

BELONGINGNESS: AN AFRICAN METAPHYSICS OF *TO BE* A PANTALEONINE APPROACH

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Abstract

Philosophical traditions, as the institutions of critical reasoning, within the historical appreciation of philosophy, have given rise to many critical and conceptual nuances of philosophy as a human heritage. Western philosophical tradition gave us the concept of being as that which is, while African philosophical tradition gave rise to the concept of belongingness as the African Metaphysics of to be. Being and Belongingness in actual critical sense, portray concrete idea and modality of being. Using the method of hermeneutics, the researcher appreciatively finds out of that being as that which is simply belongs. Belongingness, therefore, remains the redefinition of the Western philosophical concept of being in African philosophical enterprise. Hence, belongingness is the African Metaphysics of To Be.

Keywords: Being, belongingness, Africa, philosophical traditions

Introduction

Philosophy has come to stay as a discipline since ages. The history of Philosophy, therefore, is replete with possibilities dating from the Ancient Time (7th Century Before Christ: BC). Philosophy etymologically, from the Greek lexicons, is *philos* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom) transliterated *love of wisdom*. To this point philosophy remains a human science that seeks wisdom and a personal enterprise with an unaided reason. It is a human enterprise. Pragmatically, and as a love of wisdom, philosophy is an intelligent appreciation and apt understanding of reality as such. In this way, therefore, philosophy critically questions and sprucely analyses reality with an unaided reasoning. Maritain (2005) maintains that philosophy is the highest of the human *sciences*, that is, of the sciences which know things by the natural light of reason. But there is a science above it. For if there be a science which is a participation by man of the knowledge proper to God himself, obviously that science will be superior to the highest human science. Such a science, however, exists. It is theology, which means the science of God, (Maritain, 2005).

Traditionally, philosophy is *cognitio rerum per altissimas causas, solar rationis* (science that studies all things in their ultimate and universal principle). It is equally *scientia rerum per ultima causas*- knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. It's worthy of note that neither discipline nor culture, science nor arts and every form of humanities and society is devoid of philosophical influence. Taking cognizance of its main branches and other applied areas, philosophy cuts across every learning and teaching to be known as *mater scientia*, mother of sciences or knowing. Obenga, T. (1990), in his philosophical discourse writes, "*philosophy has nourished science. It preceded the sciences. Science (physics, chemistry,*

mathematics, political science, aesthetics, logic, biology, sociology, etc.), was born of philosophy” (p. 51). No wonder the Medieval philosophers influenced by the religious innuendoes of their time, based on the chronological coincidence of Medieval philosophical tradition and relationship with the significant figure of Jesus, the dominating power as well as the influence of His teaching, regarded philosophy as *ancilla theologae*, handmaid of theology.

It is worthy of note that philosophy is as old as the *homo cogitans*, the thinking man. Hence, Philosophy according to Maritain (2005), is the “*highest human sciences, that is, of the sciences which know things by the natural light of reason*”(p.72). In the chequered history of humanity especially with regard to scholarship, philosophy *presumably* dates to Socrates and his Ionian scholars of whom, ancient history as well as contemporary history, have proved that *all Greek Philosophy often referred to as Ancient Philosophy had an oriental source*. Obenga, T. (1990) reiterated this age-long hidden but necessary facts when he writes that the Ancient Greek philosophers “having studied in Africa of Pharaonic period went back to Athens to philosophize” (1ff). We must note that Ancient Egypt, of Pharaonic era, has known to be the cradle of civilization through the inscription that read thus: “thirty centuries before Greeks presented an orderly conception of life, in language suggestive of a tradition already several centuries old”. We are dealing with Philosophy that was dated with the oldest ancient civilization of Egypt. Onyenywenyi, I. (1993), supported this age long view of Egypt’s Pphilosophy pre-dating the Greeks in his book: *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentricism* and other African philosophers in their authorship had the same view with these titles: George, G. M. James (1992). *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*. However, Philosophy as a discipline has traditions often referred to as traditions of philosophy.

Traditions of philosophy is also known as philosophical traditions. It is the study of traditions or institutions of philosophy within the history of philosophy as a human enterprise. In philosophical traditions, critical works, authors with philosophical bent and budding critical ideas are divided into epochs and time so as to understand how they came about, that is, the evolution or development of such philosophical enterprise, (Onebunne & Okoye, 2023). Philosophical tradition has to do with an understanding of philosophy as a regional project with historical bent on entire societal awareness and human development. Granted that philosophers do not and ought not necessarily agree but their opinions and views are important in the cause of the history of philosophy thereby given rise to institutions or traditions of philosophy. Perennial problem of philosophy alludes to this unique view that philosophers do not agree but their thoughts endure. However, there are many philosophical traditions as the worldviews of philosophers and philosophies abound. In general, there are four philosophical traditions as: Western Philosophical Traditions (WPT), Eastern/Oriental Philosophical Traditions (EOPT). Abrahamic (Judeo-Islamic) Philosophical Tradition (AbPT) and African Philosophical Traditions (APT). From these traditions, philosophies sharing in the world philosophical heritage outflow.

