu, Mbiti, and Dopamu promote as adequately exhibiting traditional African conception of God. To show that the Yoruba lack an understanding of God as an omniscient being, Bewaji analyses portions of the Ifa religious text of the Yoruba, which narrates how Olodumare (God) was disturbed about his longevity and consulted "Wise Men" to know whether he is mortal or immortal (BEWAJI 1998, 9). It was from the Wise Men that God learnt that he is immortal. Obviously, a deity that depends on mortal beings to know whether he is immortal or not immortal cannot be omniscient. The being may be immortal indeed, but it does not have full knowledge of the world and is capable of doing evil, at least inadvertently. In the Ifa corpus, God is regularly depicted as consulting the divinity of wisdom Ifa when unable to solve puzzling matters, an indication of limitation in knowledge (see IGBOIN 2014).

However, Bewaji produces a curious or, better still, a contradictory rationale for a non-omniscient God doing evil. Returning implicitly to the framework of transcendence which he explicitly rejects, Bewaji argues that: "It is part of the attributes of the Supreme Being to be able to utilize all things…He is the most Powerful Being, the Creator, the Wise and Impartial Judge who exercises inexorable control over all in the universe…a being with all the attributes stated above is conceivable as capable of both good and bad

[in traditional Yoruba religion]. In fact, to say that God does not or cannot do evil is to unnecessarily circumscribe His power" (1998, 11).

While it may appear that Bewaji distinguishes the category of all-powerfulness from powerfulness and regards the Yoruba God as possessing only the attribute of powerfulness, he also appears to conflate the two categories. While endorsing the position of the early scholars who basically projected a traditional theistic stance, he commits himself, unwittingly, to defending the framework of omnipotence. He curiously justifies his claim that God is capable of both good and evil by invoking the transcendence claim that God is omnipotent. A God that does both good and evil, such as Olodumare, is a being with unrestricted power. Such a being must be omnipotent. This stance opposes Bewaji's view that Olodumare is limited in power and knowledge. According to Bewaji (1998, 7), "Olodumare has all the attributes which Idowu, Mbiti, Awolalu, Dopamu, and other theological scholars have annotated, that is, Olodumare is the origin of the universe and in the language of Anselm, He is the being that which none greater can be conceived." The qualities Bewaji alludes to are those traditionally attributed to the God of monotheistic religions like Christianity and Islam. The reference to Anselm's famous ontological argument betrays Bewaji's conflation of the category of powerfulness, which he regards as belonging to the African metaphysical framework of a limited God, with the category of all-powerfulness which he considers an imported Western theological category. Yet, the ontological argument which he invokes to underline the magnitude of the power of the Yoruba God (Olodumare) evolved in Western philosophy of religion as a philosophical demonstration of the existence of the Christian God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent. The ontological argument purports to prove the existence of a necessary being by demonstrating that the notion of the greatest being implies the possession of all perfections, including existence (see, for instance, MILLICAN 2004; VAN INWAGEN 2010).

In his resolve to show that a powerful God need not be all-powerful, Bewaji implicitly introduces what I will label the concepts of creatorship and co-creatorship. Based on his examination of Yoruba oral literature and religious texts as well as his familiarity with Yoruba cultural phenomena, he asserts that God is the co-creator of the universe rather than creator. As co-creator, God assigned the task of directly designing the universe and creating the diverse beings in the universe to lesser divinities that, instructively, God either created or fully controls. It is not clear that the concept of co-creatorship diminishes God's creative powers since Bewaji agrees that God is the ultimate cause of the lesser deities (1998, 11). Thus, while the lesser deities are ubiquitous and feared by humans who must, therefore, appease them with sacrifices when necessary, God has sovereign powers over the lesser deities. The deployment of the concept of co-creatorship, therefore, fails to clearly establish that the powerful God Bewaji understands to be the Yoruba (African) God is not, in fact, an all-powerful God. The tension between the explicit acceptance of the framework of limitedness and implicit belief in the

metaphysical rootedness of the framework of transcendence in African religious thought comes to the fore when Bewaji writes in a glaring example of self-contradiction: "It is only natural that the most powerful Being should not suffer any handicap or hindrance, especially in the execution of justice. God is all-wise (omniscient) and knows all things" (1998, 11).

In the next section, I will show how Fayemi also struggles to escape the framework of transcendence after committing himself to the position that the Yoruba conception of God is one of a limited deity that is yet responsible in part for the evil in the world.

Fayemi's Stance

Like Bewaji, Fayemi commits himself to demonstrating that the Yoruba traditionally conceive God as neither all-powerful nor wholly good and, consequently, do not regard the reality of evil in the world philosophically problematic. The problem of evil arises when one asserts the existence of a God who is both all-powerful and "wholly good" (see, for instance, MACKIE 1955, 200). Fayemi, however, struggles to provide information that further reinforces the emerging view in the fledgling field of African philosophy of religion that traditional African worldviews favour the conception of God as a limited deity. Like Bewaji before him, Fayemi is unable to achieve logical consistency as he uses language and terms that more accurately describe the traditional theist's God than the limited God he believes to control the Yoruba universe.

Against the claim that God is all-powerful, Fayemi invokes the concept of co-creatorship and against the claim that God is wholly good, he distinguishes between different types of evil and asserts God's complicity in the fact of physical and spiritual evil. A spiritual evil is harm inflicted on humans by non-material entities such as God and lesser deities for reasons beyond the full comprehension of human beings. A physical evil, for instance, a devastating earthquake, occurs because of the way the universe is structured. God and the lesser deities can be blamed for the fact of physical evil because they co-created the world. For Fayemi, humans are responsible for moral evil which is a consequence of the misuse of human free will. Responding to Oduwole who is of the view that the problem of evil and omnipotence arises naturally in Yoruba traditional thought, Fayemi (2012, 7) writes that "*Olodumare*…is seen by the Yoruba as the ultimate cause of all visible processes in the world. By being the creator, it does not mean that He unilaterally creates everything without the support of and consultation with other divinities."

As a creator, God is a powerful being indeed, but as a co-creator he is limited. This is the point Fayemi seeks to make. This point follows from the explicit acceptance of the limitation thesis. But his intention is undermined by the suggestion that God, as the ultimate cause of all material effects (for example, phenomena in the physical world) and non-material effects (for example, the lesser deities), is the ultimate creator and the controller of the

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ubiquitous lesser deities that are closer to humans. He admits this point directly when he analyses the meaning of an alternate Yoruba name for God, that is, Olorun. The name Olorun means "the Supreme Deity, the sustainer and upholder of the universe" (2012, 7). Here is evidence of a transcendent moment in Yoruba traditional thought that clashes with the non-transcendent moment. By the term transcendent moment, I mean the plausible traditional, theistic interpretation of traditional Yoruba and, by extension, African thought about the nature of God. The non-transcendent moment corresponds to the interpretation of the nature of God within the metaphysical framework of limitedness. The latter interpretation has gained ground recently among African philosophers. Nevertheless, an adequate conceptual framework that allows for logical consistency in the determination of the relation between God and the world is largely lacking in recent scholarship as the contradictory claims of Fayemi suggests.

If God is the ultimate cause of all material processes as Fayemi interprets traditional Yoruba thought, then the lesser deities do not limit God's power but are merely instruments of the actualisation of his plans. An ultimate being like God in Yoruba thought cannot be limited by beings that he can effectively control. Such a being is the ultimate creator and must be deemed so powerful that the category of omnipotence may well apply to him since this being has no rival in a universe that he controls. Therefore, Fayemi's recourse to the idea of co-creatorship does not succeed in enhancing logical consistency within the framework of God's limitedness, which he adopts as the best framework for thinking about God's nature in Yoruba thought. He unwittingly commits himself to the ultimacy thesis, which attributes supremacy in power and knowledge to God and upholds the framework of transcendence.

Critical Perspective

One way Fayemi and Bewaji can overcome the contradiction inherent in the idea of co-creatorship is to abandon the concept altogether and assert that God does not play any creative role in the emergence of the phenomena of the world. Indeed, Fayemi considers this possibility when he fleetingly entertains the agnostic stances of Sophie Oluwole and E.A. Odumuyiwa who assert that in Yoruba thought the creation of the world is credited to the lesser deities rather than God (see FAYEMI 2012, 11,). Still, the stances of Oluwole and Odumuyiwa do not lead to the notion of an idle God since these two scholars fail to eliminate the idea of God's overlordship in respect of the ubiquitous lesser deities. As Fayemi and Bewaji insist, these lesser deities only exercise powers allocated to them by God whose own powers are not limited by the powers of any other being and is thus worthily called the Supreme Being. The preponderance of evidence from oral literature, especially the Ifa corpus, and analysis of linguistic concepts reveal the rootedness of the idea of the Yoruba God as either a creator, co-creator, or controller (see IGBOIN 2014).

If it is asserted that a non-omnipotent God is powerful enough to either create the world or co-create the world with help from lesser deities under his sovereignty, then this God is at once both omnipotent and not

omnipotent. He is omnipotent because he has sovereign powers over all other beings. He is not omnipotent because he needs help from lesser deities to create a world. Bewaji and Fayemi will reject this contradictory proposition, yet it summarises their thinking on the nature of God as I have earlier shown. Fidelity to the concepts of creatorship, co-creatorship, and controllership commits these two scholars to explicitly assert that God is both all-powerful in the sense of a transcendent being and merely powerful in the sense of a limited being. Bewaji and Fayemi inconsistently suggest that God is both a creator and a co-creator, Fayemi (2012, 7) asserts that God is "the ultimate cause of all visible processes in the world. By being the creator, it does not mean that He unilaterally creates everything without the support of and consultation with other divinities." Bewaji (1998, 11) asserts that God is "the most Powerful Being, the Creator, the Wise and Impartial Judge who exercises inexorable control over all in the universe." Both scholars also suggest that God has the power to control the lesser deities in varying degrees. Indeed, Fayemi (2012, 7) notes that God acts like an executive president who "commissions these deities to administer the universe along with him." An executive president (God) obviously has controlling powers over his or her ministers (the lesser deities) and may fire them whenever he considers them wanting. Such powers do not belong to a limited deity.

An examination of the notions of creator, co-creator, and controller in the African context is required to reinforce my thesis that the legitimacy of both the transcendent and non-transcendent moments in African traditional thought is responsible for the inconsistency of Bewaji and Fayemi's defence of the non-transcendent moment as the legitimate interpretation of God in Yoruba and, by extension, African traditional thought. A creator, according to Bewaji, need not be all-powerful, though such a being may be so powerful indeed as to be the cause of everything in the universe. Yet, when such great powers are attributed to a spiritual entity the superlative quality of supremacy is transferred to it, such that the being can be rightfully described as all-powerful. There is support for this understanding of God's nature in the literature produced by early scholars and writers like Mbiti, Idowu, Achebe, and Awolalu as well as more recent scholars like Gyekye (1995), Njoku (2002), Boaheng (2012), Igboin (2014), and Metz and Molefe (2021).

The idea of a sufficiently powerful but not all-powerful creator would be the undisputed conception of God in traditional Yoruba and African thought if ATR can be unreservedly described as polytheistic. But ATR exhibits characteristics that correspond to those exhibited by typically monotheistic religions, notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the existence of sundry lesser deities besides God. Mbiti (1969, 1970) has noted that not only do Africans use singular names (for example, God instead of Gods) in reference to God but they also clearly regard God as the highest power in the universe. God is considered as so great that he cannot be directly approached but must be accessed through lesser deities under his control. Thus, instead of interpreting the remoteness of God as an indication that Africans lose sight of

the prime position of God in the hierarchy of beings in the universe, the phenomenon of God's hiddenness is best seen as evidence of the essential monotheism of Africans. The image of God behind the veil of remoteness is one of an all-powerful being rather than a limited being.

An analysis of the Idoma name for God, that is, *Owoicho*, buttresses the transcendence view of God. In Idoma traditional thought, *owo* is the fundamental principle of the universe, with everything in the universe having an *owo* as its constituting principle (see AGADA 2020). A human being has its own *owo* in the sense of guardian spirit. *Owo* as a concept can also be expanded to mean the principle of consciousness. *Owo* is a measure of universal activity, rationality, and animation. If *owo* is spirit, or mind, then God is Owoicho, the spirit of the sky. Here, the reference is not to the visible sky where clouds constantly float but, rather, the immense physical and metaphysical spaces beyond the earth. These spaces cover the entire known and unknown reaches of the universe. The distance between the earth and the *sky* is one that cannot be surmounted or bridged by human beings through natural means.

While indeed humans have produced spacecraft that can reach nearby planets and while it can be argued that science will some day be so advanced that it will be possible for humans to realise inter-galactic travels, it is unlikely that human ingenuity will advance enough to enable humans explore the unlimited world beyond the earth in the sense of actualising the capacity to explore the nooks and crannies of the universe. By describing God as a god of the *sky*, the Idoma people attribute to the deity unlimited powers of exploring the vast universe physically and metaphysically. The metaphysical dimension is the *idango,* or mystery, dimension of the origin and destiny of powers so great that they enable the mastery of the universe. Thus, the name Owoicho underlines God's transcendence, majesty, and, therefore, unlimited power and knowledge, from the human standpoint. From this standpoint, the magnitude of power and knowledge that can be described as unlimited must satisfy the conditions of omnipotence and omniscience. Consequently, God's remoteness, and the ubiquity of the lesser deities, does not indicate limitation. God is so far from humans because of his unimaginable majesty.

Responding to the question of God's seeming hiddenness, Achebe makes a simple clarification in his [Things Fall Apart], in a scene where the curious white Christian missionary Mr Brown engages the local sage Akunna in a theological debate. Mr Brown attempts to dismiss Akunna's *ikenga* (a wooden image symbolising mystical powers in Igbo traditional religious practice) as a mere piece of wood, thus implying that Akunna is a polytheistic or even animist idol worshipper. Akunna responds that the *ikenga,* which links the owner with cosmic powers, is indeed carved from wood; but the tree that supplies the wood is made by Chukwu (God), who also creates the lesser deities that appear more visible than God and are, in fact, Chukwu's messengers and representatives (ACHEBE 1994, 179). Akunna compares God to the master of a household and the lesser deities to the master's servants.

Someone wishing to see the master first respectfully approaches the servants. When the servants can no longer be of help, one can then go directly to the master, who must always be feared because of the great powers at his disposal. Akunna asserts that the Igbo conceive the creator-God as so great as to deserve the name Chukwuka, Chukwu is supreme. Mr Brown reminds Akunna that the Christian God, unlike Chukwu, is a loving deity that should not be feared when one is doing his will. Once again, Akunna appeals to Chukwu's unrivalled powers when he notes that: "But we must fear Him when we are not doing His will. And who is to tell His will? It is too great to be known" (ACHEBE 1994, 181). Thus, the multiplicity of lesser deities in the world and their ubiquity do not diminish the oneness and majesty of God.

It may be argued that the God of ATR is far too idle or invisible to warrant the pre-eminent status allocated to him by African scholars eager to establish equivalence between the Christian God and the God of ATR as suggested by Horton (1984). If this God is an idle deity, such that his removal from the pantheon of gods does not affect the cosmic balance of forces that sees lesser deities functioning as usual and interfacing with humans, then ATR is properly a polytheism. There is no one supreme God as Abimbola (2006) has argued and certainly no creator-God as Oluwole and Odumuyiwa have suggested in respect of Yoruba traditional belief system (see FAYEMI 2012). Yet, preponderant evidence shows that what Idowu calls the ultimacy theory is deeply rooted in the metaphysical systems or worldviews of the overwhelming majority of African ethnic groups. The ultimacy theory affirms that God is the ultimate source of the powers of the lesser deities (IDOWU 1973, 135). Since this is the case, the removal of the ultimate factor, that is, God, from the cosmic picture of the universe willmean that there is no operational foundation for the lesser deities. Either these deities are self-caused, with each one constituting a supreme (all-powerful) being, as an *ens causa sui* that cannot be limited by any other being, or there are no spiritual entities but only finite physical entities. The first conclusion that follows from the rejection of the ultimacy theory leads to an absurd scenario where there are many supreme beings in a single universe. This is impossible. The second conclusion is conceivable as it merely replaces monotheism with atheism, the rejection of the existence of God and the lesser deities. The possible rationale for this atheism will be that reality is fundamentally physical and the existence of God and the gods cannot be determined through measurable scientific processes.

One obvious philosophical response to this atheism is to remind the atheist that his or her belief is no less probabilistic than the belief of the theist and polytheist since scientific theories do not exhaust the whole gamut of reality, at least considering the current level of sophistication of scientific knowledge of the world. A general argument in favour of monotheism or against atheism is, however, not the goal of this paper.

Here, I seek to show how rejecting the ultimacy theory of ATR rationally leads to the imagination of a G(g)od-less universe, which science cannot prove to be, indeed, G(g)od-less beyond suggestions of scientistic

platitudes. Pro-atheism stances may be rare in the ATR literature, but they are not completely non-existent. As a matter of fact, the writer and ATR scholar p'Bitek (1971a, 1971b) has suggested that the Luo people of East Africa have no conception of an omnipotent creator, or a single supreme being. He argues, like most recent decolonisation scholars of ATR and African philosophy, that the idea that the Luo have a distinct conception of a supreme being is a colonial imposition of Christian missionaries bent on smoothing the path of evangelisation by equating African notions of divinity with Christian ideas of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God. For p'Bitek, traditional Luo society can be described as not markedly religious but regulated by belief in the existence of independent cosmic forces or powers, the *jogi*, that directly influence the lives of human beings. As interesting as p'Bitek's view is, it is undoubtedly an outlier in the ATR literature, as the literature reveals widespread belief in the reality of a divine being that is either the direct creator of the world or co-creator with support from lesser deities that the divine being controls. Obviously, it cannot be asserted categorically that there is only one conception of God in ATR and traditional African thought and that this conception is one that presents God as a limited deity.

While African philosophers like Bewaji and Wiredu who are committed to the limitation framework interpret Yoruba and Akan traditional worldviews as supporting the idea of a limited God, Idowu and Gyekye independently interpret the same Yoruba and Akan worldviews theistically. Wiredu (1998) asserts that the Akan conceive God as merely a cosmic architect or builder who constructs the world from matter that has always existed. The implication here is that the concept of a creator is not necessarily accompanied by the idea of supremeness or omnipotence. The pre-existing matter which God did not cause can have an essence that allows for circumstances that render the creator impotent in some ways, for instance, in the way of stopping the evil in the world supposedly created or designed by God. Such a limited God may be good and just but still unable to eliminate evil in the world (see WIREDU 2010, 195). Analysing linguistic and cultural phenomena of the Akan, again just as Wiredu did, Gyekye identifies the transcendent moment of Akan religious thought and worldviews as an accurate interpretation of the Akan conception of God. Based on his analysis of names used to describe God and the belief system of the Akan, he concludes that the Akan God is infinite, unlimited, immaterial, and eternal (see GYEKYE 1995; AGADA 2017).

Thus, contrary to the views of Bewaji and Fayemi, analysis of the notions of creatorship, co-creatorship, and controllership plausibly leads one to accept the existence of a transcendent God rather than the categorical claim that God exists but only as a limited deity. Whether ATR is understood as essentially monotheistic in the traditional sense or whether one follows Idowu (1973, 135) in calling ATR a diffused monotheism, what is not in doubt is the rootedness of the ultimacy theory. A diffused monotheism, as conceived by

Idowu, underlines the ubiquity and importance of lesser deities within a cosmic system controlled and effectuated by a supreme being, or God.

Nevertheless, Abimbola's interesting perspective on co-creatorship deserves some attention as he seeks to show how the concept leads one to question the assumed monotheism of Yoruba religion and the idea of an omnipotent Yoruba God. He asserts that the Ifa corpus does not recognise a single creator-God but rather four powerful deities occupying the same primordial space and more or less vying for supremacy (ABIMBOLA 2006). The deities are Olodumare (traditionally regarded as the supreme being), Esu, Ifa, and Obatala. Olodumare did not create Esu, Ifa, and Obatala. The three deities are co-equal with Olodumare, with whom they are also co-creators. Each deity has its sphere of supremacy. While, for instance, Olodumare is supreme in the sphere of governance and "political administration of the cosmos," Ifa is supreme in matters of "knowledge and wisdom" and Obatala is supreme in areas of "creation and corporeality" (2006, 72). Abimbola uses the term corporeality in the sense of materiality.

Still, Igboin (2014, 204),in his critique of Abimbola, has noted that while deities like Obatala are allocated important roles in the creation of finite beings like humans in Yoruba religious thought, it is Olodumare that has the unique power to animate, or breathe life into, beings moulded by Obatala, for instance. The significance of life-giving, Igboin notes, indicates the pre-eminence of Olodumare. Against Bewaji, he notes that a God so powerful as to be able to do both good and evil unhindered must be all-powerful indeed. He suggests that one may compare the lesser deities to the angels at the beck and call of the Christian God rather than regard them as rivals of Olodumare. He concludes insightfully that the promoters of a limited God as the authentic interpretation of God in traditional Yoruba thought have failed to "present a uniform account of Olodumare, therefore, it is difficult to assert that their refutation of Idowu's thesis is tenable" (2014, 207).

I submit that the claimed refutation of Idowu's thesis is untenable because there is a clear transcendent moment and a distinct non-transcendent moment in Yoruba religion and thoughtand, by extension, ATR and African traditional thought. The rootedness of the transcendent and non-transcendent perspectives on the nature of God in African religious thought commits the African philosopher of religion to recognize two equally legitimate theses, namely, 1. There exists a Supreme Being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent. 2. Only a limited deity exists and this deity is neither wholly good nor able to end the suffering in the world. Failure to recognise the antinomy of God's existence in ATR as is the case with Bewaji and Fayemi, will lead to the formulation of inconsistent metaphysical frameworks of God's existence and the reality of evil. Bewaji and Fayemi reach the conclusion that in Yoruba traditional thought Olodumare, or God, is both omnipotent and not omnipotent in one and the same sense. Acknowledging the legitimacy of the two theses will enable African philosophers to consistently advance debates in the still fledgling field of African philosophy of religion within the frameworks of

limitedness and transcendence. The transcendental perspective will admit the reality of an omnipotent God and pursue the resolution of the logical and evidential problem of evil in a uniquely African fashion that makes a contribution to issues in global philosophy of religion. On the other hand, philosophers committed to the limitation perspective will want to demonstrate how a limited God interacts with a world that shows clear evidence of moral and physical evil. Non-theists who favour atheism will also make their voices heard and demonstrate how atheism follows from the idea of a hidden God.

It may be objected that I have not read Bewaji and Fayemi charitably since what they set out to do is to simply present cultural facts with a religious hue. This possible objection trivialises the works of the two scholars by situating them in the field of anthropological studies instead of the field of critical philosophical enquiry. As philosophers engaged in the presentation, systematisation, and interrogation of cultural facts, Bewaji and Fayemi are obliged to identify the antinomy of God's existence and, accordingly, navigate the logical trap set by the antinomy.

One may object that if there is indeed an antinomy, then it must be shown that one thesis is right and the other wrong, and this task has not been accomplished. Now, it is tempting to assume that the very fact of the antinomy indicates that one thesis is correct and the other wrong. If God exists, it is either he is a transcendent being or a limited deity. This proposition that captures the antinomy seems to demand justification. However, the task here is not demonstrating the existence or non-existence of God. I am concerned with how Africans broadly conceive God, and I have argued all along that cultural and linguistic phenomena clearly reveal more than one way of conceiving God.

Consequently, asking questions about which perspective is correct will take one nowhere. It is possible that the proponents of traditional theism like Mbiti, Idowu, and Gyekye are positively disposed to the transcendental conception of God due primarily to the influence of Christianity (see, for instance, P'BITEK 1971; KATO 1975). It is also possible that the decolonisation scholars overstate matters when they assert that Africans conceive God as a limited deity. What is not in doubt is the cultural rootedness of the perspectives favoured by both camps.

It is not unusual for dual, and even pluralistic, perspectives on God to coexist in the worldviews of diverse ethnic and racial groups. One can find evidence of pluralism even in the Judeo-Christian tradition which is usually regarded as espousing traditional theism. In the Old Testament there are passages that clearly undermine the idea of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God. Exodus 32:14 states that: "And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (King James Version). The New King James Version translates the word evil as harm. Harm causes suffering and a harmful thing is an evil from the human standpoint. If for the sake of argument, one says that the so-called evil is the punishment a just (therefore still benevolent) God hands down to humans with regret, his omnipotence is

called into question since, as a creator, it was within his vast powers to have created morally perfect beings. In Genesis 6:6 one reads that: "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (King James Version). God's regret reveals not only incapacity to have created morally perfect humans but also incapacity to have known the future from the beginning.

The fact that there is an antinomy in traditional African religious thought should not worry African philosophers. The task before African philosophers is abstracting from cultural facts and sustaining logical consistency as they universalise African cultural particulars through critical thinking.

Conclusion

In this essay, I examined the claim by Bewaji and Fayemi that there is no transcendent moment in the Yoruba-African understanding of God. This claim is supposedly justified by Yoruba linguistic and cultural phenomena such as myths and the Ifa corpus. I demonstrated that dogmatic commitment to the claim that Yoruba belief structure conceives God as a limited deity leads to the kind of inconsistency and contradiction inherent in the thought of Bewaji and Fayemi, where the framework of limitedness is proposed and God is described simultaneously in terms of omnipotence and limitation. I showed that there is clear evidence in the literature on ATR of two legitimate conceptions of God, one supporting the thesis of a limited God and the other endorsing the thesis of the existence of a transcendent God. I submitted that the recognition of the legitimacy of these two distinct theses will enable African philosophers of religion to avoid the kind of logical inconsistency that mars Bewaji and Fayemi's well-received essays which I critiqued in this paper.

The field of African philosophy is still very much in its fledgling stage. Taking note of the plausibility of the two theses highlighted in this essay will go a long way in advancing the frontier of debates in the field. Philosophers committed to the framework of transcendence will have to reckon with resolving the problem of evil, while philosophers committed to the framework of limitedness will tackle questions related to the evaluation of the concepts of power and powerfulness and establish how powerful a limited God conceived as a creator or co-creator can be in relation to the universe.

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An Argument for the Non-Existence of the Devil in African Traditional Religions

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Abstract
In this essay, I will argue that the discourse over the existence of the Devil/Satan has no place among the religious cultures in sub-Saharan Africa. This may be contrasted with the numerous efforts in the dominant philosophy of religion tradition in the Anglo-American sphere, where efforts toward the establishing grounds for the existence of God have occupied and commanded so much attention. On the other hand, it seems to have been taken for granted that Devil, the One who is antagonistic of God, among the Abrahamic monotheisms, is assumed to exist and does not require serious intellectual elaboration. For my aim, I explore the traditional Yorùbá and Igbo religious cultures to foreground that God. In the traditional belief system of these two religious cultures, there is no place to entertain the idea of a necessarily antagonistic entity, popularly called the Devil.Whereas I recognise previous scholarships that have served to show that Èṣù and Ekwensu in each of these religious cultures are not synonymous with Devil in the Abrahamic monotheisms, I move beyond these to establishing the ontological framework which endorses the absence of a Devil, even when evil lingers in the world. If the argument that there is no Devil/Satan in these religious cultures is proved valid, then it is pertinent to tender the origin and persistence of evil in the world. For this task, I explore the process-relational character of Yorùbá and Igbo theology to reinforce my conviction concerning the peoples' belief in the existence of God in Chukwu and Olódùmarè, the presence of evil in the world, without encountering the philosophical problem of evil.
Keywords: Devil, Igbo, Process Ontology, God, *Yorùbá.*

Introduction

Mainstream scholarship in the traditional Western discourse on religion has been engrossed, over the centuries, with arguments and counter-arguments over grounds upon which the existence of God may be admitted. As a perennial discourse that commenced in the medieval era, various arguments for and against the existence of God, have yet to receive conclusive grounds or finality. On the other hand, it has not been a matter of intellectual inquiry if Satan or Devil exists and whether it is pertinent to establish the existence of this other antagonistic entity in the light of the evil that persists in the world. When the traditional religious cultures in Africa encountered Christianity and Islam, the imposition of the understanding of the idea of God in these non-African religious cultures surfaced, thereby compromising and even frustrating the idea of God among traditional Africans (see P'BITEK 1973). There was the emphasis on the need to provide the name of God among Africans but whose qualities will bear the same with the Abrahamic monotheisms soon became replete, as Samuel Imbo (2004, 369-370) correctly notes:

> If God has a name, then the task of the missionary is that of finding out what the equivalent name is in the African languages. *Mungu* in the Kiswahili, *Jok* in Acoli, *Allah* in Arabic, *Rubanga* also in Acoli must therefore be the local names of the Christian God. Okot notes that the missionaries did not carry out the lengthy and systematic studies in the African languages concerned to find out what true beliefs of the Africans where. They were simply looking for a local confirmation of their cherished preconceptions.

In an analogous fashion, there was no serious consideration over the existence of the Devil in African Traditional Religion (ATR, hereafter), but only the invitation of the use of seemingly malicious and trickster deities as the corresponding version of Satan in the Abrahamic monotheisms. For the traditional Igbo and Yorùbá religious cultures, Ekwensu and Èṣù, respectively are the deities that were erroneously passed as the Satan. The task of this research, then, is to show that much as the reality of evil in the world is not a matter of debate, ATR can reconcile the existence of God with evil in the absence or non-existence of God's antagonistic entity – Satan. Hence, the occupation of this research is to argue for the lack of Satan in ATR in a coherence manner that allows for the reality of evil as well as the existence of God to be admitted.

To be able to attain the foregoing aim, it is crucial to examine briefly the history and evolution of belief in the term, Devil among the Abrahamic monotheisms. This exploration is key as it can help to see that strictly speaking, there is no conclusive evidence that there is indeed an entity called Devil/Satan that can exist without human imagination. In other words, even in the mainstream non-African intellectual religious tradition, there is no conclusive evidence for the existence of the Devil. Establishing this thesis is

the commerce of the next section, which is the first. In the second section, this research makes the effort to show that belief in the existence of the Devil has no place in ATR, by using the religious cultures of the Igbo and Yorùbá as a fulcrum. Whereas it must be stated that this study is not the first to divulge that Devil, among the Abrahamic monotheisms is not the same as Ekwensu and Èṣù, in Igbo and Yorùbá, respectively, it is important to emphasise that there has been almost no effort to provide the Afro-metaphysical foundation that makes the belief coherent. This is the objective of the third part of this research. The fourth part of this study is the conclusion.

Shifting Narratives and the Identity of the Devil in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic Traditions

Before engaging the idea of the Devil in these two religious traditions, it is important to state that they share some similarities. They are products of the same region and both, along with Judaism, venerate Abraham as their father-figure. In spite of this apparent common grounds, the dualistic theologies of Christianity and Islam were shaped by the Southern Reformation, a consequent of the clash between Bishop Cyril and Bishop Nestor on the nature of God (OFUASIA 2015). Whereas the former represented the paganizing arm of the Church, the latter stood as its philosophic or scientific counterpart. Whereas the former is willing to admit Mary as God-bearer (i.e.*Theotokos*), the latter grants that Mary can only be Christ-bearer (i.e. *Christotko*). The consequence of this clash led to organised Islam under the Holy Prophet Mohammed, since Jesus, though considerd as a prophet of high standing in Islam is usually addressed as "Son of Mary." This is an aftermath of Mohammed's interaction with the Nestorians (OFUASIA 2015). In the words of William Draper, "Mohammed is brought in contact with the Nestorians and catholic faith. He adopted and extended their principles of hours of prayer and rosary chanting while rejecting the worship of the Virgin, the doctrine of the Trinity, and everything in opposition to the unity of God. He extinguished idolatry in Arabia, by force, and prepared to make war on the Roman Empire. His successors conquered Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, North Africa, Spain, and invaded France" (DRAPER 1910, 39). This, however is not the focus of this present discourse. It can only serve as an interesting anecdote to some of the feuds that informed Islam's distinct theology, even when Jesus and Abraham are admitted as Chrstians do.

Since the admission that a creature that is created yet diametrically and necessarily opposed to the Creator is alien to ATR, then inquiry must take flight via the Abrahamic monotheisms, whose religious influence in the world commands a staggering profile. For the Abrahamic monotheist, the straightforward answer to the question: "Who is the Devil?" will be that the Devil is the "Commander-in-chief of the fallen angels" (CORTE 1958, 7). This is a consensus which the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam admit completely as true. However, it must be said that over the years, due to the experiences of the harsh realities of life as well as the

undeniable place of evil and suffering in the world, the Devil soon became personified. Izak Spangenberg (2013, 213) shares this outlook when he writes that: "Believers consequently resort to belief in Satan (Belial/Lucifer/Devil) as a way of making sense of their world." It is also the case that "If one wishes to understand the origin of belief in Satan, one has to study the history of Israel's religion" (SPANGENBERG 2013, 213). On first showing, this would mean that the origin of the belief in the existence of the Devil commenced with the religion of the Israelites. A deeper exploration with the Russian scholar of religion, Sergei Tokarev (1988) underscores how the belief in two opposing forces is displayed between *Ahura Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu* in Persian Mazdaism. It is from Mazdaism, according to Tokarev (1988, 352) that Christians "adopted many other elements as well – the ancient burial cult with the attending belief in the afterlife of the soul; the shaman practice of exorcising evil spirits; magic healing methods; the ancient worship of genies relating to Nagualism and transformed in Christianity into guardian angels etc.; the survivals of ancient totemic rituals and notions (belief in Immaculate Conception, the mystery of communion)."

Much as the belief in the reality of the Devil as an adversary or opponent to a good God as held among the Abrahamic monotheisms, has its root in Persia *Mazdaism*, it is to the credit of Christianity that the Devil became personified in several measures and historical circumstance. This is the case since Christians identify themselves with the one true God and Jesus while they made those oppose to the Gospel to be in communion with and under the Devil's influence (PAGELS 1995). Before engaging how the idea of the Devil became replete in Christian doctrine, it will be helpful to relay how the idea has developed in Judaism too. On this note, it is important to expatiate that at first the idea of a creature who is an adversary to a good God was foreign to the Jews.

It has been suggested that the Jews encountered this outlook in "Mazdaism when they were ruled by the Persian Kings (sixth-fourth centuries B.C.). Probably this influence explains the concept of the evil spirit – Satan, God's antagonist. At first this ideas was alien to the Jews, and it is nearly absent from the Bible" (TOKAREV 1988, 237). It is from the interaction between the Jews and the Persians that several popular doctrines that dovetailed into Christianity emerged. Central to the doctrines which Christianity adopted through the Persian-Judaic interaction are:

> The Judean idea of the Messiah-Saviour that had been transformed into a spiritual saviour and merged with the images of agricultural dying and resurrecting gods; the Gnostic teaching of the opposition between spirit and matter and the divine medium between them – Logos; the Mazdaist notion of the evil spirit, the Devil; the ancient worship of the goddess mother (the Mother of God). (TOKAREV 1988, 352)

The first terrestrial appearance of the Devil in the Judeo-Christian revelations is represented as a serpent who deceived the first humans to initiate the fall from grace. This story may actually be metaphorical, since there are *only* three books of the Old Testament where the word Satan/Devil refers essentially to a celestial being.[1] In the events recorded in these three books of the Old Testament, not a single one passes Satan/Devil as *Yahweh*'s adversary, but a member of what Izak Spangenberg (2013, 216) calls "the heavenly court." What this means is that originally, Satan was not conceived as an opponent to *Yahweh*. The First Temple period (950-586 B.C.E); the Babylonian Exile (586-539 B.C.E) disclose an idea of Satan that is not necessarily opposed to Yahweh. However, from the Second Temple period (539-70 C.E), which commenced with the Persian period (539-333 B.C.E.), the evolution of Judaism into a deeply monotheistic religion with Devil as an entity that is opposed to God became clearer (see SPANGENBERG 2013). It was after this era that three fundamental stories concerning the Devil may be detected in the Judeo-Christian (RILEY 1999).

In the first rendition, the sons of God were said to have had illicit sexual affairs with the daughters of men leading to the presence of giants (RILEY 1999). These giants are said to have been drowned during the Great Flood while "their disembodied souls eventually became demons.[2] The leader of the demons, whose name is Asazel, was none other than the Devil…He was also called Baalzebub, the prince of the demons, and had once been the prime angel in heaven" (SPANGENBERG 2013, 222). The implication of this tale is before the flood, the idea of Devil was unheard of.

