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African Metaphysics: Traditional and Modern Discussions

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Introduction

Although the literature on African metaphysics is growing, there is no common agreement on its meaning, nature and scope. In addition, most discussions on African metaphysics do not separate traditional from modern African metaphysics. This chapter deliberates on the ongoing discussions on African metaphysics, aiming to derive some generally acceptable meanings and understandings of the nature and scope of this subject, while being well aware of the varying opinions on the same. Similarly, the chapter will distinguish traditional African metaphysics from the emerging new discussions on the same subject.

The Meaning of African Metaphysics

In general, metaphysics can be defined as the investigation of the essence, properties and laws of existence (Lajul 2014a, b: 140). Lotz, J. B. adds that metaphysics is the study of “that which is beyond the physical” (1974: 247), while Ozumba (2004) thinks metaphysics deals with the nature of existence.

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Placide Tempels, on the other hand, defines metaphysics as the study of “reality, existing in everything and in every being in the universe” (1998: 430).

African metaphysics has been defined by Ozumba (*op. cit.*) 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.” Menkiti reminds us that African metaphysics “is not rooted in supernaturalism and its metaphysics are empirically grounded” (2004b: 69). For Théophile Obenga (2004), African metaphysics, which is the main branch of African philosophy, should be engagement with reality. He derives this definition from the distinction he makes between Greek and Egyptian philosophy.

According to Obenga, Greek philosophy can be distinguished from Egyptian philosophy by noting that the Greek version considers philosophy to be *love of wisdom* and a philosopher to be a *lover of wisdom*; in the Egyptian version, to philosophize is “to be engaged with love, intense desire, and strong enthusiasm in the investigation of causes underlying reality in order to build up a system of values by which society may live” (2004: 33). African metaphysics is, then, the intense engagement¹ with reality itself, and through this engagement the meaning and the underlying causes of reality are discovered.

The point about African metaphysics is that, while the West in its methodology approaches metaphysics, like philosophy, as a detached intellectual activity to investigate reality, African metaphysics is an engaged intellectual and human activity of the whole person that is involved with reality, and through this engagement the meaning and causes of reality are discovered.² Where this view comes close to existentialism is in the belief that “existence precedes essence” (Nellickappilly 2015: 1).

In line with this, Emmanuel Ibout competently argues that man “cannot know without the involvement of his emotions, faith/belief, imagination, etc., that the only place you can find a knowledge that does not involve human emotions is artificial intelligence like computers and robots” (2010: 58–59). Here, Ibout is criticizing the Western approach to philosophy in general and to metaphysics in particular and saying that true knowledge of any kind is a result of the different faculties of the human person, not only of intellectual activity as the West thinks. This also means that in a metaphysical discourse,

¹ This is not just an intellectual engagement, but the engagement of the whole person, involving both intellect and will.

² One might ask, is this not the same as Western existentialism? My answer is no, because Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, who are usually taken to be the key early existentialists though one was a devout Christian and the other an ardent atheist, are united by their emphasis on the individual rather than society as the centre of concern and value (Cf. Sartre J.P. “Existentialism Is a Humanism.” Club Maintenant, Paris. October 29 1945).

both the mind and will are involved in deriving knowledge. This knowledge is not generated just for its own sake, but for the purpose of life.

This is why Innocent Onyewuenyi further says that African metaphysics is “the foundation upon which one builds one’s career consciously and unconsciously; it is the guide; the author of the human interests; upon its truth or falsity depends what type of man or woman you may develop into” (1991: 39). African metaphysics is not just a theoretical discourse, then, but a practical one, and we build our world on this deeply seated metaphysical knowledge and the related principles and theories.

African metaphysics is the identification of empirically grounded and deeply seated rational explanations of existence. It is the attempt to explain the relationship between what humans experience in their interactions with the visible and the invisible world around them. This world is a dynamic relationship between what was, what is and what will be, meaning the past, the present and the future. This is in contrast to John Mbiti’s view that Africans only have concepts of the past and the present (1969: 22).

The problem this definition of African metaphysics creates is to refer to the Heideggerian “metaphysical anthropology” or Kantian “*metaphysica specialis*”, which study a particular sphere of essences, like God, nature, man and so forth. It would apparently exclude Heideggerian ontology or Kantian “*metaphysica generalis*”, which is the study of being as being (Chiedozie Okoro 2011: 116). This implies that for Kant there is a distinction between special metaphysics—which is the study of particular essences, like God, nature and man—and general metaphysics—which studies being as being. Heidegger calls the former metaphysical anthropology and the latter, ontology. The definition of African metaphysics given above seems to concur with the Kantian special metaphysics and the Heideggerian metaphysical anthropology, leaving out the Kantian general metaphysics and the Heideggerian ontology.

My view is that in African metaphysics, this neat distinction between general metaphysics and special metaphysics or between metaphysical anthropology and ontology is not there.³ In living and interacting with the particular sphere of essences, like God, fellowmen and nature, man acquires deep insight into the qualities of those essences that link them together as beings, but also of those essences that distinguish them from one another. That is why thinkers like Alexis Kagame are able to identify such ideas in the Bantu term *ntu* (the Kantian *generalis*, the Heideggerian *metaphysics*), which is general to all

³ We should be aware that the term “metaphysics” is an unjustified adaptation of Andronicus of Rhodes’ classification of Aristotle’s works written after “On Nature”/“Physics”. The correct and appropriate term is ‘ontology’, which is the study of reality. However, different authors have distinguished these terms in different ways.

beings. It is only when *ntu* is joined to other prefixes that the Kantian *specialis* and the Heideggerian *physics* become particularized: *Muntu*—human being, *Kintu*—thing, *Hantu*—place or time, and *Kuntu*—modality (Udoka U.N. 2011: 253).

Thus, African metaphysics is the identification of dynamic, interactive essences between beings, some of which are universal while others are particular, and the study of how hierarchies of beings are differentiated, as Placide Tempels contends (1998: 429–434). Ozumba (2004) supports this understanding by saying that in African metaphysics, empiricism merges with rationalism. The cleavage between empiricism and rationalism, if it exists at all, is not a matter for serious epistemological dispute (*ibid*).

African metaphysics is, then, the engagement with reality, the identification of empirically grounded and deeply seated rational explanations of existence; it is an attempt to explain the relationship between what humans experience in their interactions with the visible and the invisible world around them.

The Nature of African Metaphysics

Asouzu (1985) thinks African metaphysics is *mythological* in orientation, in contrast to Western metaphysics, which is *science oriented*. He says that in Africa, metaphysics takes the form of a set or body of beliefs and practices in relation to the ultimate reality. In this form, the dynamic constitution of nature, whose self-explanatory force is fundamental for scientific growth, is replaced by belief in a dynamic force in the form of a personal god, spirit or other agencies responsible for explanation of the reality of things.