Our approach in this research is Pantaleonine. Pantaleonine approach is all about Pantaleon Osonduagwuike Iroegbu (1951-2006) is one of the greatest Contemporary African Philosophers of the twentieth century A.D. He is an Igbo of the South-Eastern Region, precisely from Umueze-Umunumo, Ehime Mbano, Imo State, Nigeria. Aproduct of Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.with his doctoral dissertations were titled: *Communalism: A Theory of Justice for Contemporary African Communities* (Philosophy) and *Theology and Community: Through Narrative Theology to an African Ecclesiology* (Theology). These works, exuding complete exercise in *afocentricism*, were upheld as original contributions to African philosophico-theological Studies. Iroegbu had a legendary literary legacy like: *Enwisdomization Theory*, *Hermeholiontic Theory* (for proving the existence of God), *Uwa Ontology*, *Communalism: Kpim of Politics* and *Metaphysics: Kpim of Philosophy*, *The Kpim of Time: Eternity* with rigorous introduction of other philosophical neologisms into philosophical lexicons like *Umuna Ecclesiology*, *Ohacracy*, *Nkuziology*, *Omenalism*, *Afroxiology*, *Philosophemna*, etc.

Appreciation of African Philosophy from African Philosophical Tradition

Philosophical tradition is all about tradition or institution of philosophy within the history of philosophy as a human endeavour. Onebunne & Okoye (2023) reiterates that in philosophical traditions, philosophical works, authors and ideas are divided into time and space, with a general view of appreciation of what philosophy is all about. It's no more a relevant issue to ask or discuss whether there is African Philosophy or not. It was rather an issue of possibility according to Theophilus Okere. Based on such possible possibility and scholarly presentations over the years, there is African Philosophy. The issue now is the conditions for the affirmed possibility. Over the years, after Okere's work saw the light of the day and many budding African scholars, especially those within the areas of critical thoughts, having discovered the truth about philosophy as peoples reality and their worldview; as well, having discovered and appreciated the place of philosophical traditions in the midst of world philosophies, African Philosophy has finally come to stay while thriving with many disciples, represented in the concept of Traditionalist Movement in African Philosophy. Many African Philosophers are now taking up issues within the parameter of African Philosophy as an independent full fledge course. There is, therefore, no need in revisiting the debate on the existence of African Philosophy. Chimakonam (n. d.) has captured it thus that:

The history of African Philosophy began with “frustration” (and not with wonder as it was in Western Philosophy) that generated angry questions and then responses and reactions. These reactions led to the nationalist movements, the great debate and then to more questions and reactions in the ongoing spiral of argumentations and so on. The frustration was borne out of colonial caricature of Africa as culturally naïve, intellectually docile and nationally inept.

Accordingly, in utter support for the coming-to-stay of African Philosophy in its philosophicality and Africanity, Iroegbu, (1994) made a definite statement that “no author has

to my knowledge declared that there can be no African Philosophy”, (p. 129). Some of these seeming problematiques and wrong perspectives with regard to the genuity and authenticity of African Philosophy, Iroegbu, however, queried vehemently thus: Is there bulk of material called African philosophy by their authors, readers or researchers genuinely philosophy and genuinely African philosophy? His positive accent were within the hallmark of tradition-based narratives in the texts of P. Tempels, A. Kagame, and J. Mbiti as well as the political thoughts of S. Senghor, K. Nkrumah, J. Nyerere, N. Azikiwe, Long-list of Contemporary African Philosophers, et cetera, (Iroegbu, 1994). These presentations above are really philosophic in a sense and cannot be mere collection of stories. However, no serious mind will doubt the philosophical dexterity and critical status of traditionalist authors and die-hard scholars like Paulin Hountondji, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwasi Wiredu, Sophie Oluwole, Kwame Anthony Appiah, V. Y. Mudimbe, Anton Wilhelm Amo, Kwame Gyekye, Paulin Hountondji, John S. Mbiti, Henri Maurier, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Placid Tempels, Alexis Kagame, Theophilus Okere, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, Odera Oruka, Pantaleon Iroegbu, Maduakolam Osuagwu, Obi J. Oguejiofor, Maduabuci Dukor, and litany of budding Contemporary African Philosophers and Scholars, to mention but a few.

African Philosophy traditionally is knowledge of Africa realities and African realisms in their englobing universal principles. In Contemporary times, Onebunne (2023) definitionally maintains that African Philosophy is primarily a *discipline* and secondarily a *movement*. It is more of a movement as it tries to reclaim its position as a discipline within the stage of world philosophical heritage. It is, therefore, fundamentally a *disciplinary movement* as it tries to rediscover itself within the world philosophical heritage and equally establish itself as such. *In lato sensu*, African Philosophy is that branch of knowledge that grew from African philosophical tradition as a philosophy done within and outside continental Africa for humanity as a human enterprise with regard to authorship, scholarship and literature. Moreover, the adjective African qualifies the noun philosophy and beyond delimiting it, it expands such critical enquiry on the far side of just African. *In stricto sensu*, African Philosophy is that course that is African and philosophical within the limits of africanity and philosophicality or africanness and philosophicalness.

