A Comparative Study of the Western Conception of Being and the Igbo- African Conception of Being.

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Abstract

This work is a comparative study of Aristotle and Pantaleon Iroegbu's concept of being. Aristotle's concept of being is used to represent the western concept of being while Pantaleon Iroegbu's *Belongingness* which is an Igbo concept of being. These philosophers belong to different socio-cultural backgrounds which has influenced their point of view on being. They agreed on some points and differed on others. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of being. Being is therefore an elemental aspect of metaphysics. The problem of being transverses through the different periods of western philosophy from the Pre-Socratic period to the Contemporary period. The early Western philosophers who ignited the flames of rational inquiry were metaphysicians though they did not use the word "Metaphysics". Just like their western counterparts, Africans reflect on themselves and the world around them, with the bid to finding solutions to questions that crop up in their mind. African metaphysics is the branch of African philosophy that studies the African man's reflections on reality. The historical and analytical method is hereby employed.

Keywords: Philosophy, Metaphysics, African Metaphysics and African Ontology

Introduction

This work attempts to make a comparative study of being in Aristotle and Pantaleon Iroegbu's *Belongingness* as being. It intends to state the similarities and differences in their approaches of being. Metaphysics is one of the core branches of philosophy and it examines reality and everything in existence. Ontology is the branch of Philosophy that is concerned with being. The problem of being is at the core of metaphysics. This problem

transverses through all the periods of philosophy from the ancient to the contemporary period. The early philosophers of Western philosophy like Thales, Anaximander, Anaximander saw being as the object – universe. They were cosmologists sometimes referred to as " natural philosophers" and each attempted to give rational explanations of the universe. Though they did not use the word " Metaphysics" in their pursuit to understand discover the world. Steenberghen (1949: 52) puts it thus, the first thinkers in Greece, the so called Physiologists, did not concern themselves with knowledge as such, nor with the knowing subject. Their attention was directed rather to the object, that is to nature whose secret they tried to discover. Aristotle, a Socratic philosopher was among the philosophers who put forth the idea of being in his " Metaphysics". The term "Metaphysics" was first used by Andronicles of Rhodes in the 70th B.C. He was Aristotle's editor who titled Aristotle's work – Metaphysics because the work was on physics (Nature). Aristotle called it, "First Philosophy" and it dealt with being *qua* being.

The African philosophers also contributed to the study of being as they developed their own philosophy of being in relation to their cultural background. *P*antaleon Iroegbu, a Nigerian Igbo philosopher, contributed to the growth of African metaphysics with his *METAPHYSICS: The Kpim of Philosophy.* This has also expanded the concept of African Philosophy. According to Iroegbu (1995 :15), " Metaphysics is an investigation into the inner side of existence. It unravels the most fundamental contents of being and beings. It radically probes existences in so far as these are knowable." African metaphysics is a branch African Philosophy that studies African notion of reality and existence.

This work centres on a comparative analysis of two philosophers' notion of Being. One from the western philosophical background –Aristotle and the other from an African background – Pantaleon Iroegbu. In order to approach this subject matter, we have divided this work into five sections. Section one is a brief history of Being. Section two is Aristotle's nature of reality. The Section three will address Aristotle's concept of Being . Section four is Pantaleon Iroegbu's *uwa* ontology and Section five shall be a comparative analysis of Being.

Conceptual clarifications

To give appropriate focus to this work, it is necessary to clarify the following key concepts of Philosophy, Metaphysics, African Metaphysics and Being.

Philosophy

The term "Philosophy" originates from two Greek words, *Philien or Philos* (to love) and *Sophia* (wisdom). This is translated to be "the love of wisdom". Philosophy is a parental

and academic discipline which is concerned with proffering solutions to human and societal problems. It is an activity that seeks to understand truths about people and the world around them. This discipline is divided into five branches namely: Metaphysics, Ethics, Epistemology, Aesthetics and Logic . Alongside the branches of philosophy are other subdivisions. These subdivisions are based on different subjects of their inquiry. According to Velasquez (1997:2),

> The word philosophy comes from the Greek words philien, meaning to love, and Sophia, meaning wisdom. Philosophy is the love of wisdom. It is the pursuit of wisdom about what it means to be a human being, what the fundamental nature of God and reality is, what the source and limits of our knowledge are and what is good and right in our lives and in our society.

