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Complementarism and Consolationism: Mapping out a 21st-Century African Philosophical

Trajectory

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Abstract

African philosophy has been compelled to constantly define itself in relation to a domineering Western philosophy given the historical circumstances of colonialism and the dual heritage of the professional African philosopher who is at once an African by cultural affiliation and a participant in Western civilization by reason of her Western education. Many notable African philosophers have responded to the challenge posed by the tremendous success of Western philosophy by philosophizing in ways that seek to transcend a purely Afrocentric agenda on the one hand and an uncritical acceptance of Western philosophical methods on the other hand. In this paper, I present and interrogate the response of the noted Nigerian philosopher, Innocent Asouzu, to the crisis of identity in African philosophy. I demonstrate that Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* philosophy of complementarism is a philosophical synthesis that seeks to transcend the famous universalism-particularism divide in African philosophy. Adopting an expository, analytical, and evaluative methodology, I show how the philosophical current of consolationism advances the philosophical trajectory Asouzu was blazing. I introduce into African philosophical discourse the universal category of *consolation* which supplies a panpsychist framework for exploring meaning in a tragic universe.

Keywords: Complementarism, Consolationism, *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy, African philosophy,

Mood, Panpsychism.

1. Introduction

The philosophical tradition now universally known as African philosophy has been disproportionately dominated by metaphilosophical discourse (Vest 2009; Makwinja 2018). The term ‘metaphilosophical discourse’ refers one to the preoccupation with meta-philosophy noticeable in African philosophy. Meta-philosophy arises as a field of philosophical enquiry that investigates the conditions of the possibility of philosophy through the interrogation of philosophy itself. Meta-philosophy is philosophy reflecting on itself, its methods, conceptual schemes, and goals. The dominance of meta-philosophy, especially in the early period of the establishment of African philosophy, brought to the fore the problem of an African philosophy in search of a unique identity that distinguishes it from the philosophies of other cultures, notably Western philosophy.

As a written intellectual tradition, African philosophy emerged in the first half of the 20th century, with the arrival of anti-colonial nationalist thinkers like Kwame Nkrumah, J.B. Danquah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kenneth Kaunda, L.S. Senghor, Julius Nyerere, and others. As professionally trained African philosophers emerged from European and American universities, the discipline made a shift towards greater intellectual rigour, away from the ideological fervour of the nationalists. The emergent professional philosophers found themselves in two camps based on their individual responses to the challenge of Western philosophy in which they were trained. The question arose over what African philosophy is, whether it even exists and how different and similar it is to the dominant Western philosophy. This question created the great divide in African philosophy, the universalism-particularism rupture. While the universalists, led by the acute Paulin Hountondji, insisted that African philosophy must exhibit the criticality and generality that essentially characterize Western philosophy, others like Onyewuenyi towed the path of Placide Tempels and endorsed ethno-philosophy as a uniquely African philosophy. Others, yet, like Kwasi Wiredu sought to transcend the universalism-particularism divide by applying Western analytical methods to the interpretation and systematization of traditional African belief systems and phenomena. The universalists, or modernists,

urge African philosophers to embark on “a systematic appropriation of the international philosophical heritage, which is inseparable from the scientific heritage” (Hountondji 1996, 107). On the other hand, the particularists – and especially that sub-set called ethno-philosophers – assert that African philosophy should carve out a unique space for itself and retain a distinctive identity. What this distinctive identity should consist of exactly¹ and how an authentic African philosophical system can be constructed on the basis of this distinctness remains, perhaps, the biggest task for African philosophers in the 21st century. Ethno-philosophers have ventured to present ethno-philosophy as that distinctive African philosophical tradition that robustly contrasts itself with Western philosophy. This stance of the core proponents of ethno-philosophy is opposed by universalists who see in ethno-philosophy a tradition of thought deficient in criticality (cf. Mangena 2014; Matolino 2015; Aribiah 2016; Ogbonnaya 2018).

The long-drawn universalism-particularism debate greatly contributed in sustaining the preoccupation with metaphilosophical questions about the existence and nature of African philosophy even in the absence of constructive philosophical systems on which meta-philosophy could thrive. Over the years, however, a number of African philosophers have moved in the direction of system-building. Innocent Asouzu’s *ibuanyidanda* philosophy pursues the goal of system-building both as an acknowledgment of the relative absence of system builders in African philosophy as well as in homage to the necessity of intercultural philosophy in a continually globalizing world. Advancing Asouzu’s system-building project, philosophers of the conversational school of thought have recommended the conversational method as an appropriate procedure for achieving the goals of building systems in African philosophy and showing how these newly constructed African systems

¹ Ogbonnaya (2018, 99) believes that this distinctive characteristic that makes a philosophy African philosophy is the essential African communitarian ontology that exhibits the dynamic wholeness of reality. If Ogbonnaya is correct, then African philosophers have the task of constructing sophisticated logical, epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, and socio-political thought-systems that draw inspiration from Afro-communitarianism in its narrow and broad dimensions. This task has largely been completed in the fields of ethical and socio-political philosophy with the remarkable success of ubuntu ontology in undergirding African ethical and socio-political systems.

are similar and different from Western systems of thoughts at the roundtable of intercultural philosophical engagement (see Egbai 2018; Chimakonam 2015a).

