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"Reaction to Innocent Asouzu's Approach to African Philosophy and the Context of Other Interpretations"

by Heinz Kimmerle, Zoetermeer

In the following remarks I want to give a critical review of the book *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and beyond African Philosophy*, written by Innocent Izuchukwu Asouzu, a Catholic priest and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Calabar in the Igbo-region of Nigeria. This book has first been published in July 2004 with Calabar University Press and republished in 2005 as volume 4 of the series 'Studies in African Philosophy' with LIT-Verlag at Münster in Germany (ISBN 3-8258-8578-x). When numbers between brackets are given, they refer to pages of the new edition. In his 'Comments to the Lit-Verlag edition' the author reports that the earlier publication had certain shortcomings ('oversights' and 'avoidable errors'), which the new edition 'endeavours to address'. (15)

In his book Asouzu presents a fresh approach to African philosophy, which has an incisive impact on the discussions about this particular kind of philosophy. First of all it is underlined that African philosophy has to be regarded as philosophy precisely in the same way as the philosophies of any other region of the world: 'Arab philosophy, Greek philosophy, Asian philosophy, Indian philosophy, Japanese philosophy ... American philosophy, European philosophy' and other philosophies. (52) The specificity of African philosophy, with its primarily oral practice and tradition and its particular cultural ambience, is worked out by Asouzu from the perspective of the Igbo community. He comes to generalisations, which are valid for the big majority of peoples living in Africa south to the Sahara. As the key notion and the paradigm of thought of African philosophy in this sense is introduced 'complementary reflection'.

The special conditions of partly nomadic living peoples in Africa south to the Sahara like the Masai, Hausa, or Fulani, and of groups with different historical backgrounds on this continent like the Pygmies, San or Khoi Khoi are not taken into consideration in detail. Although it is not discussed at length, one can say that the northern parts of Africa, which have a primarily Arabic cultural ambience since about the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century, are not excluded. 'Besides the ancient Egyptian heritage', Asouzu refers to the 'highly intellectualised and sophisticated climate of thought' in this region, which 'produced such brilliant minds of the third century Alexandrian school as Tertullian, Clement, and Origen'. (275) African philosophy in this broad context is part and parcel of the philosophies of the world as a whole, and it contributes to the contents and the potential of problem solving reflections all over the world. Therefore, the paradigm of complementary reflection has its meaning 'in and beyond African philosophy'.

In Asouzu's book complementary reflection has mainly three different aspects. Firstly, there is 'ontological complementarity'. Reality is regarded as an all-embracing whole, in which all units form together a dynamic play of forces, which are in harmony with each other, by completing and supporting one another. The harmony of this play of forces does not exist without dangers, but it can maintain its balance against the influence of counter-forces, which try to disturb or undermine it. 'The worldview of the traditional African shows, in a very natural way, strong moment[s] of the transcendent ontological categories of unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness and future referentiality as authentic dimensions of thoroughgoing complementarism'. (150)

Secondly, complementarity can be found in society. What is true for the units of reality as a whole is also and in a more conscious manner valid for the members of society. They do not leave alone somebody,

who is in danger or in need, but in the family or in the larger community, which is regarded as an 'extended family', this person will find support. There are limits to this kind of harmony between human beings in society. Envy and hatred between them do occur, even sacrifice of human beings are real sometimes and somewhere. Personal interest and the personal existential situation are the causes of these limits. However, completing and supporting one another is and remains the main attitude of the members of African societies, so that the principle of 'caring is sharing' forms the predominant feature of them. The ant is the example of strength by cooperation and mutual support, as it is expressed in the 'Igbo work song', in which the following verse is repeated many times: 'Bunu bunu oo ibu anyi danda' ('Lift the load, lift the load, nothing is impossible for the ant'). (118)

Thirdly, 'personal complementarity' is taken into consideration. Every person represents this paradigm because his or her permanent and transcendent flow of consciousness connects the present life to the former life of the ancestors and to the own afterlife in the land of spirits. Thus the understanding of reality and all its different units turns out to transcend personal life by embedding it into a spiritual whole of a cosmic process, which develops in time and space. To every person the possibility is offered that he or she can participate in what is called in the Igbo-language: 'Jide ka iji' ('Joy of being'), which permeates the cosmos as a whole, society with its structure of extended families, and personal life. (148) When a person is referred to by 'using the impersonal pronoun it', this gives expression to the fact that one is speaking of the human being in its totality that 'can never be conceptualised in a fragmented mode, but as complementary units that form a whole'. (159)

The 'complementary approach to reality' is not exactly 'anthropocentric or human-centred' as it is sometimes described. Ontologically it is 'rather comprehensive': 'to be is to be in a relationship of mutual joyous complementary service'. (156/7) There is a special accent on being part of the community, and certain metaphysical and mythological ideas about the influence of the spirits occur in the worldview of African people. Also a misuse of these ideas for 'ideological manipulation' cannot be denied. Nevertheless the 'theoretical technical reason' of the African mindset and also a widespread pragmatic attitude in solving everyday problems have to be argued for.

Asouzu knows about complementary reflection from his own personal history and experience as a member of a family within the Igbo people. In the Section 'Dedication and Acknowledgement' the reader gets thoroughly informed about this personal background. Asouzu participates in this particular knowledge by learning from his ancestors and from the fellow members of his people and also by listening to his language, especially to proverbs, sayings or maxims. This knowledge is spread in the society as a whole. Nevertheless it is concentrated in persons like himself, summarising and critically evaluating what is handed down and communicated to them. These persons can be elders, office bearers, priests, healers or ordinary people. At any rate, it can be attributed to certain individuals in the present situation and in the history of the Igbo community, although Asouzu does not and/or cannot give their names. In this sense, he speaks about 'the anonymous Igbo philosopher'. (142-148, *passim*) The 'experience of transcendent complementary unity of consciousness joins' this thinker 'to his milieu'. This can be regarded as an advantage. For, 'the thinker and his environment reinforced themselves mutually'. On the other hand must be admitted: 'Due to the symbiotic relationship between the ideas of these thinkers and their environment, their thoughts did not attain the level of refinement, freshness and dynamism it would (or could) otherwise have attained'. (212; addition in the quotation between brackets by me, HK)

By the reformulation of the method and principles of complementary reflection Asouzu tries to avoid the limits and the negative aspects of the teachings of the anonymous Igbo philosopher. In respect of the 'ontological reflection' the conditions for overcoming the negative forces in the world and for stabilising harmony are sorted out. This kind of reflection includes a certain type of logic, which 'seeks to explore missing links in a comprehensive, total and universal' way of thought. Thus 'it presupposes the acquisition of an inclusive comprehensive logical mindset as opposed to a disjunctive logical mindset'. (355) And it has an impact on the 'ethical reflection', which is not only related to the questions of right or wrong, but also to those of beauty and ugliness in an aesthetic sense (369), and to the 'the joy and sadness of human action', as they are incorporated in the joyful being of cosmic and natural harmony. (361) Above all, this ontology has a religious foundation. For, 'the ontological joy of being is transcendent in the sense that it is

something that has to do with the foundation of our being outside ourselves' in the land of spirits. In connection with that, 'the search for this ultimate foundation of our existence takes very concrete and acute shape in religious experiences where this one true, absolute, and transcendent being is clearly identified in different cultures under diverse names. Some of these names are Chukwu, God, Mu'umba, Udali ...Olodumare, Onyankupon ... Allah, Yahwe' and others. (438/9)

It is a remarkable contribution to the history and the specific problems of philosophy in the Western world that complementary reflection leads to a possibility of 'overcoming the subject-object dichotomy'. It turns out not to be adequate to 'raise a thoroughgoing subjectivism' or 'a thoroughgoing objectivism' to 'a universal methodological principle'. On the one hand, scepticism and relativism, which undermine every true statement, would follow from that. And on the other hand dogmatism and imposed orthodoxy could not be avoided. In the way of thought, which is suggested by Asouzu, 'we see how a transcendent complementary unity of consciousness belongs to the same region as (or is in correspondence with) the transcendent categories of being'. (474-481; addition in the quotation between brackets by me, HK)

Not all dimensions of complementary reflection can be reviewed here. In a final analysis Asouzu comes back to a perspective of the first part of his book: the 'African paradigm' forms an answer to the 'global imperative' of political peacekeeping and social justice. The promise of a New World Order can become true by using complementary reflection instead of thinking in oppositions and in terms of friend and enemy. (51-60) In the 'new global family' nobody 'can be understood without reference to other members of the family'. And everybody has the right to be helped in a situation of danger or of need. The 'differences in age, in sex, in nationality, in religion, in language, in ethnicity, in tribe, in race, in culture, in ideologies' are expressions of a multidimensional reality. They can and must be seen as enrichment for each other in 'building a viable and meaningful human family'. (481/2)

In his Preface to Asouzu's book, Obi Oguejiofor from the Seminary at Enugu in Nigeria declares it as an advantage and as 'a clear indication of its originality' that this book 'does not dwell on discussions of theories and contentions about past writers', but 'charts its unique course in contriving a special theory'. (13) And this special theory, one could add, is based on the author's personal knowledge of authentic African traditions in the Igbo community and on dealing with them in his own philosophical thinking. This is a reasonable judgment of Asouzu's approach to African philosophy and its meaning in the context of world-philosophy.

