



Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology and its implications for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology

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Abstract

This study examines Innocent Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology and its implications for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. Asouzu is an African philosopher who argues that the dominant Western ontology, or concept of being, is inadequate for interpreting African ontology. He claims that African ontology is based on a sense of wholeness, mutual complementation and interdependency, which is succinctly captured in his notion of *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology. The study focuses on Asouzu's ontology, conceived as ontological relationality, complementarity and mutual complementation. Specifically, it examines the concept of being, as proposed by Asouzu, and how this ontology differs from the Western ontological conception of being. It then analyzes the implications of this ontology, such as social-ontological, intercultural/comparative, and gender-complementarity dimensions for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. To achieve its goal, the study adopts the methods of historical hermeneutics and textual analysis.

Keywords: ontology, *ibuanyidanda*, being, mutual complementarity, missing link, essential relationality, cross-culturality.

Introduction

This study examines Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology with the aim of demonstrating the implications of this ontology for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology expresses the idea of mutual relationality, complementarity, and interdependency. *Ibuanyidanda*, in the Igbo-African traditional system, describes the natural order of interdependent cooperative action aimed at achieving a common goal. It literally translates as an idea that no load is insurmountable for ants (*danda*) to carry. The concept is derived from the mutual interdependent cooperation exhibited by a colony of ants (known as *danda*) in carrying loads that appear bigger and heavier than themselves (see Njoku, 2018; Asouzu, 2011; cf. Ohuche, 1991; Madubuiké, 2012; Nwauwa & Korieh, 2011; Odumayak, 2016). The concept of *ibuanyidanda*, as articulated through the cooperative and mutually complementary relational action of ants carrying loads that appear bigger and heavier than themselves, expresses Asouzu's ontological complementarity and relationality.

For Asouzu, the essence of being is not constituted in exclusivity, abstraction, and speculation, but rather in its relational capacity with other beings (see Asouzu, 2011a; cf. Asouzu, 2011b). For him, any ontology worthy of the name must be grounded in mutual complementarity. In his estimation, being can be grasped only as something that has an intrinsic relational moment of mutual complementarity (see Asouzu, 2007a; 2004; cf. Ojimba, 2023; Ojimba, 2022). He contended that being can be concretely and necessarily articulated only within the context of relations and mutual interdependency, outside of which being loses its significance as that which exists (see Asouzu, 2007a). He deconstructs previous ontologies preceding his work (see Tempels, 1959 & Kagame, 1959) and accuses these ontologies of lacking relational capacity, mutuality and being detached from the traditional African philosophical complementary system of thought. It was in an attempt to fill the ontological lacuna inherent in these earlier ontologies that he constructed a new complementary ontology embedded in dynamic relationality and mutual complementation, as articulated in his notion of being – *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, which takes

into account the authentic African traditional complementary system of thought (see Asouzu, 2007a; cf. Asouzu, 2007b; Ojimba, 2023b).

Previous works have focused on the communitarian, social, political, and educational dimensions of Asouzu's concept of being (see Njoku, 2018; Ogbonnaya, 2015; Ohuche, 1991; Madubuike, 2012; Ojimba, 2023b; Nwauwa & Korieh, 2011). However, relatively little attention has been paid to the implications of this concept of being for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. This study addresses this gap by examining Asouzu's concept of being, as articulated in his idea of *ibuanyidanda*, and the implications of this for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. The study further argues that Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, as long as it focuses on the question of being, is philosophically significant and relevant to the contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology, as demonstrated in the last section of this paper. To properly address this concern, the study raises the following questions: What are the essential elements of the Asouzuan African concept of being, as articulated in his notion of *ibuanyidanda*

complementary ontology? How does this ontology differ from the Western ontology or concept of being? What are the implications of this ontology for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology? To achieve its purpose, the study is divided into three sections. Section one reviews the African metaphysical literature to provide an adequate background for the discussion of Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology. Section two scrutinizes Asouzu's concept of being, as captured in his notion of *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, while section three examines the implications of this ontology for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. This final section also presents the conclusion.

