

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368292472>

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TEMPELS' DYNAMIC METAPHYSICS AND ASOUZU'S COMPLEMENTARY LOGIC

Article · February 2023

CITATION

1

READS

67

2 authors:



Darty Darty

University of Uyo

21 PUBLICATIONS 15 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Aniekan Ekefre

University of Uyo

8 PUBLICATIONS 7 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TEMPELS' DYNAMIC METAPHYSICS AND ASOUZU'S
COMPLEMENTARY LOGIC**

By

***DARTY, Darty Emmanuel (PhD)**

Department of Philosophy
University of Uyo
Uyo – Nigeria.
dartydarty@uniuyo.edu.ng

And

EKEFRE, Aniekan Ubong (MA)

Department of Philosophy
University of Uyo
Uyo – Nigeria
aniekanekefre@uniuyo.edu.ng

Abstract

The dynamic conception of African metaphysics as proposed by Placide Tempels has been seen by many thinkers as an ontological framework that adequately captures the nature of reality in the African context. Tempels was a Belgian missionary who asserted that there is a rich reserve of philosophical resources in African culture using the Bantu tribe of Congo as his case in point. The historical significance Tempels' idea is that it had a legitimizing effect on African philosophy against scandalous claims made by Enlightenment philosophers like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel and so on who doubted the possibility of philosophical resources in African culture. This work attempted to look into the nature of the metaphysics that Tempels discovered in African culture and philosophy. Since logic is the tool of philosophy, this research used Innocent Asouzu's complementary logic in proving that the Tempelsian legacy is an inadequate model for the explanation of being in the African context. This is because it has a polarizing effect on the perception of being. This work argued that a complementary notion of being better captures the way reality presents itself in the African universe of discourse.

Keywords: African philosophy, Being, Complementary logic, Dynamism, Metaphysics, Vital force

Introduction

It is a legitimate question to ask whether Tempels ‘discovered’ or ‘invented’ his idea of African metaphysics. If it was a discovery, then the legitimacy of his efforts can be justified by the ethno-philosophy trend which is an orientation in African philosophy marked by an acceptance of the descriptive methodology as the appropriate method of extracting African philosophical materials from the cultural beliefs of the African people. This is why Tempels’ work is often seen to place him as one of the early pioneers of ethno-philosophy which sees African philosophy to be more particular and less universal. Particularity in this sense means being rooted firmly in African culture.

Apart from the descriptive approach to philosophy which finds support in ethno-philosophy, it is well known that philosophy can as well be prescriptive in approach. This involves moving beyond ‘what is’ in an attempt to have some understanding of what ‘ought to be’. In this sense if ‘what is’ are the facts, what ‘ought to be’ are values and the concern of the philosopher is an attempt to bring values to bear on the facts before him or her. This prescriptive approach finds support in the professional trend of African philosophy which emphasizes that philosophy and specifically, African philosophy ought to stand above in order to critically and creatively engage African culture. Professional African philosophers hold that the only way that ethno-philosophy can qualify as ‘philosophy’ is for her to critically analyze the raw materials gotten from culture as it is not enough to merely gather information on what African ancestors and traditional societies believe in and tag such information as ‘philosophy’. Without proper critical analysis being brought to bear on these raw materials of culture, professional philosophers see them to be non-philosophical. The fact that these two approaches to African philosophy (ethno-philosophy and professional philosophy) qualify as ‘philosophy’ points to the fact that African philosophy is both Universalist and particularist in nature. This can be traced to the symbiotic nature of the relationship between philosophy and culture.

Culture is a highly contested concept in respect of its definition. O’Hear defines it as “those aspects of human activity which are socially rather than genetically transmitted” (1). For African philosophers of the professional and Universalist persuasion, philosophy must be regarded as an independent arbiter of culture. Philosophy’s role is to help people to think about and assess culture and traditions – what culture takes for granted, what constitutes culture and even whether culture or way of life is worth preserving or not. Inspired by the commitment to

reason and proof, a number of philosophers saw their role as importantly one of judgment and critique – challenging the values and traditions of cultures and institutions, calling to question their claims of legitimacy, and casting doubt on normative principles within culture.

In opposition to the view that philosophy can transcend culture and by so doing evaluate her objectively, is the particularist position which holds that culture is the root and source of philosophy. Tempels belongs to this persuasion. Here philosophy is considered to be a product of culture as culture gives philosophers a language and values and sets up specific sorts of problems and questions that philosophers pursue. Culture influences the kind of material environment in which such questions are raised as well as economic production that permits the creation of goods and the opportunities for leisure in which philosophy is done. Culture seems to determine as well, what counts as philosophy since it influences not only the language in which philosophical questions are expressed and answered but what counts as a satisfactory philosophical answer. Thus, for an ethno-philosopher like Tempels, philosophy is clearly rooted in culture and there is a strong case for the claim that culture provides and imposes the discourse in which philosophical enquiry is pursued. This view is not just a peculiarity of African philosophy. With respect to Western or Greek philosophy for instance, Dewey has said that without Greek religion, Greek art, Greek civic life [all of which are aspects of Greek culture] Greek philosophy would have been impossible” (19). What this means is that even Plato and Aristotle, in their philosophies reflected the meaning of Greek culture and tradition.

