FILOSOFIA THEORETICA
JOURNAL OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY,
CULTURE AND RELIGIONS

A Publication of
The Conversational Society of Philosophy (CSP)

Special Issue: African Perspectives on God, the Problem of Evil, and Meaning in Life
Guest Editors: Ada Agada & Aribiah Attoe

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 4 DECEMBER 2022

ISSN: 2276-8386 (Print)
E-ISSN: 2408-5987 (Online)

SCOPUS ID: 21100812553

Note to Contributors:
General Information: Filosofia Theoretica Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions is dedicated to the promotion of conversational orientation and publication of astute academic research in African Philosophy and Thought. The articles submitted to Filosofia Theoretica must be presented in defensive and conversational style. The journal has a vision to put Africa and African intellectuals on the global map. However, this does not imply that non-Africans cannot submit articles for consideration insofar as the title falls within the focus
of the journal.

Submission Requirements: All manuscripts must be original (hence, not under consideration anywhere) and submitted to the editor in MS word format via e-mail: filosofiatheoretica@gmail.com or filosofiatheoretica@unical.edu.ng. The entire work can range from 2000 to 6000 words maximum excluding citations with a concise title and a 150-word abstract. Authors are not to place page numbers or paper title (on each page) on the manuscript; we no longer accept endnotes, but footnotes may be used in the CSP Style Guide. Articles (or parts of articles) in languages other than English will no longer be considered. All submissions must list the author's current affiliation and contact points (location, e-mail address, etc.). In regard to style, the Conversational School of Philosophy Documentation Style which is downloadable from the journal's site is the only acceptable reference style. Camera ready manuscripts will receive first preference in the publishing cycle. Any manuscript not well proof-read will not be considered for review. All manuscripts are peer-reviewed and those considered acceptable by the editors will be published after recommended corrections free of any charges as quality and originality are the ONLY conditions for publishing essays in this journal.

Aim:
FILOSOFIA THEORETICA was founded by Jonathan O. Chimakonam in May 2010 and the aim is to make it a world class academic journal with a global brand that would thrive on standard, quality and originality, promoting and sustaining conversational orientation in African Philosophy. It is published quarterly with an option for an additional release that is a special issue. Each issue traditionally contains ten (10) articles plus/minus, including book review in both print and online editions with separate ISSN. The Online version is published by Ajol, South Africa and appears on Scopus, Scimago, Philosophy Documentation Center, Sabinet, EBSCO Host, and others.

Review Process:
Generally, Editors should be able to reach a decision including recommending corrections if any or acceptance/rejection of any paper within three months of receipt which is communicated to the author subsequently. Authors are therefore advised to avoid needless correspondences. Also, Editors are not committed to the views expressed in articles. Contributors may receive one copy of the journal free of charge, but additional copies may be obtained at the normal price. Copyright to articles published in the journal shall remain vested with the journal. All correspondences including subscription, copyright and sponsorship should be sent to the Editor at **info@cspafrica.org** Visit us at: **http://www.cspafrica.org** , or **https://journals.co.za/content/journal/filosofia**

Indexing Information:
Filosofia Theoretica is abstracted/indexed in SCOPUS, EBSCO Discovery, EBSCO Humanities Source Ultimate, ELSEVIER, NAVER Academic (Korea), CNKI Scholar, SCImago Journal Rank, Philosopher's Index, AJOL, Google Scholar, OCLC Worldcat, Archive.org, Scribd, SABINET, The African Journal Archive (AJA), African Digital Repository, Academia.edu, AfricaBib, EBSCO Database, Black Studies Center Index, JournalTOCs, Philosophy Documentation Center, The Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers, etc.

Editor's Contact:
Jonathan O. Chimakonam,
The Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP)
University of Calabar, Nigeria
info@cspafrica.org, csp.info@unical.edu.ng

Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy is a publication of the Conversational School of Philosophy. It publishes quarterly: January-April, May-August and September-December. Manuscripts are to be submitted electronically to submission@cspafrica.org **or** filosofiatheoretica@unical.edu.ng

FILOSOFIA THEORETICA is a member of Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

Table of Contents

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This Special Issue was made possible through a grant support from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

CALL FOR SPONSORSHIP:

The Editorial Board of Filosofia Theoretica hereby calls on corporate bodies, philanthropists and funding organizations to come to the aid of this journal. Potential funders will be acknowledged in the printed copies/e-copies as well as in the journal's website. Funding could cover the production of one issue or several issues or the bilingual editions. We need this funding to enable us to maintain and improve on our existing high standard. To discuss the terms of funding, please email us: admin@cspafrica.org and we will get back to you. For inquiries, email us at info@cspafrica.org Thank you!

Official Notice:

The CSP has officially migrated from the University of Calabar website which has hosted it for a long time to its independent website. Every information about the society and the journal can now be accessed at the new site below:

http://www.cspafrica.org

Editorial: African Perspectives on God, the Problem of Evil, and Meaning in Life

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.1s

Ada AGADA
Centre for Leadership Ethics in Africa, University of Fort Hare
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3616-3608
Email: adaagada@gmail.com

And

Aribiah David ATTOE
Department of Philosophy, University of the Witwatersrand
&
The Conversational School of Philosophy
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9786-1824
Email: aribiahdavidattoe@gmail.com

The Expanding Frontiers of African Philosophy

Much has been written in the last two centuries about African religions and religious phenomena from anthropological, sociological, colonial, postcolonial, missiological, and philosophical perspectives. The British explorer and author Richard F. Burton had provocatively asserted in the nineteenth century that: "The Negro is still at the rude dawn of faith-fetishism and he has barely advanced to idolatry...He has never grasped the idea of a personal deity" (cited in NJOKU 2002, 8). By faith-fetishism, Burton is referencing the simplest kind of animism, the attribution of magical qualities to natural objects. He is, of course, dismissing African Traditional Religion (ATR) with a wave of his hand. The inspiration for the sustained early Western dismissal of the African as an inferior *other,* so well analysed by V.-Y.Mudimbe (1988), can be traced, in part, to two of the greatest names in Western philosophy, David Hume and Immanuel Kant. In a testimony to how racial prejudice dishonours even the best brains, Hume insists:

> I am apt to suspect the negroes naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences...there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity...In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly. (1987, 208n)

As if expecting enslaved Africans to do the impossible in a hostile environment where they are not at ease with themselves and ignoring the noted achievement of the African philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo in Prussia, Kant wrote that:

> The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talent, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality, while among the whites there are always those who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. (Kant 2011, 58–59; 2:253, Academy Edition page number)

Obviously, a culture of Western derogatory exoticisation of African belief-systems was very well entrenched in Western societies long before African scholars began to investigate African religious phenomena. With the 1944 publication of J.B. Danquah's book [The Akan Doctrine of God], a new phase of the articulation of traditional African belief-systems commenced. This phase was defined by a marked influence of Christianity on the authors who took it upon themselves to debunk the speculative and mostly inaccurate conjectures of European philosophers like Hume and Kant, early European missionaries and anthropologists who regarded African religion as primitive.

While these African authors were keen to promote what they considered to be the authentic views of God in the belief-systems of traditional African societies, they were yet noticeably influenced by the Christian religion, in particular, and went out of their way to find Western categoreal equivalences in African belief-systems (see KATO 1975; BEWAJI 1998; WIREDU 1998; ABIMBOLA 2006; P'BITEK 2011; FAYEMI 2012; AGADA 2022). We will call these African apologetic authors the theistic scholars since they hold the views that ATR is basically monotheistic and Africans traditionally believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God. The theistic scholars include Danquah, John S. Mbiti, E. Bolaji Idowu, J.O. Awolalu, P.A. Dopamu, and Kwame Gyekye. The traditional theistic stance has since been vigorously contested by African researchers that we may label decolonisation scholars (see IGBOIN 2014). As hinted earlier, the decolonisation scholars are sceptical of the correctness of the transcendental conception of God attributed to traditional African societies by the theistic scholars. Decolonisation scholars like Okot p'Bitek, Kwasi Wiredu, Kola Abimbola, Oladele Balogun, and B.H. Kato underline the need for African scholars and philosophers to rethink concepts in usage in African religious studies and discard those found to have been illegitimately imported from Western religious and philosophical studies. The decolonisation scholars broadly assert, contrary to the traditional theistic scholars, that traditional African societies conceive God as limited in power, knowledge, and goodness.

The emergence of the two camps has ensured that, going forward, the fledgling field of African philosophy of religion will witness some of the most exciting developments and debates in African philosophy. But given that the field is still relatively underexplored, it is not surprising that only a few specialist books dedicated to the philosophical evaluation of God and related questions exist. One such book is Aribiah David Attoe's recently released work titled [Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Pre-deterministic Historicity] (2022). While there are quite a handful of journal articles on African religious themes published by trained philosophers, the field of African philosophy of religion remains surprisingly neglected by philosophers. Special journal editions in the field are a rarity. However, with research support from the John Templeton Foundation and the University of Birmingham Global Philosophy of Religion Project, African philosophers are taking a second critical look at the dispute between the theistic and decolonisation camps. A special edition of [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture, and Religions] supported by the John Templeton Foundation recently brought African and Chinese philosophers together to brainstorm on issues in African philosophy of religion. The current special edition on "African Perspectives on God, the Problem of Evil, and Meaning in Life" further expands the horizon of the field by bringing together African philosophers who review existing literature and advance novel theories and positions on God and the relation of this being with human beings and the world.

Ten articles are featured in this special edition. In "The Human Being, God, and Moral Evil," Ada Agada sets out to answer the question of whether the magnitude of evil in the world may indicate the actuality of a tragic universe and not merely a deterministic universe indifferent to human hopes and fears. According to Agada, a tragic universe would be one with an unachievable purpose. Such a purpose might not have been discovered by the human mind but perfection is presented as a possible candidate. A tragic universe is one without an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator, one populated by human beings who are determined by a variety of impulses and causes but are yet morally responsible for their actions. He paints a picture of the human being as a seeker after the fullest state of being that would be defined by the absence of moral evil, drawing insights from Ifeanyi Menkiti's idea of personhood and with recourse to his philosophy of consolationism. On the search for the fullest state of being,

Agada notes that the journey to full personhood is one that the human being cannot bring to a satisfactory conclusion in its lifetime. The human being is thus powerless. On the possible intervention of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator to eliminate moral evil, Agada explores African conceptions of God and demonstrates that if God is limited in power, knowledge, and goodness as many African philosophers today interpret traditional African conceptions of God, then God is neither the author of evil nor able to eliminate evil. Agada advances the doctrine of *mood* and identifies this fundamental principle of the universe as a limiting quality from which neither God nor the human being, nor any other being, can escape. Consequently, moral evil must be

regarded as part of the way the world is structured. That all beings are powerless in the face of the operation of *mood,* even as conditioned beings like humans are responsible for actions that are determined, points to the actuality of a tragic universe, according to Agada.

Joyline Gwara and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya in "Rethinking God's Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence in the Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic: An African Perspective" insert the perennial problem of omnipotence and evil into ongoing debates about the devastating Covid-19 pandemic. With millions dead, hundreds of millions infected with the coronavirus, and with billions struggling with the socio-economic disruptions caused directly and indirectly by the pandemic, it is fitting that philosophers of religion should wonder where God, or belief in a good, omnipotent, and omniscient God, fits in the current scheme. Gwara and Ogbonnaya explore the intriguing theme of omnipotence and physical evil from the perspective of African thought and find a solution that leads to the conclusion that the pandemic shows that belief in a powerful and good God remains rational although weakness and badness inhere in the divine power and goodness. To demonstrate this seeming contradiction, they appeal to African duality logic as prominently exemplified by *Ezumezu* logic. This logical framework asserts that in addition to the rigid Aristotelian laws of thought, there are complementary African laws of thought that do not promote the absolute necessity of the law of excluded middle. Consequently, Gwara and Ogbonnaya pitch their tent with the African decolonisation scholars who favour the idea of a limited God but go further to argue that while God is not omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, he is powerful, knowledgeable, and good. The conclusion that inherent in his power, knowledge, and goodness are weakness, ignorance, and badness will provide food for thought for philosophers and non-philosophers.

In "Evil, Death, and Some African Conceptions of God" Hasskei M. Majeed engages a number of African philosophers of religion in a conversation on the evilness of death. He argues that the phenomenon of death itself does not belong to the class of things called evil. His reason for making this assertion follows from his view that death itself is a value-neutral phenomenon consisting basically of the cessation of biological existence. For him, factors surrounding death, such as prolonged physical and emotional pain felt by the dying and their relatives, are different from the event of death. According to Majeed, if inherently evil phenomena exist that can be identified as putting the idea of a good God in question, death is not one. In "The Oromo Doctrine of God" Workineh Kelbessa explores traditional Oromo conceptions of God and argues that the deity in Oromo belief-system is a supreme being. *Waaqa* (God) is, however, different from the Christian God to the extent that *Waaqa* is not transcendental (or outside the universe). Kelbessa makes the intriguing assertion that ancestor veneration is a practice unknown to the Oromo. This conclusion is particularly intriguing because ancestor veneration is a widely documented practice in most traditional African societies. African philosophers and researchers in the field of African religious studies will, no doubt, be eager to explore Kelbessa's conclusion.

Aribiah Attoe, in his paper "Cosmic Purpose: An African Perspective", pits the idea of God and the African understanding of relationality as prominent determinants for what cosmic purpose from an African perspective would look like. For him, while God subsists as the first cause, the unattractiveness of *being-alone* and the necessity of relationality allows him to think that the existence of the universe/other things in the world is necessitated by the need to legitimise God's existence. Proof for this lies in the fact that destiny, divine law, and communal practices all seek the type of harmony that sustains the existence of this universe. The need to sustain the universe is anchored on the need to legitimise God's existence. This, for Attoe, is cosmic purpose.

In "The Concept of God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought," Anthony Chimankpam Ojimba and Victor Iwuoha Chidubem defend the controversial assertion that the concept of a Supreme Being is unknown to traditional Igbo religion even as they assert that this religion is properly polytheistic. Their assertion is certain to provoke reactions in some corners of African philosophy of religion. In "Exploring Recent Themes in African Spiritual Philosophy," Diana-Abasi Ibanga introduces the exotic angle of spiritual philosophy into this special edition and shows how spiritual philosophy has moved away from mysticism and transcendence towards an immanence that implicates psychological attitudes towards the totality of nature – God, humans, animals, vegetable life, and mineral elements.

Lerato Mokoena, on her part, seeks to wrestle with the question of the essence of God and, interestingly, tries to answer those questions by looking at two different perspectives: Gericke's theological conception and the version of God put forward by Aribiah Attoe (2022). Ultimately, what the article does is find ways in which both the philosophical methods that Attoe uses and the theological modes of enquiry can aid each other in attempts to understand the notion of God, and also highlight the similarities between both views.

Pius Mosima in his article "African Approaches to God, Death, and the Problem of Evil: Some Anthropological Lessons Towards an Intercultural Philosophy of Religion" argues for an intercultural philosophy of religion from an African perspective. For him, understanding the philosophical foundations of certain religious beliefs (God, death, problem of evil, etc.) through an analysis of the various ideas related to these concepts (as found in various African traditions) would help in revealing the underlying premises of the African viewpoints and also allow us have meaningful intercultural conversations with other viewpoints. This is mainly because, for Mosima, much of the discussions in philosophy of religion is, for the most part, about the same kinds of phenomena/problems (for instance, God, death, and the problem of evil). Thus, various traditions are mostly offering different perspectives on the same issues, and should, therefore, be in conversation with each other, with African perspectives also offering significant input.

Finally, Christiana Idika and Enyimba Maduka's article "A New Perspective on Religion in African Philosophy of Religion: *ONYENACHIYA*" seeks to interrogate the notion of religious belief within the African context. Specifically, they seek to show that belief in God in African (Igbo) traditional religion is not necessarily predicated on the idea of a supreme deity in a monothestic sense. Rather, for them, religious practices are predicated on the belief in personal deities (Chi) that continue to externally influence human behaviours as well as the fate of human beings.

What all these articles have in common is that they extend the frontiers of African philosophy of religion, beyond the usual debates and beyond the usual ways of understanding issues in African philosophy of religion. The novelty inherent in the diverse topics and viewpoints espoused in the articles not only opens up new vistas of thought, but also allows for more questions and conversations to sprout and enrich the field of African philosophy of religion.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations. M1316447

Relevant Literature

1. ABIMBOLA, Kola. [Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account], 2006. Iroko Academic Publishers: Birmingham. Paperback.

2. AGADA, Ada. "Bewaji and Fayemi on God, Omnipotence, and Evil," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp41–56, 2022. Vol 11. No 1. Doi: 10.4314/ft.v11i1.4. Web.

3. ATTOE, Aribiah David. [Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Pre-deterministic Historicity], 2022. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland. Paperback.

4. AWOLALU, J.O., and DOPAMU, P.A. [West African Traditional Religion], 1979. Onibonoje Press: Ibadan. Paperback.

5. BEWAJI, John A.I. "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil," [African Studies Quarterly], pp1–17, 1998. Vol 2. No 1. **http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.pdf**. Web.

6. DANQUAH, J.B. [The Akan Doctrine of God], 1944. Lutterworth: London. Paperback.

7. FAYEMI, A.K. "Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E.O. Oduwole," [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1–15, 2012. Vol 41. No 1. Web.

8. HUME, David. "Of National Characters," [Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, Eugene F. MILLER Tr.], 1987, pp197–225. Liberty Fund: Indianapolis, IN. Ebook.

9. KANT, Immanuel. [Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings, Patrick FRIERSON & Paul GUYER Eds.], 2011. Cambridge University Press: New York. Ebook.

10. KATO, B.H. [Theological Pitfalls in Africa], 1975. Evangel Publishers: Nairobi. Paperback.

11. MUDIMBE, Valentin-Yves. [The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge], 1988. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis. Paperback.

12. NJOKU, Francis O.C. [Essays on African Philosophy, Thought, and Theology], 2002. Claretian Institute of Theology, Nekede: Owerri. Paperback.

13. P'BITEK, Okot. [Decolonizing African Religions: A Short History of African Religions in Western Scholarship], 2011. Diasporic Africa Press: New York. Paperback.

14. WIREDU, Kwasi. "Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion," [African Studies Quarterly], pp17–46, 1998. Vol 1. No 4. **http://africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/3.pdf**. Web.

The Human Being, God, and Moral Evil

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.2s
Submitted 13 March 2022. Accepted 27 August 2022

Ada AGADA
Centre for Leadership Ethics in Africa (CLEA)
University of Fort Hare
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3616-3608
Email: adaagada@gmail.com

Abstract
The evidence of human wickedness in the world is so transparent that no rational person can dispute its reality. This paper approaches the question of the human person from an African philosophical perspective and explores the relation between the apparently free-acting human being and God conceived as the creator of the world and the ultimate cause of the human being. The paper will proffer answers to the following question: to what extent can the human being be absolved of blame for the evil they perpetrate in a world conceived in African traditional religion and thought as the creation of a high deity who could have foreseen the negative bent of human nature and should have made human nature inclined to goodness all of the time? The paper will make novel contributions to the debate about human nature in African philosophical discourse by recasting the human being as a *homo melancholicus*, or melancholy being, whose evil inclination in the world can best be understood in the context of a tragic vision of reality.
Keywords: Human being, God, moral evil, freedom, omnipotence, omniscience, *homo melancholicus*, free will, determinism, destiny

Introduction

This paper approaches the question of the human person from an African philosophical perspective and explores the relation between the apparently free-acting human being and God conceived as the creator of the world and the ultimate cause of the human being. In much of the literature on African ethics, metaphysics, and religion, the human being is presented as an entity that possesses physical/material and spiritual and rational dimensions with inherent powers of choice.

This unique capacity to make rational choices, ideally, would motivate the individual to act in a socially responsible manner that eventually leads to the actualisation of a maximal moral state. That is, in an ideal situation, the capacity to make rational choices will increasingly correspond to the making of moral choices that in turn actualise a sufficiently moral world where goodness is maximised and wickedness minimised. The maximal moral state has been linked with the attainment of full personhood by the African philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti who

distinguishes between the ontological and normative senses of the person. An ontological sense of personhood regards the individual simply as inherently a person by virtue of being a human being with the power of choice derived from the possession of an active reason. The normative sense, which Menkiti favours, relates the inherent power of choice with the full range of sociality and, consequently, morality. Full personhood "is not given at the very beginning of one's life, but is attained after one is well along in society" (MENKITI 1984, 173). However, if personhood in the social-normative sense involves a long moral journey signposted by stages of improvement, or, conversely, degeneration, then it is obvious that the term full personhood cannot be exhausted by expanding the definition of a human being beyond the ontological sense to the social-normative sense. This paper will build on Menkiti's insight and argue from the perspective of consolation philosophy (AGADA 2015, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c) that the *full person* is a perfectly moral individual. Since the world is not populated by full persons, full personhood becomes a maximal moral state that is never attained in a lifetime but represents an ideal state that humans can seek to realise. The fact that the human power of choice does not often tally with moral outcomes and, in fact, often manifests actively in wicked deeds reveals the limitation of this power in a moral sense and questions the reality of free will in the actual world. Here the idea of free will is associated with morality as a phenomenon of the rational human being. The human power of choice is so constrained by diverse factors and so frequently expresses itself in the performance of wrong, wicked, and outright diabolical activities that full personhood is never reached. Indeed, the human being comes across as a being that is at once both a, seemingly, free moral agent and a socially (GYEKYE 1995, 2010), physically (ATTOE 2022a), biologically (AGADA 2022a), theologically (OKERE 1996; GBADEGESIN 2004; BALOGUN 2007), and psychologically (AGADA 2022a) determined entity.

In this paper, I focus attention on an African version of theological determinism that often comes under the label destiny. Theological determinism is broadly the view that events in the world and the paths of humans follow an unbranching course set by God. This view, also called predestination, has been explored at some length in, particularly, Yoruba and Akan religious and philosophical thought. According to the African notion of predestination, or destiny, a supreme deity, or God, lesser deities, or gods, and related spiritual entities and principles determine what becomes of a person in their lifetime (GBADEGESIN 2004). The African notion of predestination is markedly different from the Christian notion which usually focuses on salvation. Predestination in the African context focuses on the conditioning power of God and lesser deities that are believed to derive their powers from God. If God is conceived narrowly or broadly as the source of life-influencing destinies that more or less constrain the inherent human power of choice, and he is regarded as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent creator (see, for example, MBITI 1969, 1975; IDOWU 1973), how is it that he did not create human beings in such a way that they will always positively exercise their power of choice? A positive exercise of the power of choice would result in the reality of a world without moral evil or, at least, one with minimal evil. If, on the other hand, God is a limited creator-deity or designer

as African decolonisation scholars have recently asserted (see, for example, WIREDU 1998), is the human being solely responsible for their evil actions? Or is there a larger picture of reality that presents a gloomy state of affairs, whereby moral evil must be regarded as a necessary part of the way the world is structured? In what sense are human beings responsible for their evil deeds in a deterministic world?

In answering the allied questions posed above, this paper will be divided into four sections. Section 1 addresses notions of the human person in the African philosophical literature. Section 2 revisits the debate on determinism (predestination) and free will in the African philosophical literature. Section 3 argues that a limited God cannot be blamed for the reality of moral evil. Section 4 introduces the idea of *mood* and demonstrates how human beings can be morally responsible for their evil deeds in a tragic, deterministic world.

The Human Being in African Philosophical Thought

Philosophical anthropology has noted the human being's unique capacity to act in ways that project the actuality of freedom. Freedom, or the exercise of free will, is problematised in this paper from the standpoint that defines it as an individual's capacity to have acted differently than one did in a specific situation. To exercise free will, then, would mean to deliberately choose a course out of more than one available courses (cf. VAN INWAGEN 1975). Before grappling with the tension between the notions of predestination and free will in African thought I will briefly highlight the nature of the human being with a view to establishing its moral dimension.

According to Gyekye (1995, 1999), the human being is an entity with material and spiritual dimensions, a body animated by the *sunsum,* which translates as spirit or mind in English and an *ōkra,* which translates as soul. Since Gyekye closely identifies the *sunsum* with the *ōkra* one will be right to interpret the *sunsum* and *ōkra* as constituting the sphere of conscious existence as distinct from the sphere of material existence. In this paper, I will use the terms 'material' and 'physical' interchangeably to cover tangible and non-tangible phenomena that are describable in the language of physics, for example a chair, electrons, and numbers. I will use the term 'spiritual' to cover phenomena that cannot be adequately comprehended using descriptive physical language, for instance, consciousness and entities like God and gods.

The material-spiritual distinction does not mean that there are two worlds. The distinction rather connotes two spheres, two dimensions of reality that complete each other. Gyekye (1995, 72–73) underlines this fact when he notes that:

> "The Akan universe, essentially spiritual, is endowed or charged with varying degrees of force or power. This force or power is *sunsum,* usually translated as "spirit" all created things, that is, natural objects, have or contain *sunsum*…*Sunsum,* then appears…a universal spirit, manifesting itself differently in the various beings and objects in the natural world.

If Gyekye is positing two worlds, it is hard to see how *sunsum* as consciousness can underlie material entities since a material type in one world will be ontologically different from a consciousness type in another world. Gyekye's understanding of the human being as a unity of the physical and the spiritual is shared by scholars like Mbiti (1969), Okere (1996), Edeh (1999) and Ijiomah (2014) who write about the human being as an entity constituted by material and spiritual principles, with a natural and supernatural orientation. While Wiredu (1983) has favoured an entirely physicalist understanding of the human being, he also emphasises this being's conscious dimension and the unique power of thinking and choosing. Making a choice involves deciding whether something is good or bad, true or false, seemly or unseemly, etc. It involves not only knowledge but also moral judgment. Consequently, the human being is a moral being. This being is always a self-interested entity whose actions either promote the wellbeing of other conscious entities or injure them.

In the Afro-communitarian literature the human being is cast as a moral being born into the community of moral selves. This being is required to commit itself to the attainment of full personhood in a condition of mutuality, with the individual contributing to society's wellbeing while the society in its turn protects the individual (see MBITI 1969; MENKITI 1984; KAPHAGAWANI 2004; IKUENOBE 2018; GYEKYE 2010). Menkiti famously used the term full personhood in his endeavour to articulate a normative Afro-communitarian understanding of personhood which goes beyond the bare definition of a person as a rational being to encompass the full range of the moral potentials of rationality. Thus, Menkiti situates the person in a community of other persons united in the quest for a maximal moral state of existence that benefits everyone. While Menkiti believes that this moral state is achievable within the social framework, or community, I interpret full personhood as an ideal that motivates human moral behaviour and is itself unattainable in a person's lifetime. Menkiti (1984, 73) states specifically:

> That full personhood is not perceived as simply given at the very beginning of one's life, but is attained after one is well along in society, indicates straight away that the older an individual gets the more of a person he becomes.

Yet, increasing age does not absolutely guarantee moral maturity and the positive channelling of the innate power of choice towards the improvement of the lot of other persons in the community. Indeed, it is certain that no one individual attains moral perfection in their lifetime since full personhood is a quest, a journey, without a defined terminus. Sooner or later the most morally advanced human being will make a moral error. Such an individual may flare up in anger over some provocation from another individual or entertain bitterness towards another in their heart and wish them evil, or become jealous of another even for a moment, etc. As small as these kinds of moral blemishes are, they nevertheless underline the claim that full personhood is unattainable.

Additionally, the human being often chooses a path that leads to the multiplication of bad and even terrible deeds. Indeed, evidence abound throughout history that reveals the human being's disturbingly massive capacity for wickedness. The human being consciously plots murder on small, medium, massive, and planet-wide scale; it steals, wreaks destruction, promotes violence and exploit its own kind and other kinds. It deploys its intellect in the production of weapons of mass destruction and creates economic elites that acquire unimaginable wealth at the expense of the vast majority. It is this wickedness resulting from the human being's choice of the wrong path that I call moral evil (cf. BEWAJI 1998; VAN INWAGEN 2006; BALOGUN 2009).

It is easy to place all the blame on human beings for the wickedness they unleash on themselves and even on other living things. The human being appears to be a free moral agent. Yet, it seems that the capacity for rational choice is itself conditioned by biological, physical, emotional, and psychological constraints. A man loves three women B, C, and D, and decides to marry B after reviewing the prevailing state of affairs. In the beginning, he appears free to marry any of the three women. He does not marry B who he prefers because B flatly rejects him. He also fails to marry C because C has AS genotype just like him. After much thought he decides to marry D. While he has indeed exercised the power of choice, it is obvious that this decision was conditioned by circumstances not of his making. His decision is indeed his own, but it is yet a constrained decision. He settled for D because B and C were beyond his reach.

A striking feature about the exercise of 'free will' is the fatalistic atmosphere that encompasses this capacity. Once a supposedly free choice has been made an irreversible sequence of events follows that sometimes leads to disenchantment with the irreversible choices already made. After A marries D he can in the future divorce D, but he cannot unmarry D in a manner that reverses that singular event of his marriage to D. That event is already history and irreversible. Before it occurred A was supposedly free to choose a different course, but after it occurred A was not free to have chosen a different course. Therefore, A was never really free. The fatalistic atmosphere that surrounds the process of choosing increases the suspicion that making a choice is by no means an exercise of free will. So, it will appear that the idea of freedom is a useful fiction. The power of choice does not exclude the sway of determinism. But, can determinism be absolute, such that humans must be deemed not responsible for their actions? In answering this question, I will start by dwelling briefly on some African responses to the problem of freewill and determinism (specifically theological determinism or predestination).

On the Notions of Destiny and Free Will

A number of African philosophers have teased out contours of the relationship between freedom, determinism, and the will of God considered as the ultimate cause of the world. The research work of Hallen and Sodipo (1986), Gbadegesin (1991, 2004), and Balogun (2007) in the area of Yoruba traditional thought establishes *ori* as that which determines a human being's personality and is simultaneously the determinant of destiny. As the determinant of personality, *ori*

is integral to the structure of the self and as the determinant of destiny it is the link between the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality, and human reality in particular.

The positions of Gbadegesin and Balogun are particularly interesting. Gbadegesin analyses the Ogbegunda oral text and the Ifa Corpus of the Yoruba and notes the cultural rootedness of the idea of *ori* as destiny and, therefore, the determinant of a person's destiny. In the Ogbegunda text individuals go up to heaven to receive their destinies from the god Obatala, one of the deities answerable to God (Olodumare) in Yoruba religious thought (GBADEGESIN 2004, 313). In the Ifa Corpus, the gods are depicted as conferring *ori* on humans who adopt a kneeling position, a clear indication of the passive role of humans in the scheme of things. Despite the place of a God-allocated destiny in the lives of individuals, Gbadegesin notes a paradox in Yoruba thought, whereby a supposedly fixed destiny can be changed by individuals through sacrifice to the gods and individual effort. The fact that the Yoruba are inclined to blame people for their amoral and immoral conduct rather than their *ori* lends support to the idea that the Yoruba hold a compatibilist perspective that upholds only a weak sense of destiny (predestination), rather than a strong sense that affirms inexorable universal necessity (GBADEGESIN 2004, 321).

The *ori* is conceived by Balogun as possessing physical and spiritual qualities. On the one hand, it is part of the structure of the self and is united with the body and on the other hand it is a kind of individual guardian angel/spirit, a kind of personal god which precedes a person's worldly existence and bears their destiny. God is the ultimate giver of destiny, which he communicates to the individual through their *ori.* Tension between determinism (predestination) and free will arises in the Yoruba framework because while destiny is regarded as unalterable, the individual possesses the power of choice which they can exercise to alter their destiny, for instance through individual effort and appeasement rituals that may influence the will of God and the *ori.* The tension leads Balogun (2007, 123) to suggest like Gbadegesin that Yoruba thought recommends the compatibility of free will and determinism. However, he notes, strangely, that human responsibility is not undermined because "*Ori* is limited to issues of material success. *Ori* has nothing to do with moral character, and as such it does not affect all of human actions and/or inactions" (BALOGUN 2007, 125).

To justify soft determinism, the idea that free will and determinism may be compatible after all, Balogun attempts to separate the notion of destiny from the human power of choice. He thus ties the fate that *ori* imposes on the individual to the mere fortune or misfortune of an individual in a lifetime. The snag here is that fortune and misfortune are often outcomes of the decisions humans make and, therefore, are not often separable from moral conduct. A financially corrupt politician who becomes rich by embezzling government funds and who later has his assets confiscated may blame destiny for his perceived misfortune and curse his *ori.* The politician has suffered a material misfortune involving loss of all his ill-gotten possessions and a long jail term. The fact that *ori* is blamed for the turn of events seem to undermine Balogun's claim that the determination of *ori* is restricted to bare material circumstances. The politician's misfortune cannot be

understood without reference to his bad and, in fact, immoral choices. Here one sees the politician absolving himself of blame and shifting the moral burden to his *ori*. If God has determined the course of future events in an individual's life through the *ori* it stands to reason that the moral choices the individual will make are constrained choices.[1]

But if Gbadegesin and Balogun trace an individual's destiny to God through lesser deities answerable to God, the outstanding Ghanaian philosopher of Akan extraction, Gyekye, asserts that destiny comes directly from God and that it is always good, although human power of choice can pervert that which was given as a wholesome endowment. According to Gyekye (1995, 114), predestination only covers the "broad outlines of an individual's life, not the specific details." With this manoeuvre he hopes to establish the compatibility of determinism and free will. The thinking is that if minute details of a human life are not conditioned, there is room for rational, independent action. To drive home this point, he distinguishes between events and actions. Events cover the natural causality we see in nature posited as mind-independent while actions refer to causal sequences initiated by human beings as rational agents (Gyekye 1995, 120). But as Okello (2003), has noted, Gyekye fails to show how the event-action distinction reconciles free will and determinism given that Gyekye generalises that every occurrence has a cause in the Akan universe. Gyekye is forced to claim that in the page of destiny some things and actions in a human life are determined while others are not. Reflecting on this claim, Okello notes:

> [S]ome things a person does do not represent a page from the 'book of destiny.' One would, by implication, deduce that…there are other things a person does which could represent a page from the book of destiny…is Gyekye not suggesting that some human actions and choices are determined? (2003, 83)

The page of destiny is like a ledger with fully filled credit (fortune) and debit (misfortune) columns. Since all actual or possible credit and debit transactions are in the same ledger, it amounts to a contradiction to say that some transaction details will be smuggled into the ledger without fraud alarm being raised. In other words, compatibilism is impossible going by the way Gyekye presents the idea of destiny.

[1] There appears to be a way out of the conundrum for Balogun. He can abandon the compatibilist framework entirely and either affirm the truth of theological determinism or the truth of free will. The former option is explored in this paper. The latter option may see Balogun suggesting that what the concept of destiny entails on second thought is not any kind of initial conditioning but rather a divine operation of foresight consistent with the power of omniscience. Thus, God sees the future course of things and all outcomes of human moral choices from the very beginning and is satisfied. He refrains from constraining human free will. This second line of thinking will be explored in a future work

Gyekye notes that God-allocated destinies are always good *ab initio*. This implies that God is benevolent. He always wishes what is good for human beings. Gyekye's stance, like the positions of Gbadegesin and Balogun, favours a compatibilist perspective. Attoe rejects the compatibilist perspective and asserts that the universe is a thoroughly deterministic totality, in which a current state of affairs can be traced backward up to a first (primordial) cause if the complete information of causally related chains of events is available. He notes: "As a universe motioned by interactive relationships, one cannot but trace a certain [every] outcome to a previous state of affairs. If this is the case...then one must admit that this world is a fully deterministic one" (ATTOE 2022a, 83). There is no room for free will in the world, according to Attoe. The operation of rigid determinism eliminates moral responsibility which, for Attoe, is an illusion we have on account of the mistaken belief that our thoughts escape the mechanical conditioning we see in the behaviour of physical objects. For Attoe, since the world is a physical, interactive network of causes that are traceable to a first physical cause (which he calls an impersonal materialist God), no phenomenon in the world lies beyond the range of material determinism, including thought.

I suggested earlier that notwithstanding the human being's unique power of choice, the decisions this being makes are constrained by its physical, social, and psychological environment, which indicates that humans are not free. The ability to choose is thus the exercise of a rational power that is impeded by existential struggles in the field of human experience (see section 4). An interesting dimension is added to the discourse on human freedom when God is conceived as the creator of the world and human beings.

There are two broad views of God in the African philosophy of religion and African traditional religion (ATR) literature, namely: (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (see, for instance, IDOWU 1973; MBITI 1975; GYEKYE 1995). (2) God is limited in power and is not wholly good (see, for instance, BEWAJI 1998; WIREDU 1998; OLADIPO 2004). Defenders of both views generally agree that God is a creator-deity or at least a designer (of humans and the world). If one goes with the first view, God should not only have allocated good destinies to humans but he should have created them with the ability to always channel their power of choice towards the performance of good deeds.[2] If this was the case there would be no moral evil. The reality of our world, which exhibits signs of serious blemish, makes the second view plausible. If one goes with the second view, then something is wrong with the world itself that makes it impossible for moral perfection, or full personhood, to be attained by humans.

On God's Transcendence, Limitation, and Moral Evil

If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent it is within his power

[2] From a libertarian perspective, the idea of choiceless humans may appear obnoxious. Yet, it seems that a world where there is no free will but in which humans act with moral perfection and are happy is preferable to a world like ours where humans supposedly enjoy the gift of free will and act wickedly. It is possible that morally perfect but choiceless beings in a perfect world will be so constituted that the absence of free will is not regarded as a deprivation.

to create humans to always act morally, such that moral evil will be non-existent in the world. The transcendence view of God has been defended by early scholars of ATR like Mbiti (1969), Idowu (1973), and Metuh (1981). Philosophers like Gyekye (1995), Metz and Molefe (2021) have endorsed the transcendence view of God as a legitimate traditional African conception of God. Since traditional African thought recognises the potent role lesser deities play in the scheme of things, defenders of the transcendence view typically invoke the ultimacy thesis to preserve God's unrivalled powers. This thesis acknowledges the ubiquitous influence of the lesser deities in the world but subordinates them to God, such that without the powers delegated to them by God they lose their potency. Idowu (1973, 135) presents the ultimacy thesis very clearly:

> I do not know of any place in Africa where the ultimacy is not accorded to God…the religion (ATR) can only be adequately described as monotheistic. I modify the 'monotheism' by the adjective 'diffused', because here we have a monotheism in which there exists other powers which derive from Deity.

Thus, not only is God the highest deity in the universe, according to the transcendence view but he is also the supreme being in this universe and is, therefore, describable in terms that correspond to the traditional theistic attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence.

But when the reality of moral evil is taken into account and any right-thinking person contemplates the dimensions of human wickedness, which is constantly on display in the world, one must wonder if the transcendence view is indeed correct. If God is omnipotent and omniscient it is within his capacity to eliminate moral evil by creating human beings in such a way that they always will their acts ethically. This is not too much to ask of an all-powerful and all-knowing creator. If this being is unwilling to eliminate moral evil, he cannot be omnibenevolent (in the sense of all-good). Given the great suffering that the perpetration of wicked deeds inflicts on victims, an omnibenevolent God must be interested in removing the conditions that make wickedness possible. But it is clear from what goes on in the world that there is a certain silence of the universe with regard to the moral and existential condition of humans, and God himself seems to be as silent as the universe. Wicked deeds continue to proliferate even as humans have to endure the accompanying suffering. Each human being appears condemned to find their way through the treacherous terrain of life and survive as best as they can.

The limitation perspective in African philosophy of religion emerges to tackle the problem of omnipotence and evil by purporting to eliminate the problem

altogether.[3] Proponents of this view include Wiredu (1998), Bewaji (1998),

Oladipo (2004), Fayemi (2012), and Ofuasia (2022a). They defend the compatibility of the amount of moral evil in the world with the existence of God. They do not defend atheism in response to the apparent silence of the world. Instead, they articulate a perspective that decolonises the concept of God and establish what they presume to be an authentic African understanding of God. This perspective presents God as a limited creator or a designer. God is limited by the multiplicity of other beings that are present in the world and pre-existing matter itself.

Writing about the limitation of God's powers by other entities in the world, Oladipo (2004, 360) notes, with emphasis on Yoruba cosmogony:

> If omnipotence implies 'infinite powers,' then to say that Olódùmarè is omnipotent is to say that He is almighty in the sense that He is not subject to any constraints in the exercise of his powers. However, it is doubtful that Olódùmarè can be said to be all-powerful in this sense. A crucial consideration in this regard is the acknowledgment, by the people, of other powers and principalities–divinities, spirits, magic, witchcraft, and so on. Some of these powers and forces are treated as ends in themselves. Hence, the people endeavor, through sacrifice, to be on good terms with them in recognition of their powers to aid or hinder human activities.

The suggestion that evil arises necessarily as part of the structure of the world, which may well exist tenselessly, is captured by Wiredu (1998, 29–30) in this provocative passage:

> God is the creator of the world, but he is not apart from the universe: He together with the world constitutes the spatio-temporal "totality" of existence. In the deepest sense, therefore, the ontological chasm indicated by the natural/supernatural distinction does not exist within Akan cosmology... The notion of creation out of nothing does

[3] The literature on African Traditional Religion (ATR) and African philosophy of religion clearly reveals two dominant conceptions of God, with one conception upholding traditional theistic view of God as a perfect being and the other favouring the understanding of God as a limited deity, as suggested earlier. Agada (2022b) has argued that there is an antinomy of God's existence in African religious thought that consists of the conflicting propositions of the transcendence and limitation frameworks. While the transcendence framework defends belief in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent (in the sense of all-good) God, the limitation framework defends belief in the existence of a limited God. Agada (2022b, 46) notes that there is "[E]vidence 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."

> not even make sense in the Akan language... In the most usual sense creation presupposes raw materials. A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words and ideas. If God is conceived as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions a world order out of indeterminate raw material, the idea of absolute nothingness would seem to be avoidable.

Oladipo's stance seems to shift blame from God to entities capable of real malevolence. But it is not very clear how an evil spirit can be responsible for the wicked acts of a human being. An evil spirit is not a creator-deity. However, it may be asserted that malevolent spirits are powerful enough to make human beings do wicked things that they normally will not do. This possibility not only further constrains free will but also lends credence to the suspicion that something is fundamentally wrong with a world that evolves malevolent spirits that take delight in misleading human beings. Wiredu's analysis stems from his famous commitment to a physicalist understanding of the world. He is suspicious of a supernaturalist perspective and insists on a spatio-temporal conception of reality. In Wiredu's thought, the notion of God's transcendence is ruled out *ab initio* since reality is fundamentally spatial. For him, spatio-temporality characterises matter, and matter has always existed. Thus, either God began to exist at the same time as the matter constituting spatiality began to exist or God evolved after matter began to exist. Either way, this matter limits God who can only be properly described as a designer, who produces new forms, for example human beings, from matter. This is Wiredu's view and it opposes the transcendence view.

The African traditional religion literature overwhelmingly presents God as the creator of the world and human beings. Bewaji (1998, 7), notes that: "Olodumare is the origin of the universe..." Even when Wiredu questions the concept of a creator, he still acknowledges that God is a designer. He only has a problem with the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* rather than the very idea of creation. A designer who produces new forms from already existing material can be regarded as a creator even if the glamour of omnipotence and omniscience is lost. If a limited God created a world where evil flourishes and also created human beings in a way that allows them to misuse their willing capacity, must he not be blamed for the reality of moral evil? Fayemi (2012) has suggested that God and the lesser deities that assist him in running the world bear responsibility for moral evil. Does this not mean God is evil, if he lets evil thrive in a world he created? If God is good, as he is portrayed in much of the literature, he must be limited in power and knowledge and is, therefore, unable to stop the moral evil perpetrated by human beings in the world. If God cannot be blamed for the reality of moral evil and human beings are not free, how can human beings be said to be morally responsible agents? This question will be answered in the next section.

Human Being as *Homo Melancholicus*

I noted earlier that notwithstanding the operationality of the inherent human power of choice, this phenomenon cannot be described as free will because the power of

choice is constrained by physical, psychological, biological, social, etc., factors. There is indeed a willpower which manifests itself in acts that are either good or bad and upholds the notion of moral responsibility, but this willpower itself is not free. A possible freedom of the will cannot consist merely in the capacity of an individual to have acted differently than they did in a particular situation. Free will consists rather in willpower that is not constrained by the factors mentioned above. The reality of the will is not denied since it is the absolute condition for human action. However, the freedom of the will is denied from the perspective of consolationism which I will briefly articulate in this section. This perspective presents the human condition as a tragic one and human freedom as an illusion. The perspective is different from what the student of Western philosophy is familiar with. In much of Western philosophy, the debate on free will and determinism revolves around what people do in fact and what they are able to do. While determinists believe that what people do and what they are able to do is the same thing and that peoples' doings are conditioned by a variety of factors, advocates of free will contend that the doings are ultimately voluntary and rational choices made under adequate epistemic conditions (for in-depth analysis of deterministic, libertarian, and compatibilist theories see NOWELL-SMITH 1948; SMART 1961; LEHRER 1966; VAN INWAGEN 1975; DENNETT 1981). In other words, free will is believed to involve the capacity to have acted differently.

The fact that constraining factors are operational and influence decisions means that there is already always an existential struggle ongoing in the field of experience which denies the will freedom. At this juncture I introduce the idea of the human being as a *homo melancholicus,* or melancholy being. *Homo melancholicus* is the entity that finds itself in a deterministic world of yearnings and pursues consolation from moment to moment. Consolation is the only marker of meaning in a silent world, that quality measured in terms of joy which the human being actualises in the field of experience and which runs through all the activities of an individual, be these activities intellectual or emotional (see AGADA 2015, 2020, 2022a). The idea of consolation is articulated within the framework of consolationism, "a tightly knitted network of metaphysical themes which condense the universe and its manifestations in the doctrine of mood" (CHIMAKONAM and OGBONNAYA 2021, 41). Analysing the consolationist system further, Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021, 49) aver that consolationism captures the:

> [C]ondition of a reality that is expressed tragically and the conditioned beings that constitute this reality. Reality is expressed tragically because it is incomplete in the sense that evil–both physical and moral–adheres intimately to this reality even as the human mind cannot clearly identify the reason for the emergence of the universe and the purpose of human beings in this universe.

Given the final decisiveness of the epistemic factor, human existence assumes a tragic dimension in a world where meaning-making consists merely in the pursuit of the emotion of joy (see ATTOE 2022b; OFUASIA 2022b) and related states like contentment, satisfaction, excitement, etc.. The epistemic factor reminds us that despite the internal purpose we find in our quest to actualise joy in our various intellectual and emotional engagements, we have no reliable knowledge about why we were born and why the world itself has to exist and be observed by us. When our daily struggle for meaning and survival in the face of physical and moral evil is combined with this fatal epistemic deficiency, human existence must be acknowledged as tragic just as talk about free will becomes untenable (see AGADA 2022a). The universe is a totality of yearnings of diverse entities. These yearnings clash and condition events, such that the mere power of choice is only a function of knowledge (and a severely limited knowledge for the matter) rather than a capacity independent of the ever-present yearnings that condition human existence.

A man must eat to survive, but sometimes he has no money and he steals. A ritual killer has no money or does not have enough and kills another human being in the hope that the deed will bring him wealth. A man succumbs to lust and commits the crime of rape. It is easy to straightaway condemn the evil doers as weak-willed. Yet, the very idea of a weak will compromises the notion of a free will by indicating the existential struggles surrounding the individual which the will often cannot overcome, even in the face of harsh punishments meted out to weak-willed actors by state institutions like the judiciary.

While the human being who carries out evil deeds is guilty by reason of knowing beforehand that he or she is doing something bad, the evil deed is to a large extent conditioned. Thus, while the human being is not free, they are guilty as self-interested beings with the knowledge of right and wrong. The man who commits the evil of rape is self-interested and pursues his joy in the effort at maximising sexual pleasure. He cannot be guiltless. That the march to personhood can be aborted[4] shows that the guilt of *homo melancholicus* is of a peculiar kind. This is the case because even where this being knows that it is doing something bad, its moral willpower fails it and it persists in doing evil. Why is this the case? The problem lies in the very fact of existing. Whatever exists as yearning necessarily realises both good and evil. I call whatever exists with the capacity to yearn a product and function of *mood. Mood,* then, is the essence of all things and the interface of mind and matter. God is constituted by *mood;* so is the human being, and the seemingly non-living thing. That which is capable of activity reflects a moody essence and can realise evil in its operative sphere. Thus God, human beings, animals, etc, are capable of doing evil. Since the capacity for evil is a structural capacity of the world, everything is guilty. The universal sway of *mood* means that yearning is fundamental and defines all entities. The ubiquity of yearning makes for a deterministic world, one in which proximate and remote impulses and desires act as causes. Though determined by the yearnings that

[4] Menkiti (1984) notes that personhood is attained over a lifetime and enlarges as the human being advances in age. Instructively, people can fail in the journey towards personhood, as when they continually decline in moral awareness instead of increasing.

constitute human nature–the impulses and desires that analysis of the human psychological, physical, and biological structures uncovers–the human being is yet a guilty being since it already exists in a universe of yearning and knows what is good and bad for itself.

It is desirable at this point to more clearly explain what I mean by the term *mood.* Elsewhere I elucidated the term *mood* as describing the most fundamental reality:

> [T]hat in which mind–as advanced consciousness–and body inhere, the all-pervading principle of conscious and subconscious beings that energizes or animates these beings…the ultimate origin of reason, emotions, affects, and dispositions of living and seemingly nonliving things, the marker of the eternal striving towards an unrealizable perfection in nature. (AGADA 2020, 110)

Mood is:

> [T]he primordial mind-matter interface and the source of all intelligence and emotions in the universe...The idea of *mood* as a proto-mind implies that it is an event prior to what is commonly referred to as mind or the sphere of mental properties...*mood* as proto-mind is what produces mindness in things. It is also submitted that *mood* is a unity of the physical and the minded. It follows, then, that this fundamental principle is an event, the mind-matter interface, where the borders distinguishing mind from matter are constantly transgressed, such that it makes more sense to talk about phases of reality rather than wholly independent mind and matter spheres. (AGADA 2022a, 87)

As a metaphysical doctrine, the philosophy of *mood* seeks to identify a fundamental principle whose articulation can provide insight into why the world appears so incomplete, with moral evil a glaring dimension of this incompleteness. As an epistemological framework, the philosophy of *mood* navigates between a strong physicalist perspective that denies the fundamentality of conscious being and a strong panpsychist perspective that denies the fundamentality of material or physical being. The implication for African philosophy of religion and, in particular, the reality of evil is the comparability of the idea of *mood* to Wiredu's pre-existing stuff which limits all beings, including God. It is obvious that *mood* itself is not God. It is the ground of all things. As a limiting principle, it essentialises entities and renders them yearning phenomena. While discussing the relation between God and *mood* as a universal limiting principle that constitutes God's nature, I noted elsewhere that:

> God is the highest embodiment of *mood*...mood constitute His essence and...He is subject to this essence. This means that God's qualities, whatever they may be, and we can only project anthropomorphically, are determined by *mood*, which is, therefore, prior to His existence even if contemporaneous with His essence...God is not *mood* per se, but He embodies it in a special way. The entity whose nature is defined by *mood* is surpassed by its nature. (AGADA 2022a, 108).

There is no contradiction when it is asserted that *mood* is prior to God's existence and contemporaneous with his essence. *Mood* is prior to God's existence when God is considered as an entity endowed with intelligence and personality. *Mood* is contemporaneous with God's essence to the extent that this limiting principle constitutes the nature of God who exemplifies it in the highest degree

The metaphysics of *mood* will then account for moral evil as the inevitable manifestation of yearnings that constitute the structure of reality itself as impulses, desires, motivators and causes at micro and macro levels. This manifestation of yearning is said to be evil because yearning is misdirected by weak-willed actors. Reality here means the totality of all actually existing and potentially existent things animated by *mood.* In a nutshell, nature is the universe of *mood* where there is neither pure consciousness (one that cannot affect physical reality or be affected by physical reality) nor pure matter (one that cannot affect conscious reality or be affected by conscious reality). Thus, I regard *mood* as a consciousness-matter event, a first occurrence in the universe which has no strict consciousness-matter boundary since both consciousness and matter evolve from *mood,* their primordial prototype.

In a deterministic world, impulses, motivators (actuating principles), and desires are causes, whether hidden or transparent. Such a world is not a blind totality because impulses, motivators, and desires become reasons as they gain clarity and coherence even as these elements indicate a goal that motivates striving. I call this goal–decidedly the product of speculation rather than epistemic certainty–perfection. It is unrealisable since the very nature of *mood* indicates perpetual incompleteness evidenced as perpetual striving. The doctrine of *mood,* therefore, describes a tragic universe. In this universe, God cannot be blamed for the moral evil perpetrated by humans because he is limited by *mood* which is all-pervading and, therefore, limits every entity, including God. One may point out that if I say that God is not responsible for human wickedness and yet maintain that whatever exists is guilty, there is a contradiction. Put more clearly, if I say that God cannot be blamed for the wicked deeds of human beings, how can I assert that he is guilty? What is he guilty of if he is not morally responsible for human wickedness? The guilt I refer to here is not tied to moral responsibility but rather to existential incompleteness.

The being that persists quantitatively and qualitatively, whether eternally or for a defined duration, in a universe of *mood* is guilty precisely because it is capable of doing evil by virtue of its essence, which is yearning. The being does not have to actually do evil before it is said to be guilty. It suffices that this being is a yearning being. Yearning encompasses an experiential field of actualities and potentialities. In this metaphysical framework, the notion of moral evil is exhibited as one that indicates wickedness as a phenomenon that is either actual now or soon to become actual.

I noted earlier that the compatibilist stance in the African philosophy literature reveals how problematic a free will account of moral evil is. If predestination, or destiny, is true, compatibilism cannot be true. What the compatibilist stance achieves is showing that moral responsibility is possible even when free will is denied. According to Gbadegesin, Balogun, and Gyekye, God (acting either directly or through the lesser deities under his control) establishes

the destinies of individuals from the beginning. The initial given constitutes an initial condition to which subsequent events in a person's life are tied. If these philosophers then turn around to suggest that only the broad outlines of a person's life, and not minute details, are conditioned by God, one can justifiably respond that the predestination stance is a libertarian stance in disguise. This is the case because it is not clear how the initial condition loses its conditioning power along the way, such that the presumed broad outlines of a person's life are separated from the assumed minute details. Either destinies are given by God from the very beginning, in which case determinism is true, or the idea of destiny is superfluous and should be discarded, in which case free will is real. Attoe (2022a) rejects the idea that there can be an initial causal state which later allows a break in the causal series to enable freedom. He asserts that if determinism is true, then free will cannot exist in a world where events can be traced to God as the guarantor of the initial causal state.[5]

[5] My kind of determinism is different from the rigid determinism of the African philosopher Aribiah Attoe. Attoe (2022a) adopts a rigid deterministic framework and describes a mechanical causal system. I agree with him that there is no freedom in the world but I do not agree that rigid, inexorable determinism operates. The rigidity he focuses on, I think, follows from retrospective thinking. Once events occur they become irreversible and strict determinism seems to apply given irreversibility and the thinking that how things panned out is how they could have panned out. But this is true only in retrospect. My account of free will and determinism affirms the universal operation of yearning –impulses, conscious and unconscious activities at all levels, motives and dispositions. However, rigid sequences do not come into play because the universe of yearnings is an imperfect one where the varieties of yearnings often clash and create room for the emergence of uncertainty. In the particular case of human beings, consciousness is real and active; it is goal-directed. The reality of intentionality, a potentiality of *mood* that attests to intelligence as an evolvable quality in the world, means that before events occur through human agency they could have happened differently than they did. It is only after events occur that retrospective thinking persuades us that rigid conditioning was at play before the occurrence of specific events. In consolationist metaphysics, emphasis is on the incompleteness of the universe of yearnings rather than rigid causal conditioning. The incompleteness that defines yearning entities means that complexity and uncertainty subvert any possible rigid conditioning traceable through time and space to a first cause, as Attoe asserts. When we face the future there is no rigidity in the forward portion of Attoe's chain of interactions. We are faced with complexity, as Attoe himself acknowledges when he notes that: "This complexity, vast as it may be, does not reveal an indeterminate or probabilistic future, it only reveals the inability of the human observer to cognitively capture this complexity" (2022a, 87). Talk about the epistemological limitation of the human observer of nature involves talk about the incompleteness of the universe as a whole, for the human observer too is an essential part of nature and not an entity distinct from nature. Like the universe, *mood* constitutes the human being. Complexity and uncertainty no doubt indicate problems with rigid determinism; novelty is predicted in advance as an actualisation of potentials inherent in *mood,* as an additional instance of yearning in the world.

Given the contradiction that arises from affirming determinism (destiny) and at the same time affirming free will, I suspect that what the compatibilist philosophers are actually proposing is the compatibility of determinism and moral responsibility. Insight from consolationist thought can establish how moral responsibility is real in a deterministic world. As already suggested, all entities in the world are guilty by reason of the way they are constituted by *mood*. The human being, specifically, is guilty since it is naturally capable of evil. As a being that pursues the maximisation of the state of joy–whether successful in the quest or not–the human being knows what is good for itself. Certain knowledge of the ultimate purpose of human existence beyond speculation about perfection as the possible goal of life is not required for humans to know what is good for them and, accordingly, distinguish between good and bad. If humans have this discriminatory power that highlights their tendency to gravitate towards both good and evil for the benefit of the self, they are morally responsible for their actions as these actions negatively or positively affect their world. In this way moral responsibility is affirmed to be real in a deterministic world of yearnings. In a nutshell, moral responsibility is a function of knowledge rather than independence of constraining social, physical, and psychological factors, although constraining factors can be proposed as mitigating factors for morally irresponsible behaviour. The human being is, after all, an imperfect being.

To be morally responsible for an action it is sufficient for an actor to have known that they are doing something wrong for their own benefit. It does not matter that a rapist was compelled to commit rape because of their raging hormones. Knowledge of the wrongness of the act of rape is enough to confer moral responsibility. There is, of course, a poignant dimension to the human condition, whereby knowledge fails to save the doer of bad deeds who can point to deterministic elements that defeat willpower. I have, in this paper, captured this poignant dimension with reference to the tragedy of human existence.

On the question of God's relation with the world, the traditional theist may object that the limitation thesis proponents wrongly assume that we already have an adequate epistemic access to the world and the true nature of God. An adequate epistemic access to the world means that we know what constitutes physical objects beyond descriptive physical knowledge of how physical entities relate to each other. Epistemic access to God’s nature means that we know what God really is beyond our current speculative posturing which is merely a human standpoint. It is true that humans have no such epistemic access and may well be wrong to deny the legitimacy of the transcendental conception of God. Nevertheless, the undeniable evidence of moral evil all around us justifies holding the view that if God exists he may be in some way limited. Therefore, as a response to the evidential problem of moral evil, the limitation thesis is not awkward even if it may someday be determined to be mistaken, when humans are able to gain adequate epistemic access to the way the world is structured and the nature of God. It may also be objected that the doctrine of *mood* is speculative. I respond that the speculative character of the doctrine does not invalidate its main premise which states that the incompleteness of the world that comes out clearly in the reality of evil indicates a fundamental lack at the core of being itself. The response to the theist's objection to the limitation thesis also applies here since the evidence of evil in the world cannot be denied.

Conclusion

My main argument in this paper all along is that a world like ours defined in terms of *mood* based on the behaviour of living and non-living things–characterised as yearning and ceaseless activity–is a deterministic world where moral evil arises necessarily. I began the journey towards the articulation of the human being as *homo melancholicus* by identifying African notions of the person and highlighting the desirability of the attainment of full personhood while, at the same time, noting the impossibility of attaining this ideal moral condition. I argued that determinism and free will cannot be compatible. I asserted that the human being must take responsibility for moral evil in the world since a limited God cannot be blamed for the wicked deeds of humans. Introducing the concept of *mood,* I argued for the compatibility of determinism and moral responsibility rather than the compatibility of determinism and free will.

When African philosophers like Gbadegesin and Balogun defend compatibilism, they in fact want to show how humans who are conditioned by a variety of factors are morally responsible for their deeds. If determinism is true to whatever degree, the will cannot be free. I argued in this paper that the attribution of moral responsibility derives its validity from human knowledge of good and evil. The very fact that a being without a free will can be morally responsible for its action points to a tragic kind of world where beings yearn for perfection but are, by virtue of their yearning essence, unable to attain perfection.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. ABIMBOLA, Kola. 2006. [Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account], 2006. Iroko Academic Publishers: Birmingham. Paperback.

2. AGADA, Ada. [Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy: Beyond Universalism and Particularism], 2022a. Routledge: New York. doi: 10.4324/9781003172123. Hardback.

3. ---------. "Bewaji and Fayemi on God, Omnipotence, and Evil," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp41–56, 2022b. Vol 11. No 1. doi: 10.4314/ft.v11i1.4. Web.