Nevertheless I am of opinion that his approach becomes clearer and more concrete, that it gets sharper contours, if it is embedded into the context of other interpretations of African philosophy. Of course, in certain connections Asouzu is in discussion with other African and non-African philosophers. He is referring especially to well known and also to less famous Nigerian thinkers and theorists, more in particular from Igboland. References to Achebe, Bodunrin, Eboh, Eze, Okolo, Serequeberhan, Sodipo or Unah are important and often enlightening, those to Aligwekwe, Arazu, Iwe, Okadigbo, Ugorji or Uwalaka add something to the list of authors, who have already been quoted in many other books on African philosophy. From the Nigerian environment I miss names as Gbadegesin, Oluwole or Momoh. Absolutely essential contributions to African philosophy as those of Senghor, Nkrumah, Hountondji, Odera Oruka, Wiredu or Gyekye are only mentioned incidentally and not always judged carefully enough. For instance, Wiredu's project of 'conceptual decolonisation' is taken as 'a typical example' of a 'reactionary mindset'. (265) Actually Wiredu endeavours with this project to include original African thought into the worldwide philosophical work of today. To decolonise the mind does not mean to go back to traditional ways of thought, but to make them active and influential in present debates.

Odera Oruka does not refrain from giving the names of 12 Kenyan traditional philosophers from different peoples: Mwitani Masero (Utonga), Njuhi Muthoni (Kikuyu), Simiyu Chaungo (Luhya), Oruka Rang'inya (Luo), and others. (*Sage Philosophy*, Leiden a.o.: Brill 1990) And he presents more in detail the politician and philosopher *Oginga Odinga. His Philosophy and Beliefs* (Nairobi: Initiatives 1992) He calls them 'sages', like Hampaté Bâ had done in his book, written in French, with regard to his own teacher Tierno Bokar. (*La vie et l'enseignement de Tierno Bokar. Le sage de Bandiagara*, Paris: Seuil 1980) As a

follow up to that, Yacouba Konaté is looking for great names of sages further back in history and at the same time is he investigating the connection between the work of the sages and the origin of proverbs with philosophical contents. ('Le syndrome Hampaté Bâ ou comment naissent les proverbes', in: *Quest. An International African Journal of Philosophy* 8,2; 1994, p. 23-44) Thus it becomes clear how the philosophical impact of language can originate and why proverbs can be regarded as philosophical texts in the primarily oral African traditions. (H. Kimmerle, 'The philosophical text in the African oral tradition', in: Kimmerle/Wimmer (eds), *Philosophy and democracy in intercultural perspective*, Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi 1997, p. 43-56)

In his book *An essay on African philosophical thought. The Akan conceptual scheme* (Cambridge: University Press 1987) Gyekye refers to the names and the dates of interviews with Akan 'wise persons' (anyansafo) whom he regards as traditional philosophers. We learn from Asouzu and also from other African philosophers (Tschiamalenga Ntumba and Mabe) that sagacity cannot only be found with a certain group of persons. But is there in general such a recognisable group of 'wise persons' in African traditional communities? Are there persons among the Igbo people who could be identified as sages? Except his mention of Oruka's research, Asouzu refers to Ogotemmel, a blind hunter and wise person of the Dogon, by quoting the (not quite correct) story, which Masolo tells about him. (*African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington/ Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1994) And he knows about the work of Hallen and Sodipo who have discussed epistemological questions with traditional healers among the Yoruba. (Hallen/Sodipo, *Knowledge, belief and witchcraft. Analytic experiments in African philosophy*, London: Ethnographica 1986) (134-36) Odera Oruka contests that Ogotemmel and the persons who have been interviewed by Hallen and Sodipo may be called 'sages' in the sense of the word as he understands it. Is such a rather strict understanding possible? And what about philosophical sagacity which is possessed by other people than the sages? These questions arise when Asouzu refers to 'the anonymous Igbo philosopher'.

Complementary reflection of living in society makes it necessary to look at 'African communalism' and 'sense of community' as they are worked out by Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere and others. (87) However, the theoretical project of these authors, especially in connection with the movement of Negritude, is not discussed clearly enough by Asouzu. The historical context of reassuring African culture of its own value is not part of his judgment. And these authors are brought together with quite a different current in the emerging self-consciousness of African philosophy. I mean the representatives of ethnophilosophy, Tempels, Kagame, Mbiti and others, whose work was fiercely contested by Hountondji and Towa. It is true that communalism, by which a somehow idealistic picture of the African sense of community is drawn, has a limited meaning compared to complementary reflection of societal relations. It could help to show this by a more detailed argumentation. Actually the broader ontological context of complementarity in society, embedding it into a cosmic dimension, is closer to ubuntu than to communalism. Here again a discussion of conformities and differences would give sharper contours to the meaning of complementary reflection. According to Ramose ubuntu refers to the relations between human beings, completing and supporting each other, and at the same time to the forces of the universe, which are unfolded and come to self-consciousness in human thinking and speaking (*African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Books 1999).

That traditional African philosophy has been practised mainly in oral forms of tradition and communication does not mean being in any way less important, less elaborate or less thoughtful than philosophies, which prefer written forms of tradition and exchange of ideas. I agree also with Asouzu that there is no strict contradiction between orality and literacy in the practice of philosophy. (146-148) In this respect the new concept of writing which is developed by Derrida, putting it exactly on the same level as the oral use of language, can be very helpful (*De la grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit 1967). Nevertheless it is worth-wile to work out the special possibilities and strong aspects of primarily oral forms of philosophising. Oluwole has pioneered in this field relying also on the philosophical impact of oral literature, especially of the Ifa-corpus in the Yoruba tradition. (*Philosophy and Oral Tradition*, Lagos: ARK Publications 1999) And a lot can be expected for the contribution of African philosophy to solving the problems of philosophy all over the world by bringing together and harmonising both forms of philosophising, and by combining the strong aspects of them, as Mabe has suggested (*Schriftliche und mündliche Formen philosophischen*

*Denkens in Afrika*, Diss. habil., TU Berlin 2003).

In her book: *Witchcraft, Reincarnation and the God-Head* (Lagos: Excel Publishers 1992) Oluwole argues more cautiously than Asouzu and with reference to the restrictions of reliable knowledge in Western philosophy, especially in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, when she speaks of the belief in supernatural powers, the existence of God and the coming back of persons from the invisible world of spirits to the visible world of people living now. Her argumentation runs, roughly speaking, like this: If finite human beings cannot have reliable, scientifically proved knowledge, whether these dimensions of thought have a correspondence in reality, the option that there is such a correspondence (as preferred in the African worldview) is in the same way possible as the other one that there is not such a correspondence (as preferred in the Western way of thought). According to Oluwole the developments in the most advanced forms of science, particularly in microphysics, strengthen the African position. Like Achebe, to whom Asouzu refers several times, Oluwole strongly affirms that in African thought 'nothing is absolute'. (126) Therefore, she would contest that 'the worldview of the traditional African shows ... strong moment[s] of the transcendent ontological categories of unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness and future referentiality as authentic dimensions of thoroughgoing complementarism', (150) which is a core argument in Asouzu's book.

