THE QUESTION OF "BEING" IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This work is of the view that the question of being is not only a problem in Western philosophy but also in African philosophy. It, therefore, posits that being is that which is and has both abstract and concrete aspect. The work arrives at this conclusion by critically analyzing and evaluating the views of some key African philosophers with respect to being. With this, it discovers that the way that these African philosophers have postulated the idea of being is in the same manner like their Western philosophers whom they tried to criticize. This work tries to synthesize the notions of beings of these African philosophers in order to reach at a better understanding of being. This notion of being leans heavily on Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology which does not bifurcate or polarize being, but harmonizes entities or realities that seem to be contrary or opposing in being.
KEYWORDS: Being, Ifedi, Ihedi, Force (Vital Force), Missing Link, Muntu, Ntu, Nkedi, Ubuntu, Uwa

Introduction

African philosophy is a critical and rational explanation of being in African context, and based on African logic. It is in line with this that Jonathan Chimakonam avers that "in African philosophy we study reality of which being is at the center" (2013, 73). William Wallace remarks that "being signifies a concept that has the widest extension and the least comprehension" (1977, 86). It has posed a lot of problems to philosophers who tend to probe into it, its nature and manifestations. Being has given great worries to Western philosophers; many of which in trying to explain this concept have ended up giving us a misleading view of what being is.

It is against this background that this work turns to some African philosophers who developed their metaphysics or ontology respectively, claiming that it is a notion of being that is distinct from their Western counterparts. This is done with the view of having a more comprehensive and all-encompassing understanding of being. It does this by examining the notion of being in the philosophies or metaphysics of these key African philosophers. It also evaluates them showing their strengths and weaknesses. The work does this by alluding to the strengths of their ontologies. It builds on the weaknesses of their notions of being. It will, more forcefully lean on Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology which is complementary in nature and more appealing.

The Notion of Being in African Philosophy

Many African philosophers have tried to explain the concept of being but we are going to focus on some of them whose notions of being seem more appealing. It is necessary to start with the one that first gave a systematic understanding of African ontology. Placide Tempels is acclaimed and believed to be the first major proponent of African Philosophy. Hence, he is the first to put forward a more systematic African notion of being, which he believes is distinct from that of the West. He holds that African philosophy rests on African ontology—their conception of reality or notion of being as he argues that "the transcendental and universal notions of being and of its force of action, and of the relationships and reciprocal influences of beings make up Bantu philosophy" (TEMPELS 1968, 77). He also holds that it is this ontology that is the key to Bantu behaviour and thought which is centered on the idea of vital force which originates from God. With this, he placed God first in his Bantu hierarchy of being which can be pictured as follows: God, spirit of ancestors, humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects (NJOKU 2002, 18). That is to say that beings stand in relation to each other and exact influence on each other. But the superior's influence on the inferior is greater.

It is worthy of note that Bantu ontology is rooted in the expression of Tempels in which he reduced African ontology to the notion of force:

We conceive the transcendental notion of "being" by separating it from its attribute, "force", but the Bantu cannot. "Force" in his thought is 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 ideas of "force"- Without the element "force", being cannot be conceived. What has been said above should be accepted as the basis of Bantu ontology; in particular, the concept "force" is bound to the concept "being" even in the most abstract thinking upon notion of being. (1968, 50-51)

By implication, being is force and force is being. Hence, there is no way that one can talk about being without talking about force—vital force. Egbeke Aja buys into this view as he posits that for the Igbos, being is force like Tempels posits of the Bantu. For the African, the concept, force is bound to the concept of 'being' even in the most abstract thinking upon the notion of being. Similarly, the Igbo have a double concept concerning being and this can be expressed 'ife na ike ife bu otu' i.e. being is that which is force (AJA 2001, 53-54). E. A. Ruch also notes that this force is what endows being with the capacity of doing or acting as he posits, "We might say that in African conception the capacity for doing is identified with being and therefore with act or perfection… A being is defined by what it can do, rather than by what it is" (1981, 149). By this, Ruch is saying that for Tempels, force confers being. This makes his being-force a physical force thus, making being solely concrete or physical entity devoid of abstractness.

 Temples also holds that African ontology is dynamic as he notes that "We hold a static conception of "being", they (Africans) a dynamic" (TEMPELS 1968, 50-51).