4. --------. "Rethinking the Concept of God and the Problem of Evil from the Perspective of African Thought." [Religious Studies], pp1-17, 2022c. Online version. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412522000294**.** Web.

5. ---------. "Grounding the Consolationist Concept of *Mood* in the African Vital Force Theory." [Philosophia Africana], pp101–121, 2020. Vol 19. No 2. doi: 10.5325/philafri.19.2.0101. Web.

6. --------. [Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis, and Values in African Philosophy], 2015. Paragon House: St Paul, MN. Paperback.
7. ATTOE, Aribiah David. [Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Pre-deterministic Historicity], 2022a. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland. Paperback.

8. --------. "Passionate Yearning Theory as a Theory of Meaning in Life." [Philosophia], pp1–21, 2022b. Vol 51. No 1. doi. 10.1007/s11406-022-00489-w. Online version.Web.

9. BALOGUN, Oladele A. "The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil," [Lumina], pp1–20, 2009. Vol 20. No 2. Web.

10. -------. "The Concept of *Ori* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation," [Nordic Journal of African Studies], pp116–130, 2007. Vol 16. No 1.Web.

11. BEWAJI, John A.I. "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil,"[African Studies Quarterly], pp1–17, 1998. Vol 2. No 1.http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.pdf**.** Web.

12. CHIMAKONAM, J.O. and OGBONNAYA, L. Uchenna. [African Metaphysics, Epistemology, and a New Logic], 2021. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland. Ebook.

13. DENNETT, Daniel. [Brainstorms], 1981. The Harvester Press: Sussex. Paperback.

14. EDEH, Emmanuel M.P. [Towards an Igbo Metaphysics], 1999. Loyola University Press: Chicago, IL. Paperback.

15. FAYEMI, Ademola K. "Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E.O. Oduwole," [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1–15, 2012. Vol 41. No 1. Web.

16. GBADEGESIN, Segun. [African Philosophy, Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities], 1991. Gateway Publishers: Chicago, IL.

17. --------. "Toward a Theory of Destiny." [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp313–323, 2004. Blackwell: Oxford. Ebook.

18. GYEKYE, Kwame. "Person and Community in African Thought." [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I, Kwasi WIREDU, & Kwame GYEKYE Eds.], pp102–122, 2010. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. Paperback.

19. --------. 1999. "The Concept of a Person." [Philosophy and Choice, Kit R. CHRISTENSEN Ed.], pp215–225, 1999. Mayfield Publishing Company: Mountain View, CA. Paperback.

20. ---------. [An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme, rev. ed.], 1995. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA. Paperback.

21. HALLEN, Barry, & SODIPO, John O. [Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytical Experiments in African Philosophy], 1986. Ethnographical: London. Paperback.

22. IDOWU, E.B. [African Traditional Religion: A Definition], 1973. SCM Press: London. Paperback.

23. IJIOMAH, Chris. [Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought], 2014. Jochrisam Publishers: Calabar. Paperback.

24. IKUENOBE, Polycarp. "An Examination of Menkiti's Conception of Personhood and Gyekye's Critique," [Method, Substance and the Future of African Philosophy, Edwin E. ETIEYIBO Ed.], pp187–208, 2018. Palgrave Macmillan: London. Ebook.

25. KAPHAGAWANI, D.H. “African Conceptions of a Person: A Critical Survey,” [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp332–342, 2004. Blackwell: Oxford. Ebook.

26. LEHRER, Keith, ed. [Freedom and Determinism], 1966. Random House: New York. Paperback.

27. MBITI, John S. [Introduction to African Religion], 1975. Heinemann: London. Paperback.

28. --------. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Heinemann: London. Paperback.

29. MENKITI, Ifeanyi.“Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” [African Philosophy: An Introduction, 3rd ed., Richard A. WRIGHT Ed.], pp171–181, 1984. University Press of America: Lanham, MD. Paperback.

30. METUH, E.I. [God and Man in African Religion], 1981. Geoffrey Chapman: London. Paperback.

31. METZ, Thaddeus, & MOLEFE, Motsamai. “Traditional African Religion as a Neglected Form of Monotheism,” [The Monist], pp393–409, 2021. Vol 104. Web.

32. NOWELL-SMITH, P. "Freewill and Moral Responsibility," [Mind], pp45–61, 1948. Vol 57. No 225. Paperback.

33. OFUASIA, Emmanuel. "An Argument for the Non-existence of the Devil in African Traditional Religions," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture, and Religions], pp57–76, 2022a. Vol 11. No 1. doi: 10.4314/ft.11i1.5. Web.

34. --------. "The Challenge of the 'End of Metaphysics' for Ethnophilosophy: A Discourse on the Process Implication of the Metaphysics of Terror," [Ethnophilosophy and the Search for the Wellspring of African Philosophy, Ada AGADA Ed.], pp271–285, 2022b. Springer: Cham, Switzerland. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-78897-1. Hardback.

35. OKELLO, Joseph B.O. “Analysis of African Reflections on Evil,” [African Journal of Evangelical Theology], pp63–84, 2003. Vol 22. No 2. Paperback.

36. OKERE, Theophilus. “The Structure of the Self in Igbo Thought,” [Identity and Change: Nigerian Philosophical Studies, I, Theophilus OKERE Ed.], pp151–164, 1996. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC**.** http://www.crvp.org/publications/Series-II/3-Contents.pdf**.** Ebook.

37. OLADIPO, Olusegun. “Religion in African Culture: Some Conceptual Issues,” [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp355–363, 2004. Blackwell: Oxford. Ebook.

38. SMART, J.J.C. "Free Will, Praise, and Blame," [Mind], pp291–306, 1961. Vol 70. No 279. Paperback.

39. VAN INWAGEN, Peter. [The Problem of Evil], 2006. Oxford University Press: New York. Paperback.

40. --------. “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism,” [Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition], pp185–199, 1975. Vol 27. No 3. Paperback.

41. WIREDU, Kwasi. “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion,” [African Studies Quarterly], pp17–46, 1998. Vol 1. No 4. http://africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/3.pdf. Web.

42. -------. “The Akan Concept of Mind,” [Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies], pp113–134, 1983. Vol 3. Paperback.

Rethinking God's Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic: An African Perspective

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.3s
Submitted 5 April 2022. Accepted 29 August 2022

Joyline GWARA
University of Zimbabwe
&
The Conversational School of Philosophy
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2245-1171
Email: joyandjay71@gmail.com

And

L. Uchenna OGBONNAYA
University of Pretoria
&
The Conversational School of Philosophy
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1322-2473
Email: lu.ogbonnaya@up.ac.za

Abstract
The reality and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic question God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence. Two questions that stare us in the face are a) is God omnibenevolent given the current reality? b) is God omnipotent? This paper addresses these questions from the African place using the African theory of duality and its underlying logic, Ezumezu. We argue that the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse effects (such as death, hardship and social isolation) do not negate God's benevolence and powerfulness. We assert that while the current reality cannot sustain a defence of the traditional theistic qualities of omnipotence and omnibenevolence, the notions of a powerful and benevolent God are not necessarily undermined by the reality of Covid-19. In the light of the African theory of duality and Ezumezu logic, we contend that the COVID-19 pandemic brings out the argument that inherent in God's benevolence is wickedness and inherent in God's powerfulness is weakness.
Keywords: God, omnibenevolence, omnipotence, COVID-19, evil

Introduction

COVID-19 is wreaking havoc the world over, causing untold social, political and economic disruptions. Since the advent of the pandemic, hundreds of millions of people have fallen sick and millions have lost their lives, leaving relatives and friends suffering from the pain of losing loved ones. The grim state of affairs caused by the pandemic inevitably leads to the questioning of the conception of God as omnipotent and omnibenevolent. This paper argues that while the magnitude of pain

and suffering caused by the pandemic puts the traditional theistic notions of omnibenevolence and omnipotence in question, the current state of affairs does not necessarily imply that God is neither benevolent nor powerful.

Scholars of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and African philosophers are divided when it comes to reconciling the fact of evil in the world with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God. We have African philosophers who promote theistic perspectives that present God as all-knowing, all-good and all-powerful (DANQUAH 1944; MBITI 1969, IDOWU 1973; AWOLALU AND DOPAMU 1979; METUH 1981; GYEKYE 1995; ODUWOLE 2007). In this COVID-19 period, the theistic scholars will be faced with the task of answering the questions: Is God able to prevent COVID-19 but is unwilling to do so? If this is the case, then he is not all-good but may be both good and wicked. Or is he willing to stop the pandemic but cannot do so? If this is the case, then he is not all-powerful but, in fact, possesses weakness. A second group of scholars and philosophers influenced by the decolonization movement[1] in African humanities have argued that the problem of omnipotence and evil does not arise in ATR and traditional African religious thought because Africans traditionally conceive God as a being limited in power and knowledge, one that is capable of doing both good and evil (see KATO 1975; SOGOLO 1993; BEWAJI 1998; WIREDU 1998; ABIMBOLA 2006; BALOGUN 2009; P'BITEK 2011; FAYEMI 2012; AGADA 2022a).

In this paper we argue that God remains benevolent and powerful even in the face of COVID-19. In defence of the idea of a partly benevolent God who is capable of evil, we argue that if this was not the case, God would be either thoroughly benevolent (all-good) or thoroughly wicked (all-evil). If he was thoroughly benevolent there would be no COVID-19 crisis since a God possessing the perfection of all-goodness would also possess the perfection of all-powerfulness and, therefore, be able to prevent COVID-19 from happening. If he was thoroughly evil, the category of all-evilness would be a negative perfection belonging to an all-powerful being that, having caused the COVID-19 pandemic, would never let it end, so that its harm would be perpetually maximized. In defence of the idea of a powerful, but not all-powerful, God we draw from the insights supplied by African philosophers who assert that God is a creator-deity even if a limited one. Only a powerful being could have created a world in which COVID-19 happened. If God

[1]The decolonization movement in African humanities is part of a broader intellectual awakening in the Global South that seeks the reassessment of assumptions and paradigms believed to be tainted by biased Western perspectives. In African philosophy, decolonization takes the route of conceptual analysis aimed at identifying invalid or inapplicable conceptual schemes imported from Western philosophy. Scholars like Wiredu (1998) and p'Bitek (2011) urge African philosophers of religion to undertake the work of eliminating inapplicable Western categories from African philosophy of religion and ATR. We thank Dr Ada Agada for drawing our attention to the decolonization trend.

was powerless there would be no world at all and no one would be here to talk about the pandemic.

We go beyond the group of scholars who believe that God is limited by grounding our argument in the African duality theory and its undergirding background Ezumezu three-valued logic. In that spirit, we argue that the African theory of duality which states that reality is dual or two-sided allows us to talk about a benevolent and powerful God even in the face of COVID-19. The theory is anchored on the trivalent logic as opposed to the bivalent Aristotelian logic. This trivalent logic helps us harmonize the conception of God as a powerful and benevolent being with the reality of the suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve the goal of this paper, we take a look at the arguments of the theistic African philosophers and scholars who believe that God is unlimited and the submissions of those that believe that God is limited. We discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and the implication for belief in an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. Finally, we explore the African theory of duality and its background logic of Ezumezu and argue for the compatibility of belief in a powerful and good God who is yet weak and able to do evil and the reality of COVID-19.

God's Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence in the African Religious Scheme

Mbiti (1969) famously noted that Africans are very religious and that the religious consciousness pervades every aspect of traditional African life. Mbiti is certainly referring to traditional African societies. Like most human societies, African communities have been intrigued by the idea of an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent creator of the world from time immemorial. As Africans do not have a written religious book like the Bible or the Koran, ATR scholars and philosophers of religion have depended heavily on oral sources like orature (oral literature), linguistic phenomena like wise sayings, proverbs and riddles, names for God and the general worldviews of traditional African societies as embedded in African languages. These sources have produced conflicting results about authentic African conceptions of God. For a while the transcendental view of God as omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent dominated the ATR literature. The transcendental perspective was championed by ATR scholars like Mbiti, Idowu, Dopamu and Awolalu. Later decolonization scholars challenged the established view. The decolonization camp reached the conclusion that Africans traditionally conceive God as a limited being after analyzing the orally transmitted resources that the theistic scholars depended on to reach their conclusion. The decolonization camp include philosophers like Wiredu and ATR scholars like p'Bitek. Both conflicting stances have been defended by African philosophers, with Gyekye (1995) and Metz and Molefe (2021) notably making a case for a traditional monotheistic interpretation of ATR.

This section will explore the notions of omnibenevolence and omnipotence as they apply to God. According to Mbiti, Africans hold that God is omnibenevolence – all-good, kind, and well-meaning. God's benevolence is within the context of his being and disposition towards all other existent realities that he

created. Africans come to this notion of God's benevolence by observing God's deeds and care for humans and other created things in the universe. About the views of God's benevolence prevalent in some African societies, Mbiti writes:

> For example, some of the people of Zaire say, 'Rejoice, God never does wrong to people!' And in Liberia they say, 'God causes rain to pour down on our fields, and the sun to shine. Because we see these things of his, we say that he is good!' In Ghana people look at the works of God and proclaim, 'God is good, because he has never withdrawn from us the good things which he gave us!' (MBITI 1975, 49)

Elsewhere, Mbiti posits that the Vugusu assert that material prosperity is from God; and the Nandi pray to God daily to grant fertility to women, cattle, and fields; while the Langi hold that only God grants rich harvests (MBITI 1969, 37). All these are evidence of God's goodness. In the same manner, the Ewe people strongly opine that "He (God) is good, for He (God) has never withdrawn the good things from us which He gave us" (WESTERMANN 1912, 197).

It is believed that God is absolutely good and the foundation and source of all goodness. Therefore, all good things emanate and flow from God to other creatures that manifest divine goodness. Emmanuel Edeh reinforces this point when he suggests that human capacity for goodness may not be simply innate but can be regarded as a reflection of God's goodness which he communicates to all created things. According to him, although humans express goodness, the human being is not the ultimate source of this goodness. God is the source of goodness, while humans express it in the world (EDEH 1985, 100-101; CHIMAKONAM and OGBONNAYA 2015).

It is believed that God's goodness is eternal. It has no end. God is never tired of doing good. This implies that God's benevolence is not limited by space and time. Although it is manifested in this temporal world, it transcends temporality and passes into eternity. Therefore, God's benevolence is ever-present. This means that it is in God's nature to be good. In saying that God is benevolent, Africans say that God is also merciful, kind, generous, and a provider (ISLAM AND ISLAM 2015, 6). In this light, Shafiul Islam and Didarul Islam writes: "In times of personal and natural problems or difficulties, people feel the need of His urgent help and feel Him as Merciful. God causes rain during drought, provides fertility to all animals and averts calamities" (2015, 6). If this is the case then, God cannot be associated with misfortunes and ill-happenings. Bolaji Idowu makes this point when he asserts that for the Yoruba, "God is the pure King…who is without blemish" (1994, 47).

Gyekye (1995, 114) defends the view that God is utterly good while analyzing Akan notions of free will and determinism. He suggests that the Akan subscribe to a moderate kind of theological determinism that God imposes on humans. Theological determinism in African philosophical discourse is often labelled predestination. The African idea of predestination is different from the Christian idea as there are no African references to eschatological concepts like

salvation, eternal damnation, hell, etc. Predestination in the African context simply references the belief that God gives every human being their destiny before their birth, which then conditions the course of events in a person's life from birth to death. Gyekye proposes that there is no rigid conditioning and that since God is good, the destinies he awards to humans are always good destinies. He attributes evil in the world to human malevolence rather than divine agency.

There is evidence that Africans conceive God as omnipotent. The word omnipotent is synonymous with all-powerfulness. That is, God transcends all and everything in power. Nothing is beyond God's ability. God is capable of doing all things, and there is absolutely nothing that God cannot do. However, Mbiti cautions that when it is asserted that God is all-powerful there is no commitment to the view that God can act capriciously in the exercise of his unlimited power. Commitment to the transcendental conception of God does not involve God being capable of evil. Instead, there is a commitment to the view that God can only do good in accordance with his goodness. In Mbiti's words, "it must be remembered that he (God) can only do what is good and right, and what is consistent with his own nature" (1975, 56). According to this perspective, God is all-powerful only within the context of doing good and hating evil.

Mbiti notes that the attribute of omnipotence is inferred by individuals in traditional societies from African linguistic and cultural phenomena. God's all-powerfulness comes out in wise sayings such as "Everything is possible with God', God is the Master of all things'" (MBITI 1991, 56). Since God created everything, God governs and controls everything. The point is that God created all that there is, including humans.

Gyekye reaches Mbiti's conclusion based on his critical interrogation of Akan linguistic and cultural phenomena. He notes the significance of worship incantations that reference God's omnipotence and special titles that indicate belief in a transcendent God. Such names include *Onyankopōn* (the only great being, the supreme being), *Ōbōadeē* (creator), *Ōdomankoma* (the absolute, the eternal), *Brekyirihunuade* (the omniscient), *Enyiasombea* (the omnipotent), *Otumfo* (the powerful being), *Atoapem* (the unsurpassable, the ultimate one). These superlatives obviously describe the traditional theistic God who is omnipotent and omniscient. Without mincing words, Gyekye writes:

> Onyame is the Absolute Reality, the origin of all things, the absolute ground, the sole and whole explanation of the universe, the source of all existence…Onyame transcends time and is thus free from the limitation of time, an eternity without beginning, without an end…While containing space, Onyame is not held to be spatial. He is not bound or limited to any particular region of space. He is omnipresent (*enyiasombea),* all-pervading. (1995, 70)

If a being with the unlimited powers invoked by Gyekye exists, why is there so much moral and physical evil in the world? The question is a legitimate one since Gyekye's God is a benevolent deity. Gyekye half-heartedly responds to the question in two ways. Firstly, God does not rigidly condition the course of events in the lives of individuals; instead, he allows them freedom to decide minute details which are not affected by the broader context of a conditioned life (1995, 114). Secondly, evil, at least the moral variety, can be attributed to wickedness on the part of human beings and the lesser deities created by God. One may object that as an omnipotent being, God could have created humans in such a way that they would not negatively express their free will in the performance of evil deeds. In this same manner, it should be possible for the perfect being described by
Gyekye to create lesser deities that are not given to mischief. Gyekye agrees that the omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God is at the top of the hierarchy of being and sustains all other beings below him, including the ubiquitous lesser deities.

Idowu's ultimacy thesis buttresses Gyekye's claim that the ubiquitous deities do not pose any threat to God's supremacy:

> I do not know of any place in Africa where the ultimacy is not accorded to God…the religion (ATR) can only be adequately described as monotheistic. I modify the 'monotheism' by the adjective 'diffused', because here we have a monotheism in which there exists other powers which derive from Deity. (1973, 135)

If the ubiquity of the lesser deities does not invalidate the ultimacy thesis, attributing the reality of evil in the world to the deities fails to demonstrate the compatibility of the magnitude of evil in the world with the belief in the existence of a transcendent God. Or, perhaps, Gyekye's interpretation of Akan religious phenomena is incorrect? Wiredu suggests that there is a better account of traditional Akan religion that upholds belief in a limited God rather than a transcendent being.

According to Wiredu, the very notion of a God existing beyond space and time is unintelligible within the traditional Akan metaphysical scheme because reality is necessarily spatio-temporal. As a spatio-temporal totality, matter has always existed and may well be a limiting factor in the universe. Where Gyekye posits the eternity of God and fails to account for God's origin, Wiredu posits the eternity of the universe and fails to account for the origin of the universe. However, the problem of positing beginninglessness is not the focus of this paper. By positing an eternally existing universe, Wiredu attempts to show that a creator-God (which the Akan believe in) does not have to be Gyekye's transcendent being. While God is indeed powerful as the creator or designer of the world, he is limited by the totality called the universe since he is just one entity in a universe filled with diverse entities. Wiredu notes:

> In the Akan conceptual framework, then, existence is spatial. Now, since whatever transcendence means…it implies existence beyond space, it follows that talk of any transcendent being is not just false but unintelligible, from an Akan point of view. (WIREDU 1996, 49–50)

Elsewhere he notes that:

> A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words and ideas. If God is conceived as a kind of cosmic architect who fashions a world order out of indeterminate raw material, the idea of absolute nothingness would seem to be avoidable. And this is, in fact, how the Akan metaphysicians seem to have conceived the matter. Moreover, *Oboade*, the Akan word that I provisionally translated as "creator", means the maker of things. *Bo* means to make and *ade* means thing, but in Akan to *boade* is unambiguously instrumental; you only make something with something. (1998, 32)

For Wiredu, therefore, God is limited in power and knowledge. The attribute of omnibenevolence cannot apply to him. He notes that while the Akan conceive God as good, his goodness is a restricted quality and similar to that possessed by a just ancestor (2010, 195). Wiredu's stance reflects the decolonization perspective which invites African scholars to eliminate imported Western categories from ATR and African philosophy of religion. Oladipo notes that the Yoruba believe that God's powers are limited by various forces, influences and essences in the world. He notes instructively:

> If omnipotence implies 'infinite powers,' then to say that Olódùmarè is omnipotent is to say that He is almighty in the sense that He is not subject to any constraints in the exercise of His powers. However, it is doubtful that Olódùmarè can be said to be all-powerful in this sense. A crucial consideration in this regard is the acknowledgment, by the people, of other powers and principalities – divinities, spirits, magic, witchcraft, and so on. Some of these powers and forces are treated as ends in themselves. Hence, the people endeavor, through sacrifice, to be on good terms with them in recognition of their powers to aid or hinder human activities. (OLADIPO 2004, 360)

Oladipo's stance is supported by Bewaji (1998) and Fayemi (2012). Where Wiredu is reluctant to clearly state that God is capable of doing evil, Bewaji and Fayemi assert that the Yoruba God is not a merciful God. The Yoruba God is good, impartial and capable of doing evil. The capacity for evil would be consistent with God's limitedness.

It becomes increasingly obvious that there is no single absolute conception of God in the ATR and African philosophy of religion literature (AGADA 2017, 2022b, 2022c; CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES and AGADA 2022). There are two dominant perspectives in the literature, with one perspective promoting the transcendence framework and the other proposing the limitation framework as the authentic African conception of God. Given the cultural rootedness of the two conflicting perspectives, Agada has argued that there is an antinomy of God's existence in African religious thought which demands a cautious approach from African philosophers of religion. In Agada's words, there is:

> [E]vidence 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. (2022a, 46)

It will appear that the limitation perspective best accounts for the reality of evil in the world. As earlier noted, appeals to the idea of free will and the malevolence of lesser deities do not provide persuasive reasons for an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God permitting the magnitude of evil that we find in the world. If God is limited in power and goodness, it makes sense that he is either not powerful enough to eliminate evil from the world or he does not see the point of eliminating evil from the world since he himself does evil or both together. Recognizing that there are two dominant and conflicting views of God in the literature will be helpful as we proceed to relate the COVID-19 pandemic to the idea of omnipotence and omnibenevolence.

God's Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a substantial challenge for governments, individuals, and society as a whole. The World Health Organization (WHO) first declared it a Public Health Emergency Concern and then later a pandemic. A pandemic is an epidemic that affects a massive number of people on a worldwide scale. COVID-19 is an illness that results from infection with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that was first isolated and identified in patients exposed at a seafood market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019.

COVID-19 represents a spectrum of clinical manifestations that typically include fever, dry cough, and fatigue, often with pulmonary involvement. It is highly contagious, and most individuals within the population at large are susceptible to infection. The virus that causes the illness has since mutated, with the Delta and Omicron variants ravaging the world and bringing death to millions even as billions of people are compelled to wear uncomfortable face masks to limit the spread of the dreaded virus. Wild animal hosts and infected patients are currently the main sources of the disease that is transmitted through respiratory droplets and direct contact. It has greatly increased morbidity and mortality over a wide geographical area. By 21 August 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) had recorded 212,357,893 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 4,439,843 deaths. Since its advent, the daily number of deaths due to COVID-19 has surpassed the number of daily deaths due to common causes. Since the advent of the pandemic in December 2019, people have been suffering the world over due to economic, social, and political

disruptions. As of 24 February 2022, 430,879,678 cases had been confirmed and 5,940,162 deaths had been logged (https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/**).**

COVID-19 presented many challenges that disrupted the day-to-day activities of people the world over. These challenges threaten all aspects of the economic and social fabric while bringing suffering to hundreds of millions in virtually all the countries of the world. In an attempt to contain the virus, governments are imposing strict measures in the form of lockdowns that necessitate disruption of important services in the health, education, transport, tourism, etc. sectors. These lockdowns led to the forced isolation of people around the world.

One of the major challenges brought to the fore by the pandemic is economic inequality at individual, household and national levels. The severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is seen in the numbers: more than 120 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty and a massive global recession is underway (FERREIRA 2020). As suffering and poverty have risen, some data show an increase in another extreme: the wealth of billionaires (FERREIRA 2020). With both extreme poverty and billionaire wealth on the rise, the pandemic's contribution to heightened social and economic inequality is obvious. The pandemic glaringly exposed the gap between the haves and the have-nots, both within and between countries (UNDP 2020). Lockdowns have also made the digital divide more apparent, with billions of people having no access to reliable broadband (UNDP 2020). The lack of access limits peoples' ability to work, continue with their education and socialize with loved ones, among other deprivations. Also, with the closure of schools and the divides in distance learning, UNDP (2020) estimates indicate that 86% of primary school-age children in low human development index countries are currently not getting an education, compared to 20% in countries with very high human development index.

Developing countries are suffering the most along with the already vulnerable worldwide: those that rely on the informal economy, women, those living with disabilities, refugees, the displaced, and those who suffer social stigmas (UNDP 2020). The effects of COVID-19 have not spared the health sector.

According to the United Nations, the world is facing a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations, with death a daily occurrence in hospitals with overworked and traumatized health personnel (UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT, N.P). Inequalities have always existed in the health sector; however, with the advent of COVID-19 these inequalities became more apparent, with individuals from black and minority ethnic groups, poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, deprived urban and rural locations, and vulnerable groups in the society experiencing the full force of the pandemic (MISHRA et al 2020). The inequalities in the health sector have led to disastrous consequences and exposed systemic injustice. Studies have noted higher mortality rates among black and minority ethnic groups, vulnerable members of the society such as refugees, asylum seekers, and individuals from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds (MISHRA et al 2020). The social gravity of the pandemic, alongside transmission mitigation

tactics such as social distancing and quarantine requirements, is already encouraging depersonalized care delivery, greater severity of patient and family caregiver distress, and overstretched resources due to focus on testing, triage, and viral treatment (ROSA 2020 et al).

In addition to inequalities, there is the suffering of both communities and individuals as they grieve the loss of millions of lives worldwide. COVID-19 magnifies a collective fear and anxiety about impending destruction due to healthcare capacity constraints (ROSA et al 2020). Rosa et al (2020) further note the fear and anxiety that grip one upon confirming that they have COVID-19. First, there is likely fear associated with prognosis given the media coverage. Second, there is anxiety related to worsening symptomatology and the possible need for hospitalization. Sick individuals experience rapid decompensation characterized by shortness of breath, delirium, and gastrointestinal distress. At the same time, family caregivers cannot see, hold, or comfort their loved ones since visitors are prevented from going inside hospitals in most cases (ROSA et al 2020). Families watch loved ones taken away in ambulances, knowing that may have been their last moment together (ROSA et al 2020). Death and dying have increased markedly in hospitals globally, and family caregivers' grief and bereavement processes have been deeply impacted (ROSA et al 2020). Indeed, the existential distress experienced by family caregivers has likely never been higher, as is the potential for post-traumatic stress disorder and prolonged grief disorder in those left behind.

All these scenarios highlighted above bring to the fore the nature of suffering. Suffering is defined by Cassell (2004) ‘‘as the state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person. Suffering requires consciousness of the self, involves emotions, has effects on the person’s social relationships, and has an impact on the body.” The suffering inflicted on humanity by COVID-19 is an instance of physical evil.

Humans cannot be blamed for the pandemic as it has not been demonstrated that the COVID-19 virus was engineered in the lab by rogue scientists and released for maximum harmful impact. The philosopher has an interest in exploring the ethical, religious, social and political implications of the pandemic. The philosopher of religion, in particular, is interested in the exploration of the implication of the pandemic for traditional theism, the belief in a creator of the world who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent (see AGADA 2019). Oduwole (2007, 2) discusses the theistic position in relation to the question of evil and lays out the problem thus:

1. God exists.
2. God is omnipotent – all-powerful, capable of performing any act, even those that violate natural laws.
3. God is omniscient – all-knowing, continuously aware of everything.
4. God is omnibeneficient – wholly good, holy, loving, absolutely righteous.
5. Evil exists.

Fayemi (2012, 2) compresses and restates Oduwole's premises thus:

i. God exists.
ii. God has infinite and perfect attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc.
iii. Evil exists.
iv.

What can be deduced from the respective thoughts of Oduwole and Fayemi is that despite God being omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, there is evil in the world. The problem of omnipotence and evil thus arises. Writing from the decolonization perspective, Fayemi argues that God is powerful but not all-powerful. He is not all-good, but good and capable of doing evil. We demonstrated in the previous section that the limitation perspective has merit because it solves the puzzle of the reality of a transcendent God and evil in the world. Since COVID-19 is real it makes sense to think that God is unable to prevent the physical evil from occurring because it is beyond his power to do so. This paper makes the assumption that God exists. Thus, we are not going into arguments about God's existence. If God was omnipotent and omnibenevolent, there would be no COVID-19 and the massive suffering that the pandemic inflicted on humanity. If the omnipotent God was all-evil, there could still be COVID-19. But once an omnipotent and all-evil God caused COVID-19 to happen, the suffering resulting from the pandemic would not only be severe but the severity would be sustained in perpetuity. This is the case because, to be consistent with his thoroughly evil nature, an all-powerful and all-evil God would maximize the evil of COVID-19. Obviously, COVID-19 is not the sort of evil that would go on as a largely effective vaccination regime, social isolation, lockdowns and the development of natural immunity are all beginning to minimize the harmful impact of the COVID-19 virus. A God limited in goodness, that is one who is good but also does evil sometimes, would be the kind of being that can be a witness to COVID-19 and do little or nothing to stop the evil, because either he is unable to stop it or he sees no big deal in the occurrence of occasional pandemic disasters, or both together.

With the notions of omnipotence and omnibenevolence proving inadequate for the philosopher of religion, one is compelled to accept the applicability of the concepts of powerfulness (but not all-powerfulness) and goodness (but not all-goodness). Both the transcendence and limitation perspectives in African thought hold that God is a creator. God must be a powerful being to be able to create a world where COVID-19 pandemics happen. If he was powerless he would not be able to create the world and there would be no human beings to observe the world and notice a pandemic.

The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic does not negate God's benevolence and powerfulness. Instead, it questions the absoluteness of God's all-goodness and all-powerfulness. It questions how an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God can allow the COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying suffering. An absolutely benevolent God cannot allow humans to suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is only a God who possesses wickedness that can allow humans to suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that God cannot be absolutely powerful, without weakness. If God was omnipotent, the COVID-19 pandemic could not have occurred and continue to claim human life. In the next section, we will show how Ezumezu logic undergirds the kind of thinking that informs the view that God can be both good and bad, powerful and weak.

Reconceptualizing God's Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence in the African Philosophical Place

This section focuses on the reconceptualizing of God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence from the perspective of African thought. With the challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence, rethinking these two superlative attributes becomes inevitable. How ought we think about God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence in this context? We shall engage the African duality theory and its undergirding background Ezumezu three-valued logic to reconceptualize the aforementioned attributes. What then is this African theory of duality? What is the nature of its background Ezumezu logic?

The African duality theory holds that reality is dual or two-sided. About duality, Edeh notes that "for all beings... existence is a dual and interrelated phenomenon... It has a dual existence, dual in the sense that the reality of its existence is a phenomenon in the visible world and also a reality in the invisible world" (1985, 77). For instance, reality consists of matter and spirit, physical and non-physical aspects, invisible and visible aspects, nonsensible and sensible aspects. Also, being consists of substance and accident. Furthermore, the world consists of physical and non-physical, invisible and visible, nonsensible and sensible qualities. Each of the pairs is believed to be inseparable, integrated, and complementary to each other. Little wonder, Udobata Onunwa (2005) uses the term inseparable duality to describe the phenomenon; Chris Ijiomah (1996, 2006, 2014, 2016) favours the term harmonious monism while Alexander Animalu and Jonathan Chimakonam (2012) call the phenomenon complementary duality.

The idea is that the two sides of reality always have a relationship of inseparable coexistence. Aristotle (1947) famously argued in his *Metaphysics* that substance is what possesses ultimate reality while the accident is dependent on substance. Since accidents are predicable on substance, the latter is what has being. Innocent Asouzu, influenced by African ideas of duality, reconceptualized being as consisting of substance and accident in a mutually complementary relationship (2007, 2011). This dual notion of being reconstructs Aristotle's bifurcating and polarizing ontology and affirms the duality that colors the African conception of reality. Thus, scholars like Edeh, Asouzu and Onunwa assert that reality, in whatever forms, always exist as dual.

African conception of reality as dual does not operate with the bivalent logic and the Aristotelian laws of thought underlying dualism. Scholars like Asouzu regard bivalent logic as an exclusivist logic of 'either this or that.' This logic that grounds dualism also grounds belief in a God possessing the superlative attributes of all-benevolence, without wickedness, and all-powerfulness, without weakness. Aristotelian bivalent logic underpins God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence in that it absolutizes an aspect of reality and neglect the other. For instance, Aristotle

equates substance to being even in the absence of accident (ARISTOTLE 1947). This is the manner Aristotle's bivalent logic grounds God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence. With respect to God's omnibenevolence, this bivalent logic absolutizes God's love, negating God's wickedness and therefore leads to the view that God is all-loving – omnibenevolent. Also, regarding God's

omnipotence, this logic elevates God's power to an absolute instance, neglecting God's weakness and asserts that God is all-powerful – omnipotent.

Contrary to the above, African duality rests on a trivalent logic that goes beyond exclusion and embraces inclusion. Hence, it is an inclusive logic of 'this and that.' Unlike the bivalent logic that bifurcates and polarizes reality, trivalent logic unifies and harmonizes entities within reality.

Two African logic systems capture the nature of this trivalent logic, namely, harmonious monism (IJIOMAH 1996, 2006, 2014, 2016) and Ezumezu logic (CHIMAKONAM 2015, 2018, 2019, CHIMAKONAM and OGBONNAYA 2021). However, Ezumezu logic is more plausible because of its well-articulated three laws of thoughts that ground it. Consequently, our focus will be on Ezumezu logic. The three laws of thought are njikoka, nmekoka, and onona-etiti (CHIMAKONAM 2018, 2019; CHIMAKONAM & CHIMAKONAM 2022). For example, the law of njikoka (integrativity and relationality) holds that two seemingly opposed variables share a relationship of integration within a whole. The metatheoretic representation of this law is (T) A ↕ (T) A |→ (T) (A^B). This implies that "A is true iff A is true wedge-implies A and B is true" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 100). Also, the law of nmekoka (contextuality and complementarity) asserts that two seemingly opposed variables participate in a relationship of complementing each other within a whole. The metatheoretic representation of this law is (T) A ↕ (T) A |→ (T) (A^B)or T |Ↄ F. This connotes that " C is or equals a complement of T and F" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 100). Furthermore, the law of onona-etiti (included middle and complementarity) states that two seemingly opposed variables share a middle ground. The metatheoretic representation of this law is (T) A ^ (T) ~A or (T) A ^ (F) A. This implies that "A is both true and false (both and)" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 100). Here, the two variables coexist and complement each other without losing their identity. They become independent variables once strict contextualization occurs.

Chimakonam labels the variables ezu and izu. These variables cannot exist on their own except in relationship with each other. Hence, they always exist as an inseparable oneness known as ezumezu. Thus, ezumezu is a middle ground, which results from the complementary integration of ezu and izu (CHIMAKONAM 2019; cf. AGADA 2015). Therefore, to talk about ezu and izu is to speak beyond their singularities. That is, we cannot talk about either ezu or izu without the opposite other in ezumezu.

From the foregoing, it becomes apparent that Ezumezu logic is a trivalent logic with three values, namely ezu, izu and ezumezu. The values, ezu and izu, according to Chimakonam, are the sub-contrary values that function as the contextual modes. Also, the value, ezumezu, Chimakonam notes, is the complementary mode (2019, 97-99). In Chimakonam's words:

> Granted that the two standard values in African thought system are subcontraries thus capable of [complementing] each other in the third value called ezumezu; it does not annihilate the inherent two values of Western logic. It only means that inferences switch from one platform to the other. So we break the modes into two to account for this namely: (i) the contextual and (ii) the complementary modes of thought. Standing on their own, the two sub-contrary values, called ezu and izu or true and false are treated as peripheries to the centre. …. At such a platform,
> each of the two standard values is in a contextual mode of interpreting variables on contextual basis. But joined together through the conjunctive motion in the intermediary third vaue, the product called ezumezu is said to be in a complementary mode treating variables no longer at a contextual but at a complementary level until complementation breaks down and variables return to the contextual modes through disjunctive motion. (2019, 99)

We must note that ezu and izu in their singularities are the exclusive true and false values (T or F), while ezumezu is the inclusive true and false value (TF or Tand F). It is the complementarily integrated value, ezumezu, that depicts the supplementary laws of thought discussed above. Although there is a dynamic relationship between ezu and izu, their coexistence brings about ezumezu. Thus, ezumezu is a duality of ezu and izu that are in a complementarily integrated relationship. This onto-logical discourse substantiates the claim that reality is dual.

We might ask if there is any time when Africans see reality as dominantly one side of the duality? For instance, can Africans see reality as either spiritual or physical? The answer is yes. However, this does not deny the reality of duality (CHIMAKONAM 2013). The point is what seems to be either physical or spiritual is also dual. Ijiomah explains this when he says that what is physical has inherent spirituality and what is spiritual has inherent physicality (IJIOMAH 2006, 2014). Thus, reality is always inseparably dual. This applies to all reality and all possible conceptions of reality.

Applying this onto-logical discourse can help us understand that inherent in God's benevolence and powerfulness are wickedness and weakness. For instance, if we talk about God's benevolence within the context of African duality theory, we speak of it with reference to God's wickedness. God is benevolent but also wicked. God's wickedness is inherent in his benevolence. This is apparent in the fact that the benevolent God who is powerful is failing to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic from occurring and failing to stop it completely now that it has happened. But because this benevolent God is also wicked, God takes delight in seeing people suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, God is unwilling to take away the COVID-19 virus and ease human suffering. This does not make God all-evil and negate God's goodness. God is good and wicked at the same time as noted in the previous section. Therefore, a benevolent God is also wicked in line with the African duality theory.

Also, a powerful God is not devoid of weakness. God, who is powerful, also shows weakness when he fails to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic from occurring and refuses to take it away as it has occurred. God allows the COVID-19 pandemic to occur and remain since it is beyond his power to prevent the pandemic by divine fiat. Therefore, inherent in a powerful God is weakness (see section 2).

The question that readily comes to mind is, why do some African scholars regard God as omnibenevolent and omnipotent and not wicked and weak in addition? The simple answer is, they think with the exclusivist bivalent logic that underpins dualism. For them, what is good cannot be evil, following the exclusivist 'either this or that' bivalent logic. Thus, for them, a benevolent and powerful God cannot be associated with wickedness and weakness. However, in the African worldview, this is not the case. The African duality theory and its undergirding inclusivist 'this and that' logic supply an idea of reality that holds that a good thing can have an evil dimension. Thus, just as *ezu* and *izu* coexist in *ezumezu*, benevolence and wickedness and powerfulness and weakness are pairs of attributes that coexist in God. Therefore, following African duality theory, God cannot be either benevolent or wicked, or powerful or weak. Instead, God is both benevolent and wicked and powerful and weak. This is because it is in the nature of things to be dual (EDEH 1985), and God is not an exception. One possible criticism that could be raised against our position is, how is it different from the respective but related positions of Bewaji (1998) and Fayemi (2012)? Although we agree with Bewaji and Fayemi that God is not omnibenevolent and omnipotent, we take this argument a step further. First, we are of the view that benevolence has its contrary or complementary opposite, which is wickedness. Also, powerfulness has its contrary or complementary opposite, weakness. Therefore, we ground this thought using African duality theory and Ezumezu logic, which makes room for the coexistence of opposites that are contraries but not contradictories. Hence, in God, the attributes of benevolence and wickedness coexist. Also, in God, the attributes of power and weakness coexist. What is glaring here is that with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused so much suffering and pain, we have no choice but to rethink the attributes of omnibenevolence and omnipotence using the African duality theory and Ezumezu logic.

Another possible criticism is, does our view not strip the concept of God of absoluteness? Well, if we were thinking within a dualist and bivalent logic system, this criticism could have been warranted. This is because dualism and Aristotle's bivalent logic elevate and absolutize an aspect of reality, in this context, God's love and power, while their respective opposite other, God's wickedness and weakness, are negated. However, this is not what reality depicts. An aspect of reality does not equate to the totality of reality. Likewise, God's love without God's wickedness, and God's powerfulness without God's weakness do not capture God's reality. The point is that the criticism does not count since we are thinking in line with duality and an inclusive trivalent (Ezumezu) logic. The reality of the sufferings that come with COVID-19 pandemic helps us to affirm God's wickedness and weakness, which have been neglected by many African philosophers of religion.

Conclusion

So far, the question that guided our discussion is, can omnibenevolence and omnipotence, as attributes of God, be upheld in the face of the suffering that come with the COVID-19 pandemic? We teased out conceptions of God in Africa that present God as transcendent and limited and asserted that the limitation view can be helpful in accounting for belief in a benevolent God in the COVID-19 era. We discussed the COVID-19 pandemic, stating what it is, the nature of transmission, and the negative impact on humanity. We explored how the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic affects the idea that God is omnibenevolent and omnipotent.

Using African duality theory and its undergirding inclusivist 'this and that' logic, we argued that God is both benevolent and wicked and powerful and weak. Duality involves the complementary integration of seemingly opposed variables within a whole. Consequently, we contended in this paper that God possesses the attributes of benevolence and power alongside their seeming opposites, wickedness and weakness.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. ABIMBOLA, Kola. [Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account], 2006. Iroko Academic Publishers: Birmingham. Paperback.

2. AGADA, ADA. [Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis and Values in African Philosophy], 2015. Paragon House: St Paul, MN. Paperback.

3. ---------. “The Apparent Conflict of Transcendentalism and Immanentism in Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu’s Interpretation of the Akan Concept of God,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp23–38, 2017. Vol 6. No 1. doi: 10.4314/ft.v6i1.2. Web.

4. ---------. “Kant and the Classical Metaphysical Proofs of God’s Existence: How the Proofs can Play a Regulative Function in the Sphere of Pure/Speculative Reason,” [Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development], pp88–106, 2019. Vol 2. No 2. Paperback.

5. ---------. “Bewaji and Fayemi on God, Omnipotence, and Evil,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp41–56, 2022a. Vol 11. No 1. doi: 10.4314/ft.v11i1.4. Web.

6. ---------. [Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy: Beyond Universalism and Particularism], 2022b. Routledge: London and New York. doi: 10.4324/9781003172123. Hardback.

7. --------. “Rethinking the Concept of God and the Problem of Evil from the Perspective of African Thought,” [Religious Studies], pp1–17, 2022c. Online version. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412522000294. Web.

8. ANIMALU, Alexander O. E., & CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan O. “4x4 Magic Square Representation of Complementary Duality of African Thought Logic,” [African Journal of Physics], pp141–168, 2012. Vol 5. Paperback.

9. ARISTOTLE. [Metaphysics, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, W. D. ROSS Ed.], 1947. Clarendon. Oxford. Paperback.

10. ASOUZU, Innocent I. [Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology, Beyond World Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Imposition], 2007. Transaction Publishers: London. Paperback.

11. --------. [Ibuanyidanda and the Philosophy of Essence (Philosophy, the Science of Missing Links of Reality). 50th Inaugural Lecture], 2011. University of Calabar Press: Calabar. Web.

12. AWOLALU, J. O., & DOPAMU, P. A. [West African Traditional Religion], 1979. Onibonoje Press: Ibadan. Paperback.

13. BALOGUN, O. A. “The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil,” [Lumina], pp1–20, 2009. Vol 20. No 2. Web.

14. BEWAJI, John A.I. "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil," [African Studies Quarterly], pp1–17, 1998. Vol 2. No 1. http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.pdf**.** Web.

15. CASSELL, E.J. [The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine], 2004. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Paperback.

16. CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan O. "Integrative Humanism: Extension and Clarifications," [Journal of Integrative Humanism – Ghana], pp74–84, 2013. Vol 3. No 1. Paperback.

17. ----------. "The Criteria Question in Africa Philosophy: Escape from the Horns of Jingoism and Afrocentrism," [Atuolu Omalu: Some Unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy, Jonathan O. CHIMAKONAM Ed.], pp101–124, 2015. University Press of America: Lanham, MD. Paperback.

18. ----------. "The Philosophy of African Logic: A Consideration of Ezumezu Paradigm," [Philosophical Perceptions on Logic and Order, Jeremy HORNE Ed.], pp96–121, 2018. IGI Global: Hershey, PA. Hardback.

19. ----------. Ezumezu: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies], 2019. Springer: Cham, Switzerland. Hardback.
20. CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan O., & CHIMAKONAM, Amara E. "Examining the Logical Argument of the Problem of Evil from an African Perspective," [Religious Studies], pp1–14, 2022. Online version. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412522000300**.** Web.

21. CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan O., & OGBONNAYA, Uchenna L. "A Conceptual and Contextual Meaning of "Mmadu" in the Igbo Reality Scheme: Further Contribution to URAM Igbo Studies," [Ultimate Reality and Meaning], pp268–285, 2015. Vol 34. No 3-4. Paperback.

22. ----------. [African Metaphysics, Epistemology, and New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy], 2021. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland. Hardback.

23. CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES, Luis, & AGADA, Ada. "African Philosophy of Religion: Concepts of God, Ancestors, and the Problem of Evil," [Philosophy Compass, e12864], pp1–11, 2022. Online version. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12864. Web.

24. DANQUAH, J.B. [The Akan Doctrine of God], 1944. Lutterworth: London. Paperback.

25. EDEH, Emmanuel. [Towards an Igbo Metaphysics], 1985. Loyola University Press: Chicago, IL. Paperback.

26. FAYEMI, A. K. "Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E. O. Oduwole," [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1–15, 2012. Vol 41. No 1. Web.

27. FERREIRA, F. H. G. 2020. "Inequality in the Time of COVID-19. Accessed at: https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2021/06/inequality-. Web

28. GYEKYE, Kwame. [An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme, rev. ed.], 1995. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA. Paperback.

29. IDOWU, E. B. [African Traditional Religion: A Definition], 1973. SCM Press: London. Paperback.

30. ---------. [Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief], 1994. Wazobia Publication: London. Paperback.

31. IJIOMAH Chris O. [Contemporary Views about Philosophy of Education], 1996. Uptrico Press: Calabar. Paperback.

32. ----------. "An Excavation of Logic in African Worldview," [African Journal of Religion, Culture and Society], pp29–35. 2006, Vol 1. No 1. Paperback.

33. ----------. [Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought], 2014. Jochrisam Publishers: Calabar. Paperback.

34. ----------. [Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought], 2016. Xlibris. Web.

35. ISLAM, Shafiul, & ISLAM, Md. Didarul. "African Traditional Concept of God: A Critical Analysis," [Green University Review of Social Sciences], pp1–18. 2015. Vol 02. No 01. Web.

36. KATO, B. H. [Theological Pitfalls in Africa], 1975. Evangel Publishers: Nairobi. Paperback.

37. MBITI, John. S. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Morrison & Gibb Ltd: Great Britain.

38. ----------. [Introduction to African Religion, 2nd edition], 1991(1970). Heinemann Educational Publisher: Oxford. Paperpack.

39. ----------. [Introduction to African Religion], 1975. Heinemann Educational Publisher: London. Paperpack.

40. METUH, Emefie I. [God and Man in African Religion], 1981. Geoffrey Chapman: London. Paperback.

41. METZ, Thaddeus, & MOLEFE, Motsamai. "Traditional African Religion as a Neglected Form of Monotheism," [The Monist], pp393–409, 2021. Vol 104. doi: 10.1093/monist/onab007. Web.

42. MISHRA, V. et al. "Health Inequalities During COVID-19 and their Effects on Morbidity and Mortality," [Journal of Healthcare Leadership], 2020. Vol 13. Web.

43. ODUWOLE, Ebunoluwa O. "The Dialectics of *Ire* (Goodness) and *Ibi* (Evilness): An African Understanding of the Philosophical Problem of Evil," [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1–13, 2007. Vol 36. No 1. Web.

44. OLADIPO, Olusegun. "Religion in African Culture: Some Conceptual Issues," [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp355–363, 2004. Blackwell: Oxford. Ebook.

45. ONUNWA, Udobata R. [Tradition, Culture and Underdevelopment of Africa], 2005. Arima: Suffolk. Paperback.

46. P'BITEK, Okot. [Decolonizing African Religions: A Short History of African Religions in Western Scholarship], 2011. Diasporic Africa Press: New York. Paperback.

47. ROSA, W. E., FERRELL, B. R., & APPLEBAUM, A. J. "The Alleviation of Suffering during the COVID-19 Pandemic," [Palliat Support Care], pp376-378, 2020. Vol 18. No 4. Web.

48. SOGOLO, G. S. [Foundations of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought], 1993. Ibadan University Press: Ibadan. Paperback.

49. UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME. 2020. "Coronavirus vs Inequality." Accessed at: https://feature.undp.org/coronavirus-vs-inequality/. Web.

50. UNITED NATIONS. “Everyone Included: Social Impact of COVID-19.” Accessed at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included-COVID-19.html**.** Web.

51. WESTERMANN, Diedrich. [The Shilluk People], 1912. Negro University Press: Westport, CT. Paperback.

52. WIREDU, Kwasi. “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion,” [African Studies Quarterly], pp17–46, 1998. Vol 1. Issue 4. http://africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/3.pdf. Web.

53. ---------. “The Moral Foundations of an African Culture,” [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I, Kwasi WIREDU, & Kwame GYEKYE Eds], pp193–206, 2010. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. Ebook.

54. ----------. [Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective], 1996. Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis. Paperback.

Evil, Death, and Some African Conceptions of God

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.4s
Submitted 12 April 2022. Accepted 6 September 2022

Hasskei M. MAJEED
Department of Philosophy and Classics
University of Ghana, Accra
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1409-1295
Email: mmajeed@ug.edu.gh

Abstract
The age-old philosophical problem of evil, especially prominent in Western philosophy, as resulting from the intellectual irreconcilability of some appellations of God with the presence of evil – indeed, of myriads of evil – in the world, has been debated upon by many African religious scholars; particularly, philosophers. These include John Mbiti, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, E. B. Idowu and E.O. Oduwole. While the debate has often been about the existence or not of the problem of evil in African theology, not much philosophical discussion has taken place regarding death and its implications for African conception(s) of God. This paper attempts to contribute to the discussion of those implications. It explores the evilness of death, as exemplified in the African notion of "evil death," and argues that the phenomenon of death presents itself in complex but interesting ways that do not philosophically ground its characterization as evil. Therefore, the problem of evil would not arise in African thought on account of the phenomenon of death.
Keywords: The Problem of evil, death, God, evil death, Akan theology, African theodicies

Introduction

Death is a phenomenon that is as factual as the capacity for organic growth of the human being. So, a balanced study of human life would not be achieved without a serious attempt to bring the issue of death to the same prominence as, say, life. It is therefore pertinent for, perhaps incumbent on, African philosophers to devote thought to it. In doing so, some related concepts or questions which do receive attention in the African philosophical literature will even be tinged more with lucidity and receive a more comprehensive exploration. Such concepts include personhood, vitality, and the afterlife.

The physical and emotional impact of death has the tendency to influence people's perception about its value – often negatively – but the philosophical interest in the subject of death extends beyond this impact. Philosophical questions raised in this direction have as their object a broader goal of understanding its origin, nature, and place in the cosmological thoughts of human cultures. This implies that it is not enough to identify the impact of death, but it is philosophically more rewarding to understand it and examine the strengths of arguments that are advanced in connection with it. According to Ademola Fayemi (2012, 6) death is evil; and, in cultures such as the Yoruba where it is held that God is partly evil, the existence of death would not be inconsistent with the

character of God.[1]However, in African philosophies where God is believed to be good (MBITI 1969, 29) and is conceived to be the source of death, logical problems begin to emerge. Other appellations of God that will be discussed in the next section, combine with His alleged goodness to create further logical problems. God is therefore conceived differently in African thought. In this paper, I examine the implications of these different conceptions of God, and argue that death, especially death which in Akan thought is perceived as "evil death," cannot be regarded as an evil creation of God.

In section one, I discuss the philosophical problem of evil from an African perspective. This is followed by an analysis, in section two, of the argument that the problem is resolved in African philosophy. Section three explains the concept of death, while section four presents the concept of "evil death" from an Akan perspective. The implications of death, evil death and some African conceptions of God are handled in section five.

The Problem of Evil in African Philosophy

There is an ongoing debate about whether the problem of evil exists in African theology and, subsequently, about the potential for African thought to provide a solution to the problem. The problem whose essence is captured by Richard Swinburne as being about how consistent the presence of evil is with the existence of God (1987, 174), ultimately questions other attributes of God such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omni-benevolence. For some unexplained reasons, however, Kwame Gyekye excludes omniscience from his statement of the problem. He claims (1995, 123) the problem is about the following propositions:

God is omnipotent.
God is wholly good.
Evil exists.

The above constatives considered as a unit of thought provide some insight into the problem, but it is not enough. For if God is deemed to be wholly good and omnipotent, it is possible to argue that he should not be willing or feel compelled to stop evils that he did not anticipate will accompany things that he brought into being. And it may be asked why God should not be sympathized with but rather blamed for effects that he had no idea about or intend. It may then be argued that God created the earth, for example, but not earthquakes and should be responsible for what he knowingly did, just as we in normal life would not blame a person for his or her unintended actions. But Gyekye might be forgiven if he is understood to be interested in directly capturing the import of moral evil – that is, whether God can or should prevent moral evil. Even so, the inclusion of omniscience is, in my view, still important. Otherwise, one may not be able to challenge the possible troubling theodicy that God created humans (as moral agents) without knowing all that they were going to do with their free will.

[1] This is one of the reasons why some Yoruba philosophers prefer "high deity" to God in their description of *Olodumare.*

The problem of evil has been extensively discussed in Western theology where theodicies proposed have often been found to be unsatisfactory. Largely, they have been about a range of exculpating claims; for instance, that evil results from wrong choices of action freely made by humans (something close to misuse of human freedom),[2] that evil is an illusion (BALOGUN 2009, 12), and that evil is not a substance but a privation of being (according to Plotinus and Augustine, as cited by FAYEMI 2012, 4). This paper does not aim to give a historical account of the problem of evil, except to add that the above theodicies have aptly been criticized by philosophers such as Epicurus (HICK 1966, 5), Hume (1973, 186), Russell (1957, 32) and Schopenhauer (BALOGUN, 2009 13). Since the theodicies have arguably achieved little success, if any at all, in resolving the problem of evil, religionists continue to search for new ways of appreciating and presenting the nature of God, while their critics are inspired to hold firmer their arguments against the existence of God.

In the attempt to understand the nature of evil and its relation to the Supreme Being, a key question that has guided researchers is whether God created evil or not. I acknowledge that sometimes it is asked whether God permitted evil – but invariably the two perspectives (that is, the creation and permission of evil) are thought to have the same effect on life, the natural world, and the character of God. In this regard, an affirmative answer, for instance, to the question about God's creation of evil would be presumed sufficient for God's responsibility for evil, and vice versa. However, the question "Did God create evil?", in the current context, requires prior attention to be paid to some other questions. For, the question presumes for instance that God is personal and creator (at least, of evil). However, the issue of creation is never at all settled in contemporary African philosophy. It is, for instance, a matter of contention between two of the most influential African philosophers, Kwasi Wiredu and Gyekye. While Wiredu would prefer to describe the Akan Supreme Being as a "cosmic architect", Gyekye endorses the attribute of creator (WIREDU 1998; GYEKYE 1995). By this, Gyekye implies that the Supreme Being is the creator of all things and accepts the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* – contrary to Wiredu who argues that He fashioned the world from some pre-existing material.

The second question that requires our prior attention, and is quite related to the above, is that of identifying what sort of things the Supreme Being could possibly create. Knowing this is crucial if we are to tell whether evil falls within the class of entities brought into being by the Supreme Being. This question of the scope of His creation, if He did at all, has in most cases been discussed in some context of theodicy. In Yoruba thought, while some philosophers such as Sophie Oluwole (1995, 20 cited by O. BALOGUN 2009, 6 and B. BALOGUN 2014, 65) deny the presence of the problem of evil, by holding, among other reasons, that *Olodumare* (the High Deity) was not the creator of the world, others such as Ademola Fayemi (2012, 7) explicitly makes *Olodumare* a joint creator of the world with other primordial deities. In a recent publication of Thaddeus Metz and Motsamai Molefe titled "Traditional African Religion as a Neglected Form of

[2] For more on this, see Oladele Balogun (2009, 12).

Monotheism" they advance the former position about the Supreme Being in African philosophy: that "God's creativity, and hence omnipotence, does not extend to originating the physical universe" (2021, 397). There are implications for these views though. Unlike the belief that *Olodumare* did not create the world, the joint creator characterization of Him does not absolve Him of responsibility for the existence of evil. There could also be a further issue with the idea of a joint creator if Wiredu's caution is to be heeded (WIREDU 1998, 29-30); which is that "creation" is a term that historically invokes the notion of prior nothingness from which the Supreme Being brought all existents into being. But, for Wiredu, this is misleading because the African conception of Supreme Being, at least the Akan *Onyame*, is a cosmic architect who moulded things from pre-existing material(s). Nevertheless, typical in African philosophical literature of questions that are very debatable, one can always expect further divergences as Gyekye (1995) would add to the debate by criticizing the rejection of an *ex nihilo* creator-God and, by extension, the joint creator characterization of God. He interprets Akan language, beliefs, and practices to project a sole, *ex nihilo* creator.

The final and most critical question, which is whether God created evil, can be answered satisfactorily only if the reality of evil is affirmed. However, the reality of evil has been denied by some philosophers as if to suggest that that translates to a potent theodicy. This denial comes in varying degrees, nonetheless. In African philosophy, we see examples of such denials in the works of Babalola Balogun (2014, 60) where evil is said to be relativistic, such that what one may want to call evil would not be seen by another as such, thereby denying the objective reality of evil. Perhaps, a more direct denial which is about the substance of evil can be found in Augustine (also an African) and those who Oladele Balogun (2009, 12) identifies as contemporary Christian scientists. John Hick (1993, 42) rejected this view outright and in recent times, Fayemi (2012, 4) has also disagreed with Augustine and Plotinus (who held a similar view) while affirming the reality of evil from a Yoruba perspective. Evil, then, may be considered real.

Very often, we read in the literature, as explained above, that the Supreme Being is in African philosophical perspectives personal and can "create". Yet, the reality of evil may not lead an African thinker to the position that the Supreme Being created evil. Two reasons account for this position. First, I see in Akan philosophy how Kofi Busia (1963, 148) shifts responsibility for evil from the Supreme Being (*Onyame*) to the deities and humans, how in Yoruba thought Dasaolu and Oyelakun (2015, 26, 29-31) attribute moral evil to humans and evil in the cosmos to what they call "personal gods", mischievous spirits, and to punishment for actions taken by humans in their previous lives. Secondly, according to Oladele Balogun (2009, 7), "Ajala, the maker of destiny in Yoruba myth of creation can be taken as the agent indirectly responsible for evil, that is, human suffering and not God." Unless there is a typographical error in the sentence, which I suspect is the case, I wonder the purpose it will serve for Balogun to say an agent is there whose function is to act indirectly. Would the

quotation, then, not suggest that *Olodumare* rather acts directly? If so, how does Ajala's "indirect" responsibility absolves *Olodumare* of any blame as the authors are trying to establish? Perhaps, the authors intended writing "directly" if my thinking is right. And this, accordingly, confirms the authors' shifting of blame.

It is important to note that while Busia's position is motivated by the desire to eliminate the problem of evil from Akan theology, Gyekye (1995, 125-128) rather affirms the existence of the problem while, at the same time, appealing to human free will to also shift responsibility for evil to humans. For resorting to the free will argument, Wiredu criticizes Gyekye both rightly and wrongly. Wiredu (1998, 40) is right about the fact that the free will defence "does not provide satisfactory answer to the question why God does not intervene" when humans plan to do evil? However, his charge that the free will defence "does not begin to deal with physical evil" does not seem justified to me. As a result of Gyekye's explicit indication that he is discussing moral evil, it is not clear why his solution ought to deal with physical evil. It simply need not begin to deal with such evil, even though it is possible for moral (or human) evil to cause some natural evil (Hick, 1993, 45). But I do not deny that it would have been interesting if Gyekye had explained how he understood Akan thinkers to treat natural and other evils, and their implications for the goodness of God.