Moreover, as a *discipline*, African Philosophy is the *love of African wisdom*, that is, *philos Africana sophia*. Iroegbu, (1994) was very premier in giving this succinct definition that smacks a kind of rooted knowledge in and descriptive similarity with regard to world philosophical heritage in relationship to African Philosophy. This is why for Iroegbu, (1994), African philosophy is a *philo-sophia*, a *quest for African wisdom*. African Philosophy, therefore, is *scientia rerum per ulima causas* within African realities, (p.116). It is the search for the unaided authentic human knowledge that is philosophical and African. It is the habit of every wise and reasonable African man, (Onebunne, 2023). Consequently, Onebunne (2023) maintains that African Philosophy as a *movement* is a clarion invitation to Bob Marley’s redemptive insinuation to “emancipate yourselves from mental slavery...non but ourselves can free our mind”. His *Redemption Song* demands a total breakaway from the stereotype

innuendoes that philosophy is the prerogative of the West, therefore, questions directly our African human nature as *homo sapiens* and *homo cogitans* as well as *animal rationalis*.

Still as a *movement*, African Philosophy, rooted in and springing from African philosophical tradition, is a cursory look into the problematiques and prospects of Africa as part of the world philosophical heritage. As a movement, African philosophy is an effort at recovering the lost status of Africa as result of the stolen legacies with regard to philosophy and its origin. As a movement, African Philosophy searches for the authentic knowledge that is Philosophy and African within and or outside the African cultural worldview. Therefore, a definitive-thoughtful interpretation and critical analysis of the symbols of African cultural traditions would be African philosophy *qua tale*. More so, a reflection with profound application of criticality, analyticity and originality on African thoughts and cultures will give credence to Philosophy and rightly put, African Philosophy. This is why African Philosophy is a disciplinary movement, (Onebunne, 2023). However, rather than Western philosophy of Western philosophical tradition and her philosophy which started with wonder, African philosophy, the formal African Philosophy or what I may refer to as second rebirth of Philosophy that is now referred to as African Philosophy, according to Chimakonam (n.d.) started with *onuma*, that is, *frustrated* by the colonialism and racialism and other bumps of African predicaments orchestrated by many years of doubt of its historical existence which was greatly shrouded in controversies and submerged in conspiracies of lies. Therefore, as a movement, later formal African philosophy started out of frustration as a result of many lies against Africans' humanity and consequently their rationality. As a disciplinary movement, African Philosophy in its natural disposition as a discipline, that is in its own capacity, has issues with regard to thematic conceptual limits in contradistinction with Western philosophical concepts like being. African philosophy, therefore, is equally typified with conceptual ideas like belongingness, "uwa", "igwebuiké", *et cetera*. However, the western philosophical tradition concept of ontology as the science of being is synonymous with the African philosophical traditional concept of belongingness.

The Concept of Ontology

Metaphysics has been defined by some scholars as *science of being*. Since it is a systematic study of being, therefore, it demands laws guiding this being in question. Laws of being are traditional and fundamental principles that define and establish the operative action of being *qua* Being. Basically, laws or principles mean a relationship of possession, dependency or operation of one thing and in our study, being. The basic principles of being are those that characterize being immediately as the intellect conceives it. They are primary self-evident and necessary axioms that are contained in the very notion of being. Laws of being make our concept of being clear, distinct and coherent. Ontology is the science of being, the science of the *ontos*. Ontology is a word that was coined about the middle of 17th Century alongside philosophy of being, *id est, philosophia entis* as synonymous. Some authors refer to ontology as *pure* or *general* metaphysics. Ontology is nevertheless the first part of metaphysics.

Ontology is the philosophical study of being in general, or of what relates indifferently to everything that is real. It was called “first philosophy” by Aristotle in Book IV of his *Metaphysics*. The Latin term *ontologia* (“science of being”) was felicitously invented by the German philosopher Jacob Lorhard (Lorhardus) and first appeared in his work *Ogdoas Scholastica* (1st ed.) in 1606. It entered general circulation after being popularized by the German rationalist philosopher Christian Wolf in his Latin writings, especially *Philosophia Prima sive Ontologia* (1730; “First Philosophy or Ontology”)

Ontology, therefore, remains the study or science of *being* or what it means *to be*. It does not refer to the study of the being of man or the being of any entity whatsoever. It is the study of *being precisely as being* or rightly put *being qua Being, being as Being*. It is the study of *pure being*. It is not the study of what it means *to be* this or that but *what it means to be at all*, that is, in line with the question: *why are there things rather than nothing*. Through different philosophical traditions and epochs, the proper concept of being was misunderstood and misapplied. According to Peter M. Simons, Professor of Philosophy, University of Leeds, Ontology, is the philosophical study of being in general, or of what applies neutrally to everything that is real.