A brief review of African metaphysical literature and background to Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology

Innocent I. Asouzu, in his major work, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology*, explores an alternative and, perhaps, a better way of articulating ontology, which takes cognizance of the comprehensive nature of reality and which does not unnecessarily polarize the idea of being by way of elitist categorical logic of prediction (Asouzu, 2007a). Through this concept of *ibuanyidanda*,

Asouzu projects an African ontology or notion of being that captures reality from the perspective of relationality, mutual complementarity and dynamic essentiality.

Before Asouzu, Placide Tempels (1959), in his work, *Bantu Philosophy*, had attempted to project the *Bantu* African idea of being as captured in his idea of vital force. For Tempels, the *Bantu* African concept of being is enshrined in the notion of force, and this force, according to him, is embedded in the idea of becoming (Tempels, 1959). Interestingly, while Tempels' conceptualization of the *Bantu* African view of reality, as basically integrated in the notion of force, appears insightful, he nevertheless fell short, particularly in his attempt to philosophically justify his position beyond a cultural-anthropological interpretation of *Bantu* worldview (Ojimba, 2023a).

Alexis Kagame adopted the same ontological view as Tempels, as he articulated the African concept of being from the perspective of dynamic ontology, which is succinctly captured in his notion of *ntu* as a substantial category that depicts being within the framework of linguistic expression (see Kagame, 1959). Notably, both Tempels and Kagame converge on the view that

the African ontology or concept of being is permeated by the idea of motion.

In his work, *African Belief in Reincarnation: A Philosophical Reappraisal*, Innocent Onyewuenyi follows the Tempelsian and Kagamean ontological line of thought. For him, the African ontology can be designated, without further qualification, as force or dynamic ontology (Onyewuenyi, 1966). He agrees with Tempels that the notion of force permeates African ontology and that this force, as conceived by Tempels and Kagame, is deeply rooted in the idea of motion. However, Onyewuenyi's characterization of African ontology, as deeply rooted in the notion of force, has been criticized for oversimplifying the complexity of African philosophical thought. Furthermore, his account can be faulted for its tendency to detach the fundamental principle of relationality from African ontology, thereby reducing this ontology to a mere philosophy of force.

In a similar vein, Mogobe Ramose, in his book *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, captures the African idea of being as enshrined in the concept of *ubuntu*. For him, *ubuntu* is a compound word and a philosophically hyphenated concept – *ubu* and *ntu*. According to him, *ubu*

captures the idea of being in general, before its manifestation in concrete and particular entities – *ntu*. He maintains that *ubu* and *ntu* are mutually interpenetrating, constituting two aspects of the same reality as an indivisible whole (Ramose, 1999, p. 50; cf. Ojimba, 2023a; Agada, 2021).

Ramose's articulation of reality within the framework of mutuality and interdependency exhibits a close affinity with Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology. Notably, Ramose upholds the view that *ubuntu* ontology is grounded in the idea of constant motion, a position that aligns him ontologically with thinkers such as Tempels and Onyewuenyi. However, while the Ramosean characterization of African notion of being, as foregrounded in the notion of *ubuntu*, is not devoid of the principle of complementarity and mutuality, as Asouzu would want it, his rejection of the ordinary language and insistence on the *rheomodic* language of *ubuntu*, as the only language that captures being, appears too idealistic and philosophically impracticable (see Okafor et al., 2023).

Iroegbu (1995), on his own part, mirrors *Igbo*-African ontology from the perspective of *uwa*. In his book,

Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy, he articulates the African notion of being as encapsulated in the idea of *uwa*, which evokes the idea of totality, comprehensiveness and wholeness of reality (Iroegbu, 1995; Iroegbu, 1994; Onebunne, 2022). According to him, "there is only one reality, the reality of *Uwa*. There are no *uw*as (plural) but *Uwa* (singular). Yet, in the singularity is embedded plurality, hierarchy and multiplicity...Everything has its own world, and everything is in *Uwa*, the *Uwa* of *Uwas*" (Iroegbu, 1994, p. 144). This ontological position may explain why Iroegbu further affirms that: "my perception of reality in its different aspects is synthesized in my perception of *Uwa*. *Uwa* defines being. It summarizes being and beings for me. It englobes all beings in the bosom of *Uwa*-being. *Uwa* ontology thus is the way I envision the questioning of, and the responding to, the problematic which whatever is, confronts me with: particularly and universally" (Iroegbu, 1995, p. 338).