The second reason why evil may not be traced to God can be inferred from an earlier observation about Yoruba theology where the Supreme Being (*Olodumare*) is only responsible for some evils (Oluwole, Balogun) – viz. evils emanating from that which he brought into being. This only makes Him partially responsible for evil. A similar situation is what the joint creator argument brings about. Furthermore, assuming that *Olodumare's* portion of creation did not take place at the same time or is continuous, it should be possible for the other divinities to create or to have created some 'entities', which *Olodumare* required or will require, so to speak, to create his portion of existents. In this case, it would not necessarily be wrong to attribute the evil found in those entities "created" by *Olodumare* to defects originally left in the materials obtained from the other divinities who are deemed to be creators (i.e., Obatala, Esu and Ifa [B. BALOGUN 2014, 7]). Such evils may possibly be passed on to those deities.

It may be objected that *Olodumare* is supposed to know about the presence of evil or defect in the raw materials and rectify it if He is indeed omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent. But, as noted above, *Olodumare* has none of these qualities.

On the Alleged Solution to the Problem of Evil in African Philosophy

The logical incongruities in the affirmation of evil in this world and such appellations of God as omnipotence, omniscient, and omnibenevolence give rise to the problem of evil. Some African perspectives on the problem have already been discussed. What requires attention here is the supposition by some philosophers that African philosophy resolves the problem of evil because God is not conceived in it (African philosophy) in absolute terms. The idea, for instance, is that if God is not infinitely good, then, it should be consistent with His nature to expect evil in Him or His creation.

In some African philosophies, this perspective is held. Dasaolu and Oyelakun write: "… in both Yoruba and Igbo philosophy, as well as in the Akan philosophical context, it is a given that the problem of evil is a substantive philosophical problem only within the Western conception of evil and that such a problem does not hold much weight when situated within the African notion of evil" (2015, 23). This view is incorrect because some philosophers, including Gyekye, would deny this. Gyekye (1995) argues for the existence of the problem in Akan philosophy. For this reason, Babalola Balogun is quite cautious with his remark that the problem of evil is foreign to Yoruba thought (2014, 61).

Balogun (2014), however, interprets the Yoruba concept of evil in a manner that (in his thinking) makes it inconsistent with the Western view. From a Yoruba perspective, he maintains:

> Evil is an indispensable part of each person's life. A life entirely spent in good, with no possibility of evil, is impossible within the Yoruba existentialism. The good-evil dichotomy popular in Western scholarship is therefore incompatible with the Yoruba conceptions of these notions. Rather than being viewed as incompatible, good and evil are seen as necessary complements for a meaningful life: an appropriate measure of good and evil makes a fulfilled life. (2014, 62)

The above quotation reveals a two-fold approach to understanding practical life that is often not obvious. The first approach concerns the best ways of living in *this* ethically polar world, while the second is about the best ways of interpreting *this* world (with all its alleged shortcomings) as one proceeding from an *absolutely* good source. While the first option is a life management issue, the second is logical. B. Balogun's remark that "Evil is an indispensable part of each person's life. A life entirely spent in good, with no possibility of evil, is impossible within the Yoruba existentialism" appears to be a view of anyone, not just the Yoruba, who cares to look at the predicament of the human being on earth.[3] Human living is certainly about the alternation of experiences of good and evil. I do not think that in Western philosophy, it is argued that humans are, on this earth, able to continually experience evil and the absence of good, or experience good all the time without the possibility of evil. So, if human life in the Yoruba culture is taken to entail good and evil, so is it taken in the West.

It is difficult to understand the assertion that "The good-evil dichotomy popular in Western scholarship is therefore incompatible with the Yoruba conceptions of these notions" when B. Balogun is not expected to admit that evil is the same as good and good is the same as evil. In other words, so long as he would not deny that the category of good is different from the category of evil (and, thus,

[3] This is particularly so, given his endorsement of Oladele Balogun's definition of evil, that it "denotes something that is not good, that is, absence of good or the corruption of goodness" (2014, 61; O. Balogun 2009, 1). In this sense, B. Balogun notes, the Yoruba conception of *ibi* (evil) is not significantly different from the Western view.

oppose each other by definition), he cannot deny the presence of a dichotomy in Yoruba thought. For that would only suggest, for instance, that the Yoruba idea of goodness is when there is a combined presence of good and bad. Or that goodness is the entailment of good and bad. But even in this, there is a logical separation of good from bad, meaning that some dichotomy exists. There is some inconsistency in such interpretation unless it is argued that what one person judges to be good in the Yoruba culture might be adjudged bad by another. Indeed, this relativistic interpretation is affirmed by B. Balogun (2014, 60). In this case, it would be assumed that no person sees an action, event, or experience to be both good and bad, thereby eliminating the possibility of inconsistency at the level of the human individual. But in a more general cosmological sense, he perceives the Yoruba world to entail both good and bad which is not different from what any critical observer anywhere in the world would admit. There is, therefore, incompatibility in the Yoruba perspective. And, it is the same way that evil and good would relate to each other in the West. Accordingly, B. Balogun's reference to the Yoruba saying that "the universe was created as a mixture of evil and good" and therefore evil is "inextricably woven into each individual's life" (2014, 61) is an interesting observation, but it is not unique to Yoruba, nor does it change good to evil (and evil to good) in human life or in the universe. Another way of explaining the view that evil is "inextricably woven into each individual's life" is to assert that in Yoruba thought, nothing is wholly good or bad – as done by Babalola Balogun (2014, 64). But that makes the concepts of evil and good nebulous, such that there can no longer be the good or bad in Yoruba thought. Neither concept can, then, stand alone and be an object of enquiry. Yet, there are some good things in life – such as peace of mind and honesty – and bad ones as well.

What B. Balogun might be right about is in the context of life management, where the expression "good life" is meant to be a comprehensive evaluation of human circumstances. For, a life described as such may take evil into account. In this sense, the term "good" will not entail evil per se, but will be descriptive of how well a person has managed his or her good and evil experiences in practical life. And, given that humans are, and will be, unavoidably confronted with evil and good, coming to terms with this reality and making the most out of it are deemed to be virtuous. Consequently, to have a fulfilled life, and thus a good life, both evil and good would be deemed to have enabled one's attainment of such a life in practical life. In this vein, it might be right to view evil and good as "necessary complements" to manage which "an appropriate measure" of each is required. Even so, it does not seem to me that this view is uniquely African.

With regard to the second approach – as in the best ways of interpreting *this* world (with all its alleged shortcomings) as one proceeding from an *absolutely* good source – the problems raised in Western philosophy (as earlier discussed) have been about the logical propriety of conceiving a Supreme Being who is infinitely good, powerful, and omniscient, and yet is alleged to have created the sort of world we live in. The partly evil character of this world necessitates the concerns that were attributed to different philosophers in the first section of this paper that focused on the existence of God. The questions roughly constitute the problem of evil, and the preoccupation with such questions cannot be equated or

mistaken for questions about how best to manage an inescapable reality of evil in the world.

For this reason, any attempt to solve the problem of evil in African philosophy should aim at examining African conceptions of God and the African world to find out whether they generate logical difficulties. In this respect, Oladele Balogun advances that in Yoruba thought *Olodumare*, the high deity, is not perceived to "possess the absolute attributes of all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-merciful that led to the philosophical problem of evil."[4] This perception, according to him, "can be used as an African solution to the philosophical problem of evil which is one of the oldest metaphysical problems in Western philosophy that has defied solutions" (BALOGUN 2009, 15, 14).

However, the problem with this thinking is logical. Given the idea that *Olodumare* is not omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient, it is apt to assert that the problem of evil is nonexistent in Yoruba philosophy. But that does not constitute a solution *per se* to the problem of evil; for, it is an aberration, a logical misfit, to have a solution when there is no problem. The problem of evil does not just arise in Yoruba thought; and, in other philosophies where it does, adopting the Yoruba perspective on God and evil will compound, rather than solve, the logical problem of evil.

Death

I am restricting my discussion of death to biological death; in which case it would refer to the absence of life in the body. The phenomenon of death is sometimes understood differently including the view held by an Akan Chief, Nana Kwasi Opong Otaferegya I of Begoro, that an Akan may regard as dead-alive (*tease awuo*) an individual who is very bad morally, such as perverse criminals. As far as I know, the term also refers to someone who appears to have a short life ahead of him or her. But the two interpretations are not quite apart, since people who are perverse are more likely to perform actions that may shorten their lives. Nana's view is worthy of consideration because it brings out an interesting relationship between morality and death. In a related fashion, J.A. Thompson suggests that biological death, and for that matter life, may be understood in relational terms. In this sense, there is death if a person is unable to act upon or react to his or her environment (2003). Since Thompson intends, by the foregoing, a scientific explanation, it may not be wrong to understand 'environment' in terms of natural and, perhaps, social environment. A living person, then, should be able to act upon and react to the natural and social environment. These ideas about relationality bring to mind the African perspective of personhood that prizes communal relationality. Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984), Wiredu (1992) and Gyekye (1997) did not use relationality to distinguish dead from living persons, but to determine moral

[4] These attributes of *Olodumare* are confirmed by Godwin Sogolo (1993, 41) and Sophie Oluwole (1995, 20), but Balogun J. Babalola (2014, 64) maintains that *Olodumare* is omniscient.

personhood. Yet it cannot be denied that an individual who is described by them as not being a person would by virtue of the same criterion of morality/relationality be dead-alive. Thus, there is a good connection between moral death and personhood.[5]

The biological occurrence of death is, from the Akan philosophical perspective, sometimes explicable with a metaphysic of a person, where death overcomes a person only partially. In this sense, death is believed (and observed) to happen to the body but not to some other metaphysical entities postulated in Akan thought. This is made possible by the belief that a person is composed of a body (*nipadua*), soul (*okra*) and spirit (*sunsum*). The *okra* and *sunsum* are believed to survive death and constitute the grounds for belief in life after death. The exact relationship between them is well articulated by Gyekye (1995) and further strengthened by Hasskei Majeed (2017), but the characterization of the two entities as spiritual has been criticized by Kwasi Wiredu (1983).[6] This sort of controversy might exist in some African philosophies as well. This notwithstanding, there is an unmistakable expectation of the body to die at some point. Death prevents the continuation of life, but is this good or evil? I will return to this question after I have made a few observations about the notion of "evil death" in the next section.

The Concept of Evil Death

In Akan culture, there is the idea that some deaths are evil. This idea has philosophical relevance as I indicate in the sections below. For now, I intend to show how it is conceived. Death as already explained in this paper is seen by some African philosophers, such as Ademola Fayemi (2012, 6), as evil. As a result, the concept or expression "evil death" appears to be a tautology. However, the idea of redundancy in the expression "evil death" is taken care of by the following interpretation.

Even though the idea of evil death is held in Akan culture, it is difficult to make an exhaustive list of deaths that are called evil. Generally, the idea is captured by deaths that are often described as *atofowuo*. These are deaths that are conceived as unnatural or strange. They involve all sorts of premature deaths, like deaths by fire, lightning, drowning, being killed by a falling tree, by murder and mutilation, as well as losing one's life through strange diseases. I do not suggest by the foregoing that the classification of these deaths as evil is fair, for I anticipate someone asking, "what is wrong with dying through any of these means if one has achieved all one wants"? These deaths are regarded as evil because they are perceived to be a possible punishment from the deities or the living-dead

[5] The concept of personhood is central to African ethics. It does not only guide individual behaviour and action, but it also undergirds the socio-political set-up of the African community. It has prospects for contributing immensely to resolving ethical problems in modern life as exemplified by Motsamai Molefe with his *African Personhood and Applied Ethics* (MAJEED 2021). See also Majeed (2018).

[6] According to Wiredu, the *okra* and *sunsum* are quasi-physical and therefore fail to meet the criterion of spirituality as understood in English or Western philosophy. See Majeed (2013) for a critique of Wiredu's concept of quasi-physicalism.

(GYEKYE 1995, 78-80) or are caused by a curse invoked by an aggrieved person. Because of the perceived evil associated with such deaths, funeral rites cannot be properly performed, thereby barring the dead from moving on to the "land" of the living-dead (*asamando*). Apart from these supernatural reasons, evil deaths are such that they invoke horror, at the sight of the bodies thought to have undergone so much pain or suffering. In short, evil death refers to what the Akan would consider a horrible death. All this suggests that conscious effort is made in Akan thought to distinguish these deaths from others, such as natural deaths, thereby eliminating the apparent tautology in the expression, "evil death".

Death, Evil Death and the Goodness of God

Given the supposition that death is a natural phenomenon, it may be expected that those, at least some, who see death to be evil would also classify death as natural evil. And if God is believed to be the creator of nature (or for some thinkers, the creator of everything), then death would be seen as a creation of God. The thinking that death is God's creation is found in Akan thought. For, it is often said "Onyamenku wo a, odasani ye kwa" (lit. If God has not killed you, all efforts made by a human being to kill you will be in vain). Yet, Wiredu disputes the attribution of a creative function to *Onyame,* suggesting that any direct reference to His involution in bringing things about could only be expressed with the term *bo.* Wiredu's reason is that the term *bo* means "to fashion" or "make" with materials, but not to create (1998, 30). It is on this basis that the Akan reference to *Onyame* (God) as *O-bo-adee* is translated by him to mean a cosmic architect who made things from some pre-existing material. But he inadvertently approves J.B. Danquah's translation of a drum text in which *Onyame* is described as the creator of death. It reads "He [God] created death" (1998, 31; my square brackets) which will be stated in Akan as "Onyamena o-boowuo". But one may ask how meaningful it would be to assert in Akan that "Onyamena o-boowuo" if *bo* must involve some material? It would not mean much at all, for death and life are not conceived to have material origins. To make sense of the word *bo*, therefore, the context of its usage ought to be re-examined. Here, I agree with Wiredu that "the abolition of context effectively abolishes intelligibility" (1998, 29). With the relevance of context in mind, Wiredu explains that,

> In the most usual sense creation presupposes raw materials. A carpenter creates a chair out of wood and a novelist creates fiction out of words and ideas … Moreover, *Oboade*, the Akan word that I provisionally translated as "creator", means the maker of things. *Bo* means to make and *ade* means thing, but in Akan to *boade* is unambiguously instrumental; you only make something with something. (WIREDU 1998, 30)

First, to *boade* is not unambiguously instrumental as Wiredu understands, given the belief about the origin death mentioned in the preceding paragraph. What is right to advance is that to *boade* may or may not be instrumental. The belief also means that creation need not presuppose raw materials.

In the Akan language, when *bo* is used in the context of God's activities, it simply refers to His origination of things (as *oboade*). It is also not the exclusive Akan translation for "make" (especially, to make with raw materials). Otherwise, it should be possible for humans, particularly carpenters, masons, cloth weavers and other craftsmen to describe their activities in terms of *bo* or say of the things they create that they have been *bo* (made). However, that is not done.[7] It is interesting to note that whenever *bo* is used even at the human level, they do not always mean make.[8] This means, *bo* does not necessarily refer to the making of things from other things. I concede that Wiredu's translation of *oboade* as "the maker of things" (1998, 30) is intelligible, for Akan thinkers do suggest with another attribute *borebore* that *Onyame* can make things. But it is not suggested, as we saw above with the questions of death (and thus, life) that all things were made from a pre-existing material. With reference to the appellation *borebore*, Akan philosophers who believe in *Onyame*'s creation of things *ex nihilo,* such as Gyekye, would object that *Onyame* might have made (some) things out of what He had earlier originated, and argue that Wiredu's idea of pre-existing material or "indeterminate raw material" does not refer to anything that preceded God's creation. But I agree with Wiredu that the idea of nothingness, creating out of nothing, requires proper formulation in Akan philosophy.

Gyekye, like Danquah and Wiredu, recognizes the divine creation of death. But the fact that death is created by *Onyame* does not necessarily make it good. Therefore, it is worth asking why a Supreme Being believed to be omnibenevolent will originate death. Is death, philosophically speaking a creation? How correct, in other words, will it be to argue that it is an ancillary condition that arises from a created reality – life? From Gyekye's acknowledgement of evil death and postulation in Akan thought of an absolutely good and potent God, a third question may be asked, assuming his position was correct: how appropriate would it be for one to claim that the problem of evil exists in African theology, on account of the phenomenon of death, especially evil death? To answer the last question, recent discussions in the literature on the problem of evil suggest its non-existence in at least, one African culture: the Yoruba (where God is neither omnipotent nor omnibenevolent). This position comes as a reaction to earlier Yoruba scholars who argued otherwise (such as IDOWU 1962, ODUWOLE 2007). By the recent interpretation, we are assured of the absence of the problem of evil in Yoruba thought but not a justification for the evilness of death. Also, I am not quite sure if the concept of evil death is in Yoruba thought, but of

[7] The right word to use in the carpenter's case is *ye*, the weaver's is *nwene,* and the mason's is *si.*

[8] For the benefit of those who do not speak any Akan language, the following usage of *bo* would be helpful. Note that in most cases, the term *bo* is not about making or designing things: *bodwa* (to call a public gathering), *botofa* (to summarize); *bodua* (to invoke vengeful powers of the deities); *boetire* (to braid), *bobosea* (to take a loan), *bodam* (to become crazy), *boapata* (to construct a hut), *bomusuo* (to say or do something abominable), *bokwan* (to make a path), *bobede* (to weave a carrier with palm branches), *boewa* (to cough), *bowhii* (to go swiftly). Perhaps, the usages that come closest to the making or fashioning of things are *boapata* (to construct a hut) and *bobede* (to weave a carrier with palm branches).

death I cannot doubt – even though a thorough and sustained philosophical discussion of death in contemporary Yoruba thought will be ideal. The situation is not quite different from what one observes about works on death on the African continent in general. Yet, death and evil, and related concepts have the potential to enrich philosophical debates on, and increase our understanding of, humanity, God, and life. I take up the question of the evilness of death later in this paper.

The phenomenon of death is complex and at times difficult to characterize. It is often dreaded, for instance, yet it influences how many people live. One may even be advised to safeguard one's family interest (especially, that of the immediate family) in readiness for death. Secondly, and in relation to the second question raised above about whether evil was a "thing" but not an ancillary condition that arises from a created reality, there is hint of the conceptual problem that, as noted above, Augustine had to grapple with in connection with evil. The question is, thus, an attempt to see if Augustine's position extends to the phenomenon of death. Given this background, one may ask: Is death an actual, positive creation of God? This question is particularly relevant given that in many African conceptions, God is identified with life, life force or vitality (BEWAJI 1998, 8; METZ and MOLEFE, 2021). Death may therefore seem the opposite of life, of reality, of an existent. Since Augustine's conclusion was that evil was not created by God, but was just a privation of good, it may be argued that death was also not created. The thinking here would be that God created life, but not death; and that death is nothing but a human description for absence of a created reality – life. Death would then be classified as lacking concrete existence and not created by God. However, this position is difficult to sustain because even if God is believed to have created life and is a permanent presence of life (in the context where God is conceived as incapable of dying), his creation or origination of terminal life – that is all life apart from God's – logically assigns Him the quality of creator of death. For, he chose to end life, creating in its wake a situation that enabled the existence of mortal beings. God is therefore the originator of death. Further, even if it is granted that death was not positively created, the fact that mortal beings received from God life into which death was built makes it reasonable to hold that God was, at least, aware that he was going to allow death to occur. In both cases, death becomes a necessary companion to life and part of the project of causing life.

Given the above, there is need to revisit some appellations of God by asking, for example, how God's causation of death affects his goodness.[9] If God created the world, then, from the thinking that the phenomenon of death is evil (as held by Fayemi [2012, 6]), and from the notion of "evil death", it should not be difficult to claim that death is an evil creation of God. So, if one were to believe that the problem of evil existed in African thought, evil death or death could be

[9]The thinking that God is good in African thought (MBITI 1969, 29) would imply that God does not only desire, but acts good (MAJEED 2014, 134). See Ada Agada (2017) for some discussion of evil between Gyekye and Wiredu.

cited as a reason for the existence of the problem. In that case, God would at least, no longer be seen as omnibenevolent. Indeed, a conception of a partially good God would still not prevent some thinkers from attributing some evils such as death to God.

However, I see the above characterization of death and evil death as inaccurate, and maintain that death is not evil and need not be cited as opposed to the alleged good nature of God. I do not mean here that nothing else can be inconsistent with the nature of God. I will explain my point by first considering three ideas which, together, constitute a possible objection to my assertion that death is not evil: that:

(i) Death brings pain to friends and family of the deceased,
(ii) Dying persons sometimes go through the pain of ill-health, have anxiety about death and are troubled by the sheer pain of knowing that they are dying,
(iii) Evil Death – the pain or perhaps the "indignity" in dying through such horrible means as drowning, burning, and all manners of gory accidents.

The above reasons are essentially about pain and indignity, which although understandable, do not count much toward understanding the nature of death itself. Besides, I do not think death is one of the things that are wrong or bad in themselves. No wonder the alleged evilness of death is claimed based on its effects on other humans, especially family and friends. Consequently, on hedonistic grounds, especially on qualitatively utilitarian grounds, death might be seen by some as an evil act of God. But there are two things to note: (i) that it is possible to separate the phenomenon of death from its effects on people, and (ii) that death does not always have negative effects on people. This suggests that evil (and pain) is not a necessary quality of death.

Death is just the event of ending some earthly life. This, in my view, is value neutral. This view is not affected by the common observation that thoughts about the evilness of death have been about events leading to death, events surrounding death or the conditions under which a person was in at the time of death – but not about death itself. For instance, depending on the biological shortcoming(s) that a dying person may have, he or she could be said to have a painful and/or a bad death. Furthermore, in the very notion of evil death presented above, we find a number of factors preceding or surrounding death which are deemed bad or horrible, as a result of which those who suffer them are said to have had evil deaths. But all these preceding factors or conditions do not constitute death. Hence, the concept of evil death entails a misrepresentation, just as the characterization of the phenomenon of death as evil is.

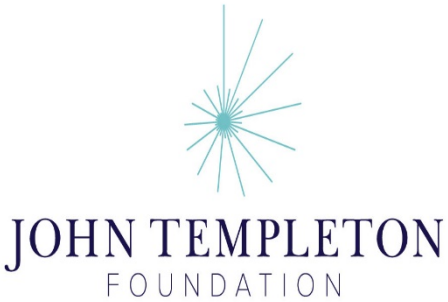
The implications of the foregoing on the argument for the existence of the problem of evil in African thought is that it (the argument) cannot be supported if death is cited as an evil phenomenon whose creation by God is inconsistent with His absolute benevolence. And if, on the other hand, God is deemed to be a joint creator, and the problem of evil is not postulated in African thought, then the phenomenon of death cannot still be tagged as evil, because it is value-neutral.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the concepts of death and evil death and discussed their implications for the existence and goodness of God. I have argued that the problem of evil in Western thought, which results from the logical inconsistencies that arise when we posit God's omnipotence, omnibenevolence and omniscience and admit His creation of death, does not arise in African thought. This is in spite of the fact that the Akan philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, allows the problem in Akan thought (on the grounds of moral evil in this world), even as many Yoruba philosophers deny its presence in their cultural philosophy. They argue that *Olodumare*, the high deity, did not create the world alone and is neither omnibenevolent nor omniscient. This, according to the Yoruba philosophers, makes for the accommodation of *Olodumare* and evil (including death) without any inconsistencies. I have argued that death is value neutral, and its creation does not add to the tally of evils on earth. Thus, in a culture like the Akan where the existence of the problem of evil is affirmed, the fact of death does not affect the status of God negatively.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.



Relevant Literature

1. AGADA, A. "The Apparent Conflict of Transcendentalism and Immanentism in Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu's Interpretation of the Akan Concept of God," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp23-38, 2017. Vol. 6. No 1. Web.

2. BALOGUN, O. A. "The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil," [Lumina], pp1-21, 2009. Vol 20. No 2. Web.

3. BALOGUN, B. J. "*Ibi*: An Examination of the Yoruba Traditional-Existentialist Conception of Evil," [Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya], New Series, pp55-73, 2014. Vol 6. No 2. Web.

4. BEWAJIJ. A. I. "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil," [African Studies Quarterly], pp1-17, 1998. Vol 2. Issue 1. Web.

5. DASAOLU, B. and OYELAKUN, D. "The Concept of Evil in Yoruba and Igbo Thoughts: Some Comparisons," [Philosophy], pp22-33, 2015. Vol 10. Web.

6. FAYEMI, A. K. "The Philosophical Problem of Evil: A Response to E. O. Oduwole," [Philosophia: An International Journal of Philosophy], pp1-15, 2012. Vol 41. No 1. Web.

7. GYEKYE, K. [An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme, rev. ed.], 1995. Temple University Press: Philadelphia. Paperback.

8. HICK, J. [Evil and the God of Love], 1966. Fontana Library: London. Paperback.

9. HICK, J. [Philosophy of Religion], 1993. Prentice-Hall of India: New Delhi. Paperback.

10. HUME, D. "God and the Problem of Evil," [Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings], 1973. Harcourt Brace Jovanovic: New York. Paperback.

11. IDOWU, E. B. [Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief], 1962. Longman: London. Paperback.

12. MAJEED, H. M. "Motsamai Molefe: African Personhood and Applied Ethics," [African Studies Review], pp26-28, 2021.Vol 64. No 4. Web.

13. MAJEED, H. M. “A Page in African Ethics: A Review of Bernard Matolino’s Personhood in African Philosophy,” [Legon Journal of the Humanities], pp338-343, 2018. Vol 29. No 2. Web.

14. MAJEED, H. M. [Reincarnation: A Question in the African Philosophy of Mind], 2017. UNISA Press: Pretoria. Paperback.

15. MAJEED, H. M. “On the Rationality of Traditional African Religion: Analyzing the Concept of God,” [Legon Journal of the Humanities] pp127-141, 2014. Vol 25. Web.

16. MAJEED, H. M. “A Critique of the Concept of Quasi-physicalism in Akan Philosophy,” [African Studies Quarterly], pp338-343, 2013. Vol 14. Issues 1 & 2. Web.

17. MBITI, J. S. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Heinemann: Oxford. Paperback.

18. MENKITI, I. A. “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” [African Philosophy: An Introduction, 3rd ed., R.A. WRIGHT Ed.], pp171-181, 1984. University Press of Americas: Lanham, MD. Paperback.

19. METZ, T., & MOLEFE, M. “Traditional African Religion as a Neglected Form of Monotheism,” [The Monist], 2021. pp393-409. Vol 104. Web.

20. MOLEFE, Motsamai. [African Personhood and Applied Ethics], 2020. NISC (Pty): Makhanda. Paperback.

21. ODUWOLE, E. O. “The Dialectics of Ire (Goodness) and Ibi (Evilness): An African Understanding of the Philosophical Problem of Evil,” [Philosophia: An International Journal of Philosophy], pp1-13, 2007. Vol 36. No 1. Web.

22. OLUWOLE, S. “Madonna and The Whore in African Traditional Thought,” [Journal of Philosophy and Development], N.P. 1995. Vol 1 & 2. No 1. Paperback.

23. RUSSELL, B. [Why I am Not a Christian], 1957. George and Allen Unwin: London. Paperback.

24. SOGOLO, G. [Foundations of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought], 1993. Ibadan University Press: Ibadan. Paperback.

25. SWINBURNE, R. “The Problem of Evil,” [Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, Louis POJMAN Ed.], pp174-184, 1987. Wadsworth Publishing Company: Belmont, CA. Paperback.

26. THOMPSON, J. A. “Life and Death: Biological,” [Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, J. HASTINGS Ed.], pp1-9, 2003. Vol 8. T & T Clark: London. Paperback.

27. WIREDU, K. “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion,” [African Studies Quarterly], 1998. pp17-46. Vol 1. Issue 4. Web.

28. WIREDU, K., & GYEKYE, K. Eds. [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I], 1992. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. Paperback.

29. WIREDU, K. “The Akan Concept of Mind,” [Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies], pp113-134, 1983. Vol 3. Paperback.

The Oromo Doctrine of God[1]

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.5s
Submitted 3 May 2022. Accepted 7 August 2022

Workineh KELBESSA
Department of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8429-2885
Email: workinehkelbessa@yahoo.com

Abstract
The Oromo of Ethiopia, the largest ethnic group, have their own indigenous religion known as Waaqeffanna. They believe in one *Waaqa guraacha* (black God) – the God who created the universe and the various forms of life. *Waaqa* has multiple attributes. *Waaqa* is He who is before everything else. *Waaqa* is Uumaa (a creator of everything in the world). *Waaqa* is hunda beekaa (omniscient). *Waaqni gonkumaa kan hin Duune* (God is immortal). *Waaqa* is *hundaa tolaa* (omnibenevolent). *Waaqa* is *hunda danda'aa* (omnipotent). Nothing is impossible with Waaqa. Waaqa is the source and lover of *dhugaa* (truth). *Waaqa is Qulqulluu* (pure). The Oromo people believe that in the olden days *Waaqa* was living on the Earth and only later that Waaqa left the Earth in anger because of personal sin and became invisible. *Waaqa* is one and at the same time manifests Himself in different ways. This paper teases out and highlights core Oromo views of God, his relationship with the world and the problem of evil.
Keywords: Ayyaana, Oromo, Saffuu, Waaqa, Waaqeffanna

Introduction

The Oromo constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, belonging to the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family in eastern and north-eastern Africa. The Regional State of Oromia is located in the central part of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Today, the Oromo are found from Rayya in south-eastern Tigray in the north to Borana in the south and from Hararge in the east to Wallaga and Illuababora in the west and beyond. The Oromo also live in Kenya, particularly in Marsabit, Tana River, Garissa, Isiolo, and Moyale Districts, and in other localities. The major religions in Oromo include Islam, Christianity, and *Waaqeffannaa* (Oromo indigenous religion). There is no evidence that shows the exact date when certain individuals or groups began to embrace Christianity or Islam. According to Tesemma Ta'a: "During the sixteenth century major population movements in Northeast Africa, the majority of the Oromo were neither Christians nor Muslims. They were followers of *Waaqeffanna*, their indigenous religion" (TA'A 2012, 96). In this paper, I will examine the doctrine of

[1] An earlier draft of this article was presented at the International Conference on God, Problem of Evil and Death in African Religious Philosophy held online from October 14-15, 2021. The author is grateful to those present for their questions and comments. He is also grateful to Daniel Ayana and to the anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions on an earlier draft.

God in the Oromo worldview. I will look into how the Oromo people perceive *Waaqa* and the relationship between *Waaqa* and other creations.

The Oromo Doctrine of God

The Oromo of Ethiopia have their own indigenous religion known as *Waaqeffanna* (BOKKU 2011, 29; TA'A 2012, 90). According to Dirribi Demissie Bokku: "*Waaqeffanna* is the religion of the ancient black people. It is an ancient religion, which originated in the homeland of the early human race, which is believed to have lived in the Horn of Africa. It is the religion of the Cushitic people–the Oromo. That means, it emerged before any other alien religions" (BOKKU 2011, 29). The term "*Waaqeffanna*" comes from the Oromo word, *Waaqa* which meant God. A person who believes in *Waaqa* is called *Waaqeffata*. *Waaqeffanna* teaches that all human beings are equal and deserve respect. "*Waaqeffanna* embodies a sense of human dignity, equality, and respect which are essential for societal interaction and integration with a strong belief in one supernatural power Waaqa (God) which cuts across several religions" (TA'A 2012, 96). *"Waaqeffanna"* is "part and parcel of the *Gadaa* system" (TA'A 2012, 107). The *Gadaa* system is a democratic egalitarian system that has been practiced by the Oromo, the Konso, and Gedeo people in Ethiopia for centuries. It has secular leaders for a non-renewable eight-year term.

Belief in the Supreme Being

The Oromo believe in one *Waaqa guraacha* (black God) – the God who created the universe and the various forms of life. They do not hold the belief that God created the universe and the various forms of life out of nothing (ex nihilo), as *Waaqa* is part of the world. Various writers have confirmed this in their writings, although their accounts of the order of creation and the names of the first human beings are more different than alike. One Oromo creation myth reveals that *Waaqa* created the first human being from the soil around a river (KELBESSA 2014, 44). According to Bokku's informant (2011, 58-59) and some of my informants (KELBESSA 2014, 44-45), Asdemii/Addeem and Hawwee were the first humans, and all humans have descended from them. According to Bokku's informant, the first human being was sexless. When this person was walking towards a river, he met *Waaqa* by accident and the latter's glance split the former into two equal parts: male and female. In the Oromo language, Hawwee means "I long for you/ I am interested in you" whereas Addeem means "come." According to Gemechu Megerssa, the first Oromo man and the first Oromo woman were called Horo (MEGERSSA, 1995, 9-10) and Hortu respectively (MEGERSSA and KASSAM 2019, 101). Many Oromo informants share the view that Horo is the firstborn Oromo and that Tulu Nama Dur or *Madda* (*hora*) Wallabu is his birthplace. Some of my informants in Borana, however, regard Tabo as the first person and Horo as the second person (KELBESSA, 2011). Others said that the firstborn Oromo is unknown. In spite of their disagreements, various writers and informants recognize the relationship between water and the origin of the first living beings. Some of them maintain that *Walaabu*/*Wolabo* water is the source of everything in the world. The expression "*ummen wallabu baate*" (MEGERSSA, quoted in BARTELS, 1983, 62; MEGERSSA 1993, 11) means all creatures were created

from water. I will not engage these conflicting arguments, as I have done so elsewhere (2011).

Like the Oromo worldview, both ancient and contemporary African holism reveal the interdependence of the natural and supernatural world. According to Lebisa J. Teffo and Abraham P. J. Roux: "[t]ogether with the world, God constitutes the spatio-temporal 'totality' of existence … the thinking is hierarchical, with God at the apex and extra-human beings and forces, humans, the lower animals, vegetation and the inanimate world, in this order, as integral parts of one single totality of existence" (2005, 167; see also OKOLO, 2003, 212; TEMPELS, 1945). For ancient Egyptians, Ra-Atum (the sun-god) came from *nun*, the primeval chaotic water, as a power of self-development and created other things (OBENGA, 2004).

Some writers wrongly defined *Waaqa guraacha* as a dark sky. For instance, consider the following definition given by Ton Leus and Cynthia Salvadori: "*Waqaa guraacha*: dark blue sky" (2006, 288). They further defined *Waaqa* as "sky, the heavens, atmospheric conditions, that which overpowers us, God" (2006, 640). Lambert Bartels also defines *Waaqa gurraacha* as "the dark coloured Waaqa" (1983, 107). He states that the word "*Waaqa*" has a double meaning: sky–i.e., the vault of the sky as we see it, and God. For Enrico Cerulli (1922), *Waaqa* has two meanings: heaven and God.

Contrary to the above claims, in my field study in Oromia, I found out that the original meaning of *Waaqa* was not "a sky God", as the Oromo people believe that in the olden days *Waaqa* was living on the Earth and only later that *Waaqa* left "the Earth in anger and became invisible. Following this, the Oromo say that black *Waaqa* is living above the blue sky. Thus *Waaqa* is not the visible blue sky" (KELBESSA 2011, 71). "The Oromo believe that there are seven skies above and below the earth. It is generally believed that *Waaqa* is found beyond these seven skies" (MEGERSSA 1995, 51; 1993, 96-97).

As I stated elsewhere, *Waaqa* has multiple properties:

> *Waaqa* is He who is before everything else. *Waaqa* is *Uumaa* (a creator of everything in the world). It should be noted that the word *Uumaa* also refers to the created physical world. *Waaqa* is *hunda beekaa* (omniscient). He has knowledge of everything; He is all-wise, all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-hearing. *Waaqa* is *hundaa tolaa* (omnibenevolent). *Waaqa* is kind … *Waaqa* is *hunda danda'aa* (omnipotent). Nothing is impossible with *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is the source and lover of *dhugaa* (truth). *Waaqa* is *Qulqulluu* (pure). *Waaqa* is intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood (KELBESSA, 2011, 69; see also AYANNA, 1984; DE SALVIAC, 2005, 204; HASSEN, 2005, 142; SUMNER 1995, 33, 313)

Bokku also identifies the following attributes of *Waaqa*:

> *Gurracha gara garbaa*, *leemmoo garaa talilaa*, *tokkicha maqa dhibbaa*, *guddich[a] hiriyaa hinqabne*, *kan waan hunda beeku*, *kan waan hunda gochuu danda'u*, *kan bakka mara jiru*, *kan hinkufne*, *kan hinduuneefi kan hincabne*. This is literally translated "O Black God who created the dark sky and the clean waters, who is one but called by [a] multitude of names, who has no competitor, the omniscient, the omnipotent, the omnipresent, who is eternal and ever powerful, whose power never declines (2011, 66)

According to Claude Sumner, a Canadian philosopher, for the Oromo, *Waaqa* is "all knowing" (1995, 313), "Almighty master, inexhaustible benefactor of men who, lacking nothing, need not refuse us anything" (SUMNER 1996, 106). The Oromo coined some proverbs to appreciate and honor *Waaqa*. To give but a few examples:

"*Waaqa malee, gaariin hin jiru*" – "There is no one who is kind except God".
"*Waan Waaqni fide lafti ba'aa hin dadhabu*" – "Whatever God brings the Earth does not fail to carry it".
"*Namn yaa Waaqi jedhe Waaqarraa hindhabu*" – "One who worships God will get everything".
"*Ollaafi Waaqatti gadi bahu*" – "One faces God and neighbors when s/he goes out of his/her house".
Neighbors and God are always near.
"*Harki Rabbi namaan qabe batti hinqabu*" – "A hand God touches you with has no harm" (TEGEGN1993, 32).
A house initiated by *Waaqa* will be completed.
Those who trust in *Waaqa* will never lack anything.
"*Namni hin awwaa Waaqni hin guuta*" /"*Namni niyaada Waaqayyom'moo hojiirra oolcha*" - "Man wishes, *Waaqa* fulfills".
"*Waan Waaqnii namaa tolcheti, ta'a*: what God does for a person, is possible / it will be. (meaning: one cannot act against one's destiny)" (LEUS and SALVADORI 2006, 640).
"*Kan Waaqayyoo jedhe hinoolu*" – "What *Waaqa* said will never fail to happen".
"*Waan chufa Waaqa tolcha*" – "God does everything".
"*Waaqayyoo hinariifatu*" - "Waaqa is never in a hurry".

When the Oromo elders pray to God, they use the following expressions:

Gurraacha garaa garba	Black God with heart like ocean.
Leemmoo garaa taliilaa	A being with clear heart.
Tokicha maqaa dhibbaa	He is one but called by a multitude of names.
Guddichaa hiriyaa hin qabne	A big being who has no equal or competitor.
Kan baka maraa jiru	Who is everywhere (the omnipresent).
Yaa guungumaa bidoo	The grumbler, an old being, with a heart full of hair/

	The thunderous, and [source] of fire or fiery.
Jaarsa garaan dabbasaa	An old being with a hairy stomach.
Guddicha hirreen jirmaa	The big being with a strong arm.
Gurraacha guunguma	A black grumbler.
Yaa Waaqa ofiin buluu	God who lives by Himself.
Kan hindhugne	He who does not drink.
Kan hin kufne	He who does not fail [Who is eternal and ever powerful]
Kan hin cabne fi kan hin duunee	He who never breaks down and die [whose power can never decline]
Kan hinmugne	He who does not sleep.
Iji chimmaa kan hinqabne	Whose eyes do not have waxy secretion.
Gurri guurii kan hinqabne	Whose ears do not have earwax.
Obsaa, kan hinjarjarre	God is patient and not in a hurry.
Kan waa hinballeesine gooftadha	God is our Lord (Master) who does not make mistakes.

Various authors mentioned some of these expressions in their works (see BOKKU 2011, 66; TA'A, 2012).

For the Oromo people, *Waaqa* is patient with them. "God of the Oromo is patient. He doesn't say 'I your God am jealous', as stated in Exodus 20:5" (BOKKU 2011, 66). The New International Version of Exodus 20:5 reads as follows: "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." The verse is incompatible with the character of the God of the Oromo.

Paul T. W. Baxter and Aneesa Kassam praise Father Lambert Bartels, a practicing Catholic missionary in Dembi Dollo in Western Wallega, Western Ethiopia, from 1968 to 1980, for avoiding specific characteristics of God discussed in Western theology. They say, "he avoided '[H]ellenizing' *Waaqa*, the God of the Oromo, by attributing to Him descriptive terms like 'omnipotence', 'omniscience' and 'omnipresence' derived from Greek philosophy" (P'BITEK 1971, 80; 86-88, cited in BAXTER and KASSAM 2005, 5). They say that he relied on the Oromo perception of God. The two authors do not clearly state that for the Oromo, *Waaqa* is not omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. If they think so, their viewpoint is not shared by the authors earlier mentioned.

Although the Oromo believe that *Waaqa* is a Supreme Being, which is above everything else, unlike the Christian God, *Waaqa* cannot be called transcendent.[2] As stated earlier, in the past, *Waaqa* was not detached from the Earth. Human beings used to live with God on the Earth (for details, see KELBESSA, 2011).[3] Gemecha Megerssa also writes:

> The Oromo believe that there was a time when *Waaqa* drew away from man, corresponding to the origins of sin, which causes catastrophes such as drought, disease, and war. For the world to prosper and flourish in spite of these calamities, the Oromo believe that distance and respect must be kept between all things. The idea of distance is connected to a concept called *saffu*. *Saffu*, or 'the sense of harmony,' directs one on the right path. It shows the way in which life can be best lived, and gives a sense of order. It is an ideal toward which the Oromo always strive. (1995, 54)

Among the Oromo, "*Waaqa* is like a father who goes away. Earth is like a mother: she is always with us" (BARTELS 1983, 110). *Waaqa* is viewed as a loving father who gives the basic necessities of life whereas *Lafa* (the Earth) is viewed as a mother that nourishes and protects all life, as it is fertile and creative. There is no separation between *Waaqa* and *Lafa*. *Waaqa* makes *Lafa* habitable and sustains life. "*Waaqa*'s presence on earth is manifested through rain, fog, and water. Therefore, a father spits on his son, and elders spit on others as [a] sign of divine presence and blessing" (AGUILAR 2005, 59). As I argued elsewhere:

> *Waaqa* is one and at the same time has different manifestations. *Ayyaana*[4] (spirit) mediates the relationship between *Waaqa* and human beings. There is a positive relationship between God and the Earth, humans and the natural environment. All creatures are essentially effected and affected by the harmonious relationship between *Waaqa* and the Earth (KELBESSA 2011, 85)

Human beings, animals, and other created things in the world are believed to have their own *Ayyaana*. Each *Ayyaana* is a manifestation of the one *Waaqa*. The belief that "*Waaqa* is one and many at the same time" shows how "the Oromo *Waaqa* differs from the God of the peoples of the Book" (HASSEN 2015, 25). It should

[2]Kwasi Wiredu states that the Akan God is not transcendent. "In ontologies such as African ones, in which to exist is to be in space, nothing existent can transcend space and time" (2013, 34).

[3] Similarly, "[i]n many African myths, man originally lived in paradise with God. But through man's disobedience, usually attributed to a woman or some detestable creature (such as a vulture, hyena, etc.), there was separation. This was the beginning of evil in the world" (DANIEL 2009, 149).

[4]The term "*ayyaana*" has different meanings: fortune, luck, celebration, ceremony, festival; a day free of work; divinity, spirit; grace; angel (BITIMA 2000, 4).

also be noted that "the Oromo concept of *Waaqa* being one and many at the same time is reminiscent of Christian theology where God is said to be 'three in one' – the doctrine of the Trinity" (HASSEN 2015, 25). On the other hand, the absolute uniqueness and singularity of God is emphasized in Islam.

Saffuu or *ceeraa fokko* regulates human activities, the use of natural resources, and mediates between different things including the relationship between God and Earth (for details, see KELBESSA 2011, 212-213). In the Oromo worldview, *Ayyaana*, *Uumaa* and *saffuu* are interrelated and cannot be understood differently. These elements are based on 'words', 'things', and the relations between them which hold the created universe together. "*Ayyaana* is a refraction of *Waaqa*. *Uumaa* is the physical thing. *Saffuu* mediates between the *Ayyaana*, which is the ideal, and *Uumaa*, which is the physical that needs to be regulated" (KELBESSA 2011, 213; see also MEGERSSA 1993; 2005, 69-71). *Uumaa* also means creator (*Waaqa*).

Waaqa is a supreme being that holds all things together. For the Oromo human beings are part of nature. This contrasts with some Christian interpretations that "although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image" (WHITE, 1967, 1205). Human beings and all the creations of God are interconnected, as God is their source. In the Oromo worldview, all things are united and have different roles and places in the universe. They are required to care for other creatures and creations by acting in harmony with the cosmic whole:

> Starting with water and rocks going through the vegetable and animal world to man, [Waaqa] has appointed to every being its own place in a cosmic order of which he is the guardian. Sin is a breaking of this cosmic order. [Waaqa's] creative ordering activity manifests itself in all things. It manifests itself in the specific characteristics of man in general, of every species of plant and every species of animal. It is manifested also in the individual characteristics of every man, of each plant and each animal taken singly (SUMNER 1995, 33)

Belief in *Waaqa* requires belief in the intrinsic value of all creatures. "The key thing is that the source of basic Oromo value is *Waaqa,* although there are also secular values that are not directly related to *Waaqa*. The valuing of *Waaqa* underpins belief in the value of trees, animals and so on" (KELBESSA 2011, 213).

The Oromo people have their own secular *Gadaa* leaders and hereditary religious leaders known as *Qaalluu*. I discussed the nature of the *Qaalluu* institution elsewhere (2011), and I will not pursue it at length here. The name "*Qaalluu"* comes from the verb "*qalu*" which literally means "sacrifice." "The concept '*Qaalluu'* refers to both an institution and leaders who represent the institution" (KELBESSA 2011, 79). The spiritual head of the traditional Oromo religion is known as *Abba Muudaa* (the father of anointment). Before Emperor Menelik II (1989-1913) banned the pilgrimage to the *Abba Muudaa* or the Supreme *Qaalluu* in 1900 (HASSEN 2005, 149), a selected group of people from different parts of Oromo lands used to participate in the ceremonies held every eight years to honor *Abba Muudaa*, and receive his blessings and anointment in

the regions of Bale and Sidamo in southern Oromia. These sacred lands are "comparable to Mecca for Muslims and the Holy Land for Christians" (HASSEN 2005, 146). According to G. W. B. Huntingford, *Abba Muudaa* "is the centre of … religious life and the rallying point of the nation, though he has no civil or executive authority. In him are personified and centralized the laws and traditions … and [Waaqa] is said to speak through him" (1955, 83). The *Muudaa* ceremony is designed to link the spiritual father and the nation.

Although the Oromo believe in One Black *Waaqa*, they also recognize lesser deities called *Ateetee, Maraam, awuliya* (*ogliya, ugliya*) and *borantica*. There is a great deal of confusion about the meanings of *Ateetee* and *Maaram*. One of the reasons is that *Ateetee* and *Maaram* rituals have been practiced differently and given different interpretations at different places because of the influence of other religions, cultural contacts and other factors. Some authors have defined *Ateetee* as the goddess of fertility/ fecundity (CERULLI 1922, 128); the Oromo Great Goddess (DASHU, 2010, N.P); "the Earth Deity" (MEGERSSA and KASSAM 2019,145), "the Mother-Goddess (*Ayyoo Umtuu*), who is associated with procreation, fertility, childbirth and agricultural crops" (MEGERSSA and KASSAM 2019, 249), and "'priestess'" (MEGERSSA and KASSAM, 2019, 295). Most authors agree that *Ateetee* is a spirit of fertility. In Shewa, the *Ateetee* ritual is performed "to secure women's fertility and bring well-being to their families" (NICOLAS 2018, 173). As Andrea Nicolas (2018) has shown, some informants consider *Ateetee* either as a ritual performance or a spiritual power, or both.

The Oromo people in Ambo, Western Ethiopia, consider *Ateetee* (female divinity) as the mother of cattle, *ayyoo Baar* (the Mother of Ocean), *Hadha Dambal* (the mother of overflow, full and the spirit of *baksaa* (melted or processed butter) (KELBESSA 2001, 29; KELBESSA, 2018). The link between *Ayyoo* and *Ateetee* shows the importance of motherhood, fertility, fulfillment, blessing, etc., as, among other meanings, *ayyo* is defined as a mother who parents a child. Oromo women rather than men perform the ritual of *Ateetee* in different parts of Oromia. Amhara women and women in other ethnic groups in Ethiopia have also adopted the *Ateetee* ritual (HASSEN 2015, 79; DASHU 2010, N.P).

For the Oromo in Ambo, *Maaram* and *Ateetee* have different but complementary roles (KELBESSA 2001, 29). Both are invoked in cases of fertility. *Ateetee* is associated with the fertility of cattle and is regarded as the mother of cattle. "During *Ateetee* ritual, an old healthy cow should be sacrificed for the cattle to breed well, for a bull to serve a cow, for a pregnancy to be successful and for a land to be leveled" (KELBESSA 2001, 29). So, *Ateetee* is not merely a ritual but is a religious practice that involves complex processes. In some places, the *Ateetee* spirit is believed to possess the woman of a house when an animal is sacrificed. The *Ateetee* ritual has symbolic significance in that the anointment of sticks with butter, the planting of green poles, the shedding of old cow's blood, the splashing of the chest and the neck with butter convey the significance of fertility, procreation, and sustenance of life on Earth.

As discussed above, the term "*Ateetee*" has various meanings. Among other meanings, it has been used to refer to female divinity, a peaceful mobilization of women to pray to God, and the mobilization of women to protect the rights of women (for details, see KELBESSA 2018; HUSSEIN 2004). Regarding the latter, *Ateetee* is regarded as a female practice that promotes women's empowerment (BAXTER 1979; HUSSEIN 2004, 103-47, ØSTEBØ 2010, 405-18).

The Oromo consider *Maaram* as the divinity of women. It is believed that *Maaram* can help a barren woman to bear healthy children (KELBESSA 2001, 28). This paper and the contribution of many a scholar (see KNUTSSON 1967, 55; DASHU, 2010, N.P) indicate that *Maaram* is a later cultural addition among the Oromo due to contact with Orthodox Christians. That means the word "*Maaram*" seemed to originate from the Christian Mary (*Maryam* in Amharic) through the Christian influence. Here one can mention a very similar case regarding the influence of ancient Egyptian belief in Isis, which was a goddess of fertility and belief. Certain people in ancient Rome and the British Isles adopted this belief. Following the spread of Early Christianity, its followers began to replace the image of Isis with the symbol and veneration of Mary. The case of *Ateetee/Maaram* indicates that Isis was replaced by Mary

For some authors, *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are the same (KNUTSSON 1967, 55; DASHU 2010, N.P). Lambert Bartels for his part states that the Oromo of Western Matcha employ the term "*Ateetee*" to refer to "the name of the ritual in which *Ma[a]ram* is invoked" (1983, 129). In summary, in the Oromo religion, *Waaqa* is above all lesser deities and the creator of everything. Lesser deities are subservient to and mere refractions of *Waaqa.* So, there is one supreme Waaqa, which is the guardian of the whole world.

The Problem of Evil

Regarding the problem of evil one can raise the following questions: If *Waaqa* is all-good, why does He allow evil at all in the present world? Why does He not make the universe uniformly good? My informants in Ambo said that *Waaqa* created evil things because of the errors of human beings. "If *Waaqa* had not tolerated both good and evil things, he would have been ungrateful; His omnipotence and omniscience would not have been known. The Oromo believe that the coexistence of good and bad, beauty and ugly is necessary" (KELBESSA 2001, 24). As Kwasi Wiredu notes: "[o]ne can detect no doctrine of original sin in traditional African theology, but this portrayal of the cosmos suggests the notion that the interplay of good and evil forces is intrinsic to the world order" (2013, 36). But for the Oromo, *Waaqa* does not commit evil against His creation. He withdraws from human beings when they breach *saffuu* and disturb the cosmic and social order. Failure to act in accordance with *Waaqa*'s order will lead to punishment. Various types of misfortunes ranging from illness, mishaps, and other bad things can happen to the guilty person and his/her relatives. Some people believe that there are spiritual causes for natural disasters, serious illness, conflict, and so on. When human beings sin, *Waaqa* would deny them rain and other important requirements for life. Human beings, animals, and plants cannot survive without water.

In this connection, it may be argued that *Waaqa* does not care for his creations, as he leaves them to suffer when they violate His laws. In this way, *Waaqa* is only responsible for the protection of people and their suffering is their own. So, one can conclude that indifference would count as wickedness or some kind of weakness. However, this conclusion is not compatible with the nature of *Waaqa*. It has been stated that *Waaqa* is patient with his creations. If they correct their mistakes through rituals and acceptable practices, He will forgive them. When *Waaqa* withdraws from them, the concerned people ought to pray to *Waaqa* and try to correct and learn from their mistakes. So, when individuals failed to observe the laws of *Waaqa* and were punished as a result, they would ask *Waaqa* for forgiveness. Human beings are required to respect the laws of God and maintain the social order through rituals. "Oromo rituals recreate, enact, and maintain the social order. This social order symbolically expresses the cosmological order. Prayers link the earthly part of the cosmological order with the divine one" (AGUILAR 2005, 58). As stated above, certain sages of the Oromo people do not believe in *Waaqa*. They employ reason and reject non-evidence-based views and beliefs. They have doubts about the soundness of certain religious beliefs and practices in Oromia.

The Afterlife

The Oromo value earthly life rather than life after death. They do not consider this world as a preparation for the next world. Neither punishment nor special rewards await a person in the hereafter. For the Oromo, "[t]here is neither paradise to be hoped nor hell to be feared in the hereafter" (BOKKU 2011, 83-84). There is no such thing as salvific eschatology in Oromo and African thought about the postmortem destiny of humankind. As stated earlier, *Waaqa* punishes in this life. Oromo religion does not envisage the end of the world. In the Oromo worldview, the ancestors cannot cause illness and suffering. There has been no ancestor cult in the Oromo religion. The Oromo do not venerate the souls of deceased ancestors.

In the Oromo religion, it is generally believed that when a person dies, he or she will go to a place called *Iddo-Dhuggaa*, the "place of truth." Different authors have interpreted this belief in different ways. According to Gemetchu Megerssa:

> [t]he Oromo concept of the after-life describes death as a transitional stage after which human beings rejoin all their dead forefathers and mothers in a place called Iddo-Dhuggaa, the "Place of Truth." Here, he or she lives in a community very similar to the one on Earth. We are yet to discover the physical description of this Place of Truth (2005, 78)

Although Megerssa seemed to endorse the Christian conception of life after death, he could not explain the nature and location of *Iddo-Dhuggaa*. Bedassa Gebissa Aga states that for the *Waaqeffataa*, human beings are incapable of knowing the nature of the afterlife and what would happen after death:

> *Waaqeffataa* believe that life after death is a secret of *Waaqa*. Accordingly, only *Waaqa* knows what would happen after the earthly life. They don't believe that *Waaqa* would come in the future to judge people and send the righteous to heaven and the sinful to hell. Unlike Abrahamic God, *Waaqaa* wouldn't come at [a] certain time and leave this world at another moment. (AGA 2016, 5)

As I said earlier, the view that there is life after death for the Oromo indigenous believers is not defensible. The original version of the term *Iddo-Dhuggaa* does not seem to imply that *Waaqa* determines the future destination of a human being on the basis of his or her actions and conduct during life, and he or she would continue to live after the death of his or her physical body. Rather it seems to refer to equality both for the rich, poor, young, old, etc. Death is understood as complete cessation of life although those who have been influenced by Abrahamic religions believe that death is simply a temporary interruption to life. I suspect that the notion of life after death is a later accretion.

Some authors consider the concept *ekeraa* as the basis of belief in life after death in the Oromo religion (see KNUTSSON 1967, 55; MELBA 1988, 12-24; TA'A 2012, 95). The spirit of a dead person is called *ekeraa*. Some informants have reported that it would be possible to invoke and speak with a deceased person by performing special rituals. As I stated elsewhere, certain individuals claim to have some power "to make the *ekeraa* (the spirit of a dead person) speak with relatives of the former. They are known as *eker dubbiftuu*. According to tradition, individuals exist in the form of a spirit called the *ekeraa*. A person is required to pray to and to give an offering by slaughtering an animal every so often to one's parents' *ekeraa*" (KELBESSA 2001, 71). However, others categorically denied the view that an *eker dubbiftuu* has the spiritual power to communicate with the spirit of the dead person. One informant reported that a certain *eker dubbiftuu* deceived him (KELBESSA 2001, 71). Further research should be conducted to understand the nature of *ekeraa* and the role of *eker dubbiftuu*. As the currently available evidence appears to indicate, equating *ekeraa* with life after death does not justify the notion of life after death. Appealing to the spirit of ancestors is a kind of universal notion, and does not really go that far to justify the notion of life after death.

Furthermore, the Oromo do not believe in the reincarnation of an ancestor's soul in a descendant's personality. "Unlike some ethnic groups in Africa, the Oromo do not believe that the souls of departed ancestors retake bodily form in new babies in their families and clans. Instead, they believe that at the moment of death the soul will be separated from the body and go to *Waaqa*" (KELBESSA 2011, 73; see also BOKKU 2011, 79).

Conclusion

For the Oromo of Ethiopia, *Waaqa* is the creator of everything in the world. *Waaqa* is one Supreme Being, the guardian of the social and natural order, and is manifested in different ways. Each creature has its own Ayyaana and special place

in the universe. Different spirits are the manifestations of one Waaqa. *Waaqa*, Mother Earth, and its inhabitants are interrelated. *Saffuu* governs the relationship between different entities. Humans are interdependent with the natural environment and its inhabitants and should not disturb the social and cosmic order though they can use those resources that have been designated and blessed by *Waaqa* for humans to fulfill their diverse needs and desires. They are part of a much larger environment from which they cannot detach themselves, and they are under obligation to recognize and respect the rights of other living beings to live and flourish on mother Earth.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. AGA, Bedassa Gebissa. "Oromo Indigenous Religion: Waaqeffannaa," [IJRS], pp1-8. 2016. Vol III. No IV. Paperback.

2. AGUILAR, Mario I. "The 'God of the Oromo': A Religious Paradigm in the Work of Lambert Bartels," [Journal of Oromo Studies], pp52-67, 2005. Vol 12, Nos 1 & 2. Paperback.

3. AYANNA, Daniel. "The Concept of Waaqa and the Missionaries: A Preliminary Study in the Grafting of Christianity on a Traditional Religion in Wollega," [Proceedings of the Second Annual Seminar of the Department of History], pp105-128, 1984. Vol 1. Addis Ababa University: Addis Ababa. Paperback.

4. BARTELS, Lambert. [Oromo Religion. Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to Understand], 1983, Dietrich Reimer Verlag: Berlin. Paperback.

5. BAXTER, Paul T. W. "Atete in a Highland Arssi Neighborhood," [Northeast African Studies I], pp1-22, 1979. No 2. Paperback.

6. BAXTER, Paul T. W. and Aneesa KASSAM. "Placing Commemorative Stones and Plants (Sooduu Dhabaabuu)," [Journal of Oromo Studies], pp1-20, 2005. Vol 12. Nos 1 & 2. Paperback.

7. BITIMA, Tamene. [A Dictionary of Oromo Technical Terms], 2000. Rüdiger Köppe: Cologne. Paperback.

8. BOKKU, Dirribi Demissie. [Oromo Wisdom in Black Civilization], 2011. Finfinne Printing & Publishing S.C.: Finfinnee.

9. CERULLI, Enrico. [The Folk-Literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia, Harvard African Studies, Volume III], 1922. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA. Web.

10. DANIEL, Kasome. "An Investigation of Sin and Evil in African Cosmology," [International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology], pp145-155, 2009. Vol 1. No 8. Web.

11. DASHU, Max. "Atete, Goddess of the Oromo People and Her Role in Women's Resistance to Battering," 2010. **Retrieved** February 18, 2022. PDF) Atete, Goddess of the Oromo People in southern Ethiopia | Max Dashu - Academia.edu. Web.

12. DE SALVIAC, Martial. [An Ancient People in the State of Menelik. The Oromo: Great African Nation, Ayalew KANNO Tr.], 2008 [2005]. Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau: Finfinnee. Paperback.

13. HASSEN, Mohammed. "Pilgrimage to the Abbaa Muudaa," [Journal of Oromo Studies], pp142-157, 2005. Vol 12. Nos 1 & 2. Paperback.

14. ---------. [The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: 1300-1700], 2015. James Currey: Oxford. Paperback.

15. HUNTINGFORD, G. W. B. [The Galla of Ethiopia: The Kingdom of Kaffa and Janjero], 1955. International African Institute: London. Paperback.

