

Engaging Emmanuel Ofuasia's *An Exploration of the Parallels between African and Process Metaphysics: Introducing the Metaphysics of Force and Becoming*

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Abstract

In this paper, I engage Emmanuel Ofuasia's *An Exploration of the Parallels between African and Process Metaphysics: Introducing the Metaphysics of Force and Becoming*, a twelve-chapter comparative study arguing that African metaphysics of force and Whiteheadian process metaphysics of becoming are structurally equivalent, and that classical bivalent logic distorted both traditions. The paper credits Ofuasia with a historically rich account spanning Danquah, Tempels, and Attoe to Whitehead and Bergson, and with foregrounding logic as a neglected variable in comparative African-Western philosophy. I commend his critique of Tempels's onto-theological conflation and his productive reading of Berkeley and Whitehead. However, I raise substantive objections against some of his metaphysical and logical claims, and I argue that this approach is conceptually flawed, resting on an equivocation between dialectical and chemical synthesis. Further, I contend that his strong convergence thesis risks flattening genuine differences between the African and Process traditions. Also, I show that the treatment of relativistic time and applied ethics remains underdeveloped. Despite these weaknesses, the book is an audacious and original contribution and recommend it for scholars of African philosophy, process thought, and philosophical logic.

Keywords: African Metaphysics, Ezumezu, Process Metaphysics, Logic, Bivalence.

Introduction

Emmanuel Ofuasia's [An Exploration of the Parallels between African and Process Metaphysics: Introducing the Metaphysics of Force and Becoming] is a significant and ambitious contribution to the growing body of literature in African philosophy and comparative metaphysics. The book arrives at a pivotal moment, just as the global philosophical conversation is finally beginning to extend the geography of reason to accommodate the marginalized perspectives and pay serious attention to their intellectual depth demands. Ofuasia brings to this volume over a decade of scholarly engagement with process metaphysics and African ontology. The book is a substantially revised outgrowth of his doctoral thesis defended at Lagos State University in 2023.

The three central aims of this book are clearly stated in the introduction as thus: to provide a critical historical account of African metaphysics from John Boakye Danquah (1944) and Placide Tempels (1945) to Aribiah David Attoe (2022); to demonstrate that the unwarranted application of classical bivalent logic has systematically distorted both African metaphysics and Western process philosophy, and to establish that the metaphysics of force (characteristic of African ontology) and the metaphysics of becoming (characteristic of process-relational philosophy) are, in several theoretically significant respects, structurally and conceptually equivalent. As Ofuasia states, the core thesis is that African metaphysics and process metaphysics exhibit convergences on multiple levels, such that any discourse on the one necessarily entails reference to the other, and vice versa (2026). The book unfolds across twelve chapters divided into two parts. The first part traces the history of distortion of force and becoming in both African and Western contexts, while the second part explores their convergence and its philosophical implications for contemporary debates in environmentalism, the philosophy of time, and the concept of meaningfulness. In this paper, I first present the central arguments of the book. I then raise several pertinent objections to the author's approach and claims. I conclude by arguing that, despite these flaws, the ambitious project of the book is commendable, as it makes a valuable contribution to the body of literature in African metaphysics.

Central Arguments

Ofuasia begins by engaging in a conversation with Martin Heidegger's onto-theological critique of traditional Western metaphysics, the thesis that the Western philosophical tradition has substituted Being (Sein) with God, thereby failing to provide any authentic analysis of Being qua Being. The author's critical perspective is that Heidegger's declaration of the end of metaphysics was issued precisely at a historical moment when academic philosophy was sprouting across post-colonial African universities. Ofuasia rightly argues that the extension of Heidegger's critique to African metaphysics would be unjustified unless it could be shown that African metaphysics suffers from the same onto-theological conflation. This becomes the organizing problematic of the book.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Ofuasia reconstructs the discourse on Being within the canon of classical Western metaphysics, drawing on Heidegger's interpretation of the tradition from Aristotle to Nietzsche. He then turns to African metaphysical thought and contends that the seminal contributions of Danquah, Tempels, Emmanuel Edeh, and Attoe inadvertently reproduce the onto-theological fallacy by presupposing a substance-oriented metaphysical approach and the principles of classical logic. The critique of Tempels is especially trenchant. Tempels had declared that for the Bantou, "Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force" (TEMPELS 1959, 35, as cited in 37). Ofuasia does not dispute the accuracy of this observation about African vitalism. What he contests is Tempels's understanding of this force through an Aristotelian-Thomistic hierarchy in which God occupies the apex as the supreme force, a trajectory that Ofuasia contends replicates the onto-theological conflation of Being with God and thereby renders African metaphysics vulnerable to Heidegger's critique. Compounding this, Ofuasia notes that Tempels himself disclosed that the intended audience of his