Asouzu's central objection to these ontologies, as articulated above, is their reductionistic and ethnocentric tendencies. Specifically, he identifies Tempels and Kagame as most culpable of these shortcomings, especially in terms of

ethnocentrism and reductionism (Asouzu, 2007a). More precisely, he criticizes their ontological account for their deficiency in relationality and mutual complementarity, as well as being estranged from the traditional African philosophical complementary system of thought. In response to these perceived inadequacies, Asouzu embarked on a systematic philosophical reconstruction of what he considers an authentic African ontology, one that is permeated by the principles of relationality, complementarity and mutuality. This ontological framework is captured in his concept of *ibuanyidanda*, which he describes as a new complementary ontology.

Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology

Ibuanyidanda ontology describes Asouzu's notion of the authentic African concept of being. The term *ibuanyidanda* is a compound expression derived from three Igbo words— *ibu*, *anyi* and *danda*. *Danda* expresses an Igbo word for a small species of ant, *ibu* represents "load," while *anyi* translates to "not insurmountable." Thus, the expression, *ibuanyidanda* presupposes that no load is insurmountable for this species of ant to carry whenever they complement and

combine their efforts (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 252). This analogy represents the belief that when humans combine or complement their efforts and potentialities, no tasks will be insurmountable for them. This is the philosophical sense intended whenever the Igbo expression *ibuanyidanda* is used to designate the English term – complementarity, which, for Asouzu, describes the horizon within which ontology plays itself out (Asouzu, 2007a). It is important to note, also, that the comparison of humans with ants, in Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda*, is analogical and metaphorical.

From the Igbo linguistic perspective, *danda* functions as both a singular and plural noun. But the *ibuanyidanda*, as employed by Asouzu, is used exclusively in the collective sense. It is also in this collective sense that the ontological force or significance of *ibuanyidanda* comes to the fore. Therefore, "the expression *ibuanyidanda* gets its full meaning, when it is seen as that horizon within which being can be grasped as something that has an intrinsic relational moment of mutual complementarity" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 252). For Asouzu, the question of meaning is also adequately handled within the ontological horizon of

ibuanyidanda as the mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent having a head and tail end. In *Igbo* expression, this idea of something having a head and tail end is translated as *ihe di, nwere isi na odu* (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 253), literally translated as "anything that exists has head and tail-end". Within Asouzu's ontological framework, this implies that a thing is meaningful only insofar as it stands in relations of mutual complementarity with other things. Therefore, for Asouzu, "to be is to have head and tail-end (*ihe nwere isi na odu*) such that a thing is hardly conceivable which exists without having head and tail-end" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 253). Should such a mode of existence be conceivable, in Asouzu's perspective, it is meaningless. The above expression is another way of affirming that whatever exists serves as a missing link of reality. From this perspective, to affirm the existence of something presupposes the affirmation of all the relational processes through which that thing is meaningfully conceived within a complementary universal framework (Asouzu, 2007a). For Asouzu, this mode of conceiving being is significant in addressing one of the difficult problems in ontology – the problem of the relation between

substance and accident. He points out that the relationship between substance and accidents has been conceived as mutually exclusive and contrastive. As a result of this, according to Asouzu, the mind tends to conceive substance and accident as conflictual and opposing and as belonging to two diverse regions of being, thereby fostering a tendency toward bifurcation and polarization. In this connection, Asouzu cautions that "where this mode of viewing being is operational, it can easily distort our perception of reality and the way we relate to other beings" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 253). Asouzu's contention is that "by recourse to the ontological horizon of *ibuanyidanda*, the new complementary ontology wishes to bridge the artificial chasm, and overcome all forms of bifurcating barriers, which the mind imposes on the relationship between substance and its accidents" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 253).