This paper locates Asouzu's philosophy of complementarity in the historical context of African philosophy and presents it as a response to the universalism-particularism conundrum. Specifically, this paper seeks to show how consolationism draws inspiration from *ibuanidanda* philosophy in particular and the broader African philosophical heritage in general to arrive at the consolationist synthesis which is founded on the explication of the doctrine of *mood* and its implication for ontology. I seek to show how consolationism, in its own way, realizes the hope of Hountondji (1996, 107) that African philosophers will ambitiously pursue the "reappropriation of our philosophical past and...reconstitution of our theoretical history." Section one introduces the subject matter of this paper. Section two presents a brief historical overview of African philosophy. Section three examines Asouzu's philosophy of complementarity while section four shows how consolationism builds on the foundation of complementarity and advances Asouzu's philosophical trajectory. Section five concludes the paper.

2. African Philosophy: A Brief Historical Overview

African philosophy as a written intellectual tradition was born in controversy. This is understandable given the relative absence of a culture of writing in Africa prior to the advent of colonialism. Western thinkers and missionaries like Hegel (2001) and Levy-Bruhl (1947) questioned the capacity of Africans for philosophical and abstract thinking. The first generation of African philosophers, therefore, found themselves in the strange position of justifying the existence of African philosophy as a direct response to the Eurocentric scepticism of Western philosophers who measured non-Western philosophies against the benchmark of Western philosophy. Given this scenario of denial, protestation, and contestation, Chimakonam (2015b) has suggested that while Aristotle may have traced the origin of Western philosophy to wonder, African philosophy was spurred by frustration.

Whether one agrees with Chimakonam or not, the inescapable fact remains that African philosophy had to justify itself before a sceptical Western audience that claimed the right to decide what was philosophy and what was not philosophy. Consequently, African philosophy launched its search for a unique identity. The search polarized African philosophers, with a group of philosophers endorsing the particularist approach to African philosophy and another group led by Hountondji betraying the pervasive influence of Western philosophy by insisting that there can be no unique African philosophy but simply a culture of philosophy in Africa that applies the critical methods of Western philosophy to its discourse (see Etieyibo 2015; cf. Hook 1997; Eze 2001; Ward 2001). The latter came to be known as the universalists. Particularists like Tempels (1959), Senghor (1964), Onyewuanyi (1993), and Mangena (2014) prominently championed what has now been labelled ethno-philosophy. Ethno-philosophy is the accumulated worldviews of traditional African societies considered as embodying a coherent intellectual vision of the universe and the place of living and non-living things in this universe (Oruka 1990; Serequeberhan 1991; Hountondji 1996; Hallen 2002; Ikuenobe 2004; Author 2015). Ethno-philosophers have promoted this traditional thought system as distinctly African given its cultural rootedness while universalists dismiss it as merely a system of traditional wisdom not self-conscious and critical enough to meet the conditions of philosophy. Hountondji, perhaps the most trenchant critic of ethno-philosophy, asserts that ethno-philosophy implies the existence of a collective African philosophy whereas philosophy is universally regarded as an explicit project of individual intellectual production.

Hountondji demands the rejection of the very idea of an implicit, collective philosophy discoverable by individual investigators. He asserts that: “By completely putting aside the idea of an implicit, silent, latent philosophy, I meant to value discourse and the history of discourse as being the only possible place where philosophy appears” (Hountondji 1996, ix). Given the centrality of criticality or analyticity in Hountondji’s definition of philosophy, it is understandable that he is

willing to bring oral discourse under the umbrella of philosophy provided it satisfies the condition of criticality.

The pitfall in glorifying criticality and making it the most defining essence of philosophy, however, is the tendency to see criticality as a method peculiar to philosophy whereas it is more correct to regard it as an essential feature of all rigorous thinking, as that quality which accompanies robust thinking (cf. Ogbonnaya 2018, 96-103). Mangena (2014, 31-32) responds to Hountondji's stance by submitting that: "[E]thno-philosophy is not a mere collection of beliefs, customs, values and traditions of a particular group of people; it also involves critical analysis of the same. *Reasoning* involves analyzing the relationships between or among given premises and drawing conclusions from them." Mangena contends against Hountondji and other opponents of ethno-philosophy that since ethno-philosophy adopts the inductive and deductive procedure of critical thinking, the accusation of non-analyticity levelled against ethno-philosophy fails.

