METAPHYSICS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Anselm K. Jimoh
Department of Philosophy
SS. Peter and Paul Major Seminary
Bodija, Ibadan.
jimohanselm1@yahoo.com

Introduction

African philosophy presupposes African metaphysics. It is that aspect of African philosophy that specifically studies the African distinctive notion of reality and existence. It does not necessarily suggest a contradictory notion of reality as conceived in Western metaphysical thought, but a peculiar way in which the African understands issues of existence and reality. Reality is one and universal but conceived differently by individuals based on their conceptions of life which makes everything around them meaningful. Metaphysics attempts a comprehensive view of reality by investigating whether there are principles that apply to everything that is real and if there is something which is ultimately real. Within this understanding, the African mind thinks in hierarchical categories and modes as against thinking in single, isolated and individualistic manner. It understands reality as a relationship of things and therefore analyzes phenomena in terms of cause and effect, balance and conflict. Any metaphysical study worthy of its salt brings under its focus of study both transcendental and particulars of individual existence. This enables the study to investigate how particulars are related within the universal. Consequently, it aims at providing a comprehensive view of reality while not neglecting individual phenomenon in the holism of reality.

The basis of African metaphysics is ‘Being’ with all its ontological appurtenances. These include personality, substance, causality, soul, etc. As a field of study in African philosophy, African metaphysics is a vast and broad area of inquiry and cannot be covered in a single volume, let-alone, a single paper in an academic journal. That notwithstanding, I shall x-ray various aspects and issues that are often discussed within the ambit of African metaphysics. The aim is to give a general overview of African metaphysics.

The Nature of African Metaphysics

The Western idea of metaphysics dominates the history of philosophy and reference to African metaphysics sounds at best awkward to some scholars. Nonetheless, it is a fertile ground of studies within contemporary scholarship in African philosophy. Ozumba defines African metaphysics as:

The African way of perceiving, interpreting and making meaning out of interactions, among beings, and reality in general. It is the totality of the African’s perception of reality. African metaphysics will therefore include systematization of as (sic) African perspective as it relation (sic) to being and existence.

African metaphysics is holistic. Its logic underlies the basis for the standards and expectations of the African in the sense that the metaphysical worldview of the African defines
his/her attitude to situations and issues in everyday living. With the multiplex of cultures in Africa, we cannot argue that all African communities uphold the same standards nor share the same expectations but the basis and underlying principles of their cultural values are basically the same. Thus, Lovemore Mbigi avers that, “Although African cultures display awesome diversity, they also show remarkable similarities”. Therefore, this discourse is an abstraction that cuts across African communities and fairly represents the general orientation of the African perception of certain aspects of reality without prejudice to any particular culture or view.

African metaphysics is pragmatic. Ideas or beliefs that produce the desired result are maintained as paradigmatic. The question of meeting the standard of objective reality is not an obstacle for the African. The fact that it works and produces the required result justifies it. As Ozumba opines, Africans have far-reaching thoughts about the phenomena, be it physical or transcendental, with which they are acquainted. That an idea works does not prevent the African mind from digging into why it works. The African tries to understand, at times through mystical means the basis for the things around. The African is aware of the danger of superficiality. As much as theoretical and experiential apparatus could take them, they seek to understand the “why” and “how” of the reality around them.

The lack of documentation in terms of storage of ideas in writing poses a danger in the field of African philosophy generally. It hinders critical after-thought reflection that written experiences afford the human intellect. Besides, “a mere mental acquaintance with reality cannot guarantee tenacity and longevity of ideas”. We lose mentally stored ideas from time to time and we make efforts to recapitulate them. In the process of reconstructing our undocumented experiences some aspects of past experiences are never remembered. Nonetheless, as Joseph Omogbe writes, “the African store their ideas in form of folklores, folk wisdom, mythologies, traditional proverb, religious worldviews, etc.” Although not comparable to documentation in writing, this form of preservation of ideas afford the traditional African the opportunity to reflect further and more critically on past experiences and shared beliefs.