This work holds that there is a symbiotic relationship between philosophy and culture. What this implies is that though the philosopher and the non-philosopher may inherit the same culture, the philosopher is not wholly bound by culture since he or she has an autonomous standing for the reflective criticism of his or her culture. This is the sense in which Russell sees philosophers as both effects and causes. For him, “philosophers are effects of their social circumstances and of the politics and of institutions of their time; causes, if they are fortunate of beliefs which mold the politics and institutions of later age” (7). What Russell means is that there is a reciprocal causation between culture and philosophy. The circumstances of men’s lives (culture) do much to determine their philosophy but conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances. This is why Tempels’ effort is that of discovery, not invention since he only aspired to document the account of being that he saw in Bantu culture. The point of relief is that his work was an effort at holding up African philosophy at a period in time when

“the idea of ‘African Philosophy’ was considered to be an oxymoron” (Eze, 4). Bhatt has said that “every system of thought (philosophy) is an outcome of felt needs of an age and a cultural milieu. Philosophical reflections do not originate in a cultural vacuum or void. To be meaningful and useful, they have to be rooted in culture-specific experiences. But this does not mean that they cannot have universal relevance or utility” (Bhatt, 221). Innocent Asouzu on his part, maintains that “just as philosophers are products of their environments, they are still reformers of those contexts from which they draw their inspirations” (Complementary Logic 278). This work will now look into the Tempelsian legacy.

Tempels and Dynamic Metaphysics

Tempels (1906-1977) whose fame mainly rests on his epoch-making work *Bantu Philosophy* is often regarded to have contributed immensely to an understanding of African ontology. Tempels was a Franciscan missionary from Belgium who lived in the colonial era among the Bantu people of Congo. The significance of Tempels’ work rests on the fact that he set out to answer the question of the existence and nature of African ontology during the colonial period - a period when African thought was considered to be pre-logical and incoherent. It may be a philosopher's game to argue that the Bantu constitute an insignificant subset of the totality of the African people and that it is a generalization to see ‘Bantu ontology’ for instance, to be synonymous with ‘African ontology’. But since Tempels uses the Bantu as a case in point of what is typically African, such arguments leave his idea unmolested since inductive generalization is still regarded as a legitimate mode of inference. The adjective ‘Bantu’ has since the time of Tempels been considered by many, explicitly or implicitly, as a synecdoche for ‘African’. So whenever this work mentions Bantu ontology or metaphysics, it is definitely talking about African ontology or metaphysics. This work shall also use the words ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’ interchangeably even though, in actual fact, ontology is a branch of metaphysics. It is to be noted, however, that metaphysics is classically divided into two; general and special. General metaphysics deals with ontology or being qua being; while special metaphysics deals with theodicy and cosmology, according to Pantaleon Iroegbu (*Metaphysics* 29). This work will now look deeper into the meaning of metaphysics and subsequently see what Tempels means when he labels Bantu and by extension African metaphysics as ‘dynamic’.

Metaphysics is the traditional branch of philosophy that enquires into the nature of existence and reality. In other words, since reality is constituted of multifarious beings in their

various modes of manifestation, metaphysics tries to capture these realities, not in the fragmentary nature that they present themselves; but with the aim of looking for what is universally common to all things in reality. Tempels acknowledges this unifying nature of metaphysics when he writes that “metaphysics studies this reality existing in everything and in every being in the universe. It is in virtue of this reality that all beings have something in common, so that the definition of reality may be applied to all existent forms of being” (*Bantu Philosophy* 49). What this means is that for Tempels, the object of metaphysical knowledge embraces everything that can be considered to be real. It is the ability of metaphysics to probe beyond the fragmented conception of the world in search for an underlying and unifying reality that makes Aristotle for instance, to see metaphysics as the highest of all sciences. Aristotle brands all other sciences as ‘ancillary’ sciences, since all they provide us with is nothing more than fragmented, representations of reality. He reasoned that since metaphysics transcends this level, and studies the first causes or highest principles, then it must be superior to all other sciences (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Book A, 2). Metaphysics is therefore the science which investigates the ultimate ground of absolutely everything, proposing a final answer to the total problem. Metaphysics seeks to get acquainted first, with the diverse modes of being and then focuses on its most abstract and universal aspect. This is why it can be safely stated that metaphysics studies the diverse categories of beings and their attributes in order to establish a common frontier towards their conceptualization as being. With the understanding of what metaphysics means, this work will now look into ‘dynamic metaphysics’ and see what Tempels means when he uses it to describe the Bantu conception of reality.