Tempels in this manner reduces the African notion of being to force as he argues that "force is being, being is force" (TEMPELS 1968, 51). According to Asouzu, "although he (Tempels) tells us that the Bantu notion of being is dynamic, he goes to reduce this notion to something that is fixed" (2007a, 183), as he projects force to the status of an object and freezes it to a substance. It is this substance that he converts to Bantu being, one which is static in nature but remaining dynamic. For him, force assumes a definite shape and character which never changes in its dynamism. This is the creation of substance similar to Aristotle's idea of being (1947, Book B, 5) but involves this with dynamic energy and power to resemble an idol. This comes closer to his understanding of Bantu as idol worshippers. And according to him, for the Bantu being is stone, stick, mountain, and so on. This connotes that his idea of being is not dynamic as many assume, but static. It is this point that Asouzu sees as the "Tempelsian Damage" as he notes that "Tempels in his discriminative elitist mindset, puts up a wrong premise and set to confirm it" (2007a, 193); and gives a "vital force" theory which leaves us with an ontology that has nothing elevating, except magic and superstition (2007b, 75). A deeper look at Tempels Bantu philosophy reveals that he was greatly under the influence of Aristotle whose metaphysics is a bifurcating metaphysics. This is apparent in his replacing Aristotle's substance with force. Thus, he approaches African ontology with Western thought system. This problematic notion of being could also be due to their (the West) desire to Christianize and civilize Africans. He strived by all means to look for a way of seeing a loophole in African way of life, especially in their conception of God, in other to fulfill his goal. He finds this departure in the African notion of being which for him is force and has nothing to do with essence.

In a nutshell, Tempels imposes his personal biased construction of ontology on Africans, saying that it is the collective notion of being of the Africans. This notion of being is one that is not only static, but also is disjunctive, divisive, polarizing, antagonistic and above all inherently causal, world-immanent in its predeterminism (2007a, 389). This notion of being is most debasing as it captures a special type of rationality that is so uncritical that it can hardly grasp being in abstractness of its transcendent otherness (ASOUZU 2007b, 77). Hence, for Tempels the (Africans) cannot conceive of being as substance just as the West does. They rather conceive it as accident (force). This misconception of the question of being is one that needed to be looked into and reconstructed to fit into the African concept of being. This, I believe, is what Alexis Kagame set out to do.

Alexis Kagame was a Bantu of Rwandan origin who gave very distinct version of his people's ontology. His ontology was presented in his mother tongue for probably the sake of originality and to prevent adulteration of the Bantu idea of being, which outsiders such as Tempels have done to this notion of being. He built on Tempels' notion of being but goes beyond it. He employed four categories that clearly depict beings of anything or form. These four categories include Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu (UNAH 2009, 265). According to Uduma Oji Uduma, "Kagame presents a Bantu ontology that is built around a hierarchy or category of forces" (2003, 96), where Muntu is first, followed by Kintu, then Huntu and finally Kuntu. D. A. Masolo in his analysis of Kagame's ontology notes that Kagame's categorization of being is as follows: 1. Muntu: categories of beings or forces with intelligence. These include, spirits, human beings (the living human and the human dead). 2. Ikintu: categories of things or beings that are dependent on intelligent beings. They include: animals, plants, minerals and inanimate objects. 3. Ahuntu: categories of place and time. 4. Ukuntu: categories of mode (1994, 87).

Kagame notes that what underlies these four categories of being is force, like Tempels. What they have in common is force. And this force is what is identified as Ntu. Ntu is what acts as a relationship existing among these four categories of being. Unah captures this thus:

> Everything there is must necessarily belong to one of these categories and must be conceived of, not as substance, but as force. Forces are also related to one another. The relationship of forces is expressed by the stem Ntu which is ever present in each of the four categories; for if we remove the determinatives Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku all that is left in each of the categories is the stem Ntu. This explains according to Kagame, the relationship and interaction of forces in Bantu worldview. (2009, 266)

Hence, in the opinion of Kagame, the underlying category of being is Ntu. Ntu is the ultimate cosmic principle that permeates every nature. In other words, Ntu is the ultimate determinative force of forces. It permeates everything including particular or specific things.

Ntu, therefore, is a force that manifests itself in individual beings or things. It does not exist alone. This is why it is seen attached to categories such as Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku. Of this idea of Kagame's Ntu, Janheinz Jahn writes that:

> Ntu is the universal force… which however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu*. Ntu is being itself and cosmic universal force. Ntu is that force in which being and being

> coalesce… Ntu expresses not the effect of these forces, but their being. But the forces act continually, and are constantly effective. (1961, 99ff)

It is the central and focal point of all beings or forms of being. Ntu is the meeting point of the living and the dead, real and imaginary, past and future, high and low, speaking and speechless and so on.