The merit of Hountondji's call for an ambitious African philosophy that exhibits the rigour pertaining to proper philosophical discourse lies in the recognition of the conceptually impoverished status of ethno-philosophy. While Mangena's stance allows African philosophy to claim the quality of uniqueness and present itself as different from Western philosophy, either in terms of content or subject matter (see Ogbonnaya 2018), he conveniently overlooks the ethnographic character of ethno-philosophy which denies it universal applicability, more or less. Outstanding professional philosophers like Wiredu, Oruka, Gbadegesin, Sodipo, Hallen, and Asouzu have tried to take a middle course by subjecting ethnographic data to the analytical method in order to tease out individual philosophical interpretations that meet the standard of philosophical rigour. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to determine the boundary between ethno-philosophy and the kind of rigorous philosophizing recommended by Hountondji in the works of the professional philosophers who attempt to transcend the universalism-particularism divide by reconciling ethno-philosophy with rigorous analysis (see Rettova 2002). The works of these professional philosophers lend some legitimacy to the idea of a

viable but unsystematized philosophy that is collective by virtue of being diffused in the community, given these philosophers' acute awareness of their own cultural rootedness and their willingness to construct thought-systems on the foundation supplied by ethnographic data. As Irele (1996, 10-11) notes eloquently:

[T]he professional philosopher in Africa today operates in a situation of cultural and social tension. For although his mind has been moulded by the principles of Western philosophy, he too is confronted by the vast body of world-views and thought systems which continue to inhabit the consciousness of the majority of Africans and to determine a fundamental attachment on their part to a traditional way of life...Faced with a dualism both of modes of thought and modes of existence, the philosopher in Africa is compelled to undertake an examination of the implications of this dualism for his discipline and for his practice of that discipline with specific reference to the African situation...there can be no form of reflection in Africa today that does not bear a direct relation to history and culture. In this broad perspective of the conditions of thought and discourse on our continent, the present debate on the question of African philosophy...can be seen to form part of a comprehensive process of reflection by the African intelligentsia upon our total historical being: it represents a significant moment in the intellectual response of Africans to the challenge of Western civilization.

Hountondji (1996, ix) admits that it is difficult for the contemporary African philosopher to ignore the cultural matrix in which she is embedded along with the worldviews this matrix produces. The constant pressure on the African philosopher to respond to what Irele calls "the challenge of Western civilization," specifically the success of Western philosophy, while remaining faithful to her primary African cultural constituency is eloquently captured by Robert Bernasconi (1997, 188) who notes that:

Western philosophy traps African philosophy in a double bind: either African philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears; or it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt.

This is true because African philosophy, by reason of its late emergence as a written intellectual tradition and in view of the appropriation of universalism by the tremendously successful Western philosophy,² finds its bearing more or less with direct reference to Western philosophy – a fact attested to by the insistence of the universalist school of thought on Western philosophical methods as the only valid methods for African philosophy.

² See Taiwo (1998) for a discussion of the hegemony of Western philosophy.

Nevertheless, philosophers of the conversational school of thought have noted the need for system-building by African philosophers, the creation of authentic African concepts woven around fundamental theories that respond to African existential conditions while, at the same time, having a universal applicability and capable of offering alternative perspectives as Africa's challenge to Western thought-systems and -patterns (cf. Egbai 2018). Such a project, as envisaged by the conversationalists, will involve a revival of the African reason as it is embedded in African languages, reliance on traditional African phenomena, and the rigorous transformation of these traditional phenomena using the time-tested analytical methods that have immensely benefitted Western philosophy (see Chimakonam 2015a; Nweke 2016).³

In furtherance of the goal of reviving African philosophy by way of a return to its source, Janz has challenged African philosophers to discover the ultimate source of African philosophy. He does not mean 'sources' in the plural but the ultimate source; for, if we are talking about sources even Western philosophy is obviously a source of African philosophy given that African philosophers borrow elements of Western philosophy, especially in the dimension of philosophical methodology. But for this project not to degenerate into the exaggeration of ethno-philosophy as substantive African philosophy, Janz (2016, 48) adds a caveat: "By that [return to the source of African philosophy] I do not mean another attempt to locate philosophy in some culturally ancient form, but rather, to think about the unique well-spring of concepts that continues to this day for African philosophy." In the following sections I will show how Asouzu responds to the challenge of a return to the source of African philosophy, which surely must be in the traditional African thought-world itself, and how

³ The Conversational School of Philosophy has developed the following canons to spur original and systematic thinking among African philosophers in the intercultural age of globalization where different cultures compete in the marketplace of ideas: critical intracultural and intercultural conversation with authors and their writings, the transformative indigenization of the intellectual productions of non-African cultures to fit into the African intellectual environment, noetic re-Africanization as the deliberate expansion and deepening of knowledge about African intellectual productions and the African thought-world, moderate decolonization which involves the affirmation of African authenticity while avoiding racial jingoism, and creative interrogation of authors and their writings to elicit new meanings and intellectual horizons (see Nweke 2016, 61-62).

consolationism latches on to the trajectory Asouzu blazed to constitute itself as a 21st century African philosophical synthesis.