16. HUSSEIN, Jeylan W. "A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromo Society," [African Study Monographs], pp103-147, 2004. Vol 25. No 3. Paperback.

17. KELBESSA, Workineh. [Traditional Oromo Attitudes Towards the Environment: An Argument for Environmentally Sound Development], 2001. Commercial Printing Enterprise: Addis Ababa. Paperback.

18. --------. [Indigenous and Modern Environmental Ethics: A Study of the Indigenous Oromo Environmental Ethic and Modern Issues of Environment and Development: Ethiopian Philosophical Studies. I.], 2011. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. Paperback.

19. --------. "Can African Environmental Ethics Contribute to Environmental Policy in Africa?" [Environmental Ethics], pp31-61, 2014. Vol 36. No 1. Paperback.

20. ---------. "Women and the Environment in Africa," [African Philosophy and Environmental Conservation, Jonathan O. CHIMAKONAM Ed.], pp83-102, 2018. Routledge: London and New York. Paperback.

21. KNUTSSON, K. E. [Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia], 1967. Ethnografiska Museet: Gothenburg. Paperback.

22. LEUS, Ton with Cynthia SALVADORI. [Aadaa Boraanaa: A Dictionary of Borana Culture], 2006. Shama Books: Addis Ababa. Paperback.

23. MEGERSSA, Gemetchu. [Booran], 1995. The Rosen Publishing Group: New York. Paperback.

24. ---------. "Knowledge, Identity and the Colonizing Structure: The Case of the Oromo in East and Northeast Africa," [Ph.D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993]. Web.

25. ----------. "The Oromo World View," [Journal of Oromo Studies], pp68-79, 2005. Vol 12. Nos 1 & 2. Paperback.

26. MEGERSSA, Gemetchu and Aneesa KASSAM. [Sacred Knowledge Traditions of the Oromo of the Horn of Africa], 2019. Fifth World Publications: Finfinnee. Paperback.

27. MELBA, Gadaa. [Oromia: An Introduction], 1988. NP: Khartoum. Paperback.

28. NICOLAS, Andrea. "Religious Transcendence in Oromo Women's Rituals: Ateetee and The Spirits' Practice," [History of Religions], pp165-201, 2018. Vol 58. No 2. Paperback.

29. OBENGA, Théophile. “Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy,” [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp31-49, 2004. Blackwell Publishing Ltd: Oxford. Paperback.

30. OKOLO, Chukwudum B. “Self as a Problem in African Philosophy,” [The African Philosophy Reader, 2nd ed., P. H. COETZEE, & A. P. J. ROUX Eds.], pp209-218, 2003. Routledge: New York. Paperback.

31. ØSTEBØ, Marit Tolo. “Wayyuu-Women’s Respect and Rights among the Arsi Oromo of Southeast Ethiopia,” [Research in Ethiopian Studies: Selected Papers of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Harald ASPEN, Birhanu TEFERRA, Shiferaw BEKELE, & Svein EGE Eds.], pp405-418, 2010. Otto Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden. Paperback.

32. SUMNER, CLAUDE. [Oromo Wisdom Literature, Volume 1. Proverbs Collection and Analysis], 1995. Gudina Tumsa Foundation: Addis Ababa. Paperback.

33. --------._.[Proverbs, Songs, Folk Tales: An Anthology of Oromo Literature], 1996. Gudina Tumsa Foundation: Addis Ababa. Paperback.

34. TA’A, Tesema. “Religious Beliefs among the Oromo: Waaqeffannaa, Christianity and Islam in the Context of Ethnic Identity, Citizenship and Integration,” [Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (EJOSSAH)], pp87-111, 2012. Vol VIII. No 1. Paperback.

35. TEFFO, Lebisa J. and Abraham P. J. Roux. “Themes in African Metaphysics,” [The African Philosophy Reader, 2nd ed. P. H. COETZEE and A. P. J. ROUX Eds], pp161-174, 2003. Routledge: New York. Paperback.

36. TEGEGN, Obsaa. [Mammaakaaf Weelluu. (Proverbs and Love Songs from Arssii)], 1993. Commercial Printing Press: Addis Ababa. Paperback.

37. TEMPELS, Placide. [Bantu Philosophy, C. KING Tr.], 1945. Présence Africaine: Paris. Paperback.

38. WHITE, Lynn. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” [Science], pp1203-1207, 1967. Vol 155. Paperback.

39. WIREDU, Kwasi. “African Religions,” [The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion, 2nd ed., Chad MEISTER, & Paul COPAN Eds.], pp29-38, 2007 [2013]. Routledge: London and New York. Paperback.

Cosmic Purpose: An African Perspective

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.6s
Submitted 19 March 2022. Accepted 17 August 2022

Aribiah David Attoe
Department of Philosophy,
University of the Witwatersrand
&
The Conversational School of Philosophy
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9786-1824
Email: aribiahdavidattoe@gmail.com

Abstract:
In much of the literature concerning African theories of meaning, there are certain clues regarding what constitutes meaningfulness from an African traditional perspective. These are theories of meaning *in* life such as the African God's purpose theory, which locates meaning in the obedience of divine law and/or the pursuit of one's destiny; the vital force theory, which locates meaning in the continuous augmentation of one's vital force through the expression and receipt of goodwill, rituals and the worship of God; and what I will call the transcendent communal normative theories, where meaning is located in the positive contributions one makes to his/her society, whether as a human being or as an ancestor. I contend that all these theories have one thing in common that unifies them – and that is the legitimization of God's existence through the continued sustenance of the universe. This, I will show, constitutes the meaning *of* life (in cosmic terms) from an African traditional religious perspective. To argue for this thesis, I will first tease out the basic tenets of the previously described theories of meaning. I will then analyse the metaphysical underpinning of the African relational ontology and how it reflects on the subject of *being*. Finally, I will end by showing the role of the universe in legitimizing the existence of God as a thing in the world, and how that constitutes the meaning *of* life.
Keywords: African; Cosmic purpose; God; Meaning of life; metaphysics; sustenance

Introduction

Perhaps the most difficult thing to attempt, in any discourse about meaning, is to attempt to provide an account of meaning at a cosmic scale. When one asks, "what is the meaning of life?", or, more poignantly, "what is the meaning of existence?", one is asking about something that appears to overwhelm the human intellect. Available evidence greatly supports the claim that man's place in this universe is not at the centre of it, for even if we were the only beings in the universe that had the capacity to express rationality from time to time, the overwhelming vastness of space places us as an insignificantly small speck in relation to the universe itself. With all our rationality, we can barely map out the oceans on our planets. How then can we know enough about the universe itself in order to propose the meaning of existence?

A careful observation of African views about meaning offers some clues. In recent times, African philosophers have been more interested in the question of life's meaning from an African perspective. Among the dominant views, with regard to the traditional African perspective, the focus has been on communalistic theories of meaning, the divine purpose view and the vitalist theory of meaning. For me, there is a common thread of thought that runs through these views, which, offers us a clue to the ultimate purpose of life. Drawing from African metaphysics (especially with regard to relationality), I see that the necessity of a first cause, the obedience of divine law, the pursuit of communal normative function and the augmentation of vitality, all point to sustenance/harmony that ensures continuous relationality. And so, I show, in this paper that the meaning of life (cosmic purpose), at least from a human perspective is the sustenance of the universe such that through a continuous relationship with God, God's existence is legitimised[1]. There are, of course, other views, such as the love view (MLUNGWANA 2020), the Yoruba cluster view (BALOGUN, 2020) and the personhood view (which can be subsumed under the communal view) (MOLEFE, 2020), but even these other theories of meaning in life all point to some form of flourishing, which does not contradict my main thesis.

To my knowledge, only one African philosopher, Ada Agada (2015; 2022), has provided a systematic account of the meaning of life (cosmic purpose) – meaning, here, thought of as the pursuit of unattainable perfection. Others like Wiredu (1992), Attoe (2020), Mlungwana (2020), Molefe (2020), Metz (2020), etc., have only considered meaning in terms of what accounts for meaning in a life (what accounts for moments of meaningfulness in an individual's life). This article offers the only other original account of the meaning of life in African philosophy, locating meaning in the sustained existence of the universe in pursuit of its mandate to legitimise God's existence.

Pursuing the thesis of this article is not an easy task and, to do it, I begin by first delineating what I mean by the "meaning of life" in order to set the stage for the subsequent discussions about the meaning of life. Next, I re-examine some of the more dominant theories of meaning in life, in the lead up to revealing the common thread that points towards the cosmic purpose that I envision. I do this in the second section. Finally, by extrapolating certain ideas about relationality in African metaphysics and combining that with insights from some of the more dominant African conceptions of meaning in life, I show how cosmic purpose involves the continued sustenance of the world, in order to legitimise God's existence.

[1] I must state, at this point what I take to be legitimisation. Legitimisation, for me, is an ontological recognition that a thing is an existent thing. A flying unicorn is not a legitimised being since there is no ontological recognition of its *being* a thing in the world. The legitimisation of the existence of a flying unicorn would involve that unicorn's relationship with other beings and/or a recognition of that relationship by the being with which the flying unicorn has a relationship. Without this, the flying unicorn would not exist or would be a being-alone – being-alone, itself, implying non-existence.

The Meaning *of* Life: Some Clarifications

What I do, here, is clarify precisely what I mean when I talk about the meaning of life. Such a clarification must, first, begin with a definition of what I take meaningfulness to entail. The concept of meaning (or the meaning of "meaning"), as Metz (2013) points out, aggregates what all (and only) talk of meaningfulness is about. In other words, it focuses on what all *conceptions* of meaning have in common.

There are many definitions of what meaning is all about, but one can congregate all these suggestions into two categories. First, is the "singular" category, so-called because these concepts of meaning usually point to one single idea as what encapsulates meaning. There are some who talk about purpose (MULGAN 2015; POETTCKER 2015), normative reasons for action (VISAK 2017), transcendence (METZ 2013), etc. However, there's a problem with singular concepts of meaning. This problem lies in the fact that singular ideas are much too narrow to account for all, and only those things, that meaning is about (as I have explained elsewhere – see Attoe and Chimakonam [2020]). This then brings us to the pluralistic category. Within this category, meaning is defined in terms of a myriad of ideas or concepts (two or more), put together in order to fully account for the meaning of "meaning". Metz favours this view, and you can see this in his family resemblance approach to meaning, where he speaks about meaning in the following terms: "[T]o ask about meaning . . . is to pose questions such as: which ends, besides one's own pleasure as such are most worth pursuing for their own sake; how to transcend one's animal nature; and what in life merits great esteem or admiration" (METZ 2013, 34). Metz's account is attractive to me since it captures much of my intuitions about what talk of meaning entails, like I have said before. However, pluralist theories can also be narrow and inadequate, and Metz's pluralist theory reflects this narrowness (see ATTOE & CHIMAKONAM 2020). This has led me to modify the Metzian approach in such a way that it incorporates subjective forms of meaningfulness, and the coherence of overarching goals needed to contemplate talk about the meaning *of* life, as follows:

> *To ask about meaning is to pose questions such as: which subjectively pursued ends, besides one's own pleasure, as such are worth pursuing for their own sake; how to transcend one's animal nature; what in life merits great esteem or admiration; and what overarching goal or purpose ties meaningful actions in a life, considered as a whole, together into one comprehensible and coherent whole*. (See ATTOE & CHIMAKONAM 2020, 5. Emphasis in the original)

Now that we have a sense of what I mean by "meaning", it is important that I delineate what I mean by "meaning *of*". In the past, I had stated that my preferred definition of the term 'meaning of' in contrast to "meaning in" is as follows:

> Meaning in life generally refers to the moments of meaningfulness that occasion an individual's life. The meaning *of* life involves the individual's life, taken as whole, and whether that life can be considered meaningful. *It must be noted that this is different from*

> *how the term "meaning of life" is usually used by a majority of philosophers of meaning. In existing literature, the term "meaning of life" usually refers to cosmic meaning (meaning of the universe) or the meaning of humanity as a whole*. (ATTOE 2021, 183, emphasis mine)

For this essay, I revert to the more popular definitions of the term "meaning of" among scholars, which view the term on a cosmic scale – that is, is there a purpose to the world and/or is there a purpose to humanity at large? This would be the concern of the next few sections.

African views about Meaning: A Roadmap to Cosmic purpose

In this section, what I do is provide an overview of some prominent traditional African views about life's meaningfulness, and situate them as clues to the cosmic purpose that I propose later on.

God's purpose

God is seen, by most traditional African religious philosophers and metaphysicians, as the source of the universe, as well as its sustainer (WIREDU 1998; 2012; NKULU-N'SENGHA 2009; ATTOE 2022). The reason for this is not far-fetched. First off, the world is seen as mostly contingent, and, therefore, dependent on something else (or something prior) for its existence. However, this contingency cannot be universal. This is because, for the anonymous traditional African philosophers (like those of the Akan school of thought), nothingness is impossible and even incomprehensible. If nothingness is impossible, then the eternal existence of some thing(s) in the world is inevitable since some *thing* must continue to exist if nothingness must be avoided. This view leads us to the foundationalism that grounds popular proofs for the existence of God such as the cosmological arguments and the ontological arguments. Now, one can of course argue from a pantheistic perspective and conclude that it could well be the case that the universe itself is eternal and the contingency of things only applies to the interactions that happen within this universe. This route is *prima facie* plausible. However, the literature in African metaphysics and African philosophy of religions, clearly toe the line that there exists a distinct being and/or group of beings, which are eternal and/or responsible for the existence of contingent things-in-the-world. This Being, often referred to as the "supreme being", is ultimately the first cause from which other things in the world emerge. This is the true power of the Supreme Being.

This supreme being, is mostly thought of as a personalised entity – a being that is conscious, a being that is superlatively rational, and a being that possesses personality/character. In other words, this supreme being is a *person*, in the highest sense of the word. While some have argued that this is not the case (ATTOE 2022), most mainstream African philosophers persist in thinking about God as a person. It is this mainstream view that allows African philosophers, while pursuing a God-driven account of meaning, to think of God as the sort of being that can rationalise purpose and imbue that purpose in the psyche of man, either directly or through mediums, and actually does so.

This view then leads us to the God's purpose or divine purpose theory that African philosophers have proposed (see: ATTOE,2020). According to this view, there are two interrelated ways in which meaningfulness can be achieved. First is through the fulfilment of one's destiny. This view is largely derived from theories of destiny, especially those proposed by Yoruba metaphysicians like Segun Gbadegesin (2004) and Oladele Balogun (2007). According to the view, there are two ways in which the pursuit of God's purpose would ascribe meaning to an individual's life. First, is through the pursuit of a God-given destiny. According to these Yoruba metaphysicians and religious scholars, prior to one's birth, the supreme being, called *Olodumare*, provides the individual with a destiny (GBADEGESIN 2004; BALOGUN 2007). While Gbadegesin (2004) mentions that there is no real consensus regarding how that destiny is conferred,[2] the fact remains that destinies are manufactured by God and the manner of conferment does not change that fact.

Destinies must be distinguished from fate, which generally involves some sort of supremely predeterministic trajectory for a life. Destinies are slightly different. Attoe (2020) defines destiny in the following terms:

> Destiny, as I imagine it, is more akin to a preset end, that is intimate and specific to an individual and generally involves a lifelong pursuit of that end, or, at the very least, a pursuit that takes most of an individual's life. Destiny in this context would not involve a series of specific events that are meant to occur in the life of an individual, but would rather involve some predetermined purpose, which an individual may, as a matter of free will, decide to accomplish. (2020, 130)

Unlike fate, one can choose whether or not to fulfil one's destiny, and, as Gbadegesin contends, it is even possible to alter one's destiny, especially if it is discovered (through certain forms of divination) to be a bad destiny. Meaningfulness, for the individual, would then mean accomplishing, or, at least, pursuing one's destiny (ATTOE 2020, 131). The major takeaway from the destiny view, as far as this article is concerned, is not the fact that meaning is derived from pursuing a god-given destiny, but rather the fact that the supreme being, in all its superlative glory, is the sort of being that considers creating destinies for human beings as something worth doing. One must wonder the reasons why this is the case, and this question sets the stage for what I discuss later on in the last section of this article.

The second way in which pursuing God's purpose confers meaning is through the obedience of divine laws. Unlike the Abrahamic religions, the dictates of God's laws, are not written in sacred texts, as far as most African religions are

[2] There are some who believe that the individual chooses his/her destiny from a myriad of choices, while others believe that destinies are imposed on the individual by the supreme being and/or other smaller deities

concerned. They are, instead, made known through intermediaries, usually passed down from God to lower deities, and then to the appropriate diviner and/or priest.[3] These diviners stand as the vital link between the physical world of humans, and the more spiritual aspects of reality. They communicate these laws to their respective societies, and these laws become part of the norms and cultures of that society. These laws usually involve specific moral injunctions, useful rituals, taboos that must be avoided, etc. Pursuing these divine laws mostly engenders flourishing – not only flourishing for the individual but, also, the flourishing of the community in which the individual belongs.

The disobedience of divine laws, on the other hand, often leads to an imbalance or disharmony, not only communally speaking but even cosmically speaking as well. And so, in the face of imbalance, the universe must restore itself in some way. This is why the disobedience of a divine law may involve things like fines, sacrifices, or specific forms of catastrophe, meant to reverse the disruptions caused by such disharmonious acts. Thus, within this context, meaning or meaninglessness is achieved in relation to the obedience or disobedience of divine commands, respectively. These laws are part of God's purpose since divine laws emanate from God and are not arbitrary. It would seem, then, that harmony-in-the-world is important enough to elicit divine laws from the supreme being.

Vitalism

The vital force theory offers us another perspective on life's meaning that would be relevant to the aims of this essay. To understand vitalism as a theory of meaning in/of life, we must first understand what vitalism, itself, means. The idea of vitalism is this: at the top of the hierarchy of being is the supreme being. Apart from the fact that all contingent things emerge from this supreme being, there is the belief that there exists some ethereal life force that emanates from the supreme being and permeates all that exists, and in varying degrees. For human beings, this force is what animates us, imbues us with creative power, and signals our wellbeing. It is, perhaps, for this reason that some African scholars, like Maduabuchi Dukor (as quoted by Wilfred Lajul), submit that this vital force is what is called "soul" in other philosophical traditions (LAJUL 2017, 28).

This life/vital force must not be mistaken with substance or essence (in the Aristotelian sense of the word). The reason for this is simple. As Attoe (2020, 133) notes:

> Force here must be distinguished from the Aristotelian idea of substance. Whereas substances indicate the essential property of a thing (i.e. what continues to endure as the thing-in-itself) that may differ from reality to reality, force (vital force) is thought of as an all-pervading ethereal entity, emanating from God and simply present in all of reality.

[3] It is important that I point out that in Yoruba religion, the ifa corpus exists as (oral) religious literature, used by diviners and priests for discernment. This does not however change the fact that these priests also received divine instructions for their communities.

What is interesting is that whereas vital force is present in all things, and in humans specifically, this force can be diminished. And, so, certain forms of encounters that are deemed negative – such as an encounter with sickness, malevolent spirits, ill-will, etc., - are thought of as being capable of diminishing one's vitality. beyond negative encounters, certain forms of negative actions – such as being the bearer of ill-will, failing to worship the appropriate deity or failing to perform a certain ritual at the appropriate time – are the sorts of actions that enable a reduction in one's vital force. It is this reduction of vital force that expresses a reduction in individual wellbeing. When unchecked, a drastic reduction of an individual's vital force leads to eventual death. The controversial[4] Placide Tempels captures what I am saying quite succinctly:

> Each being has been endowed by God with a certain force, capable of strengthening the vital energy of the strongest being of all creation: man. Supreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is, to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force: the worst misfortune and, in very truth, the only misfortune, is, he thinks, the diminution of this power. Every illness, wound or disappointment, all suffering, depression, or fatigue, every injustice and every failure: all these are held to be, and are spoken of by the Bantu as, a diminution of vital force. Illness and death do not have their source in our own vital power, but result from some external agent who weakens us through his greater force. It is only by fortifying our vital energy through the use of magical recipes, that we acquire resistance to malevolent external forces. (Tempels 1959, 23-24)

What Tempels says above also tells us that beyond the diminution of one's vital force, it is possible (perhaps, necessary) for one to augment one's vital force in a bid to achieve higher levels of wellbeing and avoid untimely death. This is done by performing certain rituals (what Tempels crudely calls "magical recipes") or reverencing the supreme being (who is the ultimate embodiment of vitality), engaging positively (not malevolently) with others and also exercising one's creative genius.

It is on the basis of this that Attoe argues for a vital force theory of meaning that sees meaning in terms of supremely augmenting one's vital force, and meaninglessness in terms of diminishing one's vital force or those of others. According to him:

> Meaningfulness would then imply performing those acts that habitually improve one's own life force, as this would mean an

[4] The controversy surrounding Tempels lies in his tendency to unanimism, with regards to how Africans view the world, and, of course the fact that the Bantus remained objects in his philosophical work (since his work was mainly addressed to a Western audience, seeking to prescribe how best to civillise and christianise the Bantus).

> improvement in the quality of life. Conversely, a meaningless life would involve *not* performing those acts that improve one's vital force (at the very least) and/or performing those actions that do act against the habitual improvement of one's vital force (the gravest of this, in the African context, would most likely be suicide). (ATTOE 2020, 134)

While we may consider the increase of one's vital force as an end-in-itself, I am convinced that this goal dovetails into a grander more cosmic purpose that cherishes the sustenance of the entity that possesses this vitality, as opposed to its death. Again, I explore the reason for this in the last section.

Communal Normative Function Theory

The African philosophical scene is famous for its emphasis on communality, whether metaphysically speaking, ethically speaking or even politically speaking. Indeed many philosophers across sub-Saharan Africa, such as Mbiti (1990), Ramose (1999), Menkiti (2004), Asouzu (2004, 2007), Murove (2007), Ozumba and Chimakonam (2014), Metz (2017), Attoe (2022) etc., have all propounded their own versions of communalism or built some of their ideas on that communalism.

Being within the context of African communalism, is always understood as being-with-others and never as *being-alone*. In this way, for reality to gain full expression, it must remain in a relationship with other beings in the world. This is why Asouzu (2004, 2007) believes that there is a mutual relationship of dependency that exists between and among realities. One cannot fully grasp reality as a whole, or being in particular, without recognizing the relationships that characterise the existence of that being. This is why Asouzu confirms that all that exists, serves as a missing link of reality.

This general metaphysics and understanding of existence trickle down to much of African ethics and value theory as well as theories about social relationships. Mbiti's ubiquitous dictum "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (MBITI 1990, 106), possibly one of the most quoted phrases in African philosophy, encapsulates the thinking that one ought to act relationally and in a way that ensures the community (the "we") is sustained since it is that community that ensures the individual's identity and well-being. This is the same thing that is expressed by the Ubuntu maxim (roughly translated as: "a person is a person through other persons'. Also, take the normative idea of personhood, as another instance. According to Ifeanyi Menkiti (2004), the achievement of personhood is nothing more than the achievement of moral/normative excellence. But what does this normative excellence entail? It usually entails engaging in morally relevant activities that allow for the flourishing of others in the society, not just for the sake of one's personhood (or the achievement of it) but for the sake of the other individual/person whose wellbeing is also at stake. Beyond moral engagements, other normative engagements are also important. Individuals must engage in certain rites that, for the most part, engender a sort of camaraderie between members of a society in general, or among specific members of a society (such as an age grade). Here, certain festivals and rites of passage are relevant.

This is where Metz's version of African relationality comes to play when he says that "[a]n action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop communion" (METZ 2017, 111). Where harmony entails a sense of shared identity and solidarity.

Also, engaging in rituals, whether community-wide or individual-based, is another form of pursuit that leads to personhood. Here, the emphasis is on a relationship with the divine – whether ancestors, spirits or, ultimately, the supreme being. These rituals become a way of acknowledging the supreme being and the relationship that one might have with the supreme being. It also becomes a way of ensuring that, beyond augmenting one's vital force, the individuals that make up the community are, at least, sustained by the magnanimity of the supreme being. And so, in communalistic philosophy, the emphasis is always on the sustainability of the community or the harmony that sustains that community.

Cosmic Purpose

All I have said so far have led to the ideas that I would present in this section. What is the purpose of existence and what is the place of the human individual in this purpose? One would think that answering this question is impossible for the human intellect since it is the case that our knowledge of the known universe is limited and we have no full grasp of the universe in totality – at least, scientifically speaking. How would one claim to know the purpose of a thing s/he barely understands?

While it is true that we don't know much about the universe, it is not always the case that one must fully grasp a thing before one can understand its purpose. From a relatively young age, I could deduce that the purpose of a car was to transport human beings and certain goods from one place to another. This seems fairly obvious, yes, but I did not need to be a mechanical engineer – who not only knew every single component of the car but also understood the way each part worked and related to each other – to understand this purpose. So, it does not seem immediately apparent that one must understand every facet of the universe in order to know its purpose. However, this point is not sufficient as it does not tell us about that purpose precisely. What is the purpose of the universe? African religions and the philosophy/metaphysics undergirding them, provide clues that may just answer the question.

To understand the meaning of life (in terms of cosmic purpose) from an African philosophical perspective, one must begin from the metaphysics that forms its foundation and work through the conceptions of meaning that I have just outlined above. African metaphysics is mostly a relational metaphysics, from the literature that much is clear. Whether it is a relationship between the material world and the spiritual/immaterial or just a relationship among "missing links", the interplay among things in the world is a supremely important aspect of African metaphysics. What is more interesting, though, is the suggestion that relationality is a necessary aspect of reality. The first clue to this necessity is the lack of belief in the idea of absolute nothingness and the attendant idea that something must always exist in place (see: WIREDU 1998, 29). Nothingness loses the battle of existence because it simply characterises an empty set – a thing conceivable only in relation with somethingness. When we say there is nothing, we only point to a partial non-existence of things within a particular space or place. Remove space

and place and what you are supposed to be left with is absolute nothingness, which, in truth, is inconceivable. It is inconceivable because for nothingness to exist (already an oxymoronic statement), not only would things, space, place, etc., cease to exist, even the conscious mind for which such emptiness must make sense, must necessarily cease to exist. Nothingness cannot be conceived by a conscious mind. And if Attoe's (2022) conception of existence is to be believed, this absence of a conscious gaze at something precludes the existence of that thing. So if nothingness does not exist, somethingness must replace it, no matter how mundane, and this somethingness must exist within space, time or place – as the anonymous traditional African philosophers of the Akan school of thought so long ago intuited. That somethingness, if it must always exist, must also necessarily be eternal. Whether we are thinking about a static eternal thing or a thing in eternal flux, it does not matter, that thing must always exist eternally, if somethingness is always around. Here, we catch of glimpse of the realm in which God exists – as an eternal thing that is beyond contingency, which must always exist if somethingness is necessary. This eternal thing, whatever it is (call it God, if you wish), must also necessarily be in a relationship with other things in the world - at the barest minimum, it is a God in relation to space, time and/or place. Just like the anonymous traditional African philosophers intuited (WIREDU 1998; ASOUZU 2004).

At this point, I will ask my readers to bear with me as I take a metaphysical leap. In my previous writing, I had, for good reason, envisioned a God lacking personality – an unconscious material God. However, my aim in this article is not to show what type of God really exists, but to find an African-inspired answer to the question: what is the meaning of life. Since this is the case, I would follow the trajectory of many African metaphysicians and take a leap, assuming that this eternal and necessary being, which we may call God, is a conscious being (perhaps at a higher level of consciousness and vitality than any other being, like most African metaphysicians are ready to believe) (MBITI, 1990; NKULU-N'SENGHA, 2009). With this understanding of God in place, we can proceed further.

Now, also important in African metaphysical belief systems is the idea of relationality and the importance of that relationality in elevating/legitimising/authenticating *being*. Pantaleon Iroegbu (1995) says as much when he confirms that being-alone is the worst form of being – indeed it is the closest to nothingness. So, beyond the most basic form of relationship – the relationship between a thing and space/time/place – something more is expected. That something more, for me, is a relationship between a (conscious) being and another conscious being because it is consciousness that grants/acknowledges existence. One can further imagine that the more conscious a being the stronger the type of relationship it can foster. That is why a relationship with certain types of animals (say a dog, dolphin or elephant) may be considered more fulfilling than a relationship with certain other types of living things like microbes or plants. It is also for this reason that human to human relationships, or human to ancestors relationships, are also prized. It is for this reason that, according to Menkiti (2004), a positive normative relationship with others and one's community is what legitimises an individual as a *person* (in the normative sense of the word). Of course, with conscious beings, relationships can be positive, negative, indifferent

or a mixture of all three. Hence, the emphasis on normativity as a way of ensuring that relationships remain positive and person-affirming rather than person-degrading.

If we agree that conscious beings require other conscious beings to achieve certain level of existential legitimisation and we also agree that God is consciousness (as per our initial leap), then we must also admit that to gain a concrete level of legitimisation then God must go beyond a relationship with certain inanimate things and have a relationship with other conscious beings. If God created the world in the sensational way (in the ultimate show of power and glory) that most Africans believe, then one must imagine that the only reason that conscious beings exist in the world is to acknowledge and legitimise the existence of God.

If you do not believe me that is fine but let us take a second look at the conceptions of meaning that I outlined earlier and you will begin to see something that ties all three views together. With the divine purpose theory, we find that individuals have destinies, which they must try to accomplish and/or divine laws that they ought to obey. Especially with regards to divine laws, we find that these laws often attempt to ensure that individuals act in ways that sustain the *life* of the community in which they belongs. These divine laws are usually moral norms or ritualistic norms that aim to sustain the community or correct/mitigate against any imbalance/disharmony that may accrue with regards to everyday life. Even destinies, whether good or bad destinies, are usually given for these same purposes. Even when an individual's destiny is to pay the supreme price of self-sacrifice, it is usually for the benefit of the community in the long run.

In the vitality view, meaning resides in increasing one's vital force. How is this done? By expressing one's creative genius, acknowledging God through worship and/or certain rituals, and being good to other people in one's society. One's creative genius usually serves the community in some positive way or the other, and being good to others not only ensures the increase in vitality in both individuals in that relationship but also ensures the flourishing of all individuals involved. All these acts point to the sustenance/flourishing of the community of persons – to ensure that conscious beings continue to exist, sustaining the relationship that legitimises God's existence. For if there was nothing left in the world except God, then God would cease to *be* since *being* involves a relationship with something else, no matter how basic. Even acknowledgment and worship of God through rituals clearly express this desire to acknowledge God, legitimise God's existence and enable God's flourishing. Beyond that, the fact that vitality increases, combined with the fact that the higher the level of consciousness the better the relationship among beings, only shows that this route to meaning specifically exists as a mode of legitimising God's existence in the best way possible.

Finally, we have the communal normative function theory, which locates meaning in performing acts that are morally good/uplifting in respect to others in the society and acts that sustain the balance/harmony in the community such that that community flourishes. This need to continually sustain the community of conscious beings (or, at least, conscious human beings), combined with the idea that it is conscious beings that legitimise God's existence, immediately points us to the idea that the legitimisation of God's existence undergirds this route to

meaning. It is no mistake, for instance, that some like Menkiti (2004) and Mbiti (1990) before him, have claimed that it is tribal memory, the mere remembering of ancestors, that sustains the very existence of said ancestors. A simple collective forgetfulness by one's relatives (and the community at large) left behind, suddenly imposes on that unfortunate ancestor a second and final death. If all this is true, then the meaning *of* life becomes apparent. For a being, God, to fully announce itself as an existent thing, and for God to avoid the worst type of existence (being-alone) it became important for a universe of other things to exist, and not only that but that conscious beings also exist and continue to do so. This is why the creation process (in whatever guise) had to happen, for what would have been more terrible for the supreme being than to be a being-alone? And so, in following routes to meaning that encourage the sustenance of the universe and the flourishing of the community of conscious beings, the individual legitimises God's existence.

What then is the meaning of life in cosmic terms? The meaning of life from an African philosophical perspective is the sustained legitimisation of God's existence. The desire to preserve our lives, the value we place on marriage and procreation, the meaning we find in contributing to human flourishing or creating beings that contribute to human flourishing, our desire to augment our vitality and the vitality of others, even our worship of God, the very idea of survival and self-preservation, all point to this one purpose. When an individual acts in a sustained disharmonious way, his/her life becomes meaningless since acting in a disharmonious manner undermines the sustenance of the existence of the universe (and the conscious beings in that universe) that legitimise God's existence. Much of human life, and much of our pursuits of meaning in life (at least from the African perspective) all dovetail into this grand purpose.

Some objections: two major objections arise, with regards to this view. First is the more obvious objection, which is that the traditional African vision of the attributes of God, especially as a conscious being, that is found in extant literature, is actually hinged on no real evidence (whether material or logical). If there is no reason to believe that God is a personalised conscious entity, like I have argued elsewhere, then this whole edifice collapses. The response from friends of the traditional African view would be that it is, at least, conceivable that the supreme being is a conscious being, if one must take the intelligent design theory seriously (WIREDU 1998). If so, then the view can be entertained since it is conceivable that the world was created by an intelligent (and, therefore, conscious) being. This conceivability would allow us, and friends of the traditional African view, to take the leap I made earlier seriously.

The second objection lies in the idea that this route to meaning considers human beings in only instrumental terms, as means to a divine end, and so the idea does not count as an attractive route to meaningfulness. While this may be true, one can plausibly argue that the rules that guide discussions of cosmic meaning may be different from those that guide moments of meaning in an individual's life. It could well be that the cosmic purpose ought to resist human emotions, morality and ego, and places its focus on the desires/pursuits of the first cause, or even the Universe at large. Beyond this, the end of sustaining the universe is mutually dependent on the legitimisation of God's existence. In this way, while the cosmic purpose described here might seem like an instrumental end, it actually is an end-

in-itself. If this is true, then this critique fails. Nevertheless, were we to agree to this idea of instrumentality, the feeling that the route is an unattractive one mostly taints it as a *desirable* route to meaning, and not necessarily as a route to meaning that is intuitively untrue.

Conclusion

So far, we have tried to draw out a cosmic purpose from traditional African views about meaning, and from our analysis we have seen how the universe must exist as a way of legitimising God's existence. While this might be a plausible claim about the meaning of life, it does raise certain important questions that would be relevant for further philosophical reflection. For instance, of what value are human beings in cosmic terms, and in the eyes of the African God? Is the universe dispensable if other universes can be created by the supreme being in just the same way that this one was created? If not, is this universe a necessary derivative from the first cause, in much the same way that other effects necessarily derive from other causes? Are there other ideas about cosmic purpose that can be derived from African religious thought? All these questions are important questions for African metaphysicians and philosophers of religion to consider for future research.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. AGADA, Ada. [Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis and Values in African Philosophy], 2015. Paragon House: Minnesota. Paperback.

2. _____. [Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy: Beyond Universalism and Particularism], 2022. Routledge: New York. Hardback.

3. ASOUZU, Innocent. [Methods and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy], 2004. University of Calabar Press: Calabar. Paperback.

4. ----------. [Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions], 2007. LIT VERLAG: Zurich. Paperback.

5. ATTOE, Aribiah. [Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Singular Complementarity], 2022. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham. Ebook.

6. ----------. “Accounts of Life’s Meaning from a Contemporary African Perspective,” [Philosophia Africana], pp168-185, 2021. Vol 20. No 2. Ebook.

7. ----------. "A Systematic Account of African Conceptions of the Meaning of/in Life," [South African Journal of Philosophy], pp127-139, 2020. Vol 39. No 2. Web.

8. ATTOE, Aribiah & CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan. “The Covid-19 Pandemic and Meaning in life,” [Phronimon], pp1-12, 2020. Vol 21. Web.

9. BALOGUN, Oladele. “The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft-Deterministic Interpretation,” [Nordic Journal of African Studies], pp116-130, 2007. Vol 16. No 1. Web.

10. ----------. “The Traditional Yoruba Conception of a Meaningful life” [South African Journal of Philosophy], pp166-178, 2020. Vol 39. No 2. Web.

11. GBADEGESIN, Segun. “‘Eniyan’: The Yoruba Conception of a Person,” [Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings, P. H. COETZEE Ed.] pp149-168, 1998. Thomson Publishing: Johannesburg. Paperback.

12. ----------. Towards A Theory of Destiny. [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp313-323, 2004. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford. Ebook.

13. IROEGBU, Pantaleon. [Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy], 1995. International University Press: Owerri. Paperback.

14. LAJUL, Wilfred. “African Metaphysics: Traditional and Modern Discussions,” [Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy, Isaac UKPOKOLO Ed.], pp19-48, 2017. Palgrave Macmillian: Cham. Ebook.

15. MBITI, John. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1990. Heinemann: London. Paperback.

16. MENKITI, Ifeanyi. "On the Normative Conception of a Person," [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp324-331, 2004. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford. Ebook.

17. METZ, Thaddeus. [Meaning in Life], 2013. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Paperback.

18. ----------. “Towards an African Moral Theory (Revised Edition [Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy, Isaac UKPOKOLO Ed.], pp97-119, 2017. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham. Ebook.

19. MLUNGWANA, Y. “An African Approach to the Meaning of Life,” [South African Journal of Philosophy], pp153-165, 2020. Vol 39. No 2. Web.

20. MOLEFE, Motsamai. “Personhood and a Meaningful Life in African Philosophy,” [South African Journal of Philosophy], pp194-207, 2020. Vol 39. No 2. Web.

21. MULGAN, Tim. [Purpose in the Universe: The Moral and Metaphysical Case for Ananthropocentric Purposivism], 2015. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Paperback.

22. MUROVE, M. (2007). “The Shona Ethic of Ukama with Reference to the Immortality of Values,” [The Mankind Quarterly], pp179-189, 2007. Vol 48. Paperback.

23. NKULU-N'SENGHA, Mutombo. "God." [Encyclopedia of African Religions, Molefi ASANTE & Ama MAZAMA Eds.], pp284-293, 2009. Sage Publications: California. Paperback.

24. OZUMBA, Godfrey, & CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan. [Njikoka Amaka Further Discussions on the Philosophy of Integrative Humanism: A Contribution to African and Intercultural Philosophy], 2014. 3rd Logic Option: Calabar. Paperback.

25. POETTCKER, Jason. "Defending the Purpose Theory of Meaning in Life," [Journal of Philosophy of Life], pp180-207, 2015. Vol 5. Web.

26. RAMOSE, M. [African Philosophy through Ubuntu], 1999. Mond Books: Harare. Paperback.

27. ----------. "The Ethics of Ubuntu," [The African Philosophy Reader, P. COETZEE and A. ROUX Eds.], pp379-387, 2003. Routledge: London. Ebook.

28. TEMPELS, Placide. [Bantu Philosophy], 1959. Presence Africaine: Paris. Ebook.

29. VISAK, Tatjana. (2017). "Understanding 'Meaning of life' in Terms of Reasons for Action," [Journal of Value Inquiry], pp507-530, 2017. Vol 51. Paperback.

30. WIREDU, Kwasi. "African Religions," [The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion], pp29-38, September 2012. October 2021. Web.

31. ----------. "Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion," [African Studies Quarterly], pp17-46, 1998. Vol 1. No 4. Web.

32. ----------. WIREDU, Kwasi. "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture," [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies 1, Kwasi WIREDU, & Kwame GYEKYE Eds.], pp. 137-152, 1992. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. Ebook.

The Concept of God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.7s
Submitted 4 May 2022. Accepted 3 September 2022

Anthony Chimankpam OJIMBA
Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8188-8392
Email: anthony.ojimba@unn.edu.ng

&

Victor Iwuoha CHIDUBEM
Department of Political Science and School of General Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9056-988X
Email: victor.iwuoha@unn.edu.ng

Abstract
This paper examines the concept of God in traditional Igbo-African religious thought, prior to the advent of Western religion, with a view to showing that the idea of a God/Deity who is supreme in every area of life and sphere of influence and who "creates out of nothing," like the God of the Christian or Western missionaries, is unrecognized in the Igbo-African traditional religious thought. Even though the Igbo conceive of strong and powerful deities that can only reign supreme within their respective sphere of influence where they are in charge, none of these deities is identical to the supreme God promoted by the Christian missionaries. The Igbo traditional religious worldview maintains a polytheistic religious view, unlike the monotheistic outlook of the Christian religion. To achieve its goal, the paper adopts the method of historical hermeneutics and textual analysis.
Keywords: God, Igbo traditional religion, Creation out of nothing, Polytheism, Monotheism; *Chi*, *Chukwu*, *Chineke*.

Introduction

This paper examines the concept of God in the Igbo-African traditional religious thought, before the arrival of the Christian religion, in line with the idea of the Supreme Being, preached by the Christian missionaries, with a view to showing that the Igbo concept of God is not identical with, and does not correspond to, the idea of God, as a Supreme Being, propagated by the Western missionaries and Christian theologians. The paper does not aim at showing that the Supreme God does not exist nor possess the qualities attributed to Him by the Christian religion; rather it aims at demonstrating that this idea was unrecognized in the Igbo religious thought, prior to the advent of Christianity.

Some African scholars and Christian theologians (see NJOKU 2002; METUH 1972), in their reflections on Igbo religious practices, occasionally hold that the Igbo believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. In addition to this, they claim that the concept of God, in Igbo religious thought, is identical to the Christian or Western religious concept of the Supreme God. This God, according to them, possesses special attributes and powers like supremacy over other gods or deities. He is further described as the ultimate cause of the universe, which he created out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*), and as the eternal and perfect Being. They further maintain that this God is omnipresent and omnipotent and all-good. In an attempt to subvert the Igbo religious view of God and to project monotheism in the Igbo religious worldview, they maintain that other minor deities were created by this Supreme God, who is at the apex of the ladder, and that these other deities or gods are only intermediaries between Africans and the Christian God preached by Christian theologians. Furthermore, they allege that the rituals performed by Africans are offered to this God through the other deities that mediate between Africans and this Supreme God. This presupposes that God, as the above view implies, is not worshipped directly, but through intermediaries.

The above picture of God, painted by the Christian theologians and the Western missionaries, does not tally with the Igbo traditional religious view of God. For the traditional Igbo, belief in God, as well as his existence, is tied to the direct worship and dedication of a shrine to him and not through the mediation of some other gods. Consequently, if there is no particular shrine established for the worship of a god, the traditional Igbo do not recognize its existence and such a God is not active in their thought (see AJA 2015, 135). As Aja has noted, "to translate the names of Igbo Deities such as *Chukwu* and *Chineke* to mean the God preached by the Western missionaries is to yoke to the Igbo religious thought the concept of 'creation out of nothing,' which is alien to the traditional Igbo African cosmology" (AJA 2015, 135).

Unarguably, colonialism has affected African religious beliefs and consequently generated intellectual and moral tensions within the African worldview. The same situation applies to Christianity as it ran alongside colonialism and distorted the authentic traditional Igbo religious thought and this has given rise to a confused religious allegiance on the side of the contemporary Igbo. In this paper, we examine whether the Supreme God, as propagated by Western missionaries and Christian theologians, is identical with, or the same as the Igbo God. To properly address this issue, we raise the following questions: What is the authentic traditional Igbo view of God? Is this authentic traditional Igbo view of God the same as the notion of a Supreme God preached by Western missionaries and Christian theologians? Are nomenclatures such as *Chukwu* or *Chineke,* in the Igbo traditional religious thought, identical and interchangeable with the God of Western missionaries, who creates out of nothing? The paper is divided into three sections. Section one examines African oral traditions with reference to the notion of the Supreme God, while section two analyzes the Western and Igbo-Christian theologians' ideas of God. Section three explores the authentic traditional Igbo idea of God as it differs from the Western idea of God.

The Supreme Being/God and African Oral Traditions

African oral traditions express little doubt regarding the existence of supreme deities or gods in African religious thought. Within the Yoruba religious system, *Olodumare* is recognized as the Supreme Being. The works of *Olodumare* are perceived, within the Yoruba oral tradition, as incomparable (see GBADAGESIN 1991, 99). This is similar to the conception of *Onyame,* within the Akan tradition of Ghana (see AGADA 2017, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Other parts of Africa have their oral conceptions of the Supreme Being. The people of Botswana call the Supreme Being *Modimo* (see SETILOANE 1976,78) while the Mende of Sierra Leone calls it *Ngewo* (EKEKE and EKEOPARA 2010, 212). In Edo State of Nigeria, it is called *Osanobua* (see EKEKE and EKEOPARA 2010, 211) and for the Igbo, it is called *Chineke* or *Chukwu* (see METUH 1981, 22; NJOKU 2002, 149; ILOGU 1985, 7).

Oral traditions constitute a reliable source of information and one gets the impression that there is a conception of supreme deities in traditional African societies. However, the point of controversy is whether these conceptions of the supreme deity in the various African oral traditions are identical to the conception of the Supreme God preached by Western missionaries and Christian theologians. Thus, is the supreme deity in African conception of God identical to the God preached by Western missionaries and Christian theologians? This question, no doubt, is answered affirmatively by Christian theologians. Some African scholars also toed the same line of thought (see NJOKU 2002; METUH 1981; ILOGU 1985; MBITI 1969). *Olodumare*, in Idowu's account, for instance, is portrayed as all-powerful, all-knowing, wise, holy and the creator of the world (IDOWU 1973).

Mbiti followed the above line of thinking when he asserts that "God is the origin and sustenance of all things. He is 'older' than the Zamani (distant time). He is outside and beyond His creation. On the other hand, he is personally involved in his creation, so that it is not outside of him or his reach. God is thus simultaneously transcendent and immanent" (MBITI 1969, 29; see also MBITI 1970). Ilogu (1985, 7) concurs when he notes that "for the Igbo, the principal object of belief is the ultimate Reality, which they call chi-Ukwu (the Great God). Variants include Chineke (the God that creates) and Obasi di n' elu (the Lord who is above)." The problem with the above three accounts, which try to show that the Supreme Being in the Western Christian tradition is one and the same with the African God, is that they appear to conflict with some aspects of the traditional oral conceptions of African God. To illustrate, "an odu of*Ifa* relates the story of how *Olodumare* had to consult an *Ifa* priest on the possibility of his own immortality. The *Ifa* priest then instructed *Olodumare* on what to do. He did it and became immortal" (AJA 2015, 138). The implication of the above traditional oral narrative is that *Olodumare* is not all-knowing and all-powerful (see WIREDU 1998; BEWAJI 1998). This goes against the Christian concept of God, who is all-knowing and all-powerful. The same idea of a limited God is also painted in the myth of creation of the Yoruba where *Esu* (the trickster god) is, sometimes, portrayed as having more power than *Olodumare* (see AJA 2015, 138-139). Also, in the Yoruba mythological account of the beginning of the world, it was claimed

that creation began in the city of Ile Ife. "The place was then a watery marsh and God (*Olodumare*) sent an agent called *Orisa-nla* to go and spray some dry soil upon the area to firm it up for human habitation. Coming, before all else, upon some palm wine, and being thirsty, he drank of it, became drunk and fell asleep. Then, God sent another agent, *Oduduwa,* who accomplished the task" (IDOWU 1962, 22). This account of creation does not agree with the Christian notion of the creation of the world. Another account is found in Dogon cosmology, where the beginning of the world is viewed as a "precipitate breaking of a primordial egg by a male component" (cited in WIREDU 2012, 36) and the rest of the history of the world is the process of remedying the consequences of this wilful act (WIREDU 2012, 36). This account, once more, does not tally with the Christian version of the creation of the world out of nothing by the Supreme God. This indicates that the African account of God is different from the idea of God propagated by the Western missionaries and Christian theologians.

In their folklore, the Igbo invented *Chukwu* or *Chineke* in an attempt to explain the nature of things. One such Igbo folklore regarding the origin of death has it that:

> 'One day, God threatened to destroy the world.' All humankind had to find a way to solve the problem by sending messages to God about what they would like to happen instead. Two messengers were sent – the dog, by the group that did not want death at all, and the tortoise by the group that did not mind death, as long as people died one after the other. The tortoise reached God first and obtained the decision. The decision could not be changed when the dog finally arrived. The tortoise had arrived before the dog because the dog had stopped from time to time to eat faeces. 'The story ends that 'since that day, death has been taking men one after another'. (AJA 2015, 139)

The above story portrays God as not all-powerful. This is because, if God were as powerful, as portrayed in the Christian tradition, he would have revoked the decision to prevent death from claiming people's life one after another. This view of God in the Igbo oral tradition clearly conflicts with the Christian account of God propagated by Western missionaries and Christian theologians. This is why African scholars like Aja (2015, 140) warn that:

> [C]are must be taken in interpreting a Supreme God in African Igbo religion in terms of the Supreme deity propagated by Christian theology. The circumstances that led people to discover their Gods differ from place to place, and people from different historical backgrounds may not have discovered the same ideas of God.

This presupposes that "in finding an identity between the African supreme deities and the supreme deity of Christian religion, the scholars and clergy were not only influenced by Christian theology" (AJA 2015, 140) but "they were also concerned about furthering the notion of the universality of the Christian God" (GBADEGESIN 1991, 100). As a follow-up to the above view, Kwasi Wiredu, while analyzing the attributes of the African God, posits that the Akan of Ghana nurture the idea of the Supreme Being, but distinguishes this Supreme Being from the Christian God with reference to the attribute of transcendence. For him, the Akan God cannot be described as transcendent, since transcendence implies being outside space and time. In African ontology, for him, to exist means to exist in space and time and whatever that is outside space and time, does not exist, for the African (see WIREDU 2012, 34). Thus, being in space and time is what existence connotes for the African mind. The implication of the above assertion, by Wiredu, is that the Christian concept of God, as a transcendent being, above space and time, does not apply to African ideas of God. Thus, the fundamental question is this: Do nomenclatures like *Chukwu* or *Chineke* in the Igbo religious thought connote the "Christian" God?

Western and Igbo Concepts of God

Slavery and colonialism played crucial roles in the distortion of the Igbo African traditional religious thought. The slaves taken from Igboland and Africa, by extension, were meted various forms of inhuman treatments. When Western slave traders were convinced of the human status of the African and that the African had a soul and could feel pain, they modified their system of enslavement in form of colonialism (see NJOKU 2002, 142-143). So many African societies were easily won over by the colonialists as a result of their centralized religious and political structures (see SAMBA et al 2021, 3). However, because of the egalitarian structure of the Igbo traditional society, the colonialists found it extremely difficult to penetrate the Igbo heartland. This quest necessitated the establishment of the indirect rule system of warrant chiefs that eventually crashed due to resistance from the egalitarian Igbo population. Consequent to the failure of colonialism to penetrate Igboland, the colonialists devised another strategy, in the form of religion, to break the spiritual backbone of the Igbo people. The people were made to believe that everything white is superior, including Western religion and system of education, while whatever that is black is fetish, barbaric and inferior. Many Igbo, who were won over by this deception and who were schooled in the Western tradition, began helping the missionaries and the colonialists in propagating Western religion and consequently distorting Igbo traditional religious thought. The result of this deception is what is playing out today in contemporary African religious thought in terms of a confused religious system, as a result of the lost traditional religious authenticity of the Igbo.

The Western missionaries, with the help of the Igbo Christian theologians, began to project their idea of God into Igbo traditional thought. This distorted Igbo view of God is based on Greek philosophical ideas dating back to Plato and Aristotle, developed by Aquinas and eventually became dominant in Western philosophy and theology (see SWEETMAN 2007, 64). In this Western religious tradition, God is conceived as the Supreme Being, the creator of the universe and all that is in it. He is the ultimate cause of the universe, which he created out of nothing. He is further described as the eternal being as can be seen in Aquinas' cosmological arguments. In this Western view of God, he is also conceived as a perfect being, who is omnipotent and omnipresent and beyond the influence and control of man. These attributes of God, in the Western tradition, do not apply to the traditional Igbo African idea of God. The Igbo God does not create out of nothing. In traditional Igbo society, each particular deity or god has an area it is in charge of and reigns supreme only in such area or locality, but not in other areas, where other deities are in charge. Even though a particular deity or god can be powerful enough to extend its influence in other localities, it is not described as supreme in such localities in the Igbo religious worldview. Igbo religious thought is originally polytheistic, with the Igbo universe boasting of a multiplicity of gods with none of them adjudged as supreme, unlike in the monotheistic religious tradition of the West. Furthermore, the traditional religious relationship the Igbo have with their god is mutual, contractual and reciprocal relationship (see AJA 2015, 148). In this relationship between the traditional Igbo person and his god, it is expected that both sides fulfil their own part of the contract. This implies that the traditional Igbo person worships his god, but, at the same time, expects such god to render the service for which it is being worshipped. Should this god fail to live up to the expectation of the worshipper, in the Igbo culture, such a god is discarded and described as a piece of wood by the worshipper and another god is sought after to replace the discarded god. For instance, in Igbo culture, if a god named *Ikenga* fails to live up to its *Ikenganess*, such a god is consequently regarded as only a piece of wood, discarded and replaced with another by the worshipper (cf. ARINZE 1970, 16). This type of relationship is not applicable to the Western God, who is outside and beyond the control and discipline of the worshipper. We will revisit the above arguments in full, in the next section, where we will exhibit the typical structure of Igbo religious thought.

In their quest to perpetuate Western dominance and superiority of Western religious thought, the converted Igbo Christian theologians were enlisted to help in propagating Christianity (see AKAH 2016,142). It is also observable that some Igbo Christian thinkers impose Christian frameworks on traditional Igbo religion. Ikenga Metuh (1990, 108) warns against such tendencies, which he ended up propagating. He belongs to the school of Igbo Christian thinkers who favour the identity of the Igbo religious God with the Western missionaries' Supreme God. In his account of the Igbo traditional religious view of God, Metuh posits that the Igbo employ three related terms in their usage of the word *Chi,* namely, the Supreme Being, the Guardian Spirit and the notion of destiny.

> The word *Chi,* as used in a religious context, evokes three related concepts: the 'Supreme Being', the 'Guardian Spirit', and the 'Idea of Destiny' or 'Fortune'. Only the context can show which of the three is uppermost in Igbo's mind [sic] when he uses the word 'chi'. This is borne out by the fact that the word appears in many Igbo proverbs sometimes referring to one concept, sometimes to another: the Supreme Being, one's personal spirit-guardian; even one's destiny. (METUH 1981, 22)

Reacting to Metuh's manner of conceiving Chi, Egbeke Aja argues that *Chi* does not in any sense evoke the idea of a Supreme Being in the Igbo religious tradition. This is why he contends that:

> [T]he Igbo experience and consciousness of transcendent power operating in their affairs gave rise to and is subsumed in the concept of *Chi*. Around this concept of *Chi*, the Igbo consolidated their expectations of life and fortune. It is this *Chi* that is the god of the Igbo person. Each person, in the Igbo thought, has his or her god, although a certain level of maturity is required before a person can set up a shrine to the god. (AJA 2015, 148)

Aja disagrees with Metuh that *Chi* evokes the idea of Supreme Being in Igbo religion. He holds that there is no single universal Supreme Being in the Igbo religious thought; rather, each god or deity can only be described as supreme within a particular Igbo locality where it reigns (see AJA 2015; cf. NZE 1981, 21). Furthermore, for Metuh, the Igbo descriptions of their God also revolve around three nomenclatures: *Chukwu*, *Chineke* and *Olisa*. In reacting to this, Nwoga (1984, 33) argues that the word *Chukwu,* as employed by Metuh, to describe the traditional Igbo Supreme Being, does not fit into the Igbo traditional religious scheme. For him, the word is projected on the basis of the cleverness and hegemony of the Aro people, which is just one locality in Igboland, in trying to impose their local deity as the Supreme Deity on the entire Igbo religious structure. Nwoga, in his work, [The Supreme God as a Stranger in Igbo Religion], rejects the name, *Chukwu,* and describes it as a stranger in the Igbo religious worldview. Similarly, in his book: [Chi: The God in Igbo Religion], Ezekwugo re-echoes the view projected by Nwoga regarding the inappropriateness of the concept of *Chukwu* in the Igbo religious thought. For him, *Chukwu* is just a name for a local deity in Aro, which the missionary appropriated and generalized to Igbo religious thought in their quest to project their idea of the Supreme God into traditional Igbo religion. According to him:

> Originally, Chukwu was just one local god among many; one of a thousand and one Igbo 'jujus' or 'alusi' deities. His ascension to the status of a chief god is attributable to three factors: the wide-spread distribution of the Aros throughout Igbo land, the superior cleverness of the Aro people themselves, and the awe-inspiring nature of Chukwu's grotto. (EZEKWUGO 1987, 96)

Ezekwugo admits that the god of the traditional Igbo person is symbolized in the concept of *Chi*, which describes a personal god and not *Chukwu*, which Metuh sees as evoking the idea of the Supreme Being in Igbo religion.

Njoku agrees with Metuh that the Igbo nurture the idea of a Supreme Being in their religious thought, identical to the Christian God. He describes the Igbo traditional religion and, by extension, African Traditional Religion, as monotheistic or what he simply identifies as "consultative monotheism" similar to Bolaji Idowu's concept of "diffused" or "bureaucratic monotheism" (see IDOWU 1975, 58), rather than polytheistic as many African scholars argue (see AJA 2015; NZE 1981; EZEKWUGO 1987; NWOGA 1984). According to him:

> Whether we call ATR 'diffused' or 'bureaucratic' monotheism, as Bolaji Idowu suggested, or 'liberal' or 'consultative' monotheism, as I would prefer; we do not need to strain our imagination to recognize that it is high time we dropped the use of the term *polytheism* in characterizing ATR. ATR has a loose monotheistic structure and there is nothing in this mode of understanding that is against authentic or valid religious reasoning. (NJOKU 2002, 146)

We disagree with Njoku that Igbo traditional religion(s) conceive of the supreme being in monotheistic terms. To devise an argument in order to create an impression that the Igbo religious structure is monotheistic, while in practice and theory, it is polytheistic, is to wallow in self-deception and in claiming what one is not. The Igbo forebears or ancestors worshipped gods and not a particular God or as Nze (1981, 21) puts it: "…there is no single instance when the Igbo perform a sacrifice to the worship of a single Being of the Christian concept." Furthermore, Aja concurs with Nze that the traditional Igbo religious structure is practically and theoretically polytheistic as he warns that:

> To foist ingenuous argument in the attempt to appear to be monotheistic while in theory and practice the Igbo is polytheistic, is "to cling to what we are not." …Facts of Igbo experience show that the Igbo are polytheistic; they are not monotheistic. There is no basis to think or feel that monotheism is more in tune than polytheism with what is truly religious….Its metaphysical origin lies in the distinction between *having* and *being*…The current desperate search for Christian conceptual pegs on which to hang traditional African religious categories is unreasonable and futile. (AJA 2015, 148-149; cf. LINDEMANN 1992, 5-9)

Njoku, himself, indirectly accepted that the Igbo religious structure is not monotheistic when he asks: "could it be that the Aros, through their so-called trick, imposed a kind of religious monotheism in Igbo hegemony, which the missionaries saw as an advantage? On this ambient, historical research continues in its scrutiny" (NJOKU 2002, 163). Furthermore, he also technically accepted

that the Aro people, a particular locality in Igboland, deceptively manipulated the authentic traditional religious belief of the Igbo and that the name *Chukwu* was the name of a local deity of Aro elevated to the status of a Supreme Being by Aro people, which the missionaries advantageously keyed into in projecting their foreign religious idea of a Supreme God in Igbo religious architecture (NJOKU 2002, 160).

Despite this admission made by Njoku that the idea of the Supreme Being in Igboland was an Aro trick geared towards raising their local deity to the status of a chief god in Igbo society, which the Western missionaries capitalized on in projecting their religion in Igbo religious culture and which proves that the Igbo is traditionally and originally polytheistic, he could not say to what extent the Aro manipulated the Igbo religious belief. We will revisit the issue of the Aro dominance and manipulation of Igbo religious belief, in the next section.

Njoku further admits that "the African Christian theologian willingly and unwillingly has a basic problem – a son of two worlds (African and Christian) to which he pays no complete allegiance" and that "it is difficult for African philosophers and Christians alike to free themselves from conceptualizing African realities in Western frames" (NJOKU 2002, 145-146). However, despite making this admission, he fell into the same pit. For instance, in an attempt to hang the traditional Igbo religious worldview on a Christian conceptual peg, he deliberately avoided mention of an important attribute of the Christian God, which is *creatio ex nihilo* and refuses to discuss this attribute in the light of the Igbo god, who does not create out of nothing but creates from already existing materials. In the following section, we will revisit the above argument and show that the authentic Igbo traditional religious concept of God is different from the idea of the supreme God propagated by Western missionaries and Christian theologians.