work was "missionaries, magistrates, administrators" (TEMPELS 1959, 20, as cited in 37), a colonial warrant that corrupted the interpretive framework from the outset.

Chapters 4 and 5 trace process-relational thought in the history of Western philosophy, from Heraclitus through Plato, Berkeley, Hegel, Teilhard de Chardin, and Bergson and diagnose the limitations of classical bivalent logic as a framework for ontologies of force and becoming. Whitehead's disquiet about the traditional laws of thought is marshalled as evidence: Ofuasia cites Whitehead's warning that "in formal logic, a contradiction is the signal of a defeat: but in the evolution of real knowledge, it marks the first step in progress towards a victory" (WHITEHEAD 1948, 186, as cited in 93). Equally telling is Whitehead's further observation:

We are told by logicians that a proposition must be either true or false, and that there is no middle term. But in practice, we may know that a proposition expresses an important truth, but that it is subject to limitations and qualifications which at present remain undiscovered. (Whitehead 1948, 182, as cited in 93)

These Whiteheadian locutions serve Ofuasia's argument well: they demonstrate that even the founding architect of academic process philosophy recognized the inadequacy of classical logic, without managing to propose a formal alternative. The proposed solution, developed in Chapters 5 and 6, is Ezumezu logic, developed by Jonathan Chimakonam of the Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP). Chimakonam describes Ezumezu as "a prototype African logic that mediates thought, theory and method in the African place but also extendable and applicable in places, non-African too" (Chimakonam 2019, as cited in 109). The system is trivalent, operating with three truth-values: truth (ezu), falsity (izu), and a complemented third value (ezumezu proper). Tersely, it replaces the classical law of excluded middle with a law of inclusive middle (onana-etiti), which, as Chimakonam explains, allows that "A could be both true and false or if a thing is equal to itself, it can be unequal to or different from itself depending on context" (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 140, as cited in 112).

In Chapter 6, Ofuasia introduces what he calls his "Neo-Ezumezu" logical variant, presented as a revision of Chimakonam's Ezumezu system on three counts. The framing of this move, however, could be seen as ethically problematic before its substance is even examined. One could argue that to call one's intervention a 'revision' of another scholar's named theory, rather than a critique is to claim authorship over what is not one's own. Perhaps, what Ofuasia should have done is to criticize the theory and then construct his own under a new name, not to rebrand the original under a 'neo' prefix while retaining its architecture. In doing this, his approach reads less as a scholarly contribution to the theory and more as an appropriation of Chimakonam's theory, which is ethically problematic. This framing problem shadows everything that follows in the chapter.

The first and most substantive of the three revisions claims that synthesis, rejected as “anathema” in the original Ezumezu, is in fact necessary at the level of simple entities. Ofuasia’s illustration is drawn from chemistry: “when two molecules of hydrogen and one molecule of oxygen enter a relationship, the result is conjunction or synthesis called water, an essential part of life on this planet” (2026, 118). This analogy, however, rests on a basic conflation of dialectical synthesis with scientific synthesis, two categorically different processes that the argument treats as equivalent. Once a thesis and antithesis combine into a dialectical synthesis, the original terms cannot be recovered from it in their prior form; even where a synthesis later transitions into a new thesis, what results is not the same thesis that entered the process but a genuinely new one. Chemical synthesis tends to behave otherwise: water can always be decomposed back into its constituent hydrogen and oxygen. By invoking scientific synthesis as though it illuminated dialectical synthesis, the argument commits the fallacies of equivocation, four terms, and red herring simultaneously, and this conflation forms the very foundation on which the “Neo-Ezumezu” critique and proposal are built. The deeper failure beneath this error is a misreading of Ezumezu itself, which is properly understood as non-classical but non-deviant, that is, a system in which there is a principled transition from two-valued to three-valued logic, with the classical values fully recoverable from the non-classical ones. A critique that misunderstands this foundational feature cannot, by definition, correctly diagnose what it claims to revise.