African metaphysics merges empiricism and rationalism as the African mind combines the experiential with reflection to validate beliefs. The African test experiences in order to ascertain their veracity, accepting only that which agrees to reason and has evidence to support it. This background knowledge of the nature of African metaphysics positions us to understand how certain concepts feature in African metaphysics.

Main Themes in African Metaphysics
The following can be taken to be the main themes in African Metaphysics.

The Human Person (Personality)
Notion of the human person or personhood is central to African metaphysics. Generally, the concept of personality consists in what makes an individual a distinct person. The notion of person, personhood or personality, which I employ interchangeably in this discussion, transcends just what makes up the constituent parts of the human person. It includes what makes the individual human being a person and the significance of the constituent parts of the individual. Within the hierarchical order of “Being” in African metaphysics, the human person comes after the spiritual entities. Quoting Kwasi Wiredu, Godfrey Onah writes that there are two approaches to the concept of a person in African metaphysics: the descriptive approach and the normative approach.

Descriptive Approach

2
This has to do with analyzing the constituent parts of the human person, both the physical and non-physical parts, their functions and significance within the general scheme of things. It reveals the ontological status of the human person. Although there are slight differences in the identification of the constituent parts of the human person from one African culture to another, these differences do not erase the fact that we can refer to a consensus of views in relation to what makes up the human person.

According to Wiredu, there are five constituent parts of a person in Akan culture. These are: (i) okra, which refers to the life principle and source of human dignity and destiny of the person, (ii) sunsum, (spirit), which is the charisma principle, (iii) moyga, the character from the mother, (iv) ntoro, the character from the father, and (v) nipadua, the physical body. Contrary to this view, Kwame Gyekye argues that there are only two constituent parts of the human person within the Akan culture; okra, which he calls the soul and nipadua, which he calls the body. Wiredu is weary of accepting that okra should translate as ‘soul’ in English because the soul is purely immaterial but okra for him, is a quasi-material substance. This reluctance is based on the fact that it is a common belief among the Akan people that highly perceptive ‘native doctors’ can see the okra. It is also believed that the okra can be allergic to specific kinds of food such that if an individual consumes the type of food that his/her okra is allergic to, the individual falls sick. Besides these pentalistic and dualistic divisions of the constituent parts of the human person within the Akan culture, we have the tripartite analysis by Kwame Appiah. He talks of a body made from the blood of the mother (mogyaa) which is the nipadaa, an individual spirit which is the sunsum that is derived from the father and the okra which is a life force that leaves the body when the person dies physically.

The Yoruba have a tripartite notion of the constituent parts of a person. They talk about the ara (body), which refers to all the material components of a person. This includes the opolo (brain), okan (heart) and ifun (intestine). Amongst these, the opolo is the most important. The second constituent part of the person is the emi, which refers to the vital principle and the third constituent part is the ori, which controls the life and activities of a person. The essential aspect of a person that is derived from the Supreme Being (Olodumare), which according to Olatunji Oyeshile, binds the person to the Supreme Being, without whom the individual cannot be.

The Igbo have something similar to the Yoruba classification. Namely, the aru (physical body), the chi (the destiny), which changes in relation to a number of factors like the individual’s handiwork, spiritual fortification, etc. Divine intervention can also change the individual’s destiny. Thirdly is the mmuo (spirit), which is immortal and ensures the continuing self-identity of the individual. The human personality has a dual existence, the earthly existence which is temporal and the spiritual existence which is eternal. While the body exists temporarily here on earth and ceases to exist at physical death, the spirit continues to exist even after physical death.