The predominant 'future relatedness' of Igbo thought, of which Asouzu speaks repeatedly (150-51, 181 a.m.o.), is also different from Mbiti's thesis that the past is the most relevant dimension of time in African thought. (*African religions and philosophy*, London 1969) Although Mbiti's statement that in African languages no anticipation of future events farther away than about two years can be expressed, has been contested heavily by Hountondji, Odera Oruka, Gyekye and others, these authors do not deny that there is a predominantly backward orientation in the African way of thought. Therefore, Asouzu's report about the future relatedness of the anonymous Igbo philosopher is in sharp contrast to most of the other philosophies of African peoples we know about. One could say, it adds a radically new aspect to the African philosophies of time. However, the close and concrete connection of time and space as 'integral dimensions of the unity of consciousness' and in the same way of 'the aspects of processes observable in nature' and of the 'aspects of the spiritual immaterial world' in Asouzu's text (175-177) is very much in accordance with the unity of time and space in the philosophy of Bantu-languages, which is worked out by Kagame. (*Sprache und Sein. Die Ontologie der Bantu Zentralafrikas*, Brazzaville/ Heidelberg 1985)

To Asouzu's ideas about 'building a viable and meaningful human family', can be added Odera Oruka's conception of a 'parental earth ethics'. In this conception the African sense of family is also extended to humanity as a (concrete) whole. And within the human family different roles and obligations can be determined. The human rights should be made more complete by the right to an existence minimum for every human being, which includes eating, clothing and housing. The former colonising countries, which are now, not independently from their colonising past, the rich countries of the world, have clear ethical obligations to share with the former colonised and now poor countries. In a future related perspective it is wise, if the rich countries now more effectively share with the poor parts of the world, for in the long run the relations between dominant and dominated parts of the world never remain the same, as history teaches us. ('Ecophilosophy and the Parental Earth Ethics', in: Graness/Kresse (eds), *Sagacious Reasoning. Henry Odera Oruka in memoriam*, Frankfurt/M. a.o.: Peter Lang 1997, p. 119-131, 'Philosophie der Entwicklungshilfe. Die Frage des Rechts auf ein menschliches Minimum, in: *polylog. Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren* 6, 2000, p. 6-16)

In a final judgment I would say that Asouzu's book presents a new approach to African philosophy as a whole and gives valuable details about African philosophy of a certain region. He argues himself that this kind of regional differentiations of African philosophy are useful and necessary. (121-22 a.m.o.) This is in line with his general claim for differentiation and multidimensionality. (450 a.m.o.) Without reducing the renewing value of Asouzu's approach to African philosophy in general, we can add his conception to those of other regional African philosophies. Besides the knowledge we have about thought systems of African peoples in the literature of cultural anthropologists, we know about Luba and other Bantu philosophies by the works of Tempels and Kagame, about Fulani and Toucouleurs philosophies by Tierno Bokar and Hampaté Bâ, about Dogon philosophy by Ogotemmel, about Luo, Lyhsia and other

Kenyan philosophies by Odera Oruka, about Akan and Ga philosophies by Abraham, Wiredu, Gyekye and Kudadjie, about Gikuyu philosophy by Wanjohi, about Yoruba philosophy by Hallen/Sodipo, Oluwole and Gbadegesin. And fortunately now we know more about Igbo-philosophy by Asouzu.

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Reply to Heinz Kimmerle, Zoetermeer's review and critical comments on  
Innocent Asouzu's Approach to African Philosophy

For the purpose of clarity, I have placed my reply to Kimmerle's review to my book under these seven headings. Each is built around some identifiable ideas taken from the review. I did not go into details about those issues I consider merely formal but I have provided enough clues on how to handle them.

- On unintended ethno-philosophic commitment and ethnocentrism
  - On reductionism and character of philosophical question beyond ethnic biases
- On the suspicion of dogmatism and imposed orthodoxy
- On the relative and absolute nature of statements
- On the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness
- On the origin and nature of ideas
- On the full emancipation of reason

#### **On unintended ethno-philosophic commitment and ethnocentrism**

The observation that "fortunately now we know more about Igbo-philosophy by Asouzu" serves as the point of departure for my comments on an issue I consider very important for the understanding and assessment of philosophy as a culture-relevant systematic methodological undertaking. This issue concerns *unintended ethno-philosophic commitment* which is the tendency for philosophers to do philosophy with ethnocentric mindset *unintentionally*. By so doing, they unintentionally, cling to and defend those ideas and values they cherish in an exclusive non-relational manner. There are two variants of ethno-philosophic commitment - *ethno philosophy proper* and *unintended ethno-philosophic commitment*.

*Ethno-philosophy proper* is the one form of commitment that is easily identifiable. This is that variant that considers the collection and description of the general worldview of a people the target of philosophical investigation and thereby it underestimates the role which personal critical reflection plays in inquiry.

In the case of *unintended ethno-philosophic commitment* we are dealing with a phenomenon that is today widespread but hardly acknowledged as a problem. This is why even many critics of ethno-philosophy are often caught in the web of the same difficulties which they are criticising without realising it. One of the main reasons for this unintended commitment is the issue of past historical wrongs. In those cases, where philosophers feel that they are or once were victims of external domination or oppression, the tendency is often to pursue philosophy vigorously with the mindset of restoration. Not only those who feel that they are victims are concerned in this matter but more so still those who feel that they are villains or guilty of one form of historical anomaly or the other. From both angles, the feeling is to make some sort of restitution. The danger in a situation of this kind is that due to over sensitivity about issues of ethnic undertone the main subject matter of philosophy as a science gets lost.

Let us take a cursory look at some of the main features of both ethno-philosophy proper and unintended ethno-philosophic commitment as it concerns African philosophy. Ethno-philosophy proper is that brand of ethno-philosophy that has attracted most criticism within the last thirty years or more in African philosophy. In many African universities and institutions of higher learning, philosophy is still taught in this way. Here, philosophy is hardly different from ethnology with the attendant field research aimed at the documentation of the general worldview of a people. Whereas ethno-philosophy proper in its approach is

triumphal, supremacist, conservative and dogmatic about African cultural heritage which it seeks to document and describe, unintended ethno-philosophy is equally conservative, triumphal, supremacist but critical. In other words, both approach their subject matter subtly differently but they are exposed to the same danger. This is the danger of ethnocentric commitment and disregard of the main target of philosophical investigation. Wherever the supremacist, conservative and triumphal dimensions take the upper hand the target of philosophical investigation as the science of ultimate reality is grossly jeopardised. Unintended ethno-philosophic commitment has much to do with ultra-nationalist sentiments of a radical fundamentalist type. In African philosophy, this form of commitment can threaten even the more promising methods of philosophical investigation. This is the case with hermeneutics of culture which Azenabor describes as "a reaction to the identity crisis due to the presence of a foreign and dominating tradition and the necessity for self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition" (Schools of Thought, 26). Thus, one can say that the danger of this type of ethnocentric commitment is all the more heightened when philosophy is brought in close contact with the issue of definition of one's identity. Aspects of this worry underlie Oguejiofor's reflections in the work "Philosophy and African Predicament". Thus hermeneutics of culture, which sees African culture as the starting point of reflection *can* miss the main focus of philosophical investigation whenever the ethnic undertone takes the upper hand.

Generally, one can then say that both ethno-philosophy proper and unintended ethno-philosophy share the common weakness of the danger of missing the target of philosophical inquiry. It is for this reason that they have the capacity to retard the growth of knowledge and stifle creative thinking due to the conservative type of inbreeding that consistently threatens their methodology. Whereas the weaknesses and excesses of ethno-philosophy proper, as a form of empirical ethnological study, is very glaring, those of unintended ethno-philosophic commitment are not always evident. It is thus a concealed type of active danger that is capable of invalidating the good intentions of those caught in the web of its debilitation effect. A few examples suffice to illustrate this threat.