This model of metaphysics concentrates primarily on grasping the nature of the being responsible for the existence of the world. It is comfortable with taking stock of the very attributes of this personal being, the being's relationship with man and nature, and so on. This view is also supported by Ruch and Anyanwu, who add that dependence on family, community and friends is unreliable, incomplete and uncertain. An African realizes that his expectations cannot be satisfied; rather, only God through faith can be relied upon (1985: 164f). Living in a community, the African believes that there are mysterious forces surrounding him.

Omeregbe apparently confirms this explanation of the nature of African metaphysics by saying that Africans realize that “[...] there are mystical or supernatural forces which defy any scientific analysis or explanation. These forces [...] can be manipulated by man and employed for both good and evil purposes, such as protection, prevention of calamities, cure of diseases,

procreation and bringing about sickness, death, and other kinds of misfortune to people” (1990: 26–27).

This mythology, as Anyanwu calls it, was that with which the African thinker was deeply engaged, had fallen in love with, and had an intense desire and strong enthusiasm to investigate so as to discover the causes underlying reality and from which he could build a system of values by which society may live. That this involvement with the mythical is a hindrance to reflective thinking and the ability to appreciate scientific development, as Asouzu claims, may not be true.

The explanation for the rejection of mythological answers to fundamental metaphysical questions stems from the Western mindset that truth can only be acquired through criticality and rationality, that anything outside human reason is a liability. So beliefs and emotions, among other things, cannot be relied upon in the deliverance of the true knowledge on which human society can be built. That is why Asouzu sees this methodology, the use of reason, as leading to the scientific approach used in Western metaphysics, while over-reliance on other methodologies has led to the mythological approach followed in African metaphysics (Asouzu 1985: 193).⁴

Fortunately, such a distinction in metaphysical methodology has long been disapproved by many thinkers. Higgs, for instance, observes that reason is neither necessary nor universal, but nor is it arbitrary, for it emerges in plural conversations in which people together inquire, disagree, explain or argue their views in the pursuit of a *consensual outcome*. Such an outcome is one that the participants, after careful deliberation of different opinions and alternative perspectives, are satisfied with for that moment in time (1997: 7). At this stage, we can still agree that African metaphysics is mythological, in the sense that it investigates and derives answers that go beyond the rational limitations of human and other particular existent realities.

Mythology, however, should be distinguished from beliefs in mental categories that do not correspond to reality. Mythology is not a belief in mental categories, but a belief in the existence of realities beyond those that can be mentally verified, although they are mentally perceivable. All scientific discoveries and inventions were at one time mythologies in the sense that they were initially only mentally perceivable, and only years later were they scientifically verified. Building a world system that acknowledges realities that are both verifiable and those that are not verifiable is not contrary to reason but rather

⁴It is also good to note that the “mythology” narrative is far from being irrational in terms of origin and formulation. Mythology, contrary to what many authors hold, is the result of man’s endeavour to rationalise the origins, meaning and ends of the universe and man.

is a supplement to human rationality. The Western world of science, purporting to be built only on verifiable realities, can be robotic and inhumane since even the human person is so complex that nobody has succeeded in scientifically verifying all that he or she is.

Another characteristic of African metaphysics is that it is *teleological*. Teffo and Roux have attempted to distinguish *teleological* and *mechanistic* metaphysics. They see teleological metaphysics as characteristic of African metaphysics because it understands reality as hanging together because of aims, and the metaphysics itself is driven by aims. In this metaphysics, there are no blind happenings but only purposeful actions. On the other hand, Western mechanistic metaphysics (which arose from the post-scientific cultural revolution between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries) rejects these views as meaningless and thinks of reality in mechanical terms, in terms of mechanical causation (1998: 192). This view of Teffo and Roux may be criticized on the ground that such mechanistic thought does not cut across all Western thinking, but it is definitely part and parcel of Western thinking.

For Teffo and Roux, there are those who reject the teleological understanding of metaphysics on the basis that everything is explainable in the scientific sense, while African metaphysics insists that not everything can be explained in the scientific sense. As Teffo and Roux contend, "Our perceptions are influenced by our expectations, beliefs and emotions, but also by our conceptual schemes, our histories and social circumstances, and the language we talk" (*ibid*: 192).

Teffo and Roux have elucidated this idea by saying, despite everything: "We argue that, generally speaking, metaphysical thinking in Africa has features which make it a particular way of conceptualizing reality. Facets of this conceptual scheme are discussed with reference mostly to specific cultural groups. [...] Such views cannot be ignored because they also come into play when issues such as development, education, government, and legislation are discussed" (*ibid*: 194).

Emphasis on scientific explanations as a basis for rejecting teleological aims in life can no longer be accepted. This is because, though rationality is not arbitrary, it cannot be taken as the absolute criterion for deriving truth. To distinguish science-oriented metaphysics, with its emphasis on rationality and criticality, from mythology-oriented metaphysics, involving use of the combination of emotions, imagination, faith and reason, may not be the right way to go. This does not mean we can absolutely rely on faith or emotions as the only means of deriving truth; reason must also be involved. Where faith and emotion replace reason completely, it is not right; and where reason ignores faith and emotions completely, it is also not right. To ignore reason in African metaphysics leads to what Ozumba has described as a backward metaphysics that distracts

us from a serious investigation of nature. Where he goes wrong is to think that serious investigation of nature can only be done by science. African metaphysics can still be teleological (which is neither “irrational” nor “arational”), and this understanding should be taken cautiously to mean that reason need not be sacrificed in preference to faith. Teleological metaphysics should then mean the ability to see meaning behind the existence of reality, purpose for the existence of the world, and underlying consistent principles as the coherency between being and existence.

A third view is that African metaphysics is *holistic*. Teffo and Roux put it bluntly; African metaphysics is holistic in nature. Reality is seen as a closed system in which everything hangs together and is affected by any change in the system. There is a principle concerning the interaction of forces, that is, between God and humankind, between different people, between humankind and animals, and between humankind and material things (*ibid*: 196).

As Teffo and Roux explain: “These forces are hierarchically placed; they form a ‘chain of being’. In this hierarchy God, the creator and source of all vital forces, is at the apex. Then follow the ancestors, then humankind, and then the lower forces, animals, plants and matter. This system of vital forces constitutes a closed universe. When one element gains in force another has to lose it” (*Ibid*). It is also important to underline that “the living person takes a central place in this system” (*ibid*). While the “vital or life force” metaphysics puts forward here is strongly questioned by More (1996: 152) and Kaphagawani (1998: 169–176), the hierarchic structure and holistic features of this metaphysics are not questioned since, for the purpose of comparison, both Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics are also hierarchical.

The teleological and holistic natures of African metaphysics are not contradictory to each other. Though some authors think mythology undermines serious metaphysical knowledge, I believe this is not the case. In my view, this mythology, as Asouzu claims, is a result of answers given to the teleologically fundamental questions in African metaphysics. This metaphysics is not a myth, but rather it provides answers that go beyond the rationative answers of Western metaphysics.

