

THE CONTROVERSY WITH THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN WESTERN AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Valentine Ehichioya Obinyan, Ph.D

Faculty of Art, Department of philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The controversy around the concept of man in western and African analysis has lingered on for decades. Some African philosophers have critically argued that the communalistic analysis of man in African philosophy is strongly opposed to the individualistic emphasis of western scholars. To a large extent, these two arguments are indication of what may have influenced all of theories and concepts as well as attitude to life in the scope of philosophy and elsewhere. From an integrationist echelon, this work seeks to reconcile these tenacious polar philosophical dogmas. To ensue this, the researcher bears in mind certain fundamental but problematic questions such as; 'who is man? Are there different conceptual analysis in every society?' Has the concept of man really changed in our time? With the hermeneutics and critical analysis method, the researcher comparatively examines the concept of man in Thomas Aquinas and Edmund Mounier representing Western perspective and Chukwudumbi Okolo and Nkafu Nkemkia representing African conceptual scheme. He argues that both Western and African concepts of man are two truth of one reality and concludes with the affirmation that for a fuller understanding, we must solemnize both angles for an approach and encompassing knowledge of man's nature.

KEYWORDS: Western, African, Society, Philosophy, Concept, Man

INTRODUCTION

The above indication does not in any way concludes that this concept 'being-with', is restricted to African philosophy or essentially predominant to the Africans as this will not be scholarly since it is also found in the philosophy of some Western scholars like; Alfred North Whitehead, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber e.t.c. But what are the fundamental qualities of the concept of man as a 'being-with' in Esan ontology and how this concept is uniquely different from the Western concepts or analysis is one of the major aims of this study. Let us first of all impugn critically into Western philosophy in an attempt to be in touch with the concept, attempt a comparative analysis so as to substantiate or show the strength of our initial conclusion namely; that the African dimension -of the concept 'being-with' is the vitality. To this end therefore, we shall critically examine man as a 'being-with' in Western Philosophy and African philosophy, but as we do this, we must bear in mind that the philosophical enterprise began among the Greeks with the quest to decode the nature of things as it was in Egypt. This quest was quite encompassing that philosophers of the first philosophical era devoted all their efforts to this course. Every quest presupposes a discovery hidden somewhere be revealed. But this was not the case with the ancient philosophers' as the nature of

things continued to elude them. Thus, from Thales to the Sophists, we have a long tradition of philosophy with only one preoccupation; the unveiling of the elusive nature of things. In view of this, finding the contents of the concept of man as a 'being-with' in early Western Philosophy therefore, will not be an easy task altogether. But let us examine the concept man as it necessarily forms the foundation for the concept of man as a 'being-with' in later parts of Western philosophy.

Presupposing epistemologically that the analysis of the human person in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle does not fall short of the concept of man as a 'being-with' as it defines him first as an ethical or epistemological tool and end and in individualistic terms with unlimited autonomy and cut off from communal links. It also refute the fact of immortality of the soul, as major arguments in this period and later, argued for the materiality and distinctiveness of the composite elements of man. Even though the universe is seen as a reflection of the human person, the fundamentality of a man-universe relationship falls short of emphasis. But it established the foundation for the ontological definition of man as a person that is; an individual, unique, unrepeatable and unchangeable reality. Let us examine the following to grasp this content.

1.1 Man in Thomas Aquinas and Edmund Mounier.

Thomas Aquinas' (1984) analogy of the human person, speaks a great influence from Boethius and Aristotle. In his; 'Summa Theologiae', he posits that the human person is a being made up of body and soul. Thomas Aquinas maintains like Aristotle that both the body and the soul complement each other, that they are connected. He in fact, believes that the soul is the substantial form of the living body that is to say that both of them are inseparable. Aquinas maintains in the 'Summa Theologiae' that "a human being is a human body, namely, a rational, sensitive, living body, and that a human being consists of a soul and a body"¹. But these two claims are apparently incompatible according to the latter claim the body is an integral part of the whole human being consisting of body and soul. But then the whole human being cannot be this body, for no integral part can be the same as the whole of which it is only a part.

Furthermore, if the human soul is the substantial form of the human body, then, since what a substantial form informs is the Aristotelian prime matter, according to Aquinas, "it seems that the human body has to be prime matter"². However, the human body cannot be prime matter, since

prime matter in itself cannot exist in actuality, whereas the human body obviously does exist in actuality. To be sure, at this point one might easily retort that the human body does exist in actuality precisely because it is actually informed by the soul. So the human body is prime matter "actually informed by the soul."³ However, this quick riposte will not do. For if one is to identify the human body with the matter that the soul informs in the context of the claim that a human being is composed of body and soul, then one would also have to admit that the human body in this composition is that component which persists through a substantial change, such as death, since prime matter in the composition of a material substance is precisely that part which is the permanent subject of a substantial change, when it loses one substantial form and takes on another. But the human body does not persist through death, for when it ceases to be informed by the soul it ceases to be, since the dead body of the human being is not a human body, except equivocally, according to Aquinas. So the human body cannot be prime matter, which is the immediate and persistent subject of the substantial form of the body.

On the other hand, given Aquinas's theory of the unity of substantial forms, it seems that it cannot be anything else either. For according to this theory, a substantial form cannot have anything else as its subject but prime matter, since otherwise it would have to inform something that would already exist in actuality. But this is impossible, for that which exists in actuality already has its own substantial form, so it cannot take on any other form as its substantial form. In fact, Aquinas's doctrine of the unity of substantial forms involves even further strange consequences in this regard. For according to this doctrine, the form on account of which a man is a body, his corporeity, is the same as that on account of which he is an animal, his humanity, and this, in turn, is the same as that on account of which he is a human, his humanity. But Aquinas also argues that a man's humanity or quiddity is what he calls the "form of the whole"⁴. (forma totius), as opposed to the 'form of the part' (forma partis), which he identifies as the soul, and that the form of the whole differs from the form of the part because the form of the whole contains both matter and form. So the form of the whole, the quiddity of man, contains the soul as its part, so it obviously cannot be the same as the soul.