It is also pertinent to state here that in the thought of Kagame, Ntu is what the four categories of being have equally. This leads to the belief that this Ntu, which is force, is inseparable from these four categories of beings or forces. If it is separated from them, they cease to exist. This is the only time when Ntu itself exists independent of them. Without this, Ntu always exist as Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu. This implies that Ntu (force) has always existed with matter (which may be Mu, Ki, Ha, or Ku). This Ntu is like the spiritual dimension of being or reality while the four categories of being are the physical dimensions of being or reality. This notion of being gives supremacy to Ntu over Mu, Ki, Hu and Ku. This Ntu is closely related to substance which is considered by Aristotle to be equal to being. In the same manner, Kagame's Ntu is equated to being. It is like the Tempels' vital force or force. But it goes beyond Tempels' force as he (Kagame) notes that it is not just a physical force. Kagame gives this force an ontological meaning rather than a physical meaning. C. M. Okoro buttresses this point thus:

> Alexis Kagama differentiates clearly this ontological meaning of force from the physical force, which emanates from life as a principle of biological life. He explains that life could be defined as the union of shadow (in the case of principle of life) with the body. (2008, 34)

The shadow is the principle that is physical or material entity that ceases to exist at death. It is what is possessed by all existing reality. This is to say that it is not restricted to the human being or intelligent beings. This shadow is identical with the biological life. This biological life factor or shadow connotes that the being that posseses it is living and not dead. Kagame according to C. M. Okoro, defines life as "a union of shadow and body" (2008, 34), which "simply means union of biological life not spiritual or ontological life with the body" (OKORO 2008, 34).

Okoro further shows the variation between Kagame's and Tempels' notion of being as vital force, which involves having a powerful life, being healthy and wealthy and having a long life. He rather sees it as the essence of being. This helps to bring out the fact that being is not identical with physical force as has been implied by Tempels. But it illustrates that for Kagame force is not accidental reality; it is not just an attribute of being. Force is being itself. This view does not really give us a true picture of what being is in African

context. It rather gives us another version of Aristotle's notion of being. This is apparent in his deviation from Tempels whose idea was the foundation to his idea of being. He accepts with Tempels that Ntu or shadow is the same as force. For him, it is not a physical force but an ontological force. In this way he makes force or Ntu to be a spiritual entity. This force or Ntu is the same as Aristotle's essence since it is abstract and is what he equates to being in the African context.

Mogabe B. Ramose articulates his notion of being around a concept known as Ubuntu, which he sees as "the basis of African philosophy" (2002, 40). He considers Ubuntu to be wholeness and not fragmentary. It is one and same indivisible reality. He sees Ubuntu as consisting of two words, which he writes as Ubu-ntu:

> Ubuntu is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix ubu-and the stem ntu. Ubu evokes the idea of being in general. It is enfolded being before it manifested itself in the concrete form or mode of existence of a particular entity. Ubu as enfolded being is always unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and models of being. In this sense ubu is always oriented towards ntu. At the ontological level, there is no stick and literal separation and division between ubu and ntu. Ubu- and -ntu are not two radical separate and irreconcilably opposed realities. (2002, 41)

By implication, ubu- and -ntu are two aspects of one reality. They are two realities within a being. Ubu- always manifests itself through ntu. Ubu cannot exist outside of ntu. Likewise ntu cannot exist independent of ubu.

Ramose holds that this ubu-ntu which is an indivisible oneness and wholeness carries with it ontological and epistemological connotations. In his words:

> Accordingly, ubu-ntu is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu–speaking people. It is the indivisible one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology. Ubu- as the generalized understanding of being may be said to be distinctly ontological whereas ntu as the nodal point at which being assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be the distinctly epistemological. (2002, 41)

Put simply, ubu-is the ontological aspect of a being while ntu is the epistemological aspect of the same being. Hence, without the ubu-ntu connection or co-existence, there can be nothing like being in existence.