God in Igbo Traditional Religious Thought

The Igbo society, just like many other human societies, is a deeply religious one. The African traditional society exhibits, in various dimensions, its beliefs in powers beyond the human reality that are believed to control the universe. Within the Yoruba religious worldview, *Olodumare* is recognized as having superior powers over other deities. This, notwithstanding, the Yoruba religious worldview is dominated by a multiplicity of gods. Each significant aspect of life has a deity assigned to it. To make a bountiful harvest, for instance, a typical Yoruba person will sacrifice to the god or deity in charge of agriculture – *Orisaoko* and to be fertile or wealthy, he or she sacrifices to the god of fertility or wealth – *Osun* (see OLANIYI 2018, 115). This same thing is applicable when protection is sought by the Yoruba man, where he sacrifices to another deity in charge of protection – *Ogun*. In this connection, Gbadegesin (1991, 75) asserts that "it is a general knowledge that the Yoruba recognize more than four hundred deities, beside Olodumare." Ile Ife, the spiritual abode of the Yoruba, is described as having only one day within the entire year that is not dedicated to any deity (see GBADEGESIN 1991, 75; cf. AJA 2015).

Traditional Igbo society is religious like other traditional African societies. A reasonable percentage of the Igbo are still stuck to their traditional religion, despite the advent of foreign religions. This is why Aja (2016, 142) is of the view that the Igbo "have not been easily won over to Islam, and Christianity remains the only exotic religion competing with the traditional religion for allegiance." Christian religion, no doubt, has some effects on the Igbo traditional religion both conceptually and mentally. Consequently, some authors (see AJA 2015; NWOGA 1984; NZE 1981) have doubted whether a supreme deity exists in Igbo religious thought. This doubt has led to the expression of divergent opinions regarding the Igbo religious worldview.

It is to be noted that every particular Igbo community has an acknowledged deity that reigns supreme over that particular community (see AJA 2015,142). Thus, when reference is made to God in any Igbo narrative, it does not immediately evoke the idea of a Supreme Being as Christian theologians will expect us to believe. The same situation is applicable to the concept of *Chukwu,* in Igbo religious thought, as briefly discussed in the previous section. In the Igbo traditional religious worldview, the concept of *Chukwu* does not connote the idea of a supreme being across the Igbo world. Rather, *Chukwu* is tied to the Igbo oracular practice (cf. AJA 2015). This is why in the Igbo traditional religion, "whenever a case becomes difficult, *ejereya be Chukuw*," meaning to go to the oracle in Arochukwu for consultation to sort out the difficult case in question (NWOGA 1984; cf. EGUDU 1973). Thus, *Chukwu* does not connote a Supreme Being, but only describes a powerful deity in Aro, whose influence, as well as power, is only recognized within the Aro locality in Igboland. This is why Nwoga writes that:

> The biggest oracle which pervaded Igboland from the 17th century was *IbiniUkpabi* of Aro… When the Aro went into the rest of the Igbo land to trade in slaves, they took with them, both for protection and as an additional business, the reputation of their *Chi-Ukwu* (Big Chi)thereby elevating *Ibini Ukpabi* to the status of the last arbiter, the god beyond whom there could be no surer answer to problems. Aro agents all over the Igboland and beyond advised individuals and groups among whom they lived to go 'to consult' Chukwu' whenever a case went beyond local solution. (NWOGA 1984, 36)

The implication of the above assertion is that had the Aro dominance, with reference to their god, *Chukwu,* materialized into full-blown political and social dominance, all other gods across the Igbo nation would have been irrelevant and of no value. "*Chukwu* of Arochukwu would have become the Supreme God in Igboland, although still with connotations different from the sole Creator God of Christianity" (AJA 2015, 144). However, with the arrival of the Europeans and their religion, the concept of *Chukwu* was dislodged from its oracular sense of Aro-*Chukwu* and turned into a Supreme Being. Even though gods have the

capacity of becoming so powerful and their recognition transcending the locality where shrines are established for them, in the Igbo world, this does not automatically connote that such a deity is supreme over other deities recognized in other Igbo localities. This is because the Igbo religious worldview is polytheistic by nature and each particular locality has an assigned deity or god in charge of that area. For instance, the Okija deity (*Arusi Okija*) is a powerful deity in charge of the Okija locality, just like *Chukwu* is a deity in charge of Aro locality. Therefore, the idea of one particular deity that is supreme in all Igbo localities and who "creates out of nothing," like the God of the Western religion, was not recognized in the Igbo-African traditional religious thought even though Christianity has, to an appreciable extent, permeated contemporary Igbo world.

The word *Chukwu*, in the Igbo world, has a linguistic dimension which can be used interchangeably with *Chineke*. The former is culturally rendered as a great spirit, while the latter is translated as the spirit that creates – *Chi-na-eke* (cf. AJA 2015, 144). The point of controversy is the *ke* root or principle, which has to do with the act of creation. In the Igbo worldview, the *ke* principle does not connote the idea of creation as in creation out of nothing or making something out of nothing, which is associated with the Christian God, but only describes the act of sharing. Therefore, from the traditional Igbo perspective, *eke* denotes one who shares and *ke* means divide. This is why Aja (2015, 144) asserts that:

> Translating *Chineke* as "God that creates" does not fit into the Igbo conceptual scheme. *Chineke*, then to keep to its Igbo language and etymology, has to mean *China Eke*, representing God in his duality as each person's deity and destiny, the determinant of a person's lot in life for good or ill, the providence that decrees whether a person will survive or not to reap the fruit of his or her labour. The duality makes some names interchangeable: for instance, *Ekelaka* can be interchanged (with) *Chilaka*…while *Ekeoma* can be interchanged (with) *Chioma.*

It is to be noted that the employment of *Eke*, as enunciated in the above quotation, will not only and always connote the idea of sharing since the Igbo language heavily depends on the tone of pronunciation. This, notwithstanding, "the root – *ke* in *Okike* does not mean creation out of nothing" (AJA 2015, 145). This implies that in the Igbo worldview, the Christian conception of "creation out of nothing" is foreign to the Igbo traditional thought. Rather, the Igbo trace the origin of any entity in terms of another entity already in existence. Thus, to use a different religious conceptual framework or category, say, Christianity, to study another religious tradition, like Igbo traditional religion, would only amount to a distortion of such religion. This is implicated in the concept of *Chineke,* adopted as the god that creates, by the Western missionary and Igbo Christian theologians, in order to give the attribute of *creatio ex nihilo* to the African god, which is a distortion of the religious architecture of the Igbo. Consequently, Aja warns that:

> [T]he concept of *Chinaeke* as the "creator God" should be accounted as an attempt to yoke onto the Igbo religions thought the category of creation *ex nihilo* in the bid to claim that the traditional African religions are also monotheistic, just as Judaism and Christianity are. The ordinary meaning of the Igbo word *okike* is not to make things out of nothing – a characteristic easily and readily attributed to the supreme God propagated by the Christian missionaries. (AJA 2015, 147)

The above view, expressed by Aja, attests to the point that using Western religious schemes to study the Igbo traditional religion is only an attempt in futility which does not show the authentic nature of traditional Igbo religious view. It is the duty of African philosophers to examine, distil and sieve the authentic African traditional religious view from the concepts and teachings of Western religion in order to bring about an enlightened understanding of the religious beliefs and concepts of ATR and Christianity. This underscores the importance or significance of this enquiry.

Margaret Green does not accept that there is anything like the Supreme Being in African religious thought. In expressing doubt over the existence of a supreme deity in Igbo religion, she asserts that:

> Whether or not there is any conception of deities that is either universal or at any rate more than local; it is not easy to know, as for *Ci* [spelt as Chi] the spirit who creates people– and whose name as in *Cineke* [*Chineke*] has been taken by the Christians to denote the Creator, it is difficult to know what the real Igbo significance of the word is. *Ci* and *Eke* together create an individual, but each person is thought of as having his own *Ci* and whether over and above this, there is any conception of universal *Ci,* seems doubtful. (cited in AJA 2015, 145)

The above view, by Green, expresses uncertainty regarding the existence of any being like the Supreme God in Igbo religious thought. It is also in the same spirit that Echeruo, in his Ahiajioku lecture, denied the existence of any supreme God in Igbo thought. In his estimation, if one should talk about any idea of a supreme god in the Igbo worldview, one should rather make reference to *Ala* (the Earth). This implies that to posit any deity, in Echeruo's perspective, which is greater than *Ala* (the Earth) is tantamount to heresy and devilish in itself. Thus, for him, to propose any god greater than *Ala*, in Igbo thought, is an abomination which amounts to a defilement of *Ala* (the Earth) (ECHERUO, 1979, 19). It is important to note that *Ala*, in Echeruo's view, does not connote the idea of the Christian God. The important role assigned to *Ala*, by Echeruo, is premised on its critical function in the control of morals in the Igbo world. The Igbo worldview maintains a belief that *Ala* is the only principle that overrides the capriciousness of an Igbo man. If any Igbo man commits an abomination, whether seen or not seen by anybody, the Igbo believe that such a person will be hunted by *Ala* (the Earth).

From the perspective of the Igbo natural egalitarian and democratic make-up, Nze counters the idea of monotheism and the notion of one supreme God in the Igbo worldview. He posits that the Igbo have no idea of any one supreme god but a multiplicity of gods that reign supreme in their respective Igbo localities or functional areas of life:

> They [the Igbo] assume the existence of numerous gods…There is a Supreme Being that created man; there is Supreme Being that created trees; there is a Supreme god of the Earth. The Sun is a God….There is no single instance when the Igbo perform sacrifice to the worship of a single Being of the Christian concept…there exists no occasion when a Supreme Being of the Christian description is appeased or worshiped, it can be said that this Being does not exist at all or exists but is not recognized because he is passive. Our fathers worshipped gods and not a God (NZE 1981, 21-30).

The above view, as enunciated by Nze, expresses the polytheistic and egalitarian nature of Igbo religious view. This attests that the Igbo religious world does not subscribe to monotheism, like you would find in other religions like Christianity. Rather, the Igbo world recognizes the existence of multiplicity of gods, each of them in control of a particular locality or an area of life, where it can be adjudged supreme.

Another salient point to note is that the existence of a god, in Igbo culture, is tied to the worship and establishment of a shrine to such a god. Where no shrine is dedicated to any god and where such a god is not worshipped, the Igbo do not recognize such a god (see AJA 2015, 135). Thus, the idea of a supreme God, as projected by Western missionaries and Igbo Christian theologians, is a distortion of the natural and original architecture of the Igbo religious worldview. If there are no shrines dedicated to such God, in the Igbo conception, it is not recognized by them, even if it exits in the passive or remote mode. As we have briefly hinted, in the previous section, the Igbo believe in a mutual, reciprocal and contractual relationship with their god. In a situation where a god is worshipped, in the Igbo worldview, but such a god is not living up to the expectations of the worshipper in keeping its own side of the bargain or contract, the worshipper can discipline such a god by terminating the contractual relationship. The worshipper can dispose of such a god and can go for another god. Such reciprocal or contractual relationship does not exist in the Christian religious world. Thus, the idea of the supreme God of the Christian religion is unrecognized in Igbo traditional religion. One may argue that the Supreme Being of the Christian religion existed in Igbo traditional religion, before the advent of the Western missionaries, but he was only passive or remote in the Igbo culture. However, the aim of the paper, as we have shown above, is not to argue for the passive or remote existence of a Supreme Being of the Christian religion in Igbo culture, but to show that such a Being was not recognized or acknowledged in the

Igbo traditional religion, before the advent of the Christian religion in Igboland, even if he existed in the passive or remote mode. The paper maintains this position because, as we have shown above, the authentic traditional Igbo religious thought is polytheistic and certain attributes of the Supreme God like the ability to create out of nothing, transcendence, etc., are not identifiable with the authentic traditional Igbo god, who does not create out of anything, but from already existing materials and who is directly worshipped by its adherents and not through intermediaries.

Conclusion

This paper defended the idea that the Igbo religious conception of God is distinct from the Christian or Western missionary concept of God. It shows that the authentic Igbo traditional idea of God is not identical or identifiable with the idea of Supreme God propagated by Western missionaries and Igbo Christian theologians. The paper noted that the Igbo religious view of God is primarily polytheistic as it recognizes a multiplicity of gods, unlike the monotheistic outlook of Western religion that acknowledges only one Supreme Being. It further submitted that certain attributes of the Western God, like the ability to create out of nothing and omnipresence, make it unrecognized in the Igbo religious tradition. This submission is made because, the Igbo god does not create out of nothing, but from already existing materials. Furthermore, each particular god or deity in the Igbo culture has a shrine dedicated to it as its place of worship and reigns supreme only in such area and does not extend its supremacy to other Igbo localities where it is not in charge and where it is not worshipped. The paper frowned at the current quest by Igbo-Christian theologians to study Igbo traditional religious thought using Western religious categories. Such efforts, the paper argued, will only amount to a distortion of the authentic traditional Igbo religious thought. The paper invites African philosophers of religion and theologians to focus on examining, distilling and sieving original and authentic traditional Igbo religious ideas separate from the concepts, ideals and teachings of Christianity, in order to bring about an enlightened understanding of both the Christian worldview and the Igbo traditional religious worldview.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. AGADA, Ada. "Bewaji and Fayemi on God, Omnipotence and Evil," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp41-56, 2022a. Vol 11, No 1. Web.
2. --------. [Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy: Beyond Universalism and Particularism], 2022b. Routledge: New York. Hardcover.
3. AGADA, Ada. "Rethinking the Concept of God and the Problem of Evil from the Perspective of African Thought," [Religious Studies], pp1-17, 2022c. Web.
4. --------. "The Apparent Conflict of Transcendentalism and Immanentism in Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu's Interpretation of the Akan Concept of God," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp23–38, 2017. Vol 6, No 1. Web.
5. AJA, Egbeke. [Doing African Philosophy], 2015. University of Nigeria Press: Nigeria. Paperback.
6. AJA, Egbeke. "The Supreme God in an African (Igbo) Religious Thought," [Philosophy in the Contemporary World], pp1-7, 1996. Vol. 3, No 4. doi.org/10.5840/pcw19963415. Web.

7. AKAH, Josephine. “The Resilience of Igbo Culture amidst Christianity and Westernization in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State in Nigeria,” [International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition], pp138-154, 2016. Vol 8. Web.
8. ARINZE, F.A. [Sacrifice in Igbo Religion], 1970. University Press: Ibadan. Paperback.
9. BEWAJI, A. I. John. “Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and Theistic Problem of Evil,” [African Studies Quarterly], pp1-17, 1998. Vol 2, No 1. Web.
10. ECHERUO, M. [A Matter of Identity: 1979 Ahiajioku Lecture], 1979. Culture Division, Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports: Owerri.
11. EGUDU, Romanus. [The Calabash of Wisdom and Other Igbo Stories], 1973. NOK: New York. Paperback.
12. EKEKE, Emeka. C. and EKEOPARA, Chike. A. “God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology,” [American Journal of Social and Management Sciences], pp208-218, 2010. Vol 1, No 2. Web.
13. EZEKWUGO, C. [Chi: The True God in Igbo Religion], 1987. Mar Matthew Press: India. Paperback.
14. FAYEMI, A.K. “Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E.O. Oduwole,” [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1-15, 2012. Vol 41, No 1. Web.
15. GBADEGESIN, Segun. [African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities], 1991. Peter Lang: New York. Paperback.
16. IDOWU, Bolaji E. [African Traditional Religion: A Definition], 1973. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY. Paperback.
17. IDOWU, E. Bolaji. [Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief], 1962. Longman: London. Paperback.
18. ILOGU, Edmund. [Igbo Life and Thought], 1985. University Publishing: Onitsha. Paperback.

19. LINDEMANN, Kate. “Philosophy of Liberation in the North American Context,” [Contemporary Philosophy], pp1-10, 1992. Vol 14, No 4. Web.
20. MBITI, John. S. [Concepts of God in Africa], 1970. Praeger: New York. Paperback.
21. ---------. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Heinemann: London. Paperback.
22. METUH, Ikenga Emefie. [God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria], 1981. Chapman: London. Paperback.
23. ---------. “Igbo Worldview: A Promise for Christian/Traditional Religious Dialogue,” [West African Religion], pp56-67, 1972**.** Paperback.
24. NJOKU, Francis. O. [Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology], 2002. Claretian Institute of Philosophy: Owerri. Paperback.
25. NWOGA, Donatus. I. [The Supreme God as a Stranger in Igbo Land], 1984. Hawk Press: Imo State. Paperback.
26. NZE, Chukwuemeka. “Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Conception of God in Africa.” [Uche], pp15-31, 1981. Vol 5, No 1. Paperback.
27. OLANIYI, Banwo A. “On Divinities: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Yoruba and Chinese Divinities,” [IJOHIS], pp103-124, 2018. Vol 8, No 2. Web.
28. SETILOANE, Gabriel. M. [The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana], 1976. A.A. Balkeme: Rotterdam. Paperback.
29. WIREDU, Kwasi. “African Religions.” [Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion, Chad MEISTER and Paul COPAN Eds.], pp29-38, 2012. Routledge: London. Paperback.
30. WIREDU, Kwasi. [Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective], 1996. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN. Paperback.
31. WIREDU, Kwasi. “Towards Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion.” [African Studies Quarterly], pp17-46, 1998. Vol 1, No 4. Web.

Exploring Recent Themes in African Spiritual Philosophy

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.8s
Submitted 8 May 2022. Accepted 2 September 2022

Diana-Abasi IBANGA
Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar
&
Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute,
University of Leeds
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4068-2520
Email: ibanga.letters@gmail.com

Abstract
There are theoretical and thematic shifts in African spiritual philosophy literature on the meaning of spirituality. On the one hand, traditional conceptions of spirituality are based on the dimensions of transcendence and supernaturalism. Common themes include ritualism, totemism, incantation, ancestorism, reincarnation, destiny, metempsychosis, witchcraft, death, soul, deities, etc. On the other hand, the evolving trend appeals to naturality and immanence. Common themes include sacrality, piety, respectability, relatability, existential gratitude, sacred feminine, etc. This work explores these recent and developing themes. It aims to show that the understanding of spirituality in African modernity is increasingly linked to psychological traits expressed in attitude and behaviour as against traditional understanding that focused on cultural/ religious practices such as ritualism, ancestorism, and deities. The analysis reveals that recent studies link the experience of spirituality with wholeness and interdependence, and a recognition of one's place in the connective web of other existents in nature. **Keywords:** Sacrality, Piety, Respectability, Relatability, Gratitude, Sacred feminine, Spirituality.

Introduction

Interest in spirituality is as old as man. Early discussions about the nature of man and being in general centred around the idea of spirit. Ancient Greek literature is annotated with stories of interactions of spiritual forces and their dominance in human affairs (JAEGER 1936). In fact, in early Greek philosophical tradition, doing philosophy was seen as a form of "spiritual exercise" – connected with the transformation of the whole person defined as a unity of body and soul (ŠĶESTERIS 2013, 1743). This began with the thought of Pythagoras who introduced a spiritocentric account of history, that the phenomenal world is animated by spiritual elements that transmigrated from the world of spirits to embody in matter (JAEGER 1936, 83). This account became dominant and later influenced Plato's thought, who regarded the transcendent spiritual realm as the ecosystem for eternal truth (PELTONEN 2019, 235). This idea influenced subsequent thinking in the West – described by Whitehead as footnotes to Plato's thought (PELTONEN 2019, 234). Importantly, spirit took on the character of

invisibility and transcendence. One could not have access to the spiritual via material sensations since spirit was beyond matter, except by transcendence (intuition, meditation, or reflection). This later characterized experience of spirituality as an attunement towards the invisible 'being' that lies outside matter. This attunement required mortification of the sensuous seen as the 'phenomenon of concealment' (JAEGER 1936, 58). With the spiritual viewed as invisible and transcendent, yet the authentic mode of being, human beings placed a premium on the invisible and transcendent as against the visible and immanent.

This approach dominated Western thinking until the time of Spinoza, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Husserl – who viewed spirit as immanent in, and inseparable from, matter. Hegel, for instance, defined spirit as the driving force of history; matter became the unfoldment of the spirit, and human consciousness emerged as the highest stage of the evolution of spirit (HEGEL 1870, 253-254). So, in the modern era, spirit became immanent (contemporaneous, ubiquitous and visible) in matter as against the absolute transcendence and invisibility in Platonist-Aristotelian philosophical disposition that characterized pre-modern thought. After Hegel and fellow idealists, the subject of the spiritual was relegated to the background in Western philosophical discourse. Modern science, which prioritizes empiricism, dominated Western thought through the re-enactment of Cartesian-Humean empiricism. The physical world was defined essentially as composed of material particles that aggregate and continue to evolve (GLENNAN 2017). The spirit of empirical science was extended to Western philosophy by the logical positivists who sought empirical explanation and interpretation for all phenomena (PASSMORE 1967). Any event that could not be given the empirical explanation of positive science was regarded as a myth. Thus, the spiritual was disparaged, and any discourse on spirit was discouraged. Meanwhile, in early African philosophy, discussion on spirit gained traction. This would later be disparaged by a group of professional philosophers who saw themselves as universalists. The discourse on the spiritual was tagged ethnophilosophy and condemned (IBANGA 2022a, 40-41). So, in African philosophy, as in Western philosophy, discourse on spirit was suppressed because it was thought to suffocate reason and counterproductive to the development of human consciousness.

In the African philosophical tradition, discourse on spirit has been reanimated. Recent works by contemporary African philosophers have discussed various themes in spiritual philosophy directly and indirectly. But sometimes they mask their works as metaphysics even though they are discussing spiritual themes. This article is designed to explore the recent themes in African spiritual philosophy. One thing that will be evident in this article is the increasing shift from supernaturalism and transcendence to naturalism and immanence in the spiritual philosophy of the continent although, philosophers like Godfrey Ozumba, Thaddeus Metz, Ada Agada, Aribiah Attoe and others have continued to discuss God-related issues in their works. In this article, I focus on the themes of sacrality, piety, relatability, existential gratitude, respectability, and sacred feminine – which are recently raised especially in the works of Chigbo Ekwealo and Diana-Abasi Ibanga. I will appeal to some ideas discussed in Asouzu, Metz, Agada, and Attoe to strengthen the analysis. In the next section, I will briefly discuss the traditional conception of spirituality in African philosophy. Thereafter, I will introduce

another section to discuss the contemporary conception of spirituality in African thinking. This is to be followed by a comprehensive analysis of six selected evolving themes in recent African spiritual philosophy. I will show how these spiritual themes are grounded in the theory of force, which is the overarching metaphysical framework of African philosophy. From the discourse, I will develop a comprehensive definition of spirituality.

Defining Spirituality

What is spirituality? Drawing from both the traditional and the contemporary paradigms, a generalized definition of spirituality may be given as: (a) religious systems of beliefs and values such as one's faith and connection with God; (b) life's meaning, purpose and connection with others such as family, friends, work, nature, culture, and even oneself; (c) non-religious systems of beliefs and values such as success and failure, lifestyle and preferences, materiality and secularity, individualism and collectivism, exclusivity and diversity; (d) metaphysical or transcendental concerns about existential challenges such as questions of identity, suffering and death, guilt and shame, freedom and responsibility, reconciliation and forgiveness, hope and despair; and (e) principles, qualities, and values such as love, kindness, concern, meekness, mercy, cooperation, tolerance, friendliness, brotherliness, empathy, justice, patience, truthfulness, inclusivity, modesty, gratitude, piety, devotion, and accommodation.

Precisely, in contemporary African thinking, "spirituality involves deeper human values" expressed in attitudes and behaviours (MARUMO and CHAKALE 2018, 11697). Hence, spirituality is linked with the 'experience of beauty' or the 'beautiful soul', which is a psychological disposition of love, kindness, tolerance, and harmoniousness (EKWEALO 2012a, 174, 297). In African philosophy, "Experience of beauty has to do with wholeness and interdependence; and recognizing one's place in the connective web of other existents" (IBANGA 2017b, 258). Therefore, locating spirituality in the experience of beauty implies that spirituality involves the feeling of the complexity of relations and complementarity, that is, a feeling of connection to other existents, rather than a feeling of opposites or isolation. Spirituality understood in terms of mutual exclusivity or "I-alonism" is un-African (EKWEALO 2012a, 296). Hence, Attoe describes the experience of God as that of interdependence (2022, 55). Yet, spirituality is conceptualized as "personal experience" or the process of "self-realization" based on an intimate relationship with the transcendent-immanent self (EKWEALO 2012a, 296). Spirituality implies self-realization in the communal sense, that is, the tendency to want to flourish and realize oneself in harmony with other existents. Importantly, self-realization is attainable in conversation or interaction with other existents. Conversation is the foundation of meaning-making in African worldview (ATTOE 2021). It is in conversation that one can participate in the web of life (IBANGA 2017c, 84-85). Spirituality is a category that belongs to the definition or basic constitution of the relations between two or more persons/things considered as complementary wholeness, so that without the relation, persons and things lose their individual sense of spirituality.

Traditional Conception of Spirituality

The notion of spirituality is not new to African philosophy. For decades, African philosophers, especially those in the tradition of ethnophilosophy, weaved their research activities around themes related to spirit. Descriptions and explanations of the notions of the spiritual was pursued with diverse research questions using different methodologies. A body of literature was considered African philosophy if it was rooted in the assumption that "reality is primarily spiritual" (MOMOH 1989a, 18). A certain understanding stood out from the works of scholars about the concept of spirit, which was the main reason African spiritual philosophy was disparaged by professional philosophers on the continent. In many works by early African philosophers, spirit or the spiritual was interpreted to imply the 'supernatural' (AGADA 2022a, 68-70). Also, as a reaction to Placide Tempels's seminal work that denied the idea of transcendence in African conceptions of being (TEMPELS 1959, 52), many African philosophers sought to interpret the spiritual to imply 'transcendence' (in terms of being-outside-the-world) to level up with Western philosophy that they saw as a model. So, the notions of spirit and the spiritual in African thought were mainly associated with transcendence and the supernatural. In addition, some scholars like John Mbiti and Pantaleon Iroegbu summarily conceptualized the spiritual merely in relation to God (or deities) so long as God was conceived as transcendent and supernatural. Thus, transcendence and supernaturality formed a conceptual framework that enabled an understanding of the various spirit-related or God-related themes in early African philosophy.

This conceptual framework is crucial to understanding the different themes that were developed in African spiritual philosophy. The main themes include worship/religion, sacrifice, ritualism, incantation/prayer, totemism, reincarnation, soul, destiny, spirit, deity, sacredness, metempsychosis, transmigration, living-dead (ancestor), witchcraft, magic, evil, death, deities, force, God, etc. To understand these themes, one must appeal to the conceptual framework alluded to above. In each of the themes, there are dimensions of transcendence and supernaturalism. Early African spiritual philosophers articulated these themes to bring out these dimensions, thus, earning the criticisms of some professional philosophers, like Paulin Hountondji, Peter Bodunrin, Odera Oruka, and Kwasi Wiredu, who disparaged their works as either unphilosophical or anachronistic. Let me explain what each of the key concepts in the framework means and entails.

Transcendence: This term is formed as a combination of two Latin words "trans" meaning 'beyond' and "scandare" meaning 'to climb'. Together, they mean 'to go beyond' or 'to climb beyond'. The latter disjunct best expresses the meaning of the word as it is used in philosophy, which is usually attuned to signify vertical-hierarchical relation. According to Karl Jaspers, the use of the term in a philosophical sense is traceable to St. Augustine – who sought via "philosophical transcending" to ground the idea of God in reason (1962, 196, 262). Later, the term was critically employed by Immanuel Kant (1998) in his *Critique of Pure Reason* to deal with the relation between subject and object, in terms of establishing the metaphysical basis of cognition. Generally, in philosophical

usage, transcendence means passing over that which is present in sense experience to that which can be intuited in the mind. This is captured in this definition, that transcendence is "going beyond" or "passing over" that involves "essentially one from beings to their Being" (UNAH 2002, 80). This expresses an effort to reach essences, which is viewed as something that exists beyond sense reality.

On the one hand, philosophical transcending is grounded in analytical (logical) reasoning. On the other hand, the transcendent is predisposed as an independent, objective, invisible, other-worldly, and suprasensible phenomenon. In traditional African spiritual philosophy, "transcendence indicates the supernatural sphere" and is related to deities (AGADA 2017, 26). In fact, the transcendent is associated with God and the invisible spiritual order. Transcendence is rooted in intuition. Also, some early African spiritual philosophers believe in, what may be called, 'spiritual transcendence' as Africa's own unique way of transcending. This includes esoteric, paranormal, mystical, and emotive activities such as adulation, ritual, astral projection, telepathy, precognition, remote viewing, telekinesis, teleportation, etc. Conversely, recent African spiritual philosophers are more analytical in their approach to spiritual themes.

Supernaturality: This term comes from the Latin word "supernaturalis", which means 'beyond nature'. It refers to events that are not explicable with the physical laws of nature (MAJEED 2012, 58). In other words, supernaturality is an attribute of something that is beyond scientific intelligibility. It is not necessarily suprasensible or invisible. The key point is that it is not natural, that is, inexplicable or unintelligible within the framework of physics. The closest philosophical synonym is metaphysics – if we take the literal definition of metaphysics that means 'beyond nature'. However, metaphysics cannot be used as a substitute for supernaturality. Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that studies the fundamental nature of reality, the structure of being – including notions of freedom and determinism, subjectivity and objectivity, mind and matter, physical and spiritual, nothing and something, reality and unreality, one and many, being and non-being, etc. This definition implicates both the natural and the unnatural, the material and the immaterial, the physical and the spiritual within the scope of metaphysics. This is not the same thing with supernaturality, which focuses exclusively on unnatural phenomena (UNAH 2002, 6). In traditional African spiritual philosophy, the notion of supernaturality is associated with extraterritorial phenomena in terms of its causal origin and cosmic effect (MARUMO and CHAKALE 2018, 11697).

Contemporary Conception of Spirituality

The meaning of spirituality is changing in the African philosophical context. This indicates a shift in consciousness about what is regarded as 'spiritual'. The shift implies that spirituality is no longer viewed via the lenses of postcolonial African religions (Islam and Christianity) and supernaturalism that characterized traditional African religions:

> By spiritualism, we are de-emphasizing theology of the contemporary African religions namely Christianity and Islam which are sectarian and promote divisiveness and extremism. Unlike these post-colonial, alien religions, African traditional religions were grounded in tolerance, accommodation and inter-faith activities and relationships, a correlation of their man-nature connectedness. (EKWEALO 2011, 9)

This means that contemporary understanding of spirituality is the consciousness rooted in psychological traits expressed in attitude and behaviour. Spirituality is a consciousness of one's place in the world as part of and one with the gestalt oneness of the world together with animals, plants, and ecosystems. This is in tune with the African communal conception of relationship as one "in which individuals cognitively, emotionally, conatively and volitionally identify with each other, that is, through psychological attitudes such as thinking of oneself as part of a group" (EWUOSO 2021, 4). This consciousness enables us to exhibit harmonious attributes such as love, kindness, benevolence, fairness, friendliness, truthfulness, peacefulness, patience, justice, tolerance, cooperation, etc. Also, spirituality is defined as "spiritual consciousness grounded on the principle of equity, justice, respectful and dignified relation of all beings in reality" (EKWEALO 2011, 11).

From the foregoing, it is evident that spirituality in African philosophy is inclined towards human-to-human, human-to-nature, and human-to-God relatedness. In fact, God is viewed as part of nature (MOMOH 1989b; EKWEALO 2012a; AGADA 2015; 2022a; 2022b; 2022c). This does not mean that there is no sustained discourse on the notion of God and its implication for events in the world. African philosophers like Agada (2015) and Attoe (2022) are renewing the discourse on God with interesting dimensions. Yet, recent works by African philosophers demonstrate an increasing shift away from supernaturality towards naturality, and from transcendence towards immanence. Together, the two concepts – naturality and immanence – form a conceptual framework for making sense of the evolving trend in African spiritual philosophy. This conceptual framework is crucial to understanding the recent themes that are developing in African spiritual philosophy. Let me briefly explain them here.

Naturality: A simple way of understanding this notion in our context is to juxtapose it as the opposite of supernaturality. The term comes from the Latin word "naturalis". It refers to a sphere of nature or phenomena associated with nature. Philosophically, this term is used in two senses as: (a) biomimetic realism often in a functional or teleological sense, and (b) relating to reason or rationality. It seeks to provide the standard for action. The aim is to shape our actions to meet the standards set by nature, especially in terms of the processes and structure of the natural environment. In African philosophy, synthetic statements are used to represent the naturalistic dimension of spiritual thinking and conceptual modelling (ASOUZU 2011, 13). Supernaturalism no longer dominantly characterize the notion of spirituality as was the case in the past. The focus is now on naturalising spiritual-connotated concepts via synthetic reflection.

Immanence: A simple way of understanding this concept in our context is to juxtapose it as the opposite of transcendence. "Immanence is conceptualized in terms of the material world" (AGADA 2017, 26). The term comes from the Latin word "manere" meaning 'to stay within' or "immanere" meaning 'to inhabit'. It was used to express the presence of God in the world or the world as the manifestation of the being of God (ROLLI 2004, 51-52). In African philosophical tradition, immanence is often expressed simultaneously as transcendence. This is usually demonstrated with the notion of *force*, which is distinct, objective, independent, and prior to the universe yet participating in the world through its yearning (AGADA 2015, 96) or interactions/activities (ATTOE 2022, 84).

The notion of immanence expresses the view that the universe is a manifestation of *force,* and this is implicated in its interconnectedness. In this sense, everything is intrinsically linked to everything else and together they constitute the unity of being. Even though *force* (or being) is conceived as immanent-transcendent spiritual essence, its mode of expression is through the concrete physical nature opened to sense experience. *Force* is the transcendent spiritual essence of all things, yet it is immanent in everything. In different African philosophy texts, *force* is interpreted to mean God. Hence, some African spiritual philosophers appeal to pansophism (MOMOH 1989b), pantheism (EKWEALO 2012a), and panpsychism (AGADA 2015). So, in this context, spirituality is about interconnecting with human and nonhuman nature as part of oneself (EKWEALO 2017, 96). Attitudes that promote harmony, interrelatedness and loveliness are designated as an expression of spirituality.

Recent Themes in Spiritual Philosophy

There is an increasing shift in the literature on the meaning of spirituality or the spiritual. This shift has been implicated in the types of themes frequently discussed and the dimensions brought to them. The recent themes evolving in the field include sacrality, piety, relatability, respectability, existential gratitude, sacred feminine, life-meaning, etc. Metz leads the field of spiritual philosophy in Africa with his pioneering works on *meaning in life*. However, his work is deeply influenced by the Anglo-American intellectual tradition (KUKITA 2015, 208). Nevertheless, there are works by African philosophers concerning *meaning in life* and its variant *meaning of life*, which are reactions to the pioneering works of Metz. However, discourse on *meaning in life*, an aspect of spiritual philosophy, is not included for consideration in this work because of the European influence on it. This article focuses squarely on recent themes in spiritual philosophy that are rooted in African intellectual history.

Sacrality: This theme is central in Ekwealo's analysis of the notion of *ndu* (life-force). Sacrality is the noun for the adjective sacred. There are two major expressions of its meaning. First, in the commonly used religious denotative sense, it means consecrated or sanctified, that is, set apart for solemn religious devotion.

Second, in the religious connotative sense, it means inviolable, inalienable, and unalterable. To say that something is sacred or sacral means that it is not to be violated, dishonoured, altered, alienated, infringed upon, or interfered with. It is in this second sense that Ekwealo uses 'sacrality' in his works in relation to the notion of life-force. The idea is that *ndu* (life or life-force) is sacred because it is the essence of life (EKWEALO 2017, 74). It is the primal energy that begets all things both animate and inanimate. Life-force is the wellspring from which beings come into existence and are sustained therein. This quality is not just present in everything, but it connects everything to everything else (Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya 2022, 202). This gestalt wholeness of all things is held as sacred. Since life-force is the building block of life – the primary quality that sustains every existent being – it becomes imperative to protect it from being infringed upon, interfered with, violated, or estranged. In this direction, every entity that possesses this quality must be protected and nurtured.

This is how life or life-force acquired the status of sacrality in African spiritual philosophy. The notion of *life-force* is used alternatively with *vital force* (IBANGA 2020, 25), and it is identified with God due to its creative quality (EKWEALO 2012a, 297). This implies that in securing life one is rendering a service to God. Life is supreme and the most important quality (EKWEALO 2012b, 104). Preservation of life is considered the highest duty man owes to himself and God. In relating to any existent (animate or inanimate), one must pay attention to the fact that it possesses life or life-force and must relate with it in such a way that this quality is not violated whether willingly or by negligence. If this quality would be affected in the relation, then such must be out of necessity or inevitability (EKWEALO 2014, 194) but one that adds to the pool of life in the cosmic gestalt sense (IBANGA 2017a, 117) and must be accompanied with permission-seeking akin to supplication indicating a need of borrowing to complement (EKWEALO 2011, 4).

Piety: This is another major theme in Ekwealo's writings. Piety is loaded with religious intonations referring to deference, veneration, profound awe, and an expression of reverence or devotion (duty) to something – especially of a deity. In Ekwealo's writings, piety is expressed as an attitude of the mind and a behavioural disposition that inspires awe, devotion, and respect for another entity (EKWEALO 2017, 94). It is an expression of innate mental attitudes such as cleanliness, friendliness, kindness, benevolence, truthfulness, love, peace, patience, tolerance, gratitude, modesty, justice, harmony, and interdependence. Ekwealo asserts that "Whenever as humans we are exhibiting these attributes, we are calling forth our innate godliness in ourselves" (2012a, 167). In other words, these qualities are an expression of our godliness. Spirituality consists in promoting balance, harmony, well-being, and social justice.

Meanwhile, these attributes are not applicable to the human realm only; rather it is to be demonstrated towards nonhuman animals, plants, and the entire ecosystem (EKWEALO 2017, 122). This is considered service to God since nature itself is an embodiment and a reflection of God (EKWEALO 2012a, 166, 297). Piety is defined as the attitude of mind and/or an activity that serves to maintain existential balance in nature. Impiety refers to the mental attitude or an activity that can disrupt this balance. Maintaining a good and respectful relationship with fellow human beings and with all entities in nature is regarded as the height of piety (EKWEALO 2017, 94). One does not need to pour libation, recite sacred verses, perform rites, or bow to certain deities to be considered pietistic or spiritual. Spirituality is defined by our relationship with fellow human beings and nonhuman nature. Attitudes and behaviours that disrupt balance and harmony in the community/ecosystem or that bring hardship and pain to any part of nature are regarded as evil. Sustainability practices such as caring for the environment are recognized as an expression of one's sense of goodliness or spirituality.

Respectability: This is one of the most widely discussed themes in African philosophy. But its applicability to spiritual philosophy is scanty and recent. So, what is respectability? The way this notion is used in African philosophy literature is about recognizing and acknowledging rights, limits, boundaries, self-worth, dignity, identity, and the existence of others in nature (EKWEALO 2012b, 92; 2014, 195; IBANGA 2014, 187; 2018, 127). According to Julius Nyerere, respect means "a recognition of mutual involvement in one another" (1968, 107). Francis explains that "mutual involvement implies that by recognizing one's basic humanity and sacrality of one's life-force one must also simultaneously recognize those same qualities in the other person by virtue of his/her basic humanity and membership in the human society" (2018, 49-50). In addition, Ekwealo argues that the recognition of the rights of others is not only applicable to human beings but must be extended to all beings including nonhuman animals, plants, and inanimate nature (2011, 5). We must recognize that every existent in nature possesses basic rights and intrinsic values – making existent things ends-in-themselves.

Life or life-force is the basic right that every existent (animate and inanimate) possesses in-itself and that entitles it as a member of the wider natural community (EKWEALO 2011, 4; 2012b, 92; IBANGA 2014, 188; 2018, 127; 2020, 25; CHIMAKONAM and OGBONNAYA 2022: 201). Life is sacred and must be secured. It is the primary value that makes existence possible and sustains it. Life is prior to all other values, and it is by it that every other value becomes possible. This makes the right to life a basic right possessed by every existent thing in the wider natural community – including the ecosystem. This basic right must be recognized and respected in every existent (EKWEALO 2012b, 92; IBANGA 2014, 188). Since everything has life in itself; they are made sacred by the life that they possess. Therefore, our relation to any existent, human and nonhuman or animate and inanimate, must be one based on respect. It follows that

any action that will negatively affect this right must be "absolutely necessary" (IBANGA 2018, 130) and accompanied by modesty (EKWEALO 2011, 4). Moreover, respect is not seen merely as a negative duty such as 'do no harm'. Respect involves acting to secure, protect, support, and nourish other existents or their ecosystem so that they can continue to flourish within the natural community (IBANGA 2018, 130). So, the duty of respect is one that can be identified with spiritual care vis-à-vis deference, reverence, devotion, observance, and moral care. Precisely, spiritual care is about the act of helping a person or thing to experience meaning in life by making the person experience a connection with the divine or the wider natural community.

Furthermore, respect is about recognizing, acknowledging, and securing natural boundaries. Drawing from the Annang sustainability principle *K'unuk Adaha Abot* (do not shift natural boundaries or do not alter natural order), Ibanga calls for respect for "natural boundaries" (2018, 127). There are boundaries in nature that must be respected to avoid the disruption of the web of existence. For example, certain places are sacralized as the abode of the spirits, and/or as dedicated spheres of certain plants or animals, etc. These can be water bodies, wetlands, forests, highlands, wilderness, etc. These are spaces in nature that provide a safe operating threshold for the functionality of specific existents and that if encroached could result in catastrophes. Encroachment on natural boundaries can be due to unsustainable practices involved in human activities leading to the extinction or depletion of some members of the natural community. Generally, earth systems (air, land, water bodies, etc.) interlock with the basic right to life of existents in nature. Therefore, "Respecting the right of existence of other entities in nature implies not denying them space to exist" (IBANGA 2018, 127). Space is crucial in the African moral worldview. Space provides the support system for both visible and invisible beings to express themselves vis-à-vis "wellbeing of the environment [which] invariably entails a good life" for all existents (LAWAL and AYUBA 2021, 43). It is an important spiritual charge that these spaces are respected to ensure existential harmony.

Relatability: This is another widely discussed theme in African philosophy. In fact, there is hardly a work done in African philosophy where the theme of relatability would not be discussed under different nomenclatures. In recent times, the theme of relatability has been employed by Ibanga in developing African spiritual philosophy. So, what is relatability? Since relatability is derived from relationality, I will first discuss the latter before the former. There are different ways African philosophers have tried to describe it – including interdependence, mutuality, complementarity, interrelatedness, interconnectedness, mutual dependence, relationalism, interactionism, and so on. I want to focus on the definitions provided by Metz and Attoe. While the former promotes a normative (ethical) account, the latter offers a metaphysical account to undergird the account of the former. Both approaches are important to understanding the spiritual relatability theory provided here.

Relationality is the philosophical viewpoint that accounts for solidarity (with others) as the authentic ground of being. This is not peculiar to African thinking, but it cannot be held to be salient in Western thinking (METZ 2015, 1180). However, relationality is considered uniquely African if it includes 'communal relationship' (EWUOSO 2021, 3) or is rooted in the African notion of personhood (IBANGA 2022b). One can exhibit the attitude of solidarity towards others without identifying with them, such as anonymous gifting to motherless babies' homes (METZ 2022, 97). In African thought, such a relation of solidarity must be rooted in a relationship of identity (EKEI 2014, 192-196). While a relationship of solidarity is about commitment to the general well-being of people, that is, sympathetic altruism towards the good of others; a relationship of identity is about mutual involvement in one another's interests, that is, "experiencing life as bound up with others" or a sense of belonging together (METZ 2022, 94-96). A communal relationship recognizes the two dimensions. It places a premium on harmonious, cooperative, interdependent, integrative, interactive, and multisectoral relationships.

Attoe distinguishes between two kinds of relationality viz. direct and indirect relationalities. While 'direct relationality' is immediate and closer to the latest event in proximity of time, 'indirect relationality' is the totality of all the historical factors that remotely contribute to cause an effect (ATTOE 2022, 69-72). Indirect relationality is squared on the framework of complementarity, which conceives reality as the stitching together of missing links (ASOUZU 2007, 267; 2011, 15). Direct relationality is a process of immediate causal relationships. Nevertheless, both direct and indirect relationalities are anchored on deterministic historicity, since all events are traceable to a single cause that Attoe identifies as God (ATTOE 2022, 56, 71). This view, therefore, shows that the world is a product of, and is anchored on, multiple relationships and interactions that are historically determined. Thus, *to be* does not simply mean 'being there'; rather "it means standing in a particular relationship with all there is both visible and invisible" (OKOLO quoted in ATTOE 2022, 70). This reflects the African conception of communal relationship, which is a kind of totemistic relationship that encompasses both the visible and invisible world and includes animals, plants, and ecosystems in a spiritual community (IBANGA 2017a, 112).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that relationship and interaction characterize being in African thought. From here, relatability can be derived from relationality. The latter is concerned with the way in which different entities are connected. The former is concerned with the feeling of rapport (to feel sympathy or identify with) and connecting to something else (transcendental other or web of relationships). Relationality is more of a substructure, whereas relatability is more of a superstructure. On the one hand, relatability can be directional when the rapport involves those immediate or closer in time (e.g., one's kins and ancestors, neighbours, fellow citizens, etc.). On the other hand, relatability can be non-directional when the rapport involves those remote or distant in time (e.g., future generations, ancestors in general, humanity, ecosystems, an entire planet, etc.). 'Directional relatability' is more personal whereas 'non-directional relatability' is more abstract.

Relatability reflects the African communal conception of relationship "in which individuals cognitively, emotionally, conatively and volitionally identify with each other, that is, through psychological attitudes such as thinking of oneself as part of a group" (EWUOSO 2021, 4). The group, here, is a kind of spiritual community with totemistic relationships between the invisible and visible, humans and nonhumans, plants and ecosystems, and the entire cosmic history. Relatability pre-orients nature. Everything is in multiple relationships with all things and receives inputs from everything else. Nothing exists independent of others. This gestalt wholeness of all things is held as sacred, and sacralization provides for existential balance and harmony (EKWEALO 2011, 5). Relatability is a spiritual consciousness that "discourages attitude of waste and impunity" while encouraging an attitude of love for all based on a relationship that "links nature, community and man" as expressed in the African doctrine of force (IBANGA 2014, 189).

Existential Gratitude: This theme is common in the works of Momoh, Ekwealo and Ibanga – where it is recognized as a key spiritual principle. Existential gratitude is defined as "an acknowledgement of the worth and sometimes a consequent expression of gratitude to an existent for its central and active roles in one's life or of the community" (MOMOH 1989b, 425). This reflects the general metaphysical disposition of African thought, namely, the belief in the interconnectedness and interdependences of all things. There is complementarity at all levels of being (ASOUZU 2007, 267). The complementary status of things implies that things are essentially incomplete in themselves, therefore, must be complemented by other things (IBANGA and PEPPE 2022, 16). The complementary status of things "indicate that no species in nature, whether human or non-human, no matter how developed the intellect, can survive on its own without the contribution of other species to its wellbeing and sustainability" (IBANGA 2016, 12). No phenomenon exists independently in itself, thus, there is no existent thing that is self-sufficient (IBANGA 2016, 15). This interdependence denies any being a claim to superiority (EKWEALO 2014, 197).

Human beings, just like other entities in nature, depend on other existents for their survival and flourishing. Since this is the case, that complementarity is implicated in the being of man, the human being must show gratitude to nature for its supply of vital needs (IBANGA 2020, 25). This must come in the form of "care and protection" of nature (IBANGA 2018, 125). This is implied in the Annang aphorism "*adia mkpo ano isong koro isong adehe ayaka* 'gwo (always show existential gratitude to the land for we share common heritage)" (IBANGA 2020, 25). Human beings are enjoined to appreciate (show gratitude to) the land for its support role. As Ibanga explains, "The land, in this prayer, does not just refer to merely the soil but all entities whose existences are connected thereto" (2016, 12). The emphasis on humans follows from the fact that the human being is expected to play a stewardship role in nature, having attained the highest stage of evolution. Bassey argues that although the human being is a plain member of the natural community, it occupies an important place in the scheme of things with the moral responsibility to care for the environment (2020, 101).

Existential gratitude is an important spiritual principle in the relation between humans and nature – one that reminds a person of the vital roles that both human and nonhuman others play in one's wellbeing. Ekwealo explains that "Existential gratitude is a universal affirmation to God and awareness of man's finitude and respectful belief that in all things, it is not one's sole power, strength and ability that bestows greatness, victory and progress" (2012b, 93); rather it is a shared effort involving the goodwill of all entities in nature including both visible and invisible beings. Hence, the charge: "Act in such a way that reflects your gratitude towards other existents, humans and nonhumans, for contributing to support your beingness or existence" (IBANGA 2018, 128). Existential gratitude means "to reciprocate the supplies from nature, by offering something [of comparative value] back to nature in return" (IBANGA 2018, 129). It is expressed in the form of "care and protection" of nature to secure the ecosystems for the survival and flourishing of all existents (IBANGA 2018, 125). Existential gratitude is an expression of love for nature. The highest expression of gratitude is love. Yet, it is impossible to feel love for nature while harbouring a negative attitude towards it. Hence, existential gratitude is associated with an attitude of thankfulness, kindness, empathy, friendliness, goodness, tolerance, respect, veneration, brotherliness, fairness, and devotion towards nature. This is the disposition associated with ecological self-concept, that is, the view of oneself as an extension of nature and nature as an extension of oneself (EKWEALO 2012b, 103). Expression of gratitude is based on the recognition that entities in nature co-exist and are interdependent on account of the spiritual force *ntu* that holds all things together (IBANGA 2016, 11).

Sacred Feminine: African philosophers known to have used this concept philosophically are Ekwealo and Ibanga. While Ibanga (2012) used it as a metaphysical concept to demonstrate the connection between sexuality and nature, Ekwealo (2012c) used it in axiological terms to show the spiritual values embedded in womanhood. Ibanga sees sexuality and fertility as mainly spiritual qualities. He argues that in traditional African society, "Sexuality was seen as sacred" (IBANGA 2012, 109). Spiritual force monitored female sexual fidelity. Sexual activity was not permitted except by the consent of the community, which had the prerogative power to will such (IBANGA 2012, 109). This was because sexuality was primarily viewed as a spiritual activity. Sexuality is related to the totality of the human condition (OJO 2010, 4), but importantly it was related to the totality of all beings – human and nonhuman, visible and invisible. For this reason, traditional African cosmology imposed enormous responsibility on the female sex as the gateway of the community (IBANGA 2012, 110). Thus, the female sex became sacralized. The female sexual organ became identified with nature and virginity was protected. Womanhood became sacred:

> Since the womb was the cradle of life, the traditional society regarded it as sacred. Hence, they demanded sanctity and purity from the woman. And because of the karmic responsibility imposed on the woman due to her oneness with nature, absolute vigilance was demanded of her. The ancient African paid attention and respect to womanhood hence the concept of sacred feminine. In Annang, *abot* (nature) was represented or symbolized as a woman, and it represented the sacred feminine. In Annang ontology, *abot* which is symbolized as woman is the origin and end of life, force or energy. Without her (abot), life is impossible; without her (abot) life is incomplete. A neglect of her (abot) energy is catastrophic. And because the woman was equated with nature (abot), her virginity and the virginity of nature was held sacred. You could not gate-crash into a virgin land or forest; it must always be engaged with acceptable permission in the form of some rituals, in the same
>
> way her virginity was to be broken within the acceptable norms of society. (IBANGA 2012, 111)

Ekwealo argues that, as the gatekeeper of the human race and nature, the woman's role is primarily that of management of nature's resources and moderator of environmental balance. As a sacred being, she occupies a unique place in creation with the mandate to "ensure the healthy maintenance and preservation of reality for those living and those of the future" (EKWEALO 2012c, 2). He added that the woman is by her nature-loving, kind, empathetic, good, deferent, tolerant, obedient, fair, meek, friendly, forgiving, etc. Interestingly, these are the spiritual qualities required to build an equitable, eco-friendly, peaceful, and harmonious society. This spiritual energy that the woman embodies is crucial for the restoration of the world order of harmony as it was at the beginning of creation. In fact, "this primal force is as good as one going back to the very foundation of one's life" (EKWEALO 2012c, 5). Sexual emotion brings out godly qualities in us, "helps us to become more fully human and akin to God… makes us more gentle and caring, more self-giving and concerned for others" (TUTU 1996, x). The sacred feminine is akin to originary sexual emotion, which is a spiritual quality vis-à-vis the primal creative energy that drives all existents and the entire evolutionary process (IBANGA 2012, 109). Spirituality is expressed best through emotion (EKWEALO 2012c, 1; AGADA 2015, 61, 105).

The sacred feminine is about "a connection to universal energy for through it and the emotion therein, every other contact forces are (sic) brought to be" (EKWEALO 2012c, 5). The sacred feminine is the primal emotion that drives all animate things. This primal emotion "is the imbued nature of especially women but is also embedded in all reality" (EKWEALO 2012c, 3). This means that the sacred feminine is not strictly about women. Ekwealo defines sacred feminine as "the-woman-in-all-of-us… that emotional nature which resides in all animates and human species and which challenges us to seek friendlier and altruistic measures"

(2012c, 4). This differs significantly from the general understanding of the sacred feminine in western and oriental cultures as ritualism. The sacred feminine is the force of love, which is the creative energy that instantiates things through centripetal yearning. Agada (2015) opines that yearning is the innate character of being (24) whose driving force is "intellectual love", that is, "emotion of the intellect" (76) undergirded with "pure thought for the good" (207) and recognition of beauty in a person or thing (221). Also, intellectual love is "a moral orientation that brings God, humans, and nature into a moral framework of longing for goodness" (AGADA 2022a, 137). Love is an emotional response to other existents and defines the way we relate with other entities in nature especially those vulnerable to our power (EKWEALO 2014, 196). Ultimately, it is the emotion of love that connects humans to God. As Ada Agada states:

> Intellectual love is an orientation of thinking and feeling beings in which joy is established as a function of empathy for fellow human beings, the acknowledgement of God as the highest moral principle, and solidarity with nature. (AGADA 2022a, 136)

This is the dimension in which sacred feminine must be understood. Masculinity is the opposite of femininity and is associated with valour, ruthlessness, severity, and strictness. However, masculinity does not represent the true nature of man, and thus, cannot be the source of authentic morality and spirituality. Social masculinity is a veil that conceals our true human feminine nature rooted in godliness. Neurobiology indicates that biologically the male brain is defeminized during foetal development by a combination of hormones (KUDWA et al. 2005). Apart from the biological defeminization that affects the male gender primarily, social defeminization via liberal feminism and masculinized morality affects both male and female genders. Thus, Ekwealo argues that the de-masculinization of society will lift the veil that conceals the woman-in-all-of-us:

> When this veil would be lifted, the spiritual qualities of womanhood would be discerned for they are simply a resurrection of the woman-in-all-of-us, the emotional selves which are all exhumed from the sacred feminine, the engine of creativity, holistic development, and wholesome qualitative realizations. (EKWEALO 2012c, 5)

In other words, social de-masculinization will facilitate the realisation of the authentic nature of the human being in society.

Conclusion

This work was designed to explore and analyze the different themes evolving in recent African spiritual philosophy. Traditionally, African spiritual philosophy had focused on worship/religion, sacrifice, ritualism, incantation/prayer, totemism, reincarnation, soul, destiny, spirit, deity, sacredness, sexuality, causality, soul transplantation, metempsychosis, transmigration, living-dead (ancestor),

witchcraft, magic, death, evil, force, etc. Attoe observes that these ideas "have largely remained the same and unchallenged" because of hesitancy among African philosophers to raise critical questions about them (2022, xvii). However, very recent works by Agada and Attoe have started to raise questions to challenge these ideas in refreshing ways. While Agada and Attoe focus on challenging the traditional understanding of God, Metz challenges the traditional notion of meaning in the general understanding of being. This work did not set out to restate the ideas already discussed broadly and deeply in traditional African spirituality literature. It skipped the mainstream thinking of Agada and Attoe in relation to the idea of God because their thoughts are still somewhat trapped in the traditional metaphysical paradigm. Also, works by Metz discussing *meaning in life* and the reactions from African scholars are left out because they are somewhat rooted in Anglo-American intellectual tradition.

This article aimed to explore the unfamiliar territories in African spiritual philosophy to unravel the meaning of spirituality that differs radically from the traditional conception. On the one hand, meaning of spirituality in traditional African thought is rooted in *transcendence* and *supernaturality*. On the other hand, meaning of spirituality in contemporary African thinking is rooted in *naturality* and *immanence*. However, this mapping can be challenged, and rightly so, because many African philosophers researching the subject of spirituality are still relying on the traditional paradigm. Therefore, this mapping may be viewed as exploring the periphery of spiritual philosophy in Africa. Yet, this mapping is pointing to a trend that is evolving while incrementally decentring the traditional paradigm. This article made substantial references to the works of Ekwealo whom I regard as the father of contemporary African spiritual philosophy – for his pioneering works that discussed most of the themes explored in this article. But it is important that readers keep their gaze on the African notion of *force* as the foundation on which the discourse is grounded.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. AGADA, Ada. [Existence and Consolation: Reinventing Ontology, Gnosis and Values in African Philosophy], 2015. Paragon House: St Paul, MN. Paperback.
2. -------. "The Apparent Conflict of Transcendentalism and Immanentism in Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu's Interpretation of the Akan Concept of God," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp23-38, 2017. Vol 6, No 1.
3. -------. [Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy: Beyond Universalism and Particularism], 2022a. Routledge: New York.. Ebook.
4. -------. "Bewaji and Fayemi on God, Omnipotence, and Evil," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp41–56, 2022b. Vol 11, No 1. Web.
5. -------. "Rethinking the Concept of God and the Problem of Evil from the Perspective of African Thought," [Religious Studies], pp1-17, 2022c. Web.
6. ASOUZU, Innocent. I. [Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions], 2007. LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG: Zurich. Paperback.
7. -------. "Ibuanyidanda (Complementary Reflection), Communalism and Theory Formulation in African Philosophy," [Thought and Practice: A Journal of Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) New Series], pp9-34, 2011. Vol 3, No 2. Web.
8. ATTOE, Arabiah D. "African Philosophical Perspectives on the Meaning of Life." [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy], 2021. December 2021. Web.
9. -------. [Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Predeterministic Historicity], 2022. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham. Web.
10. BASSEY, Samuel A. "Technology, Environmental Sustainability and the Ethics of Anthropoholism." [Przestrzen Spoleczna], pp85-110, 2020. Vol 20, No 2. Web.
11. CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan. O. and OGBONNAYA, Uchenna. L. "Environmental Thinking in African Philosophy: A Defence of Biocentrism Using the Notion of Nma Ndu," [Global Epistemologies and Philosophies of Science, David LUDWIG, Inkeri KOSKINEN, Zinhle MNCUBE, Luana POLISELI and Luis REYE-GALINDO Eds.], pp199-207, 2022. Routledge: New York. Ebook.
12. EKEI, John C. [An Introduction to African Philosophy], 2014. Smagh: Lagos. Paperback.
13. EKWEALO, Chigbo J. "Environmental Ethics and Values in the 21st Century: An Africanist Philosophical Analysis," [Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values], pp1-14, 2011. Vol 1. Web.
14. -------. [Applied and Practical Ethics: A Simplified Course Text], 2012a. African Environmental Ethics and Values Research Group: Lagos. Paperback.

15. -------. “Ndu Mmili Ndu Azu (Live-and-Let-Live): African Environmental Ethics,” [Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values], pp90-106, 2012b. Vol 3. Paperback.
16. -------. “Creativity, Holistic Development and Social Empowerment: A Critique of the ‘the-Woman-in-all-Us’,” [Paper Presented at the Biennial Conference and General Meeting of the Nigerian Philosophical Association at the University of Abuja, October 22-24], 2012c.
17. --------. “African Environmental Values Expressed through Proverbs,” [Values in Sustainable Development, Jack APPLETON Ed.], pp193- 203, 2014. Routledge: New York. Paperback.
18. -------. [Ndu Mmili Ndu Azu: An Introduction to African Environmental Ethics, Diana-Abasi IBANGA Ed.], 2017. Redcom: Lagos. Paperback.
19. EWUOSO, Cornelius. “An African Relational Approach to Healthcare and Big Data Challenges,” [Science and Engineering Ethics], pp34, 2021. Vol 27. Web.
20. FRANCIS, Diana-Abasi I. “A Critique of Ujamaa Version of African Socialism: Towards Advancement of African Capitalism,” [PhD diss. University of Calabar], 2018.
21. GLENNAN, Stuart. [The New Mechanical Philosophy], 2017. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Paperback.
22. HEGEL, Georg W.F. “The Philosophy of Plato,” [The Journal of Speculative Philosophy], pp225-268, 1870. Vol 4, No 3. Web.
23. IBANGA, Diana-Abasi and PEPPE, Sara. “The Missing Link of Machine Learning in Healthcare.” [Balkan Journal of Philosophy], pp11-22, 2022. Vol 14, No 1. Web.
24. IBANGA, Diana-Abasi. “Sexual Ethics,” [Applied and Practical Ethics: A Simplified Course Text, Chigbo Joseph EKWEALO Ed.], pp96-115, 2012. African Environmental Ethics and Values Research Group: Lagos. Paperback.
25. -------. “Climate Change and Igbo Thought: A Philosophical Analysis,” [Frontiers of Knowledge in Philosophy: Cutting Edge Issues, Martin ASIEGBU and J. Chidozie CHUKWUOKOLO Eds], pp179-192, 2014. Nigerian Philosophical Association & Jones Communications Publishers: Enugu. Paperback.
26. -------. “Logical and Theoretical Foundations of African Environmental Ethics,” [Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies], pp3-24, 2016. Vol 9, No 9. Paperback.
27. --------. “Is Deep Ecology Inapplicable in African Context: A Conversation with Fainos Mangena,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp101-119, 2017a. Vol 6, No 2. Web.
28. --------. “The Concept of Beauty in African Philosophy,” [Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies], pp249-260, 2017b. Vol 10, No 7. Web.
29. --------. “Philosophical Sagacity as Conversational Philosophy and its Significance for the Question of Method in African Philosophy,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp69-89, 2017c. Vol 6, No 1. Web.