But if it is not the same as the soul, and yet it is a form of the human being and it is clearly not an accidental form, then it seems that we have at least two substantial forms here, one of which is a part of the other, and which, besides the form of the part, also contains matter. At this point, perhaps, one's confusion has reached its peak, so it is about time one set about clarifying the basic concepts involved in these considerations. The inherent distinguishing characteristic of man is his abilities of thinking, feeling and acting; these forms the basis for Aristotle's position that "man is a composite of body and soul"⁵. The question of what causes this distinguishing characteristic of humanity and how fixed human nature is has important implications. For Aristotle, (1870) the intellect is another distinguishing characteristic of the soul of the human person and because the intellect is neither with an external sense organ nor limited in scope of

its object or even inclined to take on qualities of its objects, it seems unreasonable that it be mixed with body.

One great contribution, to the analysis of the human person in the medieval period was that of St. Thomas Aquinas. In line with Boethius, Aquinas outlined the absolute constituents of the human person that is, the separate autonomous aspect that makes him an incommunicable agent, entirely distinct from all others, in a word, 'an absolute'. On another angle, further than Boethius Aquinas includes the relational aspects of the person's constitution. This relational is the persons necessary condition and interaction with other persons in friendship and in community in view of an assurance of the common good⁶ Aquinas defines the human person as follows: 'Persona est subsistens distinctum in natura rationali'. Person is a distinct subsistent in a rational nature'⁷. Following from Boethius definition of the human person, Aquinas tend to present a definition that will be a corrective 'of Boethius. But observing analytically the 'individual substance' in Boethius and the 'distinct substance' in Aquinas, one is forced to ask what the difference is? It is in this analytical regard that Iroegbu (2000) observed that:

Aquinas corrective tries to solve this vagueness (tautolor) by replacing individual in Boethius with subsistent, and substance in Boethius with subsistent. Subsistent in Aquinas is an actual existing being in itself (in the mode of substance). It is a separate being with its own act of existence S.T., Q. 29, 9.3). But that is also the meaning of substance in Boethius equally individual in Boethius is also equivalent with Aquinas distinct (ness)⁸.

Both terms therefore in each author's definition of the human person are repetitive. Both are equally of committing a tautological fallacy.

Moreover, subsistent, for specific understanding, is that which is most underlying in a being. It is what the being is in itself considered separately from all other beings no matter how closely related. It is the essence of a being. Simply put its 'witness'. In his definition of person therefore, Aquinas underlines the absolute constitution of the being of a person as an 'other', a separate, different being considered in relation to other beings. Aquinas laid further emphasis on the separateness of the person with another definition of the person as "that which is most perfect in all nature"⁹. According to this, to be a person means therefore to be wholly oneself with no form of restriction or limitation of any kind. Aquinas emphasis on separateness as that which defines a person's identity, springs from the very fact that the being of a person lies in the very possession of a person's own act of existence that is; one's own essence. This from all indication answers for him the question of 'who am i?' (My person) as distinct from 'what am i?' (My nature)¹⁰. The 'who' question in this analogy, has to do directly with the basic and intimate constitutions of being, my being. That is individuality, rationality, distinctness and self-possession¹¹ which make me a human being who is a person. Aquinas examines the very fact that every human being is a person.

But for him each person is different from every other person. Each person is a 'who', but each person is a different type of 'who?'

However, he further defined the human person as: ...an intellectual nature possessing its own act of existence so that it can be the self-conscious, responsible source of its own actions. In a word, person is a *dominus sui* (master of itself or self-possessing)¹². According to him, self possession here is in three orders these are: (i) Knowledge (self-consciousness) (ii) will or self-determination (iii) Action or responsibility for one's own actions. To this end, he further defined the human person as: "...an actual existent i.e. (with its own act of existence) distinct from others, possessing an intellectual nature, so that it can be the self-conscious and responsible source of its own actions"¹³.

Consequently, Aquinas special emphasis on the concept of separateness as a basic characteristic of the human definition is also like Boethius, problematic. But our stand point in this work man as a 'being-with' in Esan ontology, in the auspices of communalism, is that it is impossible to exist totally separate from others, worse still when one makes stem and distinct separation from community. Consider the possibility of Jude and Fidelia to exit separately alone from the community, from where would they derive their being and how do they keep that being in continued existence and functioning if not from the community that each lives and moves and has his or her being? Without any doubt, cut off from that community, Jude and Fidelia would lose their being, fundamentally and existentially, for man is a communal being.

Sequence to this, Aquinas emphasis of community which is situated in his analysis of the relational constitution of the person, is worthy of examination. Aquinas brings to lime light the relational constitution of the human person in his discourse on friendship and the political community in Aristotelian dimension, Aquinas agrees that man is a social animal, that must form relationships and bond to promote not only his life and activities, but also his very existence is better expressed is social interaction¹⁴. For both Aristotle and Aquinas the highest of the human bonds necessitated by man's social nature is the political community (Polis), which aimed at providing the larger needs that smaller associations cannot provide. Through this assurance therefore, the human being is able to fulfill his nature as a being made for communion with other being¹⁵. Obviously, human relationships in forms of bond and groups, or association, are inevitable factors of human life and functioning according to Aquinas. This from all indications, starts with the family, especially from the little village or neighborhood, to the larger regional or inter-regional association. This social relationing in coming-together, that is 'being-with', is necessitated to promote sustenance and peaceful co-existence of the human person. With this distinction therefore, one can give an answer to the question of how Aquinas lays claim to the fact that a human being is both a body and he or she has a soul as his or her integral part. For a human being is a body in the first sense, while it has a soul in the third of the three senses distinguished here, and thus no inconsistency is involved in these two claims.