The etymological notion of being in its Greek principal noun is *to on* and its Latin derivative is *ens*. There is this distinction between *ens* or being and *esse* or to be. Being is that which *is* or *exists*. According to Madu, R., (1997: 53) the word *being* as a noun designates some substance. The word *to be* or *esse* is a verb because it designates an act. Being, therefore, is a noun and a verb representing the essence and existence. To understand this according to Madu is to reach beyond the level of essence and the deeper level of existence.

Appreciation of Being

Iroegbu, P., in his unique book *Kpim of Metaphysics* gave a full description (rather than a definition) of being thus: Being is whatever is, whatever exists, whatever has reality, entity, existence. The reality could be concrete, notional, empirical or meta-empirical. It can be relative or absolute existence. It may be visible or invisible, potential or actual. It is being in so far as it shares or can share in existence, directly or indirectly, fully or partially, independently or dependently, (Iroegbu, 1995).

Being is indefinable because to define a being is to ascribe a specific difference, a quality that distinguishes the defined from the other realities. But outside being there is no reality. Being is the first, the most simple, universal and immediate of all notions. It is the *primum notum* (the first to be known) and the *per se notum* (the most self-evident) reality of the human intellect. All experience is also experience of some being. The significance of the concept of being is that it is what makes whatever is *to be*. It is the cause of being in all things. It delivers a thing from nothingness to being. It is the highest abstraction as all are within its connotation and denotation. Being connotes and denotes all reality. In Heideggerian parlance, being is the soil from which all reality, including axio-scientific, episteme-metaphysical and logico-ethical beings have their origin. Therefore, the search for the most primordial in all beings, being itself,

makes the philosophy of Being a fundamental scientific inquiry, the ground for all other enquiries. Even the knowledge of knowledge is the knowledge of the being (of knowledge). It is an epistemological reality.

However, there is a caveat. Being is an epistemological concept as well as a philosophical concept. Ethically or Morally to value anything is to value the being. Anthropologically being is the object of studies. Aesthetically the beauty in anything is the beauty of a being. Logically being is subject and object of rational thinking. Epistemologically to know anything is to know being. If anything is to be known, valued, reasoned, admired, it is nothing but the being. It is known or valued or reasoned unto or admired because it has being; it is a being gnoseologically, logically, aesthetically, ontologically. All knowledge or value *et ceteram* is knowledge or value of being. All study or learning is study or learning of being.

Lastly, the difference between being and beings, with knowledge of analogy of being and scholastic philosophy, are appreciated using two principles: participation and individuation. Whatever is being is either substance or accidents. We conceive of being through metaphysical abstraction. Whatever is, shares in this conception. The concept of being is all applicable to all that is. The process of this application is called *predication*. However, universal concepts are considered according to their *content* and their *nature* and the way in which they can be applied to the objects that fall under them. Through predication *being* or any of its aspects is applied to another. That is, you predicate aspects or characteristics: accidents (weight, colour, health height, etc) to substances or entities, things (house, trees, food etc). The arrangement of concepts according to their contents or the internal difference between one being and another is brought out by the Aristotelian Categories. Predicables are functions of predicaments. Rightly defined, predicaments or predicates are ten supreme *genera* that are predicated to being. They are one substance and nine accidents: *quantitas*-quantity, *qualitas*-quality, *relatio*-relation, *actio*-action, *passio*-pasion, *habitus*-habit, *ubi*-where, *quando*-when and *situs*-what. We must note that predicables are the manner of predicating the predicaments to being. They are five of them as the *classique quinque voces* with examples thus: genus (living being), species (man), specific difference (rational), property (ability to laugh, *per se*) and logical accident (laughter, *per accidens*). These predicables established by Aristotle by reason of its deductions, is seen to be both necessary and complete.

Substance is that which stands under or that which remains under the appearances of a thing as the permanent element. Substance has special relationship with the accidents. It equally has its own independence. Substance has its existence not in another but in and for itself. If it is a *substance*, it subsists *in se*. Such being endures and is self dependent. This is why being is primarily reality and therefore identity. To this extent being is *space* and *time*. Hence, in African metaphysics: Being fundamentally belongs. Being cannot but belongs. This informs the thesis: *Being as Belongingness* unto *Being is Belongingness* in African Metaphysics.

Understanding and Applications of Belongingness

Etymologically, the word ‘belongingness’ is a compound word that can be broken down into constituents thus: be – (l) on (be on), be – (l) on going, be – long and belonging. These four analytic contents according to Iroegbu, (1995) substantiate the various contents or senses of the concept of ‘belongingness’. Iroegbu calls them the sub-themes of belongingness.