3. Ibanyidanda Philosophy and Asouzu's Quest for an African Philosophical Synthesis

The Nigerian philosopher Asouzu adopted the procedure of complementary reflection in the explication of his philosophical system. Complementary reflection is the epistemological vehicle of what Asouzu calls *ibanyidanda* philosophy. The term *ibanyidanda* can be translated roughly from the Igbo language as complementarity or complementarism.⁴ The chief thesis of *ibanyidanda* philosophy is that the universe is a composite of missing links advancing towards the completion of the part and the whole in a process of mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence which the human mind grasps when reflecting on the nature of things. Complementary reflection is the procedure that seeks to realize the unity of the parts of the whole in the face of the apparent fragmentation of being which we perceive in the isolated spheres of individual entities, in the diversity of forms, beings, ideas, traditions, values, etc. As a method of philosophizing, complementary reflection is the vehicle of an optimistic philosophical vision of life that explains the universe in terms of the perfectibility of the whole in which isolated parts are missing links. The notion of a missing link plays such a prominent role in Asouzu's optimistic philosophy that it requires elucidation, which I will soon supply.

Asouzu's complementarism has an African epistemic flavour because it is founded on African complementary worldview. It transcends the African experience to the extent that it deploys the critical tool of Western philosophy and makes a claim to universal applicability. The optimism of *ibanyidanda* philosophy is hinged on the very idea of complementarity itself which regards perfection as a possibility, indeed eventuality. The quest for perfection, the increasing degree of the

⁴ The concept is similar to ubuntuism in the sense that both promote the necessity of cohesion of parts of a whole in the whole, thus lending priority to community. Yet, they are different in the sense that complementarism prioritizes the individual as an important sphere of influence necessary for the completion of the whole.

realization of a wider horizon of solidarity among existent things, arouses in the human mind what Asouzu calls *jide ka iji*, or the joy of being. According to Asouzu (2004, 39), *ibuanyidanda* is:

[A] philosophy of categorisation, sorting, harmonisation, pairing-up, and complementation. In complementarity, we seek to relate world immanent realities to one another in the most natural, mutual, harmonious and compatible ways possible...to allow being assume its natural completeness as the joy that unifies all realities. Herein is rooted the joy of being as the transcendent joyous experience of the ultimate foundation of reality. In this way, *complementation 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 is optimistic. Limitations exist to be overcome, whether the overcoming happens or not. For Asouzu, it is enough that the inherent complementary drive at work in things seeks the overcoming of limitations. In overcoming, we experience an intellectual-cum-emotional satisfaction, *jide ka iji*. He writes:

In complementary reflection, we seek always to transform the limitations of being to the cause of our joy. In this case, we seek ultimate explanations, in joy, of why things happen and seek to re-establish the positive lesson that such incidents seek to communicate and try to learn from such events in very positive and optimistic manner. *In complementarism, we seek to put fatalism, pessimism, despondency, alienation and indeed all negative existential experience on their head...the foundation and driving force of all existent realities is the inherent joy that gives legitimacy to all missing links of reality....As missing links of reality, diverse entities in their diverse ways of expression, give us an insight into how to understand them in relation to other categories of thought. In this way, they serve a positive missing link in view of the certainty of the joy that is implicitly intended in the process of their realisation* (2004, 282-283).

The idea of missing links is integral to the narrative of perfection or perfectibility⁵ in *ibuanyidanda* philosophy. Sometimes Asouzu (2004, 45) seems to think that “anything that exists serves a missing link of reality,” implying that existents can be discrete or isolated and event-like, in the sense of needing other existents to be complete. In this sense, Asouzu seems not to commit himself to the strong view that everything that exists or every existent thing is a missing link – for then, one may argue, the idea of missing links becomes incoherent since there will be nothing to link in the chain of entities and events. This appears a superficial interpretation of Asouzu, however, for he views all actually existing and potentially existing things as missing links. The universe is a dynamic

⁵ Compare with the narrative of *consolation* in consolation philosophy.

whole of incomplete individual elements in a necessary relation of interdependence with one another. Asouzu's universe thus is Ramose's universe of 'be-ings' rather than beings, in which particles are more event-like and less isolated. A complementary ontology undergirds this view of existents as missing links (see Ramose 2003; Chimakonam 2018a).