Heidegger's (1973) metaphysics of existentialism of disguise, concludes and reveal that he left unanswered his

ultimate ontological questions "why is there anything and not nothing"¹⁶. Apart from the predominant characteristics of man wretchedness or life's emptiness in the existentialism of Albert Camus and Ludwig Feuerbach, a most fundamental discourse on man met its highest leverage in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. But meanwhile, let us examine the concept of 'being- with' in Martin Buber and Edmund Mounier. With the singular intention of ascribing to man what the preceding philosophers have taken from him, these contemporary philosophers defined man neither in the ontological perspective like the medieval philosophers, nor in the psychological as the moderns but in a dialogical (inter-subjective) perspective. Among these philosophers includes a group of fairly consistent thinkers like the French (Mounier, Nedoncelle, Ricoeur), the German (Scheler, Buber, Guardini), the Russian (Berdjaev), Italian (Stefanini), the Spanish (Ortega and Gasset), the American (Bright- man), and the Polish (Wojtyła). But of these authors, we shall consider in detail with the thought of Mounier and Buber who without doubt represents the contemporary concept of the human person and the thrust of our discussion.

Le personalisme (Personalism) contains the famous and auspicious philosophical thoughts of Mounier (1949). In this essay, he strongly opposed those philosophers of the empiricists, the psychoanalysts, the Idealists school, who have made of the person a simple psychological phenomenon, something absolutely subjective and individualistic especially of the medieval and modern philosophical epochs. According to him, this is a meaningless and unacceptable concept,

I cannot think without being and be without my body: by means of my body" I am exposed to myself, the world, and others; by means of my body' I escape from the solitude of a thought which would only be the thought of my thought. Refusing to concede complete transcendence to myself, the body continually projects me outside of myself, into the problematic of the world and the struggle of man¹⁷.

From the above, the person therefore according to Mondin, (1985) "cannot be resolved either in thought or in consciousness (much less the unconscious), but is conceived instead"¹⁸, as "incorporated existence", "incarnate existence"¹⁹. The dialogical considerations of man (that is, in rapport with others as a 'being- with'), in the contemporary period identifies three most prominent properties. These properties according to Mondin are: vocation, action and communication (communication encounter with others)²⁰. Consequently therefore, Mounier noted emphatically that:

every person has such a meaning that he cannot be substituted for in the place he occupies in the universe of persons¹⁶⁸ (vocation) "it is the research until death for an anticipated longed-for unity that is never realized"¹⁶⁸ (the life of the person is incessant action), "the first movement revealing a human being in the prime of infancy is a movement towards others; the baby of six to twelve months of age, leaving vegetative life, discovers himself in others, recognizes himself in some attitudes regulated by his gaze at others. It is only later, at about three years of age. That he will have his first wave of conscious

egocentrism (...). The first experience of the person is the experience of the second person: the .you, and therefore the we, comes before the I, or at least accompanies it. It is immaterial nature (which we are partially subjected to) that exclusion reigns, in that one space cannot be occupied twice; the person, instead, through the movement that makes him exist, expresses himself, he is by nature communicable, and is even the only one who can be himself²¹.

The human person therefore is the most valuable among any other thing in nature, hence to struggle in favor of the person is, according to Mounier, the fundamental task of our times as this will be an equivalent and vehement struggle against those innumerable forms of estrangement which risk exterminating man and reducing him to the background of a rule-bound conformism, thus destroy him spiritually. But, Mounier spelt out strongly, according to Mondin that:

to struggle for the person means at the same time to struggle for the community, because the true community is the personal one where the most profound bond is in the interiority of the incarnate existences living in communion, vibrating in unison, and tending to the realization of a justice that frees millions of the suffering and the poor from debasement and humiliation. The community of persons is the community of neighbors of the "I" and of others capable of realizing the "we". One arrives at this through a cultural revolution which finds its most direct adversary in impersonalizing individuality. To realize this end, we need above all to understand that we are, to return to ourselves, to repossess ourselves. We have lost the sense of being who has voted for things and not for men have fallen into the most painful of alienations. What will be spoken of is to bring man back to himself, again making him conscious of his dignity, value, grandeur and vocation²².

That African cosmology/ontology is purely anthropocentric is an affirmation of Metuh's (1985) definition of a people's world-view. He defines it thus: "the complex of their belief not attitudes concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interactions of beings with particular reference to man".²³ This no doubt is the energetic force and spring point for Okolo's (1993) declaration; "*The African as 'being-with'*"²⁴ which inspired my "*Africanness as 'being-with': A critical re-thinking in African philosophy*"²⁵. Although the essential characteristics of communal sharing inherent in the African traditional community and as a substance of his identity as an African and a human being in the world, has been vehemently emphasized by philosophers in the African bent, in forms of appraisal, critique, recommendations etc., there is no gainsaying that the most popular user of the conceptual reference to man as a 'being-with' in African philosophy is Okolo; suffice us therefore to begin our review from a succinct analysis of his concept and thereafter take a critical look at its implicit finger prints in the emphasis of other African philosophers down to the ancients.

1.2 Man In Chukwudumbi Okolo and Nkafu Nkemkia.

'What is it to be African?', forms the background of Okolo's (1993) definition of an 'African' and his introduction; usage and analysis of the phraseology 'being-with'. He declares:

Whether the African is one people or many, is insignificant in this essay. We rather assert that the African is easily identifiable ontologically or as a being-in-the-African-world. He is not just a being but a 'being-with'. (He further noted) ... the concept and full import of this uncommon phrase is the main theme and focus of this monograph which is an essay in African metaphysics whose deepest inquiry is the African man. It is indeed a search for African identity²⁶.