30. --------. “Renewable Energy Issues in Africa Contexts,” [Relations: Beyond Anthropocentrism], pp117-133, 2018. Vol 6, No 1. Web.
31. --------. “Paths to African Personhood and Identity in the Diasporas: the Case for Reburial of African Enslaved Ancestors,” [Journal of Contemporary African Philosophy], pp8-27, 2020. Vol 1, No 1. Web.
32. --------. “What is ‘Ethno’ and ‘Philosophy’ in Ethno-Philosophy?,” [Ethnophilosophy and the Search for the Wellspring of African Philosophy, Ada AGADA Ed.], pp39-56, 2022a. Springer: Cham, Switzerland. Ebook.
33. --------. “How to Ground Corporate Governance Practice on African Ethics,” [Philosophy and Business Ethics: Organizations, CSR and Moral Practice, Guglielmo FALDETTA, Edoardo MOLLONA and Massimiliano Matteo PELLEGRINI Eds.], 2022b. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. Ebook.
34. JAEGER, Werner. [The Theology of Early Greek Philosophers], 1936. Clarendon Press: Oxford. Paperback.
35. JASPERS, Karl. [The Great Philosophers: The Foundations], 1962. Harcourt, Brace & World Inc: New York. Paperback.
36. KANT, Immanuel. [Critique of Pure Reason, Paul GUYER and Allen W. WOOD. Trans. & Ed.], 1998. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Paperback.
37. KUDWA, Andrea E., BODO, Cristian., GUSTAFSSON, Jan-Ake and RISSMAN, Emilie F. “A Previously Uncharacterized Role for Estrogen Receptor β: Defeminization of Male Brain and Behavior,” [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America], pp4608-4612, 2005. Vol 102, No 12. Web.
38. KUKITA, Minao. “Review of Thaddues Metz’s Meaning in Life,” [Journal of Philosophy of Life], pp208-214, 2015. Vol 5, No 3. Web.
39. LAWAL, Bambale Z. and AYUBA, Abubakar. “Bigire (Space) in Hausa Worldview: Towards an Environmental Ethic of Zaman Lafiya (Peaceful Living),” [NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy], pp36-48, 2021. Vol 6, No 2. Paperback.
40. MAJEED, Hasskei M. “Supernaturalism and the Philosophical Character of the Traditional African Thinker,” [Legon Journal of the Humanities], pp57-74, 2012. Vol 23. Web.
41. MARUMO, Phemelo. O. and CHAKALE, Mompati. V. “Understanding African Philosophy and African Spirituality: Challenges and Prospects,” [Gender & Behaviour], pp11695-11704, 2018. Vol 16, No 2. Web.
42. METZ, Thaddeus. “How the West was One: The West as Individualist, the African as Communitarian,” [Educational Philosophy and Theory], pp.1175-1184, 2015. Vol 47, No 11. Web.
43. -------. [A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and Beyond the Continent], 2022. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Ebook.
44. MOMOH, Campbell S. “Nature, Issues and Substance of African Philosophy,” [The Substance of African Philosophy, C. S. MOMOH Ed.], pp1-22, 1989a. African Philosophy Projects Publications: Auchi. Paperback.

45. -------. “Pansophism and Ontological Placements in African Philosophy,” [The Substance of African Philosophy, C. S. MOMOH Ed.], pp372-390, 1989b. African Philosophy Projects Publications: Auchi. Paperback.
46. NYERERE, Julius K. [Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism], 1968. Oxford University Press: Dar es Salaam. Paperback.
47. OJO, Ronke. “Against Desire and Pleasure: Tradition, Morality and the Woman in African Culture,” [Sexuality in Africa Magazine and Monographs], pp4-5, 2010. Vol 6, No 1. Web.
48. PASSMORE, J. “Logical Positivism,” [The Encylopedia of Philosophy Vol. 5, P. EDWARDS Ed.], pp25-57, 1967. Macmillan: New York. Web.
49. PELTONEN, Tuomo. “Transcendence, Consciousness and Order: Towards a Philosophical Spirituality of Organization in the Footsteps of Plato and Eric Voegelin,” [Philosophy of Management], pp231-247, 2019. Vol 18. Web.
50. ROLLI, Marc. “Immanence and Transcendence,” [Bulletin de la Societe Americaine de Philosophie de Langue Francais], pp50-74, 2004. Vol 14, No 2. Web.
51. ŠĶESTERIS, Jānis. “Introduction to Philosophy of Pierre Hadot or on to Spiritual Exercises,” [Humanities & Social Sciences], pp1739-1746, 2013. Vol 12, No 6. Web.
52. TEMPELS, Placide. [Bantu Philosophy], 1959. Presence Africaine: Paris. Ebook.
53. TUTU, Desmond. “Foreword,” [We were Baptized Too: Claiming God’s Grace for Lesbians and Gays, Marilyn Bennett ALEXANDER and James PRESTON Eds], ppix-x, 1996. Westminster John Knox Press: Kentucky. Paperback.
54. UNAH, Jim. [On Being: Discourse on the Ontology of Man], 2002. Fadec Publishers: Lagos. Paperback.

The Ontological Status of Yahweh and the Existence of the Thing we call God

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.9s
Submitted 5 June 2022. Accepted 2 October 2022

Lerato, Likopo MOKOENA
University of Pretoria, Department (s) of Religious Studies, Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7510-9279
Email: lerato.mokoena@up.ac.za

Abstract
The essence of deities has captured our imaginations for as long as we can remember. Does a God exist, or is the divine entity just a figment of our dreams, a projection? Is God what Aribiah Attoe calls a "regressively eternal and material entity" or what Gericke calls "a character of fiction with no counterpart outside the worlds of text and imagination"? This paper aims to wrestle with those questions from a theological perspective and to look at the ontological status of Yahweh and how that worldview lends itself to African Traditional Religions in conversation with Attoe's method of inquiry from the perspective of African Metaphysics. This paper aims to be a part of the larger project undertaken by the author, showing that philosophy can and should be an auxiliary discipline in Old Testament Studies as it has been seen, both fields have ways of similar arguing and coming to the same conclusions. This paper is intended to be an interlocutory exercise or experiment and does not seek to validate any hypothesis about either view.
Keywords: Yahweh, God, Existence, Philosophical Criticism, Old Testament, Metaphysics.

Introduction

Many important questions about the essence of God, post-Gnosticism, have been raised by theologians and philosophers alike. Those positions will supply us with some background to introduce the central theme in Jaco's work: the ontological status of Yahweh. To query the ontological state of Yahweh is also directly asking the question; does Yahweh exist? Dealing with notions of being, first causes, and the problem of existence is considerably complex, and there is no other grammar that captures the essence of these arguments than the philosophical one we have at our disposal. I will review the major themes of the proposition as explored by Jaco Gericke, as I feel no one can marry philosophy and the Old Testament as he does; his contributions are significant and, at times, challenging but worthy of assessment. Jaco dedicated his PhD. studies to the question of whether Yahweh exists. In those 500-plus pages, he urges us to determine our own beliefs rationally.

Jaco's system derives from the fundamental belief that the world of the Old Testament has more to offer than theology. He contends that Old Testament scholars seem to be interested in debating every conceivable topic about the Old Testament religion except whether or not Yahweh exists (GERICKE 2004, 32). One can cite several reasons for this notable absence in discourse (2004, 32). Firstly, scholars limit themselves to noting that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do

we find arguments that deal with ontology. Secondly, the absence of such ideas seems to be backed by the lack of interest in philosophical questions because it is often thought that the construction of such arguments is the job of the discipline philosophy of religion. This essay will look at the case against realism and the ontological status of Yahweh, and the existence of the thing we call God.

Jaco Gericke and the ontological status of Yahweh

Part I – The case against realism.

Old testament studies seem to be the reason for its undoing due to the privileging of historical readings over philosophical ones due to nomenclature, grammar, the hierarchy of disciplines, and special issues. Philosophy is often treated with suspicion and branded as having no place in Biblical studies. This may be primarily due to the definition and conceptual history of the discipline and the historical contentions between these two ideation spaces. Philosophical inquiry is at the heart of religion and biblical exegesis. Gericke (2004, 33) notes that due to this suspicion, any venture into philosophy is branded and stigmatized as positivist, rationalist, modernist, etc. An interesting observation, given how theologians are now venturing into post-structuralism as an interpretative method.

Since very few interpretative approaches and methodological innovations exist in Old Testament concerning philosophy, Gericke (2004, 33) adopted the strategy of *philosophical-critical analysis,* which he defines as "an approach to the text that concerns itself with questions generated in the reading of the Old Testament that relate to the issues on the agenda of the discipline known as the philosophy of religion (and not philosophy per se or any other subdivision)." He explains that philosophy of religion is utilized in an auxiliary fashion analogous to how Old Testament scholars use other disciplines such as history and sociology of religion. The agenda of philosophy of religion concerns itself with several issues, namely but not limited to; (1) the nature of religion, (2) the nature of religious language, (3) the concept of revelation, (4) the nature of God (PAILIN 1986, 03).

In a three-part article series, Gericke (2005; 2006; 2007) sets on a quest in search of the philosophical Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. In the first part, he makes his case for intelligent critical analysis and philosophy of religion as an auxiliary discipline in Biblical studies. He expands on the methodology and identifies its tenets in the second part of the series to provide introductory thoughts on philosophical criticism as a form of biblical criticism. The series culminates in the curation of a higher-order discipline called 'philosophy of Old Testament religion' to which Gericke subsequently published two books; *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion* (2012) and *A Philosophical Theology Of The Old Testament: A Historical, Experimental, Comparative and Analytic Perspective* (2020).

The quest for a philosophical Yahweh now begins. I will first assess the first part of the series to outline Gericke's project. In his meditations, Gericke sought clarity and certainty. The particular matter of concern is the existence of God. He notes that since primarily the question has been heralded mainly by philosophers, i.e., Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Hume, Kant, Darwin, etc., these arguments are not necessarily all applicable to the Old Testament because the deities in question have different profiles and exist on other conceptual planes. Thus, scholars cannot apply those arguments uncritically.

The God of the philosophers and that of the Old Testament deserve special assessments given their different profiles. To jumpstart his thesis, Gericke reasons against realism to argue against the existence of Yahweh. Let us set the scene; how does one prove that Yahweh exists and is just a product of speechwriters? Phenomenologically, to prove that something exists, we will have to outline its attributes, essence, and materiality and create a general profile. Such a thing would need specific identifying markers that fit into the acceptable standards of being that thing. Since realism maintains that something can exist independently without relational subjects, Gericke (2004, 36) argues that at the preliminary stages of ontologically reconstructing Yahweh, realism begins to fall apart at the seams since Yahweh exists mainly relationally.

According to Gericke (2004, 36), it is not enough to say that Yahweh, as depicted in the Old Testament, exists, but that statement should be qualified by anti-realist skepticism that asks the question, which Yahweh?. He lists the various versions that exist with their different predicates. I will only list a few;

(1) Yahweh who is the only God (cf. 2 Kings 5:15; Isaiah 45:5).
(2) Yahweh who is NOT the only God (cf. Genesis 3:22; Judges 11:24; Psalms 82:1; 97:7).
(3) Yahweh has a localized presence (cf. Genesis 4:16; 11:5; 18:21).
(4) Yahweh who is omnipresent (cf. Psalms 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24; etc.).

Aside from the various depictions, there also exists in the Hebrew Bible contradictory versions of Yahweh's acts in history and the lives of the Israelites, and we often see Yahweh's moral code change according to various speechwriters:

(1) Yahweh approved of 'Jehu's killings (cf. 2 Kings 9-10).
(2) Yahweh denounces 'Jehu's massacre (cf. Hosea 1:4)

Jehu's coup is of particular interest to me as I have dealt with it in my master's thesis (*The Roots of 'Jehu's Coup: A violent Story of Religious Zealots, Retributive Justice or International Politics, 2017),* and I also echo some of Gericke's sentiments regarding the flip-flopping when it comes to addressing Jehu's coup between multiple sources. These are the few instances that we can quote in building the argument on the deconstruction of realism in Old Testament theology, although the project is much more complex, as we will see, than simply pitting contradictory texts against one another. This method aids preliminarily in spelling out the ontological implications of what the traditional interpretative approaches have conveniently left untreated.

Yahweh becomes personal, anthropomorphic, or transcendental based on who is writing and the source (Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, or Priestley sources).[1] This has implications for ontology since a cross-reading would mean

[1] See, *Sources of the Pentateuch: texts, introductions, annotations*. Fortress Press, 1993. For a more in-depth assessment of the sources of the Pentateuch.

that one source would consider another source problematic since the Yahweh in question, in both views, is starkly different. The originals would even go to the extent of rendering the other's theology unorthodox (GERICKE 2004, 38). This is evident even in our modern-day treatment and how we have shaped monotheistic religions. This is a truth that all critical scholars know, says Gericke, but true conservative scholarship seeks to suppress that the foundation of monotheism is structurally aided by the ontological status we afford deities.

As I have argued elsewhere, 'Gericke's argument in this first installment culminates in the following (MTSHISELWA & MOKOENA 2018, 2-3):

> Gericke's view implies that a deity has the misconceptions and primitive understanding of nature often found in humans. Furthermore, 'YHWH's ideas are informed by myths and legends like those of human speechwriters. The YHWH of the Old Testament possessed the same cultural and traditional beliefs as his devotees, which never seemed to transcend the ideologies of the Old Testament itself. The knowledge that YHWH had of the world and humans was relative to the speechwriters of the ancient biblical texts. YHWH had no knowledge of the universe and how the Earth was created; he did not know astronomy (the moon is not the source of light); he did not understand human physiology (humans are not made of clay), and he did not know the natural world before Homo sapiens and mythical creatures. What we have in the Old Testament is anthropomorphic projectionism. 'Gericke's argument is plausible because the YHWH of the Old Testament seems not to be in tune with reality, life systems, and order. The YHWH of the Old Testament appears to be only following everything his speechwriter's accord YHWH. YHWH wants the Israelites to invade occupied land (Jos 1–12), a modern-day violation and denial of human rights; YHWH orders the killing of children (2 Ki 2:23:24; Gn 22:1–12; Nm 16:41–49). Gericke (2003:153) affirms that although it is embarrassing to conservative scholars, YHWH, as depicted in the ancient biblical texts, is a construct created by humans for ideological, theological, and social purposes. He exists only in literal texts for those literal texts.

Part II – Philosophical Criticism as an Exegetical Methodology

In the discussion, I introduced how a philosophy of religion can be used as an auxiliary discipline in Old Testament studies. Gericke distinguished the understanding of reason from speculation and proposed a new approach in his case against realism in the philosophical quest of Yahweh. He refers to this method as a neologism in a meta-theoretical discourse called *critical philosophical analysis*. However, critical philosophical analysis is an umbrella term that was 'coined to designate, generally, the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible from the perspective of loci on the agenda in the *philosophy of religion*. Under this rubric, a distinction was made between *two types* of PCA, i.e., (1) *philosophical criticism* - a form of biblical criticism involving the operation of PCA on the level of exegesis; and (2) *philosophy of Old Testament religion* – a larger-scale type of PCA analogous to Old Testament theology' (GERICKE 2006, 1178).

This method is essential for this project since philosophical criticism is absent from various Biblical criticism methods (i.e., source criticism, social-scientific criticism, feminist criticism, et al.). The reasons for that have been expounded on, so we will proceed to the method. Gericke (2006, 1181) explains that due to its efficiency, philosophical criticism works in such a way that it provides philosophical perspectives on religious beliefs. This is very important to note as it is often mistaken that philosophical criticism is religious criticism. It is a particular way of reading Old Testament texts. So, it is essentially an assessment of claims and assumptions that can be identified as follows;

1) It assumes that Biblical texts are not philosophy.
2) The Biblical texts in question contain discourse of particular religious traditions.
3) These religious traditions provide us with access to the Old Testament's ontological, metaphysical, moral, epistemological, and theological assumptions and beliefs.

To elucidate more clearly how philosophical criticism functions as an exegetical method, Gericke (2006, 1182-1183) offers a few steps in the interpretive process; (a) choose a text, (b) identify the implicit assumptions or beliefs, (c) abstract the assumptions from the text, (d) reconstruct the data, (e) recognize what philosophical questions this data might raise, (f) discern what fits into the agenda of philosophy of religion, (g) decide what issues in the agenda to discuss and the lastly, (h) discuss in-depth the specific philosophical problems identified with a particular passage in the Old Testament.

Part III- Does Yahweh Exists? Towards a Philosophy of Old Testament Religion

Since the Old Testament philosopher is concerned with the nature of Yahwism, revelations of Yahwism and religious experiences in Old Testament Yahwism, the logical question for one to ask is this, 'does Yahweh then exist?' How can this be determined, and what is the relation between the texts and reality? Taking from his illustrative arguments, I am going to demonstrate that, according to Gericke (2006, 47), the ontological status of Yahweh is null outside of the texts of the Old Testament. The ontological perspectives that assist in drawing up this argument are; naïve realism, critical realism, and non-realism (or anti-realism).

By way of 'symbolic-logical notation, Gericke (2006, 49) illustrates the ontological status of Yahweh as follows:

The use of logical connectives/operators, variables, and predicate constants are used with specific reference to the symbolic logical notations;

R_0	realism
R1	naïve-realism
R2	critical-realism
R3	non-realism/anti-realism
$\forall x$	all (universal quantifier)
$\exists x$	some (existential quantifier)

x	representations of YHWH in intra-textual discourse
x^1	God in extra-textual reality
x^2	historical-cultural persona of God
y	symbolic personifications of human ideals, etc.
=df	is defined as (equals by definition)
=	equals (identity)
⊃	□if…then (entailment)
∧	□and (conjunction)
∨□	or (disjunction)
~	is not (negation)
≡□	if and only if (material equivalence)

These logical notations will assist us in determining the ontological status of Yahweh, primarily what the depictions by the speechwriters of the Old Testament are and not necessarily whether or not Yahweh exists. If realism in the Old Testament is defined as "any view that assumes or claims intra-textual representations of Yahweh refer to an extra-textual deity who exists independently of the discourse depicting" (GERICKE 2004, 33), a realist perspective of Yahweh versus that of the non-realist/anti-realist as depicted in the Old Testament can be constructed as follows:

$$R\ 0\ (x) =df (\ \forall\Box x)\ (x) \supset \Box((x1 \wedge \Box x2) \wedge \Box\sim (\ \exists\Box x)\ (x \equiv \Box y))$$

In other words, realist representations of Yahweh in the old testament are as follows; *realism representations of Yahweh in intra-textual discourse equal by definition all representations of Yahweh in intratextual discourse if x1 God in extra-textual reality and x2 the historical-cultural persona of God and is not some representations of Yahweh in intra-textual discourse if and only if they are symbolic personifications of human ideals.*

The same is true for naïve realism, which states that; "*all representations of YHWH in intra-textual discourse are equal to (literally depict) God in extra-textual reality. Moreover, it is not the case that some representations of YHWH in intra-textual discourse are there if and only if they are cultural-historical personae of God or merely symbolic personifications of human ideals, values, and commitments."* (Gericke 2006:52). *Which can be displayed as follows;*

$$R1\ (x) =df (\Box\forall x)\ (x) \supset \Box(x = x1) \wedge \Box\sim (\ \exists\Box x)\ [x \equiv \Box(x2 \vee \Box y)]$$

A realistic critical analysis of the ontological state of Yahweh claims that (GERICKE 2006, 53); "*all representations of YHWH in intra-textual depictions are equal to (literally depict) cultural-historical personae of God. Moreover, it is not the case that some representations of YHWH in intra-textual discourse are there if and only if they equate with either God in extra-textual reality or because they are merely symbolic personifications of human ideals, values, and commitments", which can be displayed as;*

$$R2\ (x) =df\ (\Box\forall x)\ (x) \supset \Box(x = x2) \wedge \Box\sim (\exists \Box x)\ [x \equiv \Box(x1 \vee \Box y)]$$

The common denominator in all three symbolic logical notations above is that the extra-textual existence of Yahweh seems in naïve and realistic depictions of Yahweh to rely heavily on the intra-textual descriptions. The idea that Yahweh is possibly just a representation of human ideals does not favor since symbolic personifications cannot equal the historical-cultural persona. Therefore, Gericke (2006, 54) argues that realists and naïve realists view texts as social photographs, as a *window.* So, while the critical realist views the text as a *painting*, a non-realist thinks of it as a *mirror* (i.e., not reflective of anything behind it); according to non-realist readings of the Old Testament text, Yahweh does not exist.

Aribiah Attoe on the Existence *(and/of)* the Thing We Call God

After assessing the ontological status of Yahweh, I now look at Aribiah Attoe's argument on the existence of the thing we call God. It is not by mistake that Attoe premised his title with 'Existence' and grammatically separated it, with the conjunction 'and', from 'the thing we call God'. From Attoe's (2022, 15) premise, we can also extract various modes in which being emanates from God by examining God's existence. The differences are warranted since Gericke is an Old Testament scholar, Attoe is a philosopher, and I, on the other hand, strive to be a bit of both. Unlike Gericke's examination, which sought to critically examine the ontological status of Yahweh from the representations of his speechwriters, Attoe wants to define what being is and what constitutes existence first.

I would love to dwell on the ideas of Attoe and how he battles with the questions of existence. And although he does not separate them in his assessment, I want to look at *the existence of what we call God*. He has contributed to the field by asking questions about the traditional conceptions of God and several ontological issues. Although a more significant part of his archive has been on meaning, I am particularly drawn to one of his recent 'god talks' in conversation with Thaddeus Metz in an article titled "Why the divine purpose theory fails: A conversation with Thaddeus Metz". This article was a response to a section in Metz's recent book on "God, Soul and the meaning of Life."' I will not dwell much on the larger project but focus on the essential interventions that Attoe contributed to the conversation; I am not being biased because I am a theologian, it is for coherence.

Attoe (2022, 15) describes God as a "regressively eternal and material entity." But the regressively eternal nature of God does not mean that God is "not a thing in the world" because that would then mean that our critical faculties would not capture God, and that would also mean that our conscious gaze, as Attoe (2022, 21) states, cannot yield any result.

To search appropriately for God, we must look to nature and its mechanisms. Drawing on insights from Mbiti (1975), Attoe (2022, 22) echoes the same sentiments that God reveals Godself in/through nature since the first way Africans have come to believe in a God is by recognizing the process of creation. Attoe asserts that a prior actor is needed for future actors to emerge, that is, the necessity of an antecedent thing for the existence of a future consequential thing.

Clues to the possible nature of God as a thing-in-the-world, according to Attoe (2022, 26), are found in pre-existing things because when we ask where they emanate from, then we can be able to ask who/what created them. And that is why Attoe finds the *ex nihilo* contradictory because of his belief that things must first exist before we can perceive them as things, so this necessary process in the out-of-nothing theory seems to be absent.

Unveiling the Face of God (P1 – God as the First Cause)

Attoe's (2022, 30) first proposition has established that he believes God to be a regressively eternal entity. He also shows that God poses itself as the enduring entity from which all other entities emanate. Since the things that derive from God are finite, God needs to be progressively eternal (infinite) to avoid the catastrophic event of all little things coming to an end. Attoe makes a fascinating observation based on this premise, what about things that cannot be labelled either finite or infinite based on the categories we use to observe, like energy? Since energy can neither be created nor destroyed as the first law of thermodynamics dictates, can it be that energy is our God?

The induction of God into the spiritual world presents us with a new set of challenges. The issue is not nomenclature but the essence of this first property. Spiritual, immaterial, etc., are the many predicates we allude to the unseen forces we call deities. However, the only consensus is that all imply an unseen transcendental entity. Attoe brings our attention to the fact that a conceptual history of these terms is nonetheless essential because it assists us in not reiterating misrepresentations held about African Philosophy as being preoccupied with mysticism (not that there is anything wrong with that, it is just how it is spelt out that makes it devoid of any critical assessment that because alarming and problematic).

This is why it is essential to recognize how Attoe himself fashions the meanings of his terms and, in this case, what materiality and immateriality mean to him. Noteworthy, in Attoe's (2022, 33) view, is that (1) material does not always have to denote that which can be seen with the naked eye, and (2) materiality lies in God's self-capacity to impress itself on the conscious mind in two possible ways; direct impressionability and indirect impressionability. On the one hand, a thing makes itself aware to the senses of the conscious mind; in the second instance, an item can, through other things, impress the conscious mind by way of logical necessities. So Attoe's definition of the material allows him to make several conceptual moves. He can account for things at the macro-level and sub-atomic level. This is the basis of Attoe's argument to account for a God that does not have to be necessarily immaterial to be a thing in the world. As he alluded to in the title of his book, this is indeed laying the groundwork for a new kind of metaphysics.

Does God Exist? (Material Existence as Property 2)

I want to quote Attoe (2022, 34) at length here:

> From the preceding, we can make the following claim. The entity we call God, which we have described as (at least) regressively eternal and necessarily so, has impressed itself on the conscious mind and stands as the first cause from which other things-in-the-world emanate. If this is the

> case, we must admit that God is not spiritual (whether in the immaterial or psychological sense) but a full-blown material entity. Thus, I add another property attributed to this entity we call God: P2 The thing *we call God is a material entity.*

Without overstating, when you read between the lines of his acceptable arguments, the question he tries to answer is not primarily concerned with whether a God exists; he is mainly worried about *what kind of God* lives within his African metaphysical system.

The two arguments are consistent about the same thing, the insistence on a metaphysical assessment of the existence of the thing we call God. This is important to the conversation because conventional arguments, especially in Biblical studies, have not had that much of an interest in the ontological status of Yahweh. It has mainly been assumed that the God of the Hebrew Bible lives unquestionably within and beyond the confines of the ancient text. That has been a postulation upheld without any proper index.

Conclusion

In Gericke and Attoe, I see an epistemic break, a difference. They have challenged me to think of ontology and metaphysics differently and broadly. I appreciate when Attoe speaks of a metaphysical abyss because it captures what has been chiefly of continental philosophy and biblical hermeneutics. I contend that the conversation can continue as I challenge myself further and theorize on being, existence, and this thing we call God.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. ATTOE, Aribiah. D. [Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Predeterministic Historicity], 2022. Springer Nature: Switzerland.
2. GERICKE, Jaco. W. [The Quest for a Philosophical YHWH (Part 1): Old Testament Studies and Philosophy of Religion, " [Old Testament Essays], pp579-602, 2005. Vol 18. No 3.
3. GERICKE, Jaco. W. "Does Yahweh Exist? A Philosophical-Critical Reconstruction of the case against realism in Old Testament theology, " [Old Testament Essays], pp30-57, 2004. Vol 17. No 1.
4. -------. Realism and Non-Realism in Old Testament Theology: A Formal-Logical and Religious-Philosophical Assessment. [*Old Testament Essays*], pp47-57, 2006. Vol 19. No 1.
5. -------. The Quest for a Philosophical YHWH (Part 2): Philosophical Criticism as Exegetical Methodology," [Old Testament Essays], pp1178-1192, 2006. Vol 19. No 3.
6. -------. The Quest for a Philosophical YHWH (Part 3): Towards a Philosophy of Old Testament Religion," [Old Testament Essays], pp669-688, 2007. Vol 20. No 3.
7. MBITI, John, S. [Introduction to African Religion], 1975. Nairobi: Heinemann.
8. MOKOENA, Lerato, L. The Roots of 'Jehu's Bloody Coup: A Violent Story of Religious Zealots, Retributive Justice, or International Politics?," [Masters dissertation, University of Pretoria], 2018. Pretoria: University of Pretoria
9. MTSHISELWA, Ndikhokhele., & MOKOENA, Lerato. "Humans Created God in Their Image? An Anthropomorphic Projectionism in the Old Testament," [*HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*], pp1-6, 2018. Vol 74. No 1.

African Approaches to God, Death and the Problem of Evil: Some Anthropological lessons towards an Intercultural Philosophy of Religion

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.10s
Submitted 2 June 2022. Accepted 28 September 2022

Pius MOSIMA
University of Bamenda
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3442-463X
Email: piusmosima@yahoo.com

Abstract
In this paper, I make a case for an intercultural philosophy of religion from an African perspective. I focus on the philosophical underpinnings of the various meaningful religious practices and beliefs that give rise to the concepts of God, death and the problem of evil. A philosophical study of African traditional religions, based on anthropological findings across African cultural orientations, gives us a good starting point in understanding African worldviews and religious experiences. It also reveals that the various world religions may all be seen as offering different perspectives on the same reality. Specifically, I argue that traditional African conceptions of God, death and the problem of evil could make significant contributions to global discourses in the philosophy of religion. First, I articulate points of convergence and divergence between African traditional religions with Saint Aquinas' proofs for God's existence; Second, I question the phenomenon of death and one's life's meaning. And third, I approach the problem of evil and attempt an African solution to the Epicurean dilemma.
Keywords: African Philosophy of Religion, Death, Evil, God, Vital force

Introduction

In African traditional thought systems, religious ideas influence people's thinking about the world and the nature of reality. These ideas are fundamental and are grounded on the African worldview in which the spiritual is widely perceived to exist and to influence the material world. These worldviews, beyond just a materialist analysis, are central in African traditional thought systems in which the notion of religion is conceived as a belief in the existence of an invisible world, which is distinct but not separate from the visible one. Reality, therefore, consists not only of what can be observed in the material world but includes experiences of the invisible world. The belief in God who created the entire universe and all life in it prevails across the African continent and forms the basis of the religious dimension of its cultures. This belief in, and understanding of, God requires utmost attention and reverence for a successful life on earth. Even though God cannot be defined by the human intellect, a close look at traditional African beliefs and practices steeped in African thought systems enables us to develop critical perspectives on God's existence, his nature, his relationship with the world, the notion of death and the problem of evil. When I say "traditional beliefs steeped in the thought systems", I mean those beliefs that belong to the long-held thought systems of pre-colonial African societies, which have been handed down orally and through rituals from one generation to the other. Even though these cultural data have been derived from the lived cultural patterns in African societies, we

must not deny the complex intercultural interactions and influences from other world religions like Islam and Christianity. In this paper, I attempt to give a philosophical evaluation of African conceptions of God in African traditional religion and thought and how these conceptions relate to the two other notions linked to it: death and evil. In other words, I attempt to bring out knowledge of God as conceived in African traditional societies and to see how this cognition influences the life of the community in relation to death and evil. I attempt answers to the following questions: what type of philosophical principles underpins the African notions of God? What are those basic philosophical principles that give meaning to people's thoughts and actions toward God? How can these traditional African beliefs enrich our intercultural understanding?

The Notion of God in African traditional Religion and Thought Systems: Some Anthropological and Philosophical Justifications

An old pillar in African religious life is the belief in God's existence. It is the center of African traditional religion and thought systems. The notion of God is very important because it forms the basis of people's lives, and their relationship with God largely depends on their knowledge of him. In every cultural orientation, people have always asked questions pertaining to who is responsible for the existence of humankind, the entire universe, and the meaning of human existence. These people, essentially agricultural rural people and hunter-gatherers, who saw storms, rain, drought, lightning, and the vast, orderly, universe, thought that there must be someone who originated this ordered whole, whom they thought to be God. It is concluded that God is the Supreme Being, the originator, Sustainer and Controller of life. Life, therefore, is the starting point of human knowledge of God. God is a living, active, and Supreme Being, who created human beings, the universe and its contents. This is the most common definition we find in most cultural orientations across the continent.[1] The names and human images every African people have of God adequately show this meaning and what they think about God, what He does and how He is approached by humans. These names and views of God are diverse but it is possible to identify similarities in worldviews and ritual processes across geographic and ethnic boundaries. From a closer view, we can identify metaphysical and religious experiences and how they shape the way Africans conceive of God.

Metaphysical and Religious Experiences

Ontology of Living Forces and the Hierarchy of Beings

One major idea in African metaphysics that allows for a belief in the existence of God is the notion of being in African thought. The metaphysical and religious experiences in African thought revolve around the topic of being. The ideas of life,

[1] Some names of African supreme beings as creator across geographical settings: Amma(Dogon Mali); Chukwu, Chineke (Igbo Nigeria); Kwoth (Nuer Sudan); Mulungu (Bantu and Sudanese of East Africa); Ngewo (Mende Sierra Leone); Nhialic (Southern Sudan); Ngai (East Africa); Nyame, Onyankopon, Onyame (Akan Ghana); Nzambi (Congo); Olodumare, Olorun (Yoruba Nigeria); Osanobwa (Edo Nigeria); UNnkulunkulu, Inkosi, (South Africa) Tata Lohwe, Zambe (Cameroon).

activity and creation are crucial trends of thought and culture that influence the way human beings know about the reality of God. These metaphysical and religious experiences also permit humans to ground some principles and concepts upon which their cultural orientations and worldviews are structured and which constitute their philosophy of existence into which these concepts are born and nurtured. God is not a mere intellectual concept but the foundation of all activities. The idea or experience of life suggests a force making life possible. This is what African religions as well as other religions have called God; an active living Person who reveals himself to human beings through various manifestations in life. That is why He is spoken of as God of this and that activity. Hence God is involved in each activity of the life of most Africans. Since humans cannot adequately describe God, they call Him Father. This conception of God as a living being helps to explain the life of each individual person and eventually the meaning of human existence. The idea of activity suggests that He is the master of all activities, the one empowering human beings.

In the metaphysical experience, there is the awareness of the contingent being that lacks the ground of its "to be, being", yet "it is" and participates in being. People experience the dynamism and vitality of being in the world. This explains why they constantly search for the ultimate ground of his being. Therefore, by use of his natural reason, they try to provide experiential arguments from which they can validly conclude that there is a Supreme Being who is responsible for the world and human experience. The knowledge of the origin of the world and life on it could be explained by using the philosophical principle of causality. The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, whose categories are still used by philosophers even today, developed a theory of causality, which is commonly known as the doctrine of the four causes.[2] For him, a firm grasp of what a cause is, and how many kinds of causes there are, is essential for a successful investigation of the world around us. Causality is a genetic connection of phenomena through which one thing (the cause) under certain conditions gives rise to something else (the effect). The essence of causality is the determination of one phenomenon by another. In other words, to cause something to be, a person must be higher in the hierarchy of being either in reality or in intentionality. In terms of the European philosophical tradition, and largely appropriated in traditional African thought, belief in God has been explained through the metaphysical theory of causality (TEMPELS 1958; KAGAME 1956, 1971). Causality is understood as an interaction of both the spiritual and physical realities at the same time. This interaction emphasizes activity as the essential characteristic of the cause to which Rwandan theologian Alexis Kagame adds anteriority (l'anteriorite), that is to say, being there before, as a prerequisite for any causality. Without the being there before, there is no cause, for there cannot be an effect, which is externally another being and/or event thereafter (KAGAME 1956).

[2] The four causes or four explanations are, in Aristotelian thought, four fundamental types of answers to the question "why?" in analysis of change or movement in nature. They include; the material cause, the formal cause, the efficient cause, and the final cause.

According to Placide Tempels, the most fundamental and basic concept in Bantu thought that defines life, activity and creation is that of vital force (*Ntu*).[3] This is the all-pervading force that gives life or energy to the entire universe. For the Bantu force is the essence of being, and is radically opposed to the Western notion of being. He describes the vitality of being and how being relates to its force as opposed to the Western notion of being which is static in these words:

> We can conceive the transcendental notion of 'being' by separating it from its attribute, 'force', but the Bantu cannot. 'Force' in his thought is a necessary element in 'being', and the concept 'force' is inseparable from the definition of 'being'. There is no idea among Bantu of 'being' divorced from the idea of 'force'. (TEMPELS 1959, 50-51)

He goes on to explain that Bantu ontology in its specificity implies that being, as understood in the Western tradition, signifies force in Bantu tradition, and therefore one can state that being is force (being = force):

> Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality, force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force. (TEMPELS 1959, 51)

God is perceived as the one "…who possesses Force in himself. He is… the source of Force in every creature" (TEMPELS 1959,46). In fact, as a consequence of God's creative Force, everything on earth, that is, human, animal, vegetable and mineral has been endowed, essentially, with a vital force. The interrelationship of forces is seen in a hierarchy of beings running down from God (the origin of the vital force), through man (including the dead ancestors and the living community of humans), to the animal and inanimate world. The dynamic relationship of the vital force in every being can be permanently sustained, decreased, or simply brought to an end. The force grows or diminishes during the passage from one stage of being to another. With these interactions of forces, beings are neither tied to themselves nor are they passive, but they are involved in what Tempels describes as a 'principle of activity' (ibid. 51); and this 'dynamic dialectic of energy' (MUDIMBE 1988, 139) forms the basis of what Tempels depicts as the 'general laws of vital causality'; that is to say:

> (a) A human being (living or deceased) can directly reinforce or diminish the being of another human being;

[3] *Ntu* entails the concept of vital force which is present in all beings. This is similar to the vital pneuma which is connected with the soul as the principle of life as described by Aristotle. For him, the soul is the first actuality of a natural body that is potentially alive (412a27). In an attempt to distinguish kinds of soul and forms of life, Aristotle affirms that the soul is attributed to whatever displays life. The human soul which is rational, according to Aristotle, includes all the lower powers of the soul, namely nutrition and perception on its own power of thought. Hence the soul, the source of life from a Supreme Life which makes all have life, can be seen from the daily lives.

> (b) The vital human force can directly influence inferior force-beings (animal, vegetable, or mineral) in their being;
> (c) A rational being (spirit or the living) can act indirectly upon another rational being by communicating his / her vital force to an inferior force (animal, vegetable, or mineral) through the intermediacy of which it influences the rational being (TEMPELS 1959, 67–68)

Rephrasing Tempels, the founder of the négritude movement, Leopold Sedar Senghor, says the vital force is a living matter capable of increasing its energy or losing it, of strengthening or weakening itself (SENGHOR 1975), and Kagame defines life by the union of the body and the vital principle of animality, a union whose dissolution automatically leads to death. This is why living is to be distinguished from existing-- the dead exist but do not live (KAGAME1956;1976). Kagame goes further to demonstrate this notion of being with four ontological categories in his native language Kinyarwanda. These include: *muntu*, being with intelligence; *kintu*, being without intelligence, or thing; *hantu,* expresses the time and place; *kuntu*, indicates modality and thus centralizes all the notions related to modifications of the being in itself or vis-à-vis other beings. Bantu ontology is clearly seen through the interrelationship between these four categories, which all come from the same root, *ntu*, and which refer to being or essence and also the idea of force. Kagame asserts that the Bantu equivalent of *to be* is strictly and only a copula. It links the subject class with the predicate and determines the quality of the proposition. By enunciating *muntu, kintu* (the essence of something) is signified and the notion of existence is not necessarily present (KAGAME 1971, 602).

However, for Kagame, God does not belong in any way to the categories of *ntu* because he is pre-existent and at their origin as the first cause.[4] Janheinz Jahn (1961) also qualifies *Ntu* as the universal cosmic force which, according to Bantu metaphysics, is present in the various ontological categories of being (JAHN1961) and Congolese theologian Francois Marie Lufuluabo considers life and activity as the expression of the dynamism that characterizes Bantu ontology. For him, the Bantu ideal is to achieve the greatest possible intensity of life (LUFULUABO 1964). Life and activity are expressions of this vital unity (l'union vitale), which is the principle for community cohesion (MULAGO 1965).[5] Cameroonian theologian Martin Nkafu Nkemkia (1999, 11) uses the term African vitalogy to describe the unified vision of reality that encompasses the invisible world. We find similar views of a complementary conception of reality in many

[4] However, in an attempt to compare African and Western philosophy through consideration of the philosophical ideas of one African language group, the Fanti of Ghana, Benjamin Oguah believes he identifies in the Fanti the notion of a being greater than one can think of, a formula that he associates with the Proslogion of Saint Anselm, a kind of ontological proof for God's existence. God is called the one who is greater than one can conceive (Babur - a- abur- adze – ado). If he did not exist, he would not be the greatest being that one can conceive. Oguah also believes that he identifies among the Fanti the cosmological argument and the teleological argument for the existence of God (OGUAH 1984).

African(ist) philosophers, like Teffo and Roux, who describe this ontology around a number of principles and laws, which control the interaction of forces, that is between God and humankind, and material things. These forces are hierarchically placed and form a chain of beings (TEFFO & ROUX 1998, 138). It is one in which beings are in a harmonious and complementary relationship, where everything that exists serves as a missing link of reality (ASOUZU 2007a; 2007b). They constitute one indivisible reality - Ubuntu (Ramose 2009) - which manifests itself as both physical and non-physical and in functional perfection of mutual complementarity (CHIMAKONAM 2012). This is what Chris Ijioma describes as harmonious monism (IJIOMA 2014).

Elements of religious worldview: God and the ancestors

When people explain the universe as having been created by God, they are automatically looking at the universe in a religious way. We can say, therefore, that African views of the universe are profoundly and notoriously religious (MBITI 1969). In all cultural orientations across the continent, scholars have, based on their research, come to similar conclusions through long experience, observation and reflection on the rituals, proverbs and worldviews of their communities (BOLAJI 1962; 1973; MBITI 1969; 1970; GYEKYE 1995). These scholars present God in the monotheistic sense as an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent being who cannot be the cause of evil in the universe.[6] However, some scholars, arguing from the Akan (in Ghana), the Yoruba and the Igbo (of Nigeria) worldviews, have argued that the problem of omnipotence and evil does not arise in African philosophy of religion because in traditional African thought God is considered as a powerful but limited deity.[7] He is not conceived of as the all-powerful, all-knowing and benevolent God, which Christian theology, for example, believes in. This is because 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 via their interaction with God (ACHEBE 1994). If God is a *Deus absconditus*, or hidden God, and the lesser deities efficiently deputize 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

[5] See Eboussi-Boulaga (1968) on this Tempelsian 'dogma' of assimilating force and life. Moreover, Innocent Asouzu (2007b) also thinks that even though Tempels projects a dynamic notion of being he ends up reducing it to something that is fixed as he projects force to an object and freezes it to a substance. It is this substance that he converts to Bantu being, one that is static in nature but remaining dynamic. Consequently, his ontology of vital force has nothing elevating except magic and superstition and leaves Africans as idol worshippers.

[6] For more critical discussion on this transcendence and limitedness of the notion of God, see Ada Agada (2022).

[7] See for example, Sogolo (1993), Bewaji (1998), Wiredu (1998), Oladipo (2004), Balogun (2009), Fayemi (2012).

of the lesser deities (BEWAJI 1998), or in both power and knowledge as he is neither all-powerful nor wholly good (FAYEMI 2012).[8] 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 (AGADA 2022). For Fayemi, God is a powerful being indeed, but as a co-creator he is limited when he argues 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" (FAYEMI 2012, 7).

Another Nigerian scholar, Amara Esther Chimakonam (2022), invokes an Igbo worldview based on Ejima (twins) to argue that the evidential problem of evil might not be a problem in African philosophy of religion after all. She makes 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.

Among the Bakuta of Congo Brazzaville, God is called Nzambi, whose divine function par excellence is creation. The Bakuta recognize in God two aspects; God from below (Nzambi Wamutsele) and God from above (Nzambi Watanda), who is properly God the creator. God is the necessary being, the final cause, who created the world out of nothing.

Even though the theory of God as creator exists as sketched above; the act of creation was not done *ex nihilo* as in some African theologies (Imbo 2004; Gbadegesin 1991) but as a demiurge that shapes a pre-existing material rather than creates it. Kwasi Wiredu, for example, does not admit the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. He underlines the meaning of the Akan verb *bo*, which means 'to create' and he argues that to *bo* or create something is to fashion out a product; and actually, it is closer to the Akan to describe the Supreme Being as a cosmic architect rather than a creator. Consequently, if to create is to cause something to come into existence, then absolute nothingness must be a logically immovable impediment (Wiredu 1998). Some scholars have endorsed Wiredu's opinion. Germaine Dieterlen (1951) mentions a sort of primordial void prior to all creation and, at the same time, the principle of universal movement and resurrection. Alassane Ndaw (1983) talks of fabrication rather than the creation of the world;

[8] However, for African scholars argue against this idea of a reclusive God, see for example, Bolaji (1962; 1973), Mbiti (1969; 1970) and Gyekye (1995).

Cheikh Moctar Ba (2007) talks of modelage (making a representation of pre-existent materials) and Olusegun Oladipo (2004) emphasizes that God made the world from pre-existing materials. However, the Dogon sage, Ogotemmeli shows that the spiritual and physical interpenetrate (JAHN 1961,105). In the creation myth of the Dogon, Amma, the only God created the earth as a woman, and then married her. His seed, Nommo, is water and fire and blood and word. Nommo is the physical-spiritual life force that awakens all sleeping forces and gives physical and spiritual life.

Religious experience recognizes a Supreme Being as that to be worshipped, adored and the One on whom everything depends for its life and existence. This explains the idea of prayers, worship, libation, and sacrifice (especially animal sacrifice). Worship and prayers could be done by individuals or the entire community for various reasons like good health, protection, fertility, rain, etc. They give the human being a spiritual outlook of life and remind him/her that s/he is bi-composite of body and some spiritual component, with the need to look after both to have full flourishing. This usually involves sacrifices, offerings, singing and dancing and the pouring of libation, which are seen as a way of approaching, appeasing and establishing a concrete rapport with the Supreme Being. They strengthen the belief in God among the traditional worshippers and create harmony in life with others in the community.

From these experiences, people have come up with various names for God. These names show us how they think of him, what he does, and how the people relate to their creator. These names and attributes show God creator of all things, the sustainer of life and the ruler of all creation. Through names, we also see God as father, mother or parent, and attribute characteristics such as goodness, mercy, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, immutable, spirit, etc. Among the Akan of Ghana, God (Onyame) is at the same time the Supreme Being (Onyankopon), Infinite Being (Odomankoma) and demiurge of all things (Boade) (Danquah 1968). Hence the knowledge of God is practical knowledge gotten from God, who is the active being who reveals himself to human beings in their environment and eventualities of life.

In most Cameroonian tribes, for example, the element of order in the universe links the origin of the universe to an intelligent being and a mystery. Consequently, the names given to God acknowledge this belief and reflect these metaphysical and religious experiences. Among the Bafut, everything is sacred and ultimately comes from God (Nwi). The Kom conceive of God as Mbom, and life as Afumbom (God's gift). Similar names exist among the Nso who refer to God as Nyuy (meaning God). Hence, Bomnyuy (It is God who has created); Mbomnyuy (God's creation). The world is seen as Fomnyuy (God's gift) and Nsaidzenyuy (the world is in God's hands). Among the Ngie God is referred to as Nyue, the living force and Supreme Being, creator of the universe, in Batie the Se (The Supreme Being), Se Boum Yok (our creator), Tata Lohwe in Bakweri. The Ejagham have a twofold figure, which embodies Ata Obasi, the celestial god (Father God), and Mma Obasi (Mother God), the earth goddess. Although perceived as being two different deities, they nevertheless form an indivisible unit and are always invoked together in prayer.

From these names and images, we see that God is not an object of observation which is scientifically verifiable, but a personal presence from which the primacy of being over abstract thinking could be inferred. Humans do not only think about God but live with God in a continuous existential dialogue. In this way, humans interpret certain universal experiences from different cultural contexts, metaphors, rituals which constitute the base from which to project their belief in God. Consequently, even though much of African philosophy of religion has, in its concepts and logic, been heavily influenced by Christian-influenced Western philosophy, we can still argue that African religious beliefs point to experiences of God as creator, etc., and also claim that this outlook is originally part and parcel of the African outlook on life.

The point that God is creator of all things is no credit to Christianity because before Christianity people knew that God made them and the rest of the universe. We can rather say that some of the ideas we find in Christian and Islamic teachings were already intuited by traditional African religions. African oral traditions are also rooted in experience-based original theologies like those of other world religions. The Christian tradition that goes back to Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle are experienced-based theological interpretations of the world and human experience as created and influenced by Divine force.

Moreover, all these images are just ways human beings try to describe God but none of them adequately captures who God is. It is this recognition of the spiritual bases of nature, one's existence and that of the universe in the various African worldviews that make it possible to discuss realities such as death and evil. African religious ideas are largely about relationships between the human being and the spirit world, which is inhabited by ancestral spirits, spirits of the land, water, forest and so on. The philosophical underpinning and implications of this ontology point to the fact that the reality of beings and forces, constitute a mutually complementary whole. Reality consists of the complementary rapport between material and spiritual existence. This explains Kwame Appiah's judgment that because of their belief in these invisible forces and beings, many Africans cannot fully accept those scientific theories that are inconsistent with that belief (APPIAH 1992, 135). This dynamic interrelationship of forces at all levels of existence, between the visible and invisible worlds, informs my understanding and interpretation of the link between God, death and evil in African traditional thought and belief systems.

Death and the afterlife

Death is one of the most mysterious phenomenon that continues to confound human thinkers. It is universal, imminent, inevitable and feared in some places and some people, and yet the uncertainty of what happens after constitutes the real mystery. We must all die but what are the main beliefs, practices and significance of death across the African continent? Many African peoples believe that there is some sort of existence after death since for them death is only regarded as a transition from one mode of existence to another. The visible part of man changes into the spiritualized man, (a muntu) a concept which signifies the human person.

This concept also embraces the living and dead ancestors (JAHN 1961, 18) who will never die again but belong to a higher hierarchy, participating to a certain degree in the divine Force (Tempels 1959, 30).[9] God has granted the ancestors a more powerful life force over their descendants and they must be respected (MAGESA 1997, 47). They are the living dead (TEMPELS 1959; MBITI 1969, OLADIPO 2004). There is no distinction between the physical world and the spiritual world; the afterlife is regarded as simply a continuation of life on earth. Death is regarded as part of man's destiny, a departure in which the physical body decays but the spirit moves on to another state of existence. So, what really happens at death? How do Africans conceive of life after death?

Causes and significance of death

There are several myths about the origin of death and in some ethnic groups people have even tried to refer to death in personal terms as a monster, an animal, or a kind of evil spirit. These myths give the impression that there are no natural causes of death. This explains why each time death occurs in a family, clan or village; the survivors consult diviners to know the cause of the death. It is only when the cause of the death is revealed by the diviner that the survivors determine the type of burial rite appropriate for the deceased. The general belief is that the negligence of an appropriate burial rite, if merited, is provocative to the departed member who may retaliate by sending some disaster to the surviving members. This is also because, in most traditional societies, there is the belief in the existence of evil or malevolent forces which could be tapped for the practice of negative witchcraft. It could also be caused by curses, broken taboos or oaths or by spirits that hold a grudge against members of the family. Apart from death at old age, most people see death as caused by mystical, evil forces that could cause revenge.

Hence in traditional African belief systems, people are never at rest until they find an explanation that they think is sufficient for the cause of a specific death. Their philosophy of life and death is founded on what they believe and their experiences, and these beliefs are strengthened by the diviners they consult for the explanations that escape their immediate perception. This explains why divination is of great importance in the village community. It is diviners who mediate between God, the spirits and the people by naming the reasons for death, suffering, and misfortune, and by also advising the people on how to rid themselves of them.

When a person dies the body, which is mortal, departs or separates from the soul, which is immortal and the real essence of the human person. The spiritual does not undergo decomposition or corruption because of its simplicity. The corpse is called a 'lifeless body' in several languages as the soul continues the journey to the departed members of the family and ancestors who are living in another form of life in the world of the living dead. The reason is that biological and spiritual life meets in the human being. In a concrete human life, neither the one nor the other can be present alone. When a person dies, his biological life

[9] However, see Menkiti(2004) and Mbiti(1969) who suggest that in most communities, they do die a second death.

is in fact over and his spiritual life also ceases but something remains, namely the 'life force' Nommo (JAHN 1961, 107) which formed his 'personality', what Tempels calls the 'genuine Muntu'. In this case, a living human being becomes a human being without life (KAGAME 1956, 179). The living dead, according to Mbiti, are the spirits of those who died up to four or five generations back. Heads of families, adults and married people are remembered in this way longer than babies, children and the unmarried (MBITI 1969). The living dead are ancestors who are physically dead but continue living in another realm, in the abode of the dead which is spiritual in nature. The ancestral cult, which forms the basis of African traditional religion, points to the fact that a person survives after death and 'goes back home' or 'joins the ancestors' as is commonly sung in dirges when a person dies. When they 'join their ancestors' they become spirits or spiritual entities which survive in the next world. The dead, following Tempels' ontological principle of vital force and hierarchical ordering of forces, continue to live on in a diminished condition of life, as lessened forces, while nevertheless retaining their higher status, strengthening fathering life force (TEMPELS 1959, 44). Hence death is a diminishing of life force but following their profound knowledge of the forces and life the ancestors are still very important in exercising their vitalizing influence on the living generation. This is because the living person has the wish to live forever. Unfortunately, death is inevitable, and so the individual prolongs his existence as a living person through his descendants.

Where do Ancestors Abide?

Concerning the dwelling place of the dead, most people hold that even though they are unseen, the dead are not far away from the living. They can be anywhere they want to be since they are no longer bound by space and time. So it is usually said the dead see us but we cannot see them with our ordinary eyes. They live in the spiritual world since they no longer live physically so they exist as ancestral spirits. In some tribes, people hold that ancestors live in natural phenomena like trees, rocks or lakes.

The Relationship between the living and the living dead

It can be asserted that in order to appreciate and better understand traditional African beliefs, it is necessary to examine the covenant they have with their ancestors. They are believed to exercise a constant influence upon people's lives as they are still part of the community of the living. The fundamental principle is that a society united in peace, harmony and cooperation and in which ancestors hold a central and respected position represents the highest social value and can be understood as one of the essential elements of African religious philosophy. The relationship with the ancestors, which could be good or bad, is so strong that Africans always remember them by pouring libation on their graves or by the door side to address them. Moreover, most people are buried in their villages beside their ancestors, and during the mourning lamentations, people express certain wishes and prayers that the deceased is supposed to convey to those who have already gone ahead. The fact that people are buried with some of their personal belongings to be using shows that the future life is nearly like the present one. This

explains why they have to continue with their daily activities such as farming, eating, hunting etc. This explains why in some villages, some yams, vegetables, and drinks are reserved for the dead. These examples show the strong link between the spiritual and physical worlds and that the deceased is still active and present when called by the survivors. The ancestors play such a profound and indispensable role in the life of an African that no serious celebration or decision in the family, clan or tribe can be carried out without first consulting them. In many parts of Africa, adult members of the family put food and pour drinks on their graves or on the ground for the spirits of the family. This could be during a family celebration, when one is suffering from a major illness when children are named after the dead (often when reincarnation is perceived) or when a major decision is to be made. It is also the custom in some parts of Africa to mention the names of departed relatives when one is praying to God. These departed members of the family are believed to relay the prayers to God, who is always named first in prayers to the ancestors. The ancestors also come in dreams to enquire about the family, give instructions to the living and also protect the family. They also make requests for things to be done or given to them and at times threaten to punish family members for neglecting them. However, in some villages when a certain departed continues to punish the living, a diviner is called to cast them out of the lives of the living and send the spirit far away. Most people see misfortunes as a sign of ancestral displeasure and it is interpreted as a warning that the persons should look closely into their conduct towards relatives and the spirits themselves.

Summarily, from the African conception of death, we see that there is life after death, that man has both body and soul; that the body is mortal but the soul is immortal, and that the spirit world exists and is accessible to human appeals. One of such appeals could be solutions to the problem of evil in their daily lives.

God and the problem of evil

The problem of evil is crucial in our understanding of God and African philosophy of religion because evil spoils the plan of God, disrupts the vital force and greatly affects African communitarian ethics (TEMPELS 1959, 64ff). However as we have discussed above God is a limited deity, a demiurge and a deified ancestor. If God is limited, then the problem of evil, as a metaphysical problem, does not arise. Yet there is the interplay between good and evil forces in the world. In western philosophy, the problem is evil is generally couched in the following form: 'How is it that a creator who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent seems to have created a world containing evil?' What does the reality of evil tell us about the nature of God who created the universe? Is God to be seen as a limited being as a result of the evidence of evil?

Indeed, the ancient philosopher, Epicurus, stated the problem of evil in the form of a dilemma:

> God either wishes to take away evils or is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in

> accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them? (KONSTAN 2018,28)

In traditional African thought, moral evil is thought of as originating from certain acts by free rational beings such as murder, lies, stealing etc., and natural evil is often seen as consequences of bad deeds perpetrated by a free agent that affect nature such as natural disasters, floods, earthquake's etc.

In most cultural orientations, people are never satisfied with any evil occurrences until they get an ultimate explanation of what has occurred. Hence, the vital question people ask is not whether evil exists or not but whether we can give a plausible explanation for evil in the universe. In their religious beliefs and practices, they want to know "why" an evil thing should happen *only* at a particular time and place to a particular person. Science sometimes asks why questions but the African response to evil is radically different from that of the typical scientist. This is because most traditional Africans seek a religious rather than a scientific explanation. It does not mean that the scientific explanations are unimportant but in the African context, causality goes beyond the realm of natural science. The point is that scientific explanations do not satisfy the traditional African belief system and so they require a causal explanation (Efficient Cause and Final Cause) in cases of evil. They think that the world is considered orderly and just, and so evil is connected with other causes, which include witches, ancestors and mystical powers. This explains why people interpret evil in direct and personal terms in the way they relate to others and God. Most often, it is believed that evil is seen when people act against the divine plan of God and he decides to withdraw from those that violate the cosmic unity. Hence, when most traditional Africans want to bring out the causal explanation of evil, the aim is to know what to do about such misfortune. They see the hand of their ancestors or witches in the evil that befalls them and have the satisfaction of knowing that there is at least something they can do to avoid it. They agree that the ancestors and witches produce such unpleasant circumstances of life for a purpose and from one incident guard against future misfortune by making sacrifices. This explains why most traditional Africans are more interested in the why and how of any evil event. Thus, the concern is not with mere secondary causal explanations (hows), the concern is actually with primary causal explanations (whys).

Among the Batie of the Western Region of Cameroon, evil (Cepon) is not from God who is almighty (Cyepo Se) and good (Se Foyoussic). Evil comes from other beings – for instance, the bad god (Se Cepon), who is also created by God and human beings (MBITI 1969). Morever, evil can proceed from the wrath of ancestors (m'pfe ba yok) and human beings (especially those who are witches and wizards), who are people with mysterious powers capable of eating the vital force of other people (m'gang sie) by causing sickness and death. Everything which deviates from the normal order of things both in the natural and in the social order

order is regarded as a manifestation of witchcraft. Hence evil is usually seen as having its origin, not from God, but from other beings, humans or spiritual, that can exercise free will (MBITI 1969).

Among the Kom evil comes from a cosmic force (meso), which produces good or evil actions or states. This notion is evident in the royal rituals of the Kom people (NKWI 1976). The traditional leader presides over the ritual and invokes the spirits of the good meso to bring fertility to the land and its people, health, prosperity and peace throughout the kingdom. On the other hand, a person could acquire the evil meso in return for a great price/sacrifice. A person, for example, could invoke the meso and ask for money by offering to the spirits the fertility of the crops and the fertility of women, thus provoking failure in harvests and a decrease in childbirths. Or the person could accept riches by offering up a member of the family whose life the spirits would claim. Hence, one of the traditional explanations of suffering is that it emanates from the cosmic force, which produces both good and evil, a cosmic force that is capable of acting according to the circumstance, either for man's welfare or man's woes. This view is contrasted with the gnostic idea that good and evil are two entirely separate forces and shows that the principle of good meets with the principle of good.