The second revision collapses the distinction between Chimakonam’s two modes of third-value logic, notional solidarity and creative struggle, into a single concept of “event dialectics” (120), depicted in Figure 6.2 of the book. This move is conceptually self-undermining: if notional solidarity and creative struggle perform the same function, as the collapse implies, there is no explanatory work left for ‘event dialectics’ to do, and no principled reason to introduce it. The objection is compounded by a further misunderstanding: notional solidarity, creative struggle, and benoke point are not, properly speaking, modes within Ezumezu, the actual modes of the system are the complementary and contextual modes (see CHIMAKONAM 2019, 99). Creative struggle and benoke point are heuristic devices outside the hardcore of the theory (see CHIMAKONAM 2021, 7 & 30). In misinterpreting mere heuristics as hardcore, Ofuasia leaves the theory itself untouched. A related lapse appears in Ofuasia’s promise to formulate three laws, of which only one materializes, expressed as: $X = X^1, X^2 \dots X^n$. This formulation is not a law, nor new. It is a well-known sequence called an ordered n-tuple, or vector, in mathematical terms, a long-established technique for representing an ordered set with potentially infinite elements. A law, properly understood, is a general statement describing a pattern that invariably holds; a notational device for ordering elements does not meet this criterion. This conflation again signals a troubling unfamiliarity with the very technical vocabulary being deployed.

The subsequent analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 applies this logical variant, respectively, to major African metaphysical systems and to Whiteheadian process philosophy. However, because this extension reproduces the ethical and conceptual deficiencies identified in Chapter 6, Chapters 6 through 8, taken together, represent the most problematic segment of the book. Consequently, the “Neo-Ezumezu” project appears compromised along three distinct dimensions: (1) an ethically contestable appropriation and revision of another scholar’s logical framework; (2) a fundamental equivocation between dialectical synthesis and scientific synthesis; and (3) a persistent lack of precision in the exposition of both the internal structure of Ezumezu and key technical notions, such as that of a law.

In Chapter 9, Ofuasia advanced the convergence thesis and identifies four key points of parallel between African and process ontologies: the treatment of Being, the conception of reality as an interconnected and indivisible web, the inadequacy of classical logic, and panpsychism or panexperientialism. The book acknowledges two divergences, differences in the motivations for each tradition’s ontological theorising, and the use of different neologisms for Being, but characterises these as differences of degree rather than of kind. Chapter 10 extends the argument to the philosophy of time, engaging the spatialization of time in special relativity physics, while Chapter 11 offers two applied illustrations: environmental philosophy and patient-centred meaningfulness.

The most significant contribution of this book lies in its insistence that the logic question has been neglected in comparative metaphysics. Ofuasia is correct that most engagements between African and Western philosophy proceed on the tacit assumption that classical logic is a universal and neutral arbitrator of philosophical claims. The point is given clear formulation by Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya, whom Ofuasia quotes approvingly: “there can only be one logic for any system because it prescribes the laws governing correct thinking that yields understanding in such a system” (CHIMAKONAM & OGBONNAYA 2021, 4, as cited in 101). By foregrounding this as a substantive philosophical choice with ontological consequences, Ofuasia opens a genuinely productive line of inquiry. The argument that African ontological systems, with their emphasis on force, complementarity, and the inseparability of apparently opposed aspects of reality cannot be adequately rendered in a bivalent logical framework is philosophically compelling.

