

## **SOME IMPORTANT IDEAS IN ASOUZU'S PHILOSOPHY**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examined the tendency for different people to perceive reality from their own unique perspectives, which almost often lead to upperclassism, divisiveness, bifurcations, intolerance, ethnocentric reductions etc. It evaluated how this phenomenon could make man reduce his fellow and exalt himself, and how it has been the chief cause of several challenges in interpersonal exchanges, societal relations and in philosophical experiences. The paper noted that in order for being to enjoy fullness of joy, all existential entities must necessarily serve as a missing link of reality. Consequently, genuine awareness through Asouzu's noetic propaedeutic becomes a necessary formula with which impediments such as unintended ethnocentric commitment and ambivalence of human interest can be mitigated, thus leading to a just, equitable, harmonious and violence-free society.*

### **Introduction**

The major task of any philosophy subsists in the harmonization of our perception of reality in the face of a world that presents itself as varied and fragmented. This task can be accomplished within the context of a philosophy whose goal is to harmonize and complement reality instead of one that seeks to divide, polarize and bifurcate it (Asouzu in: *Filosofia Theoretica*, 104).

Asouzu's 21st century philosophy of complementary ontology (popularly known as *ibuanyidanda*) has brought to bear the urgent need for mutual complementarity among whatever that exist, for the essential purpose of attaining the greatest possible flourishing and realizing the common good. The *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy of mutual complementation holds that there is a mutual dependence of all missing links in their unifying interrelatedness. Hence, all cultures, races, sexes, tribes, nations, religion and political affiliates are in mutual complementary indebtedness to each other in their privileges and responsibilities. This and more is what this paper intends to systematically evaluate.

## **Complementation, Not Competition (Ibuanyidanda: The Philosophy Of Missing Links)**

Ibuanyidanda as a concept, gets its origin from the teachings of traditional (South-Eastern Nigeria) philosophers of the complementary thought system. According to Asouzu:

The nearest English meaning of the concept of "Ibuanyidanda" is "complementarity" Danda are ants that have the capacity in mutual interdependence to carry loads that appear bigger than themselves. The implication of this is that they surmount very difficult tasks when they are mutually dependent on each other in effort complementation. Hence, traditional Igbo philosophers hold that: Ibu anyi danda (no task is insurmountable for danda) (Asouzu, Ibuanyidanda, II).

The novel philosophy of complementation is a crusade against individualism and disjointedness. It simply asserts that an organism (reality) is made up of many parts, each with a distinct function and a distinct important contribution which makes up the well being of the whole. Each part complementing the offer or in Asouzu's word serving as missing link and as such must be considered important and not sidelined or degraded.

This interrelatedness of all segments which works in mutual complementation and eventually lead to general well being of common good is what Asouzu was talking about when he opined that "reality can only be complete if all ideas are accommodated, for all ideas serves as missing links to each other. Complementarity therefore, is the genuine solution to human existential situations (Filosofia, 93).

If all parts of reality are important and fundamental to the realization of "The good", suffice it to say therefore that, to be is to be in mutual complementary relationship (ka so mu adina), and its negation is to be alone (ka so mu di). It is exactly this mutual interdependence provided by all missing links of reality that leads to the joy of being. Every philosophy therefore, must turn from being a philosophy of essence to that of mutual interdependence in complementation.

## **Essence (Substance) Versus Accident: A Clarification Of The Subject/Object Conundrum**

The word "Substance" derives from the Latin words "sub" (under) and "stans" (standing). Thus the word literally means "standing under" or "that which stands under" (Omoregbe, 164). It was Aristotle, a renowned ancient Greek philosopher who identified substance as that which constitutes the specific nature of a thing. In this sense, it is synonymous with the word 'essence', and it is that in virtue of which a thing is what it is, as distinct from other things or from its qualities.

Thus, Aristotle created a distinction between substance and accident. While substance constitutes the very nature or essence of a thing, accident represents any of its qualities which is not essential to its nature. Aristotle thereby created a rift between substantials and accidentals that will later have immense influence on later generations as regards their perception and understanding of reality.

Asouzu succinctly captures the above when he opined that:

Most metaphysical textbooks used in teaching teachers of teachers for decades...subscribed to Aristotle's radical distinction between essence and accidents.... They subscribed to Aristotle's teaching that substance or essence does not require accidents to subsist, whereas accidents need substances on which they inhere (Filosofia Theoretica, 85).

This ardent followership of Aristotle through his philosophy of essence introduced an avoidable competition into scholarship. He accorded metaphysics a much more lofty status and pronounced it to be a superior science than the other (ancillary) sciences that study accidental qualities. This division undoubtedly led to division of ideas in terms of ethnicity and ideology and added impetus to the controversies in the scientific community. This can be seen clearly when Asouzu noted that:

It is in this way that rationalism became heavily linked with French-rationalism, empiricism with British-Empiricism, idealism with German-idealism and later American pragmatism (Filosofia Theoretica, 87)

### **Unintended ethnocentric commitments**

By this phenomenon, Asouzu discusses the tendency for scholars to display an ethnocentric character. This often happens in a bid to showcase the potentials or legacies of one's cultural background at other people's peril. Asouzu calls this an "infection of the mind" and identifies it as one of the commonest problem that is often sidelined in most undertakings that are culture-related.