Metaphysics

Metaphysics is one of the five branches of philosophy. Metaphysics is the study of *reality* (i.e. Being) in its most primary and general character, in contradistinction with its outward and particular form. (Ogbinaka, 2013: 56). Etymologically, it is derived from two Greek words *meta* meaning (after) and physika which means physics or nature and put together forms *Meta ta physika* meaning "after the things of nature". The word 'metaphysics' was originated by Andronicus of Rhodes who classified Aristotle's untitled works as *ta meta ta physika physika biblia* which means "the books that come after the [books on] physics" under the title *Metaphysics.* This was after the death of Aristotle. Aristotle called his work 'First Philosophy', 'Theology 'or sometimes 'Wisdom'. Onyeocha (2009:153) asserts that " Metaphysics is the science of being, its attributes, its principles and its categories. It is, in other words, that part of philosophy that is concerned with the basic issues of reality, existence, personhood, and freedom verses determinism." Ogbinaka (2013: 58) states that Metaphysics is divided into four branches namely: Cosmology, Cosmogony, Ontology and Natural Theology. Cosmology is the study of the origin of and development of the universe or of a particular system in the universe, such as the solar system. Cosmogony is the study of the origin of the Universe. Unah (2016: iv) says, "Ontology is the branch of Philosophy that studies the nature of Being. It is the analysis of the structure of the world of man in all its complexities, in all its contradictoriness, in all its porousness and precariousness." Unah (2016 :1)Ontology means the study of being precisely as being. It means the study of pure being. Natural Theology which is sometimes called Theodicy is the study of God's existence Metaphysics is therefore the study of everything in existence, the world and beyond. Omoregbe (2007 : 146) defines metaphysics as "The science of being as being, that is, the discipline which studies being precisely in its aspect as being. Or again, it is the discipline which studies the essence of being."

African Metaphysics

African metaphysics is a branch of African philosophy that studies the African distinctive notion of reality and existence. The African like his western counterpart is interested in the world around him and ponders about what accounts for reality. African metaphysics refers to the study of (the) African man's thinking about what constitutes reality. Uduigwomen (2002:153) defined "African metaphysics as the summation or totality of solutions found to the problem of reality and the answers which he gives to the questions". African metaphysics is therefore the African man's reflection on reality.

Being

The problem of Being is foremost question of metaphysics that has transverses different periods in philosophy to our present time. This problem of being was first proposed by Parmenides of Elea, a presocratic philosopher who attempted to explain the nature of reality. For Parmenides, whatever is, is being. Being must be one, eternal, one and unchanging. Unah (2016 :7) states that "The word " Being" is much the same as the word "Reality"' in traditional metaphysics. So, for Parmenides the terms "Being", "Reality" and "the One" refer to the same thing." Being is therefore whatsoever that is in existence.

Section one : A brief history of Being

In the Ancient period, Parmenides of Elea was first to originate the concept of Being, where for him whatever is, is being. His philosophy is seen in his poem, entitled " On Nature" which had two parts namely "Way of Truth" and "Way of Opinion". The way of truth has to do with the way of reason while the way of Opinion is the way of senses. He held that through reason we get to the truth, whereas the senses can only give us opinion and cannot lead us to the truth. (Omoregbe,2007 : 78) . In other words, whatever that is in existence is being. "Being" is the material of which the whole universe is made; it is spatially extended, and therefore there is no such thing as empty space" (Donnell, 1995:10). He further states that being is one, eternal and unchanging which means that anything that is changing is not being. Heraclitus of Ephesus on his part stated that everything is in a constant state of flux. Change was constant to him. Plato followed the same line of thought as Parmenides. He holds that being is eternal and unchanging. The only difference in thoughts is that for Parmenides, being is one but for Plato, being is multiple. In his theory of Forms, Forms are the beings and they are eternal, unchanging and real. The highest form is the which is the source of being of all the other beings is the Form of Good. Aristotle whose work was called after Metaphysics, identifies being with God and sees Metaphysics as "Being qua Being" or "Being as Being". According to Aristotle, Metaphysics is theology and Being qua Being is God. God which is Being is the foundation and source of all things.