Tempels holds that an ontology based on the ‘vital force’ is the very soul of the culture of the Bantu in particular, and Africans in general. He places the Western conception of being over and above the African conception of being when he characterizes the former as being static and the latter, as dynamic, respectively. Tempels is of the opinion that:

We from the Western society can conceive the transcendental notion of being by separating it from its attribute, force but the Bantu cannot. Force in his thought is a necessary attribute of being and the concept of force is inseparable from the definition of being. There is no idea among the Bantu of being divorced from the idea of force. Without the element ‘force’ being cannot be conceived. We hold a static conception of being, they a dynamic one. (*Bantu Philosophy*, 50)

Tempels holds that “the Bantu speak, act and live as if for them beings were forces” (*Bantu Philosophy*, 51). Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality. Force is more than a necessary attribute of beings. Force is the nature of being, force is being and being is force. Looking at the African notion of being from a clearly ethnocentric point of view, Tempels asserts that when Westerners think in terms of the concept ‘being’, Africans use the concept ‘force’. Where they (Westerners) see concrete beings, Africans see concrete forces. When Westerners say that beings are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that forces differ in their essence or nature. The Bantu and by extension Africans hold that there is the divine force, celestial or terrestrial forces, human forces, animal forces, vegetable and even material or mineral forces. The point is that for Tempels, while Western culture and philosophy sees being as ‘that which is’, the Bantu definition of being is ‘that which is force’ (Tempels *Bantu Philosophy* 52). Thus since being is force the category ‘force’ necessarily entails all beings for the African.

Tempels also holds that all force can be strengthened or enfeebled. In other words being can become stronger or weaker. He holds that when in Western culture, a man is said to grow it means that such a person has developed, acquired knowledge, exercised his intelligence and will and in so doing increases them. Western culture or intellectual history does not hold that by these acquisitions and by his development such a man has become more ‘manly’, at least not in the sense that his human nature no longer remains what it was. In Western ontology, one either has human nature or one does not have it. It is not something to be increased or diminished. This is the character of a static notion of being. Tempels holds that Bantu ontology is radically opposed to such an idea of being and this is where its dynamic nature becomes very evident. For Tempels, when a Bantu says ‘I am becoming stronger’ the Bantu is thinking of something quite different from what someone in line with Western ontology means when he says that his or her powers are increasing. The dynamic notion of being makes it possible that one force that is greater than another can paralyze it, diminish it, or even cause its operation totally to cease. What cannot be ceased however is the very existence of force. The Bantu believe that this existence comes from God and cannot be taken from a creature by any created force (*Bantu Philosophy* 57).

The African for Tempels, believes in the interaction of forces that is, one being influencing another. He holds that in a typical Western static ontology as exemplified in Scholastic philosophy, “a child for instance is from birth considered a new being, a complete

human being. It has the fullness of human nature and its human existence and as such is independent of that of its progenitors” (*Bantu Philosophy* 58). Tempels states in regards to Western static ontology that “the human nature of a child does not remain in permanent causal relationship with that of its parents. This concept of separate beings which find themselves side by side, entirely independent from one another, is foreign to Bantu thought” (*Bantu Philosophy* 58). What this means is that in African dynamic ontology, the child, even the adult remains always, a force in causal dependence and ontological subordination to forces which continue to exercise influences over him or her. This implies that there is also the doctrine of the hierarchy of forces based on primogeniture. Above all force is God which gives existence, power of survival and increase to other forces. After the creator are the first fathers of men, the founders of the clans. These ones provide the link in dynamism between the dead and the living. They are high in hierarchy, participating in divine force. After these ones come the dead of the tribe before man who lives on land to exercise sovereign vital force on animals and plants. Tempels believes that for the Bantu, the created universe is centered on man. He holds that for the Bantu, man whether living or deceased can directly reinforce or diminish the influence of another man. The vital human force can directly influence inferior force-beings like animals, vegetable or mineral in their being itself. The central point for Tempels is that while the a static Western ontology makes it possible for one to draw a distinction between a substance and its attributes, what characterizes a dynamic African ontology is that being cannot be separated from its attribute which is force. This is the idea behind the statement that for the African, being is force. Having presented Tempels’ idea of dynamic metaphysics, this work intends to appraise the idea in the next section using the tool of Asouzu’s complementary logic.

