

Rethinking African Metaphysics from an Igala Perspective

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Abstract: The whole of reality in African traditional philosophy is constituted by a hierarchy of beings of two categories, namely, spiritual beings and corporeal beings. These two categories of beings exist in two corresponding kinds of worlds, namely, the spiritual world and corporeal world. These two worlds although different in nature are not completely separated, for there are links and interactions between them. Those living in the spiritual world are interested in, and often intervene in the affairs of those living in the corporeal world. Metaphysics apart from its traditional and etymological definitions has diverse definitions given differently by different scholars. However, in whatever way it is defined, it should include the necessity for a universal outlook toward reality. It is therefore a philosophical outlook which tries to reach a more comprehensive, all-embracing, totalistic view of reality without neglecting the unique place of individual things in the holism of reality. Metaphysics therefore involves a synthesis of all experiences in order to achieve a coherent whole which gives a complete picture of reality. It is in this latter sense that we intend to survey aspects of African metaphysics using Igala conception of reality to see how the disparate metaphysical objects of the African people fit into a coherent metaphysical framework. African metaphysics should be seen as the African way of perceiving, interpreting and making meaning out of interactions, among beings, and reality in general. It is the totality of the African's perception of reality. African metaphysics will therefore include systematization of African perspective and its relation to being and existence. This will embrace the holistic conception of reality with its appurtenance of relations, qualities, characterizations, being and its subtleties, universals, particular, ideas, minds, culture, logic, moral, theories and presuppositions.

Key words: Africa, Metaphysics, Being, Spirit, Corporeal and Igala concept of reality.

Introduction

The subject of African metaphysics is a very broad and far reaching inquiry but to make it relevant to any particular group of persons, it becomes necessary to reflect the thought and life of a particular people. It is in the light of the above that this discourse is centered on the Igala people of Kogi State. In the course of this research, there are two strategic hurdles to overcome. First, how can we meaningfully talk about African metaphysics? Second, how can we cover the breadth and depth of African metaphysics in a short treatise like this? Perhaps the consolation is the fact that no work can claim to say all that needs be said on any subject matter. What is important in any given work is to have a clear vision of what is intended to achieve. In this light, we feel persuaded that these hurdles can be safely handle and overcome.

Much has been said on different aspects of metaphysics. We cannot however pretend to have a fixed corpus of perception and articulation which we call African metaphysics. What we attempt therefore to do is to carry out some intellectual stock – talking on African metaphysics in these intervening years. Defining the focus of our work will allay the fears of scholars like Paulin Hountondji (1983, 32) who smell a rat any time attempt is made to talk of African philosophy as a static, collective and ideological set of beliefs which lie in the immutable soil of the African people.

In his *African Philosophy Myth and Reality*, Hountondji decried the vogue of perceiving African philosophy as a collection of immutable and definitive believe which are abstracted from history and progress (Hountondji, 1983 33). He says that our ideological definition of

philosophy is what is normally called to use when examining African philosophy. This leads to our seeing principles presenting some degree of coherence and intended to govern the daily practice of a man or people. As Wiredu and Oladipo have noted, ideology can be perceived both in a degenerate sense as “a set of ideas about what form the good society must take” (Oladipo, 1996, 73-74).

We must state that our attempt is not directed at speculating on the ideological roles of philosophy that is immutable, homogenous and hidden in the consciousness of the African people. This is also not to say that the unanimity question is totally baseless. A cultural philosophy must have certain underlying logic and understanding. However, it will be a mark of intellectual philistinism to continue to hold that all Africans conceive reality wof and weft from exactly the same perspective. What we have are similar out-looks which enjoy a higher semblance than with views outside the African sub-region.

Our target is to look at the “score board” to see how we stand with the spate or write-ups on African metaphysics or aspects of African metaphysics. This will enable us to count our gains and losses as we continue in this business of reconstructing African philosophy. This intellectual inventory will enable us to up-date our journey too far intellectually. If we do not take time to knot all our discussions together, we may soon discover to our dismay how irretrievably far fields we have stayed in the wrong direction.

