

A Philosophical Investigation of the Nature of God in Igbo Ontology

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Abstract

In its general task, philosophy as an academic or professional exercise is a conscious, critical, personal reflection on human experience, on man, and how he perceives and interprets his world. This article specifically examines the nature of God in Igbo ontology. It is widely accepted by all philosophers that man in all cultures has the ability to philosophize. This was what Plato and Aristotle would want us to believe, but it is not the same as saying that man has always philosophized in the academic meaning of the word in the sense of a coherent, systematic inquiry, since power and its use are different things altogether. Using the method of analysis and hermeneutics this article sets out to discover, find out the inherent difficulties in the common sense views, ideas and insights of the pre-modern Igbo of Nigeria to redefine, refine and remodel them. The reason is simple: Their concepts and nature of realities especially that of the nature of God were very hazy, inarticulate and confusing. The conclusion is that their concept of the nature of God cannot conform to that in Western Philosophy. Consequently the author concludes that the nature of God among the pre-modern Igbo is monopolytheism which is what was touted as “one” and “many” by pre-modern scholars and scholars of African Traditional Religion. This concept is more acceptable in the light of Igbo Ontology or theory of being, so that the term “One” and “Many”, which, according to Igbo philosophy of language is just a “raw material”, may be dropped since in Igbo philosophy, the term “One” representing one God, and “Many” representing many gods can be made less clumsy since neither of them as in Western thought can fit into Igbo Theism. The solution must be sought in the integration of the “One” and the “Many” in order to distil the true nature of God in Igbo Ontology.

Keywords

Supreme, Theism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Igbo Ontology

1. Introduction

We carry out this new investigation in the light of the saying by Ogunmodebe (1986: 258) that:

No human thought and system is perfect. If it were perfect, scholarship would have ended long ago. Philosophy in particular thrives on detecting the imperfections and defects in theories, views and opinions. Through its critical and objective analysis, new thoughts and ideas are born, old ones develop and mature, and culture and civilization are promoted and ensured.

Thus this philosophical investigation of the nature of God in Igbo world view will hopefully serve the useful function of contributing to the growth of African philosophy especially when this new conception of the nature of God is seen against the backdrop of the popular but clumsy notion of “One” and “Many”.

2. Definition of Terms

Arazu (2005: 8) who might be considered as the toughest contender and the leading scholars of African Traditional Religion raised the soul-searching question that the Igbo are polytheists and that they have no word for God just as any other cultures like the Hebrew, German, and English etc. These assertions compounded the problem of the nature of God in Igbo Ontology when he stated categorically that:

Western words like God convey a stable concept. This discovery of the fact that Igbo language does not have a single word or term for the Hebrew “el” in the course of translating the Bible Psalms into Igbo language and poetry, gave me sleepless nights. I have made appeal to Igbo scholars and to this day such a word has neither been discovered in the language nor invented by our experts.

What is implied in these statements is that when God is used in Igbo philosophy, one is faced with the problem of whether the Supreme being is in question or the world of spirits which thickly populate Igbo tribal universe. Hence the need to clarify some terms which we shall come across in this paper. This will make the article easy to understand, there is need for analysis cum systematic evaluation of data or information by breaking the basic concepts in this article so as to uncover their interrelations. The aim is to provide the basis for problem solving and decision making. In defining these concepts, we also gain knowledge or better understanding of particular philosophical issues under investigation.

2.1. Supreme

The meaning of the word supreme is immediately rendered less elusive and clarified when placed side by side with its alternative words, that is to say, other words that mean something similar to it, namely, Ultimate, Transcendent, Final, Farthest, Utmost, Perfect, etc. It is an adjective used in qualifying a being to its superlative degree. For instance, when we talk of the “Ultimate being” or “Supreme being” within a context, what we are unquestionably looking for is “the greatest”, “the highest”, “the topmost”, “the transcendent being” in that context. Put simply, the supreme is that being beyond which there is no other. Such a being transcends the rest in quality and kind. The ultimate or supreme is best understood as the absolute if we were to use that philosophical term. The superlative degree expressed in “the Supreme”, or “the Ultimate”, is not disturbing. It can only be a disturbing superlative if the reality being qualified is not by identity, supreme, that is to say, if the being by identity falls either within the positive or comparative degree. In this case, it is jumping from the proper identity of the where it naturally belongs to the superlative status or a status where it raises serious grammatical error.