A link is not 'missing' because it is unavailable or absent but because it is incomplete, arising from the fragmentation that characterizes things in time and space. Fragmentation denotes incompleteness and incompleteness connotes a quest for completeness in an absolute unity of being. Asouzu writes that:

Missing links are the diverse units that make up an entity within the framework of the whole and as they are complementarily related. They are all the imaginable, fragments, units, components, and combinations that enter into our understanding of any aspect of our world. They are also all the units and combinations necessary in the conceptualisation of an entity or of the whole. This missing links are, for example, thoughts and the thoughts of thoughts. They are diverse modes of manifestation of being in history. They are categories and the categories of categories. They are the units and the units of units, entities and the entities of entities, things and the things of things. They are ideas and the ideas of ideas, etc. as these can possibly be abstracted and related to each other as conditions of possibility of their perfectibility in a harmonious systemic manner (2004, 277-278).

The above quote clearly shows that Asouzu understands missing links in the strong sense of "all existent or possible things are missing links" rather than the weak sense of "some existent or possible things are missing links". Thus every existent thing is a missing link, and such can be simple or complex. A single atom, as a unit, is simple while the human being as an organism is complex. The human being, for instance, has an internal organization with many units functioning as missing links and granting purposiveness to the human being as a whole. Yet, there are different kinds of wholes. A human being is a whole, the family is a whole; so also is the community and the universe.

Asouzu reveals his true understanding of missing links when he tackles the problem of how things serve a missing link of reality. Separating 'things' from 'missing links', at face value, points to the distinctness of a 'thing' and a 'missing link'. But this is hardly Asouzu's understanding of 'things' and the 'missing links' they serve. All 'things' are units and fragments of wholes and the grandest

whole is the universe considered as the widest sphere of reality. For Asouzu, these units or ‘things’ are at once entities and ‘missing links’. He notes:

We have two legitimate formal ways of viewing units or fragments as ontological entities. First, we can abstract them from the whole and view them, as completely isolated discrete units. In this sense, they have the semblance of complete independent non-relational existence...they are missing in relation to each other. This idea of complete isolation and non-relation, though theoretically conjecturable, remains counter-intuitive. This makes a second way of viewing them necessary. Here they stay in relationship to each other (2004, 278).

He adds that the complementary relation subsisting among entities is affirmed by the mind in thought that necessarily orients itself towards the future in optimistic anticipation of ever expanding horizons of progress, what Asouzu calls the transcendental unity of consciousness. Interchanging ‘things’ with ‘missing links’, he notes: “In this complementary conscientisation, things serve a missing link. Since these missing links serve each other...they exist necessarily in anticipation and in a future referential perspective” (2004, 278). Missing links, therefore, are things in their state of incompleteness, Their incompleteness gives them the character of events, by virtue of which they are dynamic links in being.

Critiquing Asouzu’s idea of missing links, Chimakonam favours the term ‘necessary links’.

According to Chimakonam (2018b, 126):

Everything in the ecosystem serves a necessary link of reality...This can be contrasted with Innocent Asouzu’s idea of complementarity, formulated in terms of the missing link of reality. Both may suggest the idea of relativity in ontology, but while the former suggests the relativity of presence, the latter suggests the relativity of absence. But scholars of the conversational mindset believe that it is better to talk of reality as a presence rather than as an absence, hence, the idea of the necessary link.

However, there is no fundamental difference between a missing link and a necessary link as formulated by Chimakonam. A missing link is conceived by Asouzu in terms of incompleteness rather than absence or unavailability. The necessity demanded by Chimakonam is already entailed in the concept of the ‘missing’ link since a missing link is also a necessary link considered in isolation from other (missing) links which, nevertheless, complete the individual link.

4. From Complementarism to Consolationism

In this section, I will interrogate Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* philosophy from the perspective of consolation philosophy and show how consolationism advances the philosophical vision of Asouzu by diluting Asouzu's optimism with the new category of consolation which highlights the ontological, conceptual, and existential problems that accompanies the thesis of perfectibility.

The Consolationist Critique of Asouzu's Complementarism

Like complementarism, consolationism arises out of the cultural tension Irele alludes to (see section two). Both systems seek to project the historical being of Africa in the language of the philosopher, through philosophical syntheses that draw inspiration from the ubiquitous African complementary worldviews while acknowledging the necessity of finding answers that transcend the African thought-space in their universal applicability for the consolidation of human solidarity across cultural boundaries. Like complementarism, consolationism "seeks to understand reality from the preceding conditions of ... [an] African background, without committing itself uncritically to these preconditions" (Asouzu 2004, 41).

