

Innocent Asouzu on the Ambience of Complementary Reflection: An Analysis

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Abstract

Every philosophy has a foundation. There is no philosophical speculation that philosophizes in a vacuum. The philosophy of Innocent Asouzu on the Ambience of complementary reflection dwells on the possibility of a complementary philosophy using the African worldview. This twenty-three page work (p. 95 -118 of the 2004 edition) in *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy* captures a lot about the status of African philosophy; the foundation of African philosophy, the existence of contrary realities across cultures, philosophers of complementarity, the connection between the human mind and realities in complementarity, the relation between *Maat* and *Isfet*, the relationship between the *ego* and the world, connection between African Metaphysics and African Epistemology, Ibu Anyi Danda speculation and complementary Reflection of African Philosophy in history. The research aims at establishing the place of complementarity in African ideology. Provoked out of the quest to enthrone African Philosophy in world speculations, this research seeks to adopt both hermeneutical and critical method. Its challenge emanates from limited reflections on this theme of study from other scholars. However, Asouzu's discussion on the subject matter is quite elaborate that exhausting it within this limited provision is a problem in itself. However, the study seeks to utilize all possible measures, including the synthesis of some themes into new themes in order to justify its interest.

Keywords: *Ambience, Complementarity, Reflection, Philosophy.*

Introduction

Innocent Asouzu is renowned for his philosophy, "The Ambience of Complementary Reflection", popularly known as philosophy of complementarity. First published in 2004 in the book titled "The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy", this twenty-three-page work (Pp. 95 – 118), captures the core of the five hundred and thirty-three-page book published by Innocent Asouzu to mark the silver jubilee celebration of his sacerdotal ministry. This work brings a fresh dimension to the philosophic world designated as African philosophy. Conscious of this fact, the author opens the introductory pages of his work with these words:

One of the most important functions of philosophy is that it can help sharpen our perception of reality in a manner that is not only new but also, at times, different ... The ultimate aim of any authentic philosophizing subsists therefore in changing ideas such that through the possession of new or better ideas human beings can effect changes in the world through their actions. (Asouzu 2004, p.6).

The above quotation from Asouzu's introduction shows that the author consciously sets out to reflect on a new pattern of reasoning, targeted towards the sharpening of our perception and thus, strengthening our views and opinions of reality in a new manner. While some philosophers were still arguing if there can be anything authentically described as African philosophy, Asouzu has gone further than many by developing a pattern of reasoning in African Philosophy that has come to be identified with himself. He opines that human actions have interest guiding them and the interest of the philosopher is to change ideas by providing enduring insights into the nature of the interests guiding human actions. He notes that based on human ambivalence, we can err in our judgment, choices, and act wrongly. As such, there is a close connection between the existential ambivalence of the human situations and the speculative power of the person, since the human interests influence his ideas and his ideas influence his actions. From this angle, it is more comprehensible on how some persons deny the existence of the power of reason in some people and uphold it in others. The philosophy of complementarity helps human reasonings to compliment themselves, building from particular environmental situations. For Asouzu, "... philosophy is the act of critical self-awareness concerning the nature of reality in its most authentic and real constitution and in consideration of the ambivalent character of all human existential situations." (2004, p. 7). This is where philosophy being conceived as love of wisdom clearly manifests itself. Asouzu also states that no philosopher can devote himself to the noble philosophical task if he is so restrictive as to recoil to his private interests alone. Thus, a philosopher speculates both on his personal worldview, his society and the world at large. For Asouzu, "To put complementary reflection on a firm foundation entails exploring the ambience of its possibility." (2004, p. 95). Thus, this work first establishes the ambience of complementary reflection in African philosophy. It establishes that "... all forms of philosophizing are possible because of their ambience." (Asouzu 2004, p. 95). Ambience, therefore, becomes the frontier through which every philosophical research found its foundation. "This ambience stimulates and carries the systematic idea of a philosopher, even unintentionally." (Asouzu 2004, p. 95). It therefore becomes necessary to understand the structure of this research work even within the ambience of Asouzu's Complementarity. The work is divided into the following headings: abstract, introduction, a reconstruction of African Philosophy, the principle of "Ibu anyi danda" as key to understanding Complementarity theory, highpoints of Innocent Asouzu's theory of complementarity, placing the philosophy of complementarity in the context of African philosophy, critical evaluation, conclusion and references.