The second challenge is to explain how we can cover the scope of African metaphysics within the ambit of this work. Our view is to x-ray some literature and then see how we can make very useful deductions from our study. This we see as feasible.

What is African Metaphysics?

Metaphysics apart from its traditional and etymological definitions has diverse definitions given differently by different scholars. However, in whatever way it is defined, it should include the necessity for a universal outlook toward reality. The word “metaphysics” which is said to have Greek origin is believed to have been first used in the 4th century BC by the peripatetic. It was seen as the science of being equal being. Parmenides is often referred to as the real enunciator of western metaphysics before Socrates, Plato and Aristotle gave it a more detailed and rigorous treatment. Down to Immanuel Kant, metaphysics became divided into three major parts, namely: rational theology, rational cosmology and rational psychology. For martin Heidegger, all ontological inquires have missed the mark by not addressing satisfactorily the question of being.

Metaphysics includes both transcends and particularisms of individual existence to focus on the interrelationships of particulars within the universal. It is therefore a philosophical outlook which tries to reach a more comprehensive, all-embracing, totalistic view of reality without neglecting the unique place of individual things in the holism of reality. So, in talking about reality, we are referring to both disparate and homogenous outlooks. It may be an aspect of reality such as properties, relations, individual beings, etc. it could be the examination of being in a generic sense. What is important in each case is to reach general and fundamental assumption that articulate a rationally acceptable world view as far as such sphere of reality is concerned. Michael Loux's universals and particulars: readings and Ontology captures the different areas of concern of metaphysics. A. J. Ayer has succinctly defined metaphysics as that branch of philosophical discourse which deal with the fundamental question about the structure of reality (Ayer, 1975, 23).

The etymological meaning of metaphysics holds that metaphysics is derived from the Greek words Meta-Ta-Physika meaning “after physics” or transcending the physical. Andronicus of Rhodes, the Chronicler of Aristotle's work on physical nature as metaphysics is concerned with issues bordering on the extra-mental, spiritual, abstract, universal or transcendental discipline. This cannot totally be said to be the understanding metaphysics evidences. Like

Immanuel Kant, we see metaphysics as concerning the totality of reality whether God as in rational theology; or man, nature and the universe as in rational cosmology or mind and its ideas as in rational psychology. However, these are not periscope wholly through a priori concepts as some have opined but through the interplay of *apriori* and *aposteriori* concepts or through experience and reason. Metaphysics is a science that seeks ultimate understanding of reality.

Metaphysics is defined by Collingwood (1969, 12) as the science of pure being and as a science which deals with the presuppositions underlying ordinary science. Its procedure is to ignore the differences between the individual thing and that individual and attend only to what they have in common. Metaphysics deals with the nature of existence. Metaphysics being the study of reality as a whole is concerned with the generalization of experience for the purpose of identifying fundamental entities (Harold, 1981, 1). Metaphysics therefore involves a synthesis of all experiences in order to achieve a coherent whole which gives a complete picture of reality. It is in this latter sense that we intend to survey aspects of African metaphysics to see how the disparate metaphysical objects of the African people fit into a coherent metaphysical framework.

African metaphysics should be seen as the African way of perceiving interpreting and making meaning out of interactions, among beings, and reality in general. It is the totality of the African's perception of reality. African metaphysics will therefore include systematization of African perspective as it relation to being and existence. This will embrace the holistic conception of reality with it appurtenance of relations, qualities, characterizations, being and its subtleness universals, particular, ideas, minds, culture, logic, moral, theories and presuppositions.

African metaphysics is holistic and interrelated. The logic in their metaphysics underpins their standard and expectations. This is not to go with the impression that all African communities share the same standards even though the standard is community based (Quine 1953, 12). What we intend to do is to abstract the general orientation of the African in their metaphysics and general views about certain aspects of reality. Here, we adumbrate the African's perception of the following aspect of reality namely: personality, being, substance, and causality, immortality of the soul, witchcraft, appearance and reality.