It is also worthy of note that this ubu-ntu realities are the Bantu categories of the Aristotle's substance-accident in his concept of being. Like Aristotle, ubu

is the substance or essence of being while the ntu is the accident of being. The only distinction between Ramose's notion of being from that of Aristotle is that he does not see the existence of ubu-without ntu. But Aristotle holds that substance (essence) can exist without accident. Despite Ramose's idea that ubu- and -ntu co-exist within being, he equates ubu to being as he notes that "ubu- evokes the idea of being in general" (2002, 41). This is purely a replication of Aristotle's idea that 'being is substance'. This negates or calls to question Ramose's earlier idea that ubu-and-ntu always co-exist. It is germane to state that an aspect of being cannot be being.

A closer look at Ramose's notion of being shows that he was not interested in stating or propagating the generic notion of being but he was interested in a more specific being. This is apparent in his remark which reads:

> The word umu- shares an identitical ontological feature with the word ubu-. Whereas the range of ubu is the widest generality umu- tends towards the more specific. Joined together with-ntu then umu- becomes umuntu. Umuntu means the emergence of homo-lonquens who is simultaneously a homosapiens. In common parlance it means the human beings: the maker of politics, religion and law. Umuntu then is the specific concrete manifestation of umu-: it is a movement among from the generalized to the concrete specific. Umuntu is the specific entity which continuous to conduct an inquiry into being, experience, knowledge and truth. (2002, 41)

Therefore, the rationale behind Ramose's choosing to move from the general to the specific being is because not all beings that are, can express themselves.. It is in this vein that he focused his attention on a particular being, that is, the human being, which he called the homo-loquens (homo-sapiens). This in his local parlance is 'umuntu'. It is this being that has the capability of inquiry into what being is, the nature and forms of being. This umuntu is therefore the same as Heidegger's 'Dasein'. It is according to Heddeiger, this *dasein* (human being) that beings can be understood in their being (2002, 67).

What Ramose is trying to make us understand is that umuntu is what can lead us to the understanding of ubuntu which he equates to ubu. This ubu, for him, is silent and unknowable except through umuntu. This is possible through the speech of muntu:

> Without the speech of umuntu, ubu, is condemned to unbroken silence, the speech of umutu is thus anchored in, revolves around and is ineluctable oriented towards ubu-. The language of umuntu 'relevates',

that is, it directs and focuses the entire epistemological domain towards the ontology of ubu. (2002, 42)

What this quotation implies is that without umuntu there can be no knowledge of ubu- which can be called the essence of Ubuntu. Hence, it is umuntu that can give us the knowledge of or an insight into ubu. He notes that the possibility is through the coupling of ubu and umuntu in indissoluble manner, through the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu (motho ke motho ka batho)*. The closest English language translation is "to be human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (42). Thus, ubuntu is directly linked with 'to be humane'. In other words, Ubuntu describes the condition of being that is umuntu—a being that is capable of relating with others. One can conclusively say that the being that Ramose had in mind is the human being and nothing else.

It is apparent in his further remark that the ubuntu's conception of being is onto-triadic. This idea is centered on the human being in itself who has three dimensions of relatedness, in existence. He argues that umuntu which is the real ubuntu has three dimensions which include; umuntu, the living dead and the yet-to-be born (2002, 50). In all, it is the dimension of ubuntu called umuntu that is the centre of these three dimensions of being. This is simply because the living dead and the yet-to be born are in the level of being that is unknown and unknowable u-nkulu-nkulu. This is the realm of Ubuntu metaphysics.

From the foregoing discourse, it can be deduced that Ramose in his desire to present a notion of being that is not fragmentary in nature has failed to do so. Rather, he has done the opposite by presenting a fragmentary notion of being. This is apparent in his idea that there is the Umuntu which can engage in an inquiry about beings; and that there is also the unknowable being which he called u-nkulu-nkulu.

Emmanuel Edeh is an African philosopher of the Igbo extraction. He makes an attempt to bring out the Igbo understanding of the concept of being. He did this by alluding to two Igbo terms or words, namely: onye and ife. According to him, "the Igbo has no word that exactly translates the English word "being". However, there are two hypotheses with regard to what term approximates the concept of being" these are the "onye hypothesis and the ife hypothesis" (1985, 93-94).

He argues that the Igbo word "Onye' has limited connotation for being. According to him, this word is used in three ways. It is used as a pronominal adjective such as 'who'. It is also used as an interrogatives statement 'onye'? meaning "who?". It is further used as a noun. "In this category, its nearest but not exactly English equivalent is person. Onye in this last sense is used to refer to the living entities, both humans and superhuman" (1985, 94). Onye does not take

into consideration other entities that are non-living. This is the rationale behind his discarding the term Onye as inappropriate equivalent for being. In his own way, he notes that: the principal defect in using *onye* for the Igbo concept of being is that it cannot include inanimate, vegetative or non-human animate entities. In no way can one stretch the Igbo concept of "onye" to embrace things like stones, wood or iron etc… . Hence, Onye is not comprehensive enough to translate the term *being* (1985, 94). It is on this limitation that he discarded the concept of onye and moved over to an alternative hypothesis.