The Scope of African Metaphysics

Pancras Kaboha (1992) holds that Western metaphysics narrows the scope of metaphysics, while African philosophy has the potential to open the eyes of Western thinkers to the wider scope of metaphysics. For him, it all began with the industrial revolution, when Western civilization started worshipping

science. From the time of David Hume up to the twentieth century, the assertions of Wittgenstein that metaphysics and ethics are not philosophy were accepted without question. This eventually led to dialectical materialism and the denial of the “soul” in man.

Western metaphysics considers only those realities that are logical, reasonable and comprehensible by our rational minds to fall under the scope of metaphysics, yet the scope of African metaphysics goes beyond that which is provable by our rational minds.⁵ Western philosophy limits the realities that are verifiable by experimentation to natural science and the realities that are reasonable to human minds to philosophy. The central difference between the scopes of Western and African metaphysics lies in African metaphysics’ yearning after knowledge of the ultimate realities, whether such knowledge is derived from experience or experimentation, by reason or from faith.

For Kaboha, knowledge can be derived from our heads (reason), bodies (experience) and spirits (faith, inner senses, extra-sensory perceptions, etc.). Communing with nature at times gives us knowledge that defies easy rational analysis, he contends. He also maintains that between knowing and living, living comes first, and knowledge is only derived from the concrete circumstances of living (*ibid*).

This implies that the scope of African metaphysics is not determined by its methodology. In the West, metaphysical knowledge arises from human reason, while other methodologies are reserved for other disciplines, like faith to theology and experience to science. The scope of African metaphysics is instead determined by its aim, by what it wants to attain or arrive at. Metaphysical knowledge cannot be reached or arrived at by reason alone; it needs other methodologies, like existential experiences, intuition and faith. Combined together, they give rise to a better understanding of the ultimate reality. African metaphysics takes the knowledge of reality as a totality, regardless of whether this reality is material or immaterial, seen or unseen, mundane or celestial, human or non-human, living or non-living.

Another important point that can be derived is that, in the process of acquiring knowledge about the ultimate metaphysical realities, one does not begin by reflection but by getting involved and interacting with the realities one wants to know. From these interactions one derives abstract knowledge, the mental metaphysical knowledge, about the ultimate realities. “The African ‘lives’ the metaphysical as well as the physical life; his religion is not divorced

⁵ One may say that even Plato’s “world of forms” was not rationally provable, but it is nevertheless widely accepted in Western metaphysics. This may be beside the point, because African philosophy is not always an antithesis of Western philosophy; however, the methodology adopted in Western philosophy—namely, rationality and criticality—would put such claims in doubt.

from his culture or his philosophy of life” (*Ibid*). One might say this is typical of all “primitive” societies, and it is just a stage of development in the Marxist sense rather than an essential attribute of African philosophy. This would mean that primitive societies were not capable of doing philosophy, and philosophy only comes about when people have reached a certain stage of development in the Marxist sense, which is incorrect.

So, the scope of African metaphysics is *empirico-rationative*. That is, rational and abstract concepts of reality are derived from existential living. Thus, it goes beyond rational, abstract knowledge of the ultimate realities to include empirico-existential knowledge derived from living and interacting with the ultimate and other realities within and outside of the human environment.

Traditional African Metaphysics

If African metaphysics is engagement with reality, or the identification of empirically grounded and deeply seated rational explanations of existence, then traditional African metaphysics is the African understanding of such engagement with reality as it was in the past, and precisely before interaction with Western cultures began. It is the explanations of the relationship between existence and being as they were understood in traditional African societies. These explanations may be distinguished from modern attempts to try to understand and adapt these understandings for contemporary relevance. African traditional metaphysics investigates concepts like the absolute being (God), nature and man, among others. Modern African metaphysics is the attempt by individual African thinkers to adopt and apply these traditional metaphysical principles or any other relevant metaphysical principles and concepts for contemporary relevance in Africa.

The Concept of Being

A concept commonly discussed in traditional African metaphysics is that of “being”. Often, authors begin by quoting the most famous Tempelsian phrase, “force is being, being is force” (Tempels 1959: 51). Ansah Richard thinks that, unlike the European, the African does not conceive the world as a conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, God and Devil. The African recognizes that all beings are made of forces (2015: 2). The African believes that the life force of the creator is present in all creatures and in all things (*ibid*). “Force in African thought is a necessary element in being, and

the concept *force* is inseparable from the definition of being. There is no idea among Africans of being divorced from the idea of *force*. Without the element *force*, being cannot be conceived" (*ibid*).

Tempels, the originator of this discussion, insists that what Western thinkers call "being", Africans [the Bantu] call "force": "Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. When we say that "beings" are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that "forces" differ in their essence or nature. They hold that there is the divine force, celestial or terrestrial forces, human forces, animal forces, vegetable and even material or mineral forces" (Tempels 1998: 431). For Tempels, "beings" are hierarchical. Some beings have higher forces while others have lower forces, though each is related to the others.

Dukor adds that Africans believe that behind every human being or object there is a vital power or soul (1989: 369). Africans personify nature because they believe that there is a spiritual force residing in every object of nature. This is why African religious practices, feasts and ceremonies cannot in any way be equated to magical and idolatrous practices or fetishism. For that matter, Parrinder thinks that "the Africans were incurably religious people" (1974: 9). One may say that this is true of other primitive societies. This is not the issue, however, because to claim that Africans are incurably religious does not negate the fact that others may be the same.

My view is that being in African metaphysics is a dynamic concept. It is different from the Western understanding that distinguishes "being" from "becoming", making being static and becoming dynamic. In African metaphysics, being is activity and becoming is a process.⁶ To be a human person is an activity that goes on all the time, so long as such a person is in existence; while becoming a person is a process that starts probably at conception and continues till death, or even after death according to some African cultures.

African Ontology

Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines ontology as the science that addresses principles of metaphysics and the nature and essence of things (Kirkpatrick 1983: 885). "Ontology refers to what is out there to know. Ontology has to do with whether something exists as real (realism) or as perceived (subjectivism)" (Peter Narh 2012: 2). Ontology is thus a theory of existence concerned with the nature of reality and human beings (Lee 2012).

⁶One may claim that an activity is also a process. But activity is motion, while process is progression or a procedure which the thing in motion goes through.

If ontology is the theory of existence, then African ontology is the African theory of existence. At the core of the African theory of existence is the world and all that is related to it. African ontology is the theory of the world and all that is in existence and how all that is in existence relates to each other. Africans think this world and all that exists in it are ordered and causally related. Aja (2001) says that the world is an ordered universe in which all events are caused and potentially explicable. Gyekye (1987) thinks that the realities in existence are causally related, not just mechanically, chemically or psychologically related, as the West thinks; the African doctrine of universal causation speaks of a metaphysical kind of causality which binds the creator to the creature.