The second account of the Devil reflects in the story of the creation of Adam by God (see RILEY 1999). Upon commanding the angels to pay homage to Adam, "one angel rebelled and refused to do so. He motivated his act by arguing that he had existed long before Adam, who should rather pay homage to him. Other angels joined in the rebellion and the rebellious angels under the command of the Devil were then expelled from heaven" (SPANGENBERG 2013, 223). This narrative is also recorded in the Islamic tradition where the Devil is personified as *Iblis* who refused to bow to Adam.[3] According to Charles Mathewes (2021), "Some Islamic thinkers call Iblis an angel, some call Iblis a genie; Iblis is the one who becomes *ash-Shaitan,* the primordial rebel against God." The consequence of the refusal to bow to Adam is banishment into the terrestrial world and this is what accounts for the origin of evil in the world, according to Islamic theology. As Mathewes (2021) explains, "In the Islamic tradition, Satan himself is only ambiguously a personal agent. Sometimes Iblis appears as an agent, a person, with desires and designs on humanity…"

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[1]See Zechariah 3: 1-2; Job 1: 6-12; 2: 1-7; 1st Chronicles 21: 1
[2]See Genesis 6: 6-6; Jude 6; 2nd Peter2: 4. The Apocryphal book, 1st Enoch 6-16 also documents this event.
[3]In Al-Qur'an 7:12, Satan is quoted to have justified to Allah his refusal to bow Adam thus: "I am better than he: Thou hast created me of fire, while him Thou didst create from clay."

Sufi Islam however, has put up a spirited defence of Satan's refusal to bow. The refusal of the Devil to bow to Adam is an act that upholds the Islamic position that the only person worthy of being bowed to is Allah. This reasoning is linked to the conviction that Allah would not want the angels to worship anything other than Allah, especially something younger and even inferior (HOYT 2008). This is the position of the renowned Islamic Sufi scholar Al-Ghazali when he reflects: "Encountering Eblis on the slopes of Sinai, Moses hailed him and asked, "O Eblis, why did you not prostrate before Adam? Eblis replied, "Heaven forbid that anyone worshipped anything but the One…This command was a test" (see HOYT 2008). What this means is that for the Devil, the entire affair was a test and this is why Sufi adherents such as Abdul Karim Jili maintain that "after the Day of Judgement, Satan will be back to the service of God as one of his cherished angels. Besides the personified notion of Satan, Islam views Satan as temptations in the mind described as whisperings and desire to do evil. *Iblis* is accordingly also a cosmic force, leading humans (and jinn) astray from good" (see NDUBISI 2019, 27).

There is no doubt that this second account of the Devil, as portrayed in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions may have registered prior to the Genesis account of creation. However, it is interesting that whereas the Bible only talks about Moses going up Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments,[4] there was no mention of Moses encountering any creature on the way up and down Mount Sinai. This means that an expression of the nature of Satan can get better through a patient exploration of the revelations of the Abrahamic monotheisms. Empirically speaking, one may however argue that no human was there to have witnessed the rancour that led to Satan's banishment and the anthropocentric narratives continue to make one wonder if the Devil is real or metaphorical. In one sphere, the Devil is tangible as one of God's rebelled creatures that presently leads human astray in the actual world. On the other hand, the Devil is passed as an intangible whispering in the minds of humans that lures them into evil thoughts and actions. If the latter position is held strongly, then only moral but not natural evil can be accounted for. Clearly, an incomplete picture of the nature of evil enters the discursive fray. More so, the ground upon which the masculine pronoun is used to refer to the Devil is also circumspect and in the end compromises any fair and reliable efforts at understanding the true nature of the Devil.

The third account which Riley (1999) discusses is taken from actions in the books of Isaiah 14: 4-20 and Ezekiel 28: 11-19. Whereas these "chapters concern the King of Babylon and King of Tyrus respectively…the prophecies served as base texts for a story about the origin of the Devil" (SPANGENBERG 2013, 223-224). In this instance, it is said that one of the

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[4]Even the Ten Commandments are not novel as the Bible would want it portrayed since the tablet that bears them presents great semblances with the Hammurabi Law Code, which had been in circulation hitherto.

archangels desired equal worship and adoration with God. This archangel, along with those who supported him where exited from the celestial realm. According to Greg Riley (1999, 246), this archangel "later on received the name Lucifer, the Latin translation of the Hebrew word for "morning star" used in Isaiah 14: 12." This narrative is closely related to the account of *Surah* 7 in *Al-Qur'an,* concerning the refusal to bow. In this narrative, it seems Satan impliedly commands equal recognition with God, whereas this is not how Sufi Islam comprehends this celestial rancour.

From the exploration on the three narratives of the belief in the Devil in Islamic and Jewish beliefs, it is arguable that existence of the Devil has yet to be empirically established as a physical entity that goes about trying human faithfulness to God. As Elaine Pagels (1995, 39) observes, the Hebrew term Satan connotes an "adversarial role. It does not describe a particular character." It was when Christianity attained widespread control and recognition that the evolution of the Devil took another shift into full real-life personifications. The New Testament seems to have another version of the Devil/Satan which is in stark contrast with what obtains in the Old Testament.

The Gospels seem to dictate that Jesus was on the side of the good and all other entities that are opposed to his ministry symbolise the Devil. Specifically, the anti-Jewish Book of Mathew, discloses how Judaism and Christianity started to part ways. Since the Jews were resistant to the message of Christ, their plot to killing their own Messiah signifies how misguided they were as they were playing the role of the Devil. As Pagels (1995, 65) puts it: "If Jesus is the Son of God, then, it implies that his opponents, the Jews are the agents of "Satan."" The Gospel of John portrays the Devil working in the form of Judas, Jewish authorities, and the Jewish people in general. In the long run, Christians possessed the knowledge that all factions waging war against them were agents or instruments of the Devil. In the case of Justin Martyr, one of the first Romans to accept the Christian faith, Pagels (1995, 120) relates: "[For Justin], Every god and spirit he had ever known including Apollo, Aphrodite, and Zeus, whom he had worshipped, he now perceived as allies of Satan…" It is in a related fashion that colonial and post-colonial Africans have almost forsaken their traditional religious cultures to embrace Christ, thereby rendering indigenous deities as agents or manifestations of the Satan/Devil. The overall aim thus far, has been to foreground that grounds for the belief of Devil in the Abrahamic traditions are amorphous or nebulous. In this next part of this research, the errors generated by attempts of introducing Satan into Africa will be given serious assessment, using traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* theologies as paradigm.

The Idea of the Devil in Traditional Igbo and Yorùbá Religious Traditions

With colonisation, civilisation and Christianisation of the Africans became tools to making the African truly human. The influence of not only Euro-Christian aptitudes but Arab-Islamic beliefs concerning the Devil cannot be

easily brushed aside in contemporary African living. Western ethnographic scholars and missionaries, alongside foremost African theologians, in a bid to make sense of ATR, started seeking the equivalents of Abrahamic concepts in ATR. One of the numerous consequences of this move is the 'creation' or imposition of the Devil into traditional African theology.

Among the Igbo, Ekwensu, a deity is construed as the Igbo equivalent of the Biblical and Quranic Satan. For the Yorùbá, Èṣù was erroneously used as well. In the Igbo and Yorùbá versions of the Bible, these two entities were drafted in and used to depict Satan/Devil. What do the terms: Ekwensu and Èṣù illustrate that endears them as the direct equivalents of the Satan/Devil, among the Igbo and Yorùbá? A brief articulation of the natures of these divinities is important to establish how they fit into the idea of a Devil that is necessarily opposed to God and also responsible for the evil experienced in the actual world.

Ekwensu, among the Igbos, is the "god of warriors" (see ISICHEI 1969). As one of the arrays of deities that were worshipped among the Igbos, Ekwensu is "in fact the spirit of violence and patron of warriors and not the Christian Devil" (KANU 2013, 548). Ekwensu is also perceived as a trickster deity and has the capacity to create confusions if not properly propitiated (EZEH 2012). As a blood-thirsty deity, Ekwensu is associated with wars and violence and in spite of these qualities, Ekwensu is not shy of worshippers, as correctly noted by Anthony Kanu (2013, 548) that "among the Igbos of Asaba, there was a festival called Ekwensu festival, and it constituted their major annual feast, during which they displayed their military prowess." It is therefore questionable how this "god of warriors," who also possesses the capacity to be benevolent, became associated with the nebulous character of Satan/Devil as indicated in the Bible and Al-Quran. This cannot be divorced from the Hellenisation project of ATR, which the Ugandan scholar, Okot p'Bitek (1972) had accused African and non-African theologians of. This Hellenisation project eventually led to the imposition of categories and mistranslation (NDUBISI 2019, 27-28). It is from these two approaches that Ekwensu among the Igbo has been mistranslated as the Devil of the Bible and Al-Qur'an. The attributes of the Devil in these Abrahamic revelations has also been imposed upon Ekwensu thereby rendering the deity away from its original conception. This is evident in the doctrine of Pentecostalism in Igbo society. For instance, Jude Aguwa (1987, 40) appends that: "Ekwensu (the devil) is the most wicked spirit and he does extensive harm even without provocation. He is eternal enemy of Chukwu (God). He and his group are able to manipulate man's will and emotions and induce him to do evil. Ekwensu is considered so dangerous to handle, so uncompromising and so unappeasing that shrines for him do not exist." Clearly, Aguwa's rendition of the nature and belief of Ekwensu among the Igbo is both untrue and misleading. The outlook that Ekwensu has a group and is antagonist to Chukwu is a clear imposition of the nature of the Devil in the Abrahamic monotheisms over Igbo ontology and

theology. As a way of correcting this misleading rendition, John Anenechukwu Umeh (1999, 196-197), ripostes:

> Ekwensu is also confirmed to be one of the benevolent lunar deities. The Igbo Afa terminology Ora Obala/Oha Obala literally means child of the sun, which means the moon, the Eagle, and Ekwensu,…It is indeed a ridiculous absurdity for any Igbo person to talk of Ekwensu as a devil or an evil spirit as the Eagle and the moon and the child of light have never been associated with evils or evil ones but have always been associated with achievement, good victory, success and beautiful ones.

In a matter of dispute of this nature, the best way of making sense of this belief is to explore the ritual archives of the traditional Igbo as Umeh (1999) does. This discloses the proper belief of the Igbo as it was originally held before colonial and Western civilisation. In spite of the establishment that Ekwensu is not the direct equivalent of Satan, it needs to be said that it is an ontological entity that is usually associated with natural but not moral evil:

> The traditional Igbo do not think of Ekwensu as the force that stands in opposition to other supernatural beings. Certainly, evil deeds, especially unexpected and unintentional ones are attributed to his influence. But moral evil is not attributed to him. His malevolence is attributed to bring misfortune. Ekwensu has no nkwu (statue) and is in some areas invoked and extolled during warfares and within three days set apart among the western Igbo as festivals of Ekwensu (Igba oso Ekwensu) (OGUEJIOFOR 1984, 85).

Since Ekwensu commands worship among some Igbos, it is therefore clear that the rendition of Aguwa (1987) is unreliable and nothing other than the imposition of Abrahamic conceptions of the Devil over Igbo ontology, leading to misrepresentation and distortion. Same may be said of Èṣù, among the Yorùbá, who will now be the focus of inquiry.

Like Igbo ontology, Èṣù is one of the deities in Yorùbá ontology that has suffered the misfortune of being passed as a direct equivalent of the Devil as espoused in the Bible and Al-Qur'an.

The word Èṣù is a combination of a prefix 'È' (i.e. you) and a verb 'ṣù' (i.e. to harmonize or bring together). Hence, Èṣù may be seen as "one who brings people or issues together for harmonious existence" (ADEKOLA 2013, 58). Èṣù is arguably, one of the most misrepresented of the òrìṣàs (divinities) in Yorùbá ontology. He is known by different names to different people (AKANDE & OFUASIA 2021, 102). This is why it has been documented that "The Yoruba call him Èṣù, Ẹlẹgbára, Lanroye and Ẹlẹgbà, but he has many names from different homes. To the Fon he is Legba; in African America, he is Papa Joe; in the Caribbean he is Papa Labas and Loa Legba; in Brazil he is Exu. He is the God of duality, multiplicity, duplicity, confusion and evolution.

Ẹlegbà is one of the most significant divinities, and his origin texts, manifestations and contributions are innumerable" (WASHINGTON 2013, 315). The renowned scholar of Yorùbá studies, Wande Abimbola (1976, 9) is of the outlook that Èṣù is "the servant or messenger of God and other deities but Èṣù is closer to Ọrúnmìlà than any other divinity." Abimbola's (1976) assertion is right since Èṣù is usually depicted at the top of the divining trays (Ọpọn Ifá) of the Ifá diviners. Similarly, Shitta-Bey (2013, 79) amplifies that "Èṣù is primarily a special relations officer of Olódùmarè and a messenger of the gods."

For the sake of the discussion here, it is interesting to understand that the identity of Èṣù among all the Yorùbá divinities has suffered the most from gross imposition and misrepresentation. The exposition of Samuel Johnson (1921, 28), like Ajayi Crowther before him misleads one into taking the perspective that Èṣù passes as the Biblical Satan, the Evil One, the author of all the evil experienced in the world. It is, however, important to disclose that there have been concrete efforts at correcting this wrong equivalent. Emmanuel Ofuasia (2021); Emmanuel Ofuasia and Babajide Dasaolu (2017); Kazeem Fayemi (2013); Danoye Laguda (2013); Oladele Balogun (2009); John Bewaji (1998); Sophie Oluwole (1995) are some intellectual exertions that have shown why the expression of Èṣù as Devil in the Judeo-Christian and Biblical traditions.

The core of their various arguments is that the personification of Abrahamic imposition of Èṣù as Devil has no place in African ontology and theology. For them, the evils in the world cannot be traced to the handiwork of Èṣù. In the words of Oladele Balogun (2009, 31): "The Yoruba do not postulate an all evil being that is solely responsible for the occurrence of evil as we have in the West or in Judeo-Christian thought. Rather, the Yoruba conceive both evil and good as arising from the activities of Olodumare (God,) his ministers (divinities) and other theoretical entities." Similarly Sophie Oluwole (1995, 20) expatiates that "The Yoruba thinker recognizes evil as real, but he does not regard its existence as proof of God's incompetence or His limited goodness, since He is not conceived as absolute in any of these sense in the first instance." In spite of these scholarly exertions aimed at clearing the distortion, it is still clear that in the understanding of the average modern-day Yorùbá, just like Ekwensu among the Igbo, Èṣù continues to be perceived as an agent that directly or indirectly accounts for the sufferings and evils in the world. It is therefore clear that clearing misrepresentations and distortions will not do. A plausible metaphysical framework that admits the existence of God, the reality of evil but which excuses an antagonistic Devil to God, as the effective causation of evil and suffering is important to put the matter to rest. In the next section, this ontological framework is the focal concern.

Process-Relational Philosophy and Evil in Traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* Religious Traditions

The use of process-relational theology for comprehending Igbo and Yorùbá theologies can be justified on the basis of the recent urgency in African scholarship to cast away the misrepresenting tendencies of substance metaphysics, which is not only steeped in Aristotle's metaphysics, but also the two-valued logic upon which it thrives. In recent times, works of scholars such as Ada Agada (2015) have served to show the emergence of process thinking in African scholarship. However, much as these African authors are bold to state in clear terms theories that their metaphysical theories are not inspired from substance thinking, they have to openly announce their process-undergirding, which I have discerned in their efforts. It is because of this lack of open avowal to process-relational metaphysics that I take to Whitehead's (1978) analysis for the present inquiry. To understand how traditional Igbo and Yorùbá societies were able to conceive the identity of Ekwensu and Èṣù respectively in relation to the reality of evil and suffering in the world, an exposition of the core aspect of process-relational thought may be of immense help. This is because the process-relational philosophy, first fully or extensively codified by Alfred North Whitehead (1978) treats the reality of evil and suffering in the world in ways that traditional Igbo and Yorùbá societies do. This semblance is one of the reasons why this research takes the position that traditional Igbo and Yorùbá thought systems are ancient models of process philosophy. What then is the core of process-relational philosophy? How does it treat the reality of evil and suffering in the world and how does its treatment consider the Devil?

There are various strands of process-relational philosophy. This study will however stick with Whitehead's (1978) analysis since most of the contemporary discourses on this strand of metaphysics take inspiration from him, being the first to codify the central thesis.

Whitehead (1978, vi) calls his version of process philosophy, "philosophy of organism." He makes this assertion following his conviction that traditional substance metaphysics, which is the dominant metaphysical perspective in Western philosophy, is inadequate on many fronts. Instead of positing that the world is made of substance as Aristotle and nearly all the influential Western philosophers maintain, Whitehead vies for actual entities/occasions. For him, actual occasions or entities are "the final real things of which the world is made. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 18). It is clear that Whitehead is rejecting and replacing substance with actual entities with the aim of showing how consciousness emerged. Substance metaphysics could not account for the origin of consciousness, especially in the light of developments in the fields of electromagnetic and quantum physics. Whitehead, being a philosopher of science, at one point in his intellectual career takes the outlook that it is more sensible to assume that there are degrees "of experience in every entity than to assume there is none on the lower end of being and that

somehow, miraculously, experience sprang from nowhere" (OLAV 2010, 7). This is the development of his theory of panexperientialism – the metaphysical doctrine that all things, animate and inanimate are capable of having experience. With this, the hard question of the origin of consciousness in traditional metaphysics is put to rest. On this metaphysical doctrine, it is clear that the individual tissues and cells that make up plants and animals are individual actual entities with their unique experience, just as the computer that is used to type these words. In a nutshell, thoughts, imaginations, stones, trees, chimpanzees, lakes and water bodies are various manifestations of actual entities, what Aristotle would call substance with various accidents. However, it is instructive to explain that given the understanding that the actual world comprises of actual entities, Whitehead adds that there higher level and lower level grades of actual entities/occasions. He stresses that "God is an actual entity, and so is the trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actuality exemplifies all are on the same level" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 18). What Whitehead implies here is that God is not beyond but bound to the metaphysical laws that dictate events for all other actual entities and the actual world. He stresses: "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save them from collapse. He is their chief exemplification" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 343).

All actual entities or occasions have two parts: physical and mental poles. So plants, humans, waters, stones all have these two aspects of existence, although one is more pronounced in some over others. For instance, among humans the mental pole is more pronounced than stones, where the physical pole is more manifest. This means that the distinction between the mind and the body in traditional metaphysics does not rear head in process metaphysics. God, who is a being of the highest grade, has two natures: the primordial and the consequent natures. In the primordial state, God provides all actual entities in the world with courses of actions and deliberations popular called "potentials or eternal objects" (WHITEHEAD 1978). God's primordial nature corresponds to the mental pole of all actual entities and this is how the eternal objects given to them by God are prehended.[5] Eternal objects or potentials are options open to all actual entities to admit into their essences or not. The ways that these entities respond, either positively or negatively to these eternal objects establish the consequent nature of God – the reaction of the world back on God. This nature, as Whitehead (1978, 46) puts it "…is the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe." This makes the entire scheme panentheistic in since God is necessarily influences and is influenced by the events of the world. And panentheism, as it functions in process ontology, in the words of foremost Whiteheadian scholar, David Ray Griffin (2010, 163) is summed thus: "What

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[5]Whitehead (1978) uses the term 'prehension' to capture the ways through which actual entities come to acquire these eternal objects from God. This is because of the failure of the popular term 'perception' to admit other ways of knowing beyond the five sense organs.

exists necessarily is not simply God alone but God-and-a-world – not our particular world, with its contingent forms of order, but some world or other." In a related development, William Lawhead (2002, 495) adds that panentheism "is the view that God includes the world in his being (since he is affected by every event within it) and at the same that he is more than the events in the world (God has his own unique aims and actions)." What these points illustrate is that the world is a collaborative effort among all actual entities with God occupying the highest hierarchy for being the only entity capable of positively dealing with eternal objects. In other words, God provides all actual entities in the actual world eternal objects because God, the highest of all actual entities, is capable of diminishing negative eternal objects for the positive ones, to be able to the role of an orderer in the actual world.

On the other hand, other actual entities, owing to their freewill may prehend positively or negatively. Hence, Whitehead (1978, 345) explains if the prehension is positive, "every entity on its finer side introduces God into the world." And on the non-fine side, what is introduced into the world is disharmony or disorder, or in clear terms, evil and suffering. It is precisely this factor that is responsible for the disorder or evil that is encountered in the actual world. This means that in process theology, there is no agent of antagonism, such as the Devil that accounts for the persistence of evil in the actual world. A little more elaboration is needed at this juncture.

Being a persuasive agency, if it is the case that God wants what is best for the world, and there is evil in the world, process theology says the evil is a result of deviation from what God intends for the world (OFUASIA 2021). Evil, is therefore, according to the Nigerian Whiteheadian scholar, Martin Onwuegbusi (2013, 259), "as a result of the individual deviating from what God intends for him, which is in fact the best." The main place that Whitehead gives to God is the role of the actual entity that guarantees order in the actual world and this to him is an adequate reason for maintaining the existence of God. In his words:

> …it is not the case that there is an actual world which accidentally begins to exhibit an order of nature. There is an actual world because there is order in nature. If there were no order, there would be no world. Also, since there is a world, we know that there is an order. The ordering entity is a necessary element in the metaphysical situation presented by the actual world. (WHITEHEAD 1957, 104)

God, as understood in process theology, is immanent in the world even when it transcends all other actual entities in the world. Here, Whitehead expatiates further: "The immanence of God gives reason for the belief that pure chaos is intrinsically impossible." As a result, "God and the World stand over against each other, expressing the final metaphysical truth that appetitive vision and physical enjoyment have equal claim to priority in creation. But no two actualities can be torn apart: each is all in all. Thus each temporal occasion

embodies God, and is embodied in God" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 111). If God is nothing but an orderer, then it means there must be ultimate metaphysical category – the primordial ground which sustains all things, God inclusive. This category is what Whitehead calls Creativity.

According to Whitehead (1978, 21), Creativity is the "universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact." Creativity, in his word "lies in the nature of things that the many enter into one complex unity" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 31). Hence it may be deduced as Whitehead (1978, 47) does that God "is at once a creature of Creativity and a condition for Creativity." Due to this God like any other actual entity expresses Creativity but also as "organ of novelty, aiming at intensification" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 104) and the 'foundation of order…the goal towards novelty" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 135). It is precisely this capacity to play the role of an orderer as a creature of Creativity that makes makes order or events such as cause and effect, in the actual world to be possible.

It is also worthy of adding that the thrust of the exposition provided thus far is that God in process theology is "not adorned with the superlative accidents of might, power and knowledge. This is a persuasive but not a coercive God that breaks the laws of nature at will to save Its people miraculously. When coercive power involves parting the Red Sea, transgressing or upsetting the established law of water bodies, for some chosen people to thread on dry ground into Palestine, process theology proposes that God works persuasively and finds the idea of an all-powerful God untrue" (DASAOLU & OFUASIA 2019, 68). Hence, since God uses persuasive power, God sets before all entities (human and non-human; natural and moral) ideal of harmony, love and dignity, leaving them to either choose or not to act accordingly. It is the frustration of this ideal that accounts for the presence of evil in the universe (DASAOLU & OFUASIA 2019, 68). It is on this basis that the origin of evil and suffering in the world, according to process theology is not to be traced to a Devil that is antagonistic of God. Evil and suffering occurs as a result of the failure to do the right ideals which God presents before all actual entities, humans and non-human to choose from. As a result, the various quandaries which reinforce the problems of evil are absent in process theology, "…since God is neither an absolute nor ultimate being who is usually invoked to save metaphysical theories from rumbling" (OFUASIA 2021, 39).

For the Sufi, this process-relational analysis of the effective cause of evil may actually justify their outlook that the Satan/Devil is an intangible force who presents itself as temptations in the mind described as whisperings and desire to do evil. A related understanding seems to have been held among the traditional Igbo and Yorùbá societies, even before process-relational metaphysics received its inspiring codification from Whitehead. The idea that evil and suffering may be traced to an agent of antagonism against Chukwu and Olódùmarè for the traditional Igbo and Yorùbá, respectively, has no place. It is the influx of mainstream and dominant Euro-Christian and Arab-Islamic

beliefs into Africa that accounts for the introduction of the beliefs of evil as the handiwork of a personal agent. When there was not explicit character in the traditional religions of Igbo and Yorùbá that works against the interests of Chukwu and Olódùmarè, distortions and misrepresentations emerged when Ekwensu and Èṣù, were erroneously invoked. As notable Igbo and Yorùbá scholars have argued in the preceding section, there is no space for a tangible entity that is opposed to God but also accounts for evil and suffering in the actual world. This study has moved beyond these assertions by providing an ontological and theological stance in process-relational philosophy that makes it possible to be able to admit belief in the existence of God, the reality of evil, but the non-existence of the Devil.

Based on the foregoing, to therefore say that there is no entity in traditional African religions that is equivalent to the Devil – an entity that is naturally antagonistic of the God in the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition is valid. The invocation of one deity by the early missionaries and African theologians that translated the Bible and *Al-Qur'an* into non-African languages are to blame for this sort of conceptual imposition. As this research has been able to argue, such an entity that is necessarily evil and jelous of God has no place in traditional African belief system, and the Igbo and Yorùbá religious cultures have been used as fulcrum to make this point clear.

Having used process-relational metaphysics as a metaphysical framework for making sense of traditional Igbo andYorùbá theologies, a critic may query the appropriateness of this approach as an instance in conceptual or theoretical imposition. On first showing, this may seem valid. However, to respond to this objection, it is helpful to understand that there are two popular ways of conceiving metaphysics – substance and process or becoming. These two ways are for me, no respecter of culture and race. The most popular and dominant approach is substance metaphysics and this has done so much distortion and misrepresentation of African thought systems. For instance, whilst admitting that the Bantu idea of Being is dynamic and becoming, Tempels (1959) was unable to resist his Aristotelian substance framework from not creeping into what would betray his rendition of Bantu ontology. Based on this, this research is convinced that the use of process-relational metaphysics is not an exercise in conceptual imposition since recent works of scholars such as Ada Agada (2015) has been able to show why that African ontology is more of process than substance.

Conclusion

Conceptual superimposition of categories and mistranslation on the part of Euro-Christian missionaries and Arab-Islamic scholars over ATR, accounts for the entertainment of the belief in the existence of the Devil. More so, this research has been able to argue that even in these two popular and global commanding non-African religious cultures, the idea of the Devil is shifting, nebulous and amorphous in relation to historical realities and perception. Two traditional African cultures, have however, been used to argue that there is no

existence of the Devil in ATR. Traditional Igbo and Yorùbá religions have shown that there is an explanation of the reason why evil and suffering persist in the actual world without invoking an adversary to God. The use of Ekwensu and Èṣù in Igbo and Yorùbá linguistics respectively, has been argued to be a result of imposition of categories and mistranslation. More so, as a way of making the outlook coherent and intelligible, the viable metaphysical scheme upon which it is possible to understand that there is God without an arch enemy in the Devil as the source of evil has been explored in process-relational ontology. On this note, this research maintains the position that there is no conclusive grounds for the existence of the Devil as the author of evil and suffering both in African and non-African religious cultures. Whereas this study has explored the traditional religious cultures of the Igbo and Yorùbá for its aim, it challenges the need to explore other African languages and cultures to see whether their understanding of the Devil parallels the ones from the Abrahamic monotheisms. On a final note, I make bold to say that any attempt by any human being who seeks to foreground the existence of an entity that has made the actual world a place of misery and misfortune need only look at the mirror, and there the real culprit appears, in flesh and blood.

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Abhored but Necessary: A Relational Interrogation of Zaman Lafia (Peaceful Living) and the Evil of the Death Penalty in the Traditional Hausa Belief System

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Abstract
In Hausa worldview, Peaceful living (*Zaman Lafiya)* is conceived as the chief goal of life. *Zaman Lafiya* is that which determines goodness or badness of actions and practices. Everything, including morality, life, death and the afterlife is construed as being good or bad with reference to *Zaman Lafiya*. So, for instance, no matter the gravity of one's wrongful conducts, it is not justified to punish him, except when punishing him does contribute to the consolidation/realization/attainment of *Zaman Lafiya*. This paper investigates the Hausa culture and belief system, especially the aspect of punishment alongside the actions that are thought of as being grave to warrant evil punishment such as the death penalty. With the aid of some Hausa proverbs and the African notion of relationality, it would demonstrate how a conversation of metaphysical nature is sparked among such realities/constructs as morality, life, evil, death and the afterlife. It will also show how living an ethical life entails acting in a manner that consolidates communal or relational existence as framework for Zaman Lafiya.
Keywords: Traditional Hausa Belief System, Zaman Lafiya, Death Penalty, God, Evil, Death, Afterlife, Crime and Punishment

Introduction

This paper discusses the death penalty from an African perspective. Using the example of the Hausa[1], the paper inquires and interrogates important concepts in relation to how they in turn impact on the Hausa worldview on the morality

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[1] Except otherwise specified, reference in this paper is to the Non- Muslim Hausa culture otherwise referred to as the Maguzawa. There is no gainsaying the fact that the maguzawa are the Hausa who have not succumb to the foreign influence of either Islam or Christianity. Their culture, belief and worldview remain as it was, especially before Islamic contact (MURRAY, 365). Worthy of note is the fact that very few are now left of the Maguzawa with majority succumbing to Islamic influence and a handful to Christianity. For centuries and as early as the 12th century, the Hausa have had their way of life changed by Islam so much so that it is now difficult to talk about Hausa without talking about Islam. This has led to the usual clarification by scholars of Hausa culture in terms of Muslim Hausa and Non-Muslim Hausa. Like many cultures in Africa south of the Sahara, the maguzawa worlview is relational.

or otherwise of the death penalty. The paper discusses Zaman Lafiya, death, afterlife and evil within the framework of Hausa worldview and the context of the roles they play in determining the moral justification of the Hausa cultural practice of the death penalty as a form of punishment for some wrongs committed.

In the first section, the paper examines Zaman Lafiya as a moral concept in Hausa worldview. The examination would show how Zaman Lafiya, guided by the Hausa teleological and cosmological thought, is considered as the chief goal of life through which the morality or otherwise of any practice, including the death penalty is determined. The second section discusses Hausa religious belief system and its perspective on evil, in relation to how the death penalty is construed as a necessary evil despite seeming to violate the African relational value encapsulated in the Hausa culture. The third section discusses the concept of death and afterlife, their place in Hausa communal thought and the role they play in the Hausa quest for the attainment of Zaman Lafiya as well as in the determination of the morality or otherwise of the death penalty. In the fourth section, the paper brings to the fore, Hausa thought on crime, punishment and the death penalty. The section identifies some wrongs that are punishable with death and the moral basis upon which the death penalty is thought of as an appropriate punishment for such wrongs. The conclusion follows immediately.

Zaman Lafiya and the Teleology of the Cosmos in Hausa Worldview: An Interrogation
The term Zaman Lafiya literally means peaceful living or peaceful coexistence in Hausa worldview, and it is regarded as that which should drive everything, every action or practice. In fact, it is the main goal, which everyone should aim to achieve. To achieve Zaman Lafiya entails, among others, that people cultivate and sustain good relationships. So, relationship or the principle of relationality,[2] which is widely defended in the African philosophical literature, is crucial to the achievement of Zaman Lafiya.

Zaman Lafiya is what should be the chief goal of life, and it is, as we shall come to see, what determines the moral status of Hausa cultural practices including, the death penalty. Zaman Lafiya is regarded as the chief goal of life in Hausa worldview largely because of the Hausa cosmological and teleological thought. Duniya (the universe), for the Hausa, is designed in such a way that it is manifestly complex. One of the ways in which this complexity is reflected is in the conceptualization of the term itself. As a concept, it is in Hausa worldview, used to mean at least two things. First, it is used to mean the world

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[2] Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021), for example, provide ample discussions on the centrality of relationship in the African worldviews and intellectual history.

(cosmos) and second, it is used to mean life (AMIN 2002, 248). When used to mean the world, otherwise referred to as bigire, reference is made to the space in which the existence of life of humans and other living things occur. Here, the environment (habitable and non-habitable), the waters and islands, directions and seasons, feature prominently (AYUBA 2019, 220). Closely related to this meaning is the conception of duniya as that about which is not so much known because of its being expanse, long and therefore unascertainable. This is reflected in the expression usually uttered by the Hausa when someone is missing. Thus, the Hausa say yana can uwa duniya, meaning he is out there in the world. When duniya is used in the second sense, it denotes life as an event and in this context, the totality of the experience that occurs from birth of especially humans, to death in the world.

Muhammad Lawal Amin (2002, 248-249) argues that the difference between duniya as cosmos and as life is seen in the expressions in which the words are used. Thus, where the Hausa say, duniya ta yi dadi (the world is enjoyable), reference is not to the world as a space but to life as an event. This, however, hardly goes to show a necessary difference because it is not meaningless for both the world as a space and as life to be conceived as being enjoyable. This is more so that life, as used in the second sense, necessarily occurs within the world/universe existing as a space and as used in the first sense. It is argued thus, that, it is when the Hausa hints the sense or context in which the term is used that the difference is revealed. It is not the case that once duniya is used in the Hausa expression above, it necessarily means life as an experience and not as a space within which life occurs.

Closely connected to this line of thought on the conceptualization of duniya in Hausa is the argument of K.C. Anyawu (2000 as cited by NDUBUISI and OKORO 2005, 67) that there exists the subject and the object in any conceivable experience. While the subject is thought of as the ego that experiences, that which is experienced by the subject is the object and is thought of as the world, of which the subject is a part. Here the object is thought of, from the point of view of African cosmology, with reference to the self and ultimately man who experiences, through life or living, the world.

The African conception of life as an experience or event is such that involves contradictions that must be reconciled in order to protect the self from danger. Such contradictions are not unconnected with the African notion of duality of experience as in body and mind, time and eternity etc. (NDUBUISI and OKORO 2005, 67). This is not different from the Hausa conception because, for the Hausa, life is conceived as being designed to be among others transient, hard, deceptive, contemptible, complex and capricious while yet being enjoyable, pleasing and attractive (AMIN 2002, 247; AMIN 2003, 1). Glaring contradictions are, for instance, demonstrated in the manner by which, on the

one hand, life is construed as being hard, deceptive and capricious, and on the other hand, it is construed as being enjoyable. For the Hausa, however, these contradictions are reconcilable by aiming to achieve Zaman Lafiya. To achieve this, as we shall see, one must possess some qualities, one of which is sani/ilimi (being knowledgeable) of how to navigate the turbulence of life. It is to this end that the Hausa say Zaman duniya iyawa ne, to live peacefully in the world is to know how to live.

Because these contradictions confront life, actions, practices and activities in Africa are conceived as responses to the contradictions. Life is deliberately confronted in such a manner that those contradictions are reconciled and or resolved. It is in the manner by which such contradictions are approached that social norms, morality and ultimately thoughts and beliefs of the African people are fashioned. For the Hausa, struggling to achieve Zaman Lafiya is the manner by which such contradiction should be confronted. In Hausa worldview, thus, it is only when Zaman Lafiya is attained that the contradictions of life can be resolved and the way it can and should be achieved is to make it of paramount importance so much so that it becomes the chief goal of life. It is by virtue of this that the Hausa say:

> *Zaman lafiya yafi gara*
> Peaceful living is worth more than wedding commodities (that a Hausa bride takes to her groom's house).

The Hausa also say:
> *Zaman lafia ya fi zama dan sarki*
> Living in peace is worth more than being a prince. It can also be used to mean that nothing matches the price of peace (AMIN 2002, 245; AMIN 2003, 2)

Given the importance with which the Hausa attach to the size and variety of farm produce which form the bulk of wedding commodities as well as the status of the prince, one can boldly say that the Hausa revere Zaman Lafiya to the extent that they rather forfeit farm produce meant to be used as wedding commodities than lose the state of peaceful co-existence. Also, even the exalted position of a prince can be forfeited in favour of attaining peaceful living.