To preface this examination, we aver that, though we cannot really see African system as being rooted in the analytic tradition of western philosophy, this is not to say that African metaphysics is less rigorous. African metaphysics in the primeval time due to their unwritten nature cannot provide us with a written rigorous specimen of the metaphysics argumentation and analysis, nonetheless, the spirit of rigor is not absent because every view is properly examined and seen to rationally explain a cosmic puzzle before it is accepted. The African had a pragmatic metaphysics, if an idea, an explanation, a conception a belief or folk wisdom worked; it was accepted even though they may not fulfill certain fundamental criteria of objective reality. This notwithstanding, the Africans had far reaching thoughts about their environment, physical and transcendental phenomena with which they are acquainted with. If an idea worked, they still dig deep to unravel through mystical means to ascertain the basic for such phenomenon in their reality scheme. This means that the Africans are aware of the consequence of superficial contemplation of their universe. They thought and tried as deeply as their theoretical and experiential apparatus could aid them. Not having a form of writing must have hindered serious reflective after – thought which ruminating over written experiences can afford. A mere mental acquaintance with reality cannot guarantee tenacity and longevity of ideas. The ideas evaporate and new attempts are made from time to time to recapture the substance of previous experience. But as J. I Omoregbe (1996, 6) has opined, the African store their ideas in form of folklores, folk wisdom, mythologies, traditional proverb, religious world views etc. This enables them to examine more closely their views. However, this

form of preservation cannot be compared with documentation in written form. Their experiences are tested in order to ascertain their truth. These tests provide the Africans with clues as they continue their forays into wilderness of reality. It is thereafter against such a background that African metaphysics should be periscoped. Nothing is accepted without evidence and reason. The reason may commit us to either empirical or rational validation.

We can therefore say that in African metaphysics, empiricism merges with rationalism. The cleavage between empiricism and rationalism, if it exists at all is not a matter for serious epistemological dispute. With this background, we shall examine different concepts in order to show how they feature in African metaphysics.

Issues in African Metaphysics

In African metaphysics, there is no great divide; there is nothing that is totally other; the human world and the spirit world intersect, feeding each other and in the meeting, heating the world up, and by the same token, making it cool. African metaphysics is all encompassing just as the African system of thought in its entirety. It is experienced in African concepts, songs, dances, proverbs, religious and social arena and the various ways of African life. In this case, we shall continue to examine established concepts in metaphysics such as personality, substance, being and immortality of the soul.

Personality

Personality as a concept means all the qualities and attributes that makes an individual a distinct person. It includes one's make-up or constituent parts, character, conduct and personal idiosyncrasies. But personality in the context in which we are viewing it is seen from the angle of what makes-up the human personality in general and the significance of each constituent part. The western conception of a person being a rational, moral, free, linguistic and social entity (Omoregbe, 1996, 36-38) is taken for granted in the African metaphysics. In the western conception of personality, a person is said to be made up of spirit, soul and body. The spirit is usually said to be a higher principle in close link with the divine order, while the soul is the go-between sandwiched between the spirit and the body performing relational, regulative and communicative functions for both the spirit and body. Plato dwelt extensively on this subject. Talking of the rational, spirited and appetitive parts of the soul which appropriately should be seen as the part of the individual rather than the soul. The rational represents the spirit, the spirited, the soul and the appetitive, the body.

But in the African conception of personality, the initial problem is that of reaching a consensual view as to the constituent parts or dimensions of human persons. According to Onwuaniba (1984, 184-186), the Ibos, the Yoruba's of Nigeria and Akans of Ghana have their views of human personality. There exist some differences. In Igbo metaphysics, we have three component parts of human person namely Ahu (body) Mkpuruobi (soul) and Mmuo (spirit). For the Igbo, a man is simultaneously a physical and spiritual entity. However, it is his spirited dimension that is eternal. In the Akan conception of personality, we witness three variants of this conception-Dualist, Trichotomist and "Pentachotomist" positions. For instance, Wiredu holds a pentachotomist view instantiated by five parts of the human personality. We have the Nipadua (body), the okra (soul) Sunsum (Spirit), Notro (character from father), Mogyia (character from mother).