Asouzu contends that an entity does not owe its existence or being only to itself in isolation, but to other beings whose presence makes its existence evident. For him, where such an entity projects itself as isolated and detached from other beings, it runs the risk of its existence being unknown, even if it does exist (Asouzu, 2007a). As a result of this, such

an entity remains irrelevant or insignificant to other perceiving subjects. Thus, to remain in existence, Asouzu argues that "an entity must be perceived by any of the units with which it constitutes a complementary whole relationship within which its existence is co-affirmed" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 254). This is why he further argues that any person who nurtures the belief that a subject can manage to live independently, outside the legitimacy conferred by the mutual complementary relationship existing among all missing links, and still describes this as existence, deserves pity (Asouzu, 2007a; cf. Enyimba & Agada, 2021). Thus, from Asouzu's perspective, the being of any entity is constituted through its participation in a shared complementary relationship with other beings. To exist, for Asouzu, then, presupposes serving as a missing link within the framework of the whole of reality.

Within the context of *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, it is inadequate to affirm the existence of an entity without necessarily emphasizing its mode of being within a complementary ontology. In the absence of this complementary ontology, an entity cannot be adequately grasped in its

essential relational mode. In the words of Asouzu:

...ontology studies being, what is or what has existence (ihe di) in so far as it has head and tail-end (ihe di, nwee isi na odu). Hence, what exists and has a head and tail-end (ihe di, nwee isi na odu) constitutes the subject matter of the new complementary ontology. Hence, what is and has a head and tail-end (ihe di, nwee isi na odu), goes beyond spatio-temporal metaphor as to include all modes of existence. Within this framework, we are thinking of all beings and their modes of existence, which can be determined as far as they have heads and tail-end (ihe di, nwee isi na odu), serve a missing link and can be grasped within a complementary horizon (*ibuanyidanda*). (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 257)

What the above quotation expresses is that, for Asouzu, ontology invariably transcends all possible modes in which being finds expression and resists all

forms of fixity and predetermination. Thus, an idea of being that stands aloof and detached from its various modes of expression remains un-transcended (see Asouzu, 2007a). Therefore, there is a necessity for an ontology that grasps being from the perspective of mutual interaction without encapsulation, polarization or bifurcation. Such horizon is encapsulated within the ontological complementary framework of *ibuanidanda*. This framework approaches being from the horizon where anything that exists serves as a missing link within the whole that gives legitimacy to all beings in a future-referential mode. Therefore, it is not enough to know what a thing is in its fixed or predetermined or mere abstract sense, but rather what it is, insofar as it serves a missing link of reality (see Asouzu, 2007a).

Admittedly, Asouzu's new commentary ontology seeks to supersede world-immanent (exclusivist) concomitant modes of thinking. It rejects all forms of exclusivist, bifurcating and polarizing manner of relating to the world. For him, all modes of being seeking relevance must mutually serve one another in order to sustain their significance and meaning. This complementary ontological relationship opens up the horizon of being as something that is inherently

relational, comprehensive and mutually reinforcing. In this way, Asouzu contends that matters of ontology are removed from abstract, fixed and speculative modes of thought. This is why he accuses Western philosophers, like Aristotle, of articulating an ontology that is overly abstract and speculative (see Asouzu, 2007a). This type of ontology, Asouzu argues, is generally inadequate to describe authentic African ontology, which is inherently relational and originally complementary. This conviction informs his deconstruction of both Kagamean and Tempelsian ontologies, which he accuses of misrepresenting African ontology by interpreting it through Western conceptual frameworks and categories.