As noted earlier, making Zaman Lafiya the chief goal of life entails the cultivation, development and possession of some virtues that are necessary for the actualization of that goal by individual Hausa. It is only when individuals are in the possession of these virtues that Zaman Lafiya can be attained. Some of the most important of those virtues include the cultivation of relational capacities such as tolerance, empathy, recognition, patience, etc. To achieve

Zaman Lafiya, one must enter into relationships with other humans and even the non-human elements in the environment. Since the attainment of Zaman Lafiya is a good, it is in the possession of these relational virtues that morality and ethics in Hausa worldview are construed. Thus, the Hausa man attains the status of mutumin kirki (the good man) only when these relational qualities are possessed and expressed.

Scholars such as Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene (2000), Amin (2002), Jerome H. Barkow (N.D, 3-6) have at varying length, identified some of these virtues and or qualities. While some qualities serve the purpose of making the good Hausa man in general some are specific in preparing the Hausa individual in the struggle for the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. Some of these general qualities are gaskiya and Amana (truth and trust), Karamci (open-minded generosity), hakuri (Patience), hankali (reason), ladabi (discipline), kunya (bashfulness), mutunci (humaneness), hikima and adalci (wisdom and scrupulous behaviours). These qualities are critical to constructing and sustaining healthy relationships.

On the other hand, the qualities that the Hausa should deliberately cultivate, develop and possess in order for the Hausa to be adequately prepared for the task of working towards the attainment of Zaman Lafiya are ilimi⁄sani (knowledge), hakuri (patience), juriya⁄jimiri (perseverance), gaskiya (honesty/truth/sincerity/objectivity), taka tsantsan (caution), himma (resoluteness), kwazo (hard-work), yakana (contentment), biyayya (obedience), mutunci (respectability) zumunci (communality) and mutual assistance (taimakon juna). Worthy of note is the fact that it is difficult to identify and exhaust all the qualities that meet the sufficient condition for being mutumin kirki in Hausa thought. What we may easily find are necessary conditions that aid one in constructing the sort of relationships that lead to Zaman Lafiya. What we have so far discussed is the general moral outlook of the Hausa with Zaman Lafiya or the struggle for its attainment as the determinant of good or bad. In the next section, our discussion will be on the Hausa belief system in relation to how evil is conceived and how the death penalty is thought of as a necessary evil.

The Hausa Belief System, God and Evil: An Overview
Although so much has been written about the Hausa from the point of view of academic disciplines such as History, Language, Anthropology and, to some degree, Religion, very little has been written about the Hausa from the point of view of philosophy, especially philosophy of religion. This is probably because the Hausa has had to contend with early foreign contact, with especially the Arabs. In this section, an attempt will be made at bringing to the fore introductory notes on the Hausa religious belief system, especially as it relates

to the Nature of deity or deities (God or gods) as well as the Hausa idea of evil. It is hoped that the issues raised would merit further debates. To begin, the traditional Hausa religion may originally have been anchored on the idea of evil which they believe hampers sustenance. From the understanding of human nature as beings who refuse anything good when angered, thereby making others suffer, the Hausa form the idea that there is something that is responsible for evil such as drought and drying up of rivers because of being angered. Just as Humans are approached for forgiveness when angered, so is that thing that brings about evil in the form of drought, ailment, etc. Hence, the struggle to constantly make that thing happy through sacrifices. Here is an anthropomorphic origin of the Hausa religious belief system according to which deity or deities are believed to exist by virtues of human attributes.

Another way by which the origin of the traditional Hausa religion is anchored is especially from the perspective of the struggle to do away with ailments. The Hausa, in this regard, conceive of something(s) beyond humans that are more powerful than humans and are able to end ailments as they are able to bring about good or evil to humans. From the knowledge they have of human nature also, the Hausa, conceive the idea of pleasing those things, which would turn out to be some kind of worship that would be later known as bori (being one of the two ways of worship) (IBRAHIM 1982, 36). What is common in the two conceptions of the origin of the traditional Hausa religion is the fact that evil existed and needed to be done away with. The salient point to note is that there is a presumption of some form of omnipotence and omniscience in the manner by which those powerful things who would be known as God (Ubangiji), gods and or spirits (iska or iskoki) are able to know how to solve human problem. One may argue that these deities are, however, not absolutely omnipotent and omniscient. This is in the manner by which they do not seem to know all human problems until they are told. It is also in the manner by which the deities, the spirits in this case, are thought of as being able to solve only particular problems. This is the case, except for God who is presumed to be one and is able to solve more general and complex problems. Thus, different iskoki, with different names have different designated purposes and powers exclusive to each other (MUCIZZ 1985, 50). In Hausa religious belief, thus, there are many (thousands) iskoki with Kure (hyena) as the chief iska who is worshipped by all, and that is why the Hausa construe hyena as a sacred animal (AMIN 2002, 148).

The problem of evil from the Hausa purview can better be understood in the following way. While the white spirits are the source of good, the black spirits are the source of evil. Some of the white spirits are Sarkin Makada (chief drummer), Sarkin Aljan (Chief spirit), Sarkin rafi (Chief spirit, of the Rivers) etc. on the other hand, the black spirits are Uwar gona (mother of the farms), Bako (the stranger), Gajimare, Duna, etc. (IBRAHIM 1982, 39-50)

The Hausa idea of God, especially as it regards omnipotence and omniscience is derived from the realization of human limitations, which is expressed in Mutum tara yake bai cika Goma ba (man is nine (9) and not ten (10)) (AMIN 2002, 130). Goma, which means ten, in this proverb is used as a metaphor for perfection/completion/finality/greatness. The proverb is situated in the context of Hausa idea about numbers and counting with ten as some kind of the greatest number. Since the Hausa have an idea of completion and since the Human is said to be incomplete, speculation about the idea of a Being that is complete, thereby matching ten as a number, with all the attendant qualities of perfection and completion, is inevitable. This speculation or wonder is to be found in the manner by which the Hausa say, Allah na mutane, mutane na tukwane, tukwane na fashewa (Allah creates men, men create pots and pots do break) (AMIN 2002, 130). Implied in this saying is the idea of creation and relative perfection. It implies that indeed, God created humans who are construed as almost perfect creatures, at least, relative to other creatures in the universe. It also implies that, relative to God's creation, man's creation (the pots in this context) are imperfect as they do break. The scope of this research goes beyond the possibility of an omnibenevolent God co-existeing with evil, but the above suggests that God in Hausa religious worldview might be the maker of both good and evil. This suggests that a complete universe is one where both good and evil are inevitable.

Although from Hausa oral traditions and habits, one could infer the Hausa conception of a Supreme Being, such conception has not been articulated in clear terms. The Hausa conception of God is thus, vague. The idea of vagueness in the conceptualization of the Hausa God is expressed thus: Ubangiji buwayi gagara misali (God, the all-powerful the indescribable). Beyond the literal meaning of being indescribable, the proverb, goes to show God's omnipotence. Buwayi, is used in the context of being all-powerful and uncontrollable. The Hausa invoke such expression to show how powerful and uncontrollable a member of the community, a son, a leader or criminal has become so much so that the community is unable to control and or regulate the actions of that member.

Goriawala Mucizz (1985, 49) and Amin (2002, 147) maintain that the Hausa do have an idea of a supreme Being who they call Allah or Ubangiji who created the universe and controls it. Mucizz (1985, 49), however, argues that the idea that the Hausa have of Allah is probably influenced by Islamic thoughts. This is even though the conception of a supreme being called Allah predates Islam. Mucciz's argument that the Hausa conception of a supreme being as being vague may have been influenced by the Islamic thought may not be plausible since the Hausa conception is influenced by Islamic Arabia, whose conception of a Supreme Being is not vague, and not Pre-Islamic Arabia whose

conception of a Supreme Being was vague. I argue that while contact with Islam may have influenced the language of the Hausa with reference to how they refer to a Supreme Being both as Allah and as Ubangiji, it has not changed the Hausa conception of a Supreme Being, especially with reference to its vagueness.

The traditional Hausa religious belief system is such that although Allah or Ubangiji created the universe and controls it as he is most powerful, He is not the central Being as they do not worship him nor seek for his help nor invoke him in their prayers except in rare occasion such as the time of drought where the Hausa woman wear men's wears, carry men's implement for farming, chanting Allah ka bamu ruwa (Allah give us rains). Thus, although, Barkow (1970, 107) argues that the Hausa do rarely worship God directly, their indirect worship of God is not unconnected with their conception of God as being more concerned with spirits and less concerned with men, according to Mucizz (1985, 50). I argue, however, that, the fact that, the Hausa worship or invoke the Supreme Being only in rare occasions (at exceptional and most trying times) does not necessarily mean that the Hausa construe God as being less concerned with the Hausa but shows how they revere God. It shows that, while there is something that the spirits cannot do, it is God who is able to do what the spirits are unable to do, which thereby shows God as the most powerful, and that is why God is invoked directly to solve the most troubling of problems such as drought. Nevertheless, on the basis of the fact that God and especially, gods in Hausa belief system is/are unable to cure some ailments even when asked, shows that the God or gods are not all powerful and that is why, in the Hausa conceptualization of God, the choice of the word 'most powerful' is more appropriate than 'all powerful'. This is why Mucizz (1985, 52) demonstrates that, sometimes, irrespective of the extent of the bori that is applied, it becomes futile in curing ailments.

Tsafi and Bori are two major ways through which worship is done by the Hausa. Worship is usually done with a view to connecting or reaching out to the spirits to especially present wishes. Tsafi is usually done at designated places such as caves, designated trees (especially tamarind or baobab), and designated places at homes otherwise referred to as Wurin al'ada (place of worship) (IBRAHIM 1982, 30; BARKOW 1970, 108). While the head of the family is always the chief priest of the worship done at home, there is always a special person considered to be the priest who is the custodian of other worship places and through whom the Hausa gets to the spirit (IBRAHIM 1982, 30; BARKOW 1970, 107). Hausa traditional religion is thus, a clan or family affair as each household has its own spirits whom they worship. However, the Hausa expresses, duk bori daya ake wa tsafi (sacrifices are to but one bori) to indicate that, while religion is a clan affair, it is the same spirit that manifests in all the places of worship of the Hausa. In all the places of worship, animals are

slaughtered as sacrifice. Bori on the other hand, is usually carried out for the purpose of cure of ailments. This is done by yan bori (special humans) who have, over time, mastered the spirits and have established relationships in such a manner by which the spirits enter their body as a result of which things such as herbs for curing specific ailments and especially barrenness are revealed to the person who in turn reveals it to humans (BARKOW 1970, 108).

In the context of Hausa traditional religious belief system, iskoki, construed as gods, are created by Allah or Ubangiji and it is from iskoki that evil and good emanate. This is as a result of the iskoki being angered. The Hausa traditional belief system is thus, anthropomorphic in the manner by which the spirits are construed as being emotional since evil is conceived as a product of the anger of the spirits (IBRAHIM 1982, 31). Although the extent of their autonomy and free will is not clear, there are at least, some actions of the spirits that are within the control of Ubangiji, such that the actions, such as the infliction of suffering and its removal, are possible with the will of Ubangiji. The point earlier made on the rare occasion in which Allah is directly reached out to, which is the time of drought being a natural evil may mean that God, for the Hausa, could be the source of natural evil while the gods (spirits) are construed as the sources of moral evil which manifests in the form of ailments, barrenness, etcetera. This is given that these are believed to be inflicted by spirits which informs why sacrifices are offered to them for healing. Ultimately thus, the traditional Hausa religious system centers around evil and how to deal with it. From what is construed as the basis of religion itself, to the reasons of worship at a particular place and time, to the requests often made, religion is in relation to doing away with evil such that if there were no evil, there may not have been the need for worship in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, the Hausa God is not an absolutely good God since it is the case that some evil are traceable to such deities. This is even though, He is construed as good, in the manner by which God, according to Hausa belief, brings about nourishment and mercy, even when offended. This is to be seen in the manner by which at any time, the Hausa attempts worship, it is so that good things are provided or evil is averted. That is why the Hausa say Ubangiji gatan bawa (God the nourisher of the servant).

However, the contradiction is in the Hausa conception of God as the creator of the universe, including everything such as the spirits that do cause evil, in it. The contradiction is in the manner by which God is conceived as the nourisher and also as the creator of the sources of evil or even the source of evil. But, it does not seem that God or even the spirits are blamed by the Hausa for the evil that exists around them. This is due to the Hausa thought on freedom according to which evil exists on the basis of the undoing of men that is freely exercised. To this end, the Hausa say, duk wani hani daga ubangiji baiwa ne (every denial (pain) from God is a blessing).

With reference to moral evil, the Hausa belief system is such that God allows free will among the Hausa to confront evil and this is done through a deliberate attempt at working towards becoming good humans. To confront moral evil thus, it is enough when the Hausa tailor their actions towards becoming good people without necessarily looking up to God. Thus, for the Hausa to confront evil, they must freely work towards navigating the turbulent, complex and chaotic world created by God. Because, freedom and free will is supposed, the conception of right and wrong is conceived by virtue of obedience to some recognized and assumed relational norms, codes and values through which human wellbeing, sustenance, harmony and ultimately life, among others are realized. This is not unconnected with the central position that man occupies in Hausa worldview. So that anything that is perceived as that which threatens man and life is construed as evil that is justified in being confronted using any option available to man, including the application of the death penalty. It is this central position that man occupies that justifies taking away the life of a person whose actions threaten human wellbeing and sustenance. This is inspite of the fact that taking away human life also violates the African relational value that the Hausa culture encapsulates. In the next section, thus, our discussion will focus on the Hausa worldview on the concepts of person (man), death and afterlife. This will be done in the context of how evil is construed with reference to the role the concepts play in the attainment of Zaman Lafiya.

Man, Death, Afterlife and Zaman Lafiya in Hausa Worldview
Apart from being referred to as mutum, man is also referred to as kai (self) who is said to have life (rai) and kurwa (soul) (AMIN 2002, 131). The Non-Muslim Hausa use rai and kurwa interchangeably and to them, anything that lives has kurwa, which is essentially immaterial and is akin to soul or life (BARKOW, 1970, 116). Sometimes, however, kurwa is used in a different sense as that which the witches and wizards are capable of subduing when one is asleep at night. Rai is the necessary and sufficient condition for living that ceases to be when death occurs. Man, for the Hausa, just like for other African cultures, is considered as the central figure of the universe so much so that he is that around whom everything in the universe revolves. Everything is meaningful or otherwise with reference to man. Even Zaman Lafiya is conceivable only when there is life and ultimately man. It is against this background that the Hausa pay attention to the concept of death which threatens the existence of life and ultimately man.

The Hausa word for death is rasuwa. But, due to the influence of Islam, the Muslim Hausa use rasuwa and mutuwa interchangeably. For the Muslim Hausa, death occurs when life (rai) leaves the body. In Hausa worldview, the necessity and inevitability of death is presupposed. That is why they say duk mai rai mamaci ne (every human is mortal). With reference to especially natural

death, the Hausa are thus, determinist, although not in absolute terms since they also believe that one should not do anything that brings about death to one's self. It is with reference to this that the Hausa say mai kasada shi yakan mutu kwanan sa basu kare ba (it is he who is reckless that dies before his time) (AMIN 2002, 144). This proverb is expressed by the Hausa in the context of the case in which a person becomes a threat to his own life by engaging in any endeavour that brings death unto him. The meaning of the proverb may however, be extended to also serve as caution to not just the owner of a life but to others whose reckless actions may bring about death of others.

In Hausa thought, the soul (rai) is referred both to as the mind and as life. When referred to as the life, it is usually in conjunction with jiki (body) of which the human being is made up. Rai is essentially immaterial while the body is essentially material and it is in the body that rai lives. It is the coexistence of rai and jiki that is referred to as rayuwa (living/life). In Hausa worldview, however, this coexistence is not eternal which means, separation between rai and jiki would inevitably occur at some point. It is with this separation that rasuwa is said to have occurred and it is at this point that the Hausa say ran sa ya fita (his soul has gone out of his body) (IBRAHIM 2019, 23).

Difference of thought exists between the Muslim Hausa and the Non-Muslim Hausa on the position/destination of rai/kurwa upon death. For the Muslim Hausa, when rai leaves jiki it goes to lahira, which is afterlife otherwise referred to as the hereafter or as Barkow (1970, 116) calls it, the heaven. However, referring to lahira as heaven alone is problematic because, in Islamic thought, the hereafter is a combination of heaven and hell. For the Non-Muslim Hausa, although kurwa doubles as spirit of a dead person, it is possessed by the living and it is that which the witches and wizards have the ability to subdue and capture.

For the Non-Muslim Hausa, kurwa travels and wonders while one is asleep at night and it is in the course of such travels that witches and wizards attack and subdue it. It is only when the kurwa returns to the body from travels that one is able to be awake otherwise, such person remains asleep even though he is not necessarily dead. The person stands the chance of being awake only when the witch or wizard responsible is identified and asked to release his kurwa. It is against this background that the Hausa often make the expression thus: kurwa na kur, nama na da daci, tsakani na da maye (my kurwa is safe as my flesh tastes bitter for the wizard or witch). One wonders why the use of nama (flesh) in this expression when kurwa which the witches or wizards are concerned with is essentially immaterial. It may, however, be inferred that such reference to the flesh is because one's flesh is thought of as that which determines the taste of kurwa or atleast exert some form of influence since it is that in which the kurwa normally lives.

The kurwa when referred to as the spirit of the dead comes back to the world to relate positively and peacefully with relatives and the community at large. Here, kurwa is used to mean rai. However, in Hausa thought, instances abound in which such relationship takes a violent and dangerous turn. Such is the case where the kurwa belonged to an old man who died with anger and vengeance (BARKOW 1970, 116). One wonders, however, why this is thought of by the Hausa as applying only to the old since to be angry and vengeful, one need not necessarily be old. For instance, anyone who had his/her life unnaturally cut short has cause to be angry and vengeful. Regardless, herein lays the conversation that is sparked between life, evil, death, afterlife and Zaman Lafiya. For the Hausa, when natural death occurs, kurwa comes back to relate with the world in a manner by which peaceful living is maintained. On the other hand, when the death is unnatural and is caused by some evil done to the dead, the kurwa comes back to relate with the world in a manner by which peace is disturbed. Such is the case in which one is murdered.

Closely similar to Hausa thought on kurwa is the concept fatalwa (ghost) which is also thought of as the spirit of a dead person (BARKOW 1970, 117). Fatalwa's abode is its owner's grave from where it torments unwary travellers, the Hausa think. Unlike kurwa, however, fatalwa is visible to men. It is distinguishable from kurwa in that while kurwa, when used in some sense, does exist before death, fatalwa is an afterlife concept that is identifiable by the living because it takes the shape and appearance of the dead. However, fatalwa goes beyond the grave to attack those who have done evil to the dead while living. That is why the Hausa say, fatalwan sa ta biyo ni (his fatalwa pursued me) or na ga fatalwan sa cikin bacci (I saw his fatalwa in my sleep). Such expressions presuppose some form of acquaintance with the dead. The expressions are usually by persons who have done evil to another or were responsible for someone else's death.

The point that is being made here is that conversation or relationship takes place between life and death, which determines the direction of a society with regards to the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. Where, for instance, evil is perpetrated in the form of murder, which brings about unnatural death, the dead returns to life to disturb peaceful living as we see in the case of kurwa. However, where it is a natural death or the dead was not inflicted with any evil and has no cause to be angry and vengeful, instead of disturbing peaceful living, kurwa brings about Zaman Lafiya in the manner which by it visits kins and community with a view to providing protection. Consequently, thus, the Hausa are justified in adopting any means necessary to ensure that Zaman Lafiya is attained and or maintained. These necessary steps may include threats of sanctions or

punishment to deter persons from perpetrating evil such as murder that stand in the way of the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. In the next section, our discussion will be on the Hausa idea of crimes and especially death penalty. We will show that while actions are considered wrong because they stand in the way of the attainment of Zaman Lafiya and while the death penalty is ordinarily deemed evil because it threatens life, instances abound in which the death penalty is considered morally good. One of the instances is where carrying out the death penalty is considered necessary for the attainment of Zaman Lafiya.

Crime, Punishment and the Death Penalty as Necessary Evil
C.S. Momoh (2000, 378) argues that because the end of belief and worship is the act or conduct, what should matter for the African, is the end being the act or conduct. Put differently, in Africa, the act of belief and worship is done with a view to making those who engage in doing so act in a certain manner. Momoh's argument is probably informed by the belief that in Africa, the concept of the Day of Judgment, presided over by a Supreme Being who hands down reward and punishment is hardly thought of. That is why belief and worship, for Momoh, matter less than conduct since reward and punishment (judgment) are carried out here on earth and are incorporated into our ways of life with a view to bringing about harmony. Momoh's argument is that because Africans do not wait for a Day of Judgment, human conduct must be rewarded and or punished here on earth. This is the case in Africa before contact with Islam and Christianity because the idea and or concept of a Supreme Being is not thought of (MOMOH 2000, 377). Instead of a Supreme Being, what Africans had was a handful of gods.

Momoh's argument that the concept of a Supreme Being is not thought of in Africa is not applicable to all African worldviews. As earlier noted, the Hausa, for instance, have a conception of the Supreme God, otherwise referred to as Ubangaji, whom they regard as the maker of the universe. This is in addition to the conception they have of other gods (spirits) through which they worship the Supreme Being. The argument of Mbiti (1980, 69-70), which is to the effect that throughout Africa, humans only interact with God through intermediaries such as Priests, Diviners, Rainmakers, living dead, elders and spirits, etcetera, further supports the conception of a Supreme Being in Africa.

Conceptions of crime in Africa are not unconnected with systems of belief and cultural values. Crimes are conceived with reference to the conformity or otherwise of those crimes with acceptable societal norms. Those that are in conformity with the norms are rewarded, while those that deviate from the norms are punished at varying lengths. Specific conducts within the Nigerian socio-cultural practices that are said to be punishable because they do not conform to societal norms include theft, abduction, murder, adultery, fornication, farmland encroachment etc. The severity of punishment is not

unconnected with the extent of the damage each conduct brings about to victims and the community (JONAH 2013, 1). Consequently, the actions that are thought of as those that should attract reward are those that sustain the community relationships (BARKOW, n.d, 2). On the other hand, actions that stand in the way of the sustenance of the community relationships are thought of as those that attract punishment. Reward and punishment are thus determined with reference to how actions assure or impede communal relationships in society.

Among other kinds of punishment such as fines, warnings and banishment, the death penalty is not unknown to Africa. Unlike other kinds of punishment, however, the death penalty is not considered as a pleasant thing to do. The death penalty for crimes such as murder, manslaughter and abduction is resorted to only when it is necessary such as the the circumstance in which it is the only fitting punishment in the absence of other appropriate options such as banishment. Although public execution is not considered appropriate in some culture, such as the Goemaini of North central Nigeria because it conflicts with the sacredness of life (JONAH 2013, 3), such is not the case in Hausa culture as we will come to see.

Some of the wrongs that are considered appropriate in being punished with death include fornication and theft of farm produce. Unlike what is obtainable in other cultures, such as the Goemaini, the concept of public execution is not unknown to the Hausa. The Hausa do engage in public executions, often during ceremonies. If the death penalty is considered appropriate to be inflicted at all, then, the crime of taking away a life is one of such cases in which the death penalty must apply. This is so because of life's importance, which is a necessary condition for peace and ultimately sustenance. It is also because of the status of man as the central figure of the universe. John S. Mbiti (1980, 206) has gone further to argue that among other wrongs such as theft and rape, murder is a wrong that is appropriately punished with death in Africa. For Andrew Novak (2014, 3) also, like many other societies, murder, among other acts, was considered as a grave action that African societies frowned at.

In Africa, crime and punishment are conceived with reference to social order and peace (MBITI 1980, 295), so that, any action is being regarded as a wrong with reference to its propensity to hamper peace and social order, and any punishment is adjudged as good or proper with reference to how it brings about social order and peace. Social peace and order are of enormous importance to the extent that they are considered sacred and as measures of moral determination. One of the prisms through which the social order is viewed is the institution of kinship. Wrongs against individuals are deemed as wrongs against every other one and ultimately the community since everyone is thought

of as being related to everybody. Wrongs or evils, therefore, are conducts that disrupt peaceful relationships. Thus, if you steal from one person, it is as though you steal from every other person. If one kills another, it is as though every other person and ultimately the community is killed and or pained because relationships will be strained. This thereby brings about social disorder, which ultimately disturbs peaceful living. It is an offence against the community to act in any way that disrupts the relational order of the community.

It was earlier noted that there are qualities or virtues that must be cultivated in order to attain the status of being good (mutumin kirki). Apart from the role these qualities play in bringing about mutumin kirki, they also play the role of guiding the Hausa towards living an ethical life which is a condition for social order and peace. One must, therefore, constantly be seen striving to cultivate these virtues so he can act ethically and do away with evil. Since one must be in relationship with others in order to exhibit virtue, the capacity for relationship is then prized highly in Hausa culture as it is in other African cultures. Any struggle that is not geared towards ethical living which brings about social order and peace is evil. Sanction, in the form of punishment, is one of the ways by which this evil can be prevented. It should be noted that the option of punishment is resorted to after other options are exhausted. As earlier noted, the Hausa revere knowledge ilimi/sani which is acquired through a process of learning. It is through this process that the Hausa individual is taught how to cultivate the virtues that help in living an ethical life. As it is the case with human nature, some would refuse to go through such process and some would refuse to act ethically even when they have gone through such process. It is as a response to this that punishment is applied; to either ensure that the Hausa cultivate these qualities which guides him towards living an ethical life or to protect social order and peace. It is through this that the community is thought of as being consolidated and or sustained and it is with reference to this that any punishment qualifies as being good or bad. The death penalty is therefore, thought of as being morally justified for murder because it is necessary to bringing about peaceful living or restore broken relationships. One of the ways through which the death penalty is executed is by chopping up of the head. This is carried out by a designated person known as hauni under the instruction of the community leader. It is by virtue of this that Hausa community leaders are sometimes referred to as sarkin yanka (slaughter commander) (MUHAMMAD 2014, 57).

Theft of farm produce is another wrong that the Hausa consider so grave to such an extent that the death penalty is considered appropriate as punishment. This is because of the significance of agriculture and farming in Hausa thought. One of the significance of farming is the general role farm produce plays in the provision of one of the universal basic human needs, food.

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In Hausa worldview, noma (farming) is also significant because it is thought of as the root of riches/wealth. Such significance is expressed in the saying noma tushen arziki (farming, the root of riches/wealth). Moreover, it is the yields from noma that is used in the Hausa cultural practice of what is called gara. Gara is a collection of varieties of farm produce that the Hausa bride takes to her matrimonial home. The worth of the Hausa bride is determined with reference to the quantity and quality of the gara that the bride takes to her matrimonial home. Gara, for the Hausa, is so significant that it is only Zaman Lafiya that is thought of as that which is higher in rank than gara so that the forfeiture of gara is only justified when it is done to maintain peaceful co-existence. The Hausa invoke this proverb to assert that *gara* is so important that its forfeiture is only justified when it is done to maintain peaceful co-existence (BAMBALE 2016, 17). Thus, the Hausa say *Zaman lafiya yafi gara,* Peaceful living is worth more than wedding commodities (that a Hausa bride takes to her groom's house).

It is due to the importance of farm produce that there is, in Hausa thought, a conception of a god otherwise referred to as *uwar gona* that is so revered by the Hausa such that sacrifices are offered to please her for the role it plays as the protector of the farm. It is through uwar gona that the death penalty for the theft of farm produce is executed by causing the stomachs of persons guilty of stealing from the farm to swell until they die (IBRAHIM 1982, *47-48*).

Chastity of especially brides is also a virtue that is so revered by the Hausa so much that being unchaste attracted the death penalty. In Hausa thought, marriage ceremonies are also thought of as ritual or trial conducted to determine the chastity of the bride. The trial is conducted by asking someone to use a magical knife to strike a goat with it with the aim of slicing it into two. The chastity of the girl is established when the man is able to slice the goat with one stroke. But in the event that the girl is unchaste, that man would not be able to slice the goat with that magical knife no matter how many times he tried (IBRAHIM 1982, 171).

At the beginning of the ritual, the bride is asked to say whether or not she is chaste. Her answer is what determines whether or not the ritual shall proceed. Where she says that she is chaste, then the ritual proceeds to determine the veracity of her claim. Where she says she is unchaste, there is no need for that ritual and she would be left to live in which case she would continually be mocked along with her family for having been involved in a shameful act. When a girl is actually unchaste, *uwar gona* would cause her to instantly fall and die. It may be inferred that the justification for carrying out the death penalty on the Hausa bride for being unchaste is to be found in an attempt by the Hausa to protect the kinship system. Kinship is important because virtually all values and norms connected with human relationship are understood and interpreted with reference to the kinship system of the people. It is one of the strongest forces in

traditional African life that is established by blood and betrothal (engagement and marriage) Mbiti (2000, 104). Being unchaste undermines kinship and renders engagement and betrothal useless and for the Africans and indeed the Hausa, anything that threatens it should be visited with the severest punishment.

Conclusion
Within the context of Hausa moral thought and belief system, the foregoing discussion brings to the fore the extent of the importance of the concept of Zaman Lafiya with reference to the necessary role it plays in the conceptualization of evil as well as the determination of morality in Hausa thought. This is illustrated in the manner by which some crimes such as murder are thought of as grave crimes that are justified in being punished because they stand in the way of the attainment of Zaman Lafiya. We have seen how death and afterlife are formidable concepts in the moral considerations of especially crime and punishment in Hausa thought. Critics may question whether Zaman Lafiya is a moral theory and if it is, a general or restricted one for explaining the morality of any or a particular action such as punishment. Our response would be that while Zaman Lafiya can be put forward as both a general and particular guide/ framework for determining morality in Hausa thought, it has not attained the status of a comprehensive theory. Our attempt is geared towards promoting the idea of Zaman Lafiya as a possible moral angle from which moral judgments and considerations can made in Hausa thought. Further research with a view to exploring the possibility of developing Zaman Lafiya as a comprehensive moral theory would be worthwhile.

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Indigenous African Religions (IARs) and the Relational Value of Tolerance: Addressing the evil of violent conflicts in Africa

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Abstract
This essay argues that the inherent value of Indigenous African Religions (IARs), which ensures that the belief in different gods does not eclipse the fact of common humanity might be of importance to contemporary Africa plagued by ceaseless conflicts. The IAR ideology contrasts, for example, with that of Christianity which views the Christian God as the one true God and regards those who worship a different God(s) as pagans and gentiles. It also contrasts with the ideology of Islam, which views Allah as the one true God and regards those who worship different God(s) as infidels. The essay claims that social orientation in contemporary Africa is mostly influenced by the divisive ideologies of these two foreign religions that have come to dominate. These divisive ideologies are to a large extent, indirectly responsible for some of the violent conflicts on the continent. This divisive religious orientation bifurcates humanity into in and out-groups that are extended to the social sphere where people from different religious, ethnic and linguistic groups are treated as outsiders and are made targets for attacks like in South Africa and Nigeria today. Further, if we interpret such violent conflicts as evil and consider its source in light of the perennial problem of evil, what would be our response? Using the conversational method, the essay argues that both good and evil are part of the universe, and that if we want more good, then a change from a divisive to a complementary orientation based on the relational values of the IARs is imperative.
Keywords: Tolerance, Indigenous African Religions, Africa, Christianity, Islam, Conflicts.

Introduction

Indigenous African Religions (IARs) are a cluster of traditional worship systems dedicated to different Gods associated with aspects of nature, and which usually varies from community to community in different parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The importance of these religions, when one looks at them from the lens of modernity is not located on how best they described the supernatural or the spiritual, but the social benefits that can be derived from the moral orientation they promote. Unlike Christianity and Islam that were brought into the continent, these religions do not draw divisive lines between its adherents and others, its mode of worship and those of others, and certainly do not inferiorise the Godhead of other religions, nor prohibit adherents from worshiping other Gods or associating with adherents of other religions. These religions still exist today and reflect the African outlook to existence as it is expressed in people's socio-cultural and political life-world. This outlook which prioritises humanity purveys values such as solidarity, interconnectedness, interdependence and interrelatedness that roll up into what is nowadays known as the principle of relationality.

The principle of relationality can be formulated as saying, 'realities necessarily interrelate because none is ego solus'. The importance of sustainable relationship amongst people in a given territory irrespective of creed, gender, class or race, make IARs practical religions that are inseparable from the everyday life of the people. The IARs thus served important social function of bonding and cohesion in pristine Africa and can still do so in today's world.

This social function is now under threat in parts of Africa where Christianity or Islam or both are dominant religions. Since colonial times, incidences of ethnic conflict and division have increased. Some have even reached genocidal proportions like the Hutu/Tutsi in Rwanda, House/Igbo, Boko Haram Islamic fundamentalism, as well as various Islam/Christianity conflicts in Nigeria, Northern and Southern Cameroon, The Darfur conflict in Sudan, and now, Afrophobic attacks in South Africa to name but a few. These are all deadly conflicts that have claimed lives from thousands to millions, and some of them like the Afrophobic attacks in South Africa have continued to reoccur. Some analysts have tried to trace these conflicts to political, economic, and even social causes. While not disputing any of those causes, I want to argue that most of those sources might be the immediate causes. There is, however, a need to trace the remote cause of some of these conflicts.

John Mbiti (1969) states that Africans are notoriously religious and claims that a typical African takes their religion with them wherever they go, for work or for leisure. Perhaps, the point of this claim is not necessarily about how impossible it is for an African not to be religious, we have seen several African atheists, even in this age of the two powerful foreign religions. The point of Mbiti's claim can be fully realised when we look at religion as purveying ideologies that shape and influence not only the political, economic and social life of a people but also the way they perceive and treat one another. It is in this direction that we cannot help but recount the benefits of the system of IARs that encourages tolerance and promotes cohesion amongst humans irrespective of creed, language or culture. This cannot be said of the two foreign religions: Islam that came from Arabs who used the sword to convert people in sub-Sahara, and Christianity that came from the Europeans who used gun and the force of colonialism to impose their way of life, including religion on the peoples of sub-Sahara.

One feature which these two religions share in common is their divisive ideology. Each of them promotes their Godhead as the authentic and disapproves of not just the mode of worship of other religions but discounts adherents of those religions. In Africa, where religion is not perceived simply as another aspect of the society but deeply as something that shapes the all-round orientation of adherents, it is easy to see how the divisive ideologies of Christianity and Islam could be imbibed and extended to the lines between languages, geographies and cultures.

This essay shall discuss the tractions that religious and ethnic conflicts have gained in sub-Saharan Africa since colonial times and explains violent conflicts as forms of evil. In the light of the problem of evil, the essay further argues that both good and evil are necessary part of the universe. It is within human power to reduce evil and increase good. The essay shall show the difference between the system of IARs and those of Christianity and Islam and the ways in which they could possibly influence adherents. Using the conversational method, this essay shall show how the values of IARs are relational and can reduce the evil of violent conflict by bringing about peaceful co-existence, complementarity and solidarity among different peoples in contemporary Africa. On the basis of the preceding, I will argue for an orientational change, from a divisive to a relational one based on the values of IARs.

The Religious undertone of in-group/out-group Conflicts in Africa
Political independence for many countries in sub-Saharan Africa was followed by tensions and conflicts along ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious lines. Some of these conflicts went on to evolve into full scale wars. Some good examples include Liberia, Nigeria, Angola, Sierra Leone, Congo, Burundi, Somalia, etc. The causes of some of these conflicts have been traced to all

kinds of problems in the political and economic sphere. Very little allusion has been made to the religious sphere. It is our claim here that to some extent, the divisive ideologies of foreign religions constituted part of the remote causes for some of these conflicts, except for some contexts like Nigeria where such ideologies went beyond remote to form part of the immediate causes. In the years leading up to 1960 when Nigeria gained political independence, and at least five years into her independence, Ahmadu Bello, the political and religious leader of the Islamic north, consistently incited the North against the Christian South, and specifically, the Igbo, which led to bloody attacks and pogroms against the Igbo (HEERTEN and MOSES 2014; ARO and ANI 2017). Chima Korieh traces the history of several of these pogroms against the Igbo motivated mainly by religious sentiments from 1945 to the end of the century (KORIEH 2013, 727-740).

