

## A REVIEW OF PANTALEON IREOGBU'S "METAPHYSICS: THE KPIM OF PHILOSOPHY"

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In his work *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, Pantaleon dedicated the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter to the development of his *uwa ontology*, which is a synthesis of his perception of reality. For him, "Uwa defines being. It summarizes being and beings for me- it englobes all beings in the bossom of Uwa- being-... Whatever is, in so far as it is, is Uwa. Uwa is reality and reality is Uwa" (p. 338). To deepen his search, he studied the meaning of Uwa. Translated from the Igbo to the English, it simply means world, however, Pantaleon took advantage of the richness of the Igbo meaning and defined it thus,

The entirety of existence, from God the highest being to inanimate beings of our cosmos, can be summarized in the englobing concept of the Igbo term *Uwa*. *Uwa* is all inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity, all reality. It englobes all that is animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal and global. It is transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and prospective elasticity (p. 339).

### **The connotations of the Uwa**

He further developed the connotations of *Uwa*: first as life, as in when the Igbo says *Uwa m* (my world) or *Uwa m aburo uwa gi* (my world is not your world) in all these, it means my life. Secondly as Cosmos, as when the Igbo says *Elu uwa* (surface of the earth). Thirdly, field of action, as in when the Igbo says *Uwa ndi nta* (the world of hunters). Fourthly, space and time, as in *Uwa mbu ka mma* (the old and ancient world is better than ours). Fifth, destiny, as in *uwa oma* (good destiny). Sixth, Condition as in *Uwa afufu* (world of difficulties). Seventh, tragedy, as in *uwa ike* (tragic life). Eighth, fate, as in *uwa ojo* (bad world). Ninth, age limit, as in *Uwa umuaka* (children's world). Tenth, nature, as in *uwa uwa osisi or mmiri* (the world of trees or rivers). Eleventh, nation, as in *uwa anyi na ha mekoro ihe* (the world {people} we had dealings with). Twelfth, person, as in *ndi uwa* (people of the world). Thirteenth, land, as in *uwa Igbo* (Igbo land). Fourteenth, earth, the globe, as in *uwa nile* (the whole earth). Fifteenth, totality, *uwa*, in this case whatever is, in so far as it exists, is *uwa*.

### **The Zones of the Uwa**

Pantaleon further divides the world into six zones: the cosmos, where “we human beings live and die” (p. 341). The divine world, the world of Chukwu, the Supreme Being. Godian-world, the world of powerful spirits, like Ala, Amadioha etc. the good-spirit world, the world of “ancestors who have graduated into spirits because of the loss of living memories and concrete kith and kin relationships with their families” (p. 341). Bad-spirit world, where people who were evil in the world live, who cannot reincarnate. Ancestral world, where the ancestors live. These six zones of the world are highly inter-related, with the cosmos, the world of human beings as the centre. Pantaleon writes, “The central locus of all the operations of the worlds is the cosmos, the *uwa anyi* in which we live. This is understandable because it is man who posits the question of the worlds, who reflects on the existence, and who is the subject object of their operations. Even the most sublime, the *uwa chineke*.... is still related: creatively and providentially to the cosmos” (p. 342). The gods relate with the world, maintaining order and continuity; the good and bad spirits relate with the world according to their natures, the ancestors assist human beings. Human beings on their part relate to these other worlds through prayers, libations and sacrifices. In this relationship Pantaleon avers that “The meta-empirical geography of the zonal existence of the worlds has no fixed boundaries. They co-penetrate each other’s world-zones... This affirms our argument that, in fact, there are not ontologically a multitude of worlds but one world, *Uwa*” (p. 342). These worlds, which are broadly dual, spiritual and physical, are not six worlds as such, but six different nuances or connotations of the world. It speaks more of the inhabitants of the world, which makes the *uwa* a universalizing concept.

### **The Community and Individual in Uwa**

Once a child is born, it is confronted by the *uwa*, moving from the security of the mother’s womb into a crude world, it begins to cry. The cry is a reaction to the new reality of the *uwa*. As the child is born he or she is welcomed by the mini-community that represents the larger community where the child will live for the rest of its life. The Igbo world into which the child is born is made up of common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, race, colour, habit, common historical experience and common destiny. It is to this world that the child’s being, performance and destiny is enshrined and construed, even without his consent. The community is the centre of existence. According to Pantaleon, “Without the community there is no remaining in existence” (p. 345). This is not to say that individuality is lost because one still realizes himself as “someone, distinct, individual or simply part of, a function of the group” (p. 347). The community and the individual are not two poles contrasting each other, it is

rather a relationship of mutual and functional co-existence, in which the community provides the foundation for the autonomy of the individual. A beautiful interaction between the individual and community helps the individual to belong, and in belonging he earns integrity.