Dukor thinks that African ontology is anthropocentric (meaning man-centred), in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man (1989: 369). This means that in this ontology, all other forces in the universe are related to man and his nature. For Anyanwu, forces are interrelated in African metaphysics: "From the beginning of the world, it is assumed, there has existed a life force, created by one God which is always active, spread throughout the universe, dispensed to all animate-life forces, man, animals and the plants, sometimes communicated to things which we consider inanimate" (1983: 60).

Tempels calls this life force the "vital force", while Edwin Smith calls it dynamism. Parrinder defines this dynamism as "the belief in and practices associated with the belief in hidden, mysterious, supersensible, pervading energy, powers, and potent forces" (Parrinder 1974: 2). Dukor calls it "spiritual essence" (1987: 370). In some parts of West Africa, these terms have been translated as *Nyama*, the impersonal, unconscious energy found in man, animals, gods, nature and things (Parrinder 1974: 22).

Furthermore, African ontology advocates that beings are in harmonious, complementary relationship. "This ontology holds that everything that exists serves as missing links of reality" (Asouzu 2007: 10) and that "individuals or groups can only live meaningfully in harmonious, complementary relationship" (Akpan et al. 2013: 123). Akpan *et al.* go on to conclude that Nigeria is in chaos because this principle of complementary relationship has not yet taken root in the minds of its citizens.

So, traditional African ontology is a concept of being as a life-giving force, related to and influencing other beings. This totality of beings is in harmonious, complementary relationship with each other for the benefit of the human being as a central agent in that harmony.

African Cosmology

Cosmology is “the Science of the universe as a whole: a treatise on the structure and part of the system of creation” (Kirkpatrick 1983: 283). For Kanu, several African literatures present cosmology as basically religious, saying that cosmology gives a sense of purpose and direction to the lives of people and enables them to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over their environment. Cosmology answers fundamental questions about the place and relationship of man within the universe. This cannot be done outside the ambience of supernatural power or powers, and thus this cannot be done outside religion (2013: 533). Kanu then defines African cosmology as “the way Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations; it is the African’s search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often viewed as *terminus adquo*—origin, and as *terminus ad quem*—end” (*Ibid*).

African cosmology is, then, a template and a lens through which Africans see the world, build their value system, find meaning in life, view the world as origin and end, and see existence as constituting a unifying system. This cosmology is the underlining thought link that holds together the African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies (*ibid*: 533–4).

According to African cosmology, the universe is divided into two realms: the spiritual and the physical. God represents the Chief Being and sits at the summit of power. Among the spiritual beings are the ancestors and minor spirits. The physical world is dominated by man, who occupies the central position in the scheme of the created world. Onunwa thinks that the African universe is triangular, with God at the apex, the ancestors at the base and man at the centre (Onunwa 1994: 250). Kanu similarly claims that the primacy of the human being in the African universe is due to the central place he occupies within the universe (Kanu 2013: 534).

So, African cosmology consists of a basic belief in the unity of all things and ordered relationships among all things; it is a belief that God, ancestors, man and other created things live in symbiotic and reciprocal relationship (Nwala 1985: 26).

God in African Cosmology

God in the African universe is a reality and not an abstract concept (Quarcoopome 1987). Idowu (1962) thinks that he is a personal being with whom one can enter into communion. He is approachable in all occasions of

life. In some African cultures, God is conceived as masculine, as among the Yoruba, Mende and Akan; in some cultures, God is feminine, as among the Ewe; in some others, God is conceived as both male and female, as among the Gas (Kanu 2013: 535–6).

While in many parts of the world, God is conceived of as masculine, it is interesting to note the variations in this concept in African cosmology. In my view, this may depend on the kind of African society. Some African societies are patrilineal, while others are matrilineal; the tendency is to conceive of the highest authority (God) in similar terms to the authorities existing in such societies.

Kanu then lists the different attributes of God as being: real, unique, absolute controller of the universe, one, creator, king, omnipotent, eternal and judge (*ibid.*: 537–9). These attributions may vary from one African society to another, but in essence they are similar.

The African Concept of the Person

We derive a people's concept of a person not from propositional statements made by them, but from their way of life (Appiah 2004: 25–6). Despite various views of the concept of the person from one culture to another, Ozumba (2004) observes: "What we have are similar outlooks which enjoy a higher semblance than with views outside the African sub-region" (Ozumba, 2004: 1). These outlooks, like any cultural philosophy, have certain underlying logic and understanding.

Teffo and Roux contend that African metaphysical discussions on the concept of the human person identify four major aspects: the *relational* basis of selfhood, *empirical* considerations, *dualism* and *destiny* (1998: 145–7). I will use this classification in discussing the concept of the person in African metaphysics.

The Person as Relational

While Western metaphysics bases its argument of the concept of the human person on epistemology and psychology, African thinking bases its arguments on social relations. Teffo and Roux conclude that although the community plays an important part in determining the selfhood of human beings, human persons cannot be reduced to mere products of any kind of collectivity or community (*ibid.*: 145).

Using Mbiti's famous phrase that "I am because we are" (1970: 141), Menkiti confirms that the relational or social basis of selfhood in Africa does not destroy human individuality. Its sense is that an individual who recognizes the sources of his or her own humanity realizes with internal assurance that in

the absence of others no grounds exist for a claim regarding the individual's own standing as a person (2004a, b: 324). This means that an individual is an extended self. "This Mbitian phrase should not be misunderstood. In traditional African social philosophy, the community is essentially composed of individuals who are very closely and strongly related to the community" (Lajul 2014a: 104).

The Person as Dualistic

Despite different answers to the question of what constitutes a person, most African authors agree that the person consists basically of a "material" aspect and a "spiritual" aspect or aspects. Dualism arises in the explanation of how these two aspects relate or function together. The nature of this spiritual aspect has been very controversial even among African scholars from the same ethnic communities (Teffo and Roux 1998: 146).

Other authors, however, see human nature as more than dualistic. This is manifested where a person is thought to have more than two constitutive elements, as with the Akan and the Yoruba of Nigeria (*ibid*: 147). In general, there is agreement that a person is more than the body; there is an immaterial dimension of the human person. How the body relates to this immaterial dimension constitutes what some authors call dualism.

The Person as Triadic

Another view quite common among Africans is that a human is three-dimensional (triadic), constituted of the body, soul and heart. The most central of these three is the third dimension, the heart. In other words, the heart is the central constitutive element of a person. According to Segun, the Yoruba call this element *okán*, which is acknowledged as the physical organ responsible for the circulation of blood. "[...] it is also conceived as the source of emotional and psychic reactions" (1998b: 150). The Akans call it the "personality entity" (*sunsum*) (Kaphagawani 2004: 332–3). Basically, most Africans seem to agree that the human person has more than two interrelated elements: the body, the soul and the heart. However, the heart is the element responsible for personality and the source of emotional and psychic reactions. The English term "heart", at least in many African cultural communities, does not refer to the physical organ used for the circulation of blood, as in one of the interpretations Segun gives, but only to the central part of the person responsible for character, emotions and feelings.