If a person shows abnormal physical characteristics or behaves in a way that is in striking contrast to the norms or customs of the society, the person can readily be addressed as a witch. So the old problem of evil in the world, which is particularly acute when there is the belief in the existence of a being that is omnipotent and infinitely good, has been partly solved by putting the responsibility for much of the evil and suffering on agents (witches, ancestors and other mystical powers) other than God. These agents are mostly human personalities either living or dead.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have examined the problem of God, death and evil. My main argument has been that African ontologies are similar to Aristotelian categories such as first cause and later Christian ones such as creation *ex nihilo* and still conceptualize religious experience in a different manner. These concepts, God, death and evil, can also foster our intercultural understanding. The whole universe is seen as a system, an ordered whole that is full of forces, which come from God. In face of evil and good, the spontaneous and highest reaction of an African is to offer sacrifices to the God of our ancestors. I have made references to some anthropological data from which we can infer that African cultures share some basic theological and philosophical beliefs, which could ground an African philosophy of religion. We also realize that the African conception of God is much more fluid than the Christian conception of God. Consequently, what we see as rituals are meant to foster our understanding as acts of appeasement, healing and fanning off evil. The African conception is linked to this creative force that carries within itself the ambiguous touch of good and evil, life and death, etc. Further research into these topics is certainly needed since African traditional thought is an important part of a global philosophy of religion.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. AGADA, Ada. "Bewaji, Fayemi on God, Omnipotence and Evil," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion], pp41–56, 2022. Vol 11. No 1. Web.
2. APPIAH, Kwame. A. [In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture], 1992. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Paperback.
3. ASOUZU, Innocent. I. [Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology, Beyond World Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Imposition], 2007a. Lit Verlag: Zurich. Paperback.
4. -------. [Ikwa Ogwe: Essential Readings in Complementary Reflection (A Systematic Methodological Approach)], 2007b. Saesprint: Calabar. Paperback.
5. Ba, Cheikh Moctar. [Etude Comparative entre les Cosmogonies Greques et Africaines], 2007. L'Harmattan: Paris.
6. BALOGUN, Oladele. A. "The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil," [Lumina], pp1–20, 2009. Vol 20. No 2. Web.
7. BEWAJI, John. A. I. "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil," [African Studies Quarterly], pp1–17, 1998. Vol 2. No 1. Web.

8. CHIMAKONAM, Amara Esther. “Why the Problem of Evil Might not be a Problem after all in African Philosophy of Religion,” [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion], pp27–40, 2022. Vol 11. No 1 Web.
9. --------. [Introducing African Science: Systematic and Philosophical Approach], 2012. Author House: Bloomington. Paperback.
10. DANQUAH, J.B. [The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion], 1968. Frank Cass & Co: London /Edinburgh. Paperback.
11. DIETERLEN, Germaine. [Essai sur la Religion Bambara], 1951. Presses Universitaires de France: Paris. Paperback.
12. EBOUSSI-BOULAGA, Fabien. ‘‘Le Bantou problématique’’ [Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir], pp3-40, 1968. Vol 66. No 2. Paris: Présence Africaine. Paperback.
13. FAYEMI, Ademola. K. “Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E.O. Oduwole,” [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1–15, 2012. Vol. 41, No. 1. Web.
14. GBADEGESIN, Segun. [African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities], 1991. Peter Lang: New York. Paperback.
15. GYEKYE, Kwame. [An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme. Rev. ed.], 1995. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA. Paperback.
16. IDOWU, E.B. [African Traditional Religion: A Definition], 1973. SCM Press: London. Paperback.
17. -------. [Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief], 1962. Longmans: London. Paperback.
18. IJIOMAH, Chris. [Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought], 2014. Jochrisam Publishers: Calabar. Paperback.
19. IMBO, Samuel. O. “p’Bitek’s Critique of Western Scholarship on African Religion,” [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp364-373, 2004. Blackwell Publishing Ltd: New York. E-Book.
20. JAHN, Janheinz. [Muntu:The New African Culture], 1961. Dusseldorf: Germany. Paperback.
21. KAGAME, Alexis. [La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l’être], 1956. Académie royale des Science coloniales : Brussels. Paperback.
22. -------. "L’Ethno-Philosophie de Bantu," [La Philosophie Contemporaine, Raymond KLIBANSKY, Ed.], pp589-612, 1971. La Nuova Italia: Florence. Paperback.
23. LUFULUABO, Francois-Marie. [La Notion Luba-Bantoue de l’Etre], Casterman: Tournai. Paperback.
24. MAGESA, Laurenti. [African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life], 1997. New York: Orbis Books. Paperback.
25. MASOLO, D. A. [African Philosophy in Search of Identity], 1994. Indiana University Press: Indianapolis. Paperback.

26. MBITI, J.S. [Concepts of God in Africa], 1970. SPCK: London. Paperback.
27. --------. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Heinemann: London. Paperback.
28. MENKITI, Ifeanyi. "Physical and Metaphysical Understanding: Nature, Agency, and Causation in African Traditional Thought," [African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives Lee M. Brown, Ed.], pp107-135, 2004. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
29. MUDIMBE, Valentin-Yves. [The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge], 1988. Indiana University Press/Currey: Indianapolis. Paperback.
30. MULAGO, Vincent. [Un Visage Africain du Christianisme: L'union Vitale Bantu Face à l'unité Ecclésiale], 1965. Présence Africaine: Paris. Paperback.
31. NDAW, Alassane. [La pensée africaine : Recherche sur les fondements de la pensée négro-africaine], 1983. Dakar: NEA.
32. NKEMKIA, Martin, Nkafu. [African Vitalogy: A Step Forward in African Thinking], 1999. Nairobi: Paulines Publications.Paperback.
33. NKWI, Paul. [Traditional Government and Social Change in Kom], 1976. Fribourg University Press: Fribourg. Paperback.
34. OGUAH, Benjamin, E. "African and Western Philosophy: A Comparative Study," [African Philosophy: An Introduction, Richard A. Wright, Ed.], pp281-295, 1984. University Press of America: New York .
35. OLADIPO, Olusegun. "Religion in African Culture: Some Conceptual Issues," [A Companion to African Philosophy Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp355–363, 2004. Blackwell: Oxford. Ebook.
36. Konstan, David, "Epicurus," [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Edward ZALTA], N.P, 2018
37. RAMOSE, Mogobe, B. [African Philosophy through Ubuntu], 2002. Mont Books: Harare. Paperback.
38. SENGHOR, Leopold Sedar. "De la Negritude," [Philosophie Africaine, I, Textes Choisis, A.J. SMET Ed.], pp17-28, 1975. Presses Universitaires de Zaire: Kinshasa. Paperback.
39. SOGOLO, Godwin. S. [Foundations of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought], 1993. Ibadan University Press: Ibadan. Paperback.
40. TEFFO, Lebiso. J., & Abraham P. J. ROUX. "Metaphysical Thinking in Africa," [Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings, Peter H. COETZEE and Abraham P. J. ROUX, Eds.], pp134–48, 1998. International Thomson Publishing Southern Africa: Johannesburg. Paperback.
41. TEMPELS, Placide. [Bantu Philosophy], 1968. Presence African: Paris. Paperback.
42. WIREDU, Kwasi. "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture," [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I. Kwasi WIREDU and Kwame GYEKYE Eds], pp193–206, 2010. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. E-Book.

43. WIREDU, Kwasi. "Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion," [African Studies Quarterly], pp17–46, 1998. Vol 1. No 4.

Approches Africaines Sur Les Questions De Dieu, De La Mort Et Du Mal: Quelques Leçons Anthropologiques Vers Une Philosophie Interculturelle De La Religion

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.11s
Submitted 2 June 2022. Accepted 28 September 2022

Pius MOSIMA
Université de Bamenda
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3442-463X
Email: piusmosima@yahoo.com

Résumé
Dans cet article, je plaide en faveur d'une philosophie interculturelle de la religion dans une perspective africaine. Je me concentre sur les fondements philosophiques des diverses pratiques et croyances religieuses significatives qui donnent lieu aux concepts de Dieu, de la mort et du problème du mal. Une étude philosophique des religions traditionnelles africaines, basée sur des découvertes anthropologiques à travers les orientations culturelles africaines, nous donne un bon point de départ pour comprendre les visions du monde et les expériences religieuses africaines. Elle révèle également que les diverses religions du monde peuvent toutes être considérées comme offrant des perspectives différentes sur la même réalité. Plus précisément, je soutiens que les conceptions africaines traditionnelles de Dieu, de la mort et du problème du mal pourraient apporter des contributions significatives aux discours mondiaux sur la philosophie de la religion. Premièrement, j'articule les points de convergence et de divergence entre les religions traditionnelles africaines et les preuves de l'existence de Dieu apportées par Saint Aquin; deuxièmement, je m'interroge sur le phénomène de la mort et le sens de la vie. Et troisièmement, j'aborde le problème du mal et tente de trouver une solution africaine au dilemme épicurien.
Mots-clés: Philosophie africaine de la religion, mort, mal, Dieu, force vitale.

Introduction

Dans les systèmes de pensée traditionnels africains, les idées religieuses influencent la réflexion des gens sur le monde et la nature de la réalité. Ces idées sont fondamentales et reposent sur la vision du monde africaine dans laquelle le spirituel est largement perçu comme existant et influençant le monde matériel. Ces visions du monde, au-delà d'une simple analyse matérialiste, sont centrales dans les systèmes de pensée traditionnels africains dans lesquels la notion de religion est conçue comme une croyance en l'existence d'un monde invisible, distinct mais non séparé du monde visible. La réalité ne se limite donc pas à ce que l'on peut observer dans le monde matériel, mais inclut les expériences du monde invisible. La croyance en Dieu qui a créé l'univers entier et toute vie en son sein prévaut sur le continent africain et constitue la base de la dimension religieuse de ses cultures. Cette croyance et cette compréhension de Dieu exigent la plus grande attention et le plus grand respect pour une vie réussie sur terre. Même si Dieu ne peut être

défini par l'intellect humain, un examen attentif des croyances et pratiques traditionnelles africaines ancrées dans les systèmes de pensée africains nous permet de développer des perspectives critiques sur l'existence de Dieu, sa nature, sa relation avec le monde, la notion de mort et le problème du mal. Lorsque je parle de « croyances traditionnelles ancrées dans les systèmes de pensée », j'entends les croyances qui appartiennent aux anciens systèmes de pensée des sociétés africaines précoloniales, qui ont été transmises oralement et par le biais de rituels d'une génération à l'autre. Même si ces données culturelles ont été dérivées des modèles culturels vécus dans les sociétés africaines, nous ne devons pas nier les interactions interculturelles complexes et les influences d'autres religions mondiales comme l'islam et le christianisme. Dans cet article, je tente de donner une évaluation philosophique des conceptions africaines de Dieu dans la religion et la pensée traditionnelles africaines et de la manière dont ces conceptions se rapportent aux deux autres notions qui lui sont liées: la mort et le mal. En d'autres termes, je tente de mettre en évidence la connaissance de Dieu telle qu'elle est conçue dans les sociétés traditionnelles africaines et de voir comment cette connaissance influence la vie de la communauté par rapport à la mort et au mal. Je tente de répondre aux questions suivantes: quel type de principes philosophiques sous-tend les notions africaines de Dieu? Quels sont ces principes philosophiques de base qui donnent un sens aux pensées et aux actions des gens envers Dieu? Comment ces croyances traditionnelles africaines peuvent-elles enrichir notre compréhension interculturelle?

La notion de Dieu dans la religion et les systèmes de pensée traditionnels africains: Quelques justifications anthropologiques et philosophiques

Un vieux pilier de la vie religieuse africaine est la croyance en l'existence de Dieu. Elle est au centre de la religion traditionnelle africaine et des systèmes de pensée. La notion de Dieu est très importante car elle constitue la base de la vie des gens, et leur relation avec Dieu dépend largement de la connaissance qu'ils en ont. Dans toutes les orientations culturelles, les gens se sont toujours posé des questions sur l'identité du responsable de l'existence de l'humanité, de l'univers entier et du sens de l'existence humaine. Ces personnes, essentiellement des ruraux agricoles et des chasseurs-cueilleurs, qui voyaient les orages, la pluie, la sécheresse, les éclairs et le vaste univers ordonné, ont pensé qu'il devait y avoir quelqu'un à l'origine de cet ensemble ordonné, qu'ils pensaient être Dieu. On en conclut que Dieu est l'Être suprême, l'initiateur, le soutien et le contrôleur de la vie. La vie est donc le point de départ de la connaissance humaine de Dieu. Dieu est un être vivant, actif et suprême, qui a créé les êtres humains, l'univers et son contenu. C'est la définition la plus courante que l'on retrouve dans la plupart des orientations culturelles

du continent.[1] Les noms et les images humaines que chaque peuple africain a de Dieu montrent adéquatement cette signification et ce qu'ils pensent de Dieu, de ce qu'il fait et de la façon dont il est approché par les humains. Ces noms et ces conceptions de Dieu sont divers, mais il est possible d'identifier des similitudes dans les visions du monde et les processus rituels par-delà les frontières géographiques et ethniques. En regardant de plus près, nous pouvons identifier les expériences métaphysiques et religieuses et la façon dont elles façonnent la manière dont les Africains conçoivent Dieu.

Expériences métaphysiques et religieuses

Ontologie des forces vivantes et de la hiérarchie des êtres

Une idée majeure de la métaphysique africaine qui permet de croire à l'existence de Dieu est la notion d'être dans la pensée africaine. Les expériences métaphysiques et religieuses de la pensée africaine tournent autour du thème de l'être. Les idées de vie, d'activité et de création sont des tendances cruciales de la pensée et de la culture qui influencent la manière dont les êtres humains connaissent la réalité de Dieu. Ces expériences métaphysiques et religieuses permettent également aux humains de fonder certains principes et concepts sur lesquels sont structurées leurs orientations culturelles et leur vision du monde et qui constituent leur philosophie de l'existence dans laquelle ces concepts naissent et se nourrissent. Dieu n'est pas un simple concept intellectuel mais le fondement de toute activité. L'idée ou l'expérience de la vie suggère une force rendant la vie possible. C'est ce que les religions africaines et d'autres religions ont appelé Dieu, une personne vivante et active qui se révèle aux êtres humains à travers diverses manifestations de la vie. C'est pourquoi on parle de lui comme du Dieu de telle ou telle activité. Ainsi, Dieu est impliqué dans chaque activité de la vie de l'Africain. Comme les humains ne peuvent pas décrire Dieu de manière adéquate, ils l'appellent Père. Cette conception de Dieu en tant qu'être vivant permet d'expliquer la vie de chaque personne et, finalement, le sens de l'existence humaine. L'idée d'activité suggère qu'Il est le maître de toutes les activités, celui qui donne le pouvoir aux êtres humains.

Dans l'expérience métaphysique, il y a la conscience de l'être contingent qui n'a pas le fondement de son « être, », et pourtant "il est" et participe à l'être. Les gens font l'expérience du dynamisme et de la vitalité de l'être dans le monde. Cela explique qu'il recherche constamment le fondement ultime de son être. Par conséquent, en faisant appel à sa raison naturelle, il tente de fournir des arguments expérientiels à partir desquels il peut valablement conclure à l'existence d'un Être

[1]Quelques noms d'êtres suprêmes africains en tant que créateur à travers les contextes géographiques : Amma(Dogon Mali) ; Chukwu, Chineke (Igbo Nigeria) ; Kwoth (Nuer Soudan) ; Mulungu (Bantous et Soudanais d'Afrique de l'Est) ; Ngewo (Mende Sirra Leone) ; Nhialic (Sud Soudan) ; Ngai (Afrique orientale) ; Nyame, Onyankopon, Onyame (Akan Ghana) ; Nzambi (Congo) ; Olodumare, Olorun (Yoruba Nigeria) ; Osanobwa (Edo Nigeria) ; UNnkulunkulu, Inkosi, (Afrique du Sud) Tata Lohwe, Zambe (Cameroun)

suprême responsable du monde et de l'expérience humaine. La connaissance de l'origine du monde et de la vie sur celui-ci pourrait être expliquée en utilisant le principe philosophique de la causalité. L'ancien philosophe grec Aristote, dont les catégories sont encore utilisées par les philosophes aujourd'hui, a développé une théorie de la causalité, communément appelée la doctrine des quatre causes.[2] Pour lui, une bonne compréhension de ce qu'est une cause et du nombre de causes possibles est essentielle pour une étude réussie du monde qui nous entoure. La causalité est une connexion génétique de phénomènes par laquelle une chose (la cause), dans certaines conditions, donne naissance à une autre chose (l'effet). L'essence de la causalité est la détermination d'un phénomène par un autre. En d'autres termes, pour que quelque chose soit, il faut qu'une personne soit plus élevée dans la hiérarchie de l'être, soit en réalité, soit en intentionnalité. Dans les termes de la tradition philosophique européenne, et largement appropriée dans la pensée traditionnelle africaine, la croyance en Dieu a été expliquée par la théorie métaphysique de la causalité (TEMPELS 1958 ; KAGAME 1956, 1971). La causalité est définie comme une interaction des réalités spirituelles et physiques en même temps. Cette interaction met l'accent sur l'activité comme caractéristique essentielle de la cause à laquelle le théologien rwandais Alexis Kagame ajoute l'antériorité (l'anteriorite), c'est-à-dire le fait d'être là avant, comme condition préalable à toute causalité. Sans l'être là avant, il n'y a pas de cause, car il ne peut y avoir d'effet, qui est extérieurement un autre être et/ou événement par la suite (KAGAME 1956).

Selon Placide Tempels, le concept le plus fondamental et le plus élémentaire de la pensée bantoue qui définit la vie, l'activité et la création est celui de la force vitale (*Ntu*).[3] C'est la force omniprésente qui donne vie ou énergie à l'univers entier. Pour le Bantou, la force est l'essence de l'être et s'oppose radicalement à la notion occidentale de l'être. Il décrit en ces termes la vitalité de l'être et le rapport de l'être à sa force, par opposition à la notion occidentale de l'être qui est statique:

> Nous pouvons concevoir la notion transcendantale d' « être » en la séparant de son attribut, la « force », mais le Bantou ne le peut pas. Dans sa pensée, la « force » est un élément nécessaire de l' « être », et le concept de « force » est inséparable de la définition de l' »être ». Chez les Bantous, il n'y a pas d'idée d'"être" séparée

[2] Les quatre causes ou quatre explications sont, dans la pensée aristotélicienne, quatre types fondamentaux de réponses à la question "pourquoi ?" dans l'analyse du changement ou du mouvement dans la nature. Elles comprennent : la cause matérielle, la cause formelle, la cause efficiente et la cause finale.

[3] *Ntu* implique le concept de force vitale qui est présente dans tous les êtres. Ceci est similaire au pneuma vital qui est lié à l'âme en tant que principe de vie tel que décrit par Aristote. Pour lui, l'âme est la première actualité d'un corps naturel qui est potentiellement vivant (412a27). Dans une tentative de distinguer les types d'âme et les formes de vie, Aristote affirme que l'âme est attribuée à tout ce qui a une vie. L'âme humaine qui est rationnelle, selon Aristote, comprend toutes les puissances inférieures de l'âme, à savoir la nutrition et la perception sur sa propre puissance de pensée. Ainsi, l'âme, source de vie d'une Vie Suprême qui fait que tout a la vie, est visible dans la vie quotidienne.

de l'idée de "force". (TEMPELS 1959, 50-51)

Il poursuit en expliquant que l'ontologie bantoue, dans sa spécificité, implique que l'être, tel qu'il est compris dans la tradition occidentale, signifie la force dans la tradition bantoue, et que l'on peut donc affirmer que l'être est la force (être = force).

Les Bantous parlent, agissent, vivent comme si, pour eux, les êtres étaient des forces. La force n'est pas pour eux une réalité adventice, accidentelle, la force est même plus qu'un attribut nécessaire des êtres: La force est la nature de l'être, la force est l'être, l'être est la force. (TEMPELS 1959, 51).

Dieu est perçu comme celui « ...qui possède la Force en lui-même. Il est... la source de la Force dans chaque créature » (TEMPELS 1959, 46). En fait, en conséquence de la Force créatrice de Dieu, tout ce qui est sur terre, c'est-à-dire l'humain, l'animal, le végétal et le minéral a été doté, essentiellement, d'une force vitale. L'interrelation des forces se traduit par une hiérarchie des êtres qui va de Dieu (l'origine de la force vitale) au monde animal et inanimé, en passant par l'homme (y compris les ancêtres morts et la communauté vivante des humains). La relation dynamique de la force vitale dans chaque être peut être maintenue en permanence, diminuée ou simplement interrompue. La force croît ou décroît lors du passage d'un stade de l'être à un autre. Avec ces interactions de forces, les êtres ne sont ni liés à eux-mêmes, ni passifs, mais ils sont impliqués dans ce que Tempels décrit comme un « principe d'activité » (ibid. 51); et cette « dialectique dynamique de l'énergie » (MUDIMBE 1988, 139) constitue la base de ce que Tempels décrit comme les « lois générales de la causalité vitale », à savoir:

> (a)Un être humain (vivant ou décédé) peut directement renforcer ou diminuer l'être d'un autre être humain;
> (b) La force vitale humaine peut influencer directement les êtres de force inférieurs (animaux, végétaux ou minéraux) dans leur être;
> (c) Un être rationnel (esprit ou vivant) peut agir indirectement sur un autre être rationnel en communiquant sa force vitale à une force inférieure (animale, végétale ou minérale) par l'intermédiaire de laquelle elle influence l'être rationnel. (TEMPELS 1959, 67-68)

Reprenant Tempels, le fondateur du mouvement de la négritude, Léopold Sedar Senghor, dit que la force vitale est une matière vivante capable d'augmenter son énergie ou de la perdre, de se renforcer ou de s'affaiblir (SENGHOR 1975), et Kagame définit la vie par l'union du corps et du principe vital de l'animalité, union dont la dissolution entraîne automatiquement la mort. C'est pourquoi il faut distinguer le vivant de l'existant: les morts existent mais ne vivent pas (KAGAME 1956, 1976). Kagame va plus loin pour démontrer cette notion d'être avec quatre catégories ontologiques dans sa langue maternelle, le Kinyarwanda. Il s'agit de: *muntu*: être avec intelligence; *kintu*: être sans intelligence, ou chose; *hantu*: exprime le temps et le lieu; *kuntu* : indique la modalité et centralise ainsi toutes les notions liées aux modifications de l'être en lui-même ou vis-à-vis des autres

êtres. L'ontologie bantoue apparaît clairement à travers l'interrelation entre ces quatre catégories, qui viennent toutes de la même racine, *ntu*, et qui renvoient à l'être ou à l'essence et aussi à l'idée de force. Kagame affirme que l'équivalent bantou de to be est strictement et uniquement une copule. Elle relie la classe du sujet au prédicat et détermine la qualité de la proposition. En énonçant *muntu, kintu* (l'essence de quelque chose) est signifié et la notion d'existence n'est pas nécessairement présente (KAGAME 1971: 602).

Cependant, pour Kagame, Dieu n'appartient nullement aux catégories du *ntu*, car il est préexistant et à leur origine en tant que cause première.[4] Janheinz Jahn(1961) qualifie également le *ntu* de force cosmique universelle qui, selon la métaphysique bantoue, est présente dans les différentes catégories ontologiques de l'être (JAHN1961) et le théologien congolais François Marie Lufuluabo considère la vie et l'activité comme l'expression du dynamisme qui caractérise l'ontologie bantoue. Pour lui, l'idéal du bantou est d'atteindre la plus grande intensité de vie possible (LUFULUABO 1964). La vie et l'activité sont des expressions de cette unité vitale (l'union vitale), qui est le principe de la cohésion communautaire (MULAGO 1965).[5] Le théologien camerounais Martin Nkafu Nkemkia (1999, 11) utilise le terme de vitalogie africaine pour décrire la vision unifiée de la réalité qui englobe le monde invisible. Nous trouvons des vues similaires de conception complémentaire de la réalité chez de nombreux philosophes africains, comme Teffo et Roux, qui décrivent cette ontologie autour d'un certain nombre de principes et de lois, qui contrôlent l'interaction des forces, c'est-à-dire entre Dieu et l'homme, et les choses matérielles. Ces forces sont hiérarchisées et forment une chaîne d'êtres (TEFFO & ROUX 1998, 138). Elle est celle où les êtres sont dans une relation harmonieuse et complémentaire, où tout ce qui existe sert de chaînon manquant de la réalité (ASOUZU 2007a ; 2007b).Ils constituent une réalité une et indivisible - Ubuntu (Ramose 2009) - qui se manifeste à la fois physique et non physique et dans une perfection fonctionnelle de complémentarité

[4] Cependant, dans une tentative de comparaison entre la philosophie africaine et la philosophie occidentale à travers l'examen des idées philosophiques d'un groupe linguistique africain, les Fanti du Ghana, Benjamin Oguah croit identifier chez les Fanti la notion d'un être plus grand que ce que l'on peut penser, formule qu'il associe au Proslogion de Saint Anselme, sorte de preuve ontologique de l'existence de Dieu. Dieu est appelé celui qui est plus grand que ce que l'on peut concevoir (Babur - a- abur- adze - ado). S'il n'existait pas, il ne serait pas l'être le plus grand que l'on puisse concevoir. Oguah croit également identifier chez les Fanti l'argument cosmologique et l'argument téléologique pour l'existence de Dieu (OGUAH 1984).

[5] Voir Eboussi-Boulaga (1968) sur ce « dogme » tempelsien qui consiste a assimiler la force et de la vie. Par ailleurs, Innocent Asouzu (2007b) pense également que même si Tempels projette une notion dynamique de l'être, il finit par la réduire à quelque chose de fixe puisqu'il projette la force sur un objet et la fige sur une substance. C'est cette substance qu'il convertit en un être bantou, de nature statique mais qui reste dynamique. Par conséquent, son ontologie de la force vitale n'a rien de valorisant, si ce n'est la magie et la superstition, et laisse les Africains comme des adorateurs d'idoles.

Mutuelle (CHIMAKONAM 2012).C'est ce que Chris Ijioma décrit comme un monisme harmonieux(IJIOMA 2014).

Éléments de la vision religieuse du monde: Dieu et les ancêtres

Lorsque les gens expliquent que l'univers a été créé par Dieu, ils considèrent automatiquement l'univers d'une manière religieuse. On peut donc dire que la vision africaine de l'univers est profondément et notoirement religieuse (MBITI 1969). Dans toutes les orientations culturelles du continent, les érudits sont parvenus, sur la base de leurs recherches, à des conclusions similaires grâce à une longue expérience, à l'observation et à la réflexion sur les rituels, les proverbes et les visions du monde de leurs communautés (BOLAJI 1962; 1973; MBITI 1969 ; 1970 ; GYEKYE 1995). Ces chercheurs présentent Dieu au sens monothéiste comme un être omnipotent, omniscient et bienveillant qui ne peut être la cause du mal dans l'univers.[6]

Cependant, certains chercheurs, s'appuyant sur les visions du monde Akan (au Ghana), Yoruba et Igbo (au Nigeria), ont affirmé que le problème de l'omnipotence et du mal ne se pose pas dans la philosophie africaine de la religion, car dans la pensée traditionnelle africaine, Dieu est considéré comme une divinité puissante mais limitée.[7] Il n'est pas conçu comme le Dieu tout-puissant, omniscient et bienveillant auquel croit la théologie chrétienne, par exemple. La raison en est que la plupart des sociétés africaines traditionnelles conçoivent Dieu comme si lointain que les divinités inférieures deviennent des intermédiaires dignes de révérence puisque ces divinités inférieures influencent directement la vie humaine par leur interaction avec Dieu (ACHEBE 1994). Si Dieu est un *Deus absconditus*, ou Dieu caché, et que les divinités inférieures le suppléent efficacement, il est raisonnable de penser que Dieu doit être limité, soit en puissance du fait qu'il est précédé par la matière préexistante (WIREDU 1998), soit en connaissance puisqu'il s'en remet à la sagesse des divinités inférieures (BEWAJI 1998), soit à la fois en puissance et en connaissance puisqu'il n'est ni tout-puissant ni entièrement bon (FAYEMI 2012).[8] Puisque c'est le cas, Dieu est incapable d'arrêter le mal dans le monde et, en fait, capable du mal puisqu'une divinité limitée dans la connaissance peut faire des erreurs qui causent du mal (AGADA 2022). Pour Fayemi, Dieu est certes un être puissant, mais en tant que co-créateur, il est limité lorsqu'il affirme que « *Olodumare*... est considéré par les Yoruba comme la cause ultime de tous les processus visibles dans le monde. En étant le créateur, cela ne signifie pas qu'il crée unilatéralement tout sans le soutien et la consultation d'autres divinités " (FAYEMI 2012: 7).

[6] Pour une discussion plus critique sur cette transcendance et cette limitation de la notion de Dieu, voir Ada Agada (2022).

[7] Voir par exemple, Sogolo (1993), Bewaji (1998), Wiredu (1998), Oladipo (2004), Balogun (2009), Fayemi (2012).

[8] Cependant, des universitaires africains s'opposent à cette idée d'un Dieu reclus, voir par exemple Bolaji (1962 ; 1973), Mbiti (1969 ; 1970) et Gyekye (1995).

Une autre chercheuse nigériane, Amara Esther Chimakonam (2022), invoque une vision du monde Igbo basée sur Ejima (jumeaux) pour soutenir que le problème de l'évidence du mal pourrait ne pas être un problème dans la philosophie africaine de la religion après tout. Elle fait les affirmations plausibles suivantes :

(a) Il existe un être complémentaire en qui le bien et le mal coexistent en tant que compléments;
(b) Un tel être complémentaire est puissant, bien informé et moralement bon ;
(c) Il existe des exemples de mal dans le monde, qu'un être complémentaire pourrait permettre;
(d) Un être complémentaire permettrait ces cas de mal puisque le bien et le mal coexistent inévitablement et harmonieusement en tant que modes de son être ;
(e) Par conséquent, il peut exister un être complémentaire appelé Dieu dont l'existence n'est pas viciée par l'évidence du mal dans l'univers.

Chez les Bakuta du Congo Brazzaville, Dieu est appelé Nzambi, dont la fonction divine par excellence est la création. Les Bakuta reconnaissent en Dieu deux aspects : le Dieu d'en bas (Nzambi Wamutsele) et le Dieu d'en haut (Nzambi Watanda), qui est proprement le Dieu créateur. Dieu est l'être nécessaire, la cause finale, qui a créé le monde à partir de rien.

Même si la théorie de Dieu créateur existe, telle qu'elle a été esquissée ci-dessus, l'acte de création ne s'est pas fait *ex nihilo* comme dans certaines théologies africaines (Imbo 2004 ; Gbadegesin 1991) mais comme un démiurge qui façonne un matériau préexistant plutôt que de le créer. Kwasi Wiredu, par exemple, n'admet pas la notion de création *ex nihilo*. Il souligne le sens du verbe akan *bo*, qui signifie « créer », et il affirme que *bo* ou créer quelque chose, c'est façonner un produit ; et en fait, il est plus proche de l'akan de décrire l'Être suprême comme un architecte cosmique plutôt que comme un créateur. Par conséquent, si créer consiste à faire exister quelque chose, alors le néant absolu doit être un obstacle logiquement inamovible (Wiredu 1998). Certains chercheurs ont approuvé l'opinion de Wiredu. Germaine Dieterlen (1951) mentionne une sorte de vide primordial antérieur à toute création et, en même temps, le principe du mouvement et de la résurrection universels. Alassane Ndaw (1983) parle de fabrication plutôt que de création du monde ; Cheikh Moctar Ba (2007) parle de modelage (faire une représentation de matériaux préexistants) et Olusegun Oladipo (2004) souligne que Dieu a fait le monde à partir de matériaux préexistants. Cependant, le sage Dogon, Ogotemmeli, montre que le spirituel et le physique s'interpénètrent (Jahn 1961:105). Dans le mythe de la création des Dogon, Amma, le Dieu unique a créé la terre sous la forme d'une femme, puis l'a épousée. Sa semence, Nommo, est l'eau et le feu, le sang et la parole. Nommo est la force vitale physique-spirituelle qui réveille toutes les forces endormies et donne la vie physique et spirituelle.

L'expérience religieuse reconnaît un Être suprême comme celui qui doit être vénéré, adoré et celui dont tout dépend pour sa vie et son existence. Cela explique l'idée de prières, de culte, de libation, de sacrifice (en particulier le sacrifice animal). Le culte et les prières peuvent être le fait d'individus ou de toute la communauté pour diverses raisons telles que la bonne santé, la protection, la fertilité, les pluies, etc. Ils donnent à l'être humain une vision spirituelle de la vie et lui rappellent qu'il est bi-composé d'un corps et d'une composante spirituelle, et qu'il doit prendre soin des deux pour s'épanouir pleinement. Cela implique généralement des sacrifices, des offrandes, des chants et des danses, ainsi que le versement de libations, qui sont considérés comme un moyen d'approcher, d'apaiser et d'établir un rapport concret avec l'Être suprême. Ils renforcent la croyance en Dieu chez les adorateurs traditionnels et créent une harmonie de vie avec les autres membres de la communauté.

À partir de ces expériences, les gens ont inventé divers noms pour désigner Dieu. Ces noms nous montrent ce qu'ils pensent de lui, ce qu'il fait, et comment les gens se rapportent à leur créateur. Ces noms et attributs montrent que Dieu est le créateur de toutes choses, le soutien de la vie et le maître de toute la création. À travers les noms, nous voyons également Dieu comme père, mère ou parent, et lui attribuons des caractéristiques telles que la bonté, la miséricorde, la toute-puissance, l'omniscience, l'omniprésence, l'immuabilité, l'esprit, etc. Chez les Akan du Ghana, Dieu (Onyame) est à la fois l'Être suprême (Onyankopon), l'Être infini (Odomankoma) et le démiurge de toutes choses (Boade) (Danquah 1968). Par conséquent, la connaissance de Dieu est une connaissance pratique obtenue de Dieu, qui est l'être actif qui se révèle aux êtres humains dans leur environnement et les éventualités de la vie.

Dans la plupart des tribus camerounaises, par exemple, l'élément d'ordre dans l'univers relie l'origine de l'univers à un être intelligent et à un mystère. Par conséquent, les noms donnés à Dieu reconnaissent cette croyance et reflètent ces expériences métaphysiques et religieuses. Chez les Bafut, tout est sacré et vient finalement de Dieu (Nwi). Les Kom conçoivent Dieu comme Mbom et la vie comme Afumbom (don de Dieu). Des noms similaires existent chez les Nso qui se réfèrent à Dieu comme Nyuy (signifiant Dieu). D'où Bomnyuy (C'est Dieu qui a créé) ; Mbomnyuy (La création de Dieu). Le monde est considéré comme Fomnyuy (le don de Dieu) et Nsaidzenyuy (le monde est entre les mains de Dieu). Chez les Ngie, Dieu est désigné comme Nyue, la force vivante et l'Être suprême, créateur de l'univers, dans Batie the Se (l'Être suprême), Se Boum Yok (notre créateur), Tata Lohwe dans Bakweri. Les Ejagham ont une double figure, qui incarne Ata Obasi, le dieu céleste (Dieu Père), et Mma Obasi (Dieu Mère), la déesse de la terre. Bien que perçus comme deux divinités différentes, ils forment néanmoins une unité indivisible et sont toujours invoqués ensemble dans la prière.
De ces noms et de ces images, nous voyons que Dieu n'est pas un objet d'observation scientifiquement vérifiable, mais une présence personnelle dont on peut déduire la primauté de l'être sur la pensée abstraite. Les humains ne se contentent pas de penser à Dieu, mais vivent avec lui dans un dialogue existentiel continu. De cette façon, les humains interprètent certaines expériences universelles à partir de différents contextes culturels, de métaphores, de rituels qui constituent la base à partir de laquelle ils projettent leur croyance en Dieu. Par conséquent, même si une grande partie de la philosophie africaine de la religion a été, dans ses

concepts et sa logique, fortement influencée par la philosophie occidentale d'influence chrétienne, nous pouvons toujours soutenir que les croyances religieuses africaines pointent vers des expériences de Dieu en tant que créateur, etc. et affirmer également que cette perspective fait partie intégrante de la vision africaine de la vie.

Le fait que Dieu soit le créateur de toutes choses n'est pas à mettre au crédit du christianisme, car avant le christianisme, les gens savaient que Dieu les avait créés, eux et le reste de l'univers. Nous pouvons plutôt dire que certaines des idées que nous trouvons dans les enseignements chrétiens et islamiques étaient déjà intuitionnées par les religions traditionnelles africaines. Les traditions orales africaines sont également enracinées dans des théologies originales basées sur l'expérience, comme celles des autres religions du monde. La tradition chrétienne qui remonte à Thomas d'Aquin et Aristote est une interprétation théologique fondée sur l'expérience du monde et de l'expérience humaine comme étant créés et influencés par la force divine.

En outre, toutes ces images ne sont que des façons dont les êtres humains tentent de décrire Dieu, mais aucune d'entre elles ne rend compte de manière adéquate de ce qu'est Dieu. C'est cette reconnaissance des bases spirituelles de la nature, de son existence et de celle de l'univers dans les différentes visions africaines du monde qui permet de discuter de réalités telles que la mort et le mal. Les idées religieuses africaines portent essentiellement sur les relations entre l'être humain et le monde des esprits, qui est habité par les esprits ancestraux, les esprits de la terre, de l'eau, de la forêt, etc. Les fondements philosophiques et les implications de cette ontologie mettent en évidence le fait que la réalité des êtres et des forces, constitue un ensemble mutuellement complémentaire. La réalité consiste en un rapport complémentaire entre l'existence matérielle et spirituelle. Cela explique le jugement de Kwame Appiah selon lequel, en raison de leur croyance en ces forces et êtres invisibles, de nombreux Africains ne peuvent pas accepter pleinement les théories scientifiques qui sont incompatibles avec cette croyance (APPIAH 1992, 135). Cette interrelation dynamique des forces à tous les niveaux de l'existence, entre les mondes visible et invisible, éclaire ma compréhension et mon interprétation du lien entre Dieu, la mort et le mal dans les systèmes de pensée et de croyance traditionnels africains.

La mort et la vie après la mort

La notion de mort est l'un des phénomènes les plus mystérieux qui continuent de déconcerter les penseurs humains. Elle est universelle, imminente, inévitable et redoutée dans certains endroits et par certaines personnes, et pourtant l'incertitude de ce qui se passe après constitue le véritable mystère. Nous devons tous mourir, mais quelles sont les principales croyances, pratiques et significations de la mort sur le continent africain? De nombreux peuples africains croient qu'il existe une sorte d'existence après la mort, car pour eux la mort n'est considérée que comme une transition d'un mode d'existence à un autre. La partie visible de l'homme se transforme en un homme spiritualisé (a muntu), un concept qui signifie la personne humaine. Ce concept englobe également les ancêtres vivants et morts (JAHN 1961, 18) qui ne mourront plus jamais mais appartiennent à une hiérarchie supérieure, participant dans une certaine mesure à la Force divine (Tempels 1959,

30).[9] Dieu a accordé aux ancêtres une force vitale plus puissante que celle de leurs descendants et ils doivent être respectés (MAGESA 1997, 47). Ils sont les morts vivants (TEMPELS 1959 ; MBITI 1969, OLADIPO 2004). Il n'y a pas de distinction entre le monde physique et le monde spirituel ; l'au-delà est considéré comme une simple continuation de la vie sur terre. La mort est considérée comme faisant partie du destin de l'homme, un départ au cours duquel le corps physique se décompose mais l'esprit passe à un autre état d'existence. Alors, que se passe-t-il vraiment à la mort ? Comment les Africains conçoivent-ils la vie après la mort ?

Causes et signification de la mort

Il existe plusieurs mythes sur l'origine de la mort et dans certains groupes ethniques, les gens ont même essayé de se référer à la mort en termes personnels, comme un monstre, un animal, une sorte de mauvais esprit. Ces mythes donnent l'impression que la mort n'a pas de causes naturelles. Cela explique pourquoi chaque fois qu'un décès survient dans une famille, un clan ou un village, les survivants consultent des devins pour en connaître la cause. Ce n'est que lorsque la cause du décès est révélée par le devin que les survivants déterminent le type de rite funéraire approprié pour le défunt. La croyance générale est que la négligence d'un rite funéraire approprié, s'il est mérité, est une provocation pour le membre défunt qui peut se venger en envoyant un désastre aux membres survivants. Cela s'explique également par le fait que, dans la plupart des sociétés traditionnelles, on croit en l'existence de forces maléfiques ou malveillantes qui pourraient être exploitées pour la pratique de la sorcellerie négative. Le décès peut également être causé par des malédictions, des tabous ou des serments non respectés ou par des esprits qui en veulent aux membres de la famille. En dehors de la mort à un âge avancé, la plupart des gens considèrent que la mort est causée par des forces mystiques et maléfiques qui pourraient se venger.

C'est pourquoi, dans les systèmes de croyances traditionnels africains, les gens ne sont jamais tranquilles tant qu'ils n'ont pas trouvé une explication qu'ils estiment suffisante pour la cause d'une mort spécifique. Leur philosophie de la vie et de la mort est fondée sur leurs croyances et leurs expériences, et ces croyances sont renforcées par les devins qu'ils consultent pour les explications qui échappent à leur perception immédiate. Cela explique pourquoi la divination revêt une grande importance dans la communauté villageoise. Ce sont les devins qui servent de médiateurs entre Dieu, les esprits et les gens en nommant les raisons de la mort, de la souffrance et du malheur, et en conseillant également les gens sur la manière de s'en débarrasser.

Lorsqu'une personne meurt, le corps, qui est mortel, se sépare de l'âme, qui est immortelle et constitue la véritable essence de la personne humaine. Le spirituel ne subit pas de décomposition ou de corruption en raison de sa simplicité. Le cadavre est appelé « corps sans vie » dans plusieurs langues, car l'âme continue son voyage vers les membres défunts de la famille et les ancêtres qui vivent sous une autre forme de vie dans le monde des morts vivants. La raison en est que la vie

[9]Cependant, voir Menkiti(2004) et Mbiti(1969) qui suggèrent que dans la plupart des communautés, ils meurent d'une seconde mort.

biologique et la vie spirituelle se rencontrent dans l'être humain. Dans une vie humaine concrète, ni l'une ni l'autre ne peuvent être présentes seules. Lorsqu'une personne meurt, sa vie biologique est en fait terminée et sa vie spirituelle cesse également, mais quelque chose demeure, à savoir la « force vitale » Nommo (JAHN 1961, 107) qui a formé sa "personnalité", ce que Tempels appelle le « Muntu authentique ». Dans ce cas, un être humain vivant devient un être humain sans vie (KAGAME 1956, 179). Les morts vivants, selon Mbiti, sont les esprits de ceux qui sont morts jusqu'à quatre ou cinq générations en arrière. Les chefs de famille, les adultes et les personnes mariées sont commémorés de cette façon plus longtemps que les bébés, les enfants et les célibataires (MBITI 1969). Les morts vivants sont des ancêtres qui sont physiquement morts mais qui continuent à vivre dans un autre royaume, dans la demeure des morts qui est de nature spirituelle. Le culte des ancêtres, qui constitue la base de la religion traditionnelle africaine, souligne le fait qu'une personne survit après la mort et « retourne à la maison » ou « rejoint les ancêtres », comme on le chante généralement dans les chants funèbres lorsqu'une personne meurt. Lorsqu'ils « rejoignent leurs ancêtres », ils deviennent des esprits ou des entités spirituelles qui survivent dans l'autre monde. Les morts, suivant le principe ontologique de Tempels de la force vitale et de l'ordre hiérarchique des forces, continuent à vivre dans une condition de vie diminuée, comme des forces amoindries, tout en conservant néanmoins leur statut supérieur, renforçant la force vitale paternelle (TEMPELS 1959, 44). La mort est donc une diminution de la force vitale, mais grâce à leur profonde connaissance des forces et de la vie, les ancêtres restent très importants pour exercer leur influence vitalisante sur la génération vivante. Cela est dû au fait que la personne vivante a le désir de vivre éternellement. Malheureusement, la mort est inévitable, et c'est pourquoi l'individu prolonge son existence en tant que personne vivante à travers ses descendants.

Où résident les ancêtres ?

En ce qui concerne la demeure des morts, la plupart des gens pensent que même s'ils ne sont pas visibles, les morts ne sont pas loin des vivants. Ils peuvent être où ils veulent puisqu'ils ne sont plus liés par l'espace et le temps. On dit donc généralement que les morts nous voient, mais que nous ne pouvons pas les voir avec nos yeux ordinaires. Ils vivent dans le monde spirituel puisqu'ils ne vivent plus physiquement et existent donc en tant qu'esprits ancestraux. Dans certaines tribus, les gens pensent que les ancêtres vivent dans des phénomènes naturels comme les arbres, les rochers ou les lacs.

La relation entre les vivants et les morts vivants

On peut affirmer que pour apprécier et mieux comprendre les croyances traditionnelles africaines, il est nécessaire d'examiner l'alliance qu'ils entretiennent avec leurs ancêtres. On pense que ces derniers exercent une influence constante sur la vie des gens, car ils font toujours partie de la communauté des vivants. Le principe fondamental est qu'une société unie dans la paix, l'harmonie et la coopération et dans laquelle les ancêtres occupent une position centrale et respectée représente la plus haute valeur sociale et peut être comprise comme l'un

des éléments essentiels de la philosophie religieuse africaine. La relation avec les ancêtres, qui peut être bonne ou mauvaise, est si forte que les Africains se souviennent toujours d'eux en versant des libations sur leurs tombes ou sur le côté de la porte pour s'adresser à eux. En outre, la plupart des gens sont enterrés dans leur village aux côtés de leurs ancêtres, et pendant les lamentations de deuil, les gens expriment certains souhaits et prières que le défunt est censé transmettre à ceux qui sont déjà partis. Le fait que les gens soient enterrés avec certains de leurs effets personnels pour être utilisés montre que la vie future est presque semblable à la vie actuelle. Cela explique pourquoi ils doivent poursuivre leurs activités quotidiennes telles que l'agriculture, l'alimentation, la chasse, etc. Cela explique pourquoi dans certains villages, des ignames, des légumes, des boissons sont réservés aux morts. Ces exemples montrent le lien fort entre le monde spirituel et le monde physique et que le défunt est toujours actif et présent lorsque les survivants l'appellent. Les ancêtres jouent un rôle si profond et indispensable dans la vie d'un Africain qu'aucune célébration ou décision sérieuse dans la famille, le clan ou la tribu ne peut être réalisée sans les consulter au préalable. Dans de nombreuses régions d'Afrique, les membres adultes de la famille déposent de la nourriture et versent des boissons sur leurs tombes ou sur le sol pour les esprits de la famille. Cela peut se faire lors d'une fête de famille, lorsqu'une personne souffre d'une maladie grave, lorsque des enfants sont nommés d'après les morts (souvent lorsque la réincarnation est perçue) ou lorsqu'une décision importante doit être prise. Dans certaines régions d'Afrique, il est également de coutume de mentionner les noms des parents décédés lorsqu'on prie Dieu. Ces membres décédés de la famille sont censés relayer les prières à Dieu, qui est toujours nommé en premier dans les prières aux ancêtres. Les ancêtres viennent également en rêve pour s'enquérir de la famille, donner des instructions aux vivants et protéger la famille. Ils demandent également que des choses soient faites ou leur soient données et menacent parfois de punir les membres de la famille qui les négligent. Cependant, dans certains villages, lorsqu'un certain défunt continue à punir les vivants, on fait appel à un devin pour le chasser de la vie des vivants et envoyer l'esprit au loin. La plupart des gens voient dans les malheurs le signe du mécontentement des ancêtres et les interprètent comme un avertissement invitant les personnes à examiner de près leur comportement envers leurs proches et les esprits eux-mêmes.

En résumé, la conception africaine de la mort nous montre qu'il y a une vie après la mort, que l'homme a à la fois un corps et une âme, que le corps est mortel mais que l'âme est immortelle et que le monde des esprits existe et est accessible aux appels des humains. L'un de ces appels pourrait être des solutions au problème du mal dans leur vie quotidienne.

Dieu et le problème du mal

Le problème du mal est crucial dans notre compréhension de Dieu et de la philosophie africaine de la religion parce que le mal gâche le plan de Dieu, perturbe la force vitale et affecte grandement l'éthique communautaire africaine

(TEMPELS 1959:64ff). Cependant, comme nous l'avons vu plus haut, Dieu est une divinité limitée, un démiurge et un ancêtre déifié. Si Dieu est limité, alors le problème du mal, en tant que problème métaphysique, ne se pose pas. Pourtant, il existe une interaction entre les forces du bien et du mal dans le monde. Dans la philosophie occidentale, le problème du mal est généralement formulé de la manière suivante: Comment se fait-il qu'un créateur omnipotent, omniscient et omnibienveillant semble avoir créé un monde contenant le mal ? Qu'est-ce que la réalité du mal nous apprend sur la nature du Dieu qui a créé l'univers ? Faut-il voir en Dieu un être limité du fait de l'évidence du mal ?
En effet, le philosophe antique, Épicure, a énoncé le problème du mal sous la forme d'un dilemme:

> Soit Dieu veut supprimer les maux, soit IL n'en est pas capable ; soit il en est capable, mais il ne le veut pas ; soit IL n'en est ni capable ni désireux ; soit il est à la fois capable et désireux. S'IL veut et ne peut pas, IL est faible, ce qui n'est pas conforme au caractère de Dieu ; s'il peut et ne veut pas, IL est envieux, ce qui est également contraire à Dieu ; s'IL ne veut pas et ne peut pas, IL est à la fois envieux et faible, et donc pas Dieu ; s'IL veut et peut, ce qui seul convient à Dieu, d'où viennent donc les maux ? Ou pourquoi ne les supprime-t-IL pas ? (KONSTAN 2018,28)

Dans la pensée traditionnelle africaine, le mal moral est considéré comme provenant de certains actes d'êtres rationnels libres tels que le meurtre, le mensonge, le vol, etc., et le mal naturel est souvent considéré comme les conséquences de mauvaises actions perpétrées par un agent libre et qui affectent la nature, telles que les catastrophes naturelles, les inondations, les tremblements de terre, etc.

Dans la plupart des orientations culturelles, les gens ne sont jamais satisfaits d'un événement maléfique tant qu'ils n'ont pas obtenu l'explication ultime de ce qui s'est produit. Par conséquent, la question essentielle que les gens se posent n'est pas de savoir si le mal existe ou non, mais si nous pouvons donner une explication plausible au mal dans l'univers. Dans leurs croyances et leurs pratiques religieuses, ils veulent savoir "pourquoi" un mal n'arrive qu'à un moment et un endroit précis, à une personne précise. La science pose parfois des questions sur le pourquoi, mais la réponse africaine au mal est radicalement différente de celle du scientifique typique. Cela s'explique par le fait que la plupart des africains traditionnels recherchent une explication religieuse plutôt que scientifique. Cela ne signifie pas que les explications scientifiques sont sans importance, mais dans le contexte africain, la causalité va au-delà du domaine de la science naturelle. Le fait est que les explications scientifiques ne satisfont pas le système de croyance traditionnel africain et qu'ils exigent donc une explication causale (cause efficiente et cause finale) dans les cas de mal. Ils pensent que le monde est considéré comme ordonné et juste, et donc que le mal est lié à d'autres causes, qui incluent

les sorcières, les ancêtres et les pouvoirs mystiques. Cela explique pourquoi les gens interprètent le mal en termes directs et personnels dans leur relation aux autres et à Dieu. Le plus souvent, on croit que le mal apparaît lorsque les gens agissent contre le plan divin de Dieu et qu'il décide de se retirer de ceux qui violent l'unité cosmique. Par conséquent, lorsque la plupart des Africains traditionnels veulent faire ressortir l'explication causale du mal, le but est de savoir ce qu'il faut faire face à un tel malheur. Ils voient la main de leurs ancêtres ou des sorcières dans le mal qui les frappe et ont la satisfaction de savoir qu'il y a au moins quelque chose qu'ils peuvent faire pour l'éviter. Ils conviennent que les ancêtres et les sorcières produisent ces circonstances désagréables de la vie dans un but précis et, à partir d'un incident, se prémunissent contre les malheurs futurs en faisant des sacrifices. Cela explique pourquoi la plupart des Africains traditionnels s'intéressent davantage au pourquoi et au comment de tout événement maléfique. Ainsi, la préoccupation ne porte pas sur les simples explications causales secondaires (comment), mais sur les explications causales primaires (pourquoi).

Chez les Batie de la région de l'ouest du Cameroun, le mal (Cepon) ne vient pas de Dieu qui est tout-puissant (Cyepo Se) et bon (Se Foyoussic). Le mal vient d'êtres autres que Dieu - par exemple, le mauvais dieu (Se Cepon), qui est aussi une création de Dieu et, les humains à commettre le mal (MBITI 1969). De même, le mal peut provenir de la colère des ancêtres (m'pfe ba yok) et des êtres humains (surtout ceux qui sont sorciers et sorcières), qui sont des personnes dotées de pouvoirs mystérieux capables de manger la force vitale d'autres personnes (m'gang sie) en provoquant la maladie et la mort. Tout ce qui s'écarte de l'ordre normal des choses, tant dans l'ordre naturel que dans l'ordre social, est considéré comme une manifestation de sorcellerie. Par conséquent, le mal est généralement considéré comme ayant son origine, non pas de Dieu, mais d'autres êtres, humains ou spirituels, qui peuvent exercer leur libre arbitre (MBITI 1969).

Chez les Kom, le mal provient d'une force cosmique (meso), qui produit des actions ou des états bons ou mauvais. Cette notion est évidente dans les rituels royaux du peuple Kom (NKWI 1976). Le chef traditionnel préside le rituel et invoque les esprits du bon meso pour apporter la fertilité à la terre et à ses habitants, la santé, la prospérité et la paix dans tout le royaume. D'autre part, une personne peut acquérir le mauvais meso en échange d'un grand prix / sacrifice. Une personne, par exemple, pouvait invoquer le meso et demander de l'argent en offrant aux esprits la fertilité des récoltes et la fertilité des femmes, provoquant ainsi l'échec des récoltes et la diminution des naissances d'enfants. Ou bien la personne pouvait accepter des richesses en offrant un membre de sa famille dont les esprits réclameraient la vie. Ainsi, l'une des explications traditionnelles de la souffrance est qu'elle émane de la force cosmique, qui produit à la fois le bien et le mal, une force cosmique capable d'agir selon les circonstances, soit pour le bien-être, soit pour le malheur de l'homme. Cette vision s'oppose à l'idée gnostique selon laquelle le bien et le mal sont deux forces entièrement séparées, et montre que le principe du bien se rencontre avec le principe du bien.

Si une personne présente des caractéristiques physiques anormales ou se comporte d'une manière qui contraste de façon frappante avec les normes ou les coutumes de la société, elle peut facilement être qualifiée de sorcière. Ainsi, le vieux problème du mal dans le monde, qui est particulièrement aigu lorsqu'on croit à l'existence d'un être omnipotent et infiniment bon, a été en partie résolu en faisant porter la responsabilité d'une grande partie du mal et de la souffrance à des agents (sorcières, ancêtres et autres puissances mystiques) autres que Dieu. Ces agents sont pour la plupart des personnalités humaines, vivantes ou mortes.

Conclusion

Tout au long de cet article, j'ai examiné le problème de Dieu, de la mort et du mal. Mon argument principal a été que les ontologies africaines sont similaires aux catégories aristotéliciennes telles que la cause première et aux catégories chrétiennes plus tardives telles que la création *ex nihilo*, tout en conceptualisant l'expérience religieuse d'une manière différente. Ces concepts de Dieu, de la mort et du mal peuvent également favoriser notre compréhension interculturelle. L'univers entier est vu comme un système, un ensemble ordonné qui est plein de forces, qui viennent de Dieu. Face au mal et au bien, la réaction spontanée et la plus élevée d'un Africain est d'offrir des sacrifices au Dieu de nos ancêtres. J'ai fait référence à certaines données anthropologiques à partir desquelles nous pouvons déduire que les cultures africaines partagent certaines croyances théologiques et philosophiques de base, qui pourraient fonder une philosophie africaine de la religion. Nous réalisons également que la conception africaine de Dieu est beaucoup plus fluide que la conception chrétienne de Dieu. Par conséquent, ce que nous pourrions considérer comme des rituels est destiné à favoriser notre compréhension comme des actes d'apaisement, de guérison et d'éloignement du mal. La conception africaine est liée à cette force créatrice qui porte en elle la touche ambiguë du bien et du mal, de la vie et de la mort, etc. D'autres recherches sur ces sujets sont certainement nécessaires, car la pensée traditionnelle africaine est une partie importante d'une philosophie globale de la religion.

RECONNAISSANCE DU FINANCEMENT
Cette publication a été rendue possible grâce au soutien d'une subvention de la John Templeton Foundation et de la Global Philosophy of Religion Project de l'Université de Birmingham. Les opinions exprimées dans cette publication sont celles de l'auteur ou des auteurs et ne reflètent pas nécessairement les vues de ces organisations.

Reference Pertinente

1. AGADA, Ada. "Bewaji, Fayemi on God, Omnipotence and Evil," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion], pp41–56, 2022. Vol 11. No 1. Web.
2. APPIAH, Kwame. A. [In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture], 1992. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Paperback.
3. ASOUZU, Innocent. I. [Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology, Beyond World Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Imposition], 2007a. Lit Verlag: Zurich. Paperback.
4. -------. [Ikwa Ogwe: Essential Readings in Complementary Reflection (A Systematic Methodological Approach)], 2007b. Saesprint: Calabar. Paperback.
5. Ba, Cheikh Moctar. [Etude Comparative entre les Cosmogonies Greques et Africaines], 2007. L'Harmattan: Paris.
6. BALOGUN, Oladele. A. "The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil," [Lumina], pp1–20, 2009. Vol 20. No 2. Web.
7. BEWAJI, John. A. I. "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil," [African Studies Quarterly], pp1–17, 1998. Vol 2. No 1. Web.
8. CHIMAKONAM, Amara Esther. "Why the Problem of Evil Might not be a Problem after all in African Philosophy of Religion," [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion], pp27–40, 2022. Vol 11. No 1 Web.
9. --------. [Introducing African Science: Systematic and Philosophical Approach], 2012. Author House: Bloomington. Paperback.

10. DANQUAH, J.B. [The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion], 1968. Frank Cass & Co: London /Edinburgh. Paperback.
11. DIETERLEN, Germaine. [Essai sur la Religion Bambara], 1951. Presses Universitaires de France: Paris. Paperback.
12. EBOUSSI-BOULAGA, Fabien. ''Le Bantou problématique'' [Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir], pp3-40, 1968. Vol 66. No 2. Paris: Présence Africaine. Paperback.
13. FAYEMI, Ademola. K. "Philosophical Problem of Evil: Response to E.O. Oduwole," [Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy], pp1–15, 2012. Vol. 41, No. 1. Web.
14. GBADEGESIN, Segun. [African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities], 1991. Peter Lang: New York. Paperback.
15. GYEKYE, Kwame. [An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme. Rev. ed.], 1995. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA. Paperback.
16. IDOWU, E.B. [African Traditional Religion: A Definition], 1973. SCM Press: London. Paperback.
17. -------. [Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief], 1962. Longmans: London. Paperback.
18. IJIOMAH, Chris. [Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought], 2014. Jochrisam Publishers: Calabar. Paperback.
19. IMBO, Samuel. O. "p'Bitek's Critique of Western Scholarship on African Religion," [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp364-373, 2004. Blackwell Publishing Ltd: New York. E-Book.
20. JAHN, Janheinz. [Muntu:The New African Culture], 1961. Dusseldorf: Germany. Paperback.
21. KAGAME, Alexis. [La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être], 1956. Académie royale des Science coloniales : Brussels. Paperback.
22. -------. "L'Ethno-Philosophie de Bantu," [La Philosophie Contemporaine, Raymond KLIBANSKY, Ed.], pp589-612, 1971. La Nuova Italia: Florence. Paperback.
23. LUFULUABO, Francois-Marie. [La Notion Luba-Bantoue de l'Etre], Casterman: Tournai. Paperback.
24. MAGESA, Laurenti. [African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life], 1997. New York: Orbis Books. Paperback.
25. MASOLO, D. A. [African Philosophy in Search of Identity], 1994. Indiana University Press: Indianapolis. Paperback.
26. MBITI, J.S. [Concepts of God in Africa], 1970. SPCK: London. Paperback.
27. --------. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Heinemann: London. Paperback.