Both consolationism and complementarism seek a wider circle of solidarity. Asouzu (2004, 41) says pointedly that complementary reflection, "while leaning against the traditional African ontology, seeks to transcend this in a manner that seeks wider applicability." Complementarism and consolationism acknowledge the capacity of African philosophy for uniqueness by admitting an African ontology which supplies a distinctive content relative to non-African ontologies. This ontology is a complementary, processual, and dynamic understanding of reality, and is widely acknowledged in African philosophy literature.⁶

Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between consolationism and complementarism in their approach to the notion of perfection with regard to the constitution of the universe. Asouzu's

⁶ African philosophical currents and concepts like *negritude*, *ujamaa*, *consciencism*, *Afro-communitarianism*, *ezumezu* logic, *conversationalism* and *ubuntuism* clearly promote an interconnected, interdependent, and dynamic conception of the universe. See, for instance, Tempels (1959), Senghor (1964), Nyerere (1968), Ramose (2003), Asouzu (2007), Chuwa (2014), and Chimakonam (2018b). The African holistic perspective of the universe is not necessarily a unique African perspective but Africans certainly project a distinctive complementarism as reflected in the radical understanding of nature as an interconnected and interdependent network of actualities and possibilities.

vision is overly optimistic, for it assumes that since human consciousness, in its transcendental dimension of expansive thinking, does indicate perfection as the ultimate purpose of universal existence, this high point of all future orientations of missing links is reachable.⁷ The mind indeed indicates perfection as the (possible) goal of all things that strive for the fullest possible realization of being even as there is empirical evidence of the attainability of degrees of completeness in nature. Such empirical evidence includes biological growth and development from infancy to adulthood, the capacity of humans to realize certain life goals, and comfort-enhancing technological progress. But such degrees of completion pale in comparison with the ideal of perfection as a grand purpose which these incomplete instances of the intelligibility of the thesis of perfection reinforce. Humans and things strive indeed for completion but degeneration and decay intervene to terminate the march towards perfection. In the case of humans, who are endowed with advanced consciousness, death puts an end to the grand project, and not even belief in an omniscient being who will, or can, at some point in cosmic history help humans reach a perfect state in a different plane of existence suffices. Death and decay put an end to active striving, without this striving realizing the purpose that actuated it in the first place.

Elsewhere, while mulling over the thoughts of Asouzu, I noted that:

The concept of the *joy of being*...is pivotal to the optimism of Asouzu...Why must the optimistic vision of the universe stand given that human life provides enough materials to feed pessimism and put forward the claim of pessimism to metaphysical priority over optimism? Is optimism not a missing link in the chain of complementarity? If yes, what is its relationship with pessimism? What significance can be attached to a notion such as the *sadness of being*? (Author 2015, 57).

⁷ This debatable optimism emboldens Asouzu to assume that the emotional-cum-intellectual attitude of *jide ka iji* can be sustained over significant periods in the face of the constancy of the existential obstacles whose overcoming in the first place leads us to the experience of joy. But sadness and grief are real states of the mind and are as existentially significant as joy. Stoicism, which Asouzu seems to be indirectly advocating, merely underlines the fact that all is not well although all may still be well. According to the consolationist, this stoic attitude symptomizes *consolation* as a universal existential category.

Consequently, consolationism challenges Asouzu's optimism and offers a more pessimistic vision of the universe that sheds light on the paradox of the human mind indicating perfection as the goal of existence even in the face of the impossibility of the attainability of this perfection.

The Thesis of Consolationism and the Doctrine of Mood

Consolationism seeks to find a balance between Asouzu's optimism and the pessimism which the reality of moral and physical evil arouses in the mind that proposes perfection as the possible culmination of all strivings in the universe. The consolationist asserts that yearning or striving characterizes all things that exist and all things that will exist. For, to exist now means to have in various degrees realized the impulses that constitute yearning and to exist at some point in the future indicates the causative power of yearning. Something precedes yearning as its ground and which is yet yearning in its inchoate state. For the consolationist, this thing is *mood*. Yearning, as the essence of things, indicates the working of reason throughout the universe. This universal reason rises from the unconscious state imputed to supposedly inanimate things and lower life-forms to the intense subjectivity discernible in higher life-forms like humans. Reason implicates the actuality of feeling or emotion and intellect, both being orientations of a primitive subjectivity. This primitive subjectivity I call *mood*. It transits between conscious and unconscious states by virtue of an internal dialectic (of yearning) and defines all things and pervades all things as original mind.