Momoh, in his self-understanding classifies himself as belonging to what he calls "The Purist School of Thought" within African philosophy. Besides himself, he reckons to this purist school of thought such thinkers as Sophie Oluwole, Claude Sumner, W. E. Abraham, Barry Hallen, J. O. Sodipo, Akin Makinde, K. C. Anyanwu, I. C. Onyewuenyi, Jim Unah and Enyeribe and Godwin Azenabor" (Nature, Issues 18). Commenting on the focus of the purist school of thought, Godwin Azenabor avers: "Authentic African philosophy... is pure and unadulterated, i.e. free from foreign influence and culture. ...Authentic African philosophy... should break away from western paradigms, conditionings and conceptual schemes. It should be oriented towards African environment, basic assumptions, culture and goal" (Azenabor, Schools of Thought 29). Charting a course of research, Momoh suggests, from a purist point of view, that "a researcher can focus on the 'Hausa concept of Beauty: an Essay in African Aesthetics'. In metaphysics, we can focus on, say 'Yoruba Cosmology' (or Cosmogony or Ontology)". (Nature, Issues 19). The ethno-centric and ethno-philosophic undertone of Momoh's approach is glaring even if he imagines it to be otherwise. As long as philosophy does not fully free itself from ethnocentric excesses, it would continue to find itself battling with self-imposed restrictions and even with self-contradiction. One of the main reasons for this self-delimitation is the inability of the practitioners of this type of philosophy to see that the self-expression of being in history is something that is fundamentally complementary in constitution. In this case, no form of cultural inquiry is adequate where the inquirer is not in a position to give a comprehensive account of the self-expression of being in history. Where one overlooks this fundamental comprehensive structure of reality, and seeks to steer a course of cultural autonomy outside of the legitimacy provided by the whole, the person concerned is soon caught resolving fake puzzles with the attendant risk of self-contradiction. We can then understand why "one finds elements of Western thought firmly rooted in Okot p'Bitek's works, even as he viciously critiques the impositions of Western categories on African thought system" (Masolo, The Conceptions of the Person 85).

Between ethno-philosophy proper, hermeneutics of culture and that variant of philosophy of culture understood as dialogue of cultures, complementary reflection understands itself as a transcendent critical re-evaluation of claims and statements based on culture specific insights with the intent of determining their ultimate validity in a comprehensive future oriented manner. Its recourse to African culture is therefore

due to its understanding of philosophy as an ambient reflection constituted of all the actors and factors that enter into the ideas of the thinker. If I make recourse to my African ambient in this reflection, it is only indirectly insofar as I cannot consummate my reflection except within some ambient which takes into account *all the possible relations* that determine my thinking. In this case, culture within a complementary framework connotes more than African culture as to include all the missing links that enter into the ideas of a thinker. This complementary transcendent approach has become unavoidable today where even philosophy of culture is almost being degraded to a dialogue of cultures without very clear cut philosophical focus. For this reason, the question how a philosophy of culture can be possible has to be understood as a transcendent comprehensive inquiry into the ambient of the philosophy concerned. Going from the background of globalisation today, such a comprehensive complementary approach is unavoidable bearing in mind the unavoidable complementary mutual relationship of units within the framework of the whole. Complementary reflection aims at the demythologisation of all forms of exclusive, capricious, defensive reason masquerading as localised rationality which make such a comprehensive outreach impossible. Within its framework reality as a whole, including human history as we know it today, is the result of a complementarity of all the actors and factors that enter into its genesis. Here a philosopher is a being of many colours as he seeks to serve as a bridge between reality and humanity. Hence if we now “know more about Igbo-philosophy by Asouzu”, we should bear in mind that the focus, as such, is not Igbo philosophy, Nigerian philosophy, African philosophy, Indian philosophy, German philosophy, but a transcendent comprehensive complementary inquiry into the nature of reality as to determine its true and ultimate constitution.

#### **On reductionism and character of philosophical question beyond ethnic biases**

One can say that complementary reflection does not exclude a priori any conceptual scheme in the process of articulation of being and meaning due to the universal applicability of its assumptions. In this sense, I fully agree with Kimmerle’s observation that “it is a remarkable contribution to the history and the specific problems of philosophy in the Western world that complementary reflection leads to a possibility of ‘overcoming the subject-object dichotomy’.” This remark should not be taken for granted if one considers the fact that, in many quarters today, a lot of efforts are unintentionally invested to hinder the universal relevance of the applicability of the subject matter of philosophy. In this case, many dissipate their energies securing intellectual terrains and handling issues arising from them as specific problems relevant to their intellectual traditions and domains only. I would say that this style of philosophising, wherever it is dominant, is the unfortunate remnants of the intrusion of unintended ethno-philosophic projections into inquiry as this seek to complicate human relationship and invalidate all our good intentions. This trend, as it concerns African philosophy, does nothing other than to hamper its growth, as the choice of dominant and very restricted research themes shows. Naturally, philosophy should be very relevant to life but it should be more than an obsession about specific themes congenial to a cultural milieu. Whenever the philosopher clenches to specific themes and fails to see how these are related to reality in general, he runs the risk of not rising above the trappings of commonsense experience. Where philosophy does not rise above the demands of commonsense experience and is pursued with a mythological mindset, it would invariably also be subjected to the illusions and errors of commonsense experience. (Method and 433). A cursory look at contemporary African societies shows widespread belief in superstitious practices, a feature that it shares with traditional African societies and most primitive societies the world over. Many African philosophers proceed from the assumption that there are specific themes congenial to African philosophy to which some of these superstitious practices belong necessarily. The danger is that in his zeal to reclaim these features as *specifically* African, the philosopher is often prone to import and incorporate this superstitious mindset uncritically into inquiry. This danger is all the more heightened when the inquirer, in his overconfidence as a specialist, imagines that he is the one most qualified to speak authoritatively about certain matters. Where this approach is prevalent, the main choice themes for African philosophy are those recurrent themes some of its practitioners claim are congenial to this type of philosophy. We can then understand Momoh when he proudly announces that “any work that claims to be on African philosophy, be it by an indigenous or non-African philosopher, is not on African philosophy if it is actually not in harmony and congruence with



the spirit of African philosophy” which subsists in the fact that “reality is primarily spiritual” (Nature, Issues 18). The adverse effect of this form of segmentation of philosophy into specific intellectual terrains is a type of unavoidable reductionism. In the case of African philosophy, this is often reduced to an uncritical inquiry into exotic themes of which spirits, magic, witchcraft and telepathic conjectures take a prominent place. As is often the case in such matters, those involved devise subtle mechanisms to reclaiming these as specific if not exclusive African cultural themes. Due to the high esteem some of these African inquirers enjoy, their approach enters into the way their peers elsewhere see them and into the type of self-understanding ascribed to African philosophy. It is based on this form of misperceived self-understanding that dialogue is often also sought between diverse conceptual schemes. A typical example is that intended in the book edited by Brown *African Philosophy. New and Traditional Perspectives*. The target of this book “is to bring Western philosophy into contact with traditional African folk philosophy in a fruitful way” (vii). The good intention underlying this work is easily overshadowed by the type of reductionism underlying efforts expanded by the contributors to secure those intellectual terrains they consider specific to each conceptual scheme. What is striking about this book is its tendency to typify conceptual schemes in a way that sets one against the other, even if this is what the book seeks to avoid. This tendency comes to a pitch in Brown’s own essay on “Understanding and Ontology in Traditional African Thought” (158-178). Here, he goes ahead contrasting Western Civilisation with traditional African thought which he equates with *African thought per se*. In this sense, he finds it expedient to compare “Western Perspectives and African Conceptions of Personhood” (163-167). More often than not, what is intended as a dialog between conceptual schemes soon turns out to be another mechanism devised to secure specific and often exclusive irreconcilable intellectual terrains. What works of this nature appear to forget is that we cannot think of the achievements and failures of the modern world without thinking of this in a complementary mode. In this case, these achievements or failures should not be articulated as if these are the gains or pains of what is called the Western world or any worlds of our creation and imagination. These are human issues and we should not be surprised if they surface in any culture. It is because they are human problems that we are likely to arrive at the same conclusions while coming from different cultural paradigms. In this case, it is not at all strange if through complementary reflection some light is shed on some thorny philosophical issues some decades ago. The same holds true for the conclusions arrived at in the book edited by Brown himself. The difference is that the contributors in Brown’s book believe that these are culture specific issues. One can say that the approach adopted in the book brings the contributors to the same questions that they ab initio intended to avoid. It is thus an indirect but smart way of intensifying the age old problem in African philosophy by asking if there is an African philosophy different from Western philosophy; a philosophical debate, though, which, as the editor rightly pointed out “has lost much of its luster” (vi). This form of circularity ensues when one reduces philosophy to an inquiry into the specific issues of a particular culture. If the sole purpose of philosophy were the domestication of our ideas, certainly it would lead ultimately to the worst form of solipsism.