Be- (l)-on (Be on)

This analytic theme would not be clearly understood if it is not explicated side by side its contrary: “be off”. To *be on* is to escape not being off, or not to be off. This is because either one is on, or one is off. To *be* is to *be on*. Being-on is being. Being is being-on. Being-off is not to be, to cease to be, to cease to exist, to be nothing. To tune-off is to annihilate. “Be on” shows continuity as such and in particular, it is a form of presence and a kind of being-there. In a strict sense, once one is aware of his or her environment, one is said to “be on”. One is said to ‘be on’ in a large sense if one is to be alertly involved in whatever one does. Iroegbu stressed this issue thus “the *belong*” involved in belongingness is a turning-on of being as general and abstraction into being as concrete expressible entity. It is a *being on* in *Uwa* (world) - from which all concrete realities derive their being (Iroegbu, 1995). In Iroegbu, P. (1995) exposition, “to become being in this sense is to be, becomes one’s *Uwa* ... to be-on in this sense is to escape the contrary of being-on i.e. to be off. Either one is on, or one is off. To be off is to cease to exist, to be nothing, to be *adighi-adi* (nothingness). To tune-off is to annihilate being, the *Uwa* of the being”, (p. 375). In Iroegbu’s quest to express *be (l)on*, he made use of ‘adighiadi’ to express the *be(l)on*. One would have expected him to use more African words or Igbo expression to *be(l)on*.

Be-(l) On-Going

According to Iroegbu, this is the second stage of the etymological understanding and hermeneutic appreciation of the word, belongingness. For Iroegbu, P. (1995) “...it is a form of ongoing and the *ongoingness* of being. It means that somebody who belongs today cannot, all things being equal, be regarded as not belonging tomorrow, unless at the prize of annihilation, (p.376)” It is on this account that one needs not argue at length to buttress that belongingness is not a one-time affair, a concluded issue, but an ongoing process that is ever continuous. Once a being exists, for instance, man, he makes frantic effort to belong because that is the basis for his existence not only because he is a social animal but because of his gregarious nature which cannot be put off in as much as he is on the planet earth. Little wonder Iroegbu makes an attempt to see belongingness as “in-place”.

Understanding be-(l)-on-going, with regard to belongingness, Iroegbu asserts, that having been tuned-on into *Uwa m*, the being now goes on. It proceeds in its *Uwaness*. There is always a process in the reality of being. To be maintained in being is to proceed on further in being, and not out of, or outside of, being. Belong is something that goes on, (Iroegbu, 1995). In going-on, it is both itself (identity) and something else (change). Therefore, the idea of on-going explicates the properties of the being as being what it is (identity) and something else (difference). *Be Ongoing* is an assertion as well as continuity. It is a kind of ongoingness. In

the words of Iroegbu, P. (1995): “ongoingness is an existential constituent of Being in belongingness. The ontological consequence is that being is being in so far as it is ongoing” (p. 375).

Be-long

This is the third content of belongingness. It expresses a form of relationship and or relational presence. In belongingness, a being is fulfilled since to belong means to keep on, settle, abide or live long in being. To belong is to prolong the belongingness of the being. Through belonging, *be-long* or to belong, a being relates reality with another. For Iroegbu, P. to belong simply means to stay, abide or live long. Belongingness lives long. Therefore, long-live belongingness. Belongingness means that the subject of *Uwa* stays long in being. Here time is brought in. Being is expressed in time and space (Iroegbu, 1995).

The relationship that exists in and among things that *be-long* is a full activity of identification. It equally entails duration. ‘long’, however, has the smack of *everlastingness*. That is “forever.” As long as ever. The normal salutation to a traditional ruler in Igboland often carries the connotation of “forever” as *Eze I ga-adi ndu rue mgbe ebighighi* (King, you will live forever). To “live forever” in this context, of course, refers to the traditional ruler’s dynasty, reign, office or status and has nothing to do with the person of the king who will definitely die. The cult of ancestors can as well be understood in this form of “live forever”. This concept of living for ever can as well be seen in one of the greatest blessings one can receive among the Igbos as “long life and prosperity.” Belongingness defines a being in its act. Hence, Iroegbu, P. (1995) maintains that “to be is to be long: long in existence, long in goodness, long in prosperity, long in communion with others while on-going may be open-ended, being-long stretches it still further unto everlastingness” (p. 375).

Be-longing

Belongingness entails a decision to concretely stay on. It is a desire to remain and continue its concrete existence. It brings in and stresses the personal element: the longing for life, for being, for *Uwa*. For Iroegbu, to belong is to be in the desire for life. It is the willpower or “force” to march along in life that is founded on the awareness that nothing is of higher value than life. This is seen in different names the Igbos answer like *Nduka* (life is greater) or *Ndubisi* (life is the principal thing). It is a movement of identification of a being, (Iroegbu, 1995). In it, one longs to be, but the question is where? This belongingness has been within the *Uwa* (world). However, Iroegbu (1995), maintains that “to belong is to be in the desire for life. It is the will to march along in life.” Stressing further, he notes that “the be-longingness, being-in-longing, or the longing for continued existence explains the natural inclination for self-preservation in all creatures” (p.375).

The Resume: Belongingness

Belongingness is ‘the reality of whatever is in so far as it is, being a part of, therefore belonging to reality (*Uwa*). Belongingness, however, is simply derived from the basic understanding of reality. It has a character of identification with and within a community. And in such societal

disposition, belongingness finds a powerful basis and sustenance. All these are seen in the developmental structures of African communalism. As Iroegbu reiterates, belongingness implies the basic commonness that makes a given African community as such.