28. MENKITI, Ifeanyi. “Physical and Metaphysical Understanding: Nature, Agency, and Causation in African Traditional Thought,” [African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives Lee M. Brown, Ed.], pp107-135, 2004. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
29. MUDIMBE, Valentin-Yves. [The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge], 1988. Indiana University Press/Currey: Indianapolis. Paperback.
30. MULAGO, Vincent. [Un Visage Africain du Christianisme: L’union Vitale Bantu Face à l’unité Ecclésiale], 1965. Présence Africaine: Paris. Paperback.
31. NDAW, Alassane. [La pensée africaine : Recherche sur les fondements de la pensée négro-africaine], 1983. Dakar: NEA.
32. NKEMKIA, Martin, Nkafu. [African Vitalogy: A Step Forward in African Thinking], 1999. Nairobi: Paulines Publications.Paperback.
33. NKWI, Paul. [Traditional Government and Social Change in Kom], 1976. Fribourg University Press: Fribourg. Paperback.
34. OGUAH, Benjamin, E. "African and Western Philosophy: A Comparative Study,” [African Philosophy: An Introduction, Richard A. Wright, Ed.], pp281-295, 1984. University Press of America: New York .
35. OLADIPO, Olusegun. “Religion in African Culture: Some Conceptual Issues,” [A Companion to African Philosophy Kwasi WIREDU Ed.], pp355–363, 2004. Blackwell: Oxford. Ebook.
36. Konstan, David, "Epicurus," [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Edward ZALTA], N.P, 2018
37. RAMOSE, Mogobe, B. [African Philosophy through Ubuntu], 2002. Mont Books: Harare. Paperback.
38. SENGHOR, Leopold Sedar. “De la Negritude,” [Philosophie Africaine, I, Textes Choisis, A.J. SMET Ed.], pp17-28, 1975. Presses Universitaires de Zaire: Kinshasa. Paperback.
39. SOGOLO, Godwin. S. [Foundations of African Philosophy: A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought], 1993. Ibadan University Press: Ibadan. Paperback.
40. TEFFO, Lebiso. J., & Abraham P. J. ROUX. “Metaphysical Thinking in Africa,” [Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings, Peter H. COETZEE and Abraham P. J. ROUX, Eds.], pp134–48, 1998. International Thomson Publishing Southern Africa: Johannesburg. Paperback.
41. TEMPELS, Placide. [Bantu Philosophy], 1968. Presence African: Paris. Paperback.
42. WIREDU, Kwasi. “The Moral Foundations of an African Culture,” [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I. Kwasi WIREDU and Kwame GYEKYE Eds], pp193–206, 2010. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington, DC. E-Book.
43. WIREDU, Kwasi. “Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion,” [African Studies Quarterly], pp17–46, 1998. Vol 1. No 4.
44.

Onyenachiya: A New Perspective on Religion in African Philosophy of Religion

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.12s
Submitted 4 June 2022. Accepted 19 September 2022

Christiana IDIKA
Catholic University Mainz
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3664-5041
Email: christiana.idika@gmail.com

&

Maduka ENYIMBA
Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9043-2680
Email: enyimbamauka@gmail.com

Abstract
How does one understand the relationship between a person and their objects of belief in the philosophy of Religion? How does the object of belief impact individuals' lives, choices, decisions, and what they become in the future? The character of religion is binding, and the object of belief in a being – transcendent or immanent as the sole determinant of the fate and destiny of individuals leaves room for many questions that border on freedom and responsibility. By introducing *Onyenachiya* to the discussion of the phenomenon of religion from an African philosophical approach to religion, the authors argue that there is a certain threshold of self-evaluation and relationship between a person and their object of belief which is significantly cooperative and collaborative. Although *onyenachiya,* a concept that stems from an African epistemic context (Igbo), has no corresponding English translation, it is a contraction of two independent words, *onye* (person, giver, who) and *chi* (personal god, doppelgänger). The two are joined together by conjunction, *'na'* with the suffix '*ya'* at the end, emphasizing the chi's personal and unique nature. The authors argue that if chi is connected to a person's destiny, *onyenachiya* demonstrates an agent-centered destiny, which gives room for agency, accountability, and responsibility and gives a new account of religious tolerance.

Keywords: *onyenachiya*, transcendent-immanent, God/god, destiny/fate, personal/communal, agency, Africa, religious philosophy.

Introduction

This paper introduces *onyenachiya* to the discussion of the phenomenon of religion from an African philosophical approach to religion. *Onyenachiya* is a relational concept that expresses complementarity and collaboration. Religion though a global experience is also contextual. *Onyenachiya* originates from Igbo epistemic and existential space and is a contraction of two independent words, *onye* (person, giver, who) and *chi* (personal god, doppelgänger). The two are

joined together by conjunction, *'na'* with the suffix '*ya'* at the end, emphasizing the chi's personal and unique nature. The religious meaning of *chi* is contained in it and its role in the religious practices of the people to who the language Igbo belongs. African philosophy of religion suggests two things, the African philosophical approach to the idea of religion and the African philosophical approach to religion in Africa. But, unfortunately, famous African scholars such as Wiredu focus on the latter rather than the former.

Religion remains an elusive concept that has defied any definition, but its content is abrasive and can be very annoying. The dominant idea of religion is Eurocentric, and it is enveloped in paradoxes, ambiguities, chronic trajectories, bloody history, contemporary ambivalences, and continuities of controversies. Furthermore, being Eurocentric also means that dealing with the notion of religion from the African philosophical perspective might also run the risk of Eurocentrism. That means, how can an anthropo-existential notion such as *onyenachiya* be discussed in the light of religion, a concept that lacks an equivalent outside European cultural and intellectual space? (see MBITI 1969; WIREDU 2010). Mbiti doubts if any single word or paraphrase can translate the word religion in Africa.

Nevertheless, he went ahead to say that Africans are notoriously religious. What does this imply? The use of the attribute 'traditional religion' to qualify a set of experiences, practices, and cults in Africa in other to bring them under the same European category – religion – might as well justify the power relation between religions of the West and religions of Africa.

That being said, this does not signify that the African philosophy of religion is more of an African philosophical approach to religion and less of an African philosophical approach to African religion. On the contrary, the primary concern in this analysis is that a philosophical approach to African religions should bear a critical look at the general concerns of philosophical investigation into religion and religious issues that are Western, Asian, Indian, etc.

Furthermore, religion generates epistemological and logical problems, which has led to the deconstruction of the concept in European thought. This remark is essential if the new perspective on religion explored in this paper can be understood in its terms and logic. It also implies that, while dealing with a topic such as religion, it may be necessary to separate the meaning of the concept, its origin, and function from those expressions, experiences, practices, and beliefs to which the concept of religion has been used as an umbrella word to categorize. Additionally, some scholars in the study of religion associate it with both the reformation and enlightenment in Europe but fail to accommodate at the same time what it is that made non-theistic religions such as Buddhism and theistic religions such as Christianity belong to the same category – religion. In the present context, the authors are not interested in the definition or meaning of the concept of religion. Instead, it refers to those meta-existential expressions, experiences, practices, and beliefs that bind human beings, individuals, and groups to something transcendent or immanent, as the case may be.

In that line of thought, religion, one can argue, finds its root in the psycho-spiritual composition of the human person, and it intertwines simultaneously with the political and ethnic consciousness of individuals

and groups. So put, but in a complex narrative, religion today, as in the past, plays a significant role in people's identity, even in those who distance themselves from particular religious expressions. The problem becomes more amplified than diffused, more potent than weakened, in a world where the constitution of otherness is becoming more religiously shaped.

Additionally, the atmosphere of religion, religious practices and religious expression across the world, including in Africa, raises much concern over the extent of human responsibility for their lives, fate, and destinies. In other parts of the world, as well as Africa, a common denominator in religious belief is that the object of belief has control over the fate and destiny of the believer; Moreso, where the relationship between the object of belief and the believer encompasses power asymmetry. In religions in Africa, including Christianity and other parts of the world, most people blame external forces for being responsible for the good and the bad that happens to them. Christianity attributes it to grace and heavenly favor, other religions in Africa, Asia and India attribute good fortunes to the favors of the gods and misfortunes as karma or nemesis, respectively. The question is, to what extent is this valid? What is the role of the individual? Or is the individual's life driven about by the vagaries of deities, gods, and spirits?

The authors argue that in the face of the ambivalences and ambiguities associated with the notion and practice of religion and religious belief, *onyenachiya* interrogates the nature of religious belief in which an external force controls an individual, determining his destiny and fate. It argues that the phenomenology and psychology of faith in a God or gods illustrate individual-centeredness in religious belief rather than an organized belief in an absolute monotheist being that exercise total control over the outcome of one's life. The authors claim that *onyenachiya* resolves the dilemma and paradox that pervades human existence and struggles for survival, fate, and destiny. Destiny is seen not as a determined end but as a path to possible futures.

To demonstrate the above claims, the authors will show how the topic relates to the significant issues in philosophy, religion, and religious belief. This first section will take two conceptual approaches, namely, the morphological formation of the concept itself and the analysis of its epistemological content. The second section will be a revisit of the idea of destiny. Given the history of tolerance and religion, the third section will grapple with the relevance of this new perspective to studying religion for religious tolerance. Then we conclude with notes and remarks. The work is both explanatory and expository because it illuminates the theoretical ideas inherent in the concept of *onyenachiya*. Moreover, as a new perspective on the African philosophy of religion, it consists of an African philosophical investigation into religion – the nature of religious belief – and an African philosophical inquiry into the nature of belief in African religion.

Conceptual Framework

Morphological Formation

Morphology is a scientific term used to explain the components and parts of a thing or structure. For example, in linguistic typology, "morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed" (ARONOFF & FUDEMAN 2011, 2).

In this context, it is used to describe the parts and structure of the central concept in this paper, namely '*onyenachiya,'* which is its semantic properties. There are two stem words,' *onye'* and '*chi,'* the word '*na'* in between the stem words functions as conjunction and demonstrates a relationship and collaboration or cooperation. The term *'ya'* at the end of the word is a suffix and functions as a third-person pronoun within the linguistic context (Igbo language) where *'ya'* is used. The *'ya'* is a reflexive doubling of '*onye'* because it emphasizes *'onye'* in a reflexive manner. The interest in the concept is more of a philosophical concern than its linguistic meaning. It is more or less a methodological approach to analyzing the epistemological content of the idea inherent in the concept.

Epistemic Content

This section deals with the semantic goal of the concept referred to in this paper, which provides an existential perspective on religion and religious belief. The epistemic content of *onyenachiya* is not reducible to individual scientific use of the concept. Scholars often reduce the use of language in the conceptual development of philosophical ideas to particularism because of the epistemic community from which the concept itself originated. However, thought and words, ideas, and language are intertwined because words are used to express thought, and ideas are born through language. Furthermore, language and words are culturally shaped. Therefore, the epistemic content of *onyenachiya* can apply globally while its linguistic content is born in a cultural context.

Onye

'Onye' is a demonstrative pronoun (OGBUJA 2006, 32). However, it simultaneously indicates anonymity. Hence, in some ways, it is likened to the Greek *persona*, which, at first, means masked, or something unknown and later extended to social position or roles. Finally, in Roman jurisprudence, it is used as equivalent to a human agent. In African thought (Igbo), unlike in Western philosophy, *onye* as person and a subject cannot be discussed in isolation of a simultaneous understanding of human being. In this category, *onye* refers to person, and, in contrast to the loose Western version of the idea of person or *persona*. O*nye* understood as person implies a human being. The concept of "person" in the Western thought system has been recently extended to machines and computers. The definition of a person relies heavily on rationality and consciousness, which unavoidably excludes some categories of the human species, with dire consequences. In what follows, this paper will look closely at the idea of *onye* in its multiple conceptional dimension.

Onye as Person

In the African (Igbo) linguistic field, the meaning assigned to *onye* will depend on the hyphenation and stress. Consequently, *onye̩* and *onyé* have different meanings. In the second *onye*, the vowel *e* goes up, thereby emphasizing *e*. The upward stress gives the sense that Chika J. B. G. Okpalike (2020) articulated in his discussion on *'onye.'* According to him, *onye* can be transliterated as 'giver' generated from its verb '*inye'* to give, following the root word *'nye.'* But he went ahead to discuss *onye* as person, though without emphasizing this relevant distinction. Whereas his semantic analysis cannot be doubted, *onye* as person resides in the positioning of the stress. Hence, *onye̩* as person, is the expression with the emphasis on the vowel *e*, pointing downward, which is the concern of this section of the article. Henceforth wherever *onye* is used, it refers to the *onye* with stress on the vowel *e* pointing downwards (that is, *onyè*).

Onye is not used for trees, stones, spirits, or animals. It can only apply in the context of a human being (OGBUJA 2006, 23, 37). A person is someone, and someone refers to a human being, so to say that someone is a person makes the term a predicate (SPAEMANN 2006). *Onye,* understood as person, is used in singular terms. Augustine of Hippo (400 – 415AD) argued that person represents something singular and individual. *Onye* as person, refers necessarily to a human being. In that line of thought, *'onye'* expresses 'mmadụ' as an individual in the universe of other entities (OKPALIKE 2020, 92). Another significant observation before delving into onye as person in African philosophy is that person can be descriptive and normative. For instance, *onye no ebe a ahu* (who is there)? *I bu onye* (who are you)? Whereas *onye* as 'who' will be discussed later, the answers to the two question samples narrow down the descriptive and normative use of the concept of person. It is either the answer starts to describe the physical features or attributes, or it gives personal information, but none of these can be normatively evaluated. But, some answers may require evaluative words, like in the second question about who a person is. Consequently, addressing someone as a person or non-person in the African thought system does not nullify that a person is human. This idea will be extended in the next section on *onye* as who.

The general idea of person in African philosophy narrows personhood to a normatively, ontologically, and communally centered notion (MENKITI 1984, 2006; IROEGBU, 2000; GYEKYE 1992; WIREDU 1992, 2009; CHIMAKONAM AND OGBONNA 2021; ODIMEGWU 2008; MOLEFE 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; TSHIVHASE 2013; OYOWE 2018; MATOLINO 2014; IKUENOBE 2015 2016; KAPHAGAWANI 2004).

Wiredu (1996, 2009), following the line of thought of Menkiti (1984), portrayed the concept of person as both ontological and normative, with linguistic nuances. The ontological dimension of the idea of person in African thought is related to the previous claim that persons are human beings, which calls to question the nature of human beings (GYEKYE 1995; KAPHAGWANI 2004; IKUENOBE 2016). The normative concept of person is evaluative of the individual's ethical or moral life, or a life of virtues (MENKITI 1984; GYEKYE 1992; WIREDU 1992). Hence, individuals become persons in the normative sense through a constant effort towards a life of ethical conduct (GYEKYE 1997;

MOLEFE 2020, 196). Consequently, the illustrative question, *'onye,'* with its attending correlates, demonstrates that the term person is normative and descriptive. An aspect that the question opens up for discussion is the notion of 'who.'

Onye as 'who'

The question *I bu onye?* – who are you? is asking for more than a name or identification. The variations of contexts in which *onye* could be used as a 'who question' points also to anonymity. *Onye no ebe ahu*? – (who is there), could be anybody, thus, 'who' is not definite in that sense, it is not determined, until who is there is answered. It could be a cat or a dog generating noise in a house that will create room for a question of that sort. The task in this section is an analysis of *onye* in the context of who, but a who that refers to a human being. *I bu onye* raises the concerns of personal as well social identity. Therefore, in the context of this article, what does *I bu onye* demand as an answer? Hannah Arendt (1998) provided us with a raw material to tackle this, and, according to her, the 'who' can only be known through one's biography (ARENDT 1998, 186). This biography is not about being human or not, it is about answering the question of what you are (IDIKA 2018). Subsequently, 'we can trickle down the who someone is as the story, where the person is the hero. But the story is also about relationships and values that shaped the person's life, actions, and choices that made the person who she is/was. It is about the roles and functions the person exercised, (IDIKA 2021, 92).

Furthermore, according to Charles Taylor (1994), the 'who' a person is, concerns how people understand themselves and what is most important to them. It includes their values and convictions. Hence, he argued that the answer to the question of 'who I am' is beyond giving names or age. It is about what is crucial to people. For him, the 'who' that one is, is where one stands in the scheme of things, a standpoint that provides one with the moral frame and horizon of action in different contexts (TAYLOR 2001, 27). This falls apart from the standard argument in the African philosophy of personhood, which says personhood is earned from or bestowed by the community. Invariably, depending on the context, when A asks B 'who are you,' it does not always follow that B will answer in the way Taylor propounds. Instead, it might mean a question of B's place, status, or position in the community as one who earned or is bestowed with personhood. For our interest here, these landscapes of the signification of the *onye* can be developed elsewhere.

Put together, *Onye* is the *who* one is; the one defined by commitments, one able to take a standpoint in matters of value, including matters concerning one's life, dream, future, etc. *Onye* is a person not simply because of belongingness to the specie of humans but also because of being a member of the human community.

In the articulation of *onyenachiya* within African philosophy of religion, it is imperative to note that in the constitution of *onye* as elaborated in the preceding section, African scholars, philosophers, theologians, social-anthropologist, and ethnologists, among others, have never failed to identify a spiritual, metaphysical, ontological or religious dimension of a person. Therefore,

these argued more or less that there are material and immaterial constituting elements of a person. Additionally, the communal dimension of *onye* is not reducible to social and ethical implications of belongingness. It includes a spiritual dimension since existence is circular in the African worldview, and the world beyond is connected in significant ways with the physical world. It is in the sense that the theme of *onyenachiya* occupies the space between those worlds in that moment of connectedness. This paper will now go ahead to highlight the concept of *chi* in other to introduce *onyenachiya* as a new perspective in the African philosophy of religion.

Chi

The word *chi* has multiple semantic and metaphysical modifications in historical terms, especially with the onset of Christianity, in that social, cultural, and epistemic context (Igbo) where the concept is used. A lot has been said and written about the idea of *chi* and its nuances. This section will present a brief overview and critique of the concept of *'chi'* where necessary. The *chi* with the small letter 'c' will be preferred. The *chi* with the big letter 'C' is a development within the study of Christian and African theologies, and as such, it has been subjected to changes in the course of history. The presupposed changes in history imply the impact of those changes on its definition, meaning, and usage. However, it is unclear to what extent these changes affect the epistemic goals of the term 'chi'. In the course of the present discussion, the extent to which the changes affected its epistemic property will be exposed.

As some African theologians and religious scholars have argued, chi is more of an existential than an ontological concept. The idea itself has been mainly dealt with under the category of religiosity. It has been chiefly studied under African traditional religion since it is presupposed to be religious. However, African Christian theologians have transposed it in their inculturation theology for a long time. Furthermore, the term *chi* is anthropological, and because of the multiple dimension of the human personality and the binding character of *chi* to a person, *chi* as a concept has a multi-layered interpretation.

There is no doubt that the concept of *chi* seems to be elusive or, at most, ambiguous. Ikenga Metuh (1981) observed that the term defies all etymology. It is a point to be emphasized that the distinction made between the *chi* with a big 'C' and the one with a small 'c' is a result of the struggle of some African authors to counteract the European ignorance that the African mind is incapable of conceiving or perceiving the European god (WIREDU 2010, 34, HEGEL 1956). Consequently, they began juxtaposing the idea of 'Chi' (with the big letter 'C') with the concept of Chi Ukwu, supreme being, etc. (ILLOGU 1965; OKAFOR 1992). The idea presented is not a denial or contestation of the existence of God or a supreme being. Instead, it purports that the context of differentiation between 'c' and 'C' leads to a wrong direction, which in some salient ways is a reproduction of religious imperialism, in which *chi* is a sub-set entity to the composited *Chi-Ukwu,* which assumes a single universal deity (CHUKWUKERE 1983, 522).

Accordingly, Chukwukere (1983, 523) writes:

> In the immense but widely scattered literature on chi, confusion still lingers over the exact "meaning" and full religious and sociological significance of the word. The main reason behind this unhappy situation can be traced back to the apparently strong legacy left by early Christian missionary scholars and amateur pioneer ethnographers (e.g., Basden 1921; Talbot 1926; Thomas 1913), from which "modern" students of Igbo religion and epistemology ought to break away.

The concept of *chi* has a religious background because it is often associated with gods, spirits, and other metaphysical entities. Although, as a phenomenal concept, i.e. it has an existential component, *chi* is not reducible to the physical and functional properties of the idea. It is a constituent element of religious belief. The pervading question, one may argue, is to what extent *chi* as sub-scripts of gods, spirits, or metaphysical entities impacts the individuals' lives, choices, decisions, and future as against the autonomy or freedom of the individual to choose, decide or act otherwise and the responsibility that arises from them. Overview and interrogations of some of the definitions and meanings attributed to *chi* will be laid out for the purpose pursued here.

There is this understanding of *chi* as a personal god (OKERE 1971; ARINZE 1978; EKENNIA 2003; MADU 1995; ACHEBE 1986). Okere and Arinze (1978) added that *chi* is the author of destiny, or *akaraka*. A different section will focus on the idea of destiny. However, it is important to note that destiny cannot be conceived as a determined end to which an individual is condemned. This is because destiny is thought of as synonymous with *akaraka*, and *akaraka* is understood as talents, natural capacities, and skills. If true, then the individual has a level of responsibility to choose different ends by enhancing their natural abilities, talents, and capabilities. Destiny, being the same with *akaraka*, does not imply fate or determinism. Individuality and unrepeatability are distinctive attributes of *chi* in most literature on the concept of *chi* (OJIKE 1985, EKENNIA 2003). OKAFOR C. (2004) said it manifests a 'phenomenology of pairing,' and Achebe called *chi* one's other identity in the spirit world, a *doppelgänger.*

The concept of *chi* contrast with Christian monotheism because every individual has a *chi*, and no two *chi* are the same. It is a convolution to transpose this idea of *chi* to a universal absolute *chi* with a big letter 'C'. The concept of *chi* derives from its intrinsic individuality. Because no two persons have the same *chi,* a belief in it, which is also intentional, is characterized in this context by its relational content to the one who expresses such a belief. The concept of *chi* illustrates religiosity, which must be seen from the individual's relation to religious experience, or object of religious belief rather than a collective relation to any of those, except in its plurality, each person relating to its *chi* in a plural context of different *chis*. A look at Jewish religion might seem like an objection to the argument in favour of individual relation to the object of religious belief or

expression, especially if one acknowledges chi as an unavoidable concept in understanding religion. It is common knowledge that the object of the Jewish religion is referred to as the chi of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Jews as a people, or a collective only share or participate in that chi that is identified as the chi of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moreover, Isaac and Jacob are the son and grandson of Abraham respectively. Onyenachiya exposes this personal relationship to the object of belief.

Onyenachiya

There is no corresponding translation of onyenachiya into English. Any translation will lose the epistemic goal of the concept. However, a transliteration suggests 'a person and their god.' Borrowing from the previous enunciation of *chi* as individualized and personalized, it means that *onyenachiya* re-emphasized this personal relationship to one's god. Other nuances are *munachim* (transliteration – I and my god) and *ginachigi* (you and your god). Both transliterations distort the meaning because *chi* is much more than the idea of god but that is the closest meaning in English. It is noteworthy that the word on the left side of the conjunction *na* is repeated in a reflexive form on the right side by using a reflexive personal pronoun *chim, chiya, chigi*. Thus, *onyenachiya* illustrates a possessive emphasis, as seen in the earlier nuances. The semantic analysis reveals a self-reflexive possessive usage. The semantic difference between the first person and a second person singular possessive expression is the neutrality of the third – *onye*. *Onye* is neutral in the same way that it points to a person, no matter who, and it is anonymous, meaning it can apply to anybody, anywhere, in any context. It demonstrates third-person phenomenal belief, an individual's beliefs in themselves, or experience of internal dimensional unity, expressed as a continuous relationship rather than a dependent determined hierarchical existential experience.

Onyenachiya accentuates the etymological understanding of religion as a relationship that is binding. Wiredu defined religion (2010, 34) as the entertainment of a "certain ontological and/or cosmological beliefs about the nature of the world and human destiny and to have an attitude of trust, dependency, or unconditional reverence toward that which is taken to be the determiner of that destiny, whether it be an intelligent being or an aspect of reality."

Given this definition, a pertinent question arises, namely, whether the relationship found in *onyenachiya* is a dependency? There might be an element of dependency; however, in so far as *chi*, as explored here, is mainly seen in the light of capacity, ability, talent, etc., which, in a greater measure, underscore the fate and destiny of the individual in most cases. In the nuances, *chi* is personalized. It reveals a threshold of self-evaluation and relationship that is neither hierarchical nor overly dependent but collaborative.

Onyenachiya is not simply a word or a concept emerging from nowhere to add to a long list of emerging concepts. *Onyenachiya* has an epistemological content because it obliges space for epistemic possibilities. It also projects an internal constitution and external dimensional functionality of a person or an individual in relation to the individual's choices and actions. This again points to the individual nature of religion. It is important to, at this point, note that the term

'individual' should be separated from the word 'private'. Hence, to say that religion is personal is not the same as thing as the privatization of religion. The expressions *chim, chigi, and chiya* can only be used within a social-cultural life.

Onyenachiya resolves the paradox and ambivalence in understanding *chi* as something internal and external to the agent, which controls the individual. For instance, we find the paradox in chapters four and fourteen of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In chapter four, he writes, "man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*", and in fourteen, he writes again, "when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also." The paradox consists of the tension between 'not being able to rise above one's chi and compelling the *chi* to do one's bidding.' The paradox in these two instances of the relationship between one and their *chi* re-opens the question: to what extent is *chi* a determinant of what a person becomes? In the first instance, no one can rise above their *chi*. The tension is doused if *chi* is understood as an inner driving force in a person, as a person's capacity, talent, gifts, and natural skill, which, if explored and put into use, offer the person possibilities in the future. Subsequently, not being able to rise above one's *chi* will mean that one's becoming depends on those abilities, strengths, and even weaknesses. In the context of the deficiency, the second expression by Achebe keys in, i.e., if one says yes, the *chi* says yes. Life is a struggle, and individuals are consistently confronted with situations where they want to give up or situations that frighten them, thus dousing their motivations. The person's determination to overcome the obstacles stopping the person is the same as saying yes to the *chi.*

Furthermore, it attunes to the traditional thesis in the epistemology of the mind that an individual's first-person beliefs in a phenomenal state are infallible. Although the epistemic expression that alludes to one's relation to itself cannot be false, the epistemic status expressed is best known to the subject – *onye* and the content of *onye's* belief in *chi*ya. Imagine a situation where an agent i. e. a human person acts, and an interlocutor, not being aware of the reason or justification for the action in the first place, addresses the one who acted with the following expression – *ginachigi ma*. Here *ginachigi* as demonstrated earlier is second-person-singular variant of *onyenachiya*. The *ma* at the end illustrates an epistemic state. Put together, only a person is capable of the complete reflective act whereby the nature and source of the act itself are present in the consciousness of the one knowing. (REICHMANN 1985, 205). Thus, *onyenachiya* deals with the content of belief as epistemological rather than metaphysical. Here, *onyenachiya* as a phenomenal belief in oneself as having epistemic status, forms an epistemic nexus between cognition and the external world. The personalization of *chi* in *chim, chigi,* and *chiya* is distinctive, affirmative, and demonstrates a personal belief and agent-centered destiny.

The Question of Destiny Revisited

The meaning and nature of destiny constitute one of the perennial problems confronting the study of metaphysics, African philosophy, and philosophy of religion. One often comes across the notion in the philosophy of religion when dealing with the issue of man's relationship with his maker, or, in African

philosophy, when one deals with the question of the place of the ancestors and their relationship with the living. It also confronts one in metaphysics when issues of free will and determinism are entertained. In this part of the article, we shall revisit the question of destiny from the perspective of the African philosophy of religion. In doing this, we shall respond to three important questions that arise in any reflection on the nature of destiny. The first question is what is destiny? The second question is, what is the relationship between an individual's destiny and his /her *chi*? The third question is, who chooses the content of an individual's destiny, the individual or his *chi*?

The concept of destiny lacks a univocal connotation. Its meaning varies based on the perspective. Etymologically believed to have been drawn from the Latin word *destinare,* the notion of destiny refers to that which has been firmly established. It is understood as constituting the power that controls events that happens to a person. Destiny carries the idea that a person might have been pre-determined in an irreversible manner by a superior power (OPATA 1998, 146). Metuh (1985, 24) has described destiny as that which is formed at the moment of an individual's conception, where god assigns an aspect of himself as *chi* to the individual, which goes before the individual and chooses the type of package s/he is to be born with. Chibuike O. Ukeh (2007, 224) refers to it as that which brings a person all his good from the Supreme Being, wards off all evils from its bearer, and guides and protects them at all times. For Achebe (1975), destiny can be equated with chi in the sense that a person cannot rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*.

For this study and from the perspective of Igbo cosmology and traditional religion, destiny is the totality of who an individual is and what he/she is thrown into the universe to accomplish or actualize. It constitutes an individual's purpose in life. It is that which makes an individual who he/she is. Metaphysically, the idea of destiny is often expressed in the discussion of the nature of free will and determinism. In this case, the following questions constitute questions bordering on the nature of destiny: is man free or determined in his actions, decisions, achievements, or lack thereof? Does a person's success or failure emanate from his/her free will, and is an individual free or determined generally in his life's journey? One might notice that the question of individual autonomy is implied in the above questions on the nature of destiny. There are no easy answers to these questions.

It is essential at this point to underline the relationship between destiny and an individual's *chi* to begin responding to the above questions. But first, one needs to understand what *chi* signifies. In the Igbo worldview, there are two senses of the word *chi*; the first is '*Chi*', which indicates the Igbo metaphysical notion of 'the Supreme God', otherwise known as the creator of the universe. The second sense of *'chi'* signifies 'an individual's personal god or divine, angelic guard' (ACHEBE 1986, 17; ISICHEI 1976, 25; ARINZE 1978, 88-89; UKEH 2007, 224; ONYIBOR 2019, 88).

There is an intrinsic connection between the idea of 'chi' and 'destiny' in Igbo-African cosmology and religious belief. *'chi'* represents a person's guardian/personal god, which determines the success or failure of a person's life. Destiny is the purpose or goal of a person in life, which he/she is to fulfil as they sojourn on earth. Destiny represents an individual's predesigned attitudes and accomplishments in life. Destiny is closely related to the idea of *'chi'* because it is the custodian of an individual's destiny or fortune. In this sense, the Igbo believe that a person's *chi* determines the destiny with which a person comes into the world.

Many scholars have expressed the above conception of the interrelatedness of destiny and *'chi'* in an individual's life. For instance, Madu (1995, 33) is of the opinion that the notion of '*chi'* signifies a personal god-divine or spirit that animates human beings. Similarly, Ekennia refers to *chi* as a unique life force each person possesses (2003, 27). This implies that no individual can have the same chi or destiny as another, thus showing each individual's peculiarity. Scholars such as Okere (1971, 142), Ojike (1955, 183), and Achebe (1986, 16; 1975, 94-95), among others, have suggested in their different essays the relationship between destiny and *chi* in Igbo cosmology. These scholars believe that chi is directly involved in an individual's choice of destiny or the type of destiny package with which an individual comes into the world. This raises the question of who chooses the content of an individual's destiny, the individual or his *chi*? There are three responses to this fundamental question of destiny. First, the content of a person's destiny is a collaborative decision of the individual and his *chi* (UKEH 2007, 224). Second, it is the individual's *chi* that chooses the destiny package of an individual and lets him/her out into the world to fulfil it (METUH, 1999, 50; OKERE 1971, 142; OJIKE 1995, 183; ACHEBE 1986, 16; 1975, 94-95). Third, the individual chooses the content of his/her destiny, and his/her *chi* conforms to the choice. This is encapsulated in the Igbo-African belief that *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe* (when an individual chooses/accepts, his/her chi chooses/accepts with him/her). This is another way of saying *onyenachiya* (each individual and his/her god).

It means that destiny and *chi* work hand in hand to determine who an individual is and the task or purpose an individual is assigned to accomplish in life. The question of who chooses the content of destiny, upon which the individual's self-actualization depends, is at once answered when one understands that aspect of *'chi',* which connotes the divine-guardian angel of an individual who helps the individual achieve success or failure. Following this, whether one pitch his/her tent with those who argue that the content of a person's destiny is a collaborative decision of both the individual and his *chi* (UKEH 2007, 224) or those who say that it is the individual that chooses the content of his destiny (GBADEGESIN 1983, 175), or even with those who hold that it is the individual's *chi* that chooses the destiny package of an individual and lets them out into the world to fulfil it (METUH 1999, 50); the point being made here is that *chi* is involved in the formation and expression of an individual's destiny. Hence, an understanding of destiny as *chi* or *chi* as an individual's destiny is by no means erroneous. On the contrary, it is an individual that first chooses a package of

destiny, and then his/her *chi* aligns with it. This ensures individual freedom in matters of destiny and the idea of *onyenachiya*.

Implication *Onyenachiya* for Religious Tolerance

Societies in the 21st century are becoming more diverse and complex because of the multiple factors associated with globalization and the global mobility of people. In these increasingly heterogeneous societies, people have different cultural and religious commitments, allegiances, traditions, beliefs; different languages, and ways of expression. Indeed, this diversity can enrich the quality of social life. However, the social and global tension arising from it calls for attention. Within this frame of social experiences, the questions of toleration, recognition, co-existence, secularisation, and the opposing rise of religious voices in the public space arise.

The idea of toleration/tolerance, recognition, co-existence and secularization seems for many to promote the idea of a world for everybody. However, is a world for everybody realizable or an illusion? The second appears to be the case if one looks at everyday life's ideal and painful realities. The evidence speaks for itself. The evidence includes regional wars and conflicts, intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts, terrorism, nuclear competition, and biological and chemical weapons production that make almost every social and political space a potential risk zone. We cannot also overlook the impact of wars and conflict: The mass of refugees, migrants, and displaced persons, the victims of wars and rape, discrimination, destruction of human, material, and natural resources; the loss of faith in humanity; the over-emphasis on individualism or extreme prevalence of the hold on communalism; the transformation of societies from homogeneous to heterogenous societies, and religious fundamentalism; with other issues like prejudice, stereotypes, complexes of inferiority and superiority, negative patriotism and the dialectics of "US vs. THEM." In the face of all these realities, speaking of a world for everybody is a mirage, an illusion. Our world seems divided into the rich and the poor, the developed and underdeveloped/developing, east and west, and north and south. It is divided into different cultures, religions; different interests, and identity groups. It also seems to be the case that wars and conflicts of the present era are divided along the lines of culture/religion, even when such wars are caused by inequality, political interests, and different conceptions and perceptions of injustice. Why is that the case? What is the place of religion in the wars going on since the last century? The transition from political insurgency, civil disobedience, and ethnic conflict to religious wars raises much concern. It is either that religion has become a tool to be manipulated because of its ambivalence and rootedness in the psycho-spiritual composition of human beings, or religion is intertwined with the political and ethnic consciousness of the individuals. Whichever way one looks at it, it suggests that religion today, as in the past, plays a significant role in people's identity, even in those who distance themselves from particular religious expressions. The problem becomes more complex in a religiously pluralized world – where religious identity is becoming more amplified than diffused, more potent than weakened; in a world where the constitution of otherness is becoming more

religiously 'shaped' than ever. In such a world, how is religious tolerance possible? How is co-existence possible? In what ways can one say that a world for every religion and culture is possible?

The root of religious intolerance in Europe is to be traced to religious controversies and struggles, which resulted from the Reformation and which was the root of religious division in Europe in the 16th and 17th century. There was a need to mediate and "cope with fierce religious difference[,] which were a continuing threat to civil order and personal security" (HORTON & MENDUS 1985, 1 – 2). Therefore, raising the topic of religious tolerance in view of the landscape of global events associated with religious differences is neither a denial that these social realities are not only specific to this era nor a denial that efforts have not been made to deal with such realities to make toleration and co-existence possible. Besides the attempt to secularize the state, religious intolerance in 17th century Britain was the reason for Locke's *'Letter on Religious Toleration*. Arendt's (1963, 1970) experience as a Jew in Germany provoked her ideas on toleration. Mill's *Concept of Liberty in the era of Tyranny of public opinion in Victorian Britain* inspired his proposal on toleration (Mendus, 1988). Therefore, the question of the possibility of toleration and co-existence is historical, and the effort to contain the consequences of religious differences has been a concern for humanity for a long while. However, despite these efforts, intolerance perseveres even more than ever experienced in history. Rather than solve the problems for which they are intended, new forms of intolerance continue to emerge (MENDUS 1988, 1), demanding from us a decision and an alternative. To think of any option would also include asking why those ideas did little in promoting tolerance. The problem is with the conceptualization of tolerance, within which either tolerance is synonymous with secularization or refers to policy. Secularization is mostly associated with state neutrality towards religion and the idea of non-interference. Nevertheless, non-interference and neutrality of the state towards religion seem hard to sustain without promoting some other thing that is opposed to religion itself, in the present case – secularization.

However, it does not mean that religious tolerance was absent in other cultures and parts of the world. It also represents Europe's exclusive claim to many other aspects of human achievement, morals, values, and principles. Religious tolerance is not exclusively European.

Moreover, the conditions that gave birth to religious tolerance and its existence in other parts of the world without being a child of circumstance draw a significant difference between the understanding of tolerance in Europe and other parts of the world. Religious differences exist not only in Europe but also in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Adherents lived side by side with others; they interacted and co-existed without the type of religious violence that gave birth to works on religious tolerance in Europe. It is this difference that offers hope that a new account of tolerance that looks at its meaning and reality across the world has the potential to address the question of religious tolerance today.

In the words of Chris Beneke, "toleration came as a great blessing to early modern Europe and America. It brought an end to decades of religious slaughter. It helped bring peace to Germany, prosperity to the Netherlands, and migrants to New York." (BENEKE & GRENDA 2011, 114).

The effort to secularize the state has resulted in rising religious voices in the public sphere, what an author called global rebellion (JUERGENSMEYER, 2008) or Apocalyptic Armageddon (MORTENSEN, 2003). There is a desperate need to develop a pragmatic blueprint that would offer a plausible principle for interreligious and intercultural dialogue with practical implications for defusing the tension and confusion inhibiting social cooperation and tolerance. *Onyenachiya* bespeaks tolerance and provides an interreligious paradigm that will accommodate collective identities without undermining the particularities of groups, uniqueness, and inalienable rights of individuals. It inaugurates a new meaning to religious tolerance because *onyenachiya* has a social value. It emphasizes a firm commitment to respecting others' beliefs as a value concept. It signifies participation, responsibility, and goodwill for social cohesion. Unlike the idea of toleration and its practice that seems to be one-sided, *onyenachiya* calls for mutual respect. *Onyenachiya* is a religious concept, and as a result, it overcomes those challenges to secularization or neutrality of the state with which societies are confronted. Hence it gives hope that co-existence is possible, and we require such a moral paradigm that guarantees the realisability of a world for everybody. *Onyenachiya,* as a new perspective on the African philosophy of religion, offers a recommendable approach where no religion or culture claims supremacy over others. It possesses the power of mediation and carries the principle of a recognitive attitude.

Conclusion

The argument in African philosophy that personhood is something to be achieved is connected to the idea chi, which plays a role in the person's becoming. However, the paper argued that its role is neither super-imposed nor independent of the individual. Instead, if *chi* is a destiny shaper, the individual exercises a relationship that accentuates collaboration and complementarity. The personalization of *onyenachiya* and its other nuances, *munachim,* and *ginachigi,* expose the personal nature of religious belief. This is not only within the social, cultural, and religious context from where the concept of *onyenachiya* originates but also because *onye* is anonymous and always stands for someone in place and time. Further, because *chi* has a landscape of meaning that incorporates metaphysical and existential elements, it provides a neutral context for religious dialogue.

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the Global Philosophy of Religion Project at the University of Birmingham. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

Relevant Literature

1. ACHEBE, C. "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" [African Philosophy: An Anthology. E. EZE Ed.], pp94-100, 1975. Blackwell Publishers: Massachusetts. Web.
2. _____. [The World of the Ogbanje], 1986. Fourth Dimension Publishers: Enugu. Web.
3. _____. [Things Fall Apart], 1958. Heinemann: London. Paperback.
4. ARENDT, H. [Eichmann in Jerusalem], 1963. London. Paperback.
5. _____. [On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing, in Men in Dark Times], 1970. HarperCollins – Mariner: Boston. Paperback.
6. _____. [Human Condition], 1998. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. Paperback.
7. ARINZE, C. [Sacrifice in Ibo Religion], 1978. Ibadan University Press: Ibadan. Paperback.
8. AUGUSTINE of Hippo. [On the Trinity Books], 2013. NET: LIMOVIA. Paperback.
9. ARONOFF, M. and FUDEMAN, K. [What is Morphology: Fundamentals of Linguistics], 2011. Willey-Blackwell: London. 2nd Edition. Paperback.
10. BENEKE, C. and GRENDA, C. [The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America], 2011. Pennsylvania Press: Pennsylvania. Paperback.
11. CHIMAKONAM, O. J. and OGBONNAYA, L. "Ontology of Personhood," [African Metaphysics, Epistemology and a New Logic: A Decolonial Approach to Philosophy, Jonathan CHIMAKONAM and Lucky OGBONNAYA L. Eds], pp109 – 131, 2021. Palgrave Macmillian: Cham. Web.

12. CHUKWUKERE, I. "Chi in Igbo Religion and Thought: The God in Every Man," [Anthropos], pp519-534, 1983. Vol 78. No 3-4. Web.
13. EKENNIA, J. [Bio-Medical Ethics], 2003. Barloz Publishers: Owerri. Paperback.
14. GBADEGESIN, Olusegun. [Destiny, Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: A Yoruba Perspective], 1983. Towa Institute for Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Toronto. Web.
15. HEGEL, G. W. F. [The Philosophy of History, Trans. J. H. Clarke], 1956. Dover: New York. Web.
16. GYEKYE, K. [Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience], 1997. Oxford University Press: New York. Paperback.
17. ---------. "Person and Community in African Thought." [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, 1. K. WIREDU and K. GYEKYE, Eds], pp101–122. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington DC. Paperback.
18. ---------. [An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme], 1995. Temple University Press: Philadelphia.
19. IDIKA, C. [Towards an Internormative Hermeneutics for Social Justice: Principles of Justice and Recognition in John Rawls and Axel Honneth], 2018. Peter Lang: Berlin. Paperback.
20. IKUENOBE, P. "Relational Autonomy, Personhood, and African Traditions," [Philosophy East & West], pp1005–1029. 2015. Vol 65. No 4. Web.
21. _____. "Good and Beautiful: A Moral-Aesthetic View of Personhood in African Communal Traditions." [Essays in Philosophy], pp125–163, 2016. Vol 17. No 1. Web.
22. ILOGU, E. "Christianity and Ibo Traditional Religion" [The International Review of Missions], pp335-342, 1965. Vol 54. Web.
23. IROEGBU, P. [Kpim of Personality; Treatise on the Human Person (Respect, Solidarity, Liberty)], 2000. Eustel Publications Nigeria: Nekede Owerri. Paperback.
24. ISICHEI, E. [A History of the Igbo People], 1976. Macmillian: London. Paperback.
25. JUERGENMEYER, M. [Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda], 2008. University Press Group: UK. Paperback.
26. KAPHAGAWANI, D. "African Conceptions of a Person: A Critical Survey," [Companion to African Philosophy. K. Wiredu. Ed], pp 332–442, 2004. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford. Paperback.
27. MADU, R. O. [Problem of Meaning in Philosophy and Theology: The Hermeneutic Solution], 1995. Bigard Memorial Seminary: Enugu. Paperback.
28. MATOLINO, B. [Personhood in African Philosophy], 2014. Cluster Publications: Pietermaritzburg. Web.
29. MBITI, J. [African Religions and Philosophy], 1969. Heinemann: London. Paperback.

30. MENDUS, S. [Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives], 1988. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
31. MENKITI, I. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," [African Philosophy: An Introduction. Richard WRIGHT. Ed], pp171–181, 1984. Lanham: University Press of America. Paperback.
32. ---------. "On the Normative Conception of a Person," [A Companion to African Philosophy, Kwai WIREDU, Ed], pp324 – 331, 2006. Blackwell: Oxford. Paperback.
33. METUH, I. [African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: Studies in Igbo Religion], 1985. Pastorial Institute Bodija: Ibadan. Paperback.
34. --------. [God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria], 1981. Fourth Dimension: Enugu.
35. MOLEFE, M. "Personhood and a Meaningful Life in African Philosophy" [South African Journal of Philosophy], pp194–207, 2020. Vol 39. No 2. Web,
36. ---------. "Personhood and Rights in an African Tradition" [Politikon], pp 217–231, 2018. Vol 45. No 2. Web.
37. ---------. [An African Philosophy of Personhood, Morality, and Politics], 2019a. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. Web.
38. ---------. "Personhood and Partialism in African Philosophy" [African Studies], pp309–323, 2019b. Vol 78. No 3. Web.
39. MORTENSEN, V. [Theology and Religions: A Dialogue], 2003. Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co: Michigan. Paperback.
40. OGBUJA, C. [The Idea of Personhood: A Study in Igbo (African) Philosophical Anthropology], 2006. Snaap Press Ltd: Enugu. Web.
41. ODIMEGWU, I. [Integrative Personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical Anthropology], 2008. Transaction Publishers: London. Paperback.
42 OJIKE, M. [My Africa], 1955. Macmillian: London. Paperback.
43 OKAFOR, F. U. [Igbo Philosophy of Law], 1992. Fourth Dimension Pub. Co. Ltd: Enugu. Paperback.
44 OKAFOR, C. "Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishments in Things Fall Apart," [Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, E. EMENYONU Ed], 2004. African World Press: New Jersey. Paperback.
45 OKERE, T. [Can there be an African Philosophy?: A Hermeneutical Study with a Special Reference to Igbo Culture. Ph.D. Dissertation], 1971. Louvain: Belgium. Web.
46 OKORO, E. "Chi Symbolism in Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Hermeneutic Understanding," [Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies], 2010. Vol 5. No 1. Web.
47 OKPALIKE, C. J. B. "Onweonye: Introducing the Concept of Self Personhood in Igbo Ontology," [International Journal of Philosophy], pp95-104, 2020. Vol 8. No 4. Web.
48 ONYIBOR, Marcel. I. "The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology," [Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy], pp84-100, 2019. Vol 11. No 1. Web.
49 OPATA, D. U. [Essays on Igbo Worldview], 1998. AP Express Publishers: Enugu. Paperback.

50 OYOWE, T. "Personhood and Strong Normative Constraints," [Philosophy East & West], pp783–801, 2018. Vol 68. No 3. Web.
51 REICHMANN B. J. [Philosophy of the Human Person], 1985. Loyola Press: Chicago. Web.
52 SPAEMANN, R. [Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'], 2006. Oxford University Press: Oxford. Paperback.
53 TAYLOR, C. "The Politics of Recognition," [Multiculturalism: Expanded, A. GUTMANN Ed.], pp25-74, 1994. Princeton University Press: Princeton. Paperback.
54 --------. "Multiculturalism and Political Identity," [Ethnicities], pp122–128, 2001. Vol 1. No 1. Web.
55 TSHIVHASE, M. "Personhood: Social Approval or a Unique Identity?," [Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy], pp119–140, 2013. Vol 25. Web.
56 UKEH, C. O. [Spirit between Man and God: An Igbo-African Christian Appreciation], 2007. Iko-Verlag: Frankfurt. Paperback.
57 WIREDU, K. "African Religions from a Philosophical Point of View," [A Companion to Philosophy of Religion, Second Edition, C. TALIAFERRO, P. DRAPER and P. QUINN Eds.], 2010. Blackwell Publishing Ltd: London. Paperback.
58 -------. "Moral Foundations of an African Culture," [Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies 1, K. WIREDU and K. GYEKYE Eds], pp192–204, 1992. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington DC. Paperback.
59 -------. "An Oral Philosophy of Personhood: Comments on Philosophy and Orality" [Research in African Literatures], pp8–18, 2009. Vol 40. No 1. Web.

Review of [Development and Modernity in Africa: An Intercultural Perspective], by Joseph C A Agbakoba
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i4.13s
Submitted Dec 1, 2022. **Accepted Dec 30, 2022**

Rudiger Koppe Veralge, Koln, 2019, 405pp
ISBN: **978-3-89645-633-5**

Reviewed by J Chidozie Chukwuokolo
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki
Email: chukwuokolo.chidozie@ebsu.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6670-1040

Introduction

African Philosophy as a discipline has matured with much literature already published in the field. Unlike Western philosophy that arose from awe and 'wonderment', African philosophy originated as a reactionary movement aimed at resolving the identitarian challenges hurled on Africans as 'pre-logical' entities and, *ipso facto* debased bunch of people. JO Chimakonam has described this experience as a subset of wonder called *onuma,* which translates to 'frustration' (2014, IEP online). According to Chimakonam, it was frustration with colonialism, racialism and legacies of slavery that jolted some Africans to systematic African philosophy. Unfortunately, also, some of the earliest African philosophers suffered from what is generally seen as Eurocentric mis-education that left many indignantly righteous in being complicit in denying themselves the ability to think logically and philosophically. For some scholars in the West, it was very natural to accept the capacity to philosophize for themselves. But to justify their humiliation of Africans as sub-humans, some scholars in the West used ignoble clichés. For example, some of those scholars like Lucien Levy-Bruhl (2015) used the qualifier "pre-logical" to describe Africans.

The pain of these clichés has led some African philosophers, especially in the early and middle periods, to dwell much in confronting this identitarian challenge as against developmentalism. The book under review focuses on the challenge of developmentalism. One of those stances taken by African philosophers in confronting the preceding challenge is intercultural philosophy. This book under review is one of such attempts at using interculturality in order to confront modernism for African development. Interculturality entails "taking the philosophic and cultural considerations of others very seriously with comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity …" (SWEET 2014, 2), but this is not so for Africa. Agbakoba argues that prior conceptions of interculturality do not capture African perspectives or interests while engaging in intercultural philosophical discussion. His reason may be due to coloniality, the reinvention of philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries left the African with global philosophy as against African philosophy. The curriculum of philosophy in Africa introduces indigenous Africans to philosophy by introducing the Africans to other philosophies. This led to the heightening of the identitarian challenge that birthed what is known today as African philosophy after the Great Debate on African philosophy (see NWALA, 1992).

With the end of the Great Debate, there became a new era of the re-articulation, re-envisioning and reconstruction of African philosophy from the global philosophical resources. According to Agbakoba (2019,10), several orientations became rife for this. The first group toed the afro -centric line of re-inventing the classical nativity by positing the preservation of African pristine indigenous knowledge base. Doing otherwise for this group means the erosion of the essence and integrity of the African philosophical knowledge system. Curiously, the Dutch philosopher Win van Binsbergen represents this group with all the commitments that led him into taking initiation and becoming a *sangoma* (diviner) in order to preserve the knowledge base.

A second group with vested interest in post-colonialism and its identitarian concerns recommends the dethronement of coloniality conceived as the cultural hegemonic domination that succeeded colonialism. This is what Kwame Nkrumah (1965) sees as neo-colonialism or the last stage of imperialism. Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob's article epitomizes this view. (see OLUWAGBEMI-JACOB in SWEET (ed) 2014, 7107-7120)

Another broad orientation is Afro-constructivism which recognizes the African as a cultural and intellectual hybrid who can only survive by the fusion of deepening their epistemic experiences, namely the global and African philosophical resources. Agbakoba summarizes this position in J C Chukwuokolo's view thus:

The emphasis here is on synthesis, synthesizing ideas out of diverse cultures and in so doing transcending or subsuming the feeder ideas….Jeremiah Chukwuokolo one of the young African scholars who have taken up this orientation describes it in an interesting Hegelian way: he sees pre-colonial African as the thesis, colonization and the West's adventure in Africa as the anti-thesis; and intercultural philosophy as the pursuit of a synthesis of the cultures of Africa and the West. (AGBAKOBA 2019, 11)

However, the fourth orientation embodies the possibility of the African who has the global and indigenous philosophic knowledge base to engage in philosophy without taking recourse to African philosophical ideas. This is a minimalist and inconsequential view where the philosopher has been subsumed in the global philosophical resource.

At this juncture, Agbakoba's drive for this work is to examine why intercultural philosophy in Africa took these four possibilities. To this effect, he examines the historical and social context of the cumulative of African experience vis-à-vis the means of generation, preservation and transmission of knowledge. He compares the African indigenous method of knowledge with Christian Europe and avers that epistemic censorship was the strongest heritage of Judeo-Christianity where Catholicism exerted the most profound cultural influence on Europe.

From the lessons on the African epistemic experience that mostly toed the intuitively-revelatory orientation, which the author sees as impeding the developmental trajectory of Africa, he proposes agential reactivity. This "is the capacity of an agent… to build and maintain the social immunity that is necessary for the cultural and developmental self-determination of such an agent; as well as the related cultural firewalls and firewalling processes; and, indications of advocacy and adequacy and inadequacy regarding these notions" (AGBAKOBA 2019, 49).

This work interrogates 'the why' of the apparent false developmental consciousness seen in Africa. This is seen in the fierce pursuit of the identitarian challenge in African philosophy as against the developmental orientations. The author interrogates the notion of justice in Africa's developmental societal perspectives. He surmises that unless Africa rethinks its notion of justice, its developmental demands will be a far cry. He draws this conclusion from the Singaporean model of social relations, locally and internationally. Consequently, the notion of African justice must be re-thought to improve the nature and condition of social justice in internal, inter-communal, and international settings. The essence of this is to become more open than being in the closed system of the nativists who eschew patriotism that accommodates a wider range of cultural diversity and progressivism.

With the above conceptualizations of the aims of this work which could be summarized in creating a more progressive approach for the catapulting of Africa from a developing to a developed society, the author sets out to achieve his aim in seven chapters.

The text and its contents

In chapter one, the author examines the notion of development holistically. He begins by discussing the nature of development, delineates the difference between development in animate and inanimate things, and subsequently sees integrative development as pervading the sphere of humans. He relates human development to self-realization- understandable in the actualization of the potential for thoughts and actions. The major concern he raises is whether the notion of development describable in self realization (especially in Western philosophical resources) can pass the criterion of particularity or universality. The author characterizes development in Universalist and organicist terms. There in, the modernization conception of development as the peripheral countries trying to imitate the core countries as the only model of development is seen as largely responsible for the failure of most development plans of the Third world countries. This is due mainly to the fact that there was an attempt at trying to universalize development without setting an equal social justice base. Rather the relationship was based on predatory orientations where the core countries exploit the peripheral ones. This also brings to bear the epistemic challenges of technology transfer as resulting from the mis-education of universalism and organicism vis-à-vis development. Agbakoba, however, disagrees with the notion that to develop, one must "appropriate" technology. He instead advocates for the generation of technology.

In chapter two, he asserts that true development is engendered within the confines of mutual non-negation of extant freedom. He discusses in detail the role of epistemology in the generation of ideologies, which are the fundamentals of development. The essence of this chapter is seen in the resolution of how the autonomous mind, beliefs, and values, especially reasonability and history, particularly in respect of development, enhance the development of any society and how it should help in African development. He interrogates this by stating how the "autonomous mind generates, deepens and spreads reasonability through beliefs, values, institutions etc by subordinating, transforming and generating other values based on consistency-beneficence, and causal processes by which values determine the transformation and development of societies" (AGBAKOBA 2019, 113).

In chapter three, the author's main drive is to dilate on the relationship between agency and circumstances, how the autonomous mind through ideology composes agency and in-depth evaluation of some of the specific issues concerning African agency in the historical and developmental environment. He does this by taking a historical contestation of Africa's reasonablistic and insensibilistic orientations.

In chapter four, the author does in-depth examination of the philosophical evolution of African thoughts and institutions using the Igbo and making generalizations about Africa with respect to demonstrable features shared by most African nations. He summed up by pointing out the distinction between the pre-colonial connotation of umunna characterized by what he calls umunna-obodo, and the hybridized modernist, universalistic connotation characterized by umunna-uwa, and how the latter has been influenced by global philosophical resources. Accordingly, this sort of "distinction should be considered by engaging similar and related philosophical ideas in African cultural context of Ujamaa or Ubuntu" (AGBAKOBA 2019, 211).

In chapter five, Agbakoba discusses the role colonialism played in the distortion of agential integrity of the African. He surmised that the imposition of colonial rule distorted the traditional power sources, means of legitimate exercises of power, communal control of abuse of power and processes of selecting credible leaders. There is no doubt that colonialism in the 19th century compromised the traditional reasonabilistic institution, but Africans can never be absorbed from active collaboration in this process. Development in Africa should therefore rest on the advancement of reasonability and purposivity in given contexts, including countering the revolution- converse of the anti-colonial and nationalistic struggle. Only after these have been countered can positive freedoms and development take deeper root and thrive.

In chapter six, African responses to the development crisis embody how African intellectuals responded to their developmental challenges. He focuses fundamentally on "the structures and reluctance of Africans taking appropriate levels of personal responsibility for the state of agential reactivity, malfunctioning cultural firewalls, agential integrity and concomitants as well as a reluctance to locate the roots of all these in the nature of the insensibilistic stands in traditional philosophy, culture and institutions and their evolution in the face of global challenges" (AGBAKOBA 2019, 265).

In the final chapter, Agbakoba discusses the role of justice in the development of any society following the intercultural perspective, which directs a synthesis between African and Western philosophical resources. He argues that positive justice has elements of complementary justice which can also be called developmentarian justice. Accordingly, this is the sort of justice that enhances the ideal of relations that should bring the best out of people, that is, give them their best chance of development (AGBAKOBA 2019, 368). This sort of justice is additive, as against the punitive and reparatory ones that further angst amongst diverse peoples, especially those who colonized or exploited others in the past.

Conclusion

In this work, Agbakoba has jettisoned the identitarian challenge of African philosophy and follows intercultural philosophy with a bent on Afro-constructivism. From the above, African philosophy must engage modernism in a way that must incorporate its best in deep cultural values with modern realities that face it. This is more so when compared with the Asian tigers who suffered the same fate as Africa, yet some of them, like Singapore, have migrated from Third world to First world economies.

Agbakoba is honest in challenging Africans with the personal notion of taking responsibility for our woes instead of always laying our blame and leadership failures on the colonial misadventure. He x-rays the sordid features inherent in the African state that helped undermine its development courtesy of negative colonial and Western influence. He understands the reality of such bad influence but argues that with agential integrity, Africa will surpass such mines laid by the forces of imperialism.

Reading through this work with its massive philosophical categories and concepts, one cannot but see it as *sui generis* from the other commentary works. This is where we locate its distinguishing feature from other works of this nature.

The author is convinced that development is anthropocentric by the drive for freedom and choices in the disposal of the human agents who drive it. He brings this out in the concepts of reasonability, consistency-beneficence, purposivity, insensibility that pervades the entire work. He argues that weak values ensconce African development challenges, and the above can strengthen it in order to blossom.

In its philosophical complex, the Nri example that he presents as a classic example showcases irrationalism in its climax and therefore is an instance of epistemic torpedoing of development in Africa. He uses the Nri complex to establish the enthronement of materialism that at least heaps part of the blame of the slave trade on Africans rather than its entirety on the West. He also uses the Nri philosophical complex to state how Africa mismanaged its epistemic concentration on intuitionism. This is contrary to the European catholic Judeo-Christian heritage of epistemic censorship that helped Europe to advance technologically more than Africa.

Agbakoba also draws from the Nri philosophical complex, the nze ethics, which should have placed a great premium on integrity and rectitude, thereby placing beneficence and reasonability on global concern for Africa. Agbakoba has seen the challenges inherent in these values and advocates hybridity in cultural exchange with his original and innovative application of positive justice on cross-cultural bases.

However, Agbakoba's critique of the Nri philosophical-cultural complex derivable mostly from myths as if it actually happened may present a case of one whose Eurocentric (mis)education has over-affected his ideological orientation of moving from mythical to real order. His critique of the *dibias* (diviners) as too enclosed is another instance of reactive analysis of one who judges a closed system that he does not know enough about. The dibia as the accumulation of knowledge that could make or mar should not be placed on an open systemic consideration as that could be akin to giving a nuclear reactor to one who is absolutely ignorant of how nuclear energy works. It is of serious concern for future researchers to study the epistemic experience of *dibias* in order to use the knowledge therein in to reconstruct Africa's developmental experience. Despite a few weaknesses, Agbakoba's book is a mainstream work in Afro-constructivism that should be studied and incorporated into Africa's development.

Relevant Literature

1. AGBAKOBA, Joseph C. A [Development and Modernity in Africa: An Intercultural Philosophical Perspective] 2019. Rudiger Kopper Verlag: Koln Paperback

2. CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan O. "History of African Philosophy". 2014. **https://iep.utm.edu/history-of-african-philosophy/#:~:text=The%20early%20period%20of%20African,ethnophilosophy%20and%20ideological%2Fnationalist%20schools**. Retreived, Jan 7, 2023. Web

3. LEVY-BRUHL, Lucien [How Natives Think] 2015. Reprint of 1923 edition Martino Fine Books: Chapel Hill. Paperback
4. NKRUMAH, Kwame. [Neo-colonialism: The Last stage of Imperialism], 1965. International Publishers: New York. Web
5. NWALA, Uzodinma, T. [Critical Review of t*he Great Debate on African Philosophy 1970-1990*)], 1992. Hillys Press: Enugu. Paperback
6. OLU-JACOB, Dorothy. "Interculturality in the Context of Africa's Colonial and Decolonization Experience", [What is Intercultural Philosophy?, William Sweet Ed.], PP 7107-7120, 2014. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington DC. Web
7. SWEET, William, "Introduction," [What is Intercultural Philosophy?, William Sweet Ed.], P 2 2014. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: Washington DC. Web