An Appraisal of Tempels’ Dynamic Metaphysics from the Perspective of Asouzu’s Complementary Logic

Logic as the tool of philosophy has been variously defined. Patrick Hurley defines it as “an organized body of knowledge or science that evaluates arguments” (1). Traditionally, there is a distinction between formal and informal logic; formal logic deals with the structure of reasoning as what determines the validity of arguments, while informal logic is more concerned with the identification of fallacies that arise in the use of natural language. Peter King and Stewart Shapiro assert that “Aristotle was the first thinker to devise a logical system” (496). The model of logic developed by Aristotle was considered to be perfect, and even Immanuel Kant remarked that logic as it came from the hands of Aristotle was a “closed and completed body of

doctrine”(17). Kant was later proved wrong with the development of alternative systems of logic that go beyond the bivalent tradition like the various many-valued systems of logic. Even within the bivalent tradition, propositional and predicate logics overstepped the boundaries of Aristotelian logic, thereby rendering its absolutistic conception untenable. With these developments, thinkers like Jan Lukasiewicz, Alonzo Church, Nicholas Rescher, Chris Ijiomah, Jonathan Chimakonam, Udo Etuk and so on have supported the idea that logic is relative, not absolutist in nature. The idea that logic is relative is not antithetical to its universality. Universality is itself a quality of systems of logic which define the scope or reach of their usefulness. Different systems of logic enjoy varying degrees of universality, but the bivalent system inaugurated by Aristotle’s syllogism and sustained by modern mathematical logic is the most universal system. However, this bivalent system is not absolute as it has been seen to be inadequate in specific contexts such as future contingency, quantum reasoning and African conception of reality (Darty and John 76). The complementary conception of logic of Innocent Asouzu is one of such attempts at elucidating an alternative logic that is grounded on African conception of reality though with a universalizeable dimension.

For Asouzu, most contentions in Western philosophy revolve around the polarizing conception of being inaugurated by Aristotle whose metaphysics is that of division between substance and accidents. The bifurcation and polarity becomes clear in the sense that while the substance does not need the accidents to subsist, the accidents need the substance on which they inhere. Since the idea of being is essential to the understanding of reality and relationship to the world, an idea of being which views some part of being as inessential would definitely fail to reach the ideal of a harmonized mutual relationship. This is why Asouzu holds that from the African perception of being, there is a way to relate the substance and accidents, in such a manner that they are mutually harmonized. ‘Ibuanyidanda’ philosophy which is another name for Asouzu’s philosophy of complementary reflection or complementarity is intended to help present reality in a complementary mutually harmonized way and is traceable to the anonymous traditional African philosophers. This is why Asouzu states that “complementarism is a philosophy that seeks to consider things in the significance of their singularity and not in the exclusiveness of their otherness in view of the joy that gives completion to all missing links of reality” (Asouzu, *The Method* 39).

The idea of 'Ibuanidanda' owes its origin to the traditional teachings of Igbo philosophers. The Igbo ethnic group exists in the Eastern part of Nigeria in West Africa. 'Danda' is simply the Igbo word for ants – which by Asouzu's rendering, possess the ability in mutual interdependence, to carry loads that are bigger and heavier than them. In other words, ants can surmount almost impossible obstacles through mutual dependence on each other. Drawing insight from this phenomenon, traditional Igbo philosophers state that 'Ibu anyi danda' (No task is insurmountable for the ant). It is this idea of mutual dependence as a panacea for progress that is negated in Aristotle's classical notion of being as well as the idea of Bantu ontology presented by Tempels. This idea is negated in Aristotle's idea of being because for Aristotle the substance is of significance while the accidents are the non-essential aspects of being. This creates a rift in the sense that an aspect of being (the substance) is the thing while another aspect of being (its attributes) is considered to be inessential to being. Such a notion of being is bifurcatory and polarizing as there is no essentially complementary relationship between the substance and its attributes. Tempels' presentation of Bantu ontology was built on the Aristotelian theory. Tempels also stated that being has substance and attributes. But erroneously claimed that only persons from the West can correctly perceive and distinguish the substance of being from its attribute, force. Tempels held that the Bantu and by extension Africans can only perceive the attributes of being which is force and are not sophisticated enough to perceive being as substance. Tempels' categorization of African ontology as dynamic and Western ontology as static also does not give room for a complementary understanding of these presentations of being. For instance, following his notion of African ontology, it is practically impossible for someone from the West to hold a dynamic conception of being; just as he considers it impossible for the Bantu or Africans generally to have a static idea of being. These postulations can be seen for instance, when Tempels asserts that "the West, having adopted the terminology of Greek philosophy has defined reality common to all beings. Its metaphysics has most generally been based upon a fundamentally static conception of being. Herein is to be seen the fundamental difference between Western thought and that of the Bantu and other primitive people" (*Bantu Philosophy* 50). Contrary to this, in 'Ibuanidanda' philosophy, Asouzu sees being as that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality. The static/dynamic categorizations of being that Tempels expounds for the West and African notions of ontology respectively, share

the same attribute with the polarizing conception of being inaugurated by Aristotle whose notion of substance and accidents presents reality in a mutually exclusive dimension.