In 1962, Ahmadu Bello as premier of northern Nigeria, a political office, founded an Islamic fundamentalist organization known as *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (J.N.I.), which means the 'Organisation for the Victory of Islam.' In 1963, he constituted 'Islamic Advisory Committee' (IBRAHIM 1991, 122-123). These were tasked with the advancement of the Islamic faith, interest and dominance in Nigeria. J.N.I. in addition engaged in aggressive social orientation to implant the idea of the superiority of Islam in adherents, the need to defend Islam and its interest against infidels in the South and the propaganda that the Islamic interest was under threat in the North where the Christian Igbo dominated in the civil service. In response, the Christians in the South founded the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in 1976 (IBRAHIM 1991, 123). It should be noted that prior to this time, education at different levels was controlled by the two rival religions in Nigeria, Islam in the north and Christianity in the South. Even after most of the schools transferred to government control and purportedly became secular, a handful remained in the hands of the religions. Religious education that are mainly indoctrinations also remain a strong feature in the curricula of the so-called secular school system in Nigeria to date. So, a Christian child in the South is brought up to see the Muslims in the north as unbelievers and vice versa. It is no surprise then that most bloody conflicts in Nigeria since colonial times that occurred along ethnic, linguistic and cultural lines had religious undertone.

The psychological impact and influence of religious ideologies cannot be overestimated. Sociologists and anthropologists like Emil Durkheim (1986) argue us that factors from the environment shape the orientation of the individual and impose certain choices they could not resist. For example, if you are taught from childhood by clergies you respect, teachers you admire, and parents you trust that people on the other side of faith are infidels or unbelievers, you have very little choice in determining how you treat those people. The choice has already been imposed on you and you have very little of your own to enable you make a different choice. This appears to be the case

in much of sub-Sahara Africa where two foreign religions with rival and divisive ideologies shape and continue to shape the social orientation of adherents. The increase in conflicts along ethnic, linguistic, cultural and even geographical lines has much to do with the internalised divisive ideologies of Christianity and Islam. Even when the conflict is between people from the same religion, the seed of us and them, in and out groups which is often the cause was already sown by the religions, and would always find contexts to manifest, whether ethnic, linguistic, cultural or geographic.

Interestingly, some researchers are of the view that the displacement of the IARs by the two foreign religions contributed to the radical change in social orientation of the people, from a mindset of mutual social cohesion as members of common humanity, to the knowledge of division, discrimination and lines of difference. According to Jibrin Ibrahim:

> An essential aspect of the 'civilising mission' of the colonial authorities was the concerted effort to eradicate the practices and symbols of traditional African religions. Within a few years, countless gods, deities, totems, or 'idols', to use the official terminology, were plucked from their sacred repositories only to re-emerge in new shrines in Europe known as museums. So active was the attack on indigenous beliefs and ceremonies that in a few decades most practitioners could no longer publicly admit their adhesion to the religion of their ancestors. (IBRAHIM 1991, 116)

Thus, Ibrahim blames colonialism and Arab invasion for bringing in Christianity and Islam, two religions of middle-eastern origin, with divisive ideologies. As he put it, "Colonialism as an historical epoch set in motion various fundamental changes in Nigeria, not least the de-legitimation of traditional religions, thereafter, castigated as 'paganism', and the rapid implantation of Christianity" (IBRAHIM 1991, 116). One thing that is not regularly observed in literature is the importance of IARs in maintaining social cohesion in parts of Africa prior to their displacement by Islam and Christianity. This is the goal of this essay. And this essay's hunch is not so much about the robust theoretical structure of the IARs, but about the social value of their pacifist ideologies, which almost everywhere engendered social cohesion amongst diverse peoples. With all that gone, the post-colonial Africa has become a stage for constant clash between in-groups and out-groups in different contexts, from local to international levels. South Africans today, regularly mount violent attacks and destruction of lives and property of people from other African countries whom they regard and treat as out-group. At the background is the same orientation from foreign religions that a people can discount another people in a bid to establish difference.

One way to construe violent conflicts is in light of the perennial problem of evil. What is the source of this evil and how can it be addressed? I argue that both good and evil are necessary aspects of the universe. Our daily existential quest is to reduce evil and increase good. But how can an ominibenevolent God co-exist with evil? My answer will be teased out of the relational and complementary values of the traditional African religions. These cluster of religions, as earlier explained thrives on certain values that prescribe the necessity of mutual and complementary relationships. Honoring these values increases good and reduces evil, but dishonoring these values in human interractions increases evil and reduces good. The two Abrahamic religions appear to dishonor these values when they draw divisive lines between insiders and outsiders, which has and continues to spark several violent conflicts around the world, particularly in Africa. In the next section, I will investigate the range of the influence these two religions have in conflict hotspots.

The Influence of Religious Ideologies on inter-group Conflicts in some places in Africa

There have been several conflicts on the continent prior to and since political independence. In this section, I will discuss some examples to show how religious ideologies have sparked several conflicts on the continent.

Nigeria, a typical African country is plagued with seemingly unending conflicts. The climax of the conflicts in Nigeria is the Nigerian-Biafran war, which lasted for about three years (1967-1970). In this war, the Igbo (then Biafrans) were regarded as out-group while the rest of Nigerians saw themselves as the in-group. Since the Biafrans were regarded as out-group, the in-group were out to suppress and dominate them in Nigeria that eventually morphed into a bloody war that claimed nearly three million Igbo lives, most of which through a deliberate programme of starvation (CHIMAKONAM and NWEKE 2019). Apart from the Nigerian-Biafran war, there are other in-group and out-group conflicts that have occurred in Nigeria. Some of these conflicts include the University of Ibadan conflict of May 1984; the conflict that took place at the college of Education, Kafanchan in March 1987; the conflicts that took place in Zangon, Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna and Ikara in Kaduna State in 1992, the 2014 conflict that occurred in University of Jos, to mention only a few (JEGEDE 2019, 59-61). All these conflicts had religious undertone. They were instigated by the two major foreign religions. These religions are Christianity and Islam.

For instance, the May 1984 University of Ibadan conflict though seen as student conflicts started as a Muslim demonstration and led to the burning down of the status of the Risen Christ. Also, the March 1987 conflict, which

took place in the College of Education, Kafanchan was as a result of disagreements between Christians and Muslims in the town, which escalated in the college. This demonstrates that it was religiously motivated. It led to burning and destruction of Churches by Moslems and Mosques by Christians. Furthermore, the conflicts that took place in Zangon, Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna and Ikara in Kaduna State in 1992, although started as communal quarrel between the Kataf and Hausas resulted to a religious clash between Christians and Muslims, which escalated and spilled into other parts of Kaduna State. The religious motivation is that the natives of Kataf are majorly Christians while the Hausas are mainly Muslims. More so, the University of Jos conflict of 2014 began as a communal clash by youth groups. These youths were mainly Christians and Muslims within the same neighborhood. This conflict brought about the attack on the Mosque and Church in the university (JEGEDE 2019, 59-61). Even the aforementioned Nigerian-Biafran war somehow has religious dimension to it than political. It has religious affiliation because the Biafrans were mainly Christians and the rallying call for attack on Biafrans was from the Muslim north. Others were made to believe that they were fighting for the oneness of the political entity call Nigeria, which was hardly the case.

Rwanda is another country in Africa that has experienced ethnic conflict that is worthy of mention. Their ethnic conflict resulted in the 1994 genocide wherein there was an ethnic cleansing. The main perpetrators of this genocide where the majority Hutu, who were about eighty percent (80%) of the population, while the victims were the Tutsi, who were about fifteen percent (15%) of the population of Rwanda. The Twa are the third ethnic group, who were very minute and were both perpetrators and victims of the genocide (SPIJKER 2006). History has it that the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa had coexisted peacefully, intermarried, shared a common language and Traditional Religion as well as were under the rule of the Tutsi until the advent of colonialism. It is also noted that the German colonialists did not upset the socio-political order; they ruled Rwanda through the Tutsi minority. However, when the Belgian became their colonial masters after the Second World War, there was a gradual introduction of Hutu majority into political offices. This was engineered by the Roman Catholic Church missionaries, who accompanied the Belgian colonisers. The introduction of the Hutu to political power marked the beginning of socio-political unrest in Rwanda. This is apparent in the 1959 and 1973 riots that led to some Tutsi fleeing the country into neighbouring countries such as Uganda and DR Congo (Spijker 2006). Gerard Van't Spijker notes that it was specifically in Uganda that the Tutsi formed a Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), an agency through which they launched attack on the Hutu led Rwanda government in 1990. But the climax of this conflict was the 1994 genocide.

This 1994 genocide was political since it resulted from the assassination of the Hutu President the same year. His death resulted from the shooting down of his Airplane blamed on the Tutsi Rebels in 1993. The death

of Major General Juvenal Habyarimana (President) was followed by the killing of the Prime Minister, Agatha Uwiligimana. This paved the way for a new Hutu regime that engineered and supported the killing of Tutsi as a campaign for ethnic cleansing, which led to the loss of about 800,000 to 1,000,000 Tutsi and Hutu lives (SPIJKER 2006, 339; 341). It is germane to note that this genocide was not only ethnic and politically motivated but was also religiously instigated. The idea is that religion (more specifically Christianity) played a major role in the build-up to the 1994 genocide. According to Gerard Van't Spijker, the Roman Catholic missionaries did not only bring the Hutu into political offices, but also fueled the 1994 genocide. They did so by changing the narrative of Rwanda's past of togetherness. The missionaries taught that the Hutu were the native, while the minority ruling Tutsi were non-native. And like the division between the sons of Jacob and Ishmael in the Christian Bible, the Hutu began acquiring the orientation of the native and the chosen. This inspired them to violently takeover power from the Tutsi in 1959 (SPIJKER 2006). Consequently, the Tutsi accused the Roman Catholic Church as taking sides with the Hutu against them (SPIJKER 2006, 351). This is one side of the narrative.

Another has it that "the churches of the former Colonial times, both Catholics and Protestants, favored the Tutsis and discriminated against the Hutus, thereby laying the ground for future catastrophe" (BANYANGA and BJORKQVIST 2017, 1). The idea is that Christianity was partly behind the Rwanda genocide. This is apparent in the argument of Kate Temoney that the Hutu propagandists mobilised the civilian populace for the genocide by making allusions to some Christian Biblical myths as bases for dehumanising the Tutsi as ethnic, alien other. It is on this premise that they justified the elimination of the Tutsi as threat to their social order and therefore authorised "their extirpation as granted by the state as well as clergy and the institutional churches" (TEMONEY 2016, 5). This is in line with the idea that "religion indirectly (distally) and directly (proximately) furthers the aims of genocide by coding genocidal ideology and violence as religious" (TEMONEY 2016, 3). While politicians employed the genocide to meet their goals, church leaders also used it to enhance their ecclesiastical power and position. Timothy Longman substantiates this as follows: "struggle over power within Rwanda's Christian churches led some to accept the genocide as a means of eliminating challenges to their own authority in the churches" (LONGMAN 2001, 163). The point is that the 1994 Rwanda genocide whether seen as ethnic, political or religious has some of its influences in the divisive ideology inherent in, and taught by, Christianity.

Another form of conflict that challenges the unity of contemporary Africa is the Afrophobic conflict in South Africa, misunderstood as xenophobia – the fear, hate and mistreatment of strangers. What is experienced in South Africa is not xenophobia but Afrophobia – the fear, hate and maltreatment of Africans by fellow Africans. In this act of Afrophobia, some

South Africans express antipathy, dislike and discrimination towards fellow Africans perceived to be foreign nationals. Wahbie Long, Bonga Chiliza and Dan J. Stein argue that the cause of Afrophobia in South Africa include 1.) macrostructural and socioeconomic factors – these have to do with the colonial apartheid legacy and continual inequalities and 2.) micropolitical and psychological – these have to do with the effect of foreign national entrepreneurs on the township economies and the perpetrators of Afrophobic killing being those who have a record of antisocial behaviour (LONG, CHILIZA and STEAIN 2015, 510). This essay argues that the persistent presence of poverty and socio-economic inequalities is what has resulted to anger among native South Africans. But this anger, according to Long, Bonga and Stein, is misdirected to their fellow marginalised Africans from other countries (LONG, CHILIZA and STEIN 2015, 510) who they see as foreign nationals or outsiders who need to be driven away or exterminated from South Africa. The point is that Afrophobia has its root in the divisive, racist ideology that marginalised native South Africans, but favoured the Europeans during the apartheid regime. This divisive ideology accounts for the native South Africans misdirecting their anger and frustration on their fellow Africans who share the same fate with them in contemporary South Africa. Afrophobic attacks in South Africa have led to loss of human lives and property.

In all, contemporary Africa is plagued with intergroup conflicts. These conflicts are caused by the social orientation that influences Africans interpersonal relationship. This social orientation which stems from both religious and political backgrounds and which promotes conflicts is predicated on the divisive, exclusivist and discriminatory ideology that is endemic in contemporary Africa.

The Value of Tolerance in Indigenous African Religions (IARs) and its Relational Relevance in reducing the evil of violent conflicts

Tolerance, in this context, is an attitude of accommodation, which individuals in a social group could demonstrate towards others. It habors such values as solidarity, mutual and complementary relationships. Otherness is created on the basis of perceived difference, which could be ethnic, linguistic, ideological, class, sex, gender, and so forth. Where such orientation of difference exists, tolerance is one of the values that can help keep the peace and stability of the social structure of such a society or group. Tolerance is not necessarily the acceptance of one another's orientations, but the recognition of everyone's right to their own biological, preferred or conferred identity, orientation or ideology, and the inclination to enter and sustain mutual and complementary relationships. Thus, tolerance is a core value of the relational principle. The point of relationships is not merely to get together, but to sustain such togetherness peaceably. Religion, interestingly, is one of the orientations that have the power to engender tolerance or promote intolerance in any social setting. When and where religion promotes intolerance, conflicts

of all kinds could result. According to S. P. I. Agi, religious conflicts have "led to numerous calamities, and has been responsible for the collapse of one political order or the other throughout history in various climes" (AGI 1996, v). Explaining how religious conflicts have affected contemporary Africa, Agi quotes Herbert Macauley as saying that

> As Africans we have been split into Semithereens by what we call religion in West Africa, where men and women wrangle for religion, write for it, fight for it, and perhaps even die for it,… do anything but for it. (AGI 1996, 2)

Concerning Nigeria specifically, Agi states:

> It is no longer news! Religious riots have become routine events in Nigeria. Burning houses, destroying property, maiming and killing innocent people have become "normal" way of religious life. The question is no longer "if" but "when". The fact is that religious violence has now become one of Allah's or God's unwritten commandments that must be obeyed, at least in Nigeria. Nigeria has joined the league of the religiously restless nations with intra-and-inter-religious conflicts. The common denominator is intolerance which, in turn, breeds violence. (AGI 1996, 2)

The evils of religious conflicts have led to internal division among Africans, such that people see their differences not only along ethnic lines, but along religious lines as well. The point is that Christianity and Islam are religions that promote intolerance through their divisive and exclusivist ideologies. With this point made, it is gemane to turn to the question of the idea of tolerance in Indigenous African Religions. The guiding question is, is IARs still of any relevance to contemporary Africa?

The rate at which Africans are converting to Christianity and Islam makes one wonder if IARs are still relevant for contemporary Africa. Some scholars such as David Barrett have argued that indigenous African religion is on its natural path to extinction (BARRET 1982). This conclusion might have been influenced by two other factors namely, his being 1.) a non-African and 2.) a Christian missionary with the sole aim of converting Africans to Christianity. Or, it could be true giving the high rate of conversion to the foreign religions. Likewise, there are some scholars who hold that despite the presence of Christianity and Islam in Africa, Indigenous African Religions still thrive (MBITI 1969; IKENGA-METUH 1985). John Mbiti, one of the champions of this view explains that although Africans get converted to foreign religions, they do not drop their IARs completely. According to him, they cannot leave their IARs because it has coloured, informed and shaped their worldview (MBITI 1969, xi). This chapter agrees with Mbiti that IARs

still thrive in Africa and could be relevant in some respects even with the high conversion rate of Africans to Christianity and Islam.

If the above remark is the case, then there is an inherent factor that keeps the religion alive in the African continent. This can be gleaned from its social and psychological relevance as Africans still revert to it at critical moments in their lives. The question now is: how can IARs help resolve the problem of intergroup conflicts? This essay shall address this question by arguing that IARs can function as a viable option for resolving conflicts among groups in the society by leveraging on their value of mutual tolerance.

Employing the conversational method as a philosophical/theoretical framework, this essay will show how tolerance in IARs can be harnessed for the good of contemporary African society. This essay's position would be that IARs have tolerant values such as mutual and complementary relationships as central values that they promote and that this values have relevance for Africa today, especially in reducing the evil of violent conflicts.

IARs have always promoted religious tolerance in pristine Africa due to their inherent demand for peaceful relationships. In traditional African societies where IARs were the mode of spirituality and worship, there was no struggle for supremacy of ideas of God(s), belief systems and modes of worship. Different ideas of God(s), belief systems and modes of worship were tolerated and given equal playing ground. In this context, all belief systems, ideas of God(s) and modes of worship were regarded as equals and have equal opportunities to influence and shape the lives of their adherents. Adherents of these diverse religious systems are required to cultivate and sustain healthy relationships with others as part of their moral duties.

The value of tolerance which manifests in IARs can be explained using the principle of *mmeko* grounded in Ezumezu logic. *Mmeko* is an Igbo word that means relationship nowadays formulated as the principle of relationality in African philosophy. The idea of religious tolerance in IARs is made possible by the complementary nature of IARs and the relational mindset which they inculcate in their adherents. In this way, it can be argued that adherents of IARs generally do not see their differences in ideas of God(s), belief systems or modes of worship as contradictories. Rather, they see these differences as sub-contraries that can lead to complementarity among their religions. It is pertinent to state here that Ezumezu logic purveys the idea of complementarity. This essay shall show how this logic could offer an explanation on the ideological structure of the IARs.

Ezumezu logic is a system of logic developed as an *organon* for philosophising and explaining realities within and beyond the African place, specifically those that concern intermediate valuation (CHIMAKONAM 2019a). This logic thrives on three supplementary laws of thoughts, in addition to the classical laws of two-valued logic. The supplementary laws include *njikoka, mmekoka* and *onona-etiti.* We shall here demonstrate how these laws of thought undergird and translate to relational principles for the IARs.

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The first relational principle njikoka that emphasises relationality or integration and mutual recognition, clearly manifests in the IARs. In IARs, there are diverse belief systems, modes of worship and religious expressions connected by a common philosophy as Mbiti claims. This philosophy is similar to what K. C. Anyanwu calls the 'philosophy of integration' (1984, 78). There is, in IARs, the pulling together of spiritual and social experiences by adherents through various deities and shrines to bring about an effective human communion. In IARs, most Africans do not worship one God or through one method, but sometimes diverse Gods and using different approaches. The evidence of the preceding is in the numerous shrines such as individual, family and communal shrines where worships and religious rituals take place. This is also manifested in the diversity of religious beliefs, modes of worship and religious expressions. What is implied in the foregoing is that integrative belief systems, modes of worship and religious expressions had, and still have, significance for Africa/ns.

Another relational principle that characterise IARs is the principle of *mmekoka* otherwise known as the principle of contextuality. This principle recognises that each individual represents a unique context and that the relationship between individuals also occurs in specific contects. In this context, all Gods and modes of worship, ethnic and linguistic groups found in communities in Africa can be viewed or conscientised to see one another as complementary. The preceding shows that there is no negative or antagonistic competition among IARs whether in their conceptions of God or the supernatural. They view all conceptions of God as complementary. In the same way, the orientation of accommodation of and tolerance for otherness can be inculcated in the people of sub-Sahara today, beginning with school children and youths. Using the social and news media, schools, social institutions, enlightening campaigns can be mounted to create a new orientation in which people are taught to see otherness in whatever form as complementary rather than antagonistic.

The third relational principle is called *onon-etiti* or complementarity (CHIMAKONAM 2019a). This principle, which also appears in Innocent Asouzu (2007) and Chimakonam (2019a), show that diverse or seemingly opposed variables can complement each other. This principle holds that there is a meeting point between two sub-contraries or two seemingly opposed variables. It is at this middle ground that variables co-exist aware of their differences and similarities but preferring to mutually co-exist. This co-existence is apparent in the worldview or cosmology that underlies IARs. Emmanuel Edeh terms this African worldview a 'duality' (EDEH 1985); Chris Ijiomah uses the idea of "Harmonious Monism" to explain it (IJIOMAH 1996; 2006; 2014); while Alexander Animalu and Jonathan Chimakonam calls it 'complementary duality' (ANIMALU and CHIMAKONAM 2012) ─a mutual co-existence of opposites. The argument here is that this idea of mutual co-existence or tolerance inherent in the IARs can be fostered on any modern

society like those in sub-Sahara or elsewhere to address the tension between the in-group and out-group caused mainly by divisive ideologies.

From the above, the contemporary Africa and Nigeria specifically, that are plagued with seemingly unending evils of violent conflicts can draw some lessons from IARs to address the problem. For us, the conversational method can function as a viable theoretical framework for teasing out the importance of IARs and deploying their relational values. Conversational method holds that discourse can grow through critical and creative engagement on any existential issue confronting humankind (CHIMAKONAM 2015a; 2015b; 2017a; 2017b; 2018). Here, a philosopher/scholar (*nwansa* - proponent) might argue for an idea/position on the issue at hand, while another philosopher/scholar (*nwanju* - opponent) comes up to deconstruct and reconstruct this idea, in this way generating new idea(s) on the issue. Even this new idea can still be re-engaged with and subjected to further conversation by another philosopher/scholar thus bringing forth new ideas. This involves healthy relationships in which the values of tolerance, recognition, balance, etc., are evident. This is the relational philosophical mindset that contemporary Africans should imbibe and cultivate with respect to handling the issues that divide their interests in order to avoid conflicts. In other words, difference which is a form of ontological limitation should not always be the cause of conflict. Asouzu (2007), in his rendering of the complementary mindset of the African worldview urges us to allow the limitations of our being to be the cause of our joy. Conversational thinking maintains that biological, ideological, linguistic, ethnic, sex and gender differences should not discourage objective and creative relationships. These indices rather, should constitute the basis for critical yet, creative conversation or relationship. The foremost expectation of diversity should not be relationship of war but that of reasoning. The task should be to negotiate through difference and establish identity and not to drift apart in conflict.

In the light of conversationalism, it can be argued that where there is conflict of interests on religious, ethnic, political, boundary matters, ideological, sex, gender, etc., critical and creative conversation can be employed as a tool to reach a more peaceful resolution that increase good and decreases evil. The method of conversational thinking is objective and enjoins all to approach issues with objective mindset. But besides the emphasis on objectivity, it promotes the attitude of complementarity. It does not engender a winner take all attitude. There is room for concession, tolerance and accommodation of the other as part of the features of a healthy relationship. With conversational thinking, the goal is to work together, sustain the conversation or relationship and make progress as a collective bearing in mind that interests can hardly be separated. So, through critical and creative engagements, all the parties involved are given equal opportunities to make their case and at the end come to a compromise. In this context, plurality of religions, religious beliefs, political

ideologies, social and cultural inclinations are not seen as problems that can lead to conflict. Plurality or diversity are seen as indices for complementarity and integration when reason is engaged. This idea of complementarity and integration found in IARs, marshalled by the method of conversational thinking and grounded in Ezumezu logic would not only lead to peaceful co-existence among Africans, but would enhance solidarity thereby reducing conflicts between one group and another. Humans cannot co-exist, integrate and complement each other if they are unwilling to tolerate each other. Adherents of IARs of different sects are able to bond and co-exist because of the value of tolerance that underlies their relationships. Tolerance is a value and virtue, which IARs exemplify for the world as a whole to learn, imbibe and practice.

Therefore, there is the need for adherents of Christianity and Islam in Africa to learn and imbibe the value of tolerance promoted by the IARs. There is no doubt that beneath the increasing inter-group conflicts in Africa is a demand for a change in attitude. One of the sources for such inspiration would be the IARs. Modernity has yielded many good things for the continent of Africa, peaceful co-existence and accommodation of interests among diverse groups are not some of them. Africans are therefore compelled to look elsewhere for ideas, and unlike the erroneous supposition in some literature. that Africa has made no contributions to world history and civilization Western racists like Hegel (1975), Hume and Kant (POPKIN 1977-78) and others, (see CHIMAKONAM 2019b) are examples of those that wrote off the continent and denied its intellectual contributions to modern civilisation, and have nothing important to offer the modern world. This essay demonstrates with the IARs relational values that the opposite is the case. In IARs, diversity does not stand as a challenge to human peaceful co-existence. Rather, it promotes complementarity, integration, bonding, cohesion and co-existence. Asouzu's truth and authenticity criterion, appears to capture the importance of complementary mindset succinctly. He cautions that a lopsided, polarising or dichotomising mindset is what creates irreconcilable divisions among groups. To create a system that promotes co-existence, attitudes of marginalisation and superiority must be eschewed. In his words, "never elevate any world immanent missing link as an absolute instance" (Asouzu 2007; 2011). What he means in the preceding is that every individual or group is as relevant and important as the other. Acknowledging and recognising the fact of equality of all is central to mutual tolerance and accommodation of other interests.

It is in the light of the above arguments that IARs can be said to harbour some relational values such as mutual tolerance which promote inter-group complementarity and cohesion. Thus, if this inherent idea of tolerance in IARs is properly harnessed by social institutions, government and civil societies, the problems of religious, racial, ethnic and even Afrophobic and xenophobic conflicts can be drastically reduced.

Conclusion

What has been done in this essay is to argue that the inherent relational value of tolerance in IARs has significance for contemporary Africa that is plagued by seemingly ceaseless evil of violent conflicts. This essay also notes that contemporary Africa and most Africans are nowadays guided by other religious beliefs and movements outside the IARs, which divisive ideologies have led to lack of peaceful co-existence among individuals, communities, and nation-states within Africa. Using the relational principles of IARs teased out of the conversational method that is grounded in Ezumezu logic, this chapter demonstrated how attitudes of complementarity and integration that depict tolerance, can foster unity and peaceful co-existence in contexts where there are inter-group interests like Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa.

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The Question of the Nature of God from the African Place

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Abstract

What is the constituent nature of God? Most scholars project the idea that God is an absolute, pure spirit devoid of matter. In this paper, I engage this position from the African philosophical place. First, I contend that the postulation that God is pure spirit stems from an ontological system known as dualism. This system bifurcates reality into spirit and matter and sees spirit as good, and matter as evil. Therefore, scholars who subscribe to this theory of dualism, posit that God, the Supreme Being is the ultimate good that is, and is pure spirit. Secondly, I disagree with this position. Using the African theory of duality, I argue that everything that is has both spirit and matter, and that spirit and matter are good. Thus, God as an existent reality consists of spirit and matter. I will support my argument using Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology and Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism, two African culture-inspired philosophical systems. In this paper, I employ conversationalism as my philosophical method.
Keyword: God, African theory of duality, Ibuanyidanda ontology, Harmonious monism, Conversationalism

Introduction

My topic falls under the field of African philosophy of religion. I formulated this topic in line with the colloquium's theme. The colloquium's theme suggests that African philosophy's existence presupposes African philosophy of religion's existence. If this is the case, it is germane to conceptualise the notion of African philosophy of religion. Hence, the question, what is African philosophy of religion? To answer this question, we need first to understand African philosophy.

African philosophy is a philosophical tradition distinct from other philosophies such as Western, Oriental, etc. According to Chukwudum Okolo, African philosophy involves a critical, rigorous, and systematic reflection on the African experience of reality. He also contends that it is concerned with how the African engages with reality and the situation his/her finds him/herself as an African as "being-in-the African-world" (OKOLO 1983, 8; 1993, 12). This implies that central in African philosophy is how the African experiences reality as he/she exists in the world with other realities. Here, reality is experienced and investigated to arrive at the truth about itself. This is

done using an African culture-inspired logic lens. Thus, African philosophy is the quest for truth in the African philosophical place by approaching and understanding reality using the African culture-inspired logic lens.

With the above point made, it becomes necessary for me to conceptualise African philosophy of religion. African philosophy of religion is the critical and rigorous investigation of religious realities in the African philosophical place using an African culture-inspired logic lens in other to arrive at the truth about these realities. One of the religious realities that African philosophy of religion concerns itself with is God, the subject of my inquiry.

Africans have always sought to make sense of what God is. This is apparent in their various views about God as recorded in the works of African scholars (MBITI 1969; 1975 (1991); IBEABUCHI 2013; NALWAMBA 2017; EZEUGWU & CHINWEUBA 2018). Some have God as a withdrawn being who cannot be reached or approached directly hence the need for intermediaries or media. Others assert that God can be reached and therefore approach God directly. In all, the existence of God within the African reality scheme is beyond question since God is at the apex of the African conception of reality (African ontology) (IJIOMAH 1996; CHIMAKONAM AND OGBONNAYA 2011). However, what God could be like in terms of God's constituent nature seems to be an under-researched topic in contemporary philosophy, especially African philosophy of religion. Nevertheless, it appears to be a given within the African philosophical place that God is spirit and nothing else.

In this paper, I critically and creatively evaluate the above concluding remark, using the African duality theory. First, I argue that the idea that God is pure spirit, without matter is rooted in dualism, a philosophical system or theory that bifurcates, polarises, and absolutises an aspect of reality, and in the case of God, spirit. Hence, while dualism suggests that reality is essentially one-sided, its antithesis 'duality' holds that reality is two-sided. This theory of duality is exemplified in Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism (IJIOMAH 1996; 2006; 2014; 2016) and Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology (2007a; 2011). Second, employing this duality theory, I argue that God as reality cannot be pure spirit devoid of matter. Instead, assert that God consists of spirit and matter.

After this introduction, I shall consider the following section centred on God as spirit in the African religious world. Here, I shall argue that this conception of God mirrors dualism instead of African duality. This will be followed by the section on conceptialising the African theory of duality. This section will explain duality and Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism and Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology discussed as examples. Afterward, this African duality theory will be used to reconceptualise God as consisting of spirit and matter as its constituent parts.

God as Spirit in African Religious Cosmology: A Reflection of Dualism
The concept God is an integral part of the African religious cosmology and reality scheme. African cosmology is religious because its has religious undertone. In Udobata Onunwa's words, the "cosmology is deeply rooted in religion" (ONUNWA 1990, 8). This is because the conception of the world that it projects is religious. Some African scholars hold that the world is both tripartite (NWOYE 2011, 307) and dual (EDEH 1985, 74). It is tripartite because it is compartmentalised into three parts, namely, the world above (sky), the human world (the earth), the world beneath (the underworld) (MBITI 1969, 32; EJIZU 1985, 136; IJIOMAH 2005, 84; 2006, 30; 2014, 97; OKORO 2007, 85). C. C. Ekwealor demonstrates a similar partitioning of the world but using his Igbo words and their equivalent to illustrate them. According to him, the world is partition into *Elu-Igwe* [the sky], *Alammadu* [the land of humans] and *Alammuo* [the land of spirits] (Ekwealor 1990). The diagrams below show Ijiomah and Ekwealor's cosmologies, respectively:
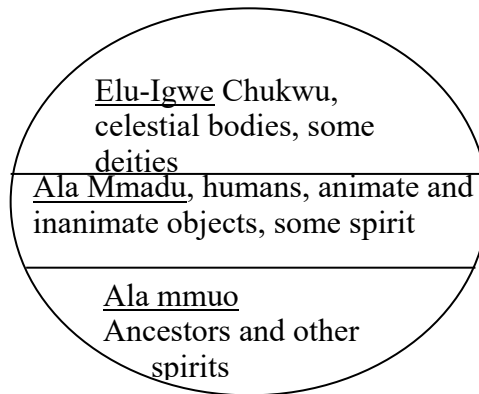

Figure 1: Ijiomah's Igbo [African] worldview.Source: Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2011, 276)

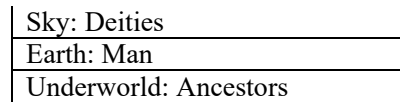| Sky: Deities |
| --- |
| Earth: Man |
| Underworld: Ancestors |

Figure 2: Ekwealor's Igbo [African] Worldview. Source: Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2011, 276)

It must be noted that Africans hold a dynamic conception of the world; hence, the tripartite conception of the world is also dual. The world partitioned into three can roll up into two – spiritual (nonphysical) and physical. The world above and the world beneath are said to be spiritual (nophysical), while the human world is termed physical. Victor Uchendu notes that Igbo world (a typical African world)is dual given that it consists of the human and the spiritual world. He also notes that there is a constant interaction between these two worlds, "the material and spiritual, the visible and invisible" (UCHENDU 1965 12). Of this Igbo world, T. Uzodinma Nwala posits that it is made up of two parts: Eluigwe –sky (Ala Mmuo – the spirit world or supernatural other) and Elu-uwa – the earth also called Ala (Ala Madu – the human world or visible other). They two are created by God – Chineke – God the creator (NWALA 1985).

It is germane to note that African cosmology is an ontologised cosomology. This is because beings populate the world. Uchendu captures this by arguing that the human world is filled with all created things and beings of both animate and animate, while the spirit world consists of the creator, ancestral spirits, disembodied and malignant spirits. Hence, he remarks there is a constant interaction between the two worlds, "the material and spiritual, the visible and invisible, the good and bad, the living and dead" (UCHENDU 1965, 12). Thus, in African cosmology, beings are arranged in the following hierarchical order: God, divinities and ancestors, humans, animals, plants, and inanimate Objects (TEMPELS 1959, 21; NJOKU 2002, 18). This points to the fact that God is at the apex of African cosmology. Onunwa's representation of the African cosmos in an isosceles triangle captures this point vividly and better.

Figure 3: Onunwa's Igbo worldview (ONUNWA 2005, 68)
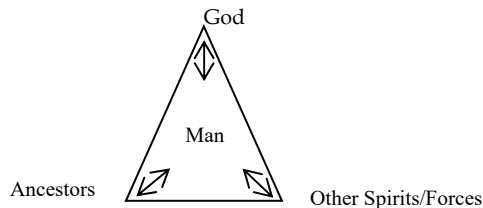
The point is that in the tripartite conception of the world, God is at the apex. This is also the case for the dual conception of the world. For instance, the Igbo world is divided into the visible and invisible worlds and that God resides in the invisible world with other spiritual beings. Although God coexists with realities in the spiritual and invisible realm of existence, God is equal to any. Theophilus Okere argues that Chukwu or Chineke is a spirit in that Chukwu is invisible to us. This God or Chukwu is not one among gods but a Supreme Being with no equal (OKERE 2005, 2). Pantaleon Iroegbu also reaffirms this point as he asserts that God is the highest of all beings that live on high, whose presence is felt on earth (although through intermediaries) (IROEGBU 2002, 14). From the preceding, one is left to wonder about the constituent nature of this God.

In most African belief and thought systems, God's constituent nature is restricted to an aspect of reality. This has to do with the spiritual aspect. Hence, the assertion, 'God is spirit' (MBITI 1975 (1991), 59; IBEABUCHI 2013, 293; NALWAMBA 2017, 1; EZEUGWU & CHINWEUBA 2018, 29). In African religious worldview, God is conceived as made of spirit and has no material part. That is to say that God has only spirit as its constituent nature. According to Madu "God is spirit and immaterial" (MADU 2003, 19). "To the Akan, God is essentially pure spirit, a being that is invisible" (AGYARKO 2013, 53). "God is pure Spirit, and this implies that he has no body of any kind" (MADU 1997, 55). This implies that God has only a spiritual part with no physical or material part. Thus, God (Chukwu) is the supreme spirit (ARINZE 1970, 12; 319; UKWAMEDUA & EDOGIAWERI 2017, 319).

The above conception of God as being solely spirit with no matter is a manifestation of dualism. Dualism is a philosophical system that promotes binary opposition. It holds that reality is either spiritual or physical/ material, with the spiritual part being superior. A typical example of dualism is Aristotle's ontology, which according to Asouzu, is bifurcating and polarising (ASOUZU 2007a; 2011). Aristotle avers that being is comprised of substance and accident. The former is non-material, the latter is purely material. He goes on to identify substance as the essence of being. He notes that "if these are not substance, there is no substance and no being at all; for the accidents of these it cannot be right to call beings" (1947: Bk B, 5). Thus, being is substance. In this context, this substance equates spirit and then God. This substance is believed to be spiritual and has nothing like matter. Thus, God is pure spirit, existing independent of matter.