A great being by nature cannot be the greatest being at the same time and in the same respect. That would be assigning improper designation to it (a disturbing superlative) and a contradiction. In Mathematics, for instance, the number “2” (two), “4” (four), and “8” (eight), are three separate even numbers differentiated from each other by their numerical quantity. To qualify the three numbers and differentiate one from the other, the appropriate suffix or adjective is used to assign to each of the numbers thereby giving each its proper designation or kind. Thus the number “2” (two), is great (positive degree), similarly, “4” (four), and “8” (eight), are greater (comparative degree) and greatest (superlative degree) respectively. The implication of this Mathematical analysis of the three numbers is that the number “2” (two), cannot in the presence of the numbers “4” (four), and “8” (eight), be described as the greatest of the three numbers, namely, 2, 4, and 8. To do this is illogical, disturbing and against the laws of thought as applied to comparative adjective in English.

The point being emphasized here is that the term “Supreme” or “Ultimate” is an adjective that qualifies any being under consideration to its superlative degree in relation to other beings compared with it and should be understood as such in this article. The Supreme is the Ultimate, that which is Transcendent, in the sense that there is none like it. It is the wholly “Other”. Hence in Igbo Ontology the word *Chi-Ukwu* is the greatest of the spirits in Igbo pantheon. Such a spirit enjoys the highest status in Igbo hierarchy of being. He can also be described as *Chi-na-eke* the spirit that creates, since no other being can “create” in Igbo philosophy. Another name for the Supreme Being in Igbo ontology is *Olisebuluwa*—the spirit that carries the world. This name also places this being apart from other spirits that populate the spiritual world of the Igbo tribal universe.

2.2. Theism

Owen (1967: 97) defines theism as a “belief in the one God who is (a) personal, (b) worthy of adoration, and (c) separate from the world but (d) continuously active in it”. It is a theory of the nature of God which holds that there is a God or there are Gods, who stand in some kind of direct or personal relationship with human beings. From the theistic conception of Divinity, two theories on the nature of God are evident: these are Monotheism and Polytheism.

Theism asserts that God is a subject possessing not only mind but also will. Being fully personal, can be conceived through images drawn from human life and can be addressed as “thou” in prayer. Theists regard this personal God of religion as the Ultimate reality. In this they differ from such thinkers as Sankara, Hegel and F. H. Bradley, for whom personal images of God are intellectually immature depictions of a supernatural Absolute. Theists claim that God merits adoration or worship on two grounds. First, He is wholly good. Second, He excels men in power. According to theism proper, (or theism in the strict sense), God is infinitely powerful both in himself (as self-existent Being), and consequently, in his relation to the world. Theists hold that God is in his essence separate from the world. This belief distinguishes theism from pantheism, which holds that the world is a point, or mode of God. Theism asserts that God created the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Admittedly, “theism” is also sometimes applied in a loose sense to the view that God imposes form on pre-existent matter. But this application is valid if the other requirements of theism are satisfied.

Theism always involves the belief that God is continuously active in the world. In this it differs from deism. Deism—a word first applied to a group of eighteenth-century English thinkers who assert that God having made the world at the beginning on its time left it to continue on its own. Theists, notably Aquinas, St. Augustine, etc on the other hand, maintain that every item in the world depends for its existence on the continuous activity of God as the creator, so that from God’s point of view; “creation” and “preservation” are identical. Because deists remove God from continuous contact with the world, they are hostile to the orthodox Christian claim that God has supernaturally revealed himself in a series of events, which reach their fulfillment in the incarnation. Hence Tolland, claiming the support of Locke, interpreted Christianity as the reaffirmation of the truths of natural religion. Theistic beliefs raise the following questions, which among others constitute the philosophy of theism, or theism as such: How can finite terms refer to God if He is infinite? Is it possible to demonstrate, or at least to justify belief in God’s existence by reason? Is there a mode of experience which is specifically “religious”? In what sense (or senses) can one speak of a divine providence? Is the belief in a God who is both omnipotent and good compatible with the fact of will?

Philosophical theism has often been attacked. At the end of the middle Ages, William of Ockham denied that reason could prove God’s existence. Kant repeated this denial. In this century Barthians, Existentialist, Maritain, and Empiricists have rejected the possibility of speculative metaphysics in any form. Jacques Maritain, etc; still maintain that theistic reasoning is both possible and necessary.