Rather than being contradictory, the various classifications from the three African cultures considered above complement one another and they show the different nuances that are present in different cultures or even within a given culture; a kind of unity in diversity. All we need is to further elucidate on them and see that the seeming disagreement, especially among the scholars on the Akan cultural classification of the constituent parts of the person, is more apparent than real. According to Ozumba, they are all collectively correct; the pentachotomistic view of Wiredu, the dualistic view of Gyekye, Appiah’s and the Yoruba cum Igbo trichotomistic views. Ozumba refers to a “three-fold categorial objectification” that we can use to understand the concept of a person.

The first is the residual categorial objectification. This merely simplifies and reduces the conception of the person to two broad categorizations, the material body and the immaterial spirit.
The tripartite conception of Appiah and the Yoruba and Igbo, which constitutes the second categorial objectification is an attempt to demarcate the spiritual elements into their functional cleavages, for instance, the fact that the spirit is functionally different from the soul even though they are both immaterial. The spirit gets information from the creator directly and transmits same to the soul that in turn affects the body. In reverse manner, the body affects the soul and then the spirit. The third, which is the bloated categorial objectification, instantiates the African basis for interpreting the individual personality. Every individual is seen as an earthly (body) and biological (imputes from father and mother) being. The individual is a product of both maternal and paternal lineages.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Narrative Approach}

This approach considers the social status of the human person. For the African, the personhood of the individual does not come with birth, the person is one who has attained the status of a responsible member of the community.\textsuperscript{16} David Lutz rightly observes that, “one of the most striking features of the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa is their non-individualistic character”.\textsuperscript{17} Personhood evolves from how the individual relates with other human and living beings.\textsuperscript{18} The community is the cornerstone in African thought and life.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, African metaphysics conceives the human person as a communal being. “People are not just individuals, living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence”.\textsuperscript{20} This fact is corroborated in John Mbiti, who argues that one becomes conscious of one’s being only in relation to other beings, to be aware of one’s responsibilities, duties and privileges towards oneself and others. One experiences pain and joy with the corporate group that consists of relatives, neighbours, kinsmen, alive or dead (ancestors), thus, “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am”.\textsuperscript{21}

In the context of the narrative approach, the individual becomes a person when he/she is an adult who can fend for him/herself, is able to reason judiciously and support a conjugal relation through which a family is raised. Along with these are a host of other obligations to the kinfolk and community that obliges the individual and define personhood. Thus, personhood excludes infants and social misfits.\textsuperscript{22} What this foregoing analysis shows is that the person in African traditional thought system exists, not just as an individual but also as a member of a group and as a member of a community.

The person is communitarian by nature because as an individual member of a group and a community, one constantly interacts with and interpenetrates others.\textsuperscript{23} Oyeshile agrees with this, for according to him, as well as being communitarian, the person is also “other things by nature”. By other things he means the person exercises other attributes like rationality, the capacity for virtue, evaluating and making moral judgments and therefore, capable of making a choice. These are not attributes that the community bestows on the individual, rather the individual develops them and they are nurtured within the community.\textsuperscript{24}

The implication of the communitarian status of the individual according to Gyekye is multiple. It includes:

i. That the human person does not voluntarily choose to enter into human community, meaning that community life is not optional.

ii. That the human person is a cultural being.

iii. That the human person cannot live in isolation from other persons.

iv. That the human person is naturally oriented towards other persons and must have relationship with them.

v. That the social relationships are not contingent but necessary.
vi. That following from (iv) and (v), the person is constituted, but only partly so by social relationships in which one necessarily finds oneself.\(^{25}\)

Communal values like mutual aid, care and concern for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation and social harmony are highly rated in African metaphysical thought. They create the sense of community that structure social relations among individual members of the society. It is an enduring feature of the African social life. The person becomes who she/he is by internalizing the communal values of society. This helps the individual develop the essential qualities of the person, for example, the right use of reason, success in family life and reasonably reciprocating individual interest to those of the community.\(^{26}\) One cannot be a person in African metaphysics outside the community; hence the African emphasis on communal values, which does not infringe on individual values in any way.