Surely, each individual stands to impact on our world beyond his private thoughts and irrespective of ethnic and cultural localisations. Here philosophy has the task of probing the range of applicability of such thoughts. In all, philosophy should be more than an avenue for recounting achievements, exploits, victories and defeats. To avoid this manner of reductionism, it may be proper for philosophers to state what they think about the issues at stake bearing in mind the demands of reality in its most sublime constitution. This they can achieve by resisting the temptation *to hide behind generalisations* arising from general worldviews or such statements as “the Western idea of this or the African idea of that” to foster ideological and ethnocentric tussles. This approach gives philosophers merely the image of cultural or ethnocentric dogmatists. Often, such approaches emphasise the need for self-definition and self-knowledge which they define as those things that make individuals and groups special and exclusive. Here, we see how this mindset has much to do with the unfounded fear and anxiety that commitment to the idea of complementarity might lead to a denial of differences and the resultant denial of achievement of units within the framework of the whole. On the contrary, complementary reflection affirms differences since it is through mutual complementarity that being in its self-expression attains full enrichment and actualisation. Thus in complementarity all entities involved stand to gain fully through the augmentation of their

potentialities since commitment to complementarity is commitment to variety and multidimensionality which in themselves are strength and not limitation. A dialogue between different cultures would hardly take place in an atmosphere where each individual is afraid that to concede to the fact of mutual complementarity his or her creativity would lose in emphasis and splendour. It is especially due to such unfounded fears that we seek to secure specific intellectual terrains that are congenial to specific peoples and cultures. In consummating our reflection, it is often useful to remember the unavoidable mutual indebtedness in complementarity of all finite beings. This creates the necessary leverage for philosophy to investigate its subject matter freely irrespective of local constraints and with regard to the universal structure of reality. This commitment has always characterised philosophy in its self-understanding as wisdom. It is based on this characteristic that it seeks to understand reality in its most sublime form. Where this complementary structure of reality is forgotten, the tendency is to elevate the alleged little privileges conveyed to us by relative historical circumstances to absolute advantages. Worse still is when we seek to raise such alleged privileges to ideal paradigms for the judgement of others. This is when we also seek to recount such privileges triumphantly and to compare them with the thought systems of others imagining that this is the main target of philosophical inquiry. Where this form of philosophising is prevalent, it would probably merely succeed in deepening the divide between diverse cultures due to its obvious localised focus. In matters of cultural philosophy, it may be worthwhile allowing those issues we imagine to be culture specific to be ringing loudly in our mind's ears continuously with a view to forestalling cases of undue false claims and avoidable reductionism.

### **On the suspicion of dogmatism and imposed orthodoxy**

It is from the background of a harmonised approach to reality that I wish to respond and probe Kimmerle's comment with reference to complementary reflection that "on the one hand, scepticism and relativism, which undermine every true statement, would follow from that. And on the other hand dogmatism and imposed orthodoxy could not be avoided."

Generally, the target of complementary reflection is to forestall relapse into extreme forms of relativism and absolutism. It seeks to achieve this by recourse to the method and principle of complementary reflection insofar these offer us the necessary tools for this task. These are those tools that cater for the unity of being and consciousness as they find expression in the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness which include fragmentation, comprehensiveness, totality, unity, wholeness and future reference. Through recourse to these transcendent categories, a complementary mindset always seeks unity in differentiation in all historical situations. Here, a complementary mindset is resistant to all forms of fixed-focus predetermination, be it absolute or relative. The reason for this is that all aspects of human experience form part of the totality of the flow of consciousness at all levels of determination. In this case, the issue would ever remain how to uphold harmony in every situation in which we find ourselves such that units are fully integrated, without contradiction – both formally and materially, into a totality as dimensions of the dynamic self-expression of being in history.

In complementary reflection, any aspects of our cognitive experience that proves exclusive makes itself inadequate for the task of this harmony of units within the framework of the whole. Here, all forms of world immanent determination proceed and are possible due to the type of relative fragmentation that is characteristic of our experience of the world and reality in general. The tendency of the human reason in all ambivalent situations is to negate this relative fragmentation and to render itself absolute. Complementary reflection rejects this tendency and seeks to restore a balance in human reason which often seeks its autonomy outside of the framework provided by the whole. This loss of balance is caused by excessive selfishness which is grounded in our passion for self-preservation. For complementary reflection, therefore, self-transcendence and authentic existence subsist in those mechanisms we put in place to rid ourselves of the passion for exclusiveness and to harmonise our personal interests and dysfunctional expectations with those of all missing links of reality. Here complementary reflection makes recourse to the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness as those categories that must be present in all attempts to validate our actions and claims. In this case, human reason upholds its authenticity and validity, if it is in a position to concede to its relativity and abdicate the passion for absoluteness. This it does in a future

referential way since the foundation of all forms of authentication is future related. In this way, no form of finite reason is absolute and all forms of finite reason are not only critique worthy but more so pedagogy worthy.

Now, if the pedagogy of reason must be consummated in reflection, it then means that a deficient exclusive form of hegemonic reason is not fit for this task. It is for this reason that complementary reflection makes recourse to that faculty that is responsible for the unity of being and consciousness and for the harmony of differences. Here we are thinking of a complementary type of totalising mind (*obi/mmuo eziokwu* in Igbo language), in so far as this is the seat of aforementioned transcendent categories of unity of consciousness. No form of rational act is adequate which negates the operations of this totalising mind as the seat of aforementioned transcendent categories. Again no form of human act can be considered adequate or authentic that is executed in the negation of the applicability of these categories. Through commitment to fragmentation all missing links concede to their relativity and inadequacy. Through commitment to wholeness, comprehensiveness, unity and future reference they become aware of their relativity and the need to refer all claims and assertions to the ultimate future referential foundation of their validation. Through the habitual internalisation of the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness the mind always seek balance between extreme forms of relativism and absoluteness and by so doing it is conscious of the dangers of relapse into extreme tendencies. The worst form of this tendency is the negation of mutual complementary relationship between units within the framework of the whole. Here, the mind comes to realise that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality in view of the joy of being. In all existential situations, this joy of being sustains our actions, such that to negate the mutual complementarity between units would amount to negation of those necessary means for our own joy and happiness. In this way, it guards against relapse into worst forms of exclusiveness, contradiction and self-alienation This approach is definitely a formidable bulwark against relapse into extreme forms of absolutism and relativism as it guards against all manners of dogmatism and arbitrary imposition bearing in mind that it is firmly anchored on the demands of the principle and imperative of complementary reflection as aspects of the principle of non-contradiction and the truth and authenticity criterion. It is therefore not a one sided claim of relativity or absoluteness, it is a comprehensive commitment to wholeness which makes recourse to one-sided dogmatism or arbitrarily imposition as methodological principle impossible

### **On the relative and absolute nature of statements**

A typical case of a one-sided depiction of the structure of human reason in history is Kimmerle's reference to Oluwole, to the effect that "in African thought 'nothing is absolute'". Kimmerle's naturally appears to share this opinion himself. First and foremost, such sweeping generalisations, which are at times unavoidable, can be considered as remnants of unintended ethno-philosophic commitment. For complementary reflection "African thought" is not homogeneous since there are identifiable systems of thought within this ambit as they represent private opinions of individual thinkers and groups of thinkers. Given that there are worldviews that are community thought, Igbos, like other human beings, are critical in their approach to such worldviews. This is why Anyanwu reminds us that "The Igbos assume, for example, that every person has his or her own 'Chi', and that no two 'Chi' are identical, but they will or may differ about the significance, function and implications of 'Chi'" (64). It is in this sense that Nwoga, on his part, avers that Igbos see things in complementary duality. Meaning that dualism is not ruled out as one of the thought systems prevalent in Igbo societies. Again Nwala, more cautiously, designates traditional Igbo ethical attitude as "flexible" and not as one devoid of absolute commitment as Achebe appears to be insinuating (*The Method and Principles* 348). These modes of accentuation and differences merely show that within Igbo philosophy there are different currents of thought of which the complementary system of thought is only one. It does not in anyway show that the thought system of Igbos generally is relative or one of anything goes lacking some ultimate foundation or anchor in absolute ultimate commitment. This differentiated approach to reality is characteristic of most traditional African societies and here, Godwin Azenabor in reference to Lancinay Keita even alludes to *holism* "as an African philosophical tradition" (Azenabor, *Understanding the problems in African Philosophy* 77). Hence if Achebe and Oluwole uphold