Asouzu's way of characterizing African ontology differs markedly from the Western concept of being, like Parmenides', Plato's, Zeno's, and even Kant's conception of being. Parmenides, for instance, argues that being is fixed and static. For him, being constitutes one single unchanging substance (cited in Freeman, 1984). Plato (1943) toed the same line of thought as he describes being as fixed, constant and absolute. He divided reality into two: the ideal world and the natural world. For him, the natural world constitutes the world of

change, whereas the ideal world describes the abstract, speculative, absolute and fixed world (Plato, 1943). In his estimation, the essence of things consists in their forms, which exist independently in the world of Forms and remain constant and unchanging. Kant (1781) extends this dualistic orientation by dividing reality into the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds. The phenomenal world is the world of appearance and change, while the noumenal world designates the world of things in themselves (Kant, 1781). Aristotle (1926), on his own part, conceives the being-qua-being as the basic substance (Ousia) of being or ontology. This basic substance, according to him, is abstract, speculative and static. Furthermore, for Aristotle, the being qua being, which describes the basic substance of reality, is the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause and the highest principle, which is not subject to change or becoming. It is a fundamental reality that exists independently, having its own identity and properties. It remains constant, despite changes, such as a human, a tree, a horse (Aristotle, 1924). This highest principle or substance, in the Aristotelian estimation, is distinguished from its attributes or accidents, which are subject to change. For Aristotle, "accidents

(Symbebekos) are properties or attributes that a substance can gain or lose without changing its fundamental nature. They are non-essential characteristics, such as a person's height, colour, or location" (Aristotle 1924, 34). Aristotle's distinction between substance and accidents thus provides a conceptual framework for addressing the concept of change, identity, and reality. His ideas have made a significant impact on Western philosophy, shaping subsequent debates on metaphysics and ontology.

Asouzu criticizes the above Western ontologies or ways of conceiving being and describes them as inadequate for characterizing the African ontology or conception of being. This conviction informed his critique of African philosophers like Kagame, who attempted to employ Western ontological categories in describing African ontology. African ontology, for Asouzu, is inherently relational and complementary. An entity exists, for Asouzu, only insofar as it serves a missing link of reality (the concept of missing link of reality emphasizes the interconnectedness of reality and interdependence of all things, where every entity complements and completes others). In Asouzu's view, the African ontology does not polarize or bifurcate the idea of being (the idea of

substance and accident), unlike the Western ontology or conception of being, as articulated in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Parmenides. Furthermore, the African ontology is essentially complementary, unlike the abstract, speculative, static and non-relational idea of being that characterize much of Western metaphysical thought. Little wonder Asouzu rejects this conception of being and describes it as inadequate for describing African ontology, whose defining features include relationality, complementarity and mutuality. This relational and complementary notion of being is systematically articulated in Asouzu's complementary ontology, as enshrined in his idea of *ibuanyidanda*, which operates within the ambience of dynamic relational essentiality. Thus, being, in Asouzu's estimation, remains concretely expressible only within the framework of complementarity and totality.

Asouzu contends that the idea of being can be concretely and necessarily articulated only within the context of relations. Outside of this context of relationality, being loses its significance as that which exists (see Asouzu, 2007a). Existence, thus, presupposes the awareness that what is can only be interpreted or conceived within the

ambience of totality, as missing links that mutually serve one another. In view of this, "grasping being, therefore, from the preceding condition of its dynamic essentiality turns out to be all the processes needed to imbue meaning in the awareness of mutual service of all things that exist" (Asouzu, 2007a, pp. 259-260). This insight explains why Asouzu maintains that outside the relational mode, being becomes meaningless. According to him, immediately the inherent necessary mutual relational structure of being is negated within any ontology, such an ontology naturally assumes an absolute and hegemonic character, to the extent that it resists relationship and complementarity. Thus, for any ontology to be meaningful and relevant, it must take seriously its dimension of mutual relational comprehensiveness, rather than positing itself as merely an abstract doctrinal construct. This dimension of being has the capacity of grasping even the human person in both the relativity and comprehensiveness of being. The idea of being, here, is understood from the perspective of unity, and the type of relationship which is at play is not one of polarization, isolation or exclusion, but rather one of inclusion and unity. At this level, the human mind has the capacity

to balance and harmonize all situations and contraries, conceiving all units as integral aspects of a unified whole. To grasp being, at this level, thus becomes synonymous with the restoration of the broken links, which are often caused by the human inability to come to terms with all ambivalent situations (see Asouzu, 2007a). The ability of the human mind in grasping all units from the perspective of harmony signals its penetration into being in its dynamic essentiality. In view of this, grasping being, in Asouzu's estimation, necessarily requires mediation within the context of its comprehensive, complementary universal ramifications (see Asouzu, 2007a).