African Duality Theory: Harmonious Monism and *Ibuanyidanda* Ontology as Examples

Besides dualism examined above, there is duality, a philosophical system that is seemingly antithetical to dualism. This duality theory is said to be African. But this does not imply that it cannot be found in non-African cultures. No! It is also found in other philosophical places outside African philosophy. A good example is Zen logic (SUZUKI 1956; 1957; DUMOULIN 1963; CHEUG-

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YUAN 1969; CUA 1981; KASULIS 1981; CHENG 1986; UDOIDEM 1992), which is an expression of duality. However, the point is that duality is a philosophical system that dominates the African philosophical place and thinking, as can be seen in many African scholarly works (MBITI 1969; EDEH 1985; IJIOMAH 1996, 2005, 2006, 2014, 2016; ONUNWA 2005; ANIMALU & CHIMAKONAM 2013; OBI 2017; etc).

The African duality theory states that reality always exists as two-sided, equally important entities. Reality is that which is made up of two entities or parts that are inseparable.   Various African scholars describe it differently. Ijiomah describes it as harmonious monism' (1996, 2004, 2014, 2016). Onunwa describes it as 'inseparable duality' (ONUNWA 2005). Animalu and Chimakonam describe it as 'complementary duality' (ANIMALU & CHIMAKONAM 2013), etc.

Although in African cosmology, the world is said to consist of the world above, the human world and the underworld (the world beneath) (MBITI 1969; EJIZU 1985; EKWEALOR 1990; IJIOMAH 2005, 2006, 2014; OKORO 2007; etc), it is also said to be dual. The world's dual nature is that it consists of the physical and nonphysical (spiritual) aspects, or the visible and invisible aspects, and the sensible and nonsensible parts. Here, the world above and the underworld are seen as nonphysical, invisible, nonsensible, while the human world is physical, visible, and sensible. The point is that for the African, the world is a duality. This is also the case with being and the human person.

In African ontology, being is seen as consisting of substance (essence) and accident, material and immaterial aspects, etc. Similarly, in African conception, the human person who could be tripartite (consisting of spirit, soul and body) or multiple parts (GBADEGESIN 1998, 28-40; APPIAH 2004, 27; etc) is reducible to two parts. Thus, the human being consists of two basic elements, the physical and the nonphysical parts The bottom line is that duality involves a "harmony of opposites" (OBI 2017, 5). For instance, the metaphysical and the physical (MBITI 1969, 177), the natural and the supernatural (PARRINDER 1962, 27). This duality theory is well articulated in two African culture-inspired ontological theories: Harmonious Monism and *Ibuanyidanda* ontology. My task in the paragraphs that follow is to tease out these ontological theories. I shall begin with Harmonious Monism.

Harmonious Monism has Chris Okezie Ijiomah (1996; 2006; 2014; 2016) as its proponent. This African culture-inspired ontological theory holds that everything that is has both physical and spiritual aspects. Ijiomah argues that although some realities might sometimes be thought of as being solely physical or spiritual, they are both physical and spiritual. Here, what is physical has inbuilt spirituality and what is spiritual has inbuilt physicality. Another way to put this is that on the one hand, what is physical has a veiled spiritual aspect. And on the other hand, its spiritual aspect is manifested while the physical aspect is veiled. Ijiomah sees this process as "dovetailing of realities into one another" (IJIOMAH 2014, 118). There is an internal

dynamic, harmonious relationship between the physical and physical aspects of being or reality since they empty themselves into each other with the whole (being). Where being manifests as physical, the spiritual empties itself into the physical aspect. And where it manifests as spiritual, the physical empties itself into the spiritual part.

Ijiomah also holds that the world is dual, made up of physical and spiritual and physical worlds. First, he asserts that the world is tripartite, consisting of the sky, the earth, and the underworld. Secondly, he reduced them into two inseparable worlds, the physical world (the earth) and the spiritual world (the sky and the underworld) (IJIOMAH 2005, 84-85; 2006, 30-31; 2014, 97-122). The point is that the world is an inseparable twoness of the physical and spiritual worlds.

Jonathan Chimakonam and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya contend that this ontological theory is grounded in three principles that they gleaned from Ijiomah's works. First is the principle of complementarity, which holds that complements are missing links or opposites that are incomplete and yearn for each other, and they find their completeness within a whole where they complement each other. The second principle is the principle of unification. It states that reality is a result of the unification of opposites. And the third principle, the principle of coexistence, posits that extremes or opposites coexist within a whole (IJIOMAH 996, 45-47; 2014, 92-132; CHIMAKONAM AND OGBONNAYA 2021).

By implication, the physical and spiritual aspects of reality are the complements, missing links, opposites that are incomplete and yearn for each other and become complete when they coexist and complement each other as they are unified within the whole. This demonstrates that reality is a unification and complementation of the physical and spiritual aspects that coexist as one. With this point made, it becomes necessary to tease out *ibuanyidanda* ontology.

Innocent Izuchukwu Asouzu is the proponent of *Ibuanyidanda* ontology. This ontology is articulated as a reaction against Aristotle's bifurcation and polarising metaphysics (ASOUZU 2007a; 2011). For example, Aristotle holds that although being consists of substance and accident, substance can be equated to being even in the absence of accident. This, for Asouzu, is an unwarranted and unacceptable way of conceptualising being. Hence, the need for reconceptualising being from an African philosophical place using ibuanyidanda[1] as a conceptual framework. Given that ibuanyidanda connotes complementarity, Asouzu contends that his ontological system (Ibuanyidanda ontology) unifies and harmonises entities instead of bifurcates them (2003; 2004; 2005; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2011; 2013a; 2013b). It is in this light that he articulates his theory of being contrary to Aristotle.

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[1] *Ibuanyidanda* is an Igbo aphorism that Asouzu translates as complementarity.

For Asouzu, being cannot be equated to substance without accident. Instead, being is that which consists of substance and accident that are in a mutually complementary relationship. He substantiates this assertion using some Igbo aphorisms and concepts. One of such Igbo aphorisms is *ka so mu adina* (ASOUZU 2007a, 257). This aphorism means 'that I might not be alone.' For being to be, neither substance nor accident exists alone. They must exist with each other. This is because they are missing links. Missing links are entities that are incomplete in themselves but are complete when they coexist with others. In this context, substance and accident are missing links that ought not to be alone (*ka so mu di*) (ASOUZU 2007a, 257). They ought to be with each other (*ka so mu adina*) for there to be being. This coexistence is in a mutually complementary manner. Thus, there is being when substance and accident are in a mutually complementary relationship as they coexist. Hence, Asouzu opines that "to be is to be in mutual complementary relation (*ka so mu adina*) and its negation is to be alone (*ka so mu di*) and nothing" (ASOUZU 2011, 42).

Also, being is articulated using another Igbo aphorism which reads: *ihedi, nwere isi na odu*. This translates as 'what exists, has head and tail-end'. Here, 'the head' (*isi*) is the substance, and the 'tail-end' (*odu*) is the accident, while 'what exists' (*ihedi*) is being. Hence, being is that which has substance and accident. Therefore, neither of substance nor accident is neglected. They are both seen as essential aspects of being. This is captured in the Igbo concepts *ihe kachasi mkpa* and *ihe di mkpa*. While *ihe kachasi mkpa* means what is more important, *ihe di mkpa* connotes what is important. Although this implies that *ihe kachasi mkpa* seems to be ontologically higher than *ihe di mkpa*, they are both indispensables in defining being. Thus, being consists of *ihe kachasi mkpa* and *ihe di mkpa*. Where, *ihe kachasi mkpa* is substance and *ihe di mkpa* is accident. This renders substance and accident the essential constituent parts of being.

Asouzu's notion of being is grounded in two principles, an imperative and a criterion. The first principle is the principle of integration (harmonious complementation) which states that "Anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (ASOUZU 2003, 58-59; 2005, 281; 2011, 103). The second principle, progressive transformation, holds that "All human actions are geared towards the joy of being" (ASOUZU 2011, 44; 2013b, 23). Ibuanyidanda imperative asserts that "Allow the limitation of being to become the cause of your joy" (2004, 281; 2007c, 187). Finally, the truth and authenticity criterion posits that "never elevate any world immanent missing link to an absolute instance" (2007b: 197). In other words, one ought not to "elevate a world missing link to an absolute mode" (ASOUZU 2007b: 197). The point here is that substance and accident are missing links that must be acknowledged as limited and insufficient in themselves. They must be seen as complementary to each other for being to emerge. Humans derive joy in realising that being consists of two missing links, substance and accident, which are incomplete but become complete when they complete each other.

So far, the thought is that Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism and Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology exemplify African duality theory. This is because they contend that reality consists of an inseparable twoness. Here, reality has two interconnected entities that interpenetrate each other such that none can exist without the other. These two entities are spirit and matter. Iroegbu takes up this discussion and contends that neither spirit nor matter can exist without the opposite. In his words:

> We maintain that while spirit needs matter to be understood as spirit, matter cannot be matter completely outside spirit. Briefly put, while matter is the hermeneutical foundation of spirit, spirit is the teleological fulfilment of matter. While integral matter is spiritualized matter, authentic spirit is material-related spirit. (IROEGBU 2002: 9)

He further stresses this point as he notes that:

> In synthesis, spirit and matter are not two different and opposing realities. They are two aspects of reality, which is one … both of them coexisting in the universe. To disunite them is to create tension, even crises. Matter without spirit decomposes. Spirit without matter is elusive; at best, it is unreachable and unidentifiable. Matter and spirit must always be together. This is ontic realism, an explanation we must describe as integral. (IROEGBU 2002: 29)

The above shows that spirit and matter are indispensable aspects of reality inasmuch as African duality theory is concerned.

The Constituent Nature of God: An African Duality Perspective
What could God's constituent nature be? Pure spirit or what? This is the issue at hand in this section. The position I seek to argue out here is that God is not pure spirit. God is both spirit and matter, immaterial (spiritual/nonphysical) and material (physical). This argument will be built on the African duality theory that has been explicated above.

African duality theory holds that reality is two-sided in that its has the metaphysical and the physical dimensions. No reality exists without this two-sidedness. God as a reality is no exception. Thus, the nature of God, like other realities, can be conceptualised as a duality. This implies that God consists of spirit and matter.

Following Ijiomah's brand of African duality theory, God is a monism consisting of harmony of spirit and matter. In the light of his principle of complementarity (IJIOMAH 1996; 2014; CHIMAKONAM AND OGBONNAYA 2021), spirit and matter are seen as complements, which are missing links and incomplete unless they complement themselves. In this context, God is the whole in which they complement themselves. The second principle, which is the principle of unification (IJIOMAH 1996; 2014;

CHIMAKONAM & OGBONNAYA 2021), shows that spirit and matter are indivisibly unified in God. Also, the principle of coexistence (IJIOMAH 1996; 2014; CHIMAKONAM & OGBONNAYA 2021), the third principle points to the fact that spirit and matter coexist in God. Thus, Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism demonstrates that God is a reality consisting of spirit and matter that complement each other as they coexist and are unified as one.

Also, Asouzu's brand of African duality theory has implications for the constituent nature of God. This is apparent in Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology explicated in the preceding section. Here, God as reality consists of 1.) substance and accident, 2.) head (*isi*) and tail-end (*odu*), and 3.) *ihe kachasi mkpa* (what is most important) and *ihe di mkpa* (what is important) that are mutually complementary relationship. Where substance, head (*isi*), and *ihe kachasi mkpa* (what is most important) stand for spirit and accident, and tail-end (*odu*), and *ihe di mkpa* (what is important) represent matter. In God, spirit and matter are in a mutually complementary relationship. Anything short of this implies that God is outside the realm of reality, and is meaningless, and nothing.

This way of conceptualising God's constituent nature aligns with the principle of integration, which emphasises the notion of missing link. Thus, spirit and matter are seen as missing links that yearn for each other. Consequently, they remain incomplete until they complete each other as a whole. The point is that spirit and matter are individual entities that do not exist in isolation but in a mutually complementary relationship with each other in God. It is in this that they affirm the existence of each other. Also, as missing links, spirit and matter are limited and should never be elevated to an absolute instance. This follows Asouzu's truth and authenticity criterion, which states that "never elevate any world immanent missing links to an absolute instance". Therefore, if God is seen as pure spirit devoid of matter, we elevate spirit to an absolute instance. To do so implies that spirit is complete in itself and does not need matter to complement it. If this is the case, then we have failed to allow the limitation of spirit to be the cause of our joy as Asouzu enjoins us in *Ibuanyidanda* imperative.

We can find joy when we realise that spirit and matter independent of each other are limited. This is what will help us reconceptualise God as consisting of spirit and matter, which are in a mutually complementary relationship. Hence, this will bring joy to our being in realising that we are not absolutising any world immanent missing link (in this case, spirit) in line with the principle of progressive transformation and the truth and authenticity criterion. Thus, God cannot be said to be spirit in isolation. God as spirit also has matter. God as spirit has inbuilt matter. To say that God has matter implies that God is a tangible being with accidental parts that can be felt. Here, I am saying that God possess physicality – physical substance like human bodily parts. Thus, God as reality has spirit and matter. This is the way that God ought to be conceived from the African viewpoint.

The possible question is, how can we begin to conceive God in the above manner? This question calls for concern because many Africans have always conceived God as spirit devoid of matter. This is because they suffer from *ihe mkpuchi anya* (the phenomenon of concealment) and have a disjunctive mindset (ASOUZU 2004; 2005; 2007c; 2013a; 2013b). As a result, they bifurcate and polarise reality and absolutise an aspect of reality. Asouzu holds the way out of this mindset is through a psycho-therapeutic measure known as "noetic propaedeutic" (2011; 2013a). Noetic propaedeutic is a pre-educating or re-educating the mind to begin looking beyond bifurcating and polarising reality, and absolutising an aspect of reality. Instead, it helps the mind to unify and harmonise aspects of reality as one. This psycho-therapeutic mechanism is supported by what Asouzu calls "existential conversion" (2007a; 2013b). Existential conversion is another psycho-therapeutic mechanism that enables the minds to see missing links as transcendent categories that can be unified and harmonied as one (Asouzu 2007a, 429-330).

Thus, when our minds are influenced by, and operate with, noetic propaedeutic and existential conversion, we have "*obioha*" (2007a; 2007b). *Obioha* is a holistic, comprehensive complementary mindset that has overcome the bifurcating, polarising of reality and absolutising of an aspect of reality. This mindset does not restrict itself to linking a fragment of reality as reality. Instead, it sees fragments of reality as missing links that ought to be unified. With this mindset, we can conceive all realities as two-sided, including God. Hence, God can be conceived as consisting of spirit and matter in line with the African duality theory.

Conclusion

African philosophy of religion challenges African scholars to reflect deeply on their conceptualisation of reality in the African philosophical place. One such concept that requires much attention is the notion of God, which seems to be pervasive in Africa. I have given a critical and creative look at this concept concerning God's constituent nature in the preceding sections. My concluding argument is that God cannot be pure spirit if the African duality lens examines its constituent nature. Instead, God will be seen as consisting of spirit and matter that are harmoniously complemented and integrated as they coexist as a whole. Outside this, God ceases to be reality, and becomes meaningless, and nothing.

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Augustine, Ancestors and the Problem of Evil:
African Religions, the Donatists, and the African Manichees

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Abstract

In this paper, I compare the philosophy of Augustine with the philosophy of relevant African traditions: Donatists, Manichees, and African traditional religions. I try to demonstrate that Augustine's religious thought was partly influenced by local African religions or movements, but also differed from them substantially. I will carry out this comparative work looking at two important issues: (a) the problem of evil and (b) the existence of other supernatural entities, such as ancestors, and their relationship with humans. These comparisons lead to a new understanding of evil in Augustine's thought; namely, evil as an inevitable world phenomenon.
Keywords: Augustine, African Traditional Religions, Ancestors, Problem of Evil, Free Will, Donatism, Northern African Religions.

Introduction

Augustine is one of the most important philosophers of religion in history. In fact, he has significantly influenced Christian thought and is potentially the most influential philosopher of Christianity, along with Thomas Aquinas. His views on evil have especially played an important and influential role in Christian philosophy. Indeed, the concept of "will" is usually attributed to Augustine, who developed this concept to interpret God's all-goodness and the existence of evil. According to him, the good God created a good cosmos, but human beings chose to rebel against God using their free, but intermediately good, will. To explain the concept of will, Augustine constructed a series of arguments that contrasted Christianity with African religions, the Donatists and the African Manichees.

In this article, I will compare Augustine's view with those of some important African religions, that is, ideas in African traditional religions, the Donatists, and the African Manichees. From this comparison I will conclude that evil ought to be understood as a natural fact of the world. In the first section, I will show that Augustine and the Donatists hold some views which are likely influenced by African religions. In the second section, I will compare Augustine's views on evil with the African Manichees, Donatists, and African religions.

Augustine and his Context: Traditional Religions, Sacrifice, and Ancestors

Augustine was born in 354 CE in Taghaste, a small city in Roman North Africa. His mother, Monica, was probably a Berber because she was named after Mon, the Berber god. His father, Patrick, had Roman descent. From the generation of Augustine's grandmother, the whole family subscribed to Catholic Christianity. After his father and mother married, the family mainly continued their Catholic beliefs, although Patrick became a catechumen and was baptized before he died (AUGUSTINEa 2009, 1.11.17; 9.9.19; 9.9.22). While learning and teaching rhetoric in Carthage, Augustine gave up his pursuit of Catholicism, although not a Catholic yet. From 373 to 383 CE, Augustine had indulged in Manichaeism for more than nine years (AUGUSTINEb 1991, 1.18.34, 2.19.68; AUGUSTINEc 1994, 1.2; AUGUSTINEa 2009, 3.4.7; 3.11.20; 4.1.1; 5.3.3; 5.6.10). He only became a Catholic when he dramatically converted in Milan in 386 CE. However, even until the time Augustine became the Catholic bishop of Hippo Regius, he did have some relatives who were members of the Donatists, a sect separated from the North African Catholic church at the beginning of the 4th century.

During the age of Augustine, North Africa was experiencing a deep process of Christianization. There were at least five main religions in the region, including Catholic Christianity, Donatism, Manicheaism, Judaism and the Roman traditional religion. It is very possible that Augustine, in addition to being influenced by such religions, was also influenced by local African religions. For example, his mentioning of sacrifice for past sins in *Confessions* is likely to originate from local African religions. Indeed, many African religions have sacrifice as a core of their practice (IBEABUCHI 2013, 289-314). Hence, it is likely that such African religious traditions influenced Augustine. Indeed, this influence can sometimes be found in his own work. Take, for example, the following passages in *Confessions* 6.2.2, where Augustine describes the North African version of memorial rituals for passed saints:

> In accordance with my mother's custom in Africa, she had taken to the memorial shrines of the saints' cakes and bread and wine, and was forbidden by the janitor. … After bringing her basket of ceremonial food which she would first taste and then share around the company, she used to present not more than one tiny glass of wine diluted to suit her very sober palate. She would take a sip as an act of respect. (2009, 6.2.2)

> But Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, "ordered that no such offerings were to be made, even by those who acted soberly, … because the ceremonies were like meals to propitiate the departed spirits and similar to heathen superstition." (2009, 6.2.2)

Here, it is clear that Augustine's mother exerted significant influence on his thought. The result was that their North African Christian practices were considered much more superstitious than the Italian ones (MEER 1961, 498-526).

This influence can also be found within the Donatists. The Donatists, named after their second bishop, Donatus the Great, were a Christian sect that grew in North Africa. In fact, the Donatists developed quickly, and became much more influential and powerful amongst the Northern African population than did the Catholic church in North Africa. Indeed, in terms of adherents to the Church, the Donatists largely outnumbered the number of Catholics (FREND 1952).

Just like Catholic Christians, Donatists in North Africa shared the same memorial ceremonies for their passed saints. They also celebrated saints' feast days with customary but drunken banquets in their churches (AUGUSTINEd 29.11). It is very likely that these memorial ceremonies were similar to the African traditional religions' ceremonies for their ancestors. Just as in traditional African Religions, those who passed away were regarded as "the living-dead" and "the oldest members of the household" (MBITI 1970, 107-111). Certainly, in the Roman religious culture, people would take food and drink to their ancestors' tombs, just so the ancestors could eat and drink with them. Likewise, in African traditional religions, it is normally believed that ancestors are present in the lives of living humans and likely to dwell within the community or in a nearby forest.

Hence, it is possible to draw some important comparisons here. In their own way, Augustine and the Donatists both believe in the importance of rituals for the dead and, more particularly, rituals that involve sacrifices. The dead play an important role in Northern African Christianity, as they were believed to interfere in the life of the living. The origin of such beliefs is likely to be traditional African religions, which also hold such views. In the case of Augustine, his mother, who strongly influenced him, is likely to be another important source for his doctrine. For the Donatists, local religious beliefs appear to be the most likely way that these rituals, sacrifices and beliefs have grown.

God, Free Will and Evil: Augustine, African Manichees, and the Donatists
Christian philosophy and the problem of evil are highly influenced by the thought of Augustine. In *De libero arbitrio* and other early works, Augustine defined at least three kinds of evil: metaphysical, moral, and natural. Metaphysically speaking, according to him, evil is not a substance but only the privation of good (*privatio boni*). In other words, evil is not an actual thing, rather; it is an absence of a thing (good). Therefore, evil has no essence; it is just an absence of something (AUGUSTINEa 2009, 7.12.18). Moral evil

originated in Adam's fall and is revealed in human sins. Moral evil can be explained as the absence of morally good agency. Natural evil refers to all disasters (e.g., earthquakes, typhoons, etc.) by which God punishes human beings. This kind of evil is understood as the absence of God's grace.

Also important to Augustine's philosophy are his views of God. Augustine argued that God was omnipotent, the creator of the cosmos and a morally perfect world. The question that of course emerges at this point is why evil exists in a morally perfect world? Augustine's answer is that in a morally good cosmos, human beings must be moral agents and take responsibility for all moral evils. A cosmos where there is no moral agency is not a good cosmos. In Augustine's words:

> Since the will is moved when it turns itself away from the unchangeable good towards the changeable good, where does this movement come from? It is surely evil, even if free will should be numbered among good things on the grounds that we cannot live rightly without it. (2010, 2.20.54)

To understand this better, it is also important to understand Augustine's theory of will. For Augustine, in this created order, creatures constitute a hierarchical sequence, with the human soul, like angels' souls, occupying the highest level, only below God Himself. Within the human soul, the higher part consists of intellect, will and memory, among which will is being able to decide freely. This kind of freedom means that, only before the fall of Adam, could will turn itself to the unchangeable good or the changeable good.

As "an intermediate good" (*medium bonum*) (AUGUSTINEe 2010, 2.19.53), the will can be directed to God or to other creatures. But if the will is not directed to God, then sin and evil originate (AUGUSTINEe 2010, 2.19.52.). After the corruption of the will, our wills fall into a state of ignorance (*ignorantia*) and difficulty (*difficultas*) (AUGUSTINEe 2010, 3.18.52) so that human beings can no longer will good or do good, but necessarily fall into willing evil and doing evil. Although it is necessary, carrying out evil is still a decision made from our own free choice, which means it is a kind of sin that we must bear moral responsibility for. Due to the corruption of will, we have damaged the "image" and "likeness" created by God (Gen. 1:26), and the higher part of the soul has lost control over the lower part, i.e. the bodily desires. Because of the body's rebellion and disturbance, we have thus fallen from the state of "cannot sin" (*potest non peccare*) to the state of "cannot avoid sin" (*non potest non peccare*) (AUGUSTINEf 1971, 13-18.7-8). However, regarding Adam's first sudden turn of will from God to the creature, Augustine never gives a clear and reliable answer. This suggests that the first evil must have been incomprehensible to him (BROWN 1978, 315-329).

The views above are, in fact, a response to the philosophy of Manichaeism. Augustine was initially influenced by Manichaeism over a number of years. Nonetheless, following his conversion to Catholic Christianity, he began to debate against Manichaeism using philosophical arguments and biblical exegeses (AUGUSTINEa 2009, 3.6.10, 3.12.21, 4.8.13, 5.11.21 and AUGUSTINEg 2004). Manichaeism was founded by Mani (216-277 CE) in the Persian Empire. It developed rapidly across the whole Roman Empire as a missionary religion and became especially significant in the North African region. Moreover, as a gnostic religion, it absorbed a lot of Christian doctrines, especially Paul's theology, into its dualistic system, although this became regarded as the most deadly heresy of Paulism (FREND 1953, 21; O'MEARA 2001, 49-50).

Contrasting with Augustine, the Manichees believed that, in the beginning, there were two material masses in the universe. One was dominated by God and was morally good. The other was dominated by the son of darkness (Satan) and was morally bad. At a certain point in time, the evil mass violated the good mass so that the former imprisoned the latter, and so our world was created by a kind of mixture. An example of this is that our body imprisoned our soul in itself, but there was always a binary opposition between body and soul. For Manichees, the soul was good (and regulated by God), but the body was evil (and regulated by the devil). Hence, the soul was not responsible for any moral evils, but the body could be led to sin. Therefore, the cause of evil is the interference of this evil mass in the good mass, which resulted in a world that mixed evil and good. Evil is, therefore, a metaphysical entity. It certainly exists in the world. But it is unclear whether God is omnipotent according to this view. God is certainly powerful, but perhaps not all-powerful so that he can avoid everything in advance. That is, from this viewpoint, the Manichee God can foresee everything, but he may not be able to stop everything (AUGUSTINEg 2004).

An important contrast is also between Augustine's view and the philosophies of the Donatists. The Donatists were rigorists, i.e., they held a strict judgement on how to follow Christian norms. Rigorism is a doctrine that originated in 250s CE as a reaction to Catholic Christians offering a sacrifice to pagan gods or the emperor to show their political loyalty and avoid harsh punishment. Rigorists considered these Christians traitors (*traditores*). In fact, some rigorist Christians insisted on a view of "a purified church". They argued that those who break the moral norms of Christian doctrine should not be permitted to reunite with the Church. Moreover, the bishops who failed to fulfill their Christian duties would lose their authority to execute baptism and consecration (TERTULLIAN 2015; CYPRIAN 1971). The Donatists, therefore, held a very tough view on sin, where forgiveness did not play an important role and was, in fact, viewed as a mistake. Augustine, however, considered that sinning was somehow part of human nature. To engage in acts

of evil is somehow inevitable, but what is important is to repent. His views on baptism are relevant for understanding this point: In *Confessions* 1.11.17, Augustine reflected his deferred baptism during his childhood:

> She (Monica) hastily made arrangements for me to be initiated and washed in the sacraments of salvation, confessing you, Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins. But suddenly I recovered. My cleansing was deferred on the assumption that, if I lived, I would be sure to soil myself; and after that solemn washing the guilt would be greater and more dangerous if I then defiled myself with sins. (2009, 1.11.17)

Initially, this view seems to be a rigorist one and it is in fact likely that it was influenced by the Donatists' rigor. However, in order to refute rigorism, in *Confessions* 10.30.41-42 and later works, Augustine argued that "I", even a bishop, was disturbed by temptations of sin and may even commit sins in dreams, but that God's grace would cure this sickness and forgive all these sins (AUGUSTINEh 1974, 4.2.10). Furthermore, for Augustine, the church could never become a purified one in a secular world, but always a mixture of real Christians and false ones.

Surprisingly, it is interesting that the Donatists, who were an indigenous African Christian sect, seemed to be less influenced by local beliefs. African religions usually consider that evil is natural in the world; they hold a kind of moral realism, i.e., evil is simply something that humans, ancestors and even God are likely and, sometimes, morally justified to do. Donatists, as rigorists, significantly disagree with this point. On the other hand, Augustine seemed to somehow share the view held by African religions that evil is something that will inevitably occur, even though he thought that metaphysically evil does not exist. Evil is not an entity, metaphysically speaking, but an inevitable occurrence in the world. That is to say, the absence of goodwill inevitably happen. Although Augustine would agree with African traditional religions that evil must occur, he disagreed that God is morally imperfect, as many African religions believe (CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES 2021).

Conclusion: Towards a New Understanding of Evil
Augustine was a philosopher living in the 4th and 5th centuries, but he left a tremendous legacy to all human beings. This legacy shed and will continue to shed much light on the problem of evil as well as the problem of human moral agency. Furthermore, Augustine has significantly influenced Christian doctrine and, particularly, views on evil. In this article, I have tried to show how African religions have played a role in Augustine's thought, as well as contrast his work with African religions to carry out a comparative philosophical enterprise. This view can bring us to a new understanding of evil

whereby evil is a natural phenomenon that inevitably occurs. This is partly because it is a necessary condition for goodness. This view, shared by Christian philosophers like Richard Swinburne, is also present in Augustine, for he believed that a cosmos with free will is a better cosmos. But considering African religions as an influence on Augustine allows for a new interpretation of Augustine: that evil will necessarily occur as a fact of the world. Evil is part of what the world is and therefore is inevitable.

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Comparing Concepts of God: Translating God in the Chinese and Yoruba Religious Contexts

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Abstract
This article discusses the concept of God with a focus on the translation of God in the Chinese and Yoruba religious contexts. Translating the word God is of the essence when comparing concepts of god(s). The translation of the Christian God as Olodumare misrepresents the latter. As suggested by Africanists, there should be appropriate translations for God, Olodumare, and other African gods. As a preliminary comparative attempt, this article presents a case on the introduction of God to the Chinese people. The translation of God into Chinese reflects different views regarding the correlation between the Christian God and the Chinese gods.
Keywords: Translating God, Olodumare, Chinese gods, Buddhist gods, Yoruba Religion

Introduction
The present article is a discussion about the concept of God. This issue involves controversial debates among Africanists. Deeply affected by the consequences of Christian proselytization, discourses about Olodumare, God in Yoruba belief system, are embedded in social and intellectual colonization and decolonization agendas. As a result, the discussion of African gods cannot avoid comparisons with the Christian concept of God. Such comparisons produce different interpretations of Olodumare's godhood.

As a preliminary comparative attempt, I present a case on the introduction of God to the Chinese people with a focus on the Jesuit mission to late Ming China (sixteenth - seventeenth centuries). Along with this presentation, I provide some comparative remarks on Olodumare, the Christian God, and some of the major Chinese gods. In the Jesuit mission during late Ming China, proselytizing strategies adopted by the likes of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), Nicolò Longobardo (1565-1655), and Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), produced different views about Chinese religiosity[1]. Their view about the relationship between God and the Chinese gods is a case in point. The evidence shows that the Jesuit missionaries primarily rendered God as *Tianzhu*

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[1] These persons are three of the most renowned and influential figures in the history of Chinese Christianity.

(the Lord of Heaven). However, in Chinese translations of Buddhist scripture, *Tianzhu* refers to the Buddhist god *Śakra*. Informed by its Buddhist connotations, the concept of *Tianzhu* then becomes rather distant from the Christian concept of God. As Matteo Ricci adjusted his proselytizing strategies, he turned to Confucian resources for explaining the Christian God to a Chinese audience. Albeit causing heated debates among Jesuit missionaries, ancient Confucian texts played a significant role in decisions concerning how to translate the word Deus (God in Latin) into Chinese. The evidence shows that late Ming Chinese audiences had a variety of views regarding the correlation between Buddhist and Daoist gods and the Christian God.

In the following, the first section reviews Africanist major discussions about Olodumare. The Africanist discussion about Olodumare advocates a call for appropriate translations for the Christian God, Olodumare, and other African gods. The second section presents a case on the introduction of God to the Chinese and compares the Christian God, Olodumare, and some of the Chinese gods. The third section offers further comparative remarks on the translation of God in the Chinese and Yoruba religious contexts.

The Yoruba Concept of God: Olodumare and the Problem of Evil
The discussion of Olodumare's godhood is of the essence for addressing the concept of God in the Yoruba religion. Indigenous and Western scholarship generate different understandings of whether Olodumare is God or not. Decolonizing Africanists criticize Western anthropologists for mistakenly regarding Olodumare as less than God (IGBOIN 2014). Africanists such as Bolaji Idowu, on the other hand, argue that Olodumare is no less in essence and quality than the Christian God that was introduced to Africa (IGBOIN 2014). For Idowu, Olodumare is equivalent to the Christian God. Specifically, Olodumare is the creator as claimed in Christianity. It is noted that Idowu is faithful to the monotheistic understanding of God, explaining that God is one but perceived differently through various cultural lenses (IGBOIN 2014). Idowu's approach, however, is questioned by some other decolonizing Africanists who attempt to divest Olodumare of any Christian garb and instead put forth true understandings of Him. The Africanist comparison between Olodumare and the Christian concept of God present different conceptualizations of Olodumare's godhood. For example, Ademola Kazeem Fayemi argues that Olodumare is not God, for Olodumare is not omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient (IGBOIN 2014). However, Fayemi emphasizes that although Olodumare does not have an equivalent meaning with the concept of God, He is neither superior nor inferior to God (IGBOIN 2014). Furthermore, according to Benson Igboin, Kola Abimbola

thinks that Olodumare "could not be a Supreme Being because of 'Its' [eternal] co-existence with three other deities such as Obatala, Esu, and Ifa" (2014, 202).

On matters like knowledge and wisdom, Olodumare would consult Ifa. Abimbola explains that Olodumare does not have an absolute rule over other divinities (IGBOIN 2014). Regardless of these contrary views, scholars of African religions have identified that concepts of God-like attributes are not so intellectually impoverished in African religions. And some of these attributes correspond to those ascribed to the Christian God, such as omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc.

The superlative attributes conferred upon Olodumare lead to a discussion about the problem of evil. The problem of evil particularly arises in Christianity and other theistic religions, where God is thought of as perfectly good. The claim of an almighty God seems to contradict the existence of evil in our experiential reality. The discussion about Olodumare's possession of equivalent nature as God may generate a question of whether the problem of evil exists in African religions or not. E.O. Oduwole, for example, thinks that Olodumare cannot be exonerated from the problem of evil for He possesses similar attributes to the Christian God (FAYEMI 2012; ODUWOLE 2007). She also argues that Yoruba holds a dialectical worldview of good and evil. However, Ademola Fayemi challenges Oduwole's thesis and articulates a Yoruba-African approach to the problem of evil.

Based on an extensive analysis of Olodumare, Esu, and other divinities, Fayemi argues that the philosophical problem of evil does not exist in traditional Yoruba thought (FAYEMI 2012). This claim, however, does not indicate the negation of evil, for Fayemi explains that evilness in Yoruba belief is more about the complement of goodness in a binary rather than a dualistic structure (FAYEMI 2012). Apart from Fayemi, John A. I. Bewaji argues that Olodumare's possession of superlative attributes "does not lead to the type of impasse or contradiction that arises within the theistic Christian religion" (1998, 1).

The essential explanation given by Bewaji is that even though Olodumare has many superlative attributes, it is misleading to present Olodumare as a Christian God. Moreover, dismissing the problem of evil is supported by rectifying the misunderstanding of Esu as Satan or the Devil.

Notably, the discourse about Yoruba gods has been overwhelmingly influenced by Western colonization. Significantly, the Africanist discussion about Olodumare and the problem of evil advocates a call for the decolonization of Olodumare and Esu. To conceptually decolonize these gods, Igboin points to a fundamental issue at stake. He suggests that, on the one hand, there should be appropriate translations for God and the Devil in the Yoruba language; on the other, scholars should develop adequate translations for Olodumre and Esu (IGBOIN 2014). Both Yoruba and Western translations

must be faithful to Christian and Yoruba theologies. Admittedly, Igboin incisively points to the fundamental issue inherent in the debates of Olodumare's godhood, namely, the proper translations of both the Christian concept of God and the African gods. In addition, Igboin points out that the translation of the Christian God as Olodumare misrepresents the latter. Indeed, translating the word God is of the essence when comparing concepts of god(s). Expectedly, apart from influencing disputes about God and Olodumare, the same issue, translating the word God, has ignited similar discussions in other parts of the world. Additionally, local populations may entertain thoughts about how their gods relate to the Christian God.