that “in African thought ‘nothing is absolute’” as Kimmerle pointed out, they are entitled to their opinion. In this case, the position they represent can be understood alongside mine and this merely goes to reinforce my assertion that there are diverse currents of thought in traditional African philosophy of which the complementary current is only one. However, should Achebe and Oluwole insist that generally “in African thought” nothing is absolute and that “I am the truth, the way, and the life would be called blasphemous or simply absurd”, (Achebe 68), I would say that “African thought” especially today, would hardly agree with them. In other words, their opinion must be taken with a philosophical grain of salt. What may interest us would be how the truth content of their assertion can be validated, if only empirically. Here I would say that their claim is highly improbable if one remember that for the traditional Igbo verdicts of such famous oracles as – Igwe-ka-Ani, Agbala, Ebulu-Okpa-Bia were considered absolute and here something is absolute. This absoluteness is one of the main reasons these oracles enjoyed much patronage and were also abused grossly (Asouzu, *The Method* 217). The oracle Ebulu-Okpa-Bia was unmistakably identified, by Igbos, with the supreme absolute deity Chukwu. It is for this reason that the custodians of this oracle the Aros enjoyed unprecedented privileges in Igbo-land since they designated themselves as Umuchukwu (the children of the supreme deity) and were understood as such. There is no doubt that the Igbo traditional African complementary system of thought has a dimension of absolute commitment since its practitioners were deeply aware of the forcefulness of the principle of non-contradiction.

For complementary reflection, the ultimate epistemological foundation of true knowledge and experience of reality is absolute and future oriented in so far this is firmly grounded, both formally and materially, in the principle of non-contradiction. This is still the case even if our experiences of the world in its relative fragmentation can differ. It is in view of this absolute future referential dimension that the validity of all our claims and assertions can be measured. This holds true not only for traditional African societies but for all human beings in general. Herein is to be located the foundation of authentication of inter-subjective experiences and legitimisation even of constituted authority. Without this form of absolute indubitable commitment, which for complementary reflection is the ideal of reason seeking full authentication in history, both practically and theoretically, no certain knowledge would be possible even at pure subjective level, as the case of the hard core sceptic clearly shows.

This point revolves around the same epistemological issues raised by Oguejiofor in his reply to Okolo and Eboh, who are poking at an all embracing African rationality (Asouzu, *The Method* 473). It is not a choice between absoluteness and relativity. It is the complementary challenge of comprehensiveness in our relationship to the world and reality in general which we encounter not only as mere relative fragments. In our encounter with reality, there is always a moment of uncertainty and here we remain ignorant of some aspects of this reality no matter the efforts we make. In this case, we are faced with evolving credible method towards the reconciliation of the tension between a thorough going subjectivism and a totalitarian form of rationality which seeks to lay claim to absolute certainty. In this matter, traditional African societies no less than our modern world has the same problem of evolving adequate parameters for resolving the challenges which the world, in its complexity, throws at the subject. In other words, complementary reflection is not claiming that human experience of the world is absolute or relative without qualification. The issue of absoluteness or relativity depends on the level of articulation of being. It is for this reason that this issue can be adequately articulated within the framework of the reasons underlying the subject-object tension such that the subject seeks its autonomy outside the foundation of its unity.

The way we relate to this issue by far determines our outlook to the world and the type of mechanisms we adopt towards resolving this difficult issue. It further determines the type of philosophy, conception of human being, and society we are capable of evolving. It is for this reason that I insist that all meanings and references get their true worth and can be validated only in a comprehensive, whole and future oriented manner since reality cannot evince itself fully in singular historical instances but only complementarily comprehensive. In this sense, wholeness, unity, comprehensiveness, fragmentation, and future reference remain those transcendent ontological categories of authentication for all forms of knowledge and experiences. Although these categories are intrinsic forms of the mind, they can be invalidated due to the challenges of our ambivalent existential situation. On the other hand, they can be regained experientially in the process of existential conversion where we render these transcendent

categories concrete. Complementary reflection thus snares at all forms of exclusive reasoning, be it absolute or relative that seek to resolve this issue arbitrarily on the platform of an ideal absolute or relative hegemonic form of rationality.

### **On the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness**

Complementary reflection thus sees the resolution of the issue of extreme forms of relativity and absoluteness as something that falls within the region of the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness as these form the foundation of the experience of transcendent complementary unity of consciousness. It is within this context that one can answer to the question how one should understand my assertion that “the worldview of the traditional African shows...strong moments of the transcendent ontological categories of unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness and future referentiality as authentic dimensions of thoroughgoing complementarity”. It is important to point out that I have in mind with this assertion the system of thought of anonymous traditional African philosophers of the complementary direction, be it among the traditional “Fulani, Ibibio, Masai, Hausa, or Fulani, , Pygmies, San or Khoi Khoi”. There is sufficient evidence that the thinking of traditional Igbos and those of most African philosophers of the complementary direction show strong moments of these transcendent categories to which belongs the dimension of *fragmentation* as moment of relative future commitment. This is mostly the case when one comes to think of the fact that traditional Igbo philosophers of the complementary system of thought seek to capture all missing links in their insufficiency in the evident insight that *uwa ezuoke* (the world is incomplete or insufficient). This is why this philosopher keeps asking: *onye ka ozuru?* (who is perfect?). The resolution of the challenges presented by human insufficiency was for this philosopher not an insurmountable task in so far he or she lives in the firm conviction that *ihe ukwu kpe azu* (the greatest events are in the future). This future is not a mere mental construct but ensures from the relative character of all forms of inquiry which in themselves cannot uphold their determination except by reason of a secure indubitable foundation which must be assumed at all times and in all places. The hope and reality of this future takes, for these philosophers, very concrete and radical form in “ancestral worship” with the attendant belief in life in the spirit world (*ana mmuo*). This is why the desire for acceptance into this spirit world constituted the main fulcrum and epicentre of traditional Igbo existential living. Traditional Igbo life revolves around a unified consciousness provided by this belief which determined most of its important rites and symbols. Thus the idea of complementarity, in its most complex expression as a transcendent unified conscious act geared towards a future that is uncertain yet intelligible enough as to sustain meaningful human action in society, forms an integral part of the ideas of traditional Igbo philosophers of the complementary system of thought. By recourse to the forcefulness of these categories, these philosophers were able to shape the worldview of their contemporaries and beyond, just as the ideas of Marxists philosophers shape the worldview of their contemporaries and beyond.

I quite agree with Kimmerle that it is worthwhile searching for concrete names of these anonymous traditional African philosophers as Yacouba Konate is now doing. If we have such names it is definitely an advantage, as the cases of Odera Oruka, Hampate Ba and Sodipo Hallen, have shown. These findings merely go to reinforce my assertion about the dominance of systems of thought in traditional African society, just as Masolo did with reference to *Ogotemmêli* phenomenon. I am more interested in the ideas of these anonymous traditional African philosophers, which are accessible to us through numerous literal sources and cultural materials, than in their persons as such. Central to their ideas is what I have characterised as the transcendent categories of unity of consciousness as these are constitutive for the experience of transcendent complementary unity of consciousness. These transcendent categories of unity of consciousness inform the mind as to make it naturally receptive for truth, both formally and materially, at all levels of experience and determination. Furthermore, these categories belong to the nature of mind in its true and authentic form since human reason by its very nature always strives to ultimate certainty. In reliance on these categories, the human mind is capable of the knowledge of missing links of reality as pure means and pure essences. The mind can achieve this because in its commitment to these categories it adheres to the demands of the principle of non-contradiction, which is an integral aspect and expression of the truth and authenticity criterion. This criterion demands that we do not elevate relative missing links to

absolute instances, nor negate the comprehensive future relatedness of all missing links of reality. Where this form of experience of being is in place, the mind is disposed to know things truly and authentically. Whenever the human reason acts naturally, that is to say, under the guidance of these transcendent categories, there is the likelihood that it intuits the foundation of its legitimacy. We encounter such a situation where the traditional Igbo philosophers of the complementary system of thought refer to the human person as a being that is guided by the faculty that is responsible for the experience of transcendent complementary unity of consciousness. This faculty is *obi/mmuo imaihe na eziokwu* or *obi/mmuo eziokwu* (the mind for grasping reality in its most authentic constitution). Acting under the guidance of this faculty Ejizu, in reference to traditional African societies, avers “they strove with religious zeal to formulate good and lasting policies, promulgated just laws, settle disputes and dispense justice promptly since they well knew that any infringement, even if it escaped the notice of members of their community was likely to provoke the wrath of the ever-attentive gods” (Ejizu 83). It is to be remarked that having an intuition into the foundation of all missing links of reality under the guidance of this faculty of *obi/mmuo eziokwu*, is no guarantee that the mind actually adhere to the dictates of this ultimate legitimising foundation. The reason for this is obvious due to the tension generated by human ambivalent situation. This explains why in spite of the high ideal proclaimed by this traditional African society, individuals and groups were caught in the web of the worst types of contradiction and paradoxes. These are those instances where extreme forms of relativity or absoluteness were elevated to norms of action. In other words, even if relativity is an integral and necessary dimension of our experience of the world, it is not constitutive of human experience of reality; not even that of traditional African societies. In this point, the traditional African world-immanent pre-deterministic concomitant tendency is as critic worthy as this is everywhere. Hence the task would always be how to reconcile the tensions arising from the challenges of extreme forms of relativity and absolutism in human ambivalent existential situation. It is not an issue of a choice between relativism or absolutism.