In the middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas towed the same line as Aristotle in seeing Being as God. For Aquinas, God is Being par excellence while creatures are beings in analogical sense only. This means that strictly speaking only God is Being. It is only in an analogical sense that we apply the word "being" to creature (Omoregbe, 2004 :2). Dun Scotus states that whatever exists is being and disagrees with Aquinas' doctrine of analogy of being . He holds that finite beings are beings just as we say that God is a being. Another Medieval philosopher, William of Ockham agrees with Duns Scotus that if being is defined as "that which is" then being is a univocal concept.

The Modern and Contemporary periods, the problem of being did not take center stage as the philosophers were more interested with the problem of substance. The problem resurfaced with Hegel who contrasted being with non-being as thesis and antithesis. For Hegel, being is the thesis while the non-being is antithesis. The dialectical encounter between thesis and antithesis is a synthesis which is a process of becoming. The concept of being for Martin Heidegger is different from that of Aristotle and Aquinas. He does not see being as a particular being but that it is the source from which all beings derive their existence. Above are some conceptions of being through the different periods in western philosophy. Being still remains that which is.

Section two: Aristotle's nature of reality

Aristotle's perceptive of what reality shows that substances are in the physical world exists though sustained by the Unmoved Mover which he refers to as God. To him, everything is made of matter and changing is as a result of the substance reaching potentiality on its way to what it actually intends to be (actuality). Aristotle in his explanation of the nature of reality states that there four causes namely: a)Material cause b)Formal cause c) Efficient cause d) Final cause. He uses these four causes to explain the nature, meaning and purpose of an object.

Matter : The material cause is that which a thing is made of. For example a wooden table is made from wood.

Form: The formal cause is the shape or form of that thing which is the essence ,In case of the table, it is the unique feature that makes a table, a table- the flat surface for placing items and the legs for support.

Agency or Efficiency : The efficient cause of a thing is the source or the agent responsible for making that thing which in the case of the table is a carpenter.

Purpose or End : The final cause is the purpose for which the thing was made. In the case of a table, it was designed for placing items like lamps and also for writing.

Section three: Aristotle's concept of Being

Aristotle's concept of Being is found in his book "Metaphysics" and He did not give this title to his work, it was given by Andronicus of Rhodes, Aristotle's editor after the death of Aristotle. Aristotle described his work as "first philosophy", "the study of being qua being". Aristotle was a student of Plato and the Academy but did not agree with Plato on innate ideas and the theory of Forms. According to Plato, the fundamental real things are "forms" which are eternal and unchanging types of things that exist outside the world of experience. For Aristotle, the substance of a particular thing cannot be separated from the thing itself. He saw Plato's theory of forms as emphasizing the existence of the immaterial world and holds that properties such as beauty are abstract universal entities that exist independent of the object .

Aristotle's (2001: 1028b4) theory of being states that a substance is the foundation of anything in the world and everything depends on it. According to Aristotle, "What is being? is just the question, what is substance? The philosophical term "substance" or "being" in Greek language is *ousia* which means something 'that stands under things'. Aristotle was the first to use the term "*ousia*" which means "Substance". He states that, Indeed what was sought of old and is sought at present and always, and what is always a matter of difficulty, namely what is being? (*ti to on)* is this : What is substance? (*tis he ousia)* (Aristotle, 2001 : 2-4). Aristotle (2001: 1042a) was of the opinion that the objects in this world are all there is and therefore reality. For him, all things which exist in this world are substances. He states thus, these are the sensible substances; and sensible substances all have matter.

Substance as the Basic Component of the World

According to Aristotle (1991:4) a substance is the basic element of the world and can be classified into primary and secondary substance. The primary substance is an individual entity while the secondary substance is dependent on the primary substance. For example a man is an entity (substance) and any other definition about that man is secondary like his height, weight etc. Aristotle explains what he means by primary and secondary substance. He says, A *substance* – that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all- is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g. the individual man or the individual horse. The species in which the things primarily called substances are, called *secondary substances,* as also are the genera of these species. In other words, the primary substance is an individual thing while the primary substances are predicated to

the individual substance and are as follows: quantity, quality, relation, place (location), time, situation, condition, action and passion. Aristotle is of the view that there are ten categories in which a thing can be a substance

Substance as Matter and Form

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* has the substance as the theme and as stated earlier, the substance is from a Greek word '*ousia'* meaning that which 'stands under things'. He pinpoints two elements that make up a substance namely, matter and form. Matter is the material of which something is made while the form is the essence of a thing, that which means a thing, a thing- its unique feature. Omoregbe (2007 :108)states that " Matter itself is indeterminate but is determined by form. When matter receives any form, it becomes that thing the form of which it has received." For better understanding, Omoregbe(2007:108) goes on to make an illustration to show the difference between matter and form. He says, for example, if wood receives the form of a table, it becomes a table; if it receives the form of a bed, it becomes a bed; if it receives the form of a statue, it becomes a statue etc. It is therefore the form which makes a thing this or that particular kind of thing. Matter is anything that has weight and occupies space while the form of a thing defines that thing. Matter is determined by the form. In Aristotle's theory of matter and form, each of these components need each other to exist.