The communal character of African worldview does not swallow the individuality of the human person. Lutz puts this lucidly:

> The communal character of African cultures does not mean that the good of the individual person is subordinated to that of the group, as is the case with Marxist collectivism. In a true community, the individual does not pursue the common good instead of his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her good through pursuing the common good.\(^{27}\)

This implies that individuals are not expected to sacrifice their own good to promote the good of others, rather they are expected to recognize the fact that they can attain their own true good by promoting the good of others. Obiora Ike and Ndidi Edozien affirm this in their description of the Igbo social structure. According to them, the clan in Igbo social structure is made up of small communities and various groups within Igbo villages hold power and social balance is maintained by a system of check and balances. Though there is a strong community consciousness, the rights of individuals and their existence as an entity are not neglected. The system guarantees free speech, free movement and free action.\(^{28}\)

Kwame Gyekye makes the same point when he argues that though the African ontological worldview is communalistic, the individuality of the person is not compromised. Commenting on the Akan proverb that says: “The clan is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached”, he posits that this proverb “stresses the social reality of the individual … [as one with] a separate identity … separately rooted and is not completely absorbed by the cluster. That is, community does not obliterate or squeeze out individuality”.\(^{29}\) Consequently, we attain our self-realisation only through interpersonal relationships. The *Ubuntu* concept that is rooted in South African cultures explicates this African ontological worldview.

**Ubuntu as An African Conception of Personhood**

As an African concept of personhood, *Ubuntu* is the idea that human beings do not exist in isolation. We are not human all by ourselves, we are connected and not separated from one another and therefore, what we do affects the whole world.

*Ubuntu* is a South African concept that aptly characterises the communitarian dimension of the African idea of person and personhood. It is a concept that is rooted in the Nguni group of languages, which Desmond Tutu describes as “very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human”.\(^{30}\) Most African scholars would however agree that it literally translates in English as “humanness” or being human,\(^{31}\) which agrees with the fact that it is a reference to the very essence of the humanity of our being. Mogobe Ramose describes it as “simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy”.\(^{32}\) Beyond being just
positive qualities of the human person, M. Muyandu describes it as, “the very human essence itself, which lures and enables human beings to become abantu or humanised beings, living in daily self-expressive works of love and efforts to create harmonious relationships in the community of the world beyond”.  

33 It is an African coinage for a universal concept which describes the potential of being human. It describes the intrinsic connection between humanity and the eco-system in which communal responsibility sustains life. Within the context of a comprehensive ontological understanding, Ubuntu entails the following:

It shows how the be-ing of an African person is not only imbedded in the community, but in the universe as a whole. This is primarily expressed in the prefix ubu – of the word Ubuntu. It refers to the universe as be-ing enfolded, containing everything. The stem – ntu means the process of life as the unfolding of the universe by concrete manifestations in different forms and modes of being.  

34 Ubuntu implies that our humanness consists in the affirmation of our humanity by our recognition of the humanity of others. It describes the view that we cannot separate our humanity from that of those around us. “Under Ubuntu, there is an individual existence of the self and the simultaneous existence for others”. 35 This makes it imperative that we establish respectful human relations with our fellow human beings. It therefore, “promotes the common good of society and includes humanness as an essential element of human growth”. 37 This fact is captured in the Xhosa expression: Umntungumntungabanyeabantu, which could be translated in English as, “People are people through other people” or “I am human because I belong to the human community and I view and treat others accordingly”. According to Onyebuchi Eze,

[This] strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance. 39

Ubuntu is a distinctive conception of human communitarianism, our identities, values, rights and responsibilities towards one another. It is a specific kind of African humanism that conceives the individual as rooted in the community such that one’s identity is defined on the basis of what one gives to the community. As Augustine Shutte puts it, “our full humanity is realised to the extent that we are included in relationships with others”. 40 This implies the notion of collective responsibility, which however should not be mistaken to be absolute in the sense that the good of the community is prior to the good of the individual as contained in the Western idea of communitarian socialism. On the contrary, “Ubuntu induces an ideal of shared human subjectivity that promotes a community’s good through an unconditional recognition and appreciation of individual uniqueness and difference”. 41 It rejects the Western minimalist notion of personhood as one who has a soul, rationality or will by embracing a maximal notion of personhood that includes other criteria. 42