Kwame Gyekye (1984, 200ff) on his part has noted that Akan conception of a person is thoroughly dualistic, not tripartite. With this, we have seen the Igbo Trichotomistic view, the Pentachotomistic view of Wiredu and the dualistic view of Kwame Gyekye. For Gyekye it is soul and body, that is Okra and Nipadua respectively. The truth here is that the seeming disagreement as seen above is more apparent than real. The views are collectively correct, that is, Wiredu's Pentachotomistic view, Ibo trichotomic view and Gyekye's dualistic view. The problem lies in the need for further clarification and elucidation. To understand the concept of a person, we have what we call "threefold categorical objectification." The first level is the

residual categorical objectification which has to do with the double aspect conception. Secondly, we have the middle ranged categorical objectification and finally, the bloated categorical objectification. The point is that all these views are correct African perspectives on theory of human personality. (The residual categorical merely simplifies and reduces the conception to their two main board categorization, that is body (material) and spirit (immaterial). The tripartite conception stresses the need to demarcate the spiritual elements into their functional cleavages. The spirit is functionally different from the soul though both are immaterial. The spiritual gets information directly from the creator and transmits the same to the soul which in turn affects the body. On the reverse side, the body first affects the soul, and then the spirit. All these happen in a matter of seconds. But in man's fallen state, the soul and the spirit are subject simultaneously to the caprice and control of the body. The spirit of a rejuvenated man rejects the directive from the body via the soul. The third and last categorization is the bloated categorical objectification. This view clearly objectifies the African man's basis for interpreting a man's personality. I see man as earthly, that is, body and as biological, that is, having input from parents. Man is a product of his maternal and paternal lineage roots. This explains why in most African communities, a man has a right to seek for a place of abode both in his paternal and maternal families. He is not regarded as a stranger in any of these places.

An African metaphysics would not subscribe to the Humean and Russellian's view that there is no continuing self-identity. Or, as William James has said that man is a stream of consciousness, for the African, man has a continuing self-identity. This, the Igbos call "Mmuo", that is, spirit. The 'chi' is the destiny which can change depending on a number of factors like handwork, spiritual fortification etc. divine intervention can change a person's 'chi' but his spirit (Mmuo) cannot be changed – it continues as an identical being throughout existence. So, in the Igbo metaphysics of personality, a man's essence is his 'mmuo' (spirit) which continues to exist even after physical death. Existence of human personality is dual, earthly existence and spiritual (eternal) existence. The body exists temporarily on earth while the spirit continues to exist after death.

We have fairly elaborated on the African conception of a person because it is the central nut that holds other metaphysical world views together. Therefore, eclectically, African conception of personality is multidimensional and yet streamlinable into a simplified dualistic view of human personality. The African conception of personality therefore embraces and transcends the western conception.

Being

Being is a generic term which represents all existing things. The Africans conceive everything as being. There is nothing that exists that is taken lightly. The belief is that there is reason for whatever is. Though man may not immediately know why a thing is created, but they all serve a purpose. Being is therefore conceived as the whole range of, existent things. The Africans have a hierarchy of being with god at the apex followed by the ancestors, then, we have totems or emblems of hereditary relationship followed by other spirits that are manipulated in the sorcery, witchcraft or magic of certain ends. These are represented at times as charms and amulets, then, we have man and finally, animal and plants as occupying the lowest level (Opoku, 1978, 9-10).