To be is to yearn and to yearn is to be *mood*. The ontological framework that conceives every existent thing or every possible existent thing as an expression of *mood* is a panpsychist framework. This is the case since *mood* is a composite of feeling and intellect – both constituting reason – and, therefore, proto-mind. All subjective forms and bodily constructions in the course of geological and evolutionary history are orientations of *mood*, according to the consolationist hypothesis. I noted elsewhere that: “Mood is an originary intelligence, the basis of feeling, a primordial reason, a proto-mind from which advanced reason, thought, affects and attitudes arise” (Author 2018). Matter understood in terms of substantiality is an orientation of *mood*; so are mental states like joy, sadness,

desire, etc. Mental activities such as thinking and behavioural dispositions are ways *mood* expresses itself.

The term 'proto-mind' underlines the panpsychist credentials of the consolationist system. Panpsychism itself is the view that mentality is fundamental and distributed throughout the universe. That is to say, objects, both living and non-living, exhibit mentality in their micro-history or at the micro level. Panpsychist views come in different shades. For instance, idealistic panpsychism submits that reality is fundamentally mentalistic while physicalist panpsychism views mind as ubiquitous in the universe and as fundamental as matter (see Sprigge 2002; Strawson 2006; Seager 2010). While the literature on panpsychism in African philosophy is scanty, some notable Western philosophers have devoted much attention to panpsychism in view of its promise in the field of consciousness studies.⁸

Consolationist panpsychism is closer to idealistic panpsychism than physicalist panpsychism, for it claims that *mood* as original subjectivity and the most fundamental reality is prior to both matter and mind (as advanced consciousness). Matter and mind are orientations of *mood*. At this point the acute thinker will wonder how mind and matter emerges out of *mood*. The process is less one of emergence than of differentiation since mind and matter already subsist in their inchoate forms in *mood* which is their defining essence. According to the philosophical hypothesis I present, mind and matter are orientations of *mood*, imbued with the capacity for further development by virtue of their yearning essence, which arises as a consequence of an internal necessity in *mood*. They arise as differentiations brought about by an internal dialect in *mood* necessitated by the very nature of *mood* as yearning.

⁸ A seemingly intractable question in the philosophy of mind is the mind-body imbroglio. By positing the fundamentality and ubiquity of mind-stuff in the universe, panpsychism supplies a compelling response to the question of the nature of mind and matter, their dependence or independence, and interaction. Physicalists like Strawson have vigorously defended panpsychism and others like Chalmers find it plausible. Strawson's argument is that experience implicates consciousness and the only way to avoid imputing the miraculous to the emergence of consciousness in the natural world is to posit the fundamentality of mind-stuff side by side with physical stuff. A form of panpsychism called Russellian monism after the British philosopher Bertrand Russell who sketched an outline of a form of monistic panpsychism, has intrigued philosophers who see it as supplying the basis for thinking the completion of the data physics supplies about the world. Russellian monism suggests that consciousness underlies reality and accounts for the intrinsic or inner nature of things which science has not deciphered even while adequately describing the behaviour of physical phenomena (see Alter and Nagasawa 2015).

Consolationism assumes a darker aspect and presents a more pessimistic vision of the universe relative to Asouzu's complementarism because consolationism submits that whatever exists as *mood* and carries the burden of yearning cannot reach its ultimate goal. This ultimate goal is the apotheosis of the human phenomenon in its attainment of freedom and happiness and the completion of nature in a way that eliminates physical evil such as earthquakes, hurricanes, diseases, and other natural occurrences that have negative consequences for humans and the natural environment. Yearning should have a purpose; and, indeed, the human mind, which reflects on empirical states of affairs, indicates perfection as the goal of the universe, being the ideal concept under which all causal dispositions, existential struggles, and forms of progress find their bearing. Yet, this perfection is impossible. The indication of perfection as the goal of the universe and the impossibility of that which consciousness indicates as a final purpose capture the universe's tragic dimension. Given the tragic dimension of existence, I use the term *consolation* to describe whatever is actual or potentially actual, what endures or will endure in a universe of yearning. For, the sphere of being and meaning already subsist in tragedy, notwithstanding the potential for progress that, yet, never reaches the ideal which this same progress indicates. The ultimate futility of yearning reveals this tragedy. Consolationism describes as tragic a universe "whose ultimate purpose the human mind can discern as completion/perfection but which never seems to reach this goal" (Author 2019, 5).

Consequently, it makes sense to describe the universe as a consolatory universe, where everything that exists and is determined by yearning possesses that inherent capacity to be and to strive without reaching its ultimate target. The very fact that something is able to exist even while its very existence denies it the power to reach its goal means this thing is a *consolation*. All existents are consolations even as the universe itself exists as a consolation. The universal category of consolation underlines the tragedy of existence. Whatever exists is *ab initio* a victim of existence even as its actuation is a concession to its being. Every existent thing is at once victim and victimizer.