God and the Chinese Gods
How to translate God into Chinese constitutes the core of dispute in the course of Christian proselytization in China. The Chinese religions have exerted great influence on the translation of God. Known as the first documentation of Christianity entering China, the Nestorian Stele, entitled *Daqin jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei* (*Stele to the Propagation in China of the Luminous Religion of Daqin)*, reveals the propagation of the Eastern Church in China during the Tang dynasty. The heading of the stele includes the Christian cross and Buddhist and Daoist motifs, such as the lotus flower and clouds. This demonstrates that Buddhist and Daoist concepts were integrated for the Nestorian propagation in Tang China. The *Jingjiao documents*, a collection of Chinese texts connected with the Church of the East in China, show that Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian terminologies appear to be frequently used for expounding the core doctrines of Syriac Christianity (MALEK 2021; TANG and WINKLER 2016).

However, it was the Jesuit reintroduction of Christianity to China in the 16th-century Ming dynasty that created the most vigorous disputes over the adoption of Chinese religious terms for translating the concept of God. Adopting the Buddhist path during their initial arrival in China, Jesuit missionaries soon realized that it was Confucianism that constituted the dominant stream among the Chinese elite. Switching their proselytizing strategy, Jesuit priests went on to criticize Buddhism and deploy Confucian concepts for explaining Catholicism to Confucian scholars. Matteo Ricci is a well-known representative of this trend. Following Michele Ruggieri (1543 - 1607), Ricci adopted *Tianzhu* (the Lord of Heaven) as the translation for *Deus*. The two Jesuit priests, however, were not aware that *Tianzhu* refers to *Śakra* in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures. *Śakra*, or the full title, should be *Śakro devānām indraḥ*. *Śakra* was originally a Hindu god and assimilated into Buddhism as a protector of the Buddhist dharma.

According to Buddhist cosmology, *Śakra* is the ruler of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, which is the highest of all heavens. It should be noted that, as a god, *Śakra* is long-lived but mortal, for in Buddhism god(s) exist in

the realm of the gods, namely one of the six realms of rebirth, or saṃsāra. In this regard, *Tianzhu*, as a Chinese translation for *Śakra,* is not compatible with the Christian concept of God. In Buddhism, the gods are not regarded as the creator. Thus, *Śakra* is not equivalent to Olodumare, for the Yoruba attributes to the latter as the creator or owner of heaven and earth. Additionally, Olodumare exercises power over his creation. Buddhist gods, however, are subject to the law of causality. Therefore, they have no absolute power over the creature realm. In Chinese Buddhism, *Śakra* is also known as *Dishitian*. *Śakra* is sometimes identified with the Daoist god, the Jade Sovereign (*Yuhuang*), as their birthdays are commonly ascribed to fall in the first lunar month of the Chinese calendar.

Apart from adopting the concept of *Tianzhu* without being aware of its Buddhist connotations, Matteo Ricci found that many ideas in the Sishu Wujing (*Four Books and Five Classics*) were compatible with the core beliefs of Catholicism. He advocated a view that the truth of a monotheistic god was presented in the ancient Chinese texts. In his *Tianzhu shiyi* (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), Ricci argues that the ancient Chinese concept of *Shangdi* corresponds to the concept of God. He claims that

> "The Lord of Heaven who I believe is what the ancient classics call *Shangdi*"

(MEYNARD, 2014, 100)

For Ricci, ancient Confucianism is compatible with Catholicism. Ricci's contemporary, Nicolò Longobardo, however, refuted his approach. Longobardo contended that ancient Chinese philosophy opposes theism or the personal God, and thus it is impossible to find equivalence between *Shangdi* and *Deus* (STANDAERT 2001). Longobardo's view is not without a reasonable base. In the theology of the classical texts, *Shangdi* refers to the Highest Deity, the Heavenly Ruler. This is equivalent to other Chinese terms such as *Tian* (Heaven), *Tiandi*, or *Shangtian*. Unlike the Christian God, who is regarded as the personal God, *Shangdi* is conceived as more impersonal. *Shangdi* tends to be perceived as heaven itself rather than the creator of heaven.

Longobardo opposed abandoning strictly Christian interpretations of God so as to accommodate Chinese culture. The Rites Controversy reflects the disagreements between Longobardo and Ricci with regard to whether *Deus* can be translated as *Shangdi* or not (STANDAERT 2001). The Vatican's response to the Rites Controversy seemed to approve a compromise in translating *Deus* as *Tianzhu*. Overall, the Chinese translation for the Buddhist god *Śakra* and the ancient concept of *Shangdi* have had a decisive influence on the translation of *Deus*. Up until today, Chinese Catholics and Protestants respectively refer to God as *Tianzhu* and *Shangdi*, both of which are used for their respective translations of the Bible.[2]

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[2] The concept of *shen* is also used by Chinese Protestants, and refers to the general concept of god in Chinese religions.

In addition to the discussion about God, *Tianzhu*, and *Shangdi*, the comparison between God and other gods in Buddhism and Daoism also ignited debate. For example, the Jesuit priest Giulio Aleni opposed any possible relation of identity between God and *Brahmā*. Recorded in the *Kouduo richao* (*Diary Transcriptions of the Father's Teaching*) dating to the late Ming period, a Chinese audience Lai Shizhang asked Aleni:

> God is the master of heaven, earth and the myriad of creature. According to Buddhism, the Heavenly King *Maha-Brahmā* has the authority to rule over the three thousand worlds. I was wondering whether he is the same as God or not?
>
> (SCHACHTER 2015, 146)

Aleni refuted such relation of identity:
> "No! No! God is the supreme, incomparable, authentic Lord, and he is in charge of heaven, earth, and the myriad of creatures."
>
> (SCHACHTER 2015, 146)

According to Aleni, *Brahmā* is not omniscient, and thus absolutely incomparable to God:

> "The Heavenly King *Maha-Brahmā*, about whom Buddhism talks, stands at the side of Sakyamunī in order to receive his teachings; how is it possible that he would be the authentic Lord of heaven and earth?"
>
> (SCHACHTER 2015, 146)

Understandably, Lai Shizhang would not equate Buddha to God, for Buddha is recognized as an enlightened human being. Lai Shizhang's question reflects that for a Chinese commoner, a god who is attributed to the ruler of heaven would tend to be equated with the Christian God. However, although *Brahmā* is a god (deva) of the heavenly realm of rebirth, *Brahmā,* together with Śakra, is considered a protector of Buddhism. In Buddhist literature, both *Brahmā* and *Śakra* are frequently portrayed as consulting Buddha about moral matters. This is reminiscent of the scenario in which Olodumare consults Ifa on matters like knowledge and wisdom. Additionally, Olodumare does not have an absolute rule over other divinities but works with them in the administration of the universe.

Lai Shizhang, however, still wondered whether the Jade Sovereign (*Yuhuang*), the chief deity of the Chinese Pantheon, and God, have any equivalence. Proffering three aspects of reasoning, Aleni refuted the identification of God with the Jade Sovereign: (1) The title, Jade Sovereign, was given by the emperor of the Song dynasty. It is incorrect to equate God to

a title coined by a man. (2) According to the *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign*, the Jade Sovereign was a human being who ascended to the status of the Thearch through self-cultivation, while God created human beings and therefore existed before creation. (3) The *Scripture of the Jade Sovereign* also states that the three gods known as the *Three Pure Ones* are above the Jade Sovereign in the Daoist Pantheon (SCHACHTER 2015). Thus, it is impossible that a god who could not be the King of Kings is equivalent to God. Aleni's argumentation is recorded in the *Kouduo richao* and is not the sole exemplar of comparison between God and the Chinese gods. In *Chongzheng bibian* (*Fundamental Debates Regarding the Veneration of Truth*), a Chinese convert He Shizhen, rejected either rendering God as any of the chief deities in Buddhism and Daoism or equating these deities to God. He says:

> The Lord of heaven, earth, and all the creatures is completely different from those gods, buddhas, bodhisattvas[3], the Jade Sovereign, Laojun[4], and Pangu[5]. They were born from their parents after heaven and earth came into being, being nothing more than the people of old times. Before they were born, they could not create heaven, earth, and the myriad of living beings, and after dying they had no power over creation.
> (SCHACHTER 2015, 151)

Unlike Lai Shizhang, He Shizhen who converted to Christianity presented an exclusive view regarding the correlation between the Christian God and the Chinese gods. He Shizhen even seemed to regard the Christian God as more superior than the Chinese gods.

Further Comparative Remarks
The Chinese and Yoruba translations for God share one similarity. Both resort to local concepts of divinity. Strictly speaking, we may say that God is erroneously rendered as *Tianzhu* or *Shangdi* in Chinese. Similarly, as Igboin argues, God should not be rendered as Olodumare (IGBOIN 2014). The discussion about God and the local gods reflects Western scholars' different approaches to Chinese and African religions. While Western anthropologists and philosophers of religion have tended to express a derogatory attitude towards African religions, Catholic missionaries express a more divergent attitude towards Chinese religions.

Having immersed himself in Chinese languages, Confucian classics, and involvement with local elites, Ricci regarded ancient Confucianism as compatible with Catholicism. However, as Africanists criticize Western

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[3] Bodhisattvas refer to those who seek enlightenment not for their own liberation but for the sake of all beings.

[4] Laojun, also known as Taishang Laojun or Daode Tianzun, is one of the Three Pure Ones, the highest divinities in Daoism.

[5] Pangu is known as a creation figure who separated heaven and earth in Chinese mythology.

scholars for not being true to African religions, the Jesuit missionaries suffered from a similar flaw. Chinese Catholics today barely notice that the concept of *Tianzhu* involves Buddhist connotations. Furthermore, although Ricci rightly noticed the ancient Chinese veneration of *Shangdi* and *Tian*, he did not understand the concept of *Shangdi* the way ancient Chinese sages did. Nor did he intend to verify the differences between God and *Shangdi*. Rather, Ricci aimed at utilizing ancient Confucianism, the "skillful means," in order to build up a common ground of dialogue with the Confucian literati and to gain their recognition of Catholicism (MEYNARD, 2014, 100). As discussed previously, representatives like Longobardo and Aleni, however, discarded Ricci's approach and rejected any deities of the three traditions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) as comparable, let alone equivalent, to God. They, therefore, dismissed any compromise of adopting Chinese religious terms for *Deus* (STANDAERT 2001). Nevertheless, many Chinese concepts such as *Tian*, *Shangdi*, and *Dao* have been deployed for explaining the concept of God. This constitutes one significant mark of the sinicization of Christianity.

The Africanist comparison between Olodumare and the Christian concept of God present a different conceptualization of Olodumare's godhood. Similarly, in terms of the correlation between Chinese gods and the Christian God, Chinese audiences came to hold a variety of views. An average Chinese may tend to identify the Buddhist gods, *Brahmā* and Śakra, as similar to the Christian God. He would have an open mind about incorporating a new foreign god into the Chinese Pantheon. This conjecture could be understood to some extent by the high level of inclusiveness entailed in Chinese polytheistic practice.

However, as exemplified by He Shizhen, a committed Chinese convert was more likely to hold an exclusive attitude towards other religions. Similarly, the Jesuit priest Longobardo, Aleni, the renowned Confucian officials, and converts like Xu Guangqi (1562-1633), and Yang Tingjun (1562-1627) regarded the Jade Sovereign as incomparable with God. As indicated in a document attributed to Xu Guangqi entitled *Pomi* [Destroying illusion], Xu relates Chinese religions to superstition (SCHACHTER 2015).

A third Chinese approach would be severe opposition to the Christian God and claiming the superiority of Chinese religiosity. In *Shengchao poxie ji* (Collection on Destroying the Evil on Behalf of the Holy Court), a Confucian literatus Huangzhen, who was also a Buddhist, severely criticized the spread of Christianity in late Ming China. Claiming Catholicism as "evil doctrines", Huangzhen criticized the doctrine of God as violating neo-Confucian

cosmology (XIA 1996). As Huangzhen explains, God creates heaven and earth, human beings, and all things. He is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. And God puts the soul in humanscalled the spirit. According to Huang, Catholicism divides heaven and earth, the Lord, and human beings, claiming that they cannot be united. And heaven and earth cannot be regarded as the Lord. Huang argues, however, that according to neo-Confucianism, the spirit is the heaven, and the heaven is the mind; thus, heaven and earth, all beings, and my mind belong to one unity. In his argumentation, Huang incisively points to the essential difference between Catholic and neo-Confucian cosmology. This leads to a criticism of Ricci's adoption of Confucianism as the kind that *seems like but not*, because Ricci has refuted the neo-Confucian doctrine. In *Tianzhu shiyi*, Ricci criticizes the ancient Confucian truth, suggesting it to be distorted in neo-Confucian doctrines. Huangzhen and Ricci seemingly had quite a different understanding of Confucianism. Moreover, as a Buddhist practitioner, Huang undoubtedly did not favor Ricci's criticism of Buddhism. Ricci's critique of Buddhism constitutes one factor that caused Huang's hostile attitude towards Catholicism.

Conclusion

As Igboin suggested, two truths are essential and imperative in Yoruba's encounter with Christianity: one is to translate God as true to Christianity, the other is to translate Olodomare as true to the Yoruba. The above review of the Jesuit mission in late Ming China has some implications relevant to Igobin's thesis. The Chinese translation *Tianzhu* is originally referred to the Buddhist god, *Śakra.* In this regard, the Buddhist concept of *Tianzhu* cannot adequately denote the meaning of God. Similarly, the ancient Confucian concept of *Shangdi* entails different connotations from the Christian concept of God. In this sense, both translations of *Tianzhu* and *Shangdi de facto* suffer from similar errors to which Igobin alludes. Both translations are neither true to Christianity nor true to Chinese religions.

However, as a matter of fact, both translations have been preserved and do not cause controversy in common contemporary usage by scholars and Chinese Christians. With respect to the Yoruba translation for God, is it possible to avoid the tendency to adopt the Yoruba religious concept? In other words, can Western scholars and local people avoid the mental and cognitive process whereby the Christian God is conceived by relating Him to local gods? Transliterations are commonly seen in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures. Perhaps, scholars may consider using the Latin word Deus so as to precisely denote the Christian God. Scholars may also consider transliterating words such as Deus, Olodumare, Esu in their translations and academic works. Transliterations do not necessarily lead to the elimination of Christian influence on the understanding of Yoruba gods. Rather, they can avoid the

the confusion caused by referring to Olodumare as God. In other words, the transliterating term bears the assumption that it carries the indigenous belief system as a distinctive whole. These remarks, however, indicate possible directions for further exploration, not a final solution to the problem.

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Rethinking Monotheism: Some Comparisons between the Igala Religion and Christianity

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Abstract

The Igala religion believes in the supreme God (*Ọjọ*) as well as the ancestral spirits (*Ibegwu*). This belief system gives rise to the question of whether the Igala religion is monotheistic or polytheistic. Isaiah Negedu has recently argued that the Igala is a peculiar form of monotheism, namely inclusive monotheism. In contrast, this essay compares the Igala understanding of ancestral spirits with the Christian notions of angels and patron saints, and argues that the question of whether the Igala religion is monotheistic or not concerns how we define monotheism and is therefore merely verbal and will not promote our understanding of the Igala religion.
Keywords: The Igala religion, Interreligious dialogue, Christianity, God

Introduction

Interreligious dialogue fosters a mutual understanding of different religions. In a similar way, second-order reflections upon interreligious dialogue yield insights into the very nature of mutual understanding of different religions. Isaiah Negedu's main thesis in his excellent paper, "The Igala Traditional Religious Belief System…" is that the Igala religion falls within the category of *inclusive monotheism* or *soft polytheism*. In response to his article, I wish to look closer into the term "monotheism" and other related notions employed in characterizing the Igala religion. My focus is not on the Igala religion as such, but on the very concept by which we try to understand it. I believe such an investigation is fruitful, because notions such as *monotheism* were invented at a time when the Igala religion was hardly studied at all, and are likely inadequate to properly capture what the Igala people believe in. However, although this essay concerns the nature of interreligious dialogue, its main contention is fairly critical. I believe interreligious dialogue conducted in the form of *Is the Igala religion monotheistic?* is not fruitful, because such a question is unable to advance our understanding of the Igala religion.

This essay is structured as follows. I first provide a brief sketch of the Igala people and the Igala religion. Then I summarize the question Negedu aims to explain, i.e. whether the Igala religion is monotheistic. In response to this question, I first digress a little and draw two comparisons between the Igala religion and Christianity. These comparisons are intended to show that the difference between the Igala and Christianity is not as great as it might appear to be. In the light of these comparisons, I then turn to explain the main thesis of this essay, i.e. the question whether the Igala religion is monotheistic or not is neither substantial nor interesting, because it does not advance our understanding of the Igala culture.

The Igala people
The Igala is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigerian society, and inhabits a large geographical area in Nigeria. It is found mainly in the Eastern Senatorial District of Kogi state, and located within the triangle formed by the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. Bounded by Niger in the west, Enugu in the east, Anambra in the south, and Nassarawa and Benue in the north, this area covers a landmass of approximately 13,665 square kilometers and counts 1.6 million people of population, according to the National Population Commission, 2006. The Igala people constitute more than half of the entire population of Kogi state (EBEH 2015, 124-125).

Due to the specific location of the Igala land, its culture is influenced by many of its neighbors, for instance the Yoruba, Edo, Jukun, Idoma, Nupe, Igbo, Hausa, Igbirra, Bassa-Nge, Bassa-Kwomu, and the Kakandas. In particular, the Igala people consider the Yoruba their sister since they both descend from the same ancestor, namely Oduduwa. Besides, the Igbo also see the Igala as their brothers who move their homeland to their present location. Interactions such as these leave a long-lasting mark on the Igala culture.

The Igala land was divided into three administrative regions, namely Idah, Dekina and Ankpa. These regions are the traditional, political and cultural centers of the Igala people. Especially noteworthy is Idah founded in the 12th century and has been the traditional headquarter of the Igala kingdom. Nowadays, it is the largest city in Igala land and boasts population of about 250 thousand people.

The Igala religion
The Igala people believe in many kinds of divine or supernatural beings, including God, Ancestors, and Diviners. According to the Igala religious system, these divine beings are not regarded as equals or rivals, but form a hierarchical order. The highest or most supreme divine being is God, which Igala people call *Ọjọchamachala* (*Ọjọ* in short). At least three features are derived from the supremacy of God. First, God is so supreme that He is beyond not only human description but also man's direct interaction with him. Second, God is so supreme that He creates both divine beings and also the entire world. Third, God is so supreme that he gave powers and authorities to the divine beings below Him to watch over the different spheres of human life.

Especially noteworthy in the Igala religion are the ancestors (*Ibegwu*), who rank second in supremacy under God. They are not living relatives such as grandfather or great-grandfather. For the Igala people, living relatives inhabit *ilẹi* (this world), whereas the ancestors belong to *ọj'ọna*, namely the afterworld, which is believed to be the continuation of this world. Thus, the ancestors are people who were once alive but regarded as everlasting after their death. The most important and peculiar feature of the ancestors is that they have a direct link with God himself, and thereby function as the messengers or representatives of God. For this reason, the ancestors are held in high regard and even awe, and considered as the protectors of the Igala society as well as the source of law and justice. Thus, as Negedu points out, "in interior villages where Igala culture is practiced to its fullest, God is not even mentioned when *Ibegwu* is the topic of discussion because it is taken for granted that they act in place of God." (NEGEDU 2013, 118). The worship of the ancestors is arguably the most distinctive feature of the Igala religion.

Is the Igala religion monotheistic?
According to the previous section, the Igala people believe in both the supreme God (*Ojọ*), who is unknowable and ineffable because of His utmost supremacy, and the ancestors (*Ibegwu*), who are directly worshipped by the Igala people and function as the messengers of God. At this point, the question naturally arises as to *whether the Igala religion is monotheistic or polytheistic*. Here, Negedu suggests (correctly, in my view) that the key issue concerning polytheism is not simply that there are many gods, but rather how they relate to one another. (NEGEDU 2013, 123) In the traditional polytheism found in Egypt, Babylon and Ancient Greece, gods are independent from one another. This belief has been specified as *hard polytheism*. The Igala religion, in contrast, envisions a different picture of gods. For (as mentioned previously) the Igala gods form a hierarchy, where Ancestors and Diviners are subsumed under God. Thus, the Igala religion is neither absolutely polytheistic nor an absolutely monotheistic. According to Negedu, a more appropriate tag would be soft polytheism, monolatry, or inclusive monotheism, namely the belief in many gods, one of which is more supreme than the other. In conclusion, he remarks as follows:

> What is troubling about the African conception of God is that it seems to imply that the West has a clear understanding of the concept of God in the African Traditional Religion. Idowu notes that the authors of this conception have erred, because they have been ignorant of that which forms the core of religion which they endeavour to study. The West, therefore, does not have a wholesome grasp of the concept of God. The concept of God is not a monopoly of any society. (NEGEDU 2013, 126)

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That is to say, the traditional conception of monotheism, derived from the West and based mainly on the Abrahamic religions, fails to apply to the Igala religion. A different look on monotheism is therefore needed.

Two comparisons between the Igala Religion and Christianity
In my view, there are some striking similarities between the Igala religion and Christianity, but we are likely to ignore these similarities if we focus mainly on whether the Igala religion is monotheistic.

To explain my point, I shall begin with a curious case I found in Negedu's essay. According to him, the Igala religion believes in one supreme God on the one hand, and many ancestral spirits on the other. Thus, for Negedu, both the supreme God (with an uppercase *G*) and the ancestral spirits are identified as *gods* (with a lowercase *g*). In other words, they are *divine beings*, so to speak. However, calling both the supreme God and ancestral spirits (the lowercase) *god* is already an implicitly theory-laden interpretation since the Igala religion does not have just one single name (the lowercase "god") for both of them. Rather, they are called *Ọjọ* and *Ibegwu,* respectively. Crucially, such an interpretation can be controversial, for it is not necessarily true that both *Ọjọ* and *Ibegwu* must be called god.

To see why this interpretation can be controversial, we can analyze a parallel case in Christianity. On the one hand, like the Igala religion, Christianity also believes in non-human supernatural beings which are not God, namely *angels*. Angelic belief is not exclusive to Christianity; it is found not only across Abrahamic religions but also in Zoroastrianism and Neoplatonism (see POPE 1907; DAVIDSON 1967; MUEHLBERGER 2013). Christian theologians even distinguish and organize angels in three different spheres: angels in the first sphere are closest to and in direct communion with God; those in the second sphere are responsible for governing or guiding the created world; and those in the third sphere, closest to human beings, are guardian angels of nations, countries and peoples. But on the other hand, unlike Negedu, Christian theologians typically refuse to call any angel *god*. Of course, they will not mistake angels as the supreme uppercase God, but that is beside the point. The point is rather this: for Christian theologians, not even the label of lowercase *god* is appropriate for angels, and not calling any angel *god* does not create any problem. Consequently, although Christianity is committed to the existence of angels, it is still widely regarded as monotheistic, even absolutely monotheistic.

The comparison with Christianity indicates the following: First, both the Igala religion and Christianity believe in non-human supernatural beings at the level of first-order religious practice. Second, at the level of second-order interreligious reflection, it is neither obvious whether these non-human supernatural beings should be called lowercase god, nor is it even clear how we should settle this issue. But lowercase god or not, angels and ancestral

spirits remain just what they are. The facts are almost identical, but the names are different. If that is the case, does it *really* matter if we call the Igala *monotheistic*?

Here is another curious case. Negedu notes that in the Igala religion, the ancestors' divinity "begins at the point when they *become 'living dead'*", and that "*all living beings who lead good lives are potential gods*. We can therefore not speak of proper polytheism or proper monotheism as such" (NEGEDU 2013, 127). I do not know if there is a special term for the idea captured by the italics above, so I will call it *Transformed Divinity*, in the sense that the status of divinity is neither intrinsic nor immutable but requires a certain kind of transformation. Put in another way, the Igala's Transformed Divinity is the view that some lowercase gods *were not gods at some points* but *only became ones afterwards*. Again, one cannot help but notice a parallel in the Christian notion of *patron saint*. A patron saint is neither God nor angel nor any kind of spiritual being, but is regarded as a special mediator with God and merits a special form of religious observance (PARKINSON 1913). The Christian patron saint shares with the Igala ancestor two salient features. First, she is (or was) at least at one point a human being. Second, she has greater power than other human beings and therefore functions as a medium, so to speak, between God and other human beings. On the other hand, the main difference between the Igala ancestor and the Christian saint is that only the former is called a lowercase god. But even if the saint is not called a god, Christian theologians still recognize that she has significant god-like power.

Now, are Christian angels and saints really lowercase gods or not? Alternatively, are the Igala ancestral spirits really lowercase gods or not? Considering the above comparison, one cannot help but feel that these questions are not very substantial. If we are not dealing with interreligious dialogue, then we would already command a sufficiently clear idea about Christian angels and saints (or the Igala ancestral spirits, for that matter), even if one does not know the proper answers to the questions above.

Rethinking monotheism: The case of the Igala Religion
Now let us turn to the main question of this essay: Is the Igala religion monotheism, polytheism, or something else? As mentioned above, the Igala religion believes in one supreme God on the one hand, and many minor ancestral spirits on the other. Both the supreme God (with an uppercase *G*) and the ancestral spirits are identified as *gods* (with a lowercase *g*). Bearing this information in mind, one naturally proceeds to ask: Is the Igala religion monotheistic or polytheistic? My initial impression, however, is that this issue is not very substantial and interesting, since it doesn't concern the nature of either the Igala religion or Christianity, but only has to do with how the technical notion of monotheism—a notion extant neither in the Igala nor in

Christianity—is defined. For if the parties of the debate define the notion of monotheism specifically as the number of supreme God/ uppercase God, then the Igala religion is monotheistic rather than polytheistic by definition. Likewise, if the parties of the debate define the notion of monotheism generally as the number of divine beings/ lowercase god, then the Igala religion is polytheistic rather than monotheistic by definition. Thus, whether the Igala religion is monotheistic or not turns out to be just a *verbal* question; it depends not on the nature of the Igala or Christianity, but rather on what we mean by "monotheism", and hence can be answered relatively easily by a more precise definition. Thus, if two parties correctly understand what the Igala religion believes in, and they agree that the Igala religion is (or is not) monotheistic, then this is merely because they agree on the meaning of monotheism. The alleged claim that the Igala is monotheistic, if true, provides us with no substantial information regarding what *Ojo* and *Ibegwu* are. And if these two parties disagree, this is merely because they define monotheism in different ways. Still, the disagreement indicates nothing informative about what *Ojo* and *Ibegwu* are.

In light of this, let us turn to examine Negedu's main thesis. He suggests that the Igala religion is an instance of inclusive monotheism, which is the "belief in and possible worship of, *multiple gods, one of which is supreme*" (italics are mine). However,given what I have just said in the previous paragraph—if a belief system is committed to multiple gods, shouldn't we just call it polytheism instead? And if such a system is also committed to one supreme God among other gods, wouldn't it be better to call it *exclusive polytheism* instead? My point is that, if we duly acknowledge the verbal nature of the initial question, then we would proceed with issues of definition more cautiously. In this way, we would see that, so far as the Igala religion is concerned, the label *exclusive polytheism* is more appropriate than *inclusive monotheism*. I don't mean to advocate the label *exclusive polytheism*; what I am saying is simply that, *if* we are going to use technical terms like monotheism and polytheism, then exclusive polytheism is *more* appropriate than inclusive monotheism.

Summing up my previous argument: assuming that certain religions such as Christianity and Islam are monotheistic, calling the Igala religion "monotheism" doesn't foster any mutual understanding between the Igala and Christianity. The reason is as follows. Unlike Christianity and the Igala, "monotheism" is not a reality that exists in certain history or culture. Rather, it is a technical term invented to describe said realities. Therefore, whether such a concept is correctly applied to a certain reality must depend on what we mean by such a concept. To clarify, compare these cases: Case 1: "the Igala believes in *Ojo*"; Case 2: "the Igala is monotheistic." There are three differences between them to be noted. First, Case 1 is about reality, whereas

Case 2 is about interpretation of reality. Second, whether Case 1 is true depends on whether it corresponds to reality, whereas whether Case 2 is true, on the other hand, depends first and foremost on what is meant by the interpretation. Last but not least, anyone familiar with the Igala religion will agree with Case 1, but remains doubtful about Case 2. Thus, when it comes to interreligious dialogue, if a Christian wishes to understand the Igala religion, she is advised to understand it in its own terms, to see the reality for herself. The same goes to the Igala people. It might be difficult, but there is no other way, for we cannot understand the Igala religion or Christianity just by notions such as *monotheism* or *polytheism*.

Conclusion
This essay reflects upon the nature of interreligious dialogue via Negedu's analysis of the Igala religion. Negedu suggests that the Igala religion be understood as a peculiar form of monotheism, namely inclusive monotheism. I contest this view and argue as follows. Notions like *monotheism* are technical terms invented to describe reality. To be correct, such a correction should be based on the proper understanding of the relevant reality, such as the belief content of the Igala religion. Therefore, it is our understanding of the Igala religion that determines how we want to define *monotheism*, and not the other way round. Just by saying that the Igala is (or is not) monotheistic will not promote our knowledge of the Igala. Thus, any interreligious dialogue conducted in the form of the question, *Is a certain religion monotheistic?* will be just a verbal business.

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Relating to the Whole Community in Akan and East Asian Ancestral Traditions

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Abstract

Ancestors play crucial roles in the cultural consciousness of diverse traditions, many maintaining ritualistic practices related to commemorating the dead. Ancestor commemoration reinforces cohesion within traditional as well as modern societies, directing a group's focus to past accomplishments of its cultural heritage whilst providing a unifying narrative of the values that bring and hold a community together. The West African Akan tradition values those who honor their ancestors and, by leading a moral life, seek to become ancestors themselves: persons whose lives enjoy standing in the community beyond their own death. This short paper explores ideas about the role of ancestors as (symbolic) constituents of enduring moral communities by comparing traditional Akan belief to traditional East Asian conceptions of ancestors. The aim is to consider the metaphysical, social, and moral dimensions related to ancestors, highlighting continuity and communal concerns.
Keywords: Ancestors, Akan belief, East Asian ancestral rites, Ancestor veneration, Moral community.

Introduction

Ancestral commemoration – if not always understood in terms ancestral veneration or ancestral spirituality – plays a role in most, if not all, human communities, most prominently those that value kinship and the community as highly or more highly than the individual. Traditional cultures, those based on African religion and philosophy or East Asian traditions for example, codified the obligations owed to ancestors by means of rites and symbolic systems, which became foundational to communal, social, moral – and in the case of Confucianism, for instance, also political – identity. The present paper first considers the metaphysical and moral implications of ancestor veneration, specifically in Akan belief, and unpacks the values of venerating one's ancestors and living in such a way as to "becom[e] an ancestor" (MORGAN and OKYERE-MANU 2020,18; EPHIRIM-DONKOR 1998) – that is, leading a life of personal integrity and assuming familial as well as social responsibilities. The paper then compares these aspects of ancestral spirituality in Akan tradition with parallel functions of ancestors and ancestor veneration

in East Asian traditions, citing examples from traditional Chinese conceptions and Korean ethnographic accounts in which communal commemoration, giving ancestors their moral due, and acknowledging ancestors' enduring meaning for spiritual and moral guidance feature prominently in the continuation of community life, stability, and human flourishing.

By means of an exploratory cross-cultural comparison, which is not systematic but draws on selected elements in Akan thought also found in East Asian ancestor traditions that survive in some cases to this day, it becomes clear that while the symbolic and other functions of ancestors differ widely across traditions, from an ethnographic perspective, ancestral bonds are affective and can be endowed with meanings particular to an individual person or family[1]; on another level, ancestors play a role in the moral and ethical formation of communities, whether the perfected elder or the master teacher himself (Confucius) – as do, to draw further comparisons, the saints of Catholic tradition, Jewish patriarchs, and, for Protestants, the ancestral exemplars of blameless living and faith in God from Abel to Christ.

Significance and Functions of Ancestors

In Akan tradition, becoming an ancestor means embarking on a path of enlightenment that requires virtuous conduct through ethical living marked, in particular, by generativity (EPHIRIM-DONKOR 1998), but also, according to Ephirim-Donkor, the acquisition of material wealth and status as an elder in the community (1998, 129-30). Thus, the pursuit of the status of ancestor itself is perceived as a contribution to societal functioning and cohesion. Moreover, as Wiredu explains with reference to the function of ancestors in African societies generally:

> what death means is the departure of the animating spirit from the bodily frame. To the spirit itself, therefore, the death of a person, by definition, has no terrors. It leaves the body and betakes itself to a territory adjacent to the earth or underneath it where, in the capacity of an ancestor, it dedicates itself to a single objective, namely, the promotion of the well-being of the living.
>
> … in African discourse [ancestors] are not only spoken of as 'persons,' but also as beings possessed of a moral maturity and spiritual power superior to that of mortals. Their manner of interacting with the living betokens these moral and spiritual qualities: they are

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[1] Mbiti, for example, notes that in African societies generally, the spirits of the departed – the "living-dead" – continue to interact with their families in different ways, but only up to four or five generations, or until the last family member who knew them passes on. In other words, those acting as intermediaries between the spiritual world and the living are persons with relationships and emotional ties to the families left behind (1990, 82-3). As William Lakos explains, a similar process of 'replacing' the ancestors occurred in Chinese tradition: "Once the family shrine had accumulated too many ancestors (tablets) the oldest and least remembered would be ceremoniously disposed of – usually by burning or by moving to a clan or lineage hall or temple" (2010, 30).

widely believed to reward good conduct and punish bad conduct. (2012, 30)

Wingo, paraphrasing Wiredu, moreover, introduces the Akan ancestor as "the culmination of the process of becoming a person whose memory serves as a moral exemplar to the living that guides the moral journey of the Akan" (2017, Section 1.Para 14). 'Memory' is an important keyword here, since memory and honoring by recalling or commemorating, as understood in the context of this discussion have wider universal and historical application than ancestor 'worship'[2] or the notion that ancestors intervene tangibly in the lives of their living relatives, which many traditions allow for, including within East Asian and African ancestral beliefs, but other religious traditions might deny or associate specifically with the occult.

African communitarian tradition sanctions the mutuality between individual identity and a person's communal belonging rather than condoning the prioritizing of one to the exclusion of the other; mutual concern – including a consciously affirmed relationality between the living and the dead – perpetuates continuing linkages with elders, which in turn encourages "*paternal care* on the part of the ancestors and *filial piety* on the part of the living" (MENKITI 2004,130; qtd. in MORGAN & OKYERE-MANU 2020,28, *emphases added*). West African Akan ontology promotes moral action within the community by describing a hierarchy of beings according to which humans can, upon completing a morally virtuous life, become ancestors who continue their lives after death as spirits able to interact with the living (MORGAN & OKYERE-MANU 2020,15). The honor of "becoming an ancestor" is not universally bestowed but makes certain demands on the living; members of a given community are held to high moral standards, which in turn benefits both individuals and strengthens the communities they live in.

What then *is* an ancestor, according to Akan thought? Wingo, again referencing Wiredu, explains:

> Those who become ancestors are those who, through their imagination, intelligence, and empathetic identification with their fellow human beings, excel not in spite of but because of all the challenges that are put before them. After having lived a full life, they obtain their 'ticket' (to use Wiredu's imagery) to the ancestral world and are reincarnated into service-ancestors. (2017: Section 1.Para 14)

Gyekye, who emphasizes the humanistic and human-centered genesis of African traditional thought, when acknowledging the religious dimensions of morality and its enforcement, also notes the practical functions of ancestors:

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[2] Morgan & Okyere-Manu reiterate that "ancestors are not worshipped by African people. This is an error or misrepresentation by some scholars, Western and African alike. This error has been observed by the likes of Zulu, Wiredu, Dzobo and Sarpong. Zulu (2002, 476), for instance, remarks that ancestors are considered to be human beings, and Africans worship God alone" (2020, 16).

"because the ancestors (ancestral spirits) are also supposed to be interested in the welfare of the society (they left behind), including the moral life of the individual, religion constitutes part of the sanctions that are in play in matters of moral *practice*" (2011: Section 5.Para 12). In other words, ancestors play a practical moral, rather than merely spiritual or symbolic function, which can extend to the function of direct intervention in the business of the living through punishment or rewards for those 'left behind.'