Among the Acholi of northern Uganda, for instance, the English word “heart” is translated as *Adunu*. *Adunu* is the physical organ responsible for the circulation of blood in the body. The word the Acholi use for personality and emotion instead is *cwiny*. This should not be identified with the English word “liver”, the physical organ, which the Acholi would translate as *Acuny*. *Acuny* is not what the Acholi would identify with *cwiny*. This is similar to other Ugandan terms that have similar interpretations: *cwing* (Acholi), *cuny* (Langi), *omutima* (Luganda) and *ingeso* (Bafumbira), all of which refer to the metaphysical reality responsible for character, emotions and, as Segun calls it, the source of emotional and psychic reactions or the spiritual source of emotion.

The Person and Destiny

The question of destiny is an important metaphysical concept on which African development hangs. The main question is whether our destiny is predetermined or whether it depends on individual choice and opportunities. For Teffo and Roux, the imposition or choice of destiny determines for the person what he or she will be in life. A person’s destiny determines his or her success or failure, personality, luck or ill-luck (Teffo and Roux 1998: 147).

A study of different African languages shows that some African societies believe in the concept of destiny as predetermination, while others think there is room for the individual to influence his or her destiny. Thinking that a person’s destiny is predetermined has consequences for the way one accepts fate and surrenders to unacceptable human conditions. Such metaphysics gives justification to thinkers like Inokoba, who believe that the African metaphysical worldview is a *cul de sac* preventing the continent from embracing innovation and change. If one’s destiny is already predetermined, then why bother to change the lot given by fate? But this is not the view of all Africans, as we shall discuss in the section on modern African metaphysics. A good number of Africans also see that while a lot of things happen to them out of chance, ultimately one’s lot can be changed. We shall discuss this idea in detail in the following section.

Modern African Metaphysics

In this section, I will discuss modern debates on the nature of African metaphysics, utilising different views of individual authors who have studied African metaphysics.

Science Versus Mythological Metaphysics

Asouzu (1985) begins by defining metaphysics as the most fundamental science and the basic tool of exploration. He believes that “metaphysical preconditioning or consciousness leads us to approach sensory data in particular ways and, furthermore, influences both our formulation of problems and possible solutions” (*ibid*). Asouzu argues that scientific progress is sustained by the urge to go beyond each attainable result, which only metaphysical sophistication can achieve.

In Africa, one discovers that serious and consistent efforts have been made within this area to ask questions that go beyond the possible limits of attainable results. Yet the curious energy expended within the African context in the search for scientific answers to challenging problems has not always yielded results comparable to those obtained elsewhere. A pertinent question is why a quest sustained by the urge to break new ground may be fundamentally the same in different contexts, but the results in terms of tangible or recognizable results remain at variance (*ibid*).

To answer this basic question, Asouzu has come up with two models of metaphysics, *the science-oriented model* and *the mythological model of metaphysics*. He defines the science-oriented model of metaphysics as characteristically dipping into the mythological worldviews of the people at their time; the identification of the ontological meanings of existent things; the discovery of self-explanatory values of existent things; the finding out of the hidden secrets and mysteries behind nature itself; and the attempt to make nature reveal the mysteries and secrets hidden in it (*ibid*).

On the other hand, African metaphysics is still a body of belief and practices in relation to the ultimate being; an inquiring into the constitution of nature, the dynamic force in the form of a personal god, spirit or other agencies responsible for the explanation of existent things; an attempt at grasping the nature of the being responsible for existence of the world; a concentration on understanding the attributes of this personal being and its relationship to man and to nature; among other things (*ibid*).

For Anyanwu, Africans have their own popular metaphysics, namely, mythology. “The African has the feeling of dependence: on family, community, friends and groups. He realizes that his dependence on them is incomplete or embodies some uncertainties because none of these dependent forces can satisfy all the expectations of the individual. Only through faith in God or dependence on Him can he be free of disappointment” (Ruch and Anyanwu 1984: 163f).

The implication of this text is that it is the feeling of alienation of man from fellow men, on the basis of their unreliability, which creates a personal insecurity that often makes man seek solace in the mystical being, God. Since human problems are many, man seeks solutions beyond this world, in the world of God through religion.

In my opinion, this is not the right way of understanding African metaphysics, yet at the same time one cannot dismiss the fact that often irresolvable problems drive mankind to the mystical. However, some aspects of African religiosity and metaphysical orientation go beyond these observations made by Asouzu. The problem of personal insecurity is not unique to Africans. All humans in their history of survival go through these basic issues, and different societies have developed their own answers to those questions and have organised their lives and societies on the basis of those answers.

African metaphysics and religiosity are a result of some basic answers given to some fundamental questions about life (Lajul 2014a, b: 62–3), but these are not the only answers Africans have given. One can read Segun Gbadegesin, who contends that the foundation of African morality is not religion or God as such, though it does not exclude religion (1998a, b: 303).

Omerégbe's assertion that in African metaphysics there are mythological or supernatural forces which defy any scientific analysis or explanation—and that these forces can be manipulated by man and employed for both good and evil purposes, such as protection, prevention of calamities, cure of diseases, procreation and bringing about sickness, death and other kinds of misfortune to people (1990: 26–7)—perfectly exonerates Asouzu's claim.

But that is not all there is to know about African metaphysics. Not all answers given to fundamental questions about life in Africa have been mythological. The real problem of Asouzu is that he ignores the *teleological* and *holistic* characteristics of African metaphysics and accentuates only the *mythological* one.

The real problem in general is that traditional African metaphysical concepts are no longer sufficient for understanding and explaining the world, nature or mankind itself. The mythological element in African metaphysics must now be minimized in the context of new scientific knowledge; room must be given to the more scientific orientations based on investigation of nature and the world. However, science is not the absolute solution to Africa's problems in and by itself either. Without sufficient moral and mythological dimensions in the sense of recognition of God, the centrality of man, and the necessity of ethics in economic and political endeavours, the very results of the science-oriented metaphysics Asouzu talks of will be detrimental.

African Metaphysics as a *Cul de Sac* Preventing Innovation

As mentioned above, some African thinker (Inokoba et al) believe that Africa's metaphysical worldview is a *cul de sac* preventing the continent from embracing innovation and change. They contend that it will take a revolutionary, aggressive and innovative science-biased education policy for African to effectively confront the menace of ignorance and backwardness (2010:23).

They observe that science as a human endeavour cannot be conceived and operated in a cultural and environmental vacuum. This view is supported by Aikenhead (1980) and Olsen et al. (1992). For Inokoba et al., the African worldview is metaphysical, while the Western worldview is scientific. They write:

Where the generally accepted worldview of the society is characterized by scientific traits of rational, logical, inquisitive and analytical reasoning, such a society is said to have a scientific culture (i.e. it is scientifically literate). On the other hand, a society that is permeated by perceptions and belief systems that encourage superstition, magic, animism, cosmology and theology, is said to be one that has metaphysical worldview. The advanced Western societies belong to the former, while the Third World, particularly Africa, is dominated by the latter worldview (2010: 24–25).