The notion of purpose in relation to perfection deserves further elucidation. The consolationist regards perfection in the Asouzian sense of the completion of the individual parts of the whole and, therefore, the whole itself. In the human sphere where subjectivity is integral to being, perfection is that state of being that equates freedom. In consolationism, freedom is conceived as transcendental and absolute. Freedom is the capacity to initiate a course of action or make a choice that leads to favourable or desired outcomes always. To be free

[I]s to possess the capacity to always will an ideal or perfect state of affairs that conduce to human happiness. The free being is a perfect being and the perfect being is a free being...it is the capacity to will a perfect state of affairs that constantly calms the radical yearning which defines the human being (Author 2018).

My conception of freedom deviates from the conventional understanding of the term to mean the ability to make a rational choice in the face of options, the ability to have acted differently than one did. My conception of freedom regards choice as a decision made in an environment of struggle and conditioned by antecedent physical, biological, and psychological impulses (see Author 2015, 223ff). To embrace a course of action out of many options or at least two options is to exercise the power of choice. This is by no means freedom because from the very beginning the outcome of the choice made is not guaranteed to be favourable as impediments lie in the path of realization.

Perfection is that ideal that renders intelligible the ceaseless strivings and push for progress that characterize the natural world and the entities that subsist in this world. This ideal informs us that the dispositions of matter at sub-atomic levels and the pursuit of progress that defines human existential engagements are not irrational but supply the human mind with the data that compel it to posit perfection as the goal of the universe. The impossibility of this ideal, which I have previously noted, validates the postulation of *consolation* as a universal existential category.

Possible Objections to the Perfection Thesis

1. The theist's objection: It is possible that an omnipotent and omniscient Being can and will realize perfection in nature and for humans, if not in this world, then in another world: in which case the submission that perfection is unrealizable is false.

I respond that not even such a Being escapes the reach of *mood*. Since every existent thing is constituted by *mood*, yearning defines the essence of such a Being. Consequently, the categories of omnipotence and omniscience do not apply.

2. The realist's objection: The idea of perfection is too expansive. It is not necessary for humans and the natural world to have perfection as a final purpose. It is enough that we pursue our worldly goals to the best of our abilities.

I respond that this is a fatalistic stance that accepts the imperfect world as simply a brute fact. The respectability of this stance lies with the claim that stoicism is the most appropriate behavioural response to the way the world appears to humans. This stance does not invalidate the consolationist hypothesis but, in fact, affirms the tragedy of existence, which tragedy calls for a resolute stoicism.

3. The atheist's objection: There is no final purpose in the universe. For there to be a final purpose, a Being or power outside the world must guarantee it. But no such Being exists. Therefore, the universe has no purpose.

I respond that the panpsychist framework of consolationism helps us meet this objection. Since mind is fundamental and ubiquitous in the universe, reason permeates all things in varying degrees of actuation. The rationality of the universe is an argument in favour of a final purpose which the human mind intuits as perfection. If existence is not irrational by virtue of the yearnings in the universe at sub-conscious and conscious levels and if the realization of these yearnings, however limited, creates meanings in the universe, it is plausible to

presuppose a final purpose that entails all existential strivings as their ideal reference point.

The non-existence of God does not annul the reason that animates the world.

4. Humans are not wholly determined. They are endowed with the power of choice. Therefore freedom is already a reality.

I respond that this capacity for rational decision making is conditioned by antecedent physical, psychological, and biological impulses even as our decisions enter a field of impediments and struggle where outcomes are unpredictable.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I presented a brief historical overview of African philosophy, highlighting the tension between universalism and particularism and the importance of a philosophical agenda that transcends the divide this tension creates. I presented Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* philosophy as an African philosopher's attempt at transcending the universalism-particularism divide by building a rigorous thought-system on the foundation of the basic African complementary perspective of the universe. I traced the philosophical trajectory of complementarism to the system of consolationism which seeks to advance the Asouzian universe by accounting for the more gloomy side of existence which the philosophy of complementarism conveniently overlooks. While complementarism predicts a future convergence of all missing links of reality in a more perfect unity that will further expand into a perfect state in an undetermined future date and state, consolationism submits the claim that this future ideal condition is an illusion of the thinking mind.

The affirmation of the impossibility of the perfection the human mind indicates as the purpose of the universe has implications for the reconceptualization of philosophical notions like freedom and determinism. Since the scope of this paper is limited to exhibiting the relation between complementarism and consolationism and showing how these thought-systems arise as a response to the universalism-particularism conflict, a fuller exposition and analysis of the concept of freedom is required in a future work.

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