### **On the origin and nature of ideas**

We are exposed to the choice between extreme forms of relativism and absolutism, for example, in those situations where we think that there is a justified need to legitimise or defend ourselves against external challenges. One of the most natural reactions to such challenges is to clench to those ideas we can designate as our “original ideas” which are radically different from those of others. When now one starts thinking of including “original African thought into the worldwide philosophical work of today” with a view to making them “influential in present debates”, it sounds as if the ideas involved in such debates are discrete quantities that must be reclaimed from somewhere. In this case, they are a priori lacking in any form of relationship to other ideas elsewhere whatsoever. Hence, the issue which Kimmerle raises with regard to Wiredu’s project of “conceptual decolonisation” cannot be resolved without going back to the age-old issue about the nature and origin of our ideas. For complementary reflection, our ideas and thoughts can be articulated and be thought of only within the framework of all the actors and factors that give rise to them. Here, our world is a world of ideas where dialogue or discourse provides the form of our ideas. Where one gives the impression that this form and its material content can be thought of outside of the framework provided by the whole, some important epistemological questions arise which must first be resolved with regard to the nature and origin of our ideas. These questions include: What is the character of “original thought”? In what sense do we have or can speak of “original ideas”? Certainly not in the sense of *excogitatio ex nihilo* i.e conjuring ideas out of pure nothingness devoid of relations.

Concepts and ideas, within the context of finite beings, are possible only within the context of relationship of units to each other. This relationship must be comprehensive to make any sense as something that has to be articulated within the framework of dialogue. Hence original ideas in the sense of pure personal intuition, even as isolated cognitive units in given locations is difficult to come by. In this sense, our relationship to reality as a whole is apperceptively complementary. In the process of cognition, sense impressions are moulded by the mind to what we consider true pictures of our world as we know it. This is that area of our world in which we show our creativity and define our cognitive freedom as individuals who are primarily located and grouped into subjective worlds peculiar to us. At this level of cognition, each person has a picture of his or her world which can be characterised as his or her “original ideas” constituted

of personal creative intuition. No one can take this world from us and not be liable of infringing into our personal freedom to represent reality as we see it and as it occurs to us. This is our “primary original world”. In a transferred sense, this mode of representation of idea can be predicated of groups of individuals who see the world similarly on account of certain experiences they share in common. This is the ambient world of the subject and of groups which we call their subjective worldviews. This area of our cognitive life is so special that to infringe upon it carries with it a shock and can amount to an inversion. In this sense we can speak of culture shock or inversion of cognitive privacy. The task would ever remain to determine in what sense this so called special reserve can be designated as *original*. Certainly not in the strict sense of the word as something that is based on pure personal intuition devoid of any form of relations. In all, we often tend to forget that this our private world is merely *apperceptive* and for this reason, we tend to elevate it to the status of pure personal or private intuition. It is for this reason also that we are at all shocked when we feel that this area has been unduly infringed upon. In this case, we perceive such intrusion as illegitimate. However the fact remains that this our private world is merely an attempt at a *habitual*, subjective “true representation” of the totality of reality which we share with others. As long as we forget that what we designate as our world, is not as independent and un-related as we imagine, that is the moment we also forget that dimension of mutual dependence and indebtedness in complementarity that is characteristic of all cognitive processes. This forgetfulness is at the root of our tendencies to always ascribe the genesis of our individual apperceptive worlds unintentionally solely to our personal private insight. In this case, we consider all intrusions into this as unwarranted even if this our world is thinkable only through such intrusion. Where these intrusions are rightly perceived, they revert to reminders about the illusion surrounding the world we have come to claim and accept unintentionally as our original world and those ideas associated with them. In the unconscious internalisation of common sense experience as true knowledge subsists the challenge of human ambivalent situation and tyranny of common sense experience. This is the mythological mindset as it complicates human relationship ( Asouzu, Method and Principles 433).

Philosophically, the epistemological challenge about the illusion of non-relational character of knowledge will ever remain one of the biggest challenges in the process of the human reason seeking certainty. We carry this illusion often into the world and one of the most severe consequences of this is to create an ideal world of our own personal achievement, with its special types of laws, values and privileges. It is that world that does not admit of alternative life style and which must co-exist with other cognitive worlds, in a parallel if not exclusive modes of paradoxical co-existence. This is the world of differences, the tribal and racist world of differences and parallel co-existence. Unless the mind overcomes the illusion of a non-relational form of the origin of our ideas all the things we call “original ideas and thoughts” will ever have all the potentials to lead us to error and to unending tension in society. One of the most severe forms of this error is the situation where we labour unduly, and often vain gloriously and triumphantly, to make one system of thought influential against another and thereby forget the mutual complementary structure of all thoughts in their genesis.

When carefully considered, we notice that Ideas are not constituted of isolated units of sensory or intellectual intuition which the mind identifies as particles hanging somewhere waiting to be grasped or intuited somehow. Where the mind is under the illusion of non-relational character of ideas, it imagines them to be discrete quantities or units that impress on it in isolation of the missing links that constitute the whole. Ideas are indeterminate relational sensations that the mind always attempts to mould into a coherent whole. They are indeterminate in the sense that they impress the mind as empirical or intellectual intuitions seeking full expression and articulation. It is the function of the mind to give them form as the localised meanings they assume but with reference to their indeterminate interrelatedness. Thus, we perceive the world *meaningfully* in quasi indeterminate forms, that is to say, in so far as the meaning of impressions, both sensory and intellectual, are not completely pre-given or determined by all the possible relations that sustain them. As such, ideas are impressions in consistent need of confirmation and authentication. Originality subsists in what we make of these *quasi determinate* ideas that challenge our minds in view of the foundation that gives them their ultimate confirmation or authentication. This is what happens in dialogue as the philosopher’s arena for digging out truth. In their indeterminacy subsists the ambivalent

nature of sensory and intellectual intuitions as they challenge the individual in all existential situations and in this capacity they can be mistaken for determinate impressions. This is why complementary reflection emphasizes the fact that knowledge acquisition (*amamihe*) has much to do with two important mental states, *uche ochiche* - anxiety and *ujo otutu* - fear. How we react to the challenges that our ambivalent situations throw at us determines the nature of knowledge involved. Certainly not by recoiling to ourselves and to those things we consider special to us but by trying to define ourselves within the framework of the totality of our world.

What this means is that all forms of ideas and thoughts are complementary not only in constitution but in excogitation and in application. It is in this manner that thought is tied to language insofar the latter is vehicle to express and articulate these intellectual and sensory impressions meaningfully. Due to the close affinity existing between ideas and language their elements are fundamentally complementary such that what we consider the most original thoughts and languages can be thought of only as a result of interplay of complementary forces in an infinite often imperceptible mode. We can then say that the most original language is reflection itself but insofar in this act the subject seeks to transcend itself and overcome the challenges of division between missing links of reality. It is for this reason that we say that reflection in a complementary sense subsists in the act of conscious sorting and sifting of missing links in view of the harmony that reflects the unavoidable mutual relationship that sustains all forms of thoughts and ideas. Thus all forms of original ideas as this is represented in reflection aim at superseding all forms of artificial symbols the mind imagines that it can concoct to represent a special type of non-relational world of its own. Original idea or reflection is therefore the life spent in complementation of all missing links in view of the totality. Whenever we seek to articulate original ideas outside of the framework provided by the totality, we are merely acting under the dictates of our passion for self-preservation. Here we are evolving defensive mechanisms to uphold thoughts that are no thoughts at all. In this case, those things we designate as our original thoughts or ideas turn out to be defensive mechanisms or figments of our imagination that we devise to uphold our interest against outside intrusion. How we address this passion for self-preservation determines the use of words and concepts in given locations. In the tendency to preserve our interests we develop those exclusive hegemonic categories of thought that can render human reason absolute in its operation.