The historical breadth of the work is commendable. Ofuasia surveys African metaphysicians from Danquah and Tempels through Kagame, Iroegbu, Ramose, Asouzu, Ijiomah, Oluwole, Chimakonam, and Ogbonnaya, offering assessments that are both fair and critical. His identification of the onto-theological flaw as a recurring methodological error, rooted in the uncritical adoption of Western educational perspective represents an original and searching diagnosis. The critique of John Mbiti, whom Okot p'Bitek labelled “Africa's chief intellectual smuggler” (P'BITEK 1972, 29, as cited in 44) for his tendency to “Hellenize three hundred African deities” through the imposition of substance-ontology and monotheism on African traditional religions (44), is most focused passages of the book.

Equally notable is Ofuasia's conversation with Whitehead. His reading of Process and Reality is careful and well-informed, and his reconstruction of Berkeley's epistemology as anticipating Whiteheadian process metaphysics is philosophically viable. The parallel between Berkeley's God as the ceaseless perceiver and Whitehead's panentheistic God as an immanent actual entity is illuminated through Whitehead's formulation: "It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God" (WHITEHEAD 1978, 343, as cited in 70). The chapter on Bergson is similarly productive in tracing the intellectual genealogy of the vitalist tradition, and Ofuasia's claim that Bergson's *élan vital* approximates the African philosophical emphasis on force as "an animating principle through which matter and mind express a duality rather than dualism" (79) is a productive comparative observation. Despite its many virtues, the book invites a number of critical observations, some of which are substantive.

The central claim of the book, that the metaphysics of force and the metaphysics of becoming are in substance identical, risks a form of philosophical assimilationism that Ofuasia himself is at pains to disavow. He concedes in Chapter 9 that there are divergences between the two traditions, particularly in their motivations and terminologies, but he consistently downplays these as "differences of degree and not of kind" (xii). Yet the divergences appear more substantive than this framing allows. Whitehead's elaborate categorical scheme, actual entities, eternal objects, prehension, creativity, the reformed subjectivist principle, and so forth is a highly systematic technical edifice constructed through rigorous engagement with mathematics, physics, and the history of Western philosophy. African metaphysical systems, as Ofuasia himself presents them, typically draw their authority from cultural practices, indigenous languages, and oral traditions, and their articulation proceeds through what the author calls ethnophilosophy "that fountain from which authentic African philosophy receives its intellectual boost" (98). To argue that both traditions are doing essentially the same metaphysical work, merely using different vocabularies, risks flattening precisely those differences that give each tradition its distinctive philosophical character. Ofuasia should perhaps have engaged more directly with scholars such as Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, whose absence he acknowledges in the preface, who have raised precisely these concerns about cross-traditional identification.

Ofuasia's employment of Ezumezu logic as the alternative system of logic, compatible with both African and process metaphysics raises several questions the book does not fully address. The claim that the three truth-values of Ezumezu logic offer a logically compatible framework for African ontology remains at a programmatic level. Campbell Shittu Momoh's challenge that "authentic African logic in artificial language is yet to be developed" and that "African professional Philosophers have this gauntlet to pick up" (MOMOH 2000, 187, as cited in 101) is acknowledged as the motivation for Chimakonam's logical system, but the book does not sufficiently demonstrate that Ezumezu has fulfilled this challenge in a technically rigorous sense. While diagrams of "creative struggle" and "event dialectics" are provided (Figures 6.1 and 6.2), these are not

accompanied by the kind of formal proof or worked philosophical examples that would allow a logician to assess whether the proposed system is coherent, non-degenerate, and genuinely capable of performing the philosophical work assigned to it. Furthermore, Ofuasia does not compare Ezumazu against the logical alternatives that process philosophers themselves have explored, paraconsistent logics, relevance logics, temporal logics, a comparison that would have sharpened the contribution considerably.