As a philosophical concept, Ubuntu implies belief in a universal bond that connects all humanity. It describes the oneness of humanity which is an integral part of the African notion of
personhood. It is the consciousness that one belongs to a greater whole and that one is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, tortured or oppressed. It is openness and availability to others, affirming others and not threatened by others because one has a proper self-assurance based on one’s belongingness to the body of the whole.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Ibuanyidanda: Asouzu’s New Complementary Ontology}

In recent times, Innocent Asouzu is pushing forward a new philosophy of \textit{ibuanyidanda} which consists, among other ideological issues, in a metaphysics of integration.\textsuperscript{44} This ontology championed by Asouzu sheds more light on the African ontological notion of personhood as rooted in communal relationship, which he aptly describes as complementary. Essentially \textit{ibuanyidanda} is a philosophy of mutual complementary relationship which defines our being. According to Asouzu, “for anything to claim existence, it has to fulfill a minimum condition, which subsists in its commitment to a mutual complementary relationship between it and other units with which it shares a common framework”.\textsuperscript{45}

Complementarity provides the framework within which a person can fully grasp the meaning of being. The personal identity of the individual is understood within the context of the intrinsic interrelatedness of all existents. This implies that no individual person exists alone but that individuals exist in relation to other things that exist. “To be” is to be in a mutual and complementary relationship with all things that are and its negation is to be alone and not nothingness.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Ibuanyidanda} is a compound Igbo concept that derives from three Igbo words: \textit{ibu}, \textit{anyi}, and \textit{danda}. \textit{Ibu} means load or task, \textit{anyi} means not insurmountable for, and \textit{danda} is a species of ants. As a concept, \textit{ibuanyidanda} derives its meaning from the traditional Igbo complementary system of thought that explores the ants’ (\textit{danda}) capacity to perform tasks seemingly bigger than they are by relying on the strength of their mutual dependence and interdependence. Thus, Asouzu employs it to mean “… no tasks are for human beings insurmountable when they complement their potentialities”.\textsuperscript{47} As an ontology, it “attempts to penetrate and grasp being, and with it ultimate reality through mediation or via the instrumentality of mutual relations”.\textsuperscript{48}

The underlying idea of \textit{ibuanyidanda} is that no one realizes personhood all by oneself. Asouzu argues that the traditional African worldview indicates “strong moments of the transcendent ontological categories of unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness and future referentiality as authentic dimensions of thoroughgoing complementarity”.\textsuperscript{49} For him, reality is all-embracing in such a way that all missing links of reality exist in complementarity.\textsuperscript{50} The actualization of our being is in the mutual complementarity of our potentialities and it is within this complementarity that our individual personal identity is defined. This suggests some form of existentialist ontology in which being is defined as “that which is insofar as it serves a missing link”.\textsuperscript{51}

The notion of a “missing link” as employed by Asouzu seems to emphasize the significance of the individual person, suggesting that no one is lost in the ‘crowd of existents’ but that everyone has a place in the ‘chain of reality’ and the absence of anyone constitutes a missing link in the holism of reality. Therefore, “I am” insofar as I mutually complement others and others are, insofar as they mutually complement me.

Apparently the concept of personality is very central to African metaphysics and it has attracted more discussions than other issues within the field. Our analysis indicates that the African metaphysical conception of the person embraces and transcends the Western notion of person. This conception is a pivotal point for other African metaphysical world views.
Being

African metaphysics conceives being as a generic term that refers to all existing things. For the African, nothing that exists is taken lightly since everything there is, is for a reason and serves a purpose. Being refers to the whole range of existent things.\(^{52}\) It is hierarchical in structure, with God at the apex. God is followed by the ancestors, the totems, which are emblems of hereditary relationship, spirits manipulated in witchcraft, sorcery or magic, which are represented, at times, as charms and amulets, man, animals and plants.\(^{53}\) Since certain events bring into prominence a hitherto insignificant divinity, who now assumes a powerful and central role in terms of reverence within a given community and thereby displace the ancestors, some scholars argue that the hierarchy of being cannot be taken to be rigid. This implies that for good reasons, there can be a rearrangement of beings in the order of the hierarchy.