This phenomenon (which is often unintended) usually becloud scientific objectivity despite the fact that scholars set out to do their works without bias. For Asouzu, such bias' that makes scientist takes sides, usually result from belongingness and from several years of being part of certain environment and its thought system. This popular heavy burden (Ibuaru) can be seen in Heinze Kimmerle and JurgenHengelbrock's intercultural philosophies, where an egalitarian type of trans-cultural philosophy is intended but where the opposite is eventually displayed.

Hengelbrock ended up saying that the brand of philosophy done in Africa can best be referred to as "African Thinking" or "wisdom" and not philosophy. For him, African proverbs, myths, pedagogical and religious narrations are what is obtainable. He made this assertion even when the great Aristotle already admitted that "a lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonder"

Kimmerle on his part also discussed African philosophy to be a special kind of philosophy synonymous with symbols, wise-sayings, folktales etc. Hengelbrock also further claimed that those African scholars discussing philosophical ideas that are different from myths, symbols etc. are only imitating or copying European philosophical style. The implication of the above assertions is that contemporary African philosophies are mere commentaries of European philosophies, while contemporary African philosophers are a kind of amorphous philosophers.

This negative criticism and exclusivist attitude toward African philosophy by European scholars like Kimmerle and Hengelbrock is why Asouzu refers to inter-cultural philosophy as a "systemless system", because such scholars have already negated what they intend to propagate. Ibuanidanda philosophy is of the view however, that all ideas in their origin and development are related in a mutual complementary manner. And as such, a world spent subverting or suppressing the interest of others is a world spend suppressing one's interest. Hence, acts of personal interest should at least be predicated on the platform of common good.

## **Human Existential Situation And The Phenomenon Of Concealment (Ihemkpuchi Anya)**

There is this tendency for human beings to exercise that inherent primitive instinct of self-preservation. It is by this instinct that they tend to acquire and secure their interest first, and by so doing they tend to impede the interest of others who they feel are threat to their cherished interest, hence they become exclusivist and intolerant.

Human beings tend to devise all possible strategies in the bid to first secure their interest. And behind most of this strategy is what Asouzu refers to as the “**super-maxim**”, which states: “The nearer, the better, the safer”. Asouzu explained that in keeping with this maxim, “we assume through our actions that those persons related to, or nearest to us are better and safer by virtue of their affinity to us” (Method and Principles, 2004:69). They simply forget that those with close affinity to a person can cause even greater harm.

Furthermore, Asouzu identified the phenomenon of concealment (Ihe mkpuchi anya) as one of the major impediments militating against objectivity and progress in our society. Literarily, Ihe mkpuchi anya according to Asouzu is an Igbo phrase which translates to “the thing that impairs vision” or “the thing that covers the eyes” (Filosofia Theoretica, 95).

The phenomenon represents our inability to properly manage existential situations around us. Asouzu has this to say concerning the phenomenon of concealment:

One of the most adverse effects arising from the phenomenon of concealment (Ihe mkpuchi anya), is its capacity to becloud our intellect...it is capable of twisting our consciousness and induces us to perceive and interpret situations only to our advantage and ignore the interests of other stakeholders. (Filosofia Theoretica, 95).

The roles of tribalism, nepotism, religious sentiments and political affiliations which have utterly blindfolded (concealed) objectivity and uprightness can however be addressed and managed by what Asouzu calls **Noeticpropaedeutic**. We shall treat this later on.

### **Ambivalent of human interest**

Asouzu unravels one of the chief causes of societal conflict to be “Ambivalence of Human Interest”. He explained this two-faced phenomenon to possess double capacity which can represent something negative and positive at the same time. The primitive inclination for self-preservation and self-preference can mislead one into believing or doing the wrong thing.

In this capacity of our interest to mislead us lies the danger of its inherent ambivalence. Because of this, Asouzu believes that creating awareness as regards the ambivalent of human interest, turns out therefore to be one of the greatest challenges towards building a just, equitable, harmonious, and violent-free society. For Asouzu:

It is a paradox that a person seeks to observe his interest, but undertakes those things that would ensure his own destruction. This is the root of the problem.... This assumption defies common sense, it has an inherent contradictory dimension because it seeks to negate what one originally intended (Effective Leadership, 15-16).

Suffice it to say, that the basic principles of complementarism will be of genuine help in mitigating this phenomenon. The understanding that anything that exist serves a missing link of reality will make us come to terms with our finitude and limitations. We accept them as given, but see them as conditions through which we can achieve higher levels of legitimization and authentic joy of being. Asouzu suggested solid personal character reformation, that is, renewing the human mindset and mentality through Noetic Propaedeutic, “for nothing can be achieved unless there is concrete will to change” (Effective Leadership, 15).