The hypothesis that Edeh sees as an alternative to the onye hypothesis is the Ife hypothesis. He asserts that "the word Ife primarily means things, anything material or immaterial. It is also used to refer to a happening, an event, an occurrence" (1985, 95). This is to say that the concept ife has a wider connotation than onye since *Ife* primary refers to inanimate entities like the English word *things*. But by expansion of meaning, it can be used to designate human and superhuman beings (1985, 95). He considers this to be the most appropriate term that can be used as an equivalent for being. After endorsing ife as the most appropriate word for being in the Igbo language, he asserts that "if ife stands on its own it can be used to refer to both existent and non-existent entities" (1985, 96).

It is with this that he goes further to search for a way of making ife to depict strictly only existence, excluding non-existence or nothingness (nothing). It is in this regard that he posits that ife needs to be suffixed with idi (to exist) for it to depict existence. He, therefore, combined ife and idi to arrive at ife-di. "ife-di is the most appropriate rendering of the English concept of being because it covers all entities, both visible and invisible, as well as the note of existence which we commonly associate with being" (1985, 96). Thus, ife-di, for each depicts what is or what is in existence and not, what is not or what is not in existence. Ife-di, therefore, refers to things that have being or existence.

It is with the above idea that Edeh notes that there are three categories of being (ife-di). This categorization of beings include: the supersensory category, chineke and 'Ndi muo' (the unseen), the human category: 'Ndi di ndu' (the living) and 'ndi Nwuru' (the dead), the thing category; this is subheaded into three groups: Anu: meat meaning animals distinct from human beings and inanimate beings; Ife nkiti: ordinary things; Ogu: has no existence of its own. It is created out of ife nkiti. It is medicine. By this Edeh is saying that Ife-di is an all-embracing concept. It embraces all manner of beings that are in existence.

In spite of the good idea of being that Edeh has expressed earlier on he goes on to propagate a notion of being that is anthropocentric. This is an ontology that is based on human beings. He holds that the Igbo notion of being is derived from a good or proper understanding of the human being. He alludes to the responses from his questionnaire to substantiate his point. To the question

"what is being?" the response is: being is being and that all things are beings. And to the question "how do you know that beings are?" the response is: "I know that beings are at least from the fact that human beings are. We are". This connotes that by knowing human beings one will come to know about other beings that exist. With this, human beings became the being through which other things are known. Hence, to understand being you have to study human being (Heidegger's *Dasein*) (1962, 24).

Edeh goes on to buttress his claim that the Igbo "notion of being could be derived from our concept of man" (1985, 100), as he asserts that the word for human is 'madu'. In his opinion, this world is etymologically derived from two Igbo words namely, "mma" and di (from idi). Mma carries the connotation of 'good', a good', the good', while di connotes 'to be'. Hence, Madu which is an abridge version of 'mma-di' implies "good that is". Human being is the good that is. It is germane to state here that this human goodness is not inherent goodness in human beings. But it is a participatory good. In Edeh's opinion, it is only God that is good but that human can only participate in God's goodness as a creature of this good God (1985, 100-101).

Thus, human being is not only the 'good that is' but other created things are. Interpreting Edeh, Iroegbu remarks that "other beings also creatively (not pantheistically) participate in divine goodness by their very being" (1995, 315). By this Edeh is saying that good that is becomes the generic term that universally applies to all beings in as much as "all things are created by God and hence the notion of "good that is" can be attributed to them" (1985, 101-102).

No matter how laudable Edeh's notion of being may appear to be, it still has some lapses that needed to be pointed out. Edeh's intension in his work was to paint a picture of the Igbo notion of being. The question remains: has he succeeded in doing this? It is glaring that he has not done this. Rather he has given us his own version of being instead of the Igbo version of being. This is apparent in his remarks with respect to the two hypotheses on the Igbo notion of being. These hypotheses include: "Onye hypothesis" and "Ife hypothesis". According to him, "in the course of my field work I discovered that many of my informants favoured the onye hypothesis". This implies that majority of his respondents see onye as the most appropriate word for being, as against his "ife hypothesis". This "Onye" is much more closely linked to his idea that "a notion of being can be derived from the concept man" (1985, 97). This is true since the closest meaning of Onye is human person, according to him.