Potentiality and Actuality

With reference to Being, Aristotle made a distinction between potentiality and actuality. These elements are deep- rooted in all things and a process of development moves a thing from potency to actuality. According to Omoregbe (2007:109) Potency is the natural capacity or power to become something else, the potentiality or possibility to grow, to develop or to change into something else. For example, an egg has the potency to become a hen or cock; an embryo has the potency to become a man . On the other hand, Actuality is the aim of potency. It is that which potency is directed. It is that which potency is the natural capacity to become: it is the goal of potency. (Omoregbe, 2007: 109) The transition from potency to actuality is possible with the aid of another being as a being cannot move itself.

Concept of the Unmoved Mover

Aristotle states that a being is aided to move from the state of potency to actuality. It cannot do it by itself. This change from potency to actuality is his argument for the existence of God. Nothing moves without being moved. Omoregbe (2007:111) says : It is obvious that Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is God. God is the Prime Mover, the Unmoved Mover and the source of the motion of the universe. This is Aristotle's theory of Change

or motion holds that God is the Unmoved Mover as He moves things and is Himself not moved. Aristotle defined Metaphysics as the study of 'being qua being' and identifies being with God. Grayling(2020:88) elaborately asserts:

> Aristotle's account of change turns on the idea of potentiality (in Greek *dunamis,* from which we get the word "dynamic"). Substances have a potentiality either to be changed by something acting on them, which is 'passive potential', or to cause change in other substances, which is what animate things can do because they possess 'active potential'. Change requires the realization of potentiality- the making of the potential actual – which he calls *energeia.*

Section four : Pantaleon Iroegbu's Being

BEING AS *BELONGINGNESS*

Pantaleon Iroegbu's contribution to Igbo metaphysics seeks to give his notion of being. It shows how the Igbo mind reflects on the world – his world. *Uwa* is an Igbo word for world and it is synonymous with reality. According to Iroegbu (1995:339) the word *Uwa* however has a much deeper meaning, scope, connotation and global elasticity than the English term, *world* . He defined the Igbo term *Uwa* :

> 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.

According to Iroegbu (1995:338) this is the world, an Igbo child is born into and the Igbo human condition is characterized by communalism and togetherness which gives the child a sense of belonging. Iroegbu makes reference to Being as reality when he says, This question with sub- questions summarizes the totality of any question I can rationally and existentially pose as a reflecting African human being. My perception of reality in its different aspects is synthesized in my perception of *Uwa* . *Uwa* defines being. It summarizes being and beings for me.This is the Igbo Worldview as presented by Iroegbu. Igbo tribe is one of the three major tribes in Nigeria. Other major tribes are the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. In this work, Pantaleon Iroegbu's concept of being will be used to represent the African concept of Being. The African is one with his world, he is his world and the world is him. Hence the question – *Uwa , gini Ka o bu ?* which means what is the world? This is the African (Igbo) reflecting on what the world is all about.

Iroegbu (1995:345) also points out seven characteristics of the Igbo world and they are namely: common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, Race, colour and habits, Common historical experience and Common destiny. The baby, still asleep in its cradle has its being, performance and destiny already enshrined and construed in the Igbo world…The baby wakes up and soon the Igbo world covers its being, its perception, its future, its global vision.

Being as "Belongingness"

Pantaleon(1995:374) defines belongingness as the synthesis of the reality and experience of belonging. To belong is to be part of a whole, in this case it is to be part of a community. The recipient is involved and belongs to a community. An individual that belongs to a community, has rights and privileges that others do not have. Pantaleon(1995:374) sees Belongingness as an abstract term, an ontological one that specifies that a thing is, because it belongs. In a general sense:

To be is to belong
To belong is to be

For him, to be is to belong and to belong is to be. He believes that what a being is, is its activity of perching(belonging) and he gives an illustration using the Igbo principle of *Egbe bere Ugo bere* which is translated to mean 'let the kite perch , let the eagle perch). To perch means to hold on to something and the act of perching is the process of acquiring being. To perch therefore is to become.