This means that African metaphysics encourages superstition, magic, animism, cosmology and theology, while Western metaphysics is scientific, logical, inquisitive, analytic and rational. This way of distinguishing African from Western metaphysics is really problematic. It brings back the old discussion of whether Africans are really rational or not. In the book, *African Philosophy: Critical Dimensions*, Lajul tried to demystify this conception by bringing to the fore the Acholi base five counting system, which is different from the Western base ten counting system (Cf. Lajul 2014a: 75–6). Behind such a counting system there is a clear demonstration of logic, criticality and rationality that dismisses the claim that African metaphysics is only mythical, superstitious and magical.

Where African backwardness and ignorance persist (Asouzu 1985), it is the result of multiple factors. I agree that it is not sufficient to always think that African problems are due to external factors; internal factors must also be looked at. It is equally wrong to see the metaphysical mindset as the source of African problems. Besides the metaphysical mindset, we should equally focus on other factors, both internal and external, that affect Africa in her efforts to face and solve her problems. I fully agree that an over-emphasis on attempting

to find mystical causes for our problems is diversionary; it distracts us from concentrating on the real issues that affect our continent.

Similar to Kant's famous "Copernican Revolution" theory (Lajul 2014b: 46–7), the modern world, in the sense Inokoba has described, has reached a level where man does not obey the laws of nature, but rather nature is obliged to obey the laws manufactured or created by man. The results are genetically modified foods, cloning, and manipulation of genes, among other things. This is the scientific culture Inokoba is proposing be adopted by Africa. When the Western world is running away from the madness of scientific innovations and looking for organic foods in Africa, Inokoba is asking Africa, in the name of overcoming backwardness, to abandon her most cherished values by adopting the scientific madness of the West that he calls progress. Africa can still progress, but this must be done in a more discreet way, moving towards what Inokoba calls progress without sacrificing African values like "environmental friendliness, human centeredness, and ethical considerations" (*ibid.*: 52).

Ubuntu—African Metaphysics in Economics

Mfuniselwa (2010) argues that there is an interconnection of disciplines within the African way of life that enables them to serve humanity best. For example, one cannot separate culture from the economy, religion from science, or philosophy from science. It is important that no space is created between the disciplines because if "the inner part of an African fails to communicate with the outer part, because the outer part is foreign, and the result is that, an African is immediately put off the balance, because his outer part [...], lacks the power to direct the processes that shape African behavior and bodily functions" (Mfuniselwa 2010: 4).

Mfuniselwa argues that African *ubuntu* metaphysics believes that created beings preserve a bond with one another, an intimate, ontological relationship comparable to the causal tie which binds creature and creator. Thus, the view of separate beings is inapplicable in Africa. According to Mfuniselwa, economics deals with how people can best share the natural resources of the earth, human resources for mobilizing earthly resources, and the rewards of their labour. He argues that in traditional Africa, issues of private ownership in a Western sense were unheard of until the coming of the colonial system.

The central point being highlighted by Mfuniselwa is that African *ubuntu* metaphysics has two dimensions, the internal and the external. The internal dimension is an intimate ontological bond that ties one individual to another. This internal bond is being disorganized by the modern economic system that

preaches competition and profit in the name of a free market economy. The outer dimension is the responsibility that we owe to one another on the basis of there being one moral universe and a shared moral sense that makes us recognize our duty to the other. This shared responsibility is lacking under the modern world economic system. If these inner and outer ontological ties are not restored in Africa, then the individual African will be annihilated, in that his inner self and its demands will not be in harmony with the outer environment imposed by the modern economic system. This will retard African development.

My view is that this inner intimate ontological relationship among Africans, whether we like it or not, can no longer be restored to its original flavour. Time has changed things; Africans are becoming ever more aggressive and individualistic. The outer bond, which is the responsibility that we owe to one another, is no more. We cannot bury our heads in the sand under the hope that African *ubuntu* philosophy can be restored and used to solve our problems. We need now to balance individualism, which is growing among Africans, with communalism, which is dwindling among Africans. Our nation states should now begin to play a more positive role in regulating and balancing these two forces of individualism and communalism. Neither the Western science-oriented metaphysical principles nor the African mythological belief in God and ethics should be used alone, but rather a combination of the two. We need a regulated scientific practice and moderated beliefs in the forces beyond human powers.

Destiny in African Metaphysics

Segun argues that *ori*, the physical head and seat of the brain in the Yoruba language, is an important part of the make-up of the human person, together with *emi* (the divine element) and *okán* (the heart, as described above). To a typical Yoruba, an *ori* is the bearer of a person's destiny as well as the determinant of the person's personality (1998b: 156). We are interested in *ori* as the bearer of a person's destiny.

The god *Ajala*, according to Segun, is the potter of *ori*, which is a symbolic representation of an inner head which is considered as the bearer of destiny (*ibid*). One can question the relationship between *ori* and human destiny, however. Segun concludes that *ori* and destiny are not identical, but rather an *ori* is the bearer and the controller of a person's life. Thus, destiny is the preordained outcome of life, wound and sealed up in the *ori*. Every human being is believed to have allotment (an allotment of *ori*) that determines what they will be in life (*ibid*: 315).

While respecting Segun's understanding of the Yorubas' concept of destiny, the question I would like to ask is whether destiny is predetermined or open to influence by individual choices in life. One cannot get these answers from Segun, since all the analyses made do not show that choice is possible: destiny is given; the right conditions for right choice are missing; and in the allotment of *ori*, the determinant of destiny, no hint of content is given before the allocation because of the similarity of the different *ori* (*ibid*: 161–163).

Our discussion should go beyond the Yoruba worldview, however. What do the other African communities say about destiny? This may not be easy to answer, but I can give the contribution from the society with which I am most well versed, the Acholi of northern Uganda. For the Acholi, destiny is called *gum*, and it may be good (*gumkom*) or bad (*keckom*). There is no particular formula. In life, some people are born lucky while others are born unlucky, and such a status tends to follow them through life. An individual has little chance to alter or influence his or her destiny.

However, among the Acholi, destiny does not encompass every aspect of one's life. It is best described as good or bad luck, but it is more recurrent than simple luck or misfortune. Even those with good luck which is recurrent and persistent still experience bad luck in other aspects of their lives. Destiny seems to be restricted to certain aspects of one's life, like good luck in hunting, farming or raising children and bad luck in fishing, relationships or trade.⁷

The Acholi language distinguishes different types of destinies: natural destiny, including God-given destiny (*gum pa Rubanga*) or destiny that one is born with (*gum anywala*), acquired destiny (*gum alama*, destiny derived from a blessing), and inherited destiny (*gum kwaro*, destiny acquired from one's ancestors). Destinies among the Acholi are normally distinguished from moral responsibilities. While destinies are important, they do not supplant human responsibilities and moral obligations. Despite one's recurrent and persistent fortunes or misfortunes, one is still expected to live according to the moral laws of society and to do what it takes to be a human person. *Ongole*, in the adage quoted in the footnote, had luck with which he was born (*gum anywala*), yet it did not prevent him from becoming the victim of wild animals. So, destiny in whatever form cannot be taken for granted; it must be embraced with care and responsibility. Neither does it replace social human duties or moral responsibilities.