### **The Human Person**

Iroegbu (1994) began his analysis of the human person from analysing the Igbo concept for person, *mmadu*. The human person is not a pure spirit but a corporeal being. According to Iroegbu, a human person is “thus body: limited, fragile, contingent and human, merely human. The conclusion from this is that, part of the essence of *mmadu-ness* is body, *ahu*” (p. 352). The corporeal dimension of the human person is very significant to the understanding of person that often *ahu* (body) is as thought it were the person. For instance, the Igbo would say, *Ahu adighi m* (my body, meaning I, am not well). It is not enough to have a body to become a human person, for animals do have a body. The Igbo also speak of *Uche*- reason, mind, intellect. Thus Iroegbu avers that to be truly human, “It is important that one is able to reason, to dialogue reasonably, to do things in a way different from other beings with bodies, i.e., brutes... One is more excellent human person who can reason more excellently” (p. 352). A third constituent of the human person is the spirit *mmuo*, which determines a lot about the personality of any given person. It is that which persists in existence even when the body disintegrates. It is the indestructible immortal element of a person. After death it sojourns to the world of the ancestors and through re-incarnation returns to the family. Another essential component of the human person, according to Iroegbu is the communal, he is a being-with.

### **God, Gods and Spirits**

When a human person is born into his community, he shares in the religious worldview of the community, where life is religion and religion is life. The knowledge of God is not taught to him, it is obvious and innate. Pantaleon wrote, “God is ubiquitously involved in the life and practices of people. He forms the ontological foundation and explanatory ground of what they are, what they do and what they have. He determines the way they relate to one another, to nature, and to their cultural data (givens)” (p. 359). He is called variously by the Igbo, as *Obasi di n’elu*, which means God on high, speaking of his nature as transcendent, and thus not being of the same composition with other realities; he is also called *Chukwu*, the Supreme God. The idea of *Chukwu* suggests that there are other minor gods. They are his deans, servants, as such function at the instruction of *Chukwu*.

## **Causality and Essence**

Pantaleon defines causality “as the act of bringing into reality what was not in reality” (p. 364). It asks the dual question of for what? (maka gini?) and why? (gini kpatara?) He said that “The two questions are actually one question, but posed from two different ends: the end point (for what?) and the starting point (why?)” He contrasts the ‘why’ question with the ‘how’. While the how requires a description of the process, event or reality the way it has come to be, which is empirical question, the how goes deeper to the ontological level, far beyond the empirical, it explores the reason, explanation and justification for. In the entire process of cause, God is the cause who remains uncaused, while every other reality outside of God are the effects of God’s power. However, even as effects, they could also cause other realities. Thus effects could both be effects and causes. Pantaleon distinguishes between ontological cause and functional cause. The ontological cause explains the being or coming into existence of the effect, and without it, the effect wouldn’t be in existence. There is also the functional cause which explains the reason for the operations of a being. As a dualist, Pantaleon avers that there are two mighty forces: good and evil, while good things come from the force of good, evil things come from the force of evil. The human person possesses these forces within himself. The question that arises then is the source of evil. Pantaleon argues that if God is the source of good, bad spirits are the source of evil. However, above is God who has the power to put evil in check if human beings cooperate and carry out their legal, natural and customary responsibilities. Man, however, has the ability to manipulate the forces of good against evil, and also evil against good. Pantaleon wrote that, “The result of his being, his life, his community is the fruit of his work in manipulation. In his contribution is his responsibility. In his responsibility is his freedom. Freedom is participation in good. His reward is thanks to his responsibility” (p. 370). He defines responsible freedom as “... an active involvement in, and a successful contribution towards the increase of the good, and the decrease of the evil in man and his world” (p. 370).

## **Being as Belongingness**

In response to the questions, ‘what makes being, being?’, ‘what does it mean to be in the Uwa?’ Pantaleon argues that it is belongingness, thus *Being* is *Belongingness*. What then is belongingness? He defines belongingness as ‘the synthesis of the reality and experience of belongingness’ (p. 374). In this case, the recipient-subject of belonging is involved: something belongs and it belongs to something. Belongingness is a special noun from the verb ‘to belong’. It means to be part of, Daisein-with or to be a member of a group. This act of belongingness

gives me rights and privileges that others who do not belong do not have. There is also a possessive nuance of the verb 'to belong'. I can say that the soap belongs to me. In the first nuance, to belong creates a situation of participation and in the second, it creates a situation of possession. There is an ontological nuance of belongingness, which specifies that a thing is because it belongs. *To be is to belong and to belong is to be.*

Pantaleon argues that the Igbo principle of *Egbe bere Ugo bere* (let the kite perch, let the eagle perch) re-enacts the contents and significance of belongingness as the essence of reality. He believes that what a being is, is its activity of perching (belonging). To perch is to be. To be is to perch. To be is to belong and to belong is to be. Pantaleon expressed this in a diagram showing the relationship between perching, belonging and being. And this diagram reveals that when one perches, one belongs and when one belongs one becomes.