Owing to the second reason for this process of 'self-discovery and recovery', is African philosophy which has unlimitedly, in scope and force, never cease to examine by questioning, to arrive at the 'kpim', quintessential or true nature of the African (human person) so as to ascertain his/her true identity as a being in the world. That a child is born black and becomes African is a straight-forward assertion of Jaques Maquet (1972). But what is to become an African? are questions that often eludes the African who is at ones both the asker and the asked. Hence in expressing his dissatisfaction in the disharmonious answer given by anthropologist as to what culturally speaking constitutes an African, Okolo noted that the African to a large extent is philosophically not just a human being as a subject in existence, but essentially, he/she is a being 'being-with' and this constitutes the very claim that he is an "African" and concretize our definition of man as a 'being-with'. This according to him has its place in major metaphysical discuss on the human person and his/her horizon of existence which essentially and practically is relational that is, towards others in the community. This horizon of be-ing according to Okolo, is self-in-relation-to-other', in fact, a 'being-with-others' and this fundamentally is his/her existence defined. Better put in his words is to note that:

As a matter of fact, individuals become real only in relationship with others, in a community or group. It is the community which makes the individuals, to the extent that without the community the individual has no existence. Consequently the African is not just a being but a being-with, a being-with-others or as I said elsewhere the African self is "defined in terms of 'we-existence' just as much as 'we' in 'I' existence through social interactions"²⁷

Okolo's further expression of this intrinsic characteristics that forms the definition of the African as a 'being-with', implies an hegemonic hold of connection and interrelations of beings whose nexus is deeply rooted in the extended family in which every member both living and dead are connected through a "complex net-work of spiritual relationship into a kind of mystical body" 28 forming its micro dimension and in a relation that wells beyond human subjects of self to self to an ontological level of 'man-with-other' realities in the universe both visible and invisible or the material and the spiritual in a macro-dimension as affirmed by okolo thus:

Being-with we said, in short is the humane and socialist attitude to life which is the essential horizon of the African and his mode of being-in-the-world, his concern of man-for-man or an involvement of man-with-and-for-others. It may well be called African brand of humanism but it's not just mere humanism as in Marxism or in naturalistic or radical existentialist

philosophies which terminates its concern with man and for the sake of man and his material universe, so to speak. Whereas 'being-with' as humanism in African philosophy goes beyond the universe of man (and for the sake of man) to include God, spirit, (ancestors inclusive), nature or reality, in its essential extension and dimension²⁹.

Summarily therefore, this dimension of the African 'being-with', or man as a 'being-with' implies an essentially true and dynamic relation with God the Supreme Being who is the Alpha and the Omega; the Beginning and End of all things, who is not distant, uncertain or idle a God as noted by early European scholars, but close and accessible. Even though scholars have noted that the precise nature of the 'Supreme Being' and His relationship with other gods is quite elusive, the African has a constant and active relationship in fact an involvement in and with the Supreme Being. This dimension of 'being-with', also means an involvement with spirits especially the dead relatives or ancestors (living-dead) who are dead but yet alive with their particular families with whom the Africans enjoy a closer interaction and communication. This dimension of the African 'being-with' does not conceive death as the absolute end and final separation of man from communal links like the Marxist and materialist outlook as a deep and continues relationship persists between the living and the dead. Another dimension of 'being-with' as a characteristic of the African mode of being-in-the-world takes the meaning of openness to the world in a form of positive and sacred worship which solidifies an unlimited relationship between man and nature. Hence Okolo (1993) emphasized that:

The African does not regard the universe or the nature 'out there' as merely thrown into being. Nature is the product of a good God. Nature is not there simply and solely to be exploited, subdued or absolutely conquered. But for the Africans it is to be venerated as the source of his material need, the tomb of his ancestors and shrine of his gods. He obtains his needed material goods not so much by conquering and mastering it as by submitting to it and venerating it as well. Injury or damage to nature is a breach of Cosmic harmony and order which attracts penalty from the gods and when venerated, good fortune and blessings, material and spiritual³⁰.

Okolo lastly examines 'being-with' as a relationship between man and the other man that is, a relationship of 'inter-subjectivity', of individuals with one another, this human social and practically structured relationship, marks the basic distinctive characteristic of the African 'being-with'. But this man with man relationship has a metaphysical foundation. In the African metaphysical analysis, man is the center of all things in the universe, being the centre focus of all things in the universe, he is subjected to its laws which he must consciously obey or bear the pains of its consequences. Man in this African metaphysical eye, is the point of interaction and inter-communication between the visible created order and world of God, spirit, and ancestors. At the center of all things, man is the ontological mean between the beings above and the beings below. Hence according to him:

Because man is at the center of created order "the focal point of the universe", the ontological mean between the visible and the invisible worlds, individuals enjoy intrinsic dignity, respect, and worth in African philosophy and in real life. This is also the metaphysical basis for anthropological humanism characteristic of the life and practice of the African particularly in his inter-personal relationships³¹

Man as a being-with therefore entails the fundamental human concern or involvement with the other, practical in his interpersonal relationship with man and other realities in the universe and with such a belief-system or wealth of value dignity and meaning for the human person and realities in the universe, man as a 'being-with' therefore implies some basic human values and characteristic as listed by Mboya (1962). For Okolo they are:

...(of) communal spirit, hospitality, generosity, acceptance, and the practice of egalitarianism, equality of opportunity for all. (According to Okolo) These are important existential concretization of 'being-with'. I will definitely include the sense of humor, friendship, openness, or open personality, kindness, trust, as also characteristic of the African, and as clear manifestation of his 'being-with'³².