⁷There is an Acholi adage which says *Jwijiwi ci Ongole oneko, nino mo dong Jubi oneko Ongole*. Ongole was a man endowed with luck. Each time he went to hunt he would come home with a buffalo or other big game animal. But one day, it was Ongole that became the victim of the buffalos. The meaning of the adage is that luck is not a permanent gift that cannot change.

Pan-African Metaphysical Epistemology

In Martin's view, pan-African metaphysical epistemology is the deeply seated, rationally known concepts shared across Africa. These concepts, in many African societies, are not just abstractions from the concrete beings. Instead, according to Martin, concepts are concretized into four forms: *Vângama*, *Vaika*, *Vànga* and *Vûnda*, or idea, the word, creativity or maturation, and death. Martin writes:

The *Vângama* is the starting stage of the formation process, and biologically speaking, it equates with conception and when genetic codes are set. In thinking this is the stage of an idea. Second, the *Vaika* is the transition from the internal to the external environment or birth wherein the idea transitions from being in the head to a material form. The *Vànga* is creativity and maturation, a time to become an *ngàngá*, or master. And the last demarcation is *Vûnda* where "one goes naturally or unnaturally into the process of dying or *Vûnda*, i.e., to rest, to extinguish, leave the physical world, to re-enter the world of living energy". (2008: 218)

I would agree to a great extent with Martin's categorization of the four conceptual stages as idea, word, maturation and death. I would add that among the Acholi of northern Uganda, concepts are also divided into four: *tam* (idea), *lok* (word), *tic* (work) and *yweyo* (rest). *Tam* is the beginning, or where ideas are born, which is believed to start in the mind through thinking, which occurs in the head. From a nascent idea in the mind is born the word that expresses such ideas, and this is verbalized in the form of *lok*, or words, songs, rhymes, proverbs and so forth. The wisdom or philosophy (*ongon*) of an individual or group of people is derivable from such expressed ideas.⁸ Action, or *tic*, flows from the wisdom or philosophy of an individual or group of individuals. *Tic* (work) not only describes the ways humans express, live out and participate in life, but it also expresses their philosophy of life. *Tic* dominates most aspects of African day-to-day life. Lastly, rest, or *yweyo*, is what comes after work, whether on a daily basis or at the end of life. Death in Acholi is expressed as a state of rest. For instance, when an elder dies, the Acholi say *laditi dong oywee*, meaning "this elder has rested".

Martin's categorization of the metaphysical epistemology differs from the Acholi's only in the concept of work (*tic*), which Martin calls creativity or maturation. If looked at critically, this creativity may not be quite so different from work as an expression of one's existence and philosophy of life.

⁸ *Ongon* is the Acholi word for philosophy or wisdom. Variations include *ongonkwo* (philosophy of life), *ongon pa lodito* (wisdom of the elders), *ongon kwaro* (traditional wisdom) and *ongon tekwaro* (loosely, history of the people).

West African, East African and South African Conceptions of a Person

Kaphagawani introduces a very interesting discussion on the conceptions of a person in East and West Africa. The distinguishing line in the discussion is that the West African concept of a person is centred on the constitutive elements of the human person, while the East African conception is centred on the dynamic constitution of the person.

The West African Conception of a Person

In explaining the West African conception of a person, Kaphagawani distinguishes the Akan and Yoruba understandings of what constitutes a human person. While both Wiredu and Gyekye agree that a person, according to the Akan, is constituted of three parts—the body (*nipaudua*), the life-giving entity (*okra*) and the personality entity (*sunsum*)—they disagree mainly on the definitions of *okra* and *sunsum* (Kaphagawani 2004: 332–3). Wiredu thinks *okra* is the innermost self, the essence of an individual, the living soul, transmitter of individual destiny, spark of the Supreme Being. It is not only the soul, and it is quasi-physical. It has para-physical properties, since life after death itself is quasi-physical (*ibid*).

Kwame Gyekye, on the other hand, thinks that *okra* is the divine element in man. Ante-mundane, it is the soul, since after death it belongs to the world of spirits, a world inhabited by the departed souls of ancestors. That the *okra* is the life-giving entity in a person seems to be accepted by both thinkers; whether it is called soul or not is a matter of opinion.

The second area of discrepancy is in the understanding of *sunsum*, the personality entity in a person. Both Wiredu and Gyekye agree that *sunsum* is the basis of individual personality. They disagree, however, on the mortality or immortality of the *sunsum*. Wiredu thinks the *sunsum* perishes at death. Gyekye thinks that the *sunsum* is not physical but psychological; that it is capable of leaving and later returning to the body during sleep; that it is divine, immaterial and immortal (*ibid*). Whether *sunsum* perishes at death or is immortal, again, is a matter of opinion, but what is important for us is that both agree that it is the basis of personality in an individual.

The other West African understanding of the constitutive elements of a human person is derived from Segun's presentation. For the Yoruba, Segun says, the human person consists of four elements: the body (*ora*), the heart or centre of human emotions (*okán*), the divine element in an individual (*emi*),

and the head or bearer of one's destiny (*ori*). Segun adds that *emi* is not only the divine breath; it is also immaterial and has independent existence, and it is the principle or force in an individual.

Apparently, Leke Adeofe, who comes from the same ethnic community, divides the Yoruba conception of the human person only into three and calls it the "tripartite conceptions of persons" (2004: 44). He writes:

A tripartite conception of a person characterizes the African thought system. A person is conceived to be the union of his or her *ara* (body), *emi* (mind/soul), and *ori* ("inner head"). Unlike *ara*, which is physical, both the *emi* and *ori* are mental (or spiritual). This dichotomy might induce us to think of the African view as dualistic. But it would be a mistake to do so, since *ori* is conceived [as] ontologically independent of the other two elements. Thus, the African view is properly thought of as triadic. (*ibid*: 45)

The only question is why Adeofe's categorization of the human person is tripartite, while the one presented by Segun shows four dimensions. How should an outsider understand this? Is Segun's fourth categorization, *okán*, non-existent, or has Adeofe missed out something? This chapter may not resolve this dilemma; it requires further study, especially by experts from the same cultural community.

The Yoruba seem to believe that the different elements of the human person are created by different deities. "*Ara*, the body, is constructed by Orisa-nla, the arch deity; Olodumare (God or 'Supreme Deity') brings forth the *emi*; while another deity, Ajala, is responsible for creating *ori*" (*ibid*). This may not be the case with other African theories of creation.