Ancestral Spirituality and Community Formation

No culture survives without some narrative contemplation of its past, a recalling of the foundational figures contributing to its self-understanding, and memory of the historical representatives – symbolic, legendary, or otherwise – of its essential values. While culture is in constant flux, crosses borders and is innovatively adapted and readapted by new bearers all the time, the common consciousness of a community relies on the acknowledgement of common ancestry; where new cultural resources are introduced, the identity-forming presence of ancestors cannot simply be erased. This is true, for example, in religious conversion, as one New Testament scholar, Edison Muhindo Kalengyo, points out when discussing the role of ancestors among Ganda Christians, insisting that Christians' beliefs in ancestors "are not misguided and should not be judged or condemned as pagan" (2009, 49). In fact, suggests Kalengyo, biblical texts offer theological "parallels" to ancestor veneration in the Christian recalling of ancestors as spiritual examples or guides:

> the principle of ancestorship in Christian theology does not contradict Jesus Christ – the Messiah. African Christians need not be ashamed … for *it is impossible* (at least in the case of the Ganda) to disassociate ourselves from our roots – the ancestors. We need to identify with the ancestors in the expression and celebration of our Christian faith and life. (2009, 50, *emphasis added*)

Kalengyo points to the well-known "cloud of witnesses" in the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews as one example of "the presence of ancestors in Christian theology" (2009, 50) and documents how other African Christian traditions have incorporated mentions of ancestors, or "faithful ancestors," in their Christian creeds or eucharist prayers. For Christians, in the celebration of the eucharist, so Kalengyo, Jesus is the "chief ancestor" (2009, 62-63).

The history of Christian mission is filled with diverse encounters and clashes between the westernized religion and traditional cultures that prize ancestral spirituality from contexts as intimate as the domestic sphere to ancestor worship in larger kin groups (see LAKOS 2010, 30) to the imperial or state cult. When European Jesuits and other orders sought to establish a Catholic presence in late Ming and early Qing dynasty China, the most famous aspect of this history of accommodation – or the failure of that policy – remains be the 17th to 18th-century Chinese Rites Controversy, still the

standard textbook example in the longstanding encounter between Chinese culture and the 'foreign religion' (*yangjiao* 洋教 in Chinese, an epithet by which Christianity is sometimes known in China even today, many centuries after its initial introduction into seventh-century Tang-dynasty China). The Rites Controversy involved such debates as which Chinese translation or transliteration to employ for Deus, or how to render "God" in equivalent Chinese terminology or concepts, and whether participation in the annual official temple ceremonies held in honor of Confucius conflicted with the new religious identities of converted degree-holding elites generally required to attend such ceremonies. However, the controversy also involved the more intimate question of family ancestral spirituality, and on this matter opinions also diverged. Chinese Catholics themselves became involved in the heated debates that ensued across enormous linguistic and cultural barriers. Nicolas Standaert has described the controversy from the perspectives of local Christians who became involved in the debates. Standaert highlights attempts by both Chinese converts and missionaries (those not opposed to the rites) to 'ameliorate' ancestral spirituality, to render it palatable to Catholic sensibilities, by addressing such ambiguities as the actual presence of ancestors in ancestral rites and determining that rites are carried out in respect of the deceased "merely "as if" (i.e., "as if" ancestors' souls are present, although not really present)" (2018,63). Jesuits and other, though not all other, missionaries understood the centrality of such rites and the detrimental effects that the demand for wholesale abolition upon conversion would entail.

I mention these examples of the enduring significance of ancestors in the context of converted Christian communities so as to highlight their constitutive meaning for traditional societies beyond purely religious imperatives: ancestors are integral to the webs of meaning and relational morality formed within these communities, which in the case of many post-contact African traditions provide an all-important building block for developing full personhood[3]; this is true among the Akan, who constitute up to about 50% of Ghana's population and roughly 40% of the population of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. In Akan belief, individuality and communality are closely interlinked and interdependent; ancestral spirituality illustrates this relationship, as Busia notes, by prioritizing the bonds of blood:

> the blood relatives, the group of kinsfolk held together by a common origin and a common obligation to its members, to those who are living *and those who are dead* …The individual is brought up to think of himself [*sic.*] in relation to this group and to behave always in such a

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[3] Note: On personhood and the communal, see Wiredu and Gyekye's edited volume, [Person and Community]. While Gyekye does not hold, as does Wiredu, that personhood is something to be achieved throughout one's lifetime rather than a quality that all humans, including newborn babies, possess, both thinkers hold that communality is an inherently human quality and that "a person is by nature a social (communal) being," as Gyekye also concedes, notwithstanding his emphasis on other aspects that *also* constitute the nature of a person (1992, 106).

way as to bring honor and not disgrace to its members. The ideal set
before him is that of mutual helpfulness and cooperation within the
group of kinsfolk. (BUSIA, quoted in GBADEGESIN 2001,133,
emphasis added)

In what follows, I will reflect on the metaphysical, social, and moral
dimensions of ancestor veneration in Akan ontology and traditional (religious)
conceptions and, along the way, try to compare these with some East Asian
understandings of ancestors, highlighting shared concerns of continuity and
communal responsibility which the homage paid to ancestors reinforces.

The Metaphysical Meaning of Ancestors: Relating to the Whole Community

Whether manifesting as prayers, libations or other ritualized enactments, the
explicit acknowledgement of ancestors' ongoing spiritual presence within a
community continues to play a meaningful role in communities shaped by
post-contact African traditional ideals. Even among groups who have
converted to other religions such as Christianity or Islam, ancestor veneration
constitutes a powerful spiritual legacy that has outlasted colonization, political
upheaval and religious change. One scholar of African Religious Traditions,
Jacob K. Olupona, recalls a harvest ceremony in a Christian church in Nigeria
that, during the singing of a familiar Christian tune, was marked by a "dull"
atmosphere until the organist struck up a war song in honor of an ancestral
lineage that the people knew well and identified with in that area (2001b, 68).
This immediately struck a chord with those present: suddenly the congregation
came alive, "the whole church just stood up in response and in respect to the
lineage," and "everyone went wild in the church" (2001b, 68-69).

Whether in African or numerous East-Asian traditions, ancestors 'live
on,' and they often do so recognized as spirits who are present and can
interfere. While Morgan and Okyere-Manu clearly reiterate the point that
"ancestor veneration" is not "ancestor worship" (2020,16), a distinction
stressed by John S. Mbiti, who traces this obfuscation to early European
anthropology (1990, 8), the spiritual and ontologically superior status of
ancestors is not denied. At the same time, family relations are reenacted, and
interconnections between the spiritual presence of deceased ancestors and their
living descendants are shown to underscore the continuity and wholeness of a
community, as Mbiti explained elsewhere:

the departed, whether parents, brothers, sisters or children, form part of
the whole family, and must therefore be kept in touch with their
surviving relatives. Libation and the giving of food to the departed are
tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect; the drink and food so
given are symbols of family continuity and contact. "Worship" is the
wrong word to apply in this situation; and Africans themselves know
very well that they are not "worshipping" the departed members of their

family. It is almost blasphemous, therefore, to describe these acts of family relationships as "worship." (1990, 8-9)

Morgan and Okyere-Manu introduce the place of ancestors in the Akan ontological hierarchy. Ancestors are grouped with beings directly below God, with "various kinds of spirits (smaller gods and the spirits of ancestors)" (2020,14). Spiritual beings care for the spiritual needs of human beings, who themselves are both spiritual and physical. Humans' physical needs are met in turn by physical beings such as non-human animals, plants, and inanimate objects, which are below humans in the ontological hierarchy. Corresponding to the Akan embeddedness within the community of ancestors and their living descendants is thus a "metaphysical worldview" (2020,11) that establishes a hierarchy within which these various beings have their place and fulfill their familial and communal roles. The awareness of community as extending beyond the living to include, in particular, *morally exemplary*, ancestors is one that is at least distantly inherent in human cultures universally (EPHIRIM-DONKOR 1998, xi). However, spiritual alienation from ancestors, biological or otherwise, is a unique characteristic of modern life, as the German Christian theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1926-) has lamented:

> In modern societies the individual consciousness of being oneself drives out the collective sense of existing within a succession of generations. This destroys all community with the dead. The dead are then 'dead' in the modern sense. That is, they no longer exist, they no longer have any significance, and are no longer perceived. We no longer take account of our ancestors. …In this way, in modern societies the living have come to dominate the dead. (2004,131)

Traditional East-Asian cultures and philosophies value an ongoing connectedness with ancestors, as anthropologist Laurel Kendall has explored in her writing on Korean ancestor rituals. Much like the "community [embracing] both the living and the dead" (MENKITI 2004,130, in MORGAN & OKYERE-MANU 2020,28), "the dead" are still very much part of the community of the living in traditional Korean culture, which persists in the divided nation today. Whether they appear in dream or shamanistic rituals, ancestors may communicate with their living relatives in intimate, personalized ways: "That the dead feel, that they continue to express emotions appropriate to a mother, father, child, sibling, or spouse, is affirmed in stories, dreams, and séance appearances (KENDALL 2001,137). All this suggests a presence of ancestors that has tangible consequences in the lives of their living descendants. "Confucius," so Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824 CE) in advocating recognition of mutual influence between Ruists and Mohists,

> advocated that the performance of rites to ancestors should be done with reverence, as if those ancestors were present; he ridiculed those who

paid only lip-service when performing the rites. Isn't this acknowledging the existence of ghosts and spirits? (LI 2020, 68)

In these examples, the presence of ancestors connects the living with the dead in a community of shared kinship and relatedness that stretches beyond physical life and expands the community beyond its present-focused spiritual confinement. The inclusive outlook of the Akan with regard to the expansion of community beyond generational divides, a position irrelevant to future-oriented modern cultures, despite the modern emphasis on inclusivity, finds a parallel in the Akan embrace of the universal: "Humanity has no boundary," which, according to Gyekye, expresses the African perception of the unity of all human beings (2004, 17, 98).

The Social and Moral Functions of Ancestors: A Durkheimian Metaphor?

> Confucius valued individual talent, and used virtuous conduct, speech, governance and culture to praise and direct students, and when a person died but their name was not celebrated this was considered shameful. Isn't this 'elevating the worthy'? (LI 2020, 68)

In his study on "Ancestors and Spirituality in African Society and Culture," Jacob K. Olupona asks why it is that "long after several ancient gods have disappeared from the African pantheon, ancestor beliefs are still as strong as they were in the distant past" (2001, 61). He posits that ancestral rituals constitute an important space linking past and present, connecting the cultures of independent African nation-states today with their pre-colonial histories: "often," Olupona writes, "ancestral ideology is invoked to legitimize ethnic identity reinforced by a bond of unity. Ethnicity and communalism …have served as rallying points for collective community development at the grassroots level" (2001, 61). Faith in ancestors, Olupona maintains, has lasted and served not only as "the main source for cultural revitalization" in post-colonial African contexts, but also as a catalyst for social change. Why it is that ancestors have so tenaciously survived the ravages of past centuries? Indeed, if we think of Chinese or Korean ancestor worship and its longevity into modern and post-modern societies, we will readily turn to its social and political significance. "When formalized," Lakos notes with regard to China, for example, "ancestor worship leads to a bureaucracy. Ancestor worship explains the genesis of bureaucracy and its importance throughout Chinese history."

At this point, one might be tempted to invoke a Durkheimian understanding of traditional rituals connected with ancestors that explains these in terms of the need for social cohesion and coercion, religious practices as functioning within a society to address demands that are not inherently religious (see Kendall). But this functionalist view obscures the fact that ancestors do not merely fill roles within the given social order. Their meanings, as Kendall also points out, are "more particularistic"; the ancestors people

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relate to after all are most often close relatives, those toward whom one might feel deep love, gratitude, guilt or any mixture of strong and complex, particularistic emotions (2001, 137).

The meaning of ancestors thus exceeds social functionalism. Indeed, as Morgan and Okyere-Manu point out, there is a powerful moral dimension to ancestor belief and veneration, and this moral dimension is relationally defined in terms of kinship. Moreover, ancestors in African traditions can directly interact with and disturb the lives of their living descendants. These interferences are again particularistic and relate to the specific situations and histories of individual families or clans. The moral demands placed on those seeking ancestry status in the Akan faith – the "moral undertones of the Akan belief in ancestors" are outlined as follows (2020,16ff.): first, "living virtuously before one's death," avoiding moral bankruptcy and being trustworthy (leading a "credible life" (2020,18). Moreover, a virtuous member of the community must build a moral legacy and pass this on to his or her children. To attain ancestor status, therefore, a person must have been married and parented children. An exception to this condition applies to those who die an honorable death defending their nation (in war, for example). Thirdly, a person must exhibit good health in life and, fourthly, not die as a result of illness or otherwise prematurely, such as by accident. Children cannot attain the status of ancestor if they die before reaching adulthood; the insane are excluded from this privilege. Overall, the person seeking to become an ancestor must be "hardworking, kind, loving, pacific, respectful, merciful, and a keeper of promises …must keep the right sort of company, speak the truth and be someone who can be trusted to keep secrets" (2020, 22).

Moral blamelessness and a fortunate life come into play in East-Asian Confucian philosophical ancestor traditions, too. As Laurel Kendall has noted: "In the literature on Korea, there is a good deal of discussion on the distinction between ancestors and ghosts. The ancestors are said to be the proper dead who died after a full life and have descendants, and the ghosts are those who didn't make it to a ripe old age, so they still rattle around and disturb the living." Kendall also acknowledges, however, that the practical realities can be complex and involved: not all those dying young are denied the status of ancestor, while not all who reach old age are thus honored: "Reality blurs it, but the basic distinction is clearly there" (2001, 68).

Moral rectitude and ancestor reverence are closely connected in Chinese tradition in the concept of filial piety (孝). Parents expected their children to provide for them in old age as they had cared for their children, and as their lives depended on and descended from their ancestors. This reciprocity and recognition would become indicative of general well-being. As seen in one of the core Ruist (Confucian) texts, the *Classic of Rites* (禮記), filial piety, in its most intimate forms, and the wider peace are understood to be connected:

> As the people are taught filial piety and brotherly love at home, with reverence toward the elder and diligent care for the aged in the

community, they constitute the way of a king; and it is along this line that states as well as families will become peaceful. (HSIEH 1968,182, in LAKOS 2010, 76)

Filial piety, in the form of reverence for and proper acknowledgement of ancestors and elders, is not merely a private matter relating to domestic harmony and relational stability within the family but has implications for society at large and the continuity of a community. It is, as Assmann notes with reference to other traditions reaching back to antiquity, a form of commemorating the dead "through which a group goes on living with its dead, keeping them present, and thereby building up an image of its own unity and wholeness, of which the dead naturally form a part (OEXLE 1983: 48ff, qtd. in ASSMANN 2012, 45)[4].

Conclusion

From the above, it can be concluded that Akan traditional thought on ancestor veneration and its relevance for incentives that promote life- and community-affirming human well-being invites a humanist interpretation of ancestors and ancestor reverence (cf.MORGAN & OKYERE-MANU, 2020) that translates well into equivalent ways of relating and relatedness in other traditions. Wiredu and Gyekye in their debate on personhood in African beliefs have put forward different emphases on what constitutes a person, a question that goes to the heart of a humanistic understanding even of this debate because it relates to the question of humanity itself, which might be distinguished from personhood and again from the kind of person, as we have seen in this brief exposé, who might become an ancestor through diligence, living responsibly and being in a position to care for others and have a certain standing among peers. What is troubling in all of this is the question of what happens to those not able or fortunate enough to attain moral and societal prominence – whether the mentally immature, the abandoned, the barren or those killed by an act of nature.

Communal rituals that honor the dead as well as the drive to "become an ancestor" (MORGAN & OKYERE-MANU, 2020,18), can nonetheless be read in humanistic ethical terms. The need to relate to a community of shared and generationally sanctioned meanings beyond the fractured significances of individualistic concerns and existence, while universal, is expressed the world over in diverse ways of appealing and relating to a whole, or ongoing, community; the articulation of this tendency as a value-laden and value-promoting process that encompasses both individual identity (as individuals pursue the status of ancestor, taking responsibility for their own personal life

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[4] In his [Cultural Memory], Assmann divides "memory of the dead" into two kinds: "retrospective and prospective," the second "consist[ing] in "achievement" and "fame" – the manner in which the dead have rendered themselves unforgettable" (2012, 45). While the first is noted as the more original form we have seen that the second is also universal, whether in Akan traditions at the level of kinship or Ruist ancestral spirituality.

choices as part of this pursuit) and communal continuity (since the goals of this orientation promote the harmony and welfare of the community) highlights aspects of shared humanity that future-fixated progress-thinking easily neglects.

That this vision of a shared community – inclusive of the old and young, living and remembered generations, the *whole community* in short – must not exclude the insane, the immature, or otherwise less privileged is another concern. Thus, the pursuit of ancestry by seeking moral perfection and status as outlined above warrants critique and a counter-emphasis on generativity, as highlighted, for example, in the ethical commitments described in Ephirim-Donkor's [African Spirituality] or Gyekye's vision of a "common humanity."

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What is Sacrifice? Towards a Polythetic Definition with an Emphasis on African and Chinese Religions

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Abstract
This paper asks a simple and yet extremely relevant question for scholars of religion: what is sacrifice? Rejecting monothetic definitions of sacrifice, I argue that the phenomenon must be understood as a polythetic class. In its two first sections, the paper discusses the evidence from African religions and Chinese religions, respectively. The last section is devoted to a comparative exercise through which I highlight the polythetic nature of sacrifice.
Keywords: Sacrifice, African Religions, Chinese Religions, Daoism

Introduction
Let me commence this brief research note with the following passage from Genesis:

> Some time afterwards, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Ready," he answered. And he said, "Take your son, your beloved one, Isaac whom you hold so dear, and go to the land of Moriah, where you shall offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." (SPEISER 1964, 161)

In the passage above, at least two key terms relate to the notion of sacrifice. The most important is the Hebrew noun *olah*, or "burnt offering." This term occurs more than 200 times in the Masoretic text. (SCHWARTZ 2011) The Hebrew word *ha'alehu* is translated above as "offer him". This rendition occurs in several modern editions of the Christian Bible, including the King James version (FREEDMAN & SIMON 1961). Perhaps due to its association with the noun *olah*, the word *ha'alehu* has been consistently translated in certain Christian editions of the Old Testament as "sacrifice him". The meaning of *ha'alehu* is far from self-evident. Accordingly, it has attracted the attention of rabbinical authorities throughout history:

> When I bade thee, "Take now thy son," etc., I will not alter that which is gone out of My lips (Ps. loc. cit.). Did I tell thee, Slaughter him? No! but, "Take him up." Thou hast taken him up. Now take him down (FREEDMAN & SIMON 1961, 498).

According to this rabbinical source, *ha'alehu* means simply "take him up", not "sacrifice him". What is more, Isaacs's story remains an important *locus classicus* through which Western audiences have come to interpret any form of sacrifice. Not coincidentally, the dominating paradigm associates sacrifice with violence. Scholars of religion and ritual tend to assume that sacrifice is synonymous with animal and blood offerings. In interpreting Girard's work, for example, Catherine Bell claims that "Sacrifice, as the ritualized killing of substitutes, is itself a substitute for the violence that continually threatens to consume society." (2009, 173) This premise informs the greatest ritual theories of the twentieth-century, including works by Girard, Hubert, Mauss, and Burkert (MCCLYMOND 2008, 65). The assumption that sacrifice is the slaughtering of substitutes seems to have influenced even the most systematic works on ritual theory, which have failed to produce a working definition of sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a mere notion, rather than a precisely defined concept. In asking "What is sacrifice?", my goal is to explore, even in a preliminary manner, the nature of the phenomenon. Accordingly, I argue that in order to leave the status of mere notion, sacrifice must be conceptualized as a polythetic class. Understanding the polythetic nature of sacrifice is important for scholars of religion, ritual, and religious history. Indeed, in his *Tractatus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that "There must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all." (2001, 10–11)

A polythetic definition of sacrifice is desirable because, like the picture in Wittgenstein's sense, it shares structural similarities with the empirical phenomenon of sacrifice. The polythetic class of sacrifices may or may not share a set of given properties, in accordance to the principle of fuzzy sets, i.e., classes of objects whose membership in a given set is determined by continuum gradation, rather than the unequivocal presence of certain absolute traits (SNOEK 2006).

In order to explore the polythetic nature of sacrifice, I examine evidence from African and Chinese religions. The first section summarizes how Igbo-Africans approach sacrifice. The second section brings into discussion the place of sacrifice in Chinese religions. The third section attempts a comparison between African and Chinese pictures of sacrifice. While a full-fledged definition of sacrifice must be pursued in another article, I advance the claim that all forms of sacrifice involve, be it at the level of ritual practice itself or at the discursive level, some sort of comparative effort on the part of ritual proponents.

Sacrifice among Igbo-Africans

Igbo-Africans are one of the three largest ethnic groups of Nigeria. Igbo-Africans speak the Igbo language, a group of tonal dialects that belongs to the Kwa group of languages (UDEANI 2007). Numbering over 35 million people, the Igbo tend to concentrate in southeastern Nigeria, which is sometimes referred to as Igboland (ORIJI 2011).

The notion of force, or ike, is central for Igbo-Africans. There is a hierarchy of ike. Spiritual beings occupy the highest place in this hierarchy, with forces that have agency over human life. The highest spiritual being is Chukwu, the creator God. Ancestors are spiritual beings who connect humans to God. Among Igbo spiritual beings, the Arụsị, who require sacrifices, are among the most important class. Chi connects humans, or mmadụ, with other forces in the universe while humans are endowed with obi, or the life force. The strength or weakness of one's obi determines the person's health, well-being, prosperity, and even social status. Ritual practice may influence the obi, causing harm or bringing blessings. The Ancestors, the Arụsị, and other spiritual entities, may impact humans, both negatively and positively.

Charms and amulets are used and may have a variety of functions; they may protect from evil spirits, attract partners, enhance fighting skills, help with passing examinations, etc. Additionally, the materials used in the preparation of charms must conform to the goals of the charm in question. Since the world is "a forest of symbols", one must utter the correct words in order to activate charms and amulets. Certain materials play an important role in the preparation of charms and amulets. These materials include a variety of trees and plants, including the Anụnụ-Ebe (a rare tree), the Akwụ Ojukwu (a species of palm-tree), and the Orodo (a type of Lily flower) (IBEABUCHI 2013).

Sacrifices are carried out in order to avert disasters or obtain favors from spirits, deities, and ancestors. According to the Igbo rationale, sacrifice is efficacious because, in reality, mmadụ bụ mmụọ, which translates as man is a spirit. As importantly, sacrifice is the sole way through which humans may restore their vital force. Those who perform sacrifices must observe certain requirements regarding the time, place, day, week, objects, and materials used during such a ritual. Chukwu, the supreme being, accepts sacrifices in the form of "a white chicken, eggs, yams, an eagle's feather and a long pole (ofolo ngwo)" (METUH 1991, 52). Depending on how it is performed, a sacrifice may not only restitute vital energies but also harm or even annihilate vital forces. Sacrifices are the means through which humans achieve control over spiritual forces which would otherwise have total control over humans.

There is a "hierarchy of forces" and, therefore, existing beings do not display the same level of strength. However, "because man is the only being that makes this enquiry about other beings, this ontological privilege makes him have an edge over every other being" (IBEABUCHI 2013, 298). Humans are weaker than other spiritual beings, however, humans are endowed with

with an ontological advantage, which is the ability to ask questions about the nature of existence. As a result, the Igbo-African designed a sacrificial system through which humans are able to control the activities of the spirits, where "Man compels spirit to comply" (IBEABUCHI 2013, 298).

Sacrifice as the Central Aspect of Chinese Religiosity

Traditionally, the Chinese had no word comparable to the Western concept of religion. The Chinese word *zongjiao* is a neologism imported from the Japanese language (cf. *shūkyō*) during the nineteenth-century (GOOSSAERT and PALMER 2011, 50). The term *sanjiao* refers to the three elite religions that enjoyed imperial patronage throughout Chinese imperial history (221 BCE–1911), i.e., Confucianism (*rujiao*), Buddhism (*fojiao*), and Daoism (*daojiao*). The term *sanjiao*, however, does not concern the religious experience of Chinese society as a whole. The same may be said of the term *zongjiao*. In its very structure, the term *zongjiao* encompasses the characters for ancestral lineage (*zong*) and teaching (*jiao*). It misrepresents Chinese religiosity as ancestor worship, which is in reality only one aspect of the Chinese religious experience. As John Lagerwey summarizes it, especially from the Song dynasty (960–1279) onwards, in China "lineage society emerged and continued to function within the context of a god-and temple-based popular religion defined in territorial terms" (LAGERWEY 2019, 31). This "god-and temple-based popular religion" constitutes the core of the Chinese religious experience. Again, Lagerwey is of great help:

> It [i.e., Chinese religion] is the religion established by the Chinese people having blood sacrifices as its core [aspect]; the main representatives of the gods are not the Daoist priests, Buddhist monks, nor the Confucian scholars, but the spirit-mediums – the *wu*. (2013, 459)

The spirit-medium (*wu*) is thus named because he or she experiences spiritual possession, which Edward Davis defines as a "trance of identification in which the persona of the divinity is substituted for, and does not coexist with, that of the subject" (2001, 2). The word *wu* appears early, for example, in relation to the oracle bones of the Shang dynasty (1600 BCE–1046 BCE). It can variously be understood as a type of sacrifice, a toponym, the name of a god, and spirit-mediums, or shamans. During the Shang and Zhou (1046 BCE–256 BCE) dynasties, which correspond to the pre-imperial period of Chinese history, the *wu* were part of the ruling class. During the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Han dynasties (202 BCE–220), the status of the *wu* begins to experience decline. After the Han dynasty and during the whole imperial period, the *wu* no longer held any position in government, and were despised by elite Confucian scholars (LIN 2009). Despite this loss of social prestige, spirit-mediums were undeniably among the most actively sought after ritual

specialists of late imperial China. From the Song dynasty onwards, for example, there is ample evidence that spirit-mediums worked in cooperation with Daoist ritual masters, Tantric (Buddhist) exorcists, and even Confucian literati (DAVIS 2001). The importance of spirit-mediums is proportional to the central role of blood sacrifices in Chinese local religion.

Sacrifices have been an ubiquitous aspect of Chinese religion since pre-imperial times. Beginning in the Shang dynasty, the state practiced sacrifice extensively (ENO 1996). The very word for blessings (*fu*) stems from the sacrificial system of the Zhou dynasty, in which the distribution of sacrificial meat (*zuo*) is variously referred to as the distribution of beneficial meat (*zhishan*) of fortune (*zhifu*) (LEVI 2009). Sacrifices played an important role in the legitimation of the imperial system during the Qin and Han dynasties, for in blood sacrifices the rulers found a model through which to claim a direct connection with the Zhou dynasty (PUETT 2001). Blood sacrifice continued to perform an extremely important role in state cults throughout the whole imperial period (GOOSSAERT and PALMER 2011).

While sacrifices to Heaven and the imperial ancestors were a state monopoly, sacrifices to local gods and personal ancestors were practiced – and continue to be practiced – everywhere in the Chinese realm. During the whole imperial period, state cults were unapologetically supportive of blood sacrifices. The relationship between Daoism, Buddhism, and blood sacrifice, on the other hand, is more complex. Some forms of Buddhism, especially esoteric Buddhism, are not necessarily against blood sacrifices (SHEN 2011). While the rejection of blood sacrifices was a key aspect of early Daoism (KLEEMAN 2016), there is ample evidence that the religion incorporated blood sacrifices and the worship of local gods into its ritual framework from the Song dynasty onwards. As argued by Terry Kleeman, "state and popular cults not only both practiced blood sacrifice, but they contested for power in relation to it" (1994, 186). Indeed, sacrifice is so important to the Chinese religious tradition that both Buddhism and Daoism had to accommodate it in their shared temples, which more often than not belonged to the people and their local gods.

Some scholars see the rejection of sacrifices as a definitional aspect of Daoism (RAZ 2012). And yet, this begs the question of what to do about Daoist deities who consume blood offerings? It also begs the question: if Daoism rejects sacrifice, why do Daoist priests resort to the ancient sacrificial system so as to better describe what their rituals are about? Other scholars, describe the Jiao – the central ritual program of the Daoist religion – as a sacrifice. The word Jiao itself predates Daoism and actually does mean sacrifice (ANDERSEN 2008, 539). Schipper (1934–2021) has been criticized for his description of the Daoist Jiao as a sacrifice involving not animal victuals, but talismans and paper. Schipper's critics maintain that his description of the Jiao as a sacrifice is incorrect because the act of burning

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petitions and other paper ephemera was not a constituent element of the Jiao ritual itself (LÜ 2011, 29). I find it particularly difficult to accept that Schipper, who was a Daoist priest, would have been wrong about this aspect of the Jiao, at least as he observed it during his fieldwork. Is the Daoist Jiao a sacrificial system or not? If it is not, why is the religion's major liturgical program named Jiao, or sacrifice? Franciscus Verellen has offered the most nuanced solution to the impasse to date:

> Breaking with the practice of sacrifice, Heavenly Master Daoism retained the language of sacrifice, transforming the nature of the offerings, formerly intended to provide sustenance, into contractual pledges that conferred on the supplicant rights over the spirit world. This was the cornerstone of the Heavenly Master dispensation. Daoism was, to be sure, not alone among world religions to have made sacrificial reform its foundation. Christ's teaching of non-expiatory forgiveness broke with the ancient imperative of shedding blood for atonement, *To give his life as a ransom for many* was interpreted as the sacrifice to end sacrifice (2019, 49).

Verellen subtlety captures what is at stake in the sacrificial revolution performed by early Daoists, which involved "transforming the nature of the offerings". This nuanced approach to ritual may be of great aid for a polythetic definition of sacrifice.

Sacrifice in Comparative Perspective

An effective manner through which scholars may explore the polythetic nature of sacrifice is by asking: How are sacrifices performed or described? Michael Puett offers important remarks about the role of sacrifices in pre-imperial China:

> And, in fact, Keightley's argument concerning the "making of ancestors" points precisely to this transformative notion of sacrifice rather than to the bureaucratic *do ut des* framework within which both he and Poo Mu-chou attempt to interpret Shang sacrificial action. The Shang sacrificers were not assuming that human and divine powers were continuous or that the giving of a gift would result in benefits from the gods. They were rather transforming spirits into figures who would operate within a humanly defined hierarchy. In other words, sacrifice did not rest upon the "belief" that correct ritual procedures would result in favors. Rather, it rested on the attempt to create a system in which this would be the case (2002, 52).

For Puett, the goal of these early sacrifices was to create hierarchy. Humans used rituals in an attempt at transforming the powerful deceased into ancestors and controlling the malicious spirits behind natural phenomena. The highest god of the Shang pantheon, Di, is not interested in sacrifices. The Shang ritual system, nevertheless, is an attempt at placing Di in the highest place of the ritual hierarchy. What is interesting about Puett's argument is the claim that hierarchy was not taken as an assumption, but as the goal of ritual practice. It is not that the ritual sacrificers were concerned with maintaining an existing harmony of forces. They were trying to create it. This insight seemingly also applies to late imperial China. The Thunder Gods, originally the vindictive souls of those who died a violent and premature death, seems to be a case in point. The Shang ritual system seems to be about relying on sacrifice in order to create ancestors. Likewise, the confluence of Daoist rituals and popular religion has much to say about the role of sacrifices in the making of spiritual entities. Consider Mark Meulenbeld's remarks about a Daoist Thunder God named Deng Bowen:

> Some climb the ladder of success to an impressive status, such as Deng Bowen, who heads the Thunder Division that is deified in Canonization. This god originates in southern Henan as a meat-eating god with the rank of general, has been given the title of marshal with his own sacred precincts on Mt. Wudang by the late twelfth century, and ends up as a Celestial Lord (Tianjun) from the thirteenth century onward. He leads the troops of the Thunder Division on exorcist tours through the empire and ultimately figures as a protagonist in other late Ming novels besides Canonization. Like Yin Jiao and Li Nezha, he wears a red apron that leaves most of his body uncovered. (2015, 103)

In this passage, Meulenbeld refers to a section in the Daoist Rites United in Principle (*Daofa huiyuan*), which I translate below:

> The Thunder Division has a great deity of scorching fire, whose surname is Deng and name Bowen. In the past, he followed the Yellow Thearch to war and defeated Chi You, being invested as the General of Henan. Once the great god saw that the Yellow Thearch assumed the celestial [throne], he abandoned rank and entered Mount Wudang so as to cultivate himself for one hundred years, [after which] he was able to ascend and descend according to [the flow of] qi. He also saw that the people of the world did not practice loyalty and filiality; [they] murder and deceive; the strong bully the weak, being unrestrained by kings and their assistants. He then vowed day and night that he wished to become a divine Thunder[-God], so as to execute these wicked perverted people on behalf of Heaven. He thought about this incessantly, so that his enraged energies penetrated

the heavens. Suddenly, on one day he achieved transformation, [displaying] a phoenix beak, silver teeth, red hair, and a blue body. His left hand holds a Thunder *Bâton*. His right hand holds a Thunder Club. He is 100 *zhang* tall. Both armpits give birth to wings, which once spread can project a shadow over 100 *li*. His two eyes are able to emit two fire-like rays of light, which can illuminate 100 *li*. His hands and feet are like dragon claws. He can fly and wander through the Supreme Void; he devours sprites and spirits, beheading demonic dragons. Obeying the Thearch on High, he was invested as the Great Deity of Judicial Command, being in charge of the Thunder Gods. His Thunder[-Soldiers] ascend to the Fire Bell Residence, which is at the Southern Palace, during the wu hour of the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. On this day, you may draw his Form in the oratory; deploying five cups of sheep blood, rooster blood, and goose blood, five sheep heads, seasonal fruits, and pure wine, you may present offerings to the Great Deity for one day and night. Once the god descends, you may command him to immediately produce clouds and rain; or to immediately create clear weather; or to stop the winds and destroy demons; or to stop epidemics and remove pestilences. He is able to devour plague gods. When sacrificing to him, you must write two talismans of the scorching flame, which will be deposited upon the altar table. On the next day, you may collect them. You will be able to heal all plagues and perverse diseases. The marvelous [secret] is orally transmitted. (DZ 1220 *Daofa huiyuan*, 56.15b)

The *Daofa huiyuan* is a ritual manual that was compiled during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). It was included in the Daoist Canon of 1445. In reality, this liturgical compendium is a selection of ritual texts from several local traditions, all of which are associated with the so-called Thunder Rites (*leifa*). This form of Daoist ritual combines inner alchemy (*neidan*), exorcism, and mediumship. The passage above is part of the *Grand Rites of the Jade Prefecture of the Upper Clarity* (*Shangqing yufu dafa*), which is a Shenxiao manual (SCHIPPER 2004, 1107), As argued by Meulenbeld, *leifa* is "is instrumental for building the local communities that form late imperial society" (2015, 2).

This claim is fundamental for understanding Deng Bowen's story. Indeed, outsiders to Daoist Studies must bear in mind that stories such as the one translated above offer an idealized picture of a grim, not to say tragic, sociological reality. In the story, Deng Bowen is said to have become a god by his own choice: "He then vowed day and night that he wished to become a divine Thunder[-God]". In reality, this could hardly be the case. If anything, Deng Bowen must have been an ordinary person who died a violent death and, becoming a vengeful ghost (*ligui*), could not receive worship as an ancestor.

In order to placate this type of ghost, Daoists developed Thunder Rituals, which is all about incorporating vengeful and yet powerful – and, therefore, useful – ghosts and demons into the ritual framework of their temple-centric society, since these ghosts could find no place within the traditional lineage. This partially explains why Deng Bowen is said to have lived during the time of the legendary Yellow Thearch. Although Deng Bowen is but a lost ghost, he is represented in the story as a national hero. This narrative has the function of appeasing this powerful and otherwise harmful spirit. Thunder Rituals are thus about compelling spirits to comply. This aspect of the ritual system allows some comparisons with the Igbo sacrifice. Ibeabuchi offers several remarks about what Igbo sacrifices do. The author resorts to the metaphor of the spider's web to explain the rationale informing sacrifices. Sacrifices are efficacious because all beings are interconnected. Sacrifices are functional. Ibeabuchi lists several of their intended goals or functions, which I compare with the functions of the Thunder Rituals:

The Igbo sacrifice and its functions, according to Ibeabuchi	Thunder Rituals, according to *Daofa huiyuan*, 56
Obtain favors	No
Avert dangers	Yes
Expiation	Yes
Ward off molestation from unknown spirits	Yes
Petition	Yes
Thanksgiving	Yes
Restoration of vital force	Yes

Some of the categories mentioned by Ibeabuchi, including "expiation", "petition", and "thanksgiving" may be incorporated into profitable comparative studies of Chinese and African rituals. Suffice to note here, however, that Ibeabuchi's observation that "time, place, day, week are specific for certain kinds of sacrifice"(2013, 295) also applies to the record above. According to the text, "the wu hour of the fifth day of the fifth lunar month" is the best time to sacrifice (*ji*) to Deng Bowen. The god demands certain offerings, which are very specific to his cult. The text recommends "five cups of sheep blood, rooster blood, and goose blood, five sheep heads, seasonal fruits, and pure wine". While it is true that Chinese ghosts and demons were fond of blood and meat, the Daoist deployment of blood sacrifices may be better approached as a return to ancient rites.