For complementary reflection authentic knowledge subsists in the reaction of the mind to the indeterminacy of sensory and intellectual intuitions, in all ambivalent situation. In their indeterminacy, impressions can conceal their nature as modes of idea in need of full authentication. Giving full meaning to this indeterminacy can happen only in full awareness of future referential dimension of all forms of knowledge seeking full authentication. The mind can achieve this in the awareness that our self-definition is possible only within the framework of all the actors and factors that enter into this definition. For complementary reflection therefore we build concepts and ideas and these are thinkable only in ordering all missing links critically into a comprehensive whole devoid of contradiction, both formally and materially in a future referential manner. Here units find full authentication and are validated harmoniously irrespective of their diversities of credential and origin. Hence all concepts and ideas get their reality and are sustained only within a complementary framework and in a comprehensive future perspective. It is within the framework of complementary mutual relationship that all forms of languages, concepts and ideas can be thought of and have their origin. Here the only ontological criterion towards the determination of the effectiveness of any language as to impact positively on others is its capacity or incapacity to harmonise missing links as aspects of the totality. Thus what is ultimately intended in the use of language and conceptual schemes can be achieved only in the process of complementary mutual act which subsists in a universal critique of language itself to determine their complementary adequacy or inadequacy. A philosopher relates to issues from the comprehensiveness of his intellectual reservoir and this he or she does as they come, not because he or she belongs to specific cultural milieu. Since being continues to evince itself in a complementary future dimension, the wider the horizon of an inquirer is, the better are his or her chances to shed useful light on questions raised. All inquirers operate fruitfully from the consciousness that all concepts, ideas and meanings are critique worthy at all levels of excogitation and this can be achieved in a complementary comprehensive future oriented manner. Hence, the excogitation of what concepts



actually designate takes place at an ontological level where the philosopher scrutinises their adequacy and applicability from the background of ultimate determination. In this case, we are probing their adequacy towards ultimate representation of meaning beyond ethnic biases. Only those ideas and concepts can be influential that help us represent reality in its most authentic and sublime form and not necessarily those that are “original” in the sense of representation of our world in the way they appear to us in our native habitat. All original ideas or concepts outside of the framework provided by the whole remain un-thought. Where they are un-thought they are no ideas.

The polarising dualistic illusion that ensues from searching for original ideas will ever remain and characterises all forms of hegemonic type of ratiocination masquerading as localised rationality. They are remnants of a milieu that is very antagonistic to the comprehensive structure of being in history as is typical of positivist rejection of metaphysical knowledge. The impression that is created by this form of approach is that the more data we have about an event, in its original habitat, the nearer we are to the truth and the more influential we become. With special reference to Wiredu, Anyanwu (68-71) and with him Azenabor (Schools of Thought 40) have questioned the wisdom behind the raw importation of logical positivism, with its undue obsession for the analysis of language, into African philosophy considering its exclusivist heavy load (Asouzu, Method 415).

All forms of hegemonic reason lay claim to special characteristics and rules that make them different. They are instances of human reason seeking absoluteness oblivious of its relative characteristic which makes it dependent on all missing links for its ultimate validation. These specialised rationalities are moments of our fundamental passion for exclusiveness as this rests on the fallacy of “the nearer the better and safer” (Asouzu, The Method and Principles 78). If there is any form of original thought, it can only be a complementary type of thought and the very logic of discourse per se is a complementary logic of discourse which distinguishes itself from all forms of special absolute and ideal forms of rationality masquerading as localised rationalities. It is a complementary rationality that lays the groundwork for the logic of discourse and dialogue as the arena for mutual enrichment of thoughts beyond impositions and unwarranted influences.

### **On the full emancipation of reason**

In all, one can say that African philosophy, as African logical positivists clearly understand, entails some sort of linguistic analysis. However, it does not subsist in linguistic analysis as Momoh sharply sees (Preface, xvi). The impression that African philosophy subsists in the analysis of African concepts as to recoup its original meaning in view of making it “influential” within the ambit of global philosophy can be considered as one of those unfortunate consequences of the raw importation of extreme forms of logical positivism into African philosophy. This style of philosophising seeks to negate the impact of the totality of indeterminate forms of intuition in the formation of our ideas. Through this tendency to negate mutual complementary relationship one can merely achieve the underdevelopment of African conceptual framework which is dependent on all missing links of reality for its growth. Not even if one were to adopt African language as the very medium of communicating meaning, as Kai Kresse extols Okot p’Bitek as “the first modern African writer who wrote in an African language” (Third Way, 218), is this complementary recourse abdicable. This complementary outreach has always characterised human reason in its attempts to develop and be resourceful. The capacity of being to be in complementary relationship opens up possibilities and is the catalyst for the full actualisation of being in history at all levels of determination. This is why in the spirit of complementarity, I quite agree with Onah that “whatever one man in any corner of the globe has thought out and expressed publicly should be regarded as a common patrimony of the entire human race and each group of people should [feel] free to appropriate and apply such thoughts to their particular circumstances, if it suits them to do so.” (Godfrey Onah, 181). This position is acceptable if we consider the fact that *ejigi ntufu abu ogaranya* (we grow through positive appropriation and not through negative self-delimiting inbreeding). For complementary reflection reality evinces itself in a way that each individual has equal claims to it in view of the joy of being and not in view of the negation of this joy. Here, we appropriate critically, mutually and in a transcendent manner those concepts, ideas,

languages and resources that help us grow and represent reality in its most authentic form as aspects of being actualising itself in history as missing links.

In human interpersonal relationship, the tendency to negate the role units play in the actualisation of the whole stems from our natural tendency to self-preservation as this fires our passion for exclusiveness. In this process we seek those things that are original on the basis of which we seek to influence those outside of the range of the world we have carved for ourselves. All attempts at making the contributions of one thought system in relationship to the other, within the framework of world philosophy, by mere reference to original thoughts would ever remain inadequate. This is valid not only for African philosophy. The same is applicable where one seeks to achieve the same merely by reference to a distant Ancient Egyptian culture. The relevance of Africa does not need to be proved by recourse to such remote points of reference or such ideas that need to be regained. We do not need to prove a self evident fact. In this case, the relevance of Africa has to be grasped as an integral part of the totality of determinations driving our world and reality already. I feel that this would ever remain an authentic aspect of our experience of reality in the world of globalisation where our achievements are as a result of complementary mutual enrichment between diverse cultures. The same can be said of its failures. Cultures do not become influential because of their claims to originality or supremacy but in the mechanisms they put in place to represent reality truly and authentically. Wherever one confuses originality for authenticity tension is bound to arise. In the search for truth and authenticity all philosophies and ideas are subject to the same truth and authenticity criterion as this is an integral part of the principle of non-contradiction. Matters of this nature are not such issues we subject only to empirical proof since they are grossly also dispositional matters. This is why those who think that they are victims of a “stolen legacy”, for example, are as liable to the same mistake as “the thieves” themselves, since their position would amount to a negation of the obvious mutual dependence between all missing links in the process of self-actualisation of being in history. This is all the more the case when we come to think of the fact that no human culture arose out of nothingness. Quite different from the philosophy of “stolen legacy”, complementary reflection is committed to the insight that a person can steal from himself only at the risk of self-negation and contradiction. Where the ego is cognisant of this danger, it can only see itself as a unit in complementary service to all missing links of reality and would avoid all those things that would put it at a collision course with other missing links. It is for this reason that anything aimed at undermining the units outside of the legitimacy conveyed by the whole will always rebound on the actor. Likewise all actions undertaken by the units to enhance the welfare of the whole would amount to enhancing the welfare of the units. Where this complementary idea has been internalised, the mind learns to see missing links in their relativity as pure means or pure essences that have the capacity to evoke the joy of being. It would certainly not be advantageous if in our zeal to achieve our petty ideological gains we find ourselves en route to conceptual underachievement, even of underdevelopment of our own conceptual frameworks.

## Footnote

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