There is the argument in some quarters that this hierarchy is not rigid. Because events can cause a hitherto insignificant god or divinity to become so powerful that it assumes a central place of reverence in the life of the community more than the ancestors. The ancestors are revered because it is held that they are always better disposed to the good of living. But other gods or divinities are highly capricious and unpredictable. Plants and animals can be habited by powerful forces which make them to become very prominent in the spiritual rating of the society. This conception of being from the point of view of force is pervasive in African

conception of being. This may have prompted Tempels to concentrate his attention on this aspect to the neglect of other elements involved in explaining the concept of being. Henri Maurier in a similar vein has suggested the vitalist framework as most appropriate in understanding the African conception of being. Vitalist here is seen in the sense of understanding being in terms of fore and interrelationship among these forces or beings (Omogegbe, 1995, 35).

The above picture will give the impression of a disordered universe of perennial strife among the forces. Though there is, but this strife is controlled and regulated by the unseen hand of the creator. The African believe that whatever happens cannot go unnoticed by the omnipresent eyes of the creator. God being at the apex of the hierarchy of beings oversees and regulates what goes on in the universe. God's supreme position is made clear in the African names of God. The Igbo for instance call God Okaka-Amasi-Amasi and Chukwuokike meaning "One who is not fully known, and the creator of the universe". The Yorubas call Him Olodumare meaning the Almighty God while the Akan people of Ghana call Him Onyame which means the Supreme Being (Opoku, 1978, 34-35). In other words, God alone is full actuality and infinite. Other beings are finite and limited. For the Africans, beings form an intricate nexus of reality. Reality is seen both particularistically and universalistically. But of ultimate importance to the Africans is how things are holistically or the interconnections that exist among particular beings.

Substance

The notion of substance in the African conception is closely related to the concepts of being and personality. Unlike western conception of substance where substance is seen as a substratum that sustains fleeting appearance or seen as the sum of all qualities or seen as mere idea in the mind As in the case of Berkeley, the Africans see substance as the quality of beingness which could be seen, felt or divined through oracular means. What constitute substances is the evidences that a thing exist whether seen or unseen by the physical eyes. The African does not go into the Berkeleyan and Lockean controversy of the unknown. Somewhat, the idea in the mind and the totality of qualities. The Africans for instances do not see spirits but they believe they exist, knowing their qualities is immaterial. What is important is that there is ample evidence that the activities of these spirits affect them favorably or adversely. However, there is the belief that every being has its distinctive qualities whether perceived or not.

Causality

For the Africans, the concept of causality is a very central issue. The African life is permeated by the understanding that nothing happens without a cause. The question that is asked is why must a particular event happen to a particular person, at a particular place and in a given time? This means that the concept of chance does not have a place in the African metaphysics. What we call chance is our ignorance of the series of actions and reactions that have given rise to a given event. The corollary of this view is to hold that the African man's world is deterministically ordered through and through. This is not true. The African cause and effect nexus still permits the exercise of free-will. When a man is faced with alternative options, he is free to choose to carry out one or the other. However, in certain cases, the individual may find himself compelled by circumstances beyond his control to choose one of the alternative options.

Again, we can say that chance, determinism and freewill when properly understood can be seen as different sides of the same coin. What we call chance is what happens accidentally but yet traceable to a cause and a reason. What we call a determined event is the aftermath of a freely committed act which has consequently led to a determined cause and effect. It is like free will opens the door of actions and then determinism takes its turn. Man is free therefore to some extent and yet limited by his community. The African reality scheme is said to be both individualistic and communitarian. (Maurier Qtd in Omogegbe, 1985, 34-35). He is free to go

against the wishes of the community but with the accompanying sanctions. Through personal initiative, the individual can exercise his freedom without coming into conflict with the collective will of the community.