Asouzu further argues that being defies definition except if it is considered from the perspective of relationality and harmony. In this case, being acquires its character and true worth within the context of complementarity. This process figuratively involves the harmonization of contraries that can conveniently be integrated within the same framework of meaning or horizon of being, outside of which being becomes imperceptible. These are the words of Asouzu:

It is ...within the context of the ontological bracket of mutual

complementarity of all things that exist that being takes full character, becomes active, starts to emerge and takes definite shape. Within the context of this ontology, contraries appear as natural complements such that to discuss the beginning, one has to think of the end. To talk of white, one has to think of black. To talk of the strong, one has to think of the weak. (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 264)

The above quotation indicates that, for Asouzu, being is conceived from the perspective of unity such that contraries are harmonized into a complementary whole and parts are conceived as integral aspects of the whole. This brings to mind the ontology of the missing links, where parts are conceived as essential dimensions of the whole. Reality, then, is constituted in terms of harmony, inclusion, unity, comprehensiveness, totality, mutuality, complementarity, inherent interrelatedness and relationality. Consequently, genuine ontology can be pursued, in Asouzu's view, not merely as the science of being qua being, as Aristotle postulates (see Aristotle, 1926), but also as a preoccupation with the idea of being within the framework of all possible

relations outside of which nothing that exists can be meaningfully conceived (Asouzu, 2007a). In the context of this type of ontology, the significance, relevance or existence of things are judged, based on the nature of the service they offer to each other just as "*ibuanyidanda* (complementarity) constitutes the inescapable horizon for penetrating being within the context of contraries, but insofar as these contraries build complementary opposites" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 265). Within this context, existence and relationality become one and the same (being and mutual complementarity become synonymous) as being does not consist in the capacity for endurance in isolation and speculation, but rather in relational capacity and complementarity. Thus, Asouzu seeks to transcend traditional conceptions of being as abstract and irreconcilable contraries and to construct a notion of being grounded on the notion of comprehensiveness, totality, and unity, which he regards as constituting the foundation of all modes of authentic complementary relationship.

Asouzu's notion of being, notwithstanding its ontological strength, is objectionable in some respects, especially from the angle of the connection between his ontology (his

idea of being or existence) and his anthropology (his idea of the human person). Asouzu's ontology interprets the human person primarily from the perspective of relational capacity. As such, for him, an individual is only qualified as a person or is only identified as existing, insofar as he/she has relational capacity –that is, the ability to relate with other individuals in the community and to mutually complement their efforts. However, within Asouzu's ontology and anthropology, especially as regards his idea of communalism or social relation, there seems to be an existential tension between the individual's freedom and the communal authority or between the parts and the whole. Asouzu interprets the individual's freedom and authenticity from the angle of mutual relationality and complementarity of the communal or collective authority. However, there is a concern that this idea of the individual's freedom, inasmuch as it is embedded in his relational capacity with the communal authority, may result in a conflict between individual freedom and communal authority. This potential conflict is implicit in Asouzu's concept of being (*ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology) as Asouzu seems to suggest that the communal authority enjoys primacy over the individual's freedom

(see Asouzu, 2011a). However, despite this perceived loophole implicit in Asouzu's concept of being, his complementary ontology, no doubt, certainly has some positive implications for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontological discourse.