2.3. Polytheism

According to Robert W. Williamson, Polytheism is a stage or phase of the religious development of mankind in which the belief in and worship of many gods prevails. It is distinguished from the previous stage (Polydaemonism) by the nature and from the subsequent stage (Pantheism, monotheism) by the number of the objects of worship. The term “Polytheism” is employed to describe the nature of God and it is generally defined as recognition and worship of many gods. Phenomenologically, polytheism reflects man’s experience of the universe as manifesting diverse forms of super human powers. Polytheism accommodates belief in many deities or divinities.

According to Paul Tillich, polytheism is a qualitative and not a quantitative concept. It is not a belief in the plurality of gods but rather the lack of a unifying and transcending ultimate, which determines its character. Omosade and Adelumo (1979: 16) have their own notion of polytheism. Polytheism from their viewpoint “is the belief in more than one God. It is the worship of many Gods”. Arguing further, Omosade and Adelumo (1979: 6) observe that “in any polytheistic system, there is usually an absence of a cohesive or unifying transcendental Supernatural Supreme Ultimate”. The Greek or the Hindus multiplication of gods is vivid examples of proper polytheism. In the Greek culture, where there are many gods, there is the Zeus, who was regarded as the Father of the gods ruling in Heaven. There are other gods like Apollo, Hermes, Arthemies and a host of others. Apart from the fact that the deities or gods all have human passions, the gods, including Zeus appear to be of the same status, without any of them having Supreme or superlative authority over the others.

In polytheism, taking the Greek pantheism for instance Idowu (1975: 166) quotes and with authority too, that:

The Olympian situation has always afforded a veritable example of what may be described as proper polytheism. Here we have a system where the Gods appear not to have transcended the universe of social cliques and inter-tribal conflicts. Not only were the gods all of the same rank and file in kind and in passion, distinguished from one another only by a hierarchy of status or power among more or less equals; but also they shared in the passions of men and tended to use their divinity in competing with, and beating, men in superfluity of naughtiness.

2.4. Monotheism

Monotheism literally means belief in and worship of one God. It is the belief in the existence of one and only God. Here the conception of Divinity is limited to one God as is the case in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Metuh (1987: 110) had made a very strong statement, which throws more light on the concept and definition of monotheism. He writes of course with emphasis on the Judaeo-Biblical traditions that “monotheism has come to connote not only belief in one God, but also denial of other deities, so that monotheism is characterized also by monolatry”.

This view of Metuh finds its support in the stand taken by Azikiwe (1977: 9) where he describes the religion of most European countries within the orbit of the Western Democracies as Christianity. He writes:

They maintain that there exists a personal God, who intervenes in the laws of the universe. He knows all, sees all. He is the most powerful and pervades the whole cosmic space. On judgment day, the dead will resurrect and, with the living, they shall give an account of their stewardship. That is how the Athanasian and Nicene creeds explain this aspect of Christianity.

Apart from Christianity that is essentially monotheistic, Islam as oriental religions theistic and its theistic conception of Divinity is monotheistic. Igbo/African traditional religion is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic.

In the light of these considerations, it would be preposterous for any one to associate Igbo/African traditional beliefs and practices with any of these name tags. Apart from the term “theism” none of these terms can be used to describe the religion of the pre-modern Igbo or the nature of God in Igbo Ontology. African religion or world view is justifiably best described as “traditional” in the sense that it is indigenous, natural and co-eval to the Africans.

Polytheism and Monotheism are the two classical theories of the nature of God in Western thought. In Igbo ontology, they form part of the basic assumptions entertained by the pre-modern Igbo. Consequently, none taken singly can be used as the appropriate term to describe the true nature of God in Igbo traditional philosophy except by qualifying or modifying any of the two terms or combining both terms to embrace the one unifying Ultimate Being and the subordinate gods to whom He delegates His power and through which He is indirectly approached. He remains the ultimate being in Igbo ontology.

The terms: polytheism and monotheism are tendencies in the God-question debate among philosophers in the Western thought. One anticipates such tendencies in the Igbo philosophy of God. This is because; it is an accepted fact that human beings by nature are essentially the same everywhere at any given time. And so we might raise these vital questions, namely, can there be Igbo Polytheists, Monotheists, Agnostics, Empiricists, Rationalists, Skeptics, Atheists, Fideists, deists, etc. We shall come across these problems in this article but we shall dwell in detail on polytheism and monotheism that are the major tendencies