The Igbo principle of *Egbe bere Ugo bere* which means let the kite perch, let the Eagle perch depicts the content and relevance of belongingness as the essence and core of reality. Pantaleon t hat what a being is , is its activity of perching (belonging). Pantaleon(1995: 379) calls it the Tree of Life.

> The tree on which *Egbe* and *Ugo* are to perch , and on which they actually perch is *Uwa* (the world). *Uwa* is the natural habitat of human beings. It constitutes equally the root-source of their existence . Though created by God, *Uwa nwe mmadu* (the world owns the human being). To perch in *Uwa* means then to acquire an *Uwa-ness*, to possess one's own *Uwa* makes one be. *Uwa* is life. It is impliedly to have the ingredients that make life possible as flourishable within the circumstances of the people's total *Uwa.*

Pantaleon presents four connotations of belongingness as follows:

1. Be- (I)-on (Be on)

This first connotation 'to belong' involves 'being on' in *Uwa* (world). In Igbo language , *Uwa* is the totality of existence 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. (Pantaleon , 1995: 375)

2. Be- (I)-on-going

After receiving existence from *Uwa,* The second feature of Belongingness states that being now goes on in its *Uwa* and *Uwaness.* Pantaleon(1995 :375) holds that to remain in being and not out of being, is to proceed in being. He goes further to say that Being goes on, in going on it is itself and something else yet it maintains its identity. It is therefore not subject to change.

3. Be – long

According to Pantaleon (1995 :375) To be-long means to stay, abide or live long. It means that belongingness lives long which implies that the subject of *Uwa* lives on. The issue of time and space come to play here as belongingness is expressed in time and space. In Igbo Ontology, Be-long gets into eternity which means that it goes beyond the physical to the spiritual realm- *Uwa* of the ancestors.

4. Be-longing

This refers to being and the longing for life. Pantaleon (1995 :376) states that To belong is to be in the desire for life. It is the will to march along in life. It is founded on the awareness that nothing is higher a value than life. The longing for life can be seen in expressions like *Nduka* (life is greater), *Ndubuisi* (life is the principal). To long for life is to want to be, not in the abstract *Uwa* but in the concreteness of what *Uwa* offers. The above contents of Belongingness addresses the significance of being and its essence. One is therefore in tune with being and there is no going back from its beingness. Belongingness is at the core of being.

Section five : A Comparative analysis

In the metaphysics of both Aristotle and Pantaleon Iroegbu, one can readily observe some similarities and differences in their concepts of being as outlined below.

Similarities

1. **The concept of Being -** Aristotle and Pantaleon Iroegbu agree that there is a concept of being. While for Aristotle it is called substance, Iroegbu sees it as *Belongingness.*

2. Immortality of Being - Aristotle and Iroegbu believe in the immortal nature of Being. Being exists perpetually.

3. Categories of Being - They both believe that there are hierarchy in the categories of being and at the peak of the hierarchy is a Being called The Umoved Mover by Aristotle and *Chukwu* by Iroegbu.
4. Commonality – Aristotle's being applies to everything in existence while for Iroegbu, belongingness is what defines being.

Differences
1. The nature of Being – Aristotle holds that substance is divided into primary and secondary substance while for Iroegbu, being is a whole that encloses all things in existence.
2. The meaning of Being - Being for Aristotle is an object- visible object in the physical world while Iroegbu sees being as 'to be' an act of belonging to a community. Belonging to a community gives an individual a sense of identity.

Conclusion
The problem of being in metaphysics cuts across different periods in philosophy and philosophers , Western and African. The concept of being has remained abstract through these ages. This work is on the comparative study of being. The philosophers used for this analysis were Aristotle and Pantaleon Iroegbu. Aristotle representing the Western philosophers and Pantaleon represented African philosophers. Each philosopher deal with the concept of being from different perspectives and background. They both agreed that being existed. Aristotle states the four elements that aid the existence of being namely : matter , form, agent and the end. Pantaleon Iroegbu holds that the existence of being is tied to *Uwa* (world) from the day of birth and through to the day of death. The two philosophers believe and agree that " Being" is eternal.

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