For Iroegbu, belongingness constitutes the most important mode in which being expresses itself. Although he holds that “belongingness” is an abstract term, an ontological one that specifies that *a thing is*, because it belongs, he articulates the idea of belongingness within the context of the theory of communalism, (Iroegbu, 1995). To belong for Iroegbu, is to belong to the basic community after the traditional Igbo model of *Umunna* (kindred), (Iroegbu, 1999). Hence, the specific articulation and understanding of belongingness embodies various definitions and meanings: conceptual, psychological, existential and physiological. And, what should be noted here is that communalism makes belongingness an indispensable conceptual starting point. Belongingness, according to Iroegbu, P. (1995), therefore, is the synthesis of realities seen in the statement of *to be is to belong. To belong is to be*. As Iroegbu, (1995) confirms: “our natural expression of belongingness is the term *Umunna*. Literary, *Umunna* means children of one father. The sense of *Umunna* transcends the nuclear family ... in another sense, a people with the same political arrangement is a political *Umunna*”, (p. 374).

Consequently, belongingness is expressed more within the context of basic community living, an *Umunna* setting, a socio-political one of course. Moreover, the principle of autonomy which is often referred to as *EBUB*, that is *Egbe Bere Ugo Bere*, shows the communitarian aspect of the individual in the community he or she belongs. However, Theophilus Okere, sees *EBUB* as an African concept of Justice and Peace, that is: *To each one his due. Live and let live. Be and let be*. According to Okere, (1983) “...the rhetorical balance in these expressions, with their frequent nods to alliteration and repetition reflects the will to use balance, equity and fair measure to gauge and order human relations, to have them reconciled, balanced and fair, to base them on justice.”(p.86). For him, this aphorism, *Egbe bere, Ugo bere. Nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwaa ya*, (*Let the Kite perch, let the Eagle perch, whichever would not let the other perch should have his wings broken*), espouses a philosophy of a total fairness and champions Igbo ethics. Okere appreciates this aphorism more from a moral interest as it controls social peace and harmony. However, he must be aware that concepts like justice and peace are community bound, that is, they are realizable only in a community life and setting. It is, therefore, within the context of human interaction and relation as well as being-with-others that one can speak of and demand for justice, peace and fair play. In a very strict sense, as human beings belong, so they relate, hence belongingness simply allows the need for harmony and respect. In the same page above Okere submits thus: “To talk of society is of course to talk of a plurality of persons, of groups, of interests, political, religious and economic interests. These interests are often misaligned and at cross purposes and need to be reconciled and harmonized”. Okere (1983) further reiterates:

Men relate to each other singly or in groups and, justice, *egbe bere ugo bere* governs this relationship if each gives to the other his due. This is a normal and proper way people live together by letting each other be who they are and have what they have, not crossing boundaries, not stepping

on toes; letting things be in their due and proper place, arranged, aligned, beautiful. When this is the case there is peace, *udo, ndokwa*, everything in its place, in order, (p. 86).

Iroegbu nevertheless went beyond understanding the referred aphorism *egbe bere ugo bere* only as an African concept of justice and peace to seeing it as an ontological principle. According to him, *egbe bere, ugo bere* as an ontological principle re-enacts the hermeneutic contents and existential significance of belongingness. It expresses the essence or *kpim* of reality, what a being is, in its activity of perching. To perch is *to be*. The *Egbe* and *Ugo* are only in potency until they perch. Perching is a part of belonging. Belonging is seen in the act of perching. And as for Iroegbu, (1995): “The act of perching is the process of acquiring being. To perch, therefore, is to belong; perching is belonging. To fully perch is to fully be”, (p.379). However, Iroegbu, (1995) goes on to explain that: “to perch is to hold on to something, to descend on the world, to embrace reality, to be present to being. It is to acquire a base and to possess one’s own *Uwa*. It is to become settled, to have a place, to be”, (p. 379). The nuances of belongingness seen in *be-on, be-ongoing, be-long and belonging* have basis on the *EBUB* as their ontological principle. According to Iroegbu, *EBUB* “expresses the essence of *Kpim* of reality”. Iroegbu, (1995) further explains that “what a being is its activity of perching. To perch is *to be*. To be is to perch. To be is to belong. To belong is to perch. In summary, the concept of belongingness is well understood in the analysis of the relationship embodied in the *EBUB*”, (p.370-380). Hence, Iroegbu in conclusion writes:

Belongingness and *EBUB*, are concrete conceptions that on analysis bring us to our hermeneutical goal. That goal we have been able to arrive at. It is the response to the ultimate why of *Uwa*? It is belongingness. Belongingness comes out to be the *Kpim of Uwa*. Why are we? What we are made of? (World, for what)? Our response is: Belongingness (*EBUB*). When all is said and done: what matters is belongingness. Do you belong: here or thereafter?... That we belong to being and being belongs to us.