The *Daofa huiyuan,* which records the passage about Deng Bowen, entails a comparative perspective on sacrifice. The evidence in the *Daofa huiyuan* demonstrates that Thunder Ritual specialists saw themselves as an extension of the state cult at the local level. For the Daoist ritual master, Thunder Rituals aim at controlling or even destroying the disruptive works of spirit-mediums, or *wu* (BOLTZ 1993). On the one hand, related texts explicitly refer to the ritual classics of the state cult. On the other, the same texts consistently portray *wu* in a negative light. What is more, the *Daofa huiyuan* shows that its redactors were nevertheless conscious about the fragility of their status as representatives of the state cult at the local level.

The *Esoteric Purpose of the Jade Down Retreat* (*Yuchen dengzhai neizhi*), for example, argues that:

> There may be those who polemicize about the fact that [we] cry to Heaven and serve the Thearch as gentlemen and commoners, which would resemble illicit cults; those who are learned men would doubt this [assumption], which I say is not [true]. (DZ 1220 *Daofa huiyuan*, 14.1a)

The status of the Daoist as a representative of the state cult at the local level was not necessarily taken for granted by those who indeed did represent the state cult as Confucian sacrificers and officials. Commonly, the latter despised Daoist priests. In order to defend the legitimacy of Daoist ritual practice vis-à-vis imperial peers, the author of the passage in question quotes from the *Mengzi*, identified simply as "the book" (*shu*):

> Although a man may be wicked, yet if he [practice the retreat] and bathe, he may sacrifice to the Thearch on High (DZ 1220 *Daofa huiyuan*, 14.1a)

The reference in this passage is not inconsequential. It equates Daoist rituals, Thunder Rituals in particular, with the state cult and its sacrifices. The Daoist sacrifice is not simply about appeasing local gods. Ultimately, it is about creating hierarchy, which is why the authors of the *Daofa huiyuan* claim that Thunder Ritual is comparable with sacrificial service to Di, or the Thearch on High, an impersonal deity who does not need any sacrifices and, therefore, is suitable for occupying the highest place in the ritual hierarchy. In a sense, the single most significant resemblance between Igbo and Chinese forms of sacrifice is that in both cases sacrifice is perceived as a means through which to achieve control over spiritual powers, instead of succumbing to their strength.

Conclusion

Does the transformation of the "nature of the offerings" cancel the sacrificial nature of a ritual system? The problem of whether blood offerings must count as a definitional aspect or not is also a matter of how we conceptualize sacrifice. If we approach it as a monothetic class, then the Daoist Jiao is not necessarily a sacrificial system, for it lacks the element of animal and blood offerings. But if we approach sacrifice as a polythetic class, it is possible to conclude that the Jiao does indeed share some key properties with other sacrificial systems.

For example, Daoists in northern Taiwan offer cooked rice to the Three Pure Ones (*Sanqing*) when they perform the Noon Offering (*wugong*). According to a monothetic definition, this particular offering does not define the Noon Offering as a sacrifice. However, why should vegetarian offerings not count as sacrificial items?

In reality, the act of presenting cooked rice to the Three Pure Ones is an extremely complex procedure, which entails a sacrificial rationale. It involves a series of esoteric actions whose contents are too complex to be described here in detail. Suffice to notice that the act of offering cooked rice demands an extremely precise performance on the part of the Daoist priest. This performance includes several actions, including (1) the manner in which the priest holds the rice bowl in his hands; (2) the secret characters to be mentally written over the cooked rice; (3) the precise moment or timing of the ritual; (4) the exact procedure that defines the act of holding the bowl as the act of presenting the cooked rice as an offering to the Three Pure Ones; (5) the procedures for offering the rice to spirit-soldiers (*yinbing*) outside the temple, which also involves certain invocations and hand-gestures. The status of the cooked rice as a sacrificial offering also entails comparative issues. According to my informant, the Daoist procedure for preparing and offering cooked rice shares some similarities with the Buddhist procedure as it is practiced in Taiwan. A whole article could be written about cooked rice as a form of sacrificial offering that does not involve a single drop of blood.

The same applies to the Igbo evidence. Although the supreme Igbo god accepts meat offerings, scholars should not rule out the possibility that vegetal substances also play an important role in the Igbo notion of sacrifice. Substances used in the preparation of charms, including the Anụnụ-Ebe, the Akwụ Ojukwu, and the Orodo, may well contain a sacrificial function.

If anything, a polythetic approach to sacrifices may considerably deepen our understanding of how rituals operate and what is at stake in the act of sacrificing. This approach, however, demands great humility on the part of scholars. In reality, a polythetic definition of ritual must be sought for in the field. A merely bookish understanding of sacrifice will not suffice.

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JOHN TEMPLET

Relevant Literature

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Divinities and Ancestors: A Preliminary Comparison between African and Confucian Cosmologies

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Abstract
This paper reflects on two sets of terms in the field of religious studies, mainly through a comparative study with the divinities and ancestorship between African and Confucian cosmologies: the first one is the classification of monotheism, polytheism and animism; and the second is so-called 'ancestor worship'. I argue that the classification system of monotheism, polytheism, and animism is partially invalidated in both African religions and Chinese Confucianism. This is because in both traditions, even if there is a supreme or original being, it is on a continuum or spectrum with other divinities and even human beings, rather than an absolute Other. Similarly, the use of the simple word 'worship' to summarise ancestorship in African religions and Chinese Confucianism is actually a simplification of the relationship between the living and ancestors across both traditions.
Keywords: Cosmology, Ancestor, African religions, Chinese Confucianism

Introduction: The Limitations of Western Terminologies

A wealth of comprehensive studies has shown us the cosmology of African religions, in particular, the structure of the cosmos, the system of gods (including their classification, attributes, and similarities, as well as the differences between different regions) and the place of human beings in the African worldview (MBITI 1970; WIREDU 2012; KANU 2013). The study on Igbo Africans is one of the highlights, including the Supreme Being (EZEUGWU and CHINWEUBA 2018), conception of forces (IBEABUCHI 2013), living-dead ancestors (MEKOA 2019), etc. Inspired by this fruitful research, in this paper, I reflect on two sets of terms in the field of religious studies, mainly through a comparative study with the divinities and ancestorship between African and Confucian cosmologies: the first one is the classification of monotheism, polytheism and animism; and the second is so-called 'ancestor worship". "He who knows one knows none." Friedrich Max Müller borrowed this statement from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to describe a foundational approach to the 'science of religion' (MÜLLER 1882). Since then, many

scholars of religion have adopted it as a maxim, and comparative studies have remained an important foundation of religious studies. However, even after more than a century of development, some presuppositions about the Abrahamic religions are still present in the academic language of religion. The most typical is the type of deity referred to by the term monotheism. The strict usage of the term is to distinguish between the Abrahamic religions and the Greco-Roman religions and similar traditions to which 'polytheism' refers (LUDWIG 2005).

John S. Mbiti has convincingly argued that the hypothesis of 'animism → polytheism → monotheism' line of evolution proposed by E. B. Tylor is totally inapplicable to the interpretation of African religion and philosophy:

> (Tylor's) type of argument and interpretation places African religions at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution. It tells us that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are at the top, since they are monotheistic. ...We can only comment that African peoples are aware of all these elements of religion: God, spirits and divinities are part of the traditional body of beliefs. Christianity and Islam acknowledge the same type of spiritual beings. The theory of religious evolution, in whichever direction, does not satisfactorily explain or interpret African religions. (1970, 10)

In addition, Mbiti also mentions that since Herbert Spencer, many scholars have referred to so-called 'ancestor worship' in order to understand the libation and giving of food to the departed in African religions, but in fact, in the African worldview, this relationship with deceased family members is anything but a form of 'worship' (1970, 11–12).

In the face of such methodological dilemmas, perhaps two approaches can be taken. First, there is the need to redefine new boundaries for the old terminology through a thick description and analysis of some traditions. Second, a better understanding of the traditions represented by specific cases is required and asks for a careful analysis of the failures of the old terminology in specific cases. The following will be discussed in relation to the aforementioned research as well as some concepts of the Confucian system in traditional China. I argue that the classification system of monotheism, polytheism, and animism is partially invalidated in both African religions and Chinese Confucianism. This is because in both traditions, even if there is a supreme or original being, it is on a continuum or spectrum with other divinities and even human beings, rather than an absolute Other. Similarly, the use of the simple word 'worship' to summarise ancestorship in African religions and Chinese Confucianism is actually a simplification of the relationship between the living and ancestors across both traditions.

Monotheism, Polytheism, and Animism

The studies of Igbo Africans show that the Supreme One is also present in their religious beliefs, but not in the narrow sense of the monotheism found in Abrahamic religions (EZEUGWU and CHINWEUBA 2018). For example, Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, in his discussion of the attributes of God, clearly states:

> Among the Igbo, there is only one God called Chukwu, even though the nomenclature is contested, he is regarded as the God and creator of the whole universe. Thus, African Traditional Religion has come to be understood, though lately, as a monotheistic religion because it recognises only one God. (2013, 538)

At the same time, Kanu also introduces and analyses the different 'divinities' of African religions, including primordial divinities, deified ancestors, and personified natural forces and phenomena, as well as the similarities and differences between different regions and communities (2013, 539–550).

The ways the term 'monotheistic' is used by these African philosophy scholars (KANU 2013; METZ and MOLEFE 2021) is clearly distinct from Jewish, Islamic and Christian usage, but extends its conceptual boundaries to consider the existence of both 'God' and 'divinities', except here, 'God' is unique. More importantly, scholars have found that the Igbo had a well-developed concept of the Supreme Being prior and post western influence (EZEUGWU and CHINWEUBA 2018). It is, therefore, easy to see that the traditional, strict usage of 'monotheism' and 'polytheism' do not perfectly explain the example of African religions.

The same terminological dilemma occurs in the case of traditional China, albeit in a different form. In fact, in the early Chinese Confucian classics, the myth of creation was left in limbo, and people were more concerned with the birth of real cultural institutions:

> Anciently, when Pao-hsi had come to the rule of all under heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He contemplated the ornamental appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things. (LEGGE 1963, 382)

Here, the creation or generation of the world is absent. The only character that
appears is Pao-hsi, who is not a primordial god, but an ancestor in the traditional
Chinese worldview.

In contrast, the neo-confucianist philosophers of medieval China
consciously explored the more abstract idea of the creation or generation of the
primordial world. A more representative one is Zhu Xi (1130–1200)[1]. In relation
to Zhu Xi's cosmology, Thompson Kirill concludes that:

> Zhu Xi conceived the world as a patterned (LI) totality made up of a
> cosmic vapour (QI) that under various conditions condenses and
> solidifies into countless permutations, from the purest
> transparent YUANQI (primordial QI),   to   the YIN-YANG poles
> modulated by the primal TAIJI (supreme polarity) pattern, to
> the WUXING (five phases), each of which bears an identifying inner
> pattern and set of propensities (XING) that involve interconvertability
> and recombination with the other four phases, and finally to the
> phenomenal world: Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. (THOMPSON
> 2021)

It is clear from this that the traditional terms 'monotheism', 'polytheism', or
'animism' do not quite encapsulate the world Zhu Xi imagined, and that the
latter is even related to all three in some way. It is true that the generation of the
world began with a certain transcendent being: it could be a 'primordial cosmic
vapour' or the 'supreme polarity'. But it is not a personified god. However, this
reality is not the Wholly Other to human beings and the world; after all, both
abstract principles and embodied matter are derived from it. In this respect, it
seems to be a particular combination of both monotheism and animism.

However, it is undeniable that the worldview constructed by Zhu Xi
also accommodates other spiritual beings - 'ghosts and spirits' (*guishen*) -
which, similarly, are not absolute Others to humans, but rather different
manifestations of the cosmic vapour, which can be said to be on the same
extended line of existence and therefore able to offer and absorb influence.
Therefore, in Zhu's philosophical vision, the natural and spirit realms are
intermingled and indistinguishable (GARDNER 1995).

The following case can well exemplify the peculiarities and subtleties in
Zhu Xi's cosmology and his interpretation of the relationship between the nature
and spirit realms:

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[1] Zhu Xi was a preeminent Neo-Confucian (*daoxue*) master in medieval China. He is one of the most
influential philosophers in Chinese history, considered second only to Confucius. The compendiums he
compiled on the basis of the Confucian classics served as the basis for the Imperial Civil Examinations
from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

> One of (Zhu Xi's) students asked, "There was a man in the village called Li San who became a malicious ghost after his death. Whenever there was a Buddhist ritual in the village, food and libation would be offered to him. On one occasion, the Daoist priests set up a Yellow Register Offering, but no food or libation was offered to him, so he defiled all the offerings in the ritual. Later, when someone set off a firecracker and accidentally burnt the tree possessed by him, he (perished and) never did any more evil." (Zhu Xi) says: "He died in an accident, so the cosmic vapour in his body did not dissipate but was finally shattered by the firecrackers. Moreover, the Offering ritual of Daoism, which is a sacrifice to heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, and to the gods and goddesses of heaven and earth, was actually defiled by a small ghost, which shows that this ritual of Daoism is not in accordance with the patterned totality of the cosmos. (WANG 1986, 38)

On the one hand, Zhu Xi fully acknowledges the existence of a world of ghosts and spirits and also believes that the two worlds are perfectly capable of influencing each other. The ghost can both interfere with the human world and be expelled by ordinary things in the human world – firecrackers in this case - without the intervention of religious experts or professional exorcists. The reason for this is that both the world of ghosts and spirits and the human world are transformed by cosmic vapour and follow the same principle, but their manifestations are different. On the other hand, Zhu Xi also incidentally criticises the prevailing Daoist rituals of the same period, arguing that the cosmological and divine concepts therein appear inconsistent with the patterned totality of the cosmos, and are therefore superstitious and useless.

Ancestor Worship
According to Mbiti, the departed person in African religion is not really dead:

> He is alive, and such a person I would call the *living-dead*. The living-dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits. So long as the living-dead is thus remembered, he is in the state of *personal immortality*. (1970, 32)

Therefore, 'ancestor' in African religion is not merely a dead forbear who has been defined by Western scholars for many years (MEKOA 2019, 99). A consequent problem is that the behaviour of the living towards the dead in African religions is not simply 'worship'. Mbiti has clearly stated that:

'Worship' is the wrong word to apply in this situation; and Africans themselves know very well that they are not 'worshipping' the departed members of their family. It is almost blasphemous, therefore, to describe these acts of family relationships as 'worship'. (1970, 11–12)

Similarly, Kanu, in his discussion of the African concept of ancestorship, makes it clear that:

They are honoured and not worshipped. The honour given to them is anchored on the principle of reciprocity and philosophy of reincarnation: having been honoured, they are expected to reincarnate and do for the living members what they did for them. (2013, 550)

The conception embodied in the term 'ancestor worship' therefore derives to some extent from a misinterpretation of the local culture by outsiders.

When the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610),[2] arrived in China, he had to face the problem of how to understand, from a Catholic perspective, the rituals of Confucius, historical sages and ancestors in the Chinese tradition. The conciliatory strategy he adopted was no doubt accompanied by missionary motives (TANG 2015). But similar questions have also affected, implicitly or explicitly, the way in which modern Western religious scholars understand this Chinese tradition.

Just as the term 'worship' demonstrates the misunderstanding of ancestorship in African culture by outsiders from the West, it also simplifies the Chinese tradition. What is hidden by the generalisation of 'ancestor worship' is the richness and diversity of religious experience.

The material evidence and textual documents that survive from early China provide a glimpse of a very diverse religious imaginary of ancestors, and the historical reality behind it may be a vast spectrum far beyond our current knowledge. In funeral customs, for example, the present-day archaeological evidence reveals a very diverse range of religious imagery. Some of it is based on the expectation that the buried ancestors could be divinised and enter the transcendent world of the dead (JIANG 2016). At the same time, there is the simultaneously soothing and suppression of the deceased to prevent them from harassing and harming the living (SEIDEL 1987). This is particularly true of the belief in 'killing spirits' (*yangsha*), which has been passed down through the centuries. Here, a dead relative will summon or transform into a demonic being on a certain day soon after death to harm or even kill those around the body (CHANG 2012). Thus, in early Chinese tradition, the imagery of dead ancestors could be both divine and demonic, and the accompanying religious rituals could

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[2] Matteo Ricci was an Italian Jesuit priest. He might be the best known Jesuit missionary to China, in part because of the Christian-Confucian dialogue he initiated.

therefore be of a blessed, pacifying and repressive nature, a complexity far from being covered by the term 'worship'.

Moreover, the concept of ancestor in traditional China is also a broad one, encompassing ancestors by blood on the one hand and ancestors by culture, i.e. early sages, on the other. In the late imperial period, with the popularity of spirit-writing, deceased ancestors and sages were not only able to enjoy the sacrifices made by the living and return implicit blessings, but were even able to directly enlighten the living by revealing texts (GOOSSAERT 2015). In other words, in this period of popular Confucianism, practitioners were not content with the abstract cosmology and impersonal system of deities constructed by neo-Confucian philosophers but preferred to transform the abstract religious system of sages and ancestors into a more intuitive connection. In fact, in nineteenth-century south-western China, Confucius was not only a sage of Confucianism and a model for philosophers but also the supreme deity in the popular Confucian rituals for the dead and blessings. There is, therefore, no such thing as a completely unified concept of the divinities in Confucianism, where there is both an impersonal cosmology, represented by the philosophy of Zhu Xi, and a pantheon of personified primordial deities and divine sages.

Having outlined Igbo and Confucian traditions, we can find the following similarities and differences. In terms of similarities: Whether as 'living-dead' in African religions or as 'ghosts and spirits' (*guishen*) in Confucianism, the ancestors of both traditions are not categorised as the Other to the living, but rather, have a continuous relationship with them. In both traditions, therefore, the living do not simply worship their ancestors, but perform religious rituals in which they are seen as living beings (but in a different form) with whom they can have a connection. The difference is that ancestors in the Confucian tradition are not always protectors. They can also bring calamity and punishment to the living, and even make trouble for the unrelated living. As a result, attitudes towards 'ghosts and spirits' in Chinese religious traditions are also diverse.

Conclusion

Of course, it is impossible for me to give a complete picture of the different cosmologies of Confucianism over the past two thousand years in a short essay. I hope that this brief comparison will help us to better understand our own traditions and to reflect on the ways in which they differ from the traditional terminological framework set out by modern religious studies. One reason for the failure of these terms is that the God-human relationship in the Abrahamic religions is not applicable to many other cultures. In both African and Chinese religions, God and human are not absolutely Other to each other, but act on a dynamic spectrum. And the conception of ancestors in both African and Chinese religions constitute, to some extent, a kind of intermediary for observing the relationship between God and man.

In fact, the relationship between God and man is not only confined to the religion of one culture, but also constitutes a mirror image of other relationships, i.e. how one understands the relationship between God and man is how one understands the relationship between man and animals and man and nature. It is hoped, therefore, that this small paper will serve as a crude attempt to interest cross-cultural scholars in reconceptualising our relationship with the world using resources from cultures such as Africa and China.

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Pathways Towards a Global Philosophy of Religion: The Problem of Evil from an Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract
In this article, we will make the case for an intercultural philosophy of religion with a special focus on interculturality between Chinese and African philosophies. We will provide an overview of the kind of intercultural philosophy that has already been undertaken between the East and the South and point out that a philosophy of religion has been left out. We will then make the case for a global philosophy of religion approach and why Chinese and African philosophies of religion should engage in philosophical interchanges. We will then highlight some directions for carrying out such a philosophy and explain why the problem of evil may be better addressed from an intercultural perspective.
Keywords: The Problem of Evil, Global Philosophy of Religion, Intercultural Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, African Philosophy, Philosophical Methodology

Introduction
Africa is an increasingly important topic for China and the world, with African philosophy and Chinese philosophy having many common issues, which are worthy of in-depth study. Nonetheless, such study has been largely neglected. In this article, we will outline the importance of doing a Global comparison between African and Chinese philosophies, with a special focus on intercultural philosophy of religion. In the first two sections, we will give an overview of the debate. In the third section, we will make the case for a dialogue between Chinese and African traditions. We will also point out some ways to carry out such intercultural philosophical work.

African and Chinese Philosophies as a Topic of Intercultural Philosophy

Intercultural dialogue opens up new possibilities of development for contemporary philosophy. Doing intercultural philosophy helps us understand the diversity of the world in a better and fairer way. Intercultural philosophy has, therefore, some ideological elements underlying it, i.e., it envisions a globalized world. To carry out intercultural philosophy is not a morally neutral enterprise. Instead, it is to consciously acknowledge that there is something valuable to learn from intercultural exchanges and the importance of building on this (WIMMER 2004). It is not a unified setting that transcends all special cultural worlds, such as providing a unified standard to measure all different cultures, but a convergence of ideological possibilities. In such a philosophy, if anything is universal, it can only be the recognition of the fact of cultural diversity and the discussion of communicability between cultures and religions. We, therefore, endorse the Polylogue approach proposed by Franz Martin Wimmer, that is, taking the principle of pluralism, and through a full discussion and multi-participation of agents, searching for an 'overlapping consensus' (WIMMER 2004). The intercultural philosophy of religion is one of the keys to this intercultural consensus. This is because it contributes to a full understanding of the most basic ways that people relate to each other and to the world and, therefore, is of key importance in a Globalized world. Religion is not a random and simple category, but rather, it refers to many fundamental aspects of people's lives.

From the perspective of intercultural philosophy, the scene of world philosophy is bound to change for an increasingly pluralist world. Western-centrism in the history of traditional philosophy, as well as the Chinese-Western dualistic structure of the Chinese world, should be challenged through the lens of contemporary intercultural philosophical methodology, and replaced by a pluralism that recognizes different cultures as valuable and deserving respect. The engagement with African philosophy is undoubtedly an important opportunity to repaint the map of world philosophy, and it is also an important step for the continuous expansion and improvement of Chinese cultural vision in the process of globalization. This is especially the case in terms of the philosophy of religion. African philosophy is very much grounded in religious thought and to this extent, other philosophical disciplines are very much inspired by the philosophy of religion (MBITI 1990). The truth is that for most Chinese scholars, African philosophy is a brand-new 'other'. We suggest that a dialogue and understanding with African thoughts and philosophy will help us find an appropriate level of self-understanding and self-positioning in the era of globalization.

From our point of view, the study of African philosophy should not be carried out from an ethnocentric standpoint, like, for example, using Western philosophical categories and conceptual systems as the only standard to measure and interpret African and Chinese philosophies. New methodologies for the study of non-Western philosophies, such as Jonathan Chimakonam's Ezumezu viewpoint, ought to be adopted as ways to proceed (CHIMAKONAM 2019). On the other hand, in addition to studying African thoughts, religions, and culture from the perspectives of linguistics, anthropology, and ethnology, we should also understand, grasp and present African philosophy from the perspective of intercultural philosophy. We should systematically sort out the basic appearances and development context of African philosophy via three aspects, namely, African ethics and political philosophy, African traditional philosophy (e.g., African religious thought), and the links between contemporary African philosophy and world philosophy. All of these should be fully presented in the context of the pluralism of world philosophy. As mentioned before, owing to the crucial importance of religious thought in African philosophy, it is crucial to explore the African philosophy of religion in order to fully understand African philosophy (MBITI 1990).

The study of African philosophy in the Chinese World
The study of African philosophy in Chinese philosophy circles is still very rare. Most Chinese scholars in the field of philosophy who work on topics related to Africa focus mostly on the philosophy of North Africa. For example, a prominent book in Chinese philosophical circles is Martin Bernal's 'Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization', which was translated into Chinese by Hao Tianhu in 2020 (BERNAL, 2011). The research on philosophy in sub-Saharan Africa is nearly inexistent. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Chinese journals such as 'World Philosophy', 'Philosophical Trends' and 'Foreign Social Sciences' published a series of translations on African philosophy, such as the articles of Allasane N'Daw, Kwasi Weredu, and Henry Odera Oruka, among others.[1]

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[1] Cf. N'DAW Allasane: 'Zivilisation und Philosophie in Schwarzafrika' [Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung], Vol.3, 1978. Chinese trans. by Yan Xiaoyuan, [World Philosophy], Vol. 5, 1979. Kwasi Wiredu: ':Can Philosophy be intercultural? An African viewpoint', [Diogenes] Vol. 184, 1998. Chinese trans. by Zhang Xiaojian, in: [Diougenni], 12/2000. Henry Odera Oruka: 'Sage Philosophy in Africa', [International Philosophical Quarterly], 1983(12). Chinese trans. by GUO Jingping, [Foreign social science], 1985(10).

Since 1985, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has translated and published the Chinese version of the journal 'Diogenes', sponsored by the International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences, and a series of representative research papers on African philosophy has been published.[2] Most of the original papers by Chinese scholars on African philosophy are very introductory and superficial and mostly focused on African Marxism (such as the thought of Franz Fanon and Julius Nyerere). Indeed, since the 1970s, this has been the core focus of the philosophical dialogue. There has also been some research on topics such as colonialism and Pan-Africanism.[3] Nonetheless, in the Chinese speaking world, there is currently no lengthy treatment in the shape of a monograph that is focused on African philosophy.

Recently, some more in-depth research attempts have been made to use African philosophy. In 2017, one of us (Jun Wang) translated *Afrikanische Philosophie im Kontext der Weltphilosophie* by the German philosopher Heinz Kimmeler from German to Chinese (2005). Jun Wang is also undertaking the translation of 10 representative African philosophical works and compiling a collection of essays on African philosophical research. These translation projects plan to cover the discussion of African political philosophy, African traditional philosophy and religions, contemporary African philosophy and world philosophy, and the methodology of intercultural philosophy. The hope is to provide more literature on basic research into African philosophy for the Chinese philosophical circle.

Towards a Sino-African Comparative Philosophy of Religion
As mentioned, comparisons between Chinese and African philosophy have been largely neglected. As far as Chinese philosophy is concerned, African philosophy is an important 'other', but it has not been fully revealed to the Chinese world so far. But as long as we pay attention to Africa, we will find that there are, in fact, many similarities between African philosophical and religious thoughts and the Chinese. Indeed, both have similar ways of thinking

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[2] Such as DIOP, Babacar: 'African Civilizations between the winds of east and west, [Diogenes], No.184, 1998. WIREDU, Kwasi: ':Can Philosophy be intercultural? An African viewpoint', [Diogenes], Vol. 184, 1998. MABORUNJE Akin L.: 'La Construction Socio-Politique de L'Espace en Afrique', [Diogenes], Vol.184, 1998. BONI, Tanella: 'Contribution to an analysis of the daily life of African women', [Diogenes], Vol. 184. 1998. PRESPEY Gail: 'Bâtie une 'culture national' interethnique et intergénérationnelle au Kenya', [Diogenes], Vol. 235-236, 2011 etc.

[3] Cf. ZHENG, Xiangfu: The Spread and Development of Marxism in Africa, [Zhejiang Social Science], 2014(12). LIN Zisai: 'The Development of Marxism in Africa', [Study & Exploration], 2019(06). ZHENG, Xiangfu: 'Marxism in the course of socialist movement in Africa', [Zhejiang Social Science] 2020(11). SHU Yunguo: 'Pan-Africanism and African Integration', in: [World History], 04/2014 etc.

about religion. Here we wish to focus on some similarities and provide some possible pathways towards philosophical comparisons of both Chinese and African philosophies of religion. Of course, we cannot include all the possible ways that Chinese and African philosophies of religion can be compared, but we will provide some important ideas that are worth considering. Here are some important comparative points:

(1)   African religions and traditional ways of life are integrated, and there is not always an opposition between religion and science, and superstition and reason in the same sense that Western thought categorizes these. In this regard, China is more similar to Africa. In China there is no notion of a purely secular and scientific knowledge system. In fact, the traditional social life and religious factors are inseparable. Similarly, in Africa, it is not uncommon that both religion and witchcraft are used as complementary knowledge systems (CHIMAKONAM 2012). In fact, as scholars like Chimakonam and Innocent Asouzu have pointed out, the African epistemological viewpoint sees different aspects of reality not as opposites, but as complementary (CHIMAKONAM 2019; ASOUZU 2005). This is still very common in many rural areas in China, and we generally think that the rural areas with later modernization reflect traditional Chinese life. In addition, compared with the West, the relationship between religion and philosophy appears to be closer in Africa and China. This is clear in the way these cultures understand the problem of evil. Routinely, in the African philosophical context, evil can be explained by alluding to metaphysical entities, such as ancestors, demons, or deities. Moreover, the division between the natural and supernatural is not very clear in African thought: often there is no division between the two. Likewise, in Chinese philosophy, evil, destiny, misfortune, and so forth are explained by forces which are part of the world but are not clearly natural or supernatural (for such division does not exist) (PERKINS 2014). In short, explanations of the world are carried out by alluding to both scientific and religious ideas and, indeed, the division between these two is not clear. They are not opposites, but complementary realities.

(2) Both Chinese and African religions have obvious practicalities and are integrated into daily life. That is to say that religion has played a fundamental role in daily life and is intertwined with social reality. Chinese indigenous religions, such as Taoism, do not have a particularly complex philosophical theoretical system (unlike Buddhism that originates from India). Taoism is

more like a belief system on how to address daily life. Praying to ancestors or God has a very practical purpose: it is about changing one's daily life in a positive way. Metaphysical entities can intervene in the world and change its course (interestingly, however, this is usually not understood as a miracle like in Western Christianity). Hence, Taoists often pray for things such as rain in arid areas, releasing souls from purgatory, health, promotion, wealth, and so on. Many religions in Africa also serve a pragmatic role (MBITI 1990). For example, the Akan have a large number of gods in order to ensure a good harvest, protect people from disasters, or take special charge of a certain region, city, and village. The many gods of the Yoruba also play important roles in daily life, such as being responsible for the harvest and better weather conditions, curing diseases, helping humans to live together peacefully, as well as being stronger and more courageous in situations of war (GBADEGESIN 1996; CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES 2020). This kind of religious thinking integrated into life experience provides an ontological view of the world which is similar in both Africa and China. Indeed, the beliefs of the Onyame, worshipped by the Akan, and the Olodumare of the Yoruba, can be understood as similar in many ways to the idea of 'tian'/'heaven' in China. But in the European tradition, ontology has been philosophical rather than religious, at least since Ancient Greece.

(3) In the religious experience and rituals of Africa and China, the body experience and the body imagination triggered by it have long played a special role. In African religious experiences and rituals, participation with one's body is worthy of attention. In the religious world view of West Africa, the induction of God and person constitutes a harmonious tension (ZUESSE, 1979; PARRINDER 1961). The relationship between person and universe is understood through the intervention of the body in the world, and the meaning of life is constructed from this. In Chinese traditional religions such as Taoism, the practice of the body is regarded as a necessary way to obtain liberation, because the body has a close correspondence with the universe (CHEN 2005). This emphasis on the body in the religious experience of Africa and China does not appear in the traditional Greek-Hebrew religion of body and mind, which focuses on duality.

(4) The meaning of God is another topic that can be explored in Sino-African comparisons. The concepts of monotheism, polytheism, and so forth do not fully apply to Chinese and African religions. Routinely, there are several Gods in both religious traditions, but because each God or deity has many different functions, characteristics, and powers, it is questionable if it makes sense to classify African and Chinese religions as polytheist or monotheist. Hence, comparing concepts of God is one more way to explore Sino-African intercultural philosophy (HU (this issue); GU (this issue) CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES 2021).

(5) Concepts of Destiny can also be an interesting way to explore Sino-African philosophies of religion. The Ori concept in Yoruba philosophy seems to suggest individuals' predetermined faith and explains misfortunes according to individuals' Ori. Likewise, in Chinese philosophy, the concept of 'Ming' explains why bad things happen to good people and, at the same time, how people can play a role in their daily actions (GBADEGESIN 1996; SONG 2019). It is worth comparing these concepts and trying to build a Sino-African philosophy of destiny.

(6) The meaning of death can also be a point of comparison. In many traditional African religions, when humans die, they become one of the 'living-dead' and are able to continue their interactions with the human world (albeit in a different way from before) (MBITI 1990). Similarly, in Taoist philosophy, when people pass away, they are believed to become semi-Gods, or even evil Ghosts.

Questions that arise in the philosophy of religion such as world suffering, evil, the meaning of the God and His characteristics, amongst other key questions may be better answered if one takes an intercultural perspective. To understand this, let us look closely at the problem of evil: how can a morally perfect, omniscient and omnipotent God allow or cause evil in the world? At its most fundamental level, the understanding of the experience of evil and suffering is about people's daily experiences. Fundamentally, the problem of evil is a normative problem, and no reasonable theory can exclude such a great number of philosophical perspectives if it is to be taken seriously. It is only through valuing all the experiences of different cultures that it is possible to understand this suffering. This is, at its core, a methodological question. Any theory to be considered as sound needs to offer a better explanation to a problem than just offer the alternatives. The way to do this is to test the theory vis-à-vis a larger number of intuitions and theories of the world. The question becomes much more fundamental when speaking about suffering and evil in the world, where people's experiences are fundamental to understanding it. The problem of evil, if it neglects different worldviews and neglects an intercultural approach, is likely to be centered on the understanding of suffering by an elite, and, more precisely, a Christian Western elite. But if one is to theorize suffering in the right way, it cannot be selective about what kinds of suffering are important.

This, of course, ought to be combined with exploring other important concepts and the list we provided above sheds some light on how to answer the question of the problem of evil. In Western Christian philosophy, the concept of free will is key to understanding the problem of evil. Philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga have explained evil in the world fundamentally as a necessary condition by which individuals can make moral choices. Nonetheless, combining the Yoruba concept of Ori with the Chinese concept of Ming seems to be another possible pathway that takes us beyond this idea of free will (SONG 2019; GBADEGESIN 1996). Both concepts offer a more deterministic (yet slightly prescriptive) views of destiny and, therefore, can give a new shape to the question of evil in the world.

It is also important to note the limits of Western Christian philosophy on addressing the problem of evil. The free will defense is grounded on a Christian idea which is, at the very least, controversial: the idea that only some people will be saved from suffering in Hell (See the passage in the Bible, Matt 22). Hence, the value of free will is justified for the good of *a minority*. Such an approach is ethically untenable.

What happens after someone dies is also a relevant topic for the problem of evil. Many Christian 'solutions' to the problem of evil are grounded in the idea of an after-life and how the existence of an after-life relativizes the suffering on Earth, making it less significant or, indeed, insignificant (ADAMS 2000). Nonetheless, this idea could potentially make sense if the after-life was eternal and some kind of paradise. In the African and Chinese conceptions, this is not the case. The after-life is often understood to be a reflection and a continuation of one's own life on Earth and, indeed, a place where suffering can exist (PERKINS 2014; MBITI 1990).

Conclusion

These similarities between African and Chinese religions illustrate the necessity of a comparative study of African culture and Chinese religions and cultures. Today, we should look at African and Chinese philosophies from an inter-cultural perspective and put them into a Global framework for understanding. For the Chinese philosopher, the contemporary world ought not only to be merely the East and the West, but also Africa, Latin America, the Near East, South Asia, and so on. Using an intercultural perspective, the diversity of religion, culture, and philosophy will eventually form a brand-new self-understanding of each of our cultures (WANG 2017). The problem of evil, in particular, requires such an approach. This is because, as a problem that is fundamentally normative and about people's experiences, it cannot do without a Global approach that encompasses intercultural views on the meaning of suffering.

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