The application of Heidegger's onto-theological critique to African metaphysicians such as Danquah, Tempels, Edeh, and Attoe is one of the most provocative moves in this book. Ofuasia contends that works on African metaphysics that conflate Being with God are "particularly guilty of this 'crime'" (2), and that the onto-theological error in African metaphysics stems from the failure to recover from the logic and substance-based metaphysics of Western doctoral training. However, this application is not without tension. Heidegger's critique was directed at a specific tradition of substance-based Western metaphysics in which the conflation of *Being and God* arose organically from the metaphysical assumptions of Greek philosophy. The question of whether the same critique applies with equal force to African scholars who were working to articulate the indigenous categories of their own cultures, even if doing so under colonial educational formation deserves more careful consideration. Ofuasia tends to treat the onto-theological error as a purely logical failing, but it was for Heidegger also a historical and existential one, tied to the unique trajectory of Western metaphysics. The transplantation of this critique to an entirely different cultural and historical context requires justification that the book does not fully provide.

Chapter 10, devoted to the spatialization of time in special relativity and its implications for African and process conceptions of time, represents an admirable but ultimately underdeveloped ambition. The chapter aims to show that pantemporalism, the view that time is real and universal is recoverable from both African and process thought in the face of special relativity's block universe implications. However, the technical treatment is insufficient. The well-known arguments of McTaggart, Smart, and Huw Price concerning the unreality or merely structural character of temporal passage are not engaged with enough depth, and the response to the challenge of relativistic simultaneity is not technically adequate to philosophers of physics. The book is on stronger ground when it draws on process philosophers' temporal commitments on Whitehead's fallibilism about physical science and Hartshorne's temporalistic theism, but even here the argument remains suggestive rather than conclusive.

Chapter 11 offers two applied illustrations: environmental philosophy and patient-centred meaningfulness, which tends to be underexplored relative to the theoretical ambitions of the preceding chapters. The treatment of environmental ethics through the metaphysics of force and becoming is suggestive but does not move beyond a programmatic sketch. Given the richness of the existing literature in African environmental ethics (drawing on concepts such as ubuntu and ecological communitarianism) and the process philosophy of ecology, these sections could have profited from deeper engagement with that literature. The chapter on meaningfulness in patient-centred care raises interesting questions about the metaphysical grounding of meaning but appears somewhat detached from the book's main argumentative arc.

The book is less persuasive in its strong convergence thesis, the claim that African and process metaphysics hold the same view about reality, and in its technical treatment of Ezumezu logic as the definitive alternative to classical bivalence. The warning Whitehead himself voiced at the close of *Process and Reality* is apposite here: “the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement, is an exhibition of folly” (WHITEHEAD 1978, xiv, as cited in 94). These are not fatal weaknesses; they are, rather, the productive sites of further philosophical debate that the work itself will engender. Scholars working at the intersection of African philosophy, process metaphysics, and philosophical logic will find essential reading here, and the book makes a strong case for the relevance of African thought systems to the global philosophical conversation.

Conclusion

Ofuasia's [An Exploration of the Parallels between African and Process Metaphysics] is, by any scholarly standard, a rigorous and original contribution to comparative philosophy. The book is particularly compelling in its diagnosis of the logical and conceptual distortions that have historically afflicted African metaphysical discourse, as well as in its reconstruction of the intellectual genealogies underpinning both process philosophy and African ontological reflection. The author convincingly demonstrates that sustained engagement between these two traditions is philosophically fruitful and that the question of logic, long marginalized in comparative philosophical inquiry, can no longer be responsibly deferred. The insistence that African philosophy must articulate its own background logical framework, if it is to avoid being, as Chimakonam cautions, vulnerable to accusations of “transliteration/copycatism and imitation/commentating” (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 17, as cited in 110), is both philosophically defensible and theoretically well-motivated. Ofuasia stands out in a bold new generation of African philosophers who reject the idea that their work must be provincial or second-hand. This book, audacious, wide-ranging, and at times daringly overreaching, makes a striking and important contribution to that intellectual revolution.

This book is a must-read for scholars and graduate students drawn to African philosophy, process-relational thought, philosophical logic, the philosophy of time, or intercultural philosophy. Its rich, extended engagement with leading thinkers is a resource in its own right, while its sharp historical overview of African metaphysics from Danquah to contemporary debates offers an indispensable entry point for anyone stepping into this field.

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