In Okolo analysis of becoming African, he noted that "being-with" as a distinguishing African characteristic or mode of being is not essentially identical to the blackness of skin alone. For since it is arguable that culture is dynamic and fluid, the qualities of 'being-with' can be lost to innovation and trend of cultures and values. It can also be regained and nurtured, or lost forever. 'Being-with' as an ontological mode of being of the African, therefore, is a concrete existential act of 'becomingness of being' into what it is not yet, or to what it was, thus, it is not stanch to 'blackness' or the African' hence that a man is born black or into any of the African communities, is not a prerequisite for being an African as he may not possess that African cultural characteristic of 'being-with'. Thus the basic lamentations of many African thinkers or philosophers like Nkruma, Kanunda, (1967) Sengbor, Nyerere, Mboya, (1962) Gyekye (1987) and others, is the gradual passing away of the African characteristics of 'being-with' which forms the root of the African identity in his cultural and humane dimensions. These thinkers clearly sensed a dilemma and out rightly called for a reasserting of the African personality as a being in the world and to discover the essence of their being in the very well of their soul from nowhere but deep within them and not outside cultural connection and enclave where they will find all the qualities of or value of man as a 'being-with'; a characteristic of the traditional African. In fundamental dimension, Okolo noted that in a world of inhumanity of man, of violence, war, racialism, tribal antagonism etc, which has affected the community structured self or nature of man nationally or internationally, the African traditional value system of brotherhood and altruism can pave the way for a new world of satisfied and harmonious co-existence.

Nkafu Nkemnkia (1995) in his: 'African Vitology: A Step forward in African Thought', presents man within the

context of an African thought that is global. For him, in a society where everything is transmitted through the daily experience of life, the formulation of abstract concepts, is not so important what matters in such societies is the search and discovery of the meaning of life; to emphasize this, the participation of each member of the society/community in the collective experience of life is of great importance. It is on this consideration according to Nkemnkia that the question of man, the world and God can be asked. Being faced with a difficulty in expressing a possible conclusive definition on man, Nkemnkia (1995) opined that;

The African life is characterized by an organic whole within which it is very difficult to distinguish clearly as the western classical conception does the boundaries of the different realities forming the whole universe of the living. It is difficult to differentiate clearly between man and the world, man and God, God and the world³³.

Thus due to this difficulty in giving a direct definition of the person of man, Nkemnkia noted that from an anthropological horizon and a cosmological perspective, we can reflect on man within the African context; by bearing certain existential questions in mind because the meaning of existence is an already given fact. He further stated that:

Within an African mentality, one should not ask; who is the living "being?" but rather "why" "how come" "for what reason?" is he alive. Thus, the question of man is etiological in nature and tries to justify the present state of his life. Why does man live rather than dies? The question of man is therefore a question of life.³⁴

Base on the above analysis, the meaning of life in the definition of man, lies in the category of a relationship centered analysis of man. In this dimension, Nkemnkia defines man in terms of the self and other (relationship) emphasizing that:

Man is the most social being ever known on earth. This is because he is able to relate to others, with his own kind, with the surrounding world and with God, his creator. For this reason, he is always a member of a society without which he losses his value. Due to the multiplicity of the others, of the individuals, the meaning of life is hidden within the dialectic of the collective or the community³⁵.

The human person therefore, can only be defined through his relationship with the other or other beings in the universe, it is therefore out of place to ask oneself 'who am I' without first of all delving into the knowledge of the other self from whom one eventually discovers himself. Thus the question of 'I' becomes the 'you' and the 'I' always becomes the other who finally is oneself. In this human person dialectics, each person is a subsumer of the other in such a way that any good done to the other is done to oneself. By this, nothing bad can ever be done towards the other, 'I' therefore loses itself in the 'you' and the 'you' in the 'we'. The human person therefore cannot be seen except in the dimension of a being-in relationship-with the other, the world and with God his creator³⁶.

1.3 A Comparative Analysis of Man in Western and African Philosophy.

In this latter part of our essay, we want to examine comparatively the understanding of what the human person is; as a 'being-with' according to the philosophies of two broad cultures: the Western and the African.

The conception of reality by Africans is in many ways different from the way the Westerner views the world and this accounts for their conception of man as a 'being-with' which we try to establish and project in this analysis in Esan ontology.

Bearing in mind therefore our discussions on man as a 'being-with' as shown in chapter two of our study which shows in various dimensions, how the Africans view of reality constitute their belief or philosophy, it won't be out of place to see why our attitude to life cannot therefore but be different from the Western attitude to life as shown in their conceptions of man in the above analysis of this study³⁷. Being astonished by the great difference in the concept of man among selected Western and African philosophers, we cannot but like Pantaleon (2000), confess our conviction, simply in the fact that:

As a people is, so are its ideas. Similarly, the ideas of a people and even of individuals make them what they are, both in their behavior and their relationships. What exactly constitutes the human person is therefore a question that can be answered by referring to the experiences and thought patterns of the people under discussion.³⁸

Even though we have come to terms with the certain lacuna in the analysis of man as a 'being-with' in Socrates and Plato's philosophy, for reasons of precision, we shall take the understanding of the human person as expressed by Boethius and Aquinas as representative of the Western viewpoint. This will be contrasted with the African conception as seen in our discussions elsewhere or traditional African culture, which is still evident in many parts of the continent. In the process, we will be able to reveal not only critically contrasts, but areas of affinity in the common project of understanding ourselves as human persons especially as we bear in mind the analysis of Jasper (1971) (*Homo communicationis*), Heidegger (co-existent), Mounier (Incarnate existents) and Bubber (1973) (*I-Thou*).