Implications of Asouzu's concept of being for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology

Certainly, Asouzu's concept of being has some implications for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. This ranges from social ontological, intercultural/comparative and even gender complementarity implications. To illustrate, at the social ontological level, Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology and the philosophy of the "missing link" can improve the ontology of mutual complementarity and harmonious intersubjective existence in the contemporary African society. Recall that the concept of *ibuanyidanda*, as articulated in Asouzu's concept of being, projects the notion of mutual complementation, harmony and complementarity. It expresses the idea that with the mutual complementation of human potentialities, every challenge can be surmounted – no challenge or task will be insurmountable when humans pull

their resources, ideas and skills together. To further illustrate, the *Igbo* cultural practice of *ikwu ogwe* (see Aja, 2015, p. 114), which has a somewhat similar connotation with Asouzu's concept of *ikwa ogwe* (see Asouzu, 2007c; Ojimba, 2003a, p. 105), expresses the intersubjective ontological form of *ibuanyidanda* complementarity and the philosophy of the missing link. For Ojimba (2003a, p. 105), *ikwu ogwe* expresses an *Igbo* African traditional practice of moving heavy logs of wood, like the bamboo wood, traditionally known as *achara*, from one location in the forest to another, which might be for the purpose of bridge construction or any other purpose. During this cultural practice, the energies, skills and resources of the age grades (groups of youths usually between the ages of 18–40 years and who were born at a certain period of time) are usually harnessed, with no remuneration attached, for the successful accomplishment of this exercise. The services of traditional drummers, dancers and flute players are also solicited for energizing and entertaining the youths during this cultural exercise. In carrying out this exercise (moving the heavy logs from one location of the forest to another), the efforts of each youth are as important as those of others, and no

individual youth's effort is considered as more or less important than another's. In other words, each individual is seen as a "missing link" (crucial part of the collective) without which the task cannot be successfully accomplished. Thus, the efforts, cooperation and mutual complementarity of every individual youth are significant for the success of the exercise. Leveraging this idea of complementarity, harmonious relationality, and mutual complementation, as expressed in Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology and concretized in the Igbo cultural practice of *ikwu ogwe*, the African contemporary society can improve its intersubjective human existence and relationship. This also reinforces the *Igbo* idea of *agbakota aka nyuo mamiri, ogboo ofufu* (when humans come together to urinate on a particular spot, at the same time, it produces many burbles), which is literally translated as when human skills, potentialities, and efforts are harmoniously combined and complemented for good, it produces enormous positive results. This is also why Asouzu believes that any particular individual who feels that he or she can live alone in an isolated world deserves to be pitied (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 260). Thus, the *Igbo* expression of *ka so mu adina*

(that I may not exist alone, in an isolated world, but exist together with the others). To further buttress, the idea of *onye aghala nwanne ya*, which expresses the *Igbo* communal experience of complementarity and mutual cooperation, lends credence to the philosophy of the missing link and *ibuanyidanda* as expressed in Asouzu's concept of being. This is why Asouzu contends that "the joy of being that is characteristic of being, in its deepest complementary ramifications, is not complete, unless this joy is a shared act in the mutual transcendent experience of complementary unity of consciousness, which turns out to be the highest form of communal experience (*onye aghala nwanne ya*) in its universal dimension" (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 261). Thus, Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology can institute the attitude of mutual help, tolerance, harmonious and peaceful intersubjective existence in the contemporary African society. Africans will come to the understanding that we are various parts that constitute a whole and that we are all united under one umbrella of humanity or under a complementary framework of universal humanism.

In the aspect of gender, which is a burning issue in contemporary African

society and the world at large, Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, which is deeply rooted in mutual complementarity and relationality, can help African society institute the sense of gender balance and sensitivity. Asouzu contends that for existence to be meaningful, it has to have "head and tail-end" (*isi na odu*) (Asouzu, 2007a, p. 253). For him, being is rooted in complementarity, relationality, and mutuality. Thus, any idea of existence or being devoid of principles of relationality, complementarity, and mutuality is meaningless. In African society today, there seems to be a conflict between the male and female genders. The relationship that exists between both genders today is one of competition, superiority and dominance. The male gender wants to dominate the female gender, and the female gender wishes to do the same (see Hird, 2000, pp. 153-164). Asouzu's concept of being, which is rooted in complementarity, can be adopted to question gender superiority and conflict. Asouzu contends that being is conceived from the perspective of wholeness, unity, totality, and mutuality. This idea of being can be utilized to evoke a sense of tolerance, mutuality and complementarity in the contemporary African society. Instead of conceiving