It is necessary to note that Edeh did not discuss the natural constituents of being. Unlike other philosophers whose ideas of being have been considered in this work, Edeh did not talk about what really constitutes being. He only talked about what being is in general without considering what it is made of. For instance, Tempels and Kagame opine that being consists of "force". Edeh did not

delve into issue of this nature probably because his respondents could not comprehend this aspect of being. This is where he should have come in as a trained philosopher to help us understand what being consists of. But he was silent with their silence.

Pantaleon Iroegbu who is also an African philosopher, of the Igbo extraction and who has extensively criticized Edeh's notion of being, seeks to give a distinct notion of being from that of other philosophers that he considered in his book [Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy]. He holds that the word that denotes being in the Igbo language is "Uwa". It is this word that is synonymous with reality. The word in the original sense depicts the cosmos or the world. According to him, "*Uwa* however has much deeper meaning, scope, connotation and global elasticity than the English term, *world*" (it) has larger extension than *world,* which directly and ordinarily means this material created world" (1995, 338-339). He further notes that:

> The entirety of existence, from God the highest being to inanimate beings of our cosmos can be summarized in the englobing concept of the Igbo term *Uwa. Uwa* is all-inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity all reality. It englobes all that is: animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal and global. It has transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and progressive elasticity. (1994, 144)

Uwa is just much more than the physical world. It has an elastic meaning. Its meaning cannot be confined to a particular entity or reality. It is applied to all beings; and it envelopes all of these beings.

Iroegbu also notes that there are fifteen connotations of the word *Uwa.* They include: life (existence), cosmos, field of action, time and space, destiny, fate, condition, tragedy, age-limit, nature, persons, nations, land, earth and uwa. The last connotation is:Totality. This is the abstract, unqualified subject of all speech and predication. *Uwa* in this totalitarian or universal sense is, as pointed above, all englobing. It is the most universal concept in Igbo language and culture. Whatever is, insofar as it exists, is *Uwa.* (1995, 341)

Uwa is therefore a singular concept with wider connotations and application. He further notes that there are six zones of uwa. These are: uwa anyi (cosmos-where we live), the divine-world (the world of the Supreme Being), Godian world (the world of powerful spirits), good-spirit (the spirit world where the ancestors, the living dead who are no longer remembered), bad-spirit world (the dwelling place of evil spirit), ancestral world (the place where ancestors live).

Not minding that the world is divided into six zones, all these zones are but one world (uwa) and not six worlds. This is simply because the zones interpenetrate each other. Hence, "there are not ontologically a multitude of worlds but one world; *Uwa*" (1995, 342). It is pertinent to state here that relationship exists between the fifteen connotations and the six zones of uwa. Iroegbu buttresses this in the following words:

> While the connotations are the different senses, meanings, nuances and aspects that the *Uwa* concept carries in it, i.e., the area- meanings it covers in Igbo thought and culture; the six worlds are the spatio-temporal locations of the worlds in terms of their inhabitants. These six zones are in fact broadly dual: the earthly and the spiritual, but both in dynamic mutual relationship. (1995, 342)

Uwa is a generic concept. It carries a lot of meanings and significance. It confronts us in all forms of beings. This notion of being, equates uwa to being. Being for him is nothing but uwa and all beings are enclosed within uwa; and outside uwa no being exists. It is saying that all realities are but one, uwa. This is pan-cosmic notion of being.

This idea of being by Iroegbu tends to emphasis mutuality and co-existence. But a closer look at Iroegbu's idea of "*Uwa*" points to the fact that it is related to Aristotle's substance. This is apparent in his critique of Heidegger where he notes that the essence of a thing is kpim. In his word "what makes a thing what it is, its underlying and therefore most important aspect. It gives the satisfactory reason for the being of the item" (1995, 374). This kpim might be his Uwa which can be equated to Aristotle's essence or substance (1947, Book B, 5). However, the difference lies in the fact that "*Uwa*" does not share in Aristotle's bifurcation. It is a being that is in isolation since it encloses all existing things within itself. This is similar to Sartre's notion of being, which is an isolated being (SARTRE 1958, viii, 26, 630). It is based on this bifurcating notion of being that we turn to Asouzu's notion of being.