No doubt going through the prism of our Western brothers' analysis of man, we observe that the overemphasis on autonomy and self-possession makes the person an atom and a being alone in his self-world. It renders difficult any real communication and relatedness of the person to other beings; the fact of man as a 'being-with'. The fundamental distinctness claimed as a criterion for personality is rather exaggerated above and beyond the vitality of the community to the human person. It should be borne in mind that one may be separate but not specially distinct, as one has a lot in common with the other in the community. Hence in line with Pantaleon's point of view as shown in chapter two, we can hold that even when we consider self-transcendence as a prolonged aspect of the relational, the thick wall

separating the substantiality of the person from the other aspects makes this self-transcendence precarious if not totally impossible. For man as a 'being-with' to find a concrete foundation in Western philosophy, the interrelationships between the three aspects of the person demand a more liquefied and a less thick wall separation. Only then can different persons really communicate and live truly human, worthy of the definition of man as a 'being-with' as defined in Esan ontology.³⁹

Above all, the forgetfulness of the communal basis of the very existence of the person in some aspects of or by some scholars in Western philosophy is a serious lacuna. This Pantaleon (2000) called *Kommunitätsvergessenheit*-forgetfulness of community⁴⁰. It may look like the idea and existence of real community is totally in the past of Western understanding and praxis. Even when it is mentioned in the philosophy of some Western scholars, the community seems to be either an empty, or only seen as a means to the individual. For example in Aquina's discussion on the political community or of friendship, the individual goals and achievement stands as the only point of reference. Generally in Western culture, only the individual is there and only the individual counts.

This infact is an indefinite proportion of egocentricism. Thus in this way, according to Senghor the African society is the ideal society which is a society not characterized by individualism as is the case in Western societies. Against Marx and other Marxists, the roots of man's development must lie in the biological and psychological dimension of man himself and not merely as an individual or in mechanical and material concerns. This leads to a growth in socialization for a better life by means of a common search for the common good of the whole.

The essentiality of man as a 'being-with' to the Africans is the very fact that the African puts humanism at the centre of relationships. Here, relations are on the basis of a natural need to live in a stabilized family and not for the sake of the individual as an autonomous being. As such, Africa can teach the Western this dimension of communityness as their society has come to be more individualistic and materialistic than the African society where solidarity, respect and hospitality are values that have remained in their life and philosophy despite the influence of the media and weighty Westernization of the world: the global process. The European society is primarily differentiated from the African one in that they are at best a collectivist society that is the bringing together into a collectivity, a number of individuals who remain individual persons in a community or society. Western man distinguishes himself from the other and claims his autonomy in total individualism in other to affirm himself in his basic originality as against the reality and fact of 'being-with'. This accounts for the reason Senghor (1964) strongly contrasts in his view of characteristics of the African society when he emphasized that:

African society on the other hand is a community: the African. Stresses more the solidarity of the group and the contributions and needs of the individual persons. This is not to say that the African neglects the individual person, but rather that he does not primarily pi conceive of the person as a member of a

kind of "mystical body" in which alone he can achieve his full development, his originality and his total potential. Indeed, this community goes beyond even the human members, since it involves a communion with all beings in the universe: stones, plants, animals, men, dead (ancestors) or alive, and God⁴¹.

To a large extent while Western man studies nature to see what he can make out of it, we acknowledge on our part that nature is mysterious, we learn from it, we perceive the dynamism of being from it and this leads us to worship. The reverence that Africans give to nature points out to traditional religion as we shall discussed in man as a 'being-with' in Esan ontology (V. E. Obinyan, 'Man As A 'Being-With' In Esan Ontology' Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Ph.D Dissertation) We perceive God in nature and we worship Him in and through nature. Nature is the ground for all the Africans relationships hence they leave in harmony with nature and relate with all that exist in it as though they are part of him thus affirming their conception of man as 'being-with'. This why we must note that:

Whereas Descartes would say, "I think, therefore, I am", we would say, "I relate, therefore, I am". I am because I am involved with other beings. Without relationship my being loses meaning and I cease to be. Where there is a breach in relationship I am bound to experience trouble, I find myself confronted with nonbeing.⁴²

Nature involves the Africans completely and they are part of it. From nature, we gain not only material goods, but also knowledge, religiosity and wisdom⁴³. If for the Westerner, what is artificial is meaningful and valuable, because it is the mark of his achievement and scientific spirit, for us, what is natural is meaningful and valuable because it is the sacred ground of our being in fact the very reason for our nature as 'being-with'. With our vision of the world, it is perhaps right to assert that we worship God naturally, the Most real Being in the most natural way⁴⁴. Again, one great mistake which the foreigner is liable to make when he sees us gazing at nature is to say that we worship trees or stones... Africans do not worship trees or stones; it is a misunderstanding of the way we look at things. Our metaphysics is impregnated with religion. Africans are notoriously religious.

The African ontology presents a concept of to world which is diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe. The latter is essentially static, objective, dichotomic; it is in fact, dualistic, in that it makes an absolute distinction between body and soul or matter and spirit. It is founded on separation and opposition: on analysis and conflict. The African, on the other hand, conceives the world, beyond the diversity of forms, as a fundamentally mobile yet unique reality that seeks synthesis. When the Westerner considers reality as empirical, Africans look at being as dynamic. In effect, for the Westerner, everything can be tested and can be explained scientifically⁴⁵. He believes in empirical causality and seeks to know the material causes of things. He holds that a thing is what it is and not something else. He is more or less occupied with experience and bases his conception of reality on the law of non-contradiction, law of identity, law of the excluded middle, which are the basic principles outside which thought must be incorrect.