Appreciation of Belongingness as African Metaphysics of *To Be*

Each epoch of human history has had things to decry and has had issues and problems which demanded urgent attention and remedy just like our own present epoch. Our research theme is one of them. This research, therefore, leads philosophy to a continued reflection on and articulation of better responses to African metaphysical problems, especially that of *being* and *belongingness* and also that of *being as belongingness* as well as *being is belongingness*. *Being* has been a central problem in Western and in African philosophies. It has remained a point of reference in the history of philosophy. Similarly, *belongingness* has been a fundamental aspect of African philosophical and communalist engagements. Belongingness, we must note, has been a basic cultural trait within the exigencies of African Philosophy. And African Philosophy, having permeated different cultures and traditions, has gathered a lot of

*philosophemes*¹, in Theophilus Okere's word. Thus, for it to be enterprising, it has to grapple with these emerging cultural and traditional issues.

This research aims at studying *being* as *belongingness*. Put the other way, *Belongingness* is the African Metaphysics of *To Be*. It is a kind of hermeneutical investigation in African metaphysics which is very dynamic. In this hermeneutic otiose investigation, *being* is studied from the point of view of *belongingness*. That is to say that *being* belongs and this *belongingness* is a fundamental condition for a thing to be considered a reality. To this end, being and belongingness are said to be ontological. Reality, therefore, is better known and understood by the concept of belongingness. In other words, reality, or *being*, in its total manifestation, is a process involving belongingness. In this form of belongingness, reality is a given that needs continuous existential understanding and development. Without belongingness there would be no discussion on being. Whatever is part of reality, is belonging to something. To understand being as belongingness, it must be understood in its relation to others. *Belongingness*, however, overshadows these existential facts and *modus operandi*, that is, modes of operations. This notion of belongingness is clearly reflected in John Donne's poem: "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

Belongingness is a fundamental quality in understanding modality of being. No being can be understood in terms of its completeness but in its relation to other beings, defining itself through other beings. Every being is defined by a relation, that is, a being is in relation to something, or with an attribute of engaging in something. *Belongingness* as an African Metaphysics of *to be* is depicted in many nuances of modalities of being and belonging as shown in many trado-cultural, critical and conceptual lexicons like *igwebuike*, *ibunayidanda*, *onyegahnwanneya*, *Ibirikambiri*, *ubuntu*, *et cetera*. These fact of belongingness show a relational modality with being.

Consequently, this fact of *beingness*, which is a form of relation, is a form of belonging to, belonging with and belonging in. Relation, therefore, becomes a kind of state by which being realizes itself among others and others within it. This relation spells out a place-place where being realizes itself, a place of social reality, a kind of integrated universe, in Donne's words, "...a piece of the continent, a part of the main..." This relational form or way of belonging as an integrated universe is not a differential one but a fundamental or ontological integration. And for this particular being-in-itself, it is through this fact of belongingness that it integrates itself in reality.

¹ For Theophilus Okere, (1983) *philosophemes* are those cultural materials, data given that we use in philosophizing..This concept depicts raw materials used for philosophical reflection, questioning, responses, analysis and eventual synthesis. Okere, (1983) writes:"we assert, however, that in black Africa there exists a reservoir of cultural *philosophemes* from which any future philosopher can inspire himself or borrow his share of philosophical raw material. Oguejifor, J.O & Onah, G.I. (ed) (2005) interpreting Okere further writes "taking inspiration from some European hermeneutic philosophers, Okere argues that philosophy, every philosophy, is essentially hermeneutics of culture (in the fullest meaning of the term culture)".

Being's identity, therefore, is in belonging. Belongingness identifies being as such. Being's nature is in belonging. Its role is in belonging. Its mode and operations are in belonging. Belongingness, as such, is the ontological value of being. By belongingness, being is related to other beings by relationship of what it is or does. Hence, in this research, there is this glaring connection on the hermeneutics of being and the hermeneutical theory of belongingness as an in-depth quest for knowledge is very effective in understanding being as belongingness on the onto-relational level. In this, there should be, as Iroegbu (1994) opines, solidarity of belongingness in being and solidarity of being in belongingness, in the manner in which we exist and relate in the reality of being and belongingness thus: "Belongingness holds that our existence as human beings, as well as our integral participation in the society in which we find ourselves, are to be defined by our being given the sense and substance of belonging," (p.145).

Across the philosophical epochs, in line with the foregoing exposition, different meanings have been attributed to being. All these, nevertheless, are in effort to have a comprehensive grasp of what being is all about. Different proposals have been made. In cognizance of these, this paper tends to use a hermeneutical approach to understand being as belongingness. Being as belongingness is necessitated as one comprehends being as expressing itself, thereby rolling into belongingness in its general and fundamental character and basic attribute. Often, the question is: can being be without belonging? Echoing Jean-Paul Sartre, there is no being which is not the being of a certain mode-a certain mode of belonging, a certain mode of existence. We must admit that the general concept of being has been a problem which led Martin Heidegger to shift his position from pure ontology to fundamental ontology with his hermeneutics of *Dasein*. And in African metaphysics, there is no consensus on the actual definition and description of what reality is, what being actually is. However, an in-depth analysis of belongingness suffices for such definitional gap.