Innocent Izuchukwu Asouzu is also an African philosopher who made use of a lot of Igbo aphorisms to discuss his philosophy as well as propagate his concept of being. His philosophy is termed *ibuanyidanda*. *Ibuanyidanda* comes from three words *Ibu, anyi* and *danda*. *Ibu* means 'load or task', *anyi* means 'not insurmountable for' whereas *danda* names a species of ants. *Ibu anyi danda* thus translates to: no load or task is insurmountable for this species of ants called *danda* (2007a, 11). *Ibuanyidanda* is therefore an Igbo idea that stands for mutual dependency, interdependency and complementarity. Hence, *Ibuanyidanda* as complementary reflection is a philosophical trend (ASOUZU 2004, 101), that is wholistic in nature.

Ibuanyidanda is an approach to ontology which wishes to bridge the artificial chasm, and overcomes all forms of bifurcating barriers, which the mind imposes on the relationship between substance and its accident (ASOUZU 2007a, 253). It also "explores a method and principles for coalescing the real and the ideal, the essential and the accidental into system of mutual complementing units" (ASOUZU 2012, 101). This is to say, "*Ibuanyidanda* ontology attempts to penetrate and grasp being, and with it ultimate reality through mediation or via the instrumentality of mutual relations" (2012, 102). In line with this complementary system of thought, Asouzu defines being as "*that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality*" (2012, 103). Within this context, to be is to be in mutual relationship with other existents. To be is not to be alone (*ka so mu adina*).

Thus, being is located within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent reality having head and tail-end (*ihedi, nwere isi na odu*)- the thing that exists has head and tail-end (2007a, 11). Therefore, all things that exist do so insofar as they can be grasped within a framework of mutual free interaction without encapsulation, bifurcation and exclusiveness of its constituent elements. *To be* is to have head and tail-end (*ihedi, nwere isi na odu*).

To be in *Ibuanyidanda* ontology is to serve a missing link of reality. To say that something has being according to Asouzu, "entails all the processes that enter into grasping the thing in question meaningfully within a complementary framework" (ASOUZU 2007a, 253). Hence, "what we understand as substance in its relation to accident can be grasped not in the mode of the relationship of an abstract isolated concept to a concrete one" (2007a, 254). In this ontology, both accident and substance are viewed as inseparable dimensions of being, where substance is used to describe the thing that is most important (*ihe kachasi mkpa*), and accident, the thing that is important (*ihe di mkpa*) (2007a, 254).

Similarly, to be in *Ibuanyidanda* is to be in control (*ima onwe onye*). It is in this context that *Ibuanyidanda* ontology opines that to be is to be in control of the tension laden existential situation which is caused by the phenomenon of concealment. The moment one is in control, one realizes that to exist is also to give others a chance. That is why it is said in *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality.

Being, for Asouzu, can also be said to be future referential. It is that which is striving towards unity (2007a, 121). This implies that for being to be fully comprehended "there is need to consider the diverse units that are involved in any given context, not only with regard to their historical conditions" (ASOUZU 2007a, 121). This is due to the fact that being is always manifesting itself as it relates with other beings or serve as a missing link to other beings. It is in this context that "we integrate all modes of self-expression of being into one

framework of mutual interrelated units" (2007a, 57), "in view of which all forms of relativity get full meaning and authentication" (2007a, 56). Hence, to be is to be in future referential relationship since being is dynamic and not static.

Asouzu has done well in discussing extensively the concept of being. He has discussed the nature of being stating categorically that being cannot be identified with any aspect of being. That is to say being cannot be equated to matter or spirit, substance or accident. But that it consists of both of them that are in mutual complementary relation and service within each being. It also posits that this being is dynamic since it continually manifests itself in its relationships. The problem with this notion of being is that it contradicts being with existence. This is apparent in the way Asouzu uses interchangeably the words 'being' and 'to be'.

Conclusion

It is quite true that the concept of being is very difficult to articulate and understand (UNAH 2009, 2). This is why the African philosophers whose notions of being have been studied in the cause of this research have been found not to give a complete or more acceptable conception of being. Even when they have tried to assert a notion of being that is distinct from the Western notion of being, they end up postulating the idea of being that replicates that of their Western counterparts. Although they have tried to use different languages to discuss this concept called being, they do not say anything really new. They have succeeded to give us an understanding of it in some of the languages of African tribe. Hence, a notion of being that reflects the language and culture of a particular African community is what is reflected in their metaphysical thoughts. This has left us more confused than clarified on the question of being in African philosophy.