Moreso, from our analysis of man as a 'being-with' in Western philosophy, we notice a total lack of existential or practical reference of the origin of the human person. Although Heidegger (1973) tried to confront some of the existential problems of man today in his *Das Sein*,⁴⁶ but the origins of the human person are not found worthy of serious discussion neither does it constitute the onus of their study. But for the Africans:

...human life is the highest good in the created order. Man's being is ordered to God because God created man for Himself Man is God's property, God's food. You cannot question Him any more in than you would question a man who takes a chicken from his poultry. This is how death is understood. The ancestors too belong to the human community, they are the living dead. Since they are mediators between God and us, we relate to them regularly through prayer, libation and sacrifice. It is for this reason that the veneration of Ancestors is considered to be the backbone of African traditional religion.⁴⁷

The African is, of course, sensitive to the external world, to the material aspect of beings and things. It is precisely because he is sensitive to the tangible qualities of things such as shape, colour, smell, or weight that he considers these things merely as signs that have to be interpreted and transcended in order to reach the reality of human beings⁴⁸. Thus, the whole universe appears as an infinitely small and at the same time an infinitely large network which emanates from God and ends in God. By and large, the dry, abstract analysis of substance, nature, hypostasis and ultimate transcendence, and so on, totally remove the person from the real world where his roots and development are found. Any authentic analysis of the person must take into account the real world in which that person lives and moves and enjoys existence as this essentially forms the foundation for the definition of man as a 'being-with' as shown in Esan ontology. Even metaphysics, the study of being in general according to Pantaleon⁴⁹, must be metaphysics for real people, i.e. people living in a world of space and time and history. Thus the culture, language, experience, that constitutes the concrete background of such people should be brought into the explanation of the identity of the person for relevance and real explanation as a 'being-with' to be achieved. For Africans, man stands at the centre of the world and of being as emphasized in chapter three. In the created realm, man is the most important being; whatever exists in the world exists for man and man exists for God. Man therefore is the reference point for any meaning in life as his existence is concretized in the world of fundamental realities.

This yawning lacuna in the Western thought or tradition lauds the very reason the African view of reality as holistic; subsuming the visible and the invisible or the material and spiritual accounts for the concept of man as a 'being-with' to them. Hence in contrast to this huge sense of autonomy and total cut off from communal links in the Western concept of man, Okolo noted the African is not just a human being but he is a 'being-with'⁵⁰ and the reason for this according to Senghor is that:

They sacrifice the part to the whole, the person to the collectivity. Since a materialist postulate underlies

this, and since the collectivity is conceived solely as a technical organization, it does not attract (as love does); to push the individuals towards it, one must resort to constraint and violence.⁵¹

The African concept of time affirms the fact that for them man is a 'being-with' which is lacking in western thought or tradition as I show elsewhere. When Western man counts units of time, Africans pay attention to man and to events in the universe, and try to determine how time gets involved in order to enhance the being of man. Time is experienced time, not conjectured time; time is being and being is time. The Ancestors, for example, though dead are still living; they are still present communicating with and involving in the activities of the community as noted by Okolo. Africans' conception of time shows itself in the way they do things ordinarily. They are often blamed for being always late comers, not time conscious. This is because for the Africans time is made for man and not man for time hence man is lord of time. So long as I achieve what I set myself to do, I am satisfied and the reckoning of time is not important.

For Africans as seen in the contents of Esan world-view, Being is dynamic, not static. It is concrete, real. As such, we are aware of the fact that there are causes and reasons that cannot be explained scientifically. We are aware of the fact that a thing can be itself and still be something else. We are not only aware of this, we live it intensively. Sometimes, our vision of things tends to defy the principles and categories of Western thought. There is more to the world than what only the eye can see. We are engaged in the events and things that occur and we are involved in Being hence for us man is a 'being-with'. Let us consider the illustration of Jude Mbi (2004) on the point that:

A tree falls and kills a man. The westerner would say there was an accident, a tree fell and killed a man. Then he would bring out his equipment and go to examine the tree. Perhaps he would discover that the tree was hollow inside. Perhaps, he would be able to establish that there was a storm at the time the tree fell. The man happened to be passing just at that moment and so he got killed. To prevent this from happening again, he would, perhaps, decide to fell all trees within a certain distance from the highway⁵².

Mbi continues by showing how Africans look at things in a way that is different from the Western vision of the world when he noted that:

He (the westerner) doesn't think of praying about the matter. Our peoples, on the other hand, would look at the man. They would want to know why the tree fell on this man. For them this is not just a simple event. It is an occurrence that has meaning. God, the Ancestors, the spirits, other human beings come into picture. Relationship has been disrupted somewhere and this situation must be set right in order to prevent a repeat of this kind of occurrence. They would go for a 'nggambe; man to find out the origin of this evil. Then they would offer sacrifices of appeasement and try to procure protection for the members of the family. They don't think of changing the physical conditions.⁵³

These are two completely different approaches to the same situation. When the Westerner will stress on the material dimension of events, the African will stress more on the spiritual dimension of it. He will see the spirit everywhere. Because Africans usually think and react the way they do, they are often condemned as being superstitious and illogical. After all, can we say that what is not known does not necessarily exist? Can we actually attribute the effectiveness of what is only to that which is known? Do we have the right to reject totally the African's understanding of being as dynamic? This will certainly lead us to the absolutisation of rationality in its scientific and technological form, the error of Positivism.

We suppose, therefore, that it is wiser to see the Western vision and the African vision as complementary ways of 'being-in-the-world' and of knowing the human person. The human being is both matter and spirit. For an encompassing view of man therefore, we must bear in mind that:

A purely rationalistic approach to reality, which takes account only of the materially demonstrable, can be just as lopsided as one, which sees spirit everywhere. It doesn't help the situation if we simply disregard and condemn. It would do a lot more good if we try to understand (reconcile) and move forward...⁵⁴

1.4 CONCLUSION

From Ancient, through medieval to modern and contemporary philosophy, the concept of man have been deeply rooted on metaphysics and religion reserved with the ability of ensuring a valid foundation for the absolute values, man inclusive. Ancient philosophical thought of Akinaton, Himotep, Amenotep e.t.c, provided the foundation for Socrates, Plato (1978) and Aristotle (326) as well medieval analysis of man on an ontological perspective with generic (substance) and specific element (rationality), a person; individual, unique, unrepeatable and unchangeable reality. This ontological definition of man was a classic-conquest subscribed to by all philosophers with a belief in the possibility of metaphysics like Boethus, Aquinas, Maritain (1947) and Guardini etc.