A Reconstruction of African Philosophy

The age-long debate if any philosophy could truly be termed African has been overtaken with the advent of Asouzu's philosophy of complementarity being situated within the ambience of African philosophy. Without prejudice to the existing history of African philosophy, this work could categorize African philosophy into three phases; the era of verbal philosophy in African philosophy, the phase establishing the existence of African philosophy, within which African philosophers sort to establish African Philosophy and the phase of intense speculations in African philosophy. To the first phase, Africans

conceive that the fables, proverbs, folklores and insight inherent in the African system suffices to establish the existences of philosophy in Africa. Asouzu compliments this while considering the idea of complementarity as a dominant paradigm of traditional African speculative and theoretical technical reason and said,

I call that intellectual ambience traditional African that gives us clues about African thinkers, whose ideas are undocumented formally in written texts, but whose thoughts we can reasonably reconstruct, by recourse to literary sources, a belonging to discernable philosophical trend as they are resistant to massive changes brought about by outside influences. (Asouzu 2004, p. 101).

Asouzu bears credence to the existence of philosophic thoughts that were not documented but can be reconstructed by putting them down. He also referenced "Kamalu (who) identifies what the ancient Egyptian call *Maat* as the opposite of *Isfet* (evil) and used it to evaluate the foundation of African thought. In one of the earliest writings in Africa, *Maat* considered as good is the opposite of *Isfet* which is considered as evil. *Maat* is considered as a principle of reciprocity in its signification of justice. While citing Kamalu, Asouzu says: "Thus, as good is the opposite of evil, *Maat* is the opposite of *Isfet* ... *Maat* was also a principle of reciprocity in its significance of justice." (2004, Pp.101–102). As such, African philosophy had speculated on the principle of good and evil, even before it was introduced in Western philosophy. In recent time, there are trending African philosophers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah who authored *Cosmopolitan Ethics in a World of Strangers*, the *Lies that Bind*, the *Ethics of Identity* and so on. We know V.Y. Mudimbe of Congo who edited the *Surreptitious Speech* and more, Chinua Achebe who exposed the collapse of traditional ethics in his *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 2008, pp. 3–165). Thus, Asouzu was right to describe his philosophical speculations as a reconstruction, which shows that there was already a foundation on which they can continue to speculate. He identified the existence of contraries such as day and night, appearance and reality, substance and accidents, being and non-being, etc as relating with the human mind not only in traditional African society but in the whole world through forms of relations such as identity, differentiation, abstraction, associations, and concatenation of ideas in its attempts to come to terms with reality as a whole. He also noted some philosophers whose speculations agree with his philosophy of complementarity such as Aristotle (in his idea of four causes), Spinoza (in his theory of coherence), Hegel (in his dialectic of concepts: thesis, antithesis and synthesis), Tillich (in his method of correlation), and categorically states that "Neils Bohr is regarded as the first person who made the principle of complementarity very relevant for modern quantum theory" (2004, p. 99). Asouzu insists that "... there are many variants of the articulation of the principles of complementarity as there are human needs and cultures." (2004, p. 100). This simply means that it can come into the speculation of the ego and the world, the Western and African philosophies, good and evil, self and non-self, metaphysics and epistemology, etc. But as Ijiomah noted: "...the connection, in terms of justification between African metaphysics and epistemology lies in the principle of intercommunicability, complementarity or the hypocycloid archetype" (1996, p. 43). By

this, metaphysics and epistemology and realities existing at these realms, meet at the point of intercommunications, complementarity and clear cases of resemblances. On his part, Onyeocha believes that “the African has a unified conception of reality. Under this frame, he notes that everything is kin to everything else.” (2000, p. 16). He therefore acknowledges the plurality of realities but with an interrelated existence. On this foundation, Asouzu builds his philosophy of complementarity as the philosophy of interdependence.

The Principle of *Ibu Anyi Danda*: A Key to Complementarity Theory

The popular principle of *ibu anyi danda*, which forms the heart of the philosophy of complementarity was first subjected to a higher level of intellectual inquiry in 1991 at an Igbo intelligentsia lecture called Ahiajoku. According to Asouzu;

...the theme for the 1991 Ahiajoku lecture, organized yearly by the whole Igbo culture and heritage, was on complementarity expounded within the framework of solidarity. The lecturer for the occasion, Prof. Ohuche, showed how the principle of complementarity – *IBU ANYI DANDA* – has always constituted an authentic Igbo approach towards surmounting the most difficult challenges. (2004, p. 108).