For instance, Tempels holds that what is termed being by the Africans is the attribute of being-force. This is not quite true of the African notion of being. For he (Tempels) has only given us another version of Aristotle's being. This force or vital force is taken to be a concrete or physical entity. It is in this light that he notes that they (the West) have a transcendental notion of being as they can separate being from its attribute force (1968, 50). It is necessary to state here that Tempels got it wrong. That the Bantu preferred to dwell most often on the attribute of being does not mean that they could not frame it in its abstract nature. After all, it is the attribute that defines being. This could possibly be the justification why the Bantu prefers approaching being through its attributes. This approach is in no way opposed to the abstract conception of being. It simply reveals that being has two dimensions. Hence, being in the thought of Tempels should be that which is both concrete and transcendental in nature. Being must have both the essence and the attribute (force) for it to be being. By way of

extension, it is important to note that being is being whether it is an intelligent being or not and that being cannot be limited to an aspect (Ntu or force), as Kagame opines. This cannot be the essence of being rather must be being if it (Ntu) exists with other categories such Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku. It is these categories that complement Ntu in each form of its existence that makes it being. This is what he had tried to do as he notes that life is "a union of shadow and body" (2001, 34). But he deviated as he linked being to shadow or force. This type of problematic notion of being can also be seen in Ramose's idea of being. He sees being as Ubuntu, consisting of Ubu- and –ntu. But he goes ahead to limit being to an aspect of being as he asserts that Ubu is what really reflects being as he notes that "ubu- evokes the idea of being in general" (2002, 41). This is like saying that Ubu is more important than ntu and can exist without ntu since it is what depicts being. Using our knowledge of complementary ontology, one cannot see Ubu as independent of ntu or being more important than ntu. Both of them are important and must co-exist for being *to be*. From the position of *ibuanyidanda* ontology, being is that which is both abstract and concrete as well as can be known and discussed objectively.

"Being or reality is what is, and cannot be something else" (INYANG 2000, 162). It is "the whole range of existent things" (OZUMBA 2004, 26). In other words, being is "everything that is so far as it is" (TILLICH 1951, 163). Being is that which is as it is. It is that which is both abstract and concrete in nature. These abstract and concrete entities co-exist in mutual complementary sense. They cannot exist independently of each other and therefore cannot on their own be considered to be being. If being must be, it must consist of both abstract and concrete entities that are in harmonious mutual complementary relationship. This helps to solve the problem of Edeh's metaphysics, which has no distinct idea of the nature of being. Being cannot just be ifedi or ihedi (what is or what exists), it is more than ifedi (ihedi) nwere isi na odu—being is whatever is that has head and tail-end. This agrees with the saying that nkedi nwere ihu abuo—what is has two sides. In other words, there are always two sides to a coin or a thing. Whatever (being) that is has two sides that are indispensable. Thus, being is that which is in–as-much-as it consists of, essence and its attribute-force (Tempels), Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku and Ntu (Kagame), ubu- and -ntu (Ramose). In each case of the pair, each of the entities is in mutual complementary relationship with the other for it to be being.

It is also germane to state that being cannot be restricted to a particular being or entity such as uwa, umuntu, madu and so on. Being includes all existing realities whether intelligent or not intelligent. It is an elastic term that includes: being-with-force and being-without-force, shadow and body, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible realities that are in existence. Being (nkedi, ihedi) is not existence (idi-to be). Being is that which exists. It is that which has

existence. But its existence is in relation to other existing realities. Being is that which cannot exist alone. For to exist alone, implies *being* not being known as well as conveying no meaning. It can never exist in isolation. It always exists with others. It is in this relationship of mutual complementary nature that its meaning is conveyed and affirmed. Hence, Asouzu asserts, "being is that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (1990, 82; 2007c, 62; 2003, 58). Outside of this mutual complementary relation which in turn leads to mutual service and dependent, being does not exist. Hence, being goes beyond an isolated being to a relationship being. Being is also both static and dynamic. It is static in the sense that the nature of being is the same for all beings. Chris Ijiomah rightly puts it that all beings or realities consist of spirit and matter (1996, 43; 2005, 76-77; 2000, 143). It is dynamic in the sense that it always manifests itself as it continuous to relate with others. Hence, in various relationships being manifests itself differently. Therefore, to understand being one needs to take into consideration all of these independent manifestations of being.

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