The ancestors, who ordinarily come second in the order of hierarchy of beings are so revered because they are better disposed to the good of the living. This is unlike the other divinities, who are unpredictable, as they are capricious.\(^{54}\) Plants and animals can assume important and prominent places in the spiritual rating of certain communities because they can be inhabited by powerful spiritual forces. This explains why in certain African communities, pythons, fish in certain rivers and streams, and some other animals and plants are revered; they are not to be killed or consumed.

The idea of being from the perspective of forces is quite pervasive in African metaphysics. Scholars like Placide Tempels\(^{55}\) and Henri Maurier\(^{56}\) paid a lot of attention to this in their description of being. They discussed being as ‘life force’ or ‘vital force’. They understood being in terms of forces and the interrelationship between these forces.\(^{57}\) We may tend to think that the lack of rigidity and the activity of the forces in the hierarchy of beings would imply strife among the forces and beings, therefore, that African metaphysics postulates a disordered universe. On the contrary, the African notion of being is that there is the unseen, omnipotent creator that oversees and ensures the control of all that happens in this universe. This creator, who is God, controls and regulates the strife among forces such that it is an ordered unity rather than a disordered and chaotic strife. The supreme position of God at the apex of the hierarchy is made clear by the descriptive names Africans have for God. For instance, the Igbo refer to God as \textit{Okaka, amasi-amasi} and \textit{Chukwu okike} (one who is not fully known and the creator of the universe), the Yoruba refer to God as \textit{Oloodumare} (the almighty God) and the Akan of Ghana refer to him as \textit{Onyame} (the Supreme Being). The significance of these names and descriptions is that God is the infinite and fullness of actuality, while other beings are finite and limited.

Although beings are multiple, they form an intricate nexus of reality.\(^{58}\) Even though the African conceive reality as both particular and universal, there is an underlying unity because everything is interconnected. The African, therefore, mind conceives reality as a continuum. This is what Molefi Asante refers to as the practicality of wholism when he describes the African mind in relation to cognition.\(^{59}\) According to Asante, “there are several elements in the mind of Africa that govern how humans behave with regard to reality: the practicality of wholism, the prevalence of poly-consciousness, the idea of inclusiveness, the unity of worlds, and the value of personal relationships”.\(^{60}\) These are the elements of the African mind, they frame the African conception of reality. Asante argues that the oneness of everything is the key with which the Egyptian mind unlocked the many secrets of the world in their quest to establish the interconnectedness of all things and reconstruct the universe as one world. They held the belief that everything created is connected; this is what early Western philosophy called unity in diversity.

Substance
The concepts of personality and being in African metaphysics already presuppose the concept of substance because substance is closely related to both concepts. Substance is the quality of beingness. It could be seen, felt or divined through oracular means. The evidence that a thing exists, whether it is seen or not by the physical eyes, as long as it is conceived with the totality of its qualities in the mind, is what constitutes substance for the African metaphysician. Therefore, the spirits are part and parcel of being in African metaphysics. Africans uphold the existence and being of spirits even though they are not visible to the physical eyes of the individual. They are not visible because they are immaterial. But their presence is felt and Africans have ample evidences of how their activities affect them, either favourably or adversely. This fosters the belief in spirits.

**Causality**

The African is always concerned with why things happen when they happen and to whom they happen and why not to someone else other than to whom things happen. This implies the concept of causality in African metaphysics. Africans believe that there is always a cause for everything that happens; they do not seem to give room for chance occurrences. Chance is conceived as a product of our ignorance of the series of actions and reactions that give rise to a given event.