Asouzu explains that one of the most common metaphors or imageries that the traditional Igbo uses to express the idea of complementarity is that of the collective effort needed by ants (*danda*) to lift heavy crumbs or loads (*ibu*) that would otherwise remain an insurmountable task. This is the *ibu anyi danda* approach or the traditional Igbo spirit and understanding of complementarity. (Asouzu 2004, p. 108). This explains the need to unify and execute seeming impossible tasks. In fact, generally the collective efforts of people make tasks easier to achieve.

There are other metaphors the Igbos use to express the efficacy of complementarity such as “*Igwe bu ike*,” loosely translated as “crowd is power”, “*Udokanma*”, which literally means “peace is better” but points that efficacy to comes from living together in peace, etc. So *Ibu anyi danda* only expresses the principle of complementarity, which could be put into different metaphors. Asouzu continues; “For the traditional Igbo *danda* (ants) can surmount the most difficult challenges if and only if they work in a harmonious complementary unified manner. This idea animates the traditional Igbo spirit and sustains it in the face of all challenges” (2004, p. 108). An English adage which attempts to convey the spirit of *Ibu anyi danda* principle is the saying that “United we stand and divided, we fall”. As early as 1799, Patrick Henry said, “let us trust God, and our better judgment to set us right hereafter. United we stand, divided we fall. Let us not split into factions which must destroy that union upon which our existence hangs.” (1799. Public Lecture). Thus, complementarity philosophy captures the need for positive unity against negative unity. It is the unity that builds that complementarity philosophy proposes. Other related literature on this are: The Four Oxen and the Lion, the Bundle of sticks. According to J.K. Rowling, “we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided.” (Rowling, Retrieved 19th June, 2021, p. 4). Although Ohuche used the principle of complementarity in the sense of the relationship between the communities who made

land available and the missionaries who used such land for building of schools for education, churches for prayers, hospitals for treatment, etc, the need for complementarity has remained ever valid in our time.

Highpoints of Innocent Asouzu's Theory of Complementarity

The philosophy of complementarity of Innocent Asouzu aspires to a possibility whereby philosophy will assist in bridging the differences in all spheres of human existence and to produce a system of tolerating ideas from different parts of the world. For him, "The idea of complementarity thus opens up opportunity for the mind to make comparisons and draw relations." (2004, p. 109). Asouzu started his thesis by making a claim of a trend that seeks global unity, which builds on the ideology of globalization. This global unity tends to create conducive environment for mutual support, equal opportunities, protection of rights and privileges. This trend, Asouzu says is "What Uwalaka tags 'inclusive humanism'" (Asouzu 2005, p. 37). According to him "many have come to interpret some of these trends as evident signs of a world seeking to come to terms with itself." (2005, p. 38). Thus, we can claim that globalization has thus helped to produce a new generation of national and international citizens who are more conscious of the similarities among human beings and who endeavor to use this to facilitate higher form of self-actualization both for the individual and for the communities. With globalization, it is believed that places of differences among peoples and nations assumes international dimensions and fairly handle that the humanism of each group is respected. This is the case with such issues as corruption in governments and multinational organizations, marginalization and suppression of minority groups. The same also holds valid for genuine attempts at bridging the divide between the rich and the poor, balancing the disparities in income and other deplorable inequity with regard to general socio-economic conditions of peoples. In all, one can therefore, say that, some of the major artificial divides, to which humanity subjugated itself in the past, willingly or unwittingly, are fast waning to a new form of consciousness based on the fundamental understanding of the human person as an autonomous individual who can make positive impact on human history irrespective of artificial differences. Recall the popular classical Class Conflict of Karl Marx, between the haves and have-nots and its replicated version in Kwame Nkrumah's Class Struggle; but this time around on a global universal war of values between the big industrial countries and the countries struggling to find their fittings. Whereas globalization is said to seek a unification of the world in mutual dependence, some persons have identified it as a movement to facilitate neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism, with the re-emergence of old ideologies and techniques of colonization and exploitation in new cloaks and in new languages with the view of playing the same old games with the new rules. Within this context, world bodies such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) are seen as necessary institutions to facilitate this mission. Globalization therefore assumes not only a position of a global trend but also that of a global paradox. The global paradox is one of the challenges of our new World Order as it pertains to individuals, groups, and nations.