The East and South African Conception of a Person

Describing the East and South African conception of a person, Kaphagawani maintains that the central idea is represented by three basic theses: the force thesis, the communalism thesis and the shadow thesis, propounded by Placide Tempels, John Mbiti and Alexis Kagame, respectively (Kaphagawani 2004: 334–41). I view these three ideas as components of one central thesis, the idea of the dynamic constitution of a person.

While Tempels sees in this dynamism the centrality of forces, Mbiti sees dynamism in the context of the community and Kagame sees it as a relationship between intelligence and the heart. For Tempels, a human person is part of being as an essential energy or vital force. Being is dynamic, and force is a necessary element of being. Though force is an essential property of being,

being implicitly has more attributes than force (*ibid*: 335). Force is the essence of being, force is being, and being is force. However, Kaphagawani points out that though Tempels makes this strong claim, there is no local word from which the concept of force has been translated (*ibid*). But the Acholi word for being is *bedo*, and the word for becoming or force is *doko* (Lajul 2014a: 141). For Kaphagawani, the concept of force is similar to *sunsum* and *okán* in the Akan and Yoruba languages, respectively (2004: 335). Tempels attempted to make a distinction between the concepts “a human being” and a “human person”, yet this distinction is immaterial. Chichewa term for person is *munthu*, and “*munthu* denotes as much a “human being” as it does a “person.” (Kaphagawani 2004: 336).

The second thesis Kaphagawani presents is the communalism thesis, which he believes originated from Tempels and was expounded by Mbiti. According to this thesis in Tempels work, a person is defined and individuated communally. A man is in causal dependence and ontological subordination to the forces which are his father and mother. Older forces dominate the younger forces. The society makes, creates or produces the individual (*ibid*: 337).

While the communalism thesis is highly esteemed in Africa, it would be wrong to reduce individuality to the communal. This understanding comes from misinterpreting the Mbitian phrase, which reads as quoted earlier; *I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am.* (1969: 106). It is interpreted from a Chewa proverb which says, *Kalikokhanikanyama; tulituwilinituwanthu*. According to the proverb, “what is alone is a brute animal; whatever or whoever has a partner/ neighbour is a human being” (*ibid*). This is similar to the Aristotelian saying that “anyone who cannot live in society is a god or an animal” (Miller 1997: 87). Communalism does not deny individualism (*ibid*: 338).

Most importantly, according to African communalism: “Without the community this individual could not survive and without the individuals the community did not exist and persist” (Lajul 2014a: 104). So, both the community and individuals are equally important.

Alexis Kagame, on the other hand, presents the shadow thesis, which centrally states that a human being is both a *complete* animal and an *intelligent* being (Kaphagawani 2004: 339). The vital principle of animality is what Kagame calls a shadow (perishable), while the intellective principle is immortal. A person possesses not only intelligence but also the heart. Intelligence makes man a reflective and meditative animal; this leads to inventions. The heart integrates all the interior man and harmonizes the operations of intelligence by adding the will. Heart, for Kagame, is the personality of man; it makes man himself and not another. Expressions like “sweet heart” refer to a good person, a kind person. Personality and behaviour distinguish one individual from another.

On this topic, I would like to observe that the African concept of the person is thus based on three central theses: the constitutive elements of a person, the dynamic element of a person and the normative concept of a person. What Kaphagawani calls the West African (constitutive) and the East and Southern African (dynamic) elements of a person do supplement each other. Since no serious comparative studies have been done of the two regions of Africa, one may find that these two dimensions or ways of looking at a human person are more widespread. Kaphagawani himself notes that the force thesis is what would in West Africa be similar to the concept of *sunsum* or *okán* in Akan and Yoruba, respectively.

The normative thesis states that the community plays a vital role both as a catalyst and prescriber of norms in transforming an individual from a biological project into a full person. Menkiti writes that in the journey of the individual towards personhood, the community's role is to guide the transformation of what was initially biologically given into full personhood, since the individual himself or herself cannot carry through the transformation unassisted (2004a: 325).

I would add that the Mbitian and Tempelsian contributions on the concept of the human person may only be eye openers rather than conclusive studies. For instance, the constitutive analysis of the human person is similar not only in many West African societies, but in many societies throughout the continent. I can observe that the Acholi of northern Uganda differentiate the human person into three: *kom* (body), *tipu* (soul) and *cwiny* (the central part of a person from which character [*kit*] springs). The Langi of northern Uganda have exactly the same distinctions. The Baganda of central Uganda think of the human person as having *omubiri* (body), *omwoyo* (soul) and *omutima* (heart, which does not refer to the physical heart but to the metaphysical element that harbours emotions, attitudes and character). Among the Bafumbira of southwestern Uganda, the person is thought to consist of *umubiri* (body), *roho* (soul, the life-giving entity) and *ingeso* (heart, or that which is responsible for a person's personality).

Though differences exist, there seems to be overwhelming agreement in the concept of a person in African metaphysics. Basically, most Africans seem to agree that the human person has three interrelated elements: the body, the soul and the heart.

So, what Kaphagawani thinks might be a West African concept is not really unique to West Africa. And what he thinks might be unique to East and Southern Africa might [as] well not be really unique to East or Southern Africa. The terms used might be different, but the ideas are basically the same.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter described the ongoing discussions on African metaphysics and the lack of conclusive answers as to what it contains. However, it is also very clear that African metaphysics is slowly taking shape. To identify this shape has been a deliberate effort of this chapter. Amidst variations of opinion, a number of African authors now agree that African metaphysics is more than just a dry, intellectual, rational activity detached from the lived situations of Africans. It is gradually coming to be understood that African metaphysics is a result of engagement with reality rather than a study of reality. In the process of engaging with reality, Africans, through all their faculties, come to a deeper understanding and perception of the reality with which they are fully involved.

In this way, African metaphysics goes beyond the boundaries of rational engagement, which is why many African philosophers consider it mythological—not in the sense of fables that are deceptive, but in the sense of mysteries humans cannot fully explain. These mysteries which cannot be fully explained by human reason influence African worldviews and inform their practices. It is also generally accepted that African metaphysics is teleological; that is, it is informed by aims and ends other than blind occurrences. Africans believe all that happens around them and in the world has aims and is purposeful. Humans should adjust their value systems and ways of life in accordance with these aims. This metaphysics is also holistic in the sense that it takes into account reality in its totality.

Lastly, it is important to point out that modern discussions on the different aspects of African metaphysics are slowly beginning to show how the various aspects are related. What have been taken by a number of African thinkers to be distinct West African and East and South African concepts of the person are now seen as very much interrelated. Basically, most Africans seem to agree that the human person has three interrelated dimensions: the body, the soul and the heart. In addition, these different aspects are dynamically related to each other. For an African, being is dynamic and becoming is a process that goes on throughout one's life. Different views abound, however, on how long this process goes on. For some it is a cyclical process that continues in reincarnation, while for others it is a movement from an "it" to an "I", from the time one begins as a little baby (an "it"), or even before birth, to the time when one disappears from the memories of the living and once more becomes an "I".

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