The African is not troubled about the Humean gnosological intricacies of necessary conditions for causality namely, priority in time, constant conjunction, contiguity in time and space and necessary connection. Neither do the Africans bother themselves about the Cartesian problem of interactionism. It is rather taken for granted that the body and the spirit though having different natures interact. As Sogolo has aptly put it, "one of the puzzles that face those seeking to understand traditional African belief system is how, in the explanation of observable events, disembodied or non-extended entities (spirits), witches, ghosts, gods etc. existing beyond the confines of space could possibly be invoked as causes. This problem arises mainly due to the widespread mechanistic view of causality where --- necessary connection is assumed to exist between the cause and effect, along Humean argument" (Sogolo, 1993, 103-104). Sogolo further maintains that the conception of causality today is so loose and varied in meaning that what counts as a causal explanation of an event would depend on factors such as the nature of the event to be explained, our interest in the event, whether the event has one cause or a multiplicity of necessary causes, whether, then the causes are more than one, they can be compatibly invoked and finally whether some of the causes are sufficient such that the other are unnecessary and superfluous (1993, 104). With the foregoing, it becomes clear that there are different conceptions that could constitute causal explanation. We may not need to examine the material, formal, efficient and final causes (as Aristotle posited) in every case of causal explanation. The Africans look at cause and effect from the point of view of imaginable range of possibilities or they resort to oracles for the final verdict.

Immortality of the soul

The question of immortality of the souls is not a controversial issue in African reality scheme. It is taken as a truism. The soul of a man is immortal. It continues to exist after the dissolution of the body. its abode is determined by how well it lived here. If a soul lived well, it will live in a special place of peace but if it lived badly, it may be barred from having a resting place; it may continue to roam the earth. However, all spirits are said to have direct contact with the physical earth. This is why ancestral spirits are sacrificed to in the understanding that they come to eat of the sacrifices. This shows that the Christian concept of eternal separation between the living and the dead is not agreeable to the African world view. The concept of heaven and hell is not well delineated in the African conception.

The concept of immortality is closely linked with re-incarnation. For the Africans, spirits are reincarnated. Both good and bad spirits. The good spirit are welcomed while the bad spirits called Abiku, Ogbanje, Ndem are either exercised or rejected. The Africans through divination or other exoteric means claim to be capable of detecting which spirit has returned. The question at this point is, does a human person have two spirits – one given by the creator and the other represented by the incarnating spirit? The truth is that unregenerate man can be inhabited by more than one spirit because the spirit of God in him is inactive, but, at regeneration the spirit of God is quickened and the evil spirits lose their hold on the person's personality. A bad spirit may manifest as the spirit of witchcraft, sorcery or necromancy.

Witchcraft

This leads us to the consideration of the notion of witchcraft in African metaphysics. Witchcraft is the spiritual skill of being able to carry on certain inimical activities in disembodied form. This could include sucking of blood, eating, holding of meetings, causing accident or inflicting pains or diseases. In Africa, there abound many proven cases of the activity of witches and wizards. This shows us that African experience surpasses the narrow causal explanatory framework of western philosophy. The scientific model is therefore not absolute. There is the method of extra sensory perception (ESP) which can be used by those so

endowed to understand the more complicated causal framework in which African experience fits. Witchcraft is a real phenomenon. The study of spiritism, occultism, mysticism, and cybernetics reveal that man is a carrier of great current of waves which can be projected to bring about certain desired ends however, with some limitations.

Conclusion

We have therefore assumed that all Africans are bound to have more in common than with people of other continents. We have used Nigeria and Ghana as representative cultures in this study. We have attempted understanding the basis of African traditional metaphysics which has to do with 'Being' and its ontological appurtenances like personality, substance, etc., and to see how they differ from the western conception of being. We examined the vital element of African traditional metaphysics and came to the conclusion that African traditional metaphysics includes and transcends the western explanatory indices. While the west limit their enquiry to experience and reason, the African go beyond that to employ extra empirical and extra-ratiocinative means often called extra-sensory perception (ESP). This study leaves more room for studies in African metaphysics such as African ontology and its amputances and the Igala thought on metaphysics and others, and believes that this study is not exhaustive and that more studies are called for.

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