In philosophy, the confronting global paradox and the identified new complementary challenges of philosophy, adequately, entails two things: "First, it entails

sufficient explanation and understanding of their root cause. Secondly, it entails proffering insightful solutions” (2005, p. 44). These are foundational issues and here philosophy has very important role to play.

Philosophy is said to embark on this dual function as that foundational normative science that addresses the ends of human action towards understanding, explaining them and thereby giving insightful answers into their causes. Besides, it formulates principles and methods towards addressing them adequately.

In this connection, philosophy analyzes the interests guiding human action in general to see why they can stay in conflict with each other and how such conflicts can be resolved. It enquires into those conditions that influence harmonious co-existence of people in society. For philosophy to fulfill these functions in the new world order, it must be true to its name as the science that studies ultimate causes. Where it fulfills this duty, it upholds its self-understanding as wisdom; that is to say, as that science that seeks to understand reality truthfully and authentically. The philosopher, therefore, in moments of conflict, must endeavour to address the facts of the matter in the most dispassionate and objective manner. Philosophy must go beyond the immediate situation, in view of an ultimate unifying foundation of meaning. Inasmuch as interests rule the world by influencing the action of people, one can say that the only interest that drives philosophical enquiry, in all matters, subsists in the philosopher’s commitment to truth and authenticity. This is the focus for authentic philosophizing in this age and time. The philosopher must, therefore, being guided by wisdom, avoid to take sides in politicized folk’s ideological thinking. This will give him an unbiased equilibrium to help the world where policies are heavily influenced by individuals’ and groups’ interests. For Asouzu, therefore;

All those scientists, pseudo-philosophers, theologians, politicians and ideologists who generate and propagate ideas, and have refused to become philosophers are some of the greatest dangers and challenges of the new world order. Herein is located the axis of evil. (2005, 46).

The search for effective social engineering, leadership and managerial objectives, scientific objectivity and authentic existence, wherever they occur, must be epitomized in the work and disposition of the philosopher in the new world order. This is how a philosopher, while belonging to his ambience, seeks always to transcend it. The philosopher must develop a mindset required to understand clearly and distinctly what concepts stand for and must be capable of addressing heterogeneous ideas in a manner that makes evident the common foundation of such ideas. This is important because although human beings express themselves differently, due to heterogeneous backgrounds, there is often a common meaning, which their actions intend to convey. It is the function of philosophy to make evident such meanings and thereby demonstrate how the unity of being and consciousness is an integral part of human quest for happiness. It is in the quest for happiness that the need of mutual dependence is formed, and makes room for compromise, indirectly also subscribes to the necessity of relating all relative existences to an ultimate foundation of legitimization. A philosophical approach that best qualifies

for this noble task in our own age must be complementary in outlook and formulation. It is complementary in the sense that it recognizes relative existences as moments of being in the world. It is complementary also because it understands the need to relate all relative entities to a common foundation of meaning and legitimization in a universal and comprehensive perspective (Maduka, 2006, pp.5-6). This constitutes of all realities that relate with one another for the actualizing of their existence.

For the achievement of the new world order which the philosophy of complementarity strives, there must be openness and tolerance as it pertains to the relationship between nations. One of the many distinguishing features is the fact that it stands for the demolition of ideological blocks. This spirit of openness makes the articulation of ideas that seek to be universally relevant easier. This is the case with paradigms that are formulated around such unusual ideas as traditional African philosophy. This would not have been the case some decades ago.