Asouzu in elucidating his notion of complementary logic holds that:

The very mechanisms and phenomena constraining our perception and judgment of the world equally impact the way we reason and relate to the laws guiding correct reasoning. This is why it is important to address all matters of logic and logical reasoning bearing in mind these constraints. This fact can be seen more clearly in the way our conjunctive and disjunctive faculties relate with each other. We sense the tension to which our consciousness is subjected to very intensively in this relationship. Whereas our conjunctive faculty helps us to be more accommodating, our disjunctive reasoning tends to resist the same; and thus contributes in restricting the way we relate to the world. Whereas our conjunctive faculty impels us to reach out to the world in the mode of ‘not only this but also that thing’; our disjunctive faculty pegs or restricts us to ‘either this or that thing’. (Complementary Logic 273-274)

Bringing Tempels’ Bantu ontology into the picture as related to the way Tempels presents his ‘we’ of Western ontology against the ‘them’ of Bantu or African ontology, one can clearly discern that Tempels must be working with an exclusively disjunctive framework. Asouzu observed that by following the dictates of our disjunctive faculty we tend to see the world in a disjointed mode where only one of two given alternatives is admissible. As humans we encounter this within contexts where in the face of alternatives, stakeholders are constrained to make radical choices, but such that have the capacity to negate all other known alternatives. This is why it becomes evident that “relating to the world in this arbitrary disjunctive mode can make stakeholders oversensitive concerning differences and otherness. They can thereby mistake differences for absolute differences and focus more on things that divide without bothering much to have contraries duly harmonized” (Asouzu Complementary Logic 275).

Tempels says that “we [those in line with Western culture and philosophy] can conceive the transcendental notion of being by separating it from its attribute force, but the Bantu [by extension, Africans] cannot” (*Bantu Philosophy* 50). Implicitly contained in Tempels’ idea is his belief that it is only persons from the West that can transcend the dynamism of world immanent expressions of being and grasp reality in its transcendental and essential dimension. That is to say that for Tempels, Africans cannot move beyond the level of a world-immanent ontology. In

fact, Tempels holds that among the Africans, there is no idea of being separated from 'vital force'. The minimal content of this assertion, is that the African conception of reality is so uncritical that it can hardly grasp being in the abstractness of its transcendent nature. This is what Asouzu calls the 'Tempelsian damage' and summarizes it into two points, namely;

(1) Due to a wrong situation analysis, Tempels sets up a false thesis and goes about investigating and proving it. The thesis is rooted in the statement: "We [the West] can conceive the transcendental notion of 'being' by separating it from its attribute, 'Force', but the Bantu cannot".

(2) Tempels in his analysis of the Bantu ontology was faced with the general problem of the ambivalent tension common to human existential experience of reality. He could hardly address this issue adequately and grossly misunderstood this phenomenon as it applies to the Bantu. It was on this wrong situation analysis that he built his thesis. (Asouzu, *Ibuaru* 74-75).

A deeper look at the dynamic African metaphysics of Tempels reveals that he could not escape the influence of the bifurcating, polarizing and elitist Aristotelian metaphysics. It is when Tempels draws the static-dynamic divide between Western and African conception of reality that his ethnocentric bias begins to emerge clearly. Writing about the interaction of beings in Bantu ontology, Tempels states that "the interaction of beings has been denoted by the word 'magic'. If it is desired to keep the term, it must be modified so that it is understood in conformity with Bantu thought" (*Bantu Philosophy* 59). This is why for Asouzu, Tempels' vital force theory leaves the Bantu with an ontology that has nothing elevating except magic and superstition. This is why Asouzu notes that "those who are under the spell of Tempels often end up dividing the world between a Western ontology that is rational and an African ontology that is occult, fetish and semi-rational" (*Ibuaru* 76).

Commenting on the implications of approaching African ontology with a polarizing mindset, Asouzu is of the opinion that "it is a mindset that uses - the idea of 'vital force' in its most debasing manner as to capture a special type of rationality that is peculiar to the Bantu: a rationality that in its inherent world immanent pre-determinism, is so uncritical that it can hardly grasp being in the abstractness of its transcendent otherness" (*Ibuaru* 77). Tempels' ethnocentric commitment and his static-dynamic distinction between Western and African ontology bears vestiges of Aristotelian ethnocentric bias. Tempels prescribes a form of thorough going world immanent pre-determinism as a positive dogma of African existential experience. The static-

dynamic ontological divide and the parallel and mutually exclusive manner which Tempels presents them, leaves them as absolute metaphysical extremes without any form of mediation whatsoever. This is one of the most unfortunate aspects of Tempels' dynamic metaphysics. Commenting on this, Asouzu states unequivocally that “all attempts to grasp reality in a static-dynamic bifurcating bracket outside the legitimacy provided by the mutual complementary interrelatedness of all missing links, will always present difficulties and worst still end up distorting our picture of reality. If there is any form of dynamic ontology, this must be defined within a complementary bracket bearing in mind the transcendent future referential dimension of human consciousness” (Asouzu, *Ibuaru* 178).

Over the years, some African scholars have stuck with idea that Tempels has been able to give a uniquely African ontology. Martin Nkemnkia is one of such thinkers who speak in glowing terms of Tempels' Bantu philosophy. He holds the opinion that Tempels' work gives an accurate insight to African ontology and summarizes ontologically, the view of both the traditional and modern African thinkers that the pivotal center of Bantu behaviour lies on one value only: vital force which is considered as being in Bantu thought (Nkemnkia 167). Asouzu has noted that it is really unfortunate that Tempels' compromised notions of 'vital force' and 'dynamism' have found their ways into philosophical vocabulary, as to capture the way all Africans see the world. This is precisely what is being paraded in many quarters today as the very essence of African ontology and experience of reality. It is in this sense that this work sees the Tempelsian damage as constituting a heavy burden on African philosophy and conception of reality. Pauline Hountondji shares this opinion when he writes that “Bantu philosophy is shown to be a myth. To destroy this myth and clear the ground for genuine theoretical discourse are the tasks now awaiting the African philosopher” (Hountondji, *African Philosophy* 26). Apart from this Tempel's idea has a heavy leaning towards an ethnocentric commitment. For instance, in a section of *Bantu Philosophy* titled ‘What point of view should the colonizer adopt in the face of Bantu philosophy?’ Tempels asserts that:

It would be high treason on the part of the colonizer to free primitive races from what is of value, which constitutes a kernel of truth, in their traditional thought, their philosophy of life; an integral part of the very essence of their being. We [colonialists] have the heavy responsibility of examining, assessing and judging this [Bantu] philosophy and of not failing to discover that kernel of truth which

must be found in so complete and universal a system, constituting the common possession of a host of primitive and semi-primitive peoples. (*Bantu Philosophy* 174)

It can be discerned from the above that empathic understanding of Bantu ontology for instance was intended to aid the colonialists in their colonialism. This also makes it clear that Tempels could possibly have preferred indirect rule or the policy of association as against the policy of assimilation. This is why a thinker like Diagne maintains that Tempels desire that colonialists understood Bantu philosophy had the additional goal of saving the colonial order from crumbling (Diagne 10). It is in this sense that Tempels' effort shares in the criticism often leveled against ethno-philosophy, namely: that rather than working dogmatically in favour of African culture and people, ethno-philosophy and the efforts of Tempels in particular were on the side of imperialism. This is why for Owolabi, it should be denounced as an attempt to disarm and demobilize the process of critical reflection in Africa (Owolabi 62).

At first glance, Tempels' work appears to be a liberal undertaking designed to either refine or contradict the theories of previous ethnologists, especially Lucien Levy-Bruhl who contended that there are two types of minds in the world: a logical mind and a pre-logical mind, the former ascribed to Western societies and the latter to primitive non-Western societies. Tempels intended to prove that the Bantu were not completely primitive. He wanted to show that they at least had a coherent and logical system of thought which, although inferior to the Europeans', was somehow philosophical. It is no wonder, then, that *Bantu Philosophy* was hailed by a number of European liberals, some of them serious philosophers, and it became the background textbook of many subsequent African thinkers. Yet, the book was not intended for Africans, but for European colonialists. Tempels asserts that a better understanding of the realm of Bantu thought is just as indispensable for all who are called upon to live among native people. he writes of his Bantu ontology that "it therefore concerns all colonials, especially those whose duty is to hold administrative or judicial office among African people; all those who are concerning themselves with a felicitous development of tribal law; in short it concerns all who wish to civilize, educate and raise the Bantu" (Tempels *Bantu Philosophy* 23-24). The negative slant of this idea is that Tempels' investigation into Bantu philosophy was intended to aid colonialism and colonialism just like slave trade, belong to the inglorious aspects of Africa's past. In the opinion of Aliko Songolo, the title and content of Tempels' last chapter 'Bantu

Philosophy and our Mission to Civilize' clearly exposes the ethnocentric attitude which underlies Tempels' conception of Bantu ontology. For Songolo,

Tempels holds that the Bantu had a special place for the White man in their ontology in the sense that the technological skill of the White man impressed the Bantu. The White man seemed to be the master of great natural forces. It had, therefore, to be admitted that the White man was an elder, a superior human force, surpassing the vital force of all Africans. In other words, the White man was somewhere between the Creator and all other forces. There is therefore no possibility of dialogue between Blacks and Whites because, in Tempels' view, the Africans have no words with which to express their thought. For Tempels, the Bantu are incapable of presenting a philosophical treatise with an adequate vocabulary. It is we [Westerners] who must develop it systematically. It is we [Westerners] who can tell them in a precise manner, what their innermost conception of being is. (Songolo 94)

It is quite true that our ontologies or what we hold as our conception of reality guides and directs our general outlook to life whether we are aware of it or not. Asouzu notes that "these are those ontologies that guide and direct our actions often unintentionally and which we have imbibed through education, socialization and indoctrination" (*Ibuanyidanda* 130). This means that one can come to imbibe an extremely bifurcating mindset that gives the tendency to see oneself as being superior to other persons that do not possess the same characteristics that one possesses. These characteristics could be age, race, sex, economic status, class, religion and so on. When this is brought to bear on Tempels' thought, the intrusion of an ethnocentric commitment can be seen in his assessment of the nature of African ontology. Here Tempels' approach is plagued with an ethnocentric commitment and Asouzu has observed that "the logic of geographical categorization has an inherent dimension of exclusivist ethnocentric character" (Complementary Logic 227).

In response to such a demeaning African ontology as the one Tempels offers and in fact, to all Western impositions that appear to look down on anything African, we have in recent times witnessed the rise of Afrocentrism which tries to show the superiority of whatever is uniquely African. But in trying to show the superiority of whatever that is African, there is the danger of the tendency of falling into the same Aristotelian and Tempelsian fallacy of ethnocentric bias. In instances such as this, the tendency to misidentify the nature of this ethnocentric tension

heightens and gives the parties involved parallel and absolute dimensions of reality only. Tempels' strict categorizations of Western and African ontologies as static and dynamic respectively for instance, does not in any sense consider the harmony of absolutes and thereby creates a vacuum that hinders a comprehensive understanding of reality. This vacuum can be seen from the perspective that he completely rules out the possibility of Western ontology having some dynamic character as well as the possibility of Bantu ontology being static. Tempels does not consider the possibility that Bantu ontology might be static in its dynamism and vice-versa. This vacuum can be filled by adopting the complementary *Ibanyidanda* ontology articulated around the idea of complementary reflection as a systematic methodological approach to reality ensuing from a refined type of complementary understanding of the world, as an aspect of authentic traditional philosophical heritage, but one, which has a universal appeal (Asouzu, *Ibanyidanda* 179).

Since Tempels' compromised notions of 'vital force' and 'dynamism' imposes on the Bantu, a sort of rationality that is incapable of abstract, critical conception of being as being, this work sees in complementarity an ontology that goes beyond ethnocentric reductions and impositions to give a harmonizing ontology that adequately explains the nature reality. This is because rather than seeing the static and dynamic representations of being as phenomena that are tied to geographic boundaries, this work in line with the philosophy of complementarity holds that it is possible for the Bantu to have a static conception of being. What this means is that the categorizations of Tempels do not hold in a strict sense. In the light of this ontology, Asouzu explains that "traditional African existential experience with its predominantly world immanent pre-determinism, did not lack the dimension of transcendence" (*Ibuaru*, 83). Tempels did not assert this. The fact is that this dimension of transcendence, was only enshrouded in ambivalence and the world immanent dimension, had the upper hand and in Tempels' inability to understand this ambivalent tension, he was led to describing African conception of being as vital force in dynamism. Rather than see African metaphysics as dynamic in the Tempelsian sense of mutual exclusivity from the transcendent conception of being, this work sees it as dynamic in a transcendent and complementary way.

A complementary ontology bridges the divide between substance and accidents by articulating an ontology that does not polarize the idea of being. Though 'force is being and being is force' does not look like a form of polarization, the static and dynamic divide is a

polarization along ethnocentric lines. Complementarity offers an ontological framework that harmonizes the fragmented conception of being that the Tempelsian vital force in dynamism offers. Asouzu holds that "even if being expresses itself spatio-temporarily in a fragmentary manner, as we experience in our diverse localities, reality can only be articulated and grasped fully and authentically in a complementary, whole, unified, comprehensive way (Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda* 268). In this regard, the Tempelsian ontological analysis which leaves Western and African ontologies as mutually exclusive categories cannot give a holistic understanding of being. The dynamic-static Tempelsian ontological divide which is similar to the substance-accidents ontological divide of Aristotle both restrict aspects of being to boundaries that are presented as if they cannot be overstepped. Such a perception and presentation of being for Asouzu bears vestiges of an ethnocentric commitment (*Ibuaru* 59). This mode of viewing reality distorts the African conception of being since the Bantu ontology is often seen as a synecdoche for African ontology. Tempels' presentation of the Bantu notion of being presents the two sides of the coin of reality as mutually exclusive categories without showing their mutual interrelatedness. The idea that everything that exists serves a missing link of reality which is Asouzu's principle of integration is very profound. Concretely applied to the Tempelsian static-dynamic ontological divide, this work sees both the static and dynamic categories not as mutually exclusive metaphysical extremes of being, belonging to different geographical regions as Tempels does, but as necessary aspects of being that belong together and complement each other in giving being its complete meaning.

Conclusion

If one considers the fact that metaphysics is itself a unifying science that seeks to unite our fragmented conception of reality, 'dynamic metaphysics' in the sense and context that Tempels uses it can hardly give us a true and complete picture of reality. This is seen when Tempels asserts that:

We [the West] can conceive the transcendental notion of 'being' by separating it from its attribute 'force' but the Bantu cannot. Force in his [Bantu] thought is a necessary element in being, and the concept 'force' is inseparable from the definition of 'being'. There is no idea among the Bantu of 'being' divorced from the idea of 'force'. Without the element of force being cannot be conceived. We [the West] hold a static conception of being, they [the Bantu] a dynamic one. (50-51)

Apart from the fact that Tempels dynamic metaphysics tends to look down on African conception of being as one not sophisticated enough to perceive reality in its transcendental mode, a more serious problem arises when Tempels conceives of African and Western ontologies as mutually exclusive perceptions and presentations of being. This work argues that viewing these ontologies in a mutually disjunctive manner as Tempels does, does not show that they are different but necessarily complementary dimensions of being. This is the weakness of Tempels' dynamic metaphysics as well as the strength of the complementary conception of being as put forward by Asouzu. The complementary conception of being takes into account the comprehensive nature of reality, recognizing the fact that both the static and dynamic aspects of being are complementary. In other words, it cannot be ruled out completely that the Bantu cannot perceive being as static and that persons in the West do not perceive being from their attribute, force. While Tempels holds that African ontology cannot discriminate between the substance (being) and its attribute (force); the complementary ontology of Asouzu holds that the notion of being and force are complementary. In line with conjunctive logical reasoning which provides human consciousness with the means to steer a more liberal, mediating and more accommodating course, complementary African ontology makes room for the coexistence of opposites as complementary missing links or dimensions of reality. If it is true that the West hold a radically different notion of being from the Bantu, then cross-cultural discussion, debate or even the sort of research that Tempels carried out would have been impossible. The possibility of cross-cultural or intercultural research lends credence to position that the static/dynamic perception of being is complementary, not strictly divided along geographic lines as Tempels suggested.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, Translated by W. D. Ross. Retrieved from www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu on December 5, 2021.
- Asouzu, Innocent. "Complementary Logic". *Logic and African Philosophy: Seminal Essays on African Systems of Thought*, Edited by Jonathan Chimakonam, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2020. Pp. 273-295.
- Asouzu, Innocent. *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*. Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2007.
- Asouzu, Innocent. *Ibuaru: The Heavy Burden of Philosophy beyond African Philosophy*. Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2007.
- Asouzu, Innocent. *Ikwa Ogwe: Essential Readings of Complementary Reflection*. Calabar: Saesprint Publishers, 2007.
- Asouzu, Innocent. *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2004.
- Bhatt, Sanjiv. "Philosophy, Culture and Human Experience". *Philosophy Emerging from Culture*. Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2013.
- Darty, Darty Emmanuel and Elijah O. John. "Culture, Values and Nigeria's Political Development: Engaging Affective Logic as a Methodological Model in a Post-Truth Era". *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 1 December, 2019. Pp. 67-86.
- Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.
- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa*. Translated by Jonathan Adjemian. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2016.
- Eze, Emmanuel. *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997.
- Hountondji, Pauline. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Translated by Henri Evans. London: Hutchinson, 1983.
- Hurley, Patrick. *A Concise Introduction to Logic*. Belmont: Thomson and Wadsworth, 2008.
- Iroegbu, Panteleon. *Metaphysics: The 'Kpim' of Philosophy*. Owerri: International University Press Ltd., 1995.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan, 1964.

King, Peter and Stewart Shapiro. "The History of Logic". *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. Pp. 496-500.

Nkemnkia, Martin. *African Vitalogy: A Step Forward in Africa Thinking*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1999.

O'Hear, Anthony. "Culture" *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1998.

Owolabi, Kolawole "Orientations in African Philosophy: a Critical Survey". *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol XXVI No. 1, 1999. Pp. 59-70.

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945.

Songolo, Aliko. "Muntu Reconsidered: From Tempels and Kagame to Janheinz Jahn". *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1981. Pp. 92-100.

Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africane, 1959.

***How to cite:**

Darty, Darty Emmanuel and Aniekan Ubong Ekefre "A Comparative Analysis of Tempels' Dynamic Metaphysics and Asouzu's Complementary Logic" *University of Uyo Journal of Humanities* UUIJH Vol. 26 No. 1. 2022. Pp. 117-135.