This may suggest that the African worldview is deterministic, which would not totally true as the African conception of cause and effect provides for the exercise of freewill. According to Ozumba, “when a man is faced with alternative options, he is free to choose to carry out one or the other.” He argues further on the relationship between chance, determinism and freewill that:

...we can say that chance, determinism and freewill when properly understood can be seen as different sides of the same coin. What we call chance is what happens accidentally but yet traceable to a cause and a reason. What we call a determined event is the aftermath of a freely committed act which has consequently led to a determined cause and effect. It is like free will opens the door of actions and then determinism takes its turn. Man is free therefore to some extent and yet limited by his community.

Within the communitarian *cum* individualistic reality scheme of the African, he or she can go against the wishes of the community but should be ready to take on the consequences in terms of sanctions from the community. However, with right reasoning and personal initiative the individual can exercise freedom in the community without conflicting with the collective will of the community.

African metaphysics subscribes to the different and distinct natures of the body and spirit. This notwithstanding, Africans believe that body and spirit interact. The issues of necessary connection, continuity in space and time, constant conjunction and priority in time that characterize the Western discussion of causality are no issues in African metaphysics. Rather, Africans consider cause and effect from various ranges of possibilities, resulting to divination or oracles for final verdict.

**Immortality of the Soul/Reincarnation**

The idea of an immortal soul goes along with the conception of reincarnation in African metaphysics. That the soul is immortal is not in the least controversial for the African. The soul of the individual continues to exist after the physical dissolution of the human body at death. The soul departs the body to a place of peaceful abode if the individual has lived a good life. On the contrary, if the individual has lived badly, the soul is not allowed into the place of peaceful rest, rather it continues to roam about the earth without finding rest.
The African believes that all spirits are in direct contact with the physical earth and play a role in the activities of humans in this world. Hence the usual practice of offering sacrifice to ancestors who come to partake of the food offered at such sacrifices. Although we can have a glimpse of the Christian notion of heaven in this discussion, we cannot argue that the peaceful place of rest where the soul takes abode which seems to point to the Christian notion of heaven is equivalent to the Christian heaven. The notion of hell is apparently not indicated.

The immortality of the soul in African metaphysics is also closely linked with the notion of reincarnation. Reincarnation is the doctrine of a second birth to earthly life. It describes a phenomenon in which the spirit, which is understood as the life force or soul of the individual comes back to earth in one form or another, after the physical death of the individual. All spirits reincarnate, both the good and bad ones. While the reincarnation of good spirits is welcomed, that of the bad ones is abhorred and efforts are made to exorcise them. The reincarnated good spirits are often identified as Babatunde, Iyabo, while the bad spirits are often identified as Abiku, Ogbanje or Ndém. Through divination, the African claim to know which spirit has reincarnated.

Conclusion

This discussion of African metaphysics is not in any way exhaustive of the field, which is vast and has witnessed contributions from leading scholars in the field of African philosophy. It is one of the richest and fertile grounds in contemporary African philosophy. This is just a sketch of what Ozumba calls “a hotchpotch of beliefs and realities which are the outcome of … lived experience”.66 This paper only exposes themes in African metaphysics as a thriving and fertile ground of African scholarship and invites us to further critical reflection from the African mindset, on the reality around us. Such reflection would provide the framework within which we can postulate theories for the integral development and growth of the African nations.

Endnotes


36 F. R. Luthans, Van Wyk and F. O. Walumbwa, “Recognition and Development of Hope for South Africa Organizational Development Leaders”.
38 Xhosa is one of the eleven official languages of South African.
43 Desmond Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness.
48 Innocent I. Asouzu, “Ibuanyidanda and the Philosophy of Essence 1”.
54 Godfrey O. Ozumba, “African Traditional Metaphysics”.


64 *Ibid.*