Placing the Philosophy of Complementarity in the Context of African Philosophy

One of the strong arguments against the existence of African philosophy is on the ground of a unique and peculiar philosophy which is originally and authentically African. Asouzu stated that "carrying complementary reflection into the ambit of traditional African philosophy is an attempt at reconstructing this philosophical tradition on the parameters of the principle of complementarity." (2004, 110). Since, only what exist can be reconstructed, the first establishment of Asouzu's philosophy of complementarity on African philosophy is the reaffirmation of the existence of African philosophy. Although Asouzu noted two challenges that African philosophy has faced: "The first position equates the general worldview of traditional African society with African philosophy per se." (2004, 111) Here the impression is created that African philosophy is a unified body of ideas congenial to all African societies. As such, there is no ascribed distinct philosophical trends to be cited. However, "The second position considers general world views of a people as matters of less philosophical importance because those are not self-conscious, systematic, and methodological ideas of historical personalities within traditional African society. (Asouzu 2004, 111). Such views even when they originate from individuals, do not qualify as philosophy in the strict sense of the word, but are merely ethno-philosophy or folk-philosophy unfit for inclusion in the corpus of serious philosophical thoughts. As such, the lack of philosophical figures of reference in the past raises the question of the existence of African philosophy in past.

However, when we consider a reconstruction of past philosophical events, one cannot deny the existence of reasoning in such reconstruction. As such, it is a logical belief that from the corpus of materials available for African philosophy, we can infer that there were individuals behind the speculations in African philosophy. May be what we cannot establish is the precise identity of such people and that does not take away the philosophical content of their speculations. Omoregbe argues that "... for the existence of concrete historical individuals behind the general worldviews on which traditional African climate of thought is founded" (1985, 1 – 14). Wiredu remains skeptical of folk-philosophy as true philosophy.

Definitely, there are diverse trends to be discovered in African philosophy. If we should be able to map out clearly identified trends, we would be in a position to pave the way for more concrete and creative philosophical pursuits that can compare and compete with other philosophical pursuits on purely neutral grounds without undue leveling up mentality. We must avoid the error of transposition of western arrogance in the name of philosophy and work hard to develop traditional African philosophy with possible trends.

Critical Evaluation

The philosophy of complementarity opens up a new aspect of philosophy. It approaches philosophy from a trans-cultural perspective and therefore persuades people of different traditional backgrounds to help one another in bringing out what is good and emphasize less on their differences. However, Asouzu's philosophy seems to have adopted a presumptive approach at a stage in its logical coherence. This logical gap could be vividly seen in the presumption found in the "Ibu anyi danda" ideology. It presents itself as if every challenge must be surmounted, should we approach it from a complementary perspective. As true as this might seem, we must always know that a total and holistic complementarity is not possible in a world filled with human interests. The author under review strongly noted the place of human interests in the introductory part of his work, but failed to show how these interests can be an obstacle in his philosophy of complementarity. Since our needs are different, so our interests are different. In fact, it could be the interest of some people that the idea of complementarity should never see the light of day. But the philosophy of complementarity failed to note this weakness in its approach and efforts to build a better world, where there will be mutual inclusion in human activities. Therefore, taking it even from the literally surface of "Ibu anyi danda", we know in pragmatic terms that it depends on the size of the ibu (load). If the load surmounts the efforts of all the danda (ants) within that environment, the danda can only pinch it but cannot roll it as it would be the case with the ibu that they can carry. Human differences are one of those ibu (load) that thwarts our efforts and we must accept it and only make efforts to bridge what can be bridged for the common good.

Conclusion

The idea of complementarity avails us the opportunity for comparisons and to draw relations. It is a philosophy of comparing particularity with plurality, one-dimensionality with multidimensionality, monotony with variety, etc. For the traditional Igbo, the idea of complementarity challenges the mind to choose and here the mind must choose rightly. For Asouzu, choosing togetherness (njiko) is the correct choice and rejecting disunity (nkewa) compliments it. Complementarity (ibu anyi danda) is thus, an opportunity to seek relations, causes and meaning; it is an opportunity for the ego to reach out to something outside of itself and in this case towards the other-self. It is an opportunity to form communities and adhere to the principles of authentic existence in society. Besides, it is an opportunity to inquire about the otherness of the other in view of harnessing all the opportunities the world has to offer outside of the ego. Here, complementarity (ibu anyi danda) is the moment of reflection between the choices of isolation and teamwork. In the idea of complementarity, the mind sees why life with the opposite other is better

than life in isolation. This idea thus opens up the inestimable worth of fellow feeling and solidarity to the mind of the traditional Igbo. As a paradigm of man's authentic existence in community, the Igbo recognize the centrality of the idea of complementarity as it gives unity to human co-existence in the society. Thus, the philosophy of complementarity, even though it has an Igbo root, is a philosophy that pursues global unity, togetherness and cognizance of values in one another.

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