### **Noetic Propaedeutic: Re-setting and re-structuring the mindset**

Noetic Propaedeutic is a systematic pre-education of the mind and human reason with a view to overcoming the broken unity in human consciousness, which is caused by the challenges of the tension-laden human ambivalent existential situations and *Ihe mkpuchi anya* (phenomenon of concealed) (Asouzu: *Filosofia Theoretica*, 108)

The main task of noetic propaedeutic is to salvage the ego from shattered unity and to restore the subject to true self, such that it can affirm insightfully that “to be” is to be in mutual complementary relationship with all missing links of reality (*ka so mu adina*). It is by the reason of this same insight that they strive

always to act from the prompting of a complementary comprehensive type of mindset (*obi/uche ka so mu adina*). Because of this inherent dangers of phenomenon of concealment and the ambivalence of human interest that is obtainable in human existential situations, Asouzu believes that there is need to train the mind towards the acquisition of a good mindset, that can genuinely transcend bifurcating tendencies. This need to re-train and re-structure the mind is in order for it to acquire the required mindset that can aid its attainment of the common good.

For Asouzu, Noetic Propaedeutic is essential in that “it leads to the understanding and sharing of meaning in a way that outweighs artificial impediments it creates around itself” (Ibuanyidanda, 81). If most contentious and controversial issues in philosophy are concerned with meaning and interpretation, then the pre-education of the mind is of supreme importance for proper comprehension and understanding. This perhaps shows why Asouzu asserted that:

Any undertaking that takes the tensions generated in the human situation seriously must also be interested in the acquisition of a type of mindset which transcends cultural boundaries, as to provide clarity and credibility in all matters of inquiry.... The task is therefore that of evolving the conditions under which philosophers and people of diverse cultural backgrounds can speak creditably about the daunting problems of our age with one mind.... This is an enormous undertaking that must be articulated carefully as to provide a solid foundation for all forms of discourse (Ibuanyidanda, 80).

The solid foundation created through noetic propaedeutic becomes a common horizon for mutually shared understanding which communicates meaning to all involved. There is need therefore, for seekers of authentic meaning to have the requisite mindset for the purpose of knowledge grasping. Moreso, since the mind is the most fundamental aspect of being and also the seat of power, its refurbishment remains an indispensable pre-condition for all forms of activities that yearns for truth and clarity. And as such, the mind becomes that aspect through whose activities, human beings can be distinguished from other lesser beings and missing links.

In order therefore, to curb the strong tendencies of mind becoming absolute and exclusivist in its commitments, the mindset requires urgent treatment that can

help it overcome ambivalence of human interest and ihe mkpuchi anya (phenomenon of concealment). Asouzu succinctly captures this when he reiterated that where proper cleansing and restructuring of the mind is lacking there is often no prospect. Hence, for the mind to attain the level of refinement expected of it, it has to learn to view units 'as complements within a comprehensive universal setting (Ibuanyidanda, 83).

With this point in mind, we can then understand the essential need for on accompanying noetic propaedeutic in cases that relate to proper understanding and unification of diverse views.

### **Critical evaluation**

If philosophy must remain love of wisdom and truth, it must strive beyond all paradoxes and contradictions, (it must) reject bifurcations, divisiveness and disjointedness and demolish all forms of ideology and ethnocentric inspired beliefs. It must be a philosophy of mutual complementary relationship between all existent realities (Asouzu:filosofia, 93)

Unlike Aristotle's polarized worldview, Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda philosophy of complementarity presents a benchmark and method for the systematic amalgamation of the real and the ideal, essence and accidents into an encompassing whole. It is a framework which portrays how philosophy can influence all parts that makes up a bunch. In this case, the essential and accidental, universal and particular, necessary and contingent and other opposing entities can be easily clarified and categorized on the same platform.

No entity is useless. In the production of soap, oil is essentially and unavoidably required. Something as minute as a spider web can save human life. The import of this is that essentials and accidents always must be in mutual agreement for the sake of progress and the joy of being.

When Ibuanyidanda performs this task according to Asouzu:

It immediately portrays itself as that undertaking which seeks to complementarily penetrate and explore the idea of being in the dynamism of its immediacy and considers all things that exist as missing links of reality (Filosofia Theoretica, 102).

This paper agrees with Asouzu's vision and ideas, maintaining that reality can only be complete when all ideas are accommodated to serve as missing links to each other. Complementarity therefore, is the way forward and the genuine remedy to human existential quandaries.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper found Ibuanyidanda philosophy of complementary reflection to be a contemporary rational system with principles that can help humanity achieve its existential goals and attain the joy of being. It holds that whatever exist serves a missing link of reality, and as such, a person should (in all tension-laden existential situations) allow his limitation be the cause of his joy. Through its recommendation of the noetic propaedeutic method, interpersonal and philosophical challenges can be mitigated.

In all, it is a living, lively, practical and necessary 21st century philosophical system which can help alleviate some of the bifurcating problems that exist throughout the globe.

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