When *Egbe* perches and *Ugo* perches, they come face to face with each other. They are with each other. They are present to each other. They relate to each other deeply and directly as well as have relationships with other inhabitants of *Uwa* (world). To relate is to share something: to give and take. They have common projects, needs and desires. Together they struggle to overcome their difficulties and share their joy.

Obviously, the idea of 'To be is to belong and to belong is to be' may sound tautological, but it is the definitional circle involved in any description of being as being. This circle will however be clarified as the four Pantaleonine analytic connotations of belongingness is explored.

### ***Be-(I)-on (Be on)***

In this case, 'to belong' involves 'being on' in the *Uwa* (*Uwa* is the world in English, but in Igbo it takes up a meaningful depth. It is the entirety of existence, from God the highest being to inanimate beings of our cosmos) from which all concrete realities derive their being. To be on in this sense is to escape the contrary of being off. For either one is on or he is off. To be off is to cease to exist and to be on is to be.

### ***Be- (I)-on-going***

Having been given existence in the *Uwa*, this aspect of belongingness speaks of the being now going on in its *Uwa* and *Uwaness* (Pantaleon, 1995). In this case, Pantaleon suggests that *Uwa* is the underlying principle in Igbo Metaphysics. This particularly speaks of the process of being, for to remain in being is to proceed in being and not out of being. In this process of being, he makes a

difficult synthesis of change and permanence. As the being goes on in being, it maintains its identity even though something in it changes. In ancient philosophy, change and permanence was a bone of contention between Heraclitus and Parmenides, but in Igbo Metaphysics it is no problem at all. For *uwa naeme ntughari* (the world changes), even though, in the midst of the change *Uwa bu otu* (the world does not change).

### ***Be-long***

To be-long means to abide, to stay or live long. In this case, it means that belongingness lives long. As such, the subject of *Uwa* lives long. This brings in the issue of space and time, for belongingness is expressed in space and time. Be-long extends into eternity in Igbo ontology; it goes beyond the present dimension of the *Uwa* to the *Uwa* of the ancestors, such that to be and not to be-long is not to be at all. While *on-going* belongingness may be open-ended, *being-long* belongingness stretches into everlastingness. As such, in Pantaleon, one becomes through being-on so as to be-going, in other to be-long.

### ***Be-longing***

This speaks of being and longing to be. It stresses the longing for life and being. It is founded on the awareness that nothing is higher a value than life. Expressions in Igbo bring this home: *nduka* (life is greater); *Ndubuisi* (life is the principal thing). To long for life is to want to be, not in the abstract *Uwa* but in the concreteness of what *Uwa* offers.

For Pantaleon, the essence of being or existence is belongingness. That is what we are and that it what we are made for. He wrote that "When all is said and done, what matters is belongingness. Do you belong here and after?... That we belong to being and being belongs to us" (p. 382).

### **Evaluation**

Asouzu (2007) sees the work of Iroegbu as one of the very few that have gone beyond describing worldviews of their people and presenting them as scientific ontology, at least since the time of Tempels and Kagame. Distinguishing him from Edeh (1985), Asouzu avers that while Edeh tried to explain what all the Igbo people believe, regarding their worldview, Iroegbu who is equally an Igbo undertook a personal critical enquiry to explain his *Uwa* and its content. And since philosophy is an enterprise that requires a thinker taking clearly identifiable positions, in the contention of Asouzu, Iroegbu's approach and effort is praise worthy.

The idea of belongingness in Iroegbu metaphysics can be criticised variously. First of all, the idea of being as belongingness speaks of the characteristic of being and not of being itself. Being pre-exists belongingness, for a being would have to be before it can belong. Belongingness is a modality of being and not being itself. Furthermore, the idea of being as belongingness in Iroegbu is central to human beings, and even when he tried to apply it to other created things, he did that in relation to human beings. This constricts the power and capacity of being, as its capacity to encompass all that exists is limited. Pantaleon's opinion that existence is not only meaningful, but also possible only in a community raises questions about the extent of the power of the community over the individual. Pantaleon presents it as though it is the community that gives being to the individual. Contrary to his opinion, it is more reasonable to argue that the community cannot give a being its existence, but can only give meaning to existence. Iroegbu gives to the community powers it has no audacity to exercise. His equation of individual being with the community being raises difficulty as regards differentiating the individual from the whole. This is a problem of identity, with the potentiality of causing traffic in the order of being.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the philosophy of belongingness is one that touches virtually on every aspect of the human life, be it political, economic, social, ethics, etc, and demands an inextricable reciprocity with the act of acting, relating and communing. It is also one that identifies with the categories of the African people. As an idea, it is substantive, egalitarian, communalistic, transcendental and yet concrete. At a time when globalization with its weapon of individuality, among others, is eating deep into Africa and her values, the philosophy of belongingness is in tandem with the call for an African cultural renaissance. Above all, the philosophy of belongingness answers the fundamental question of the reason for existence, not just abstractly but concretely: the reason to be is belongingness.

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