Being has been an all-encompassing subject in philosophical enterprise. Its descriptions, definitions and understanding as *whatever is*, in a general sense, makes its study and further hermeneutic investigation a problem. Another problem has to do with what being is and how being can be understood to be, especially in our *African ontology*. What is being? What is belongingness? What is the African concept of being and belongingness? Is belongingness an alternative to being, a correlate of being or a synonym of being? How can we globalize the concept of belongingness which is a fundamental attribute of being in African metaphysical enterprise? The relational identity of being and belongingness already in exposition in this work is a quite good steps towards such knowledge. Identifying and relating being and belongingness are problematiques of their own since the theory of belongingness continues to receive the attention of great African scholars and thinkers. Because there is no definitive definition and description of these two concepts, the problem continues to linger as one appreciates *being as belongingness*. Generally, *being as belongingness* has nuances of meaning ranging from understanding properly this concept of being along with idea of belongingness. Here lies the hub of the problem. However, the phenomena of belongingness and being are receiving increasing attention in African metaphysics and African communalism. It may not be a problem when being, in its attendant meanings and understanding, is buttressed with examples of the

many unwarranted assumptions that one concept can be comfortably interchanged with the other, probably as a kind of return to the “roots of being” *via* the roots of belongingness. More so, being is whatever is and as a thread running through all reality. Being, however, will be a locus of operation for belongingness, and, of course, for other realities.

Resume

Having gone this far, belongingness remains a word with hidden and loaded meaning in African metaphysics and communalism. Belongingness, therefore, is to *be-on*, *be-ongoing*, *be-long* and *be-longing*. For Iroegbu, there is always a starting point of passage from an *off-from* being, to an *on-in*, inside, being (be-on). Continuing, he reiterates that this being that is realized by being “put-on” into existence is meant for ongoingness (be-ongoing). The analytic contents of belongingness reveal the inner significance of being as essentially referential. Equally, these analytic nuances are realized in the African languages, African traditions and African cultural values. Definitely, Iroegbu writes that belongingness is the synthesis of the reality and experience of belonging. Any act of a thing belonging to something often shows a possession. It is a kind of participation. This is the belongingness of a being. It equally explains the participation of a being in a community of beings and in relation to the reality (world, *Uwa*). For Iroegbu, (1994) “belongingness comes from the verb, to belong, meaning to be part of, member of, in the group of... Thus my belongingness is a substantive that summarizes all the things that I possess”, (p.148).

Conclusion

Belongingness is an African philosophical redefinition of being. However, the fundamental problems of metaphysics are perennial problems which are often, that of conceptualization and analysis. Iroegbu, as we have tried to explore here, delved into one of such fundamental problems of philosophy, that is, the problem of being and tries to redefine it with the concept of belongingness. The being-question has been a perennial problem in and over the years, a series of attempt at understanding of this and coming to a point of agreement have been made by many philosophers. Right from the Ancient period of philosophy till the contemporary era, *what is being?*, as a perennial question, has gotten a substantive redefinition with the concept of belongingness in Panteleonine philosophy. Iroegbu, authoritatively, points that, in African Metaphysics, there is a substantive redefinition of being with the concept of belongingness. For him, belongingness is the African Metaphysics of *To Be*. A proper analytic definition of being has been a perennial problem in the discourse of being. It is a very crucial problem because it is basic and fundamental to all other problems in philosophy, as the problem of existence *per se*, the very subject matter of philosophy. This problem is, of course, an ontological one as it questions and verifies the essential meaning of being. For Iroegbu, metaphysics which studies this *being qua being* is the *Kpim of Philosophy*. According to Ukaga, G. U. (2007) writing on *Pantaleon Iroegbu: On the Nature and Significance of Time: A Critical Appraisal*, thus: “Iroegbu discovered the core of all philosophizing to be in the deepest discovery of being what epistemology searched in knowledge for instance is nothing but being... Iroegbu developed a new thesis that the *Kpim of Being* itself is Belongingness”.

By the foregoing, Iroegbu notes that *Belongingness* describes *Being* more deeply, more universally in its generality. In the sphere of metaphysics schools are multiple and with the pronouncements of existentialism and phenomenology, Iroegbu (2004) tries to marry both: ontically and ontologically. To him, "...it has an ontological nuance of defining whatever is or exists. It thus specifies that a thing is because it belongs, (p.30)." *Belongingness* can be variously conceived either as *participation* or *possession*. As *participation*, saying that, "I belong to Ekwulobia community" means that, "I participate in the membership of", or "I am part and parcel of Ekwulobia community". *Belongingness* conceived in this sense of participation gives the one that participates some special duty, rights and privileges over another who does not. On the other hand, *belongingness* viewed from the angle of *possession*, describes the properties or belongings that one has or possesses. "This car belongs to me" would connote that "it is mine" or "it is my property". However, our major concern here, nevertheless, is with *belongingness* understood in the ontological sense, that is, such that it describes being or a given reality. *Belongingness* defines the very being of a given reality. *Belongingness*, therefore, specifies the *beingness*, the *quidity*, i.e. saying that 'to be is to belong'. *Belongingness* defines a being to be.

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