themselves as irreconcilable opposites or contraries, the male and female genders should see themselves from the angle of complementarity and mutual complementation of needs, as expressed in Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology. Recall that for Asouzu, being becomes meaningful to the extent that it is relational and complementary. Leveraging this Asouzuan ontology or principle of complementarity, the existence of the male and female genders becomes meaningful, to the extent that they are complementary and mutually reinforcing of each other's potentialities. Even in the Holy Scriptures, the female gender was added to the male gender, not as a slave or a distinct part of the male gender, but as an integral and complementary aspect of the male gender (see the Holy Bible, Genesis 2:18-24). Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology or concept of existence, as embedded in the principle of complementarity, becomes significant in this dimension.

Asouzu's concept of being, as captured in his idea of *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology and the idea of the missing link, can also have some positive implications for transcultural, cross-cultural or intercultural ontology, as it encourages a united or joint understanding of being or existence between the contemporary

African ontology and other ontological traditions across the world, at large. Asouzu, himself, describes complementarity as a transcultural idea (see Asouzu, 2004, pp. 96-101). Thus, *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, as articulated in Asouzu's understanding of being, expresses the importance of ontological complementarity and relationality. This explains why he argues that any ontology or view of the world that recognizes itself as exclusive, absolute, or superior to the other is bound to fail. This intercultural ontological attitude, as expressed by Asouzu, can help Africa and the wider global community cultivate a cross-tradition attitude with reference to understanding being and come to the realization that no one view of reality has the absolute understanding of being. Each ontological tradition or view of the world remains a missing link of reality, without which the idea of being will be incomplete. This underscores the need for a complementary approach with reference to a better and comprehensive understanding of being. This is the essence of cross-tradition or intercultural approach to philosophizing, where different ontological views of the world can come together to dialogue with one another, learn from one another,

complement one another, talk with one another, engage with one another, understand one another and make joint contributions to the understanding and interpretation of being and, as such, widen their ontological, cultural, intellectual and conceptual horizons (Ojimba, 2023a, p. 112; cf. Mall 2000 and Ranly1991). For instance, the African understanding of being, as articulated in the Asouzuan complementary ontology, can be constructively engaged with and complemented by the *yin-yang* complementary ontology of ancient China. The *yin-yang* ontology is an attempt to harmonize two aspects of reality – becoming and being (*yang and yin* forces) – into a relationship of mutually interdependent and complementary opposites (Mou, 2003, p. 88; Ojimba, 2023a, p. 105). Interestingly, this Ancient Chinese metaphysical vision can constructively engage with, dialogue, and mutually reinforce the Asouzuan African complementary ontology that materializes in the idea of *ibuanyidanda*. This intellectual complementary attitude has the capacity to widen both the African and Asian epistemic, conceptual and cultural horizons and spark a revolution in comparative and intercultural ontology, especially in contemporary African philosophy. The

above ontological complementary attitude can also exist between African ontology and other ontological traditions in the world. This will liberate African ontology from the heavy burden as well as the unnecessary and uncritical claim to uniqueness or particularistic ontology (cf. Ojimba, 2021; Asouzu, 2007b) and foster the attitude of interculturality or transculturality in African ontology and philosophy, in general.

Conclusion

This study examined Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* complementary ontology, with a view to showing the implications of this ontology for contemporary African

society and cross-cultural ontology. To this end, the paper scrutinized Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology, as enshrined in the principle of essential relationality and mutual complementarity, contrasted this ontology or concept of being with the Western idea of being, and foregrounded its implications for contemporary African society and cross-cultural ontology. It noted that Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* ontology, as embedded in the idea of relational essentiality, can institute a complementary interpretation of contemporary African social and intercultural ontology as well as institute the idea of gender complementarity in the contemporary African society.

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