With the postulations of Descartes, the study of the human person shifted from a metaphysical to the psychological plane. Given that the problems of metaphysics cannot be attacked unless one radically makes certain the value of our knowledge, Descartes employed doubt, both methodic and skeptical in the study of man and logically concluding that the problems of human person can be seen in this prescriptive, he no longer defines the person in relation to the autonomy of being (individuality, rationality and subsistent) but in relation to self-consciousness. Man therefore is a being in himself, an effective existent and not a pure dream but an authentic being because he thinks himself; 'Cogito ego sum'. By this psychological analogy of being, Descartes transformed the person from an ontological to psychological fact, thus opening the door to a series of either grave reduction of the concept of the human person as seen not only in the works of Hume, Freud and Watson, but nauseatingly in Fichte, Hegel -and Nietzsche. Although modern philosophy set the plane for Jasper and Sartrean analysis of the person, which influenced and attracted frightening consequences of dehumanization especially in

the social and political planes as recorded in the history of mankind; from human extermination to racial discrimination, and from scientific and technological manipulations through barbaric and iniquitous laws, many latter contemporary philosophers have engaged in a project of reflection to establish anew the concept of the person in his intrinsic value and dignity, hence they defined man in dialogical perspective of inter-subjectivity, vocation, action and communication as shown in Ricocur, Gasset, Wojtyla and Mounier and Bubber.

The concept of person therefore, is the community holding the most profound bound of incarnate existents living in common; a community of the 'I' and of others. These epochal definitions of man as substance, self-conscious and communicable being, are indications of semantic diffusion. Therefore for an wholesome definition of man, the ontological, psychological and dialogical qualities must not be considered complete without the quality of self-transcendence as it express the sense and value of the human person. As noted before, Man is not only an existent (Heidegger), a co-existent (Bubber) nor a subsistent (Boethius), but a transcendent; a project towards the infinite, penetrating the realms of the absolute and the eternal. Hence a global definition of man weather black, white, Christian, Buddhist or Islam, must include all four transcendental qualities or elements: authonomy, self-consciousness, communication, and self-transcendence as in the African scientific paradigm of 'being-with' shown in Weiredu Gvekve Mbiti, Tempels, pantaloon and in Esan ontology as 'Oria no ri wi usuagbon'-a being in the community with-others⁵⁵. From our analysis so far, we can deduce that the concept of man as a 'being-with' has been essentially and seemingly the thrust of the preceding analysis of man by African philosophers. It is with all precision that I affirm that this conceptual analysis of man as a 'being-with' wells from the fact that African cosmology/ontology is purely anthropocentric and this forms their world-view. And as a complex of their belief not attitude concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interaction of beings with particular reference to man, simply put a 'man-universe' relation, the concept 'being-with' is easily stanchied to African nature traced to ancient past. Hence as long as the Blackman is among his own people, he will have no need to put his own being to the text for someone else's benefit. This account for what gave rise to the search for African personality; as a 'being-in-the-white' world he is a 'being-uncomfortable-in-the-white-attitude', and being conscious of he/her uniqueness in the world, he was psychologically conditioned with the need to search for himself, to define himself, to seek an understanding of himself in relation to himself or his community, but more problematically, in confrontation with the 'white world'. The self-consciousness and self-discovery of the African personality therefore, arose in the circumstances of slavery, colonialism and other forms of dehumanizing racial oppressions whose predominant effects characterized the post-colonial African.

This search substantiated the definition of man as a 'being-with' planted in the philosophy of Okolo, Jacquet, Senghor, Nyerere, Mboya, Nyasani, Shutte, Tutu, Pantaleon, Odimegwu, Geyekye, Nkemkia, Mbiti, Tempels and in Ruch and Ayanwu, Menkiti, Steven Shalita, Kihumbu Thairu, Thaddeus Mbi, Ogwejiofor, Ukhun e.t.c. although in semantic

diffusion, each identifying 'being-with' and its uniqueness as distinct from the Western that is; tracing it to his origin, showing its concrete dimensions in the micro and macro interrelation of beings, visible and invisible, its characteristics in family hood, names, cultural rite, religion etc. and advocating it as a way forward for Africa and the rest of the world, but only if they can look at man through this African scientific paradigm of 'being-with'. No doubt the analysis in this study clearly examines the imports of the definition of man as a 'being-with'. But there lies a lacuna which this Esan ontological analysis essentially fills it is in fact a reconciling integrationist philosophy. Although Man as a 'being-with' in Esan ontology speaks family hood like other African ontologies but in this dimension, it speaks a contract of solidarity between all nations, if we are to realize a rational relationship not only between individuals, but also between groups and peoples. Family hood in this Esan ontology is that of the universal in which everyman is deeply related in a form of universal brotherhood. This Esan ontology of being also portrays the essential characteristics of communalistic life, but this community structure 'being' goes beyond the level of emphasizing a dignified and distinctive personal identity in theoretical terms to laying concrete in existential terms what it is to be so defined in living experience. Man as a 'being-with' in Esan ontology is a humanism which bears a meaning in terms of economical, political, social and religious policies as it seeks to reconstruct the structure of geocentricism, exploitation, inequality and disharmony to harmony (of being in a mystical network of interrelatedness, material and physical), so to ensure a universal equilibrium.

From the above, it is important to acknowledge our differences in the way we look at Being instead of trying to condemn one attitude or the other. Suffice to this, let us indicate that taking a critical and hermeneutical look at the concept as a man In Thomas Aquinas and Edmund Mounier Chukwudumbi Okolo and Nkafu Nkemkia side by side with the reality of our very existence as well as its imports in our daily actions, a brighter understanding will be reached as this will enable a digestion of the arguments or controversy and a reconciliation disconnects in the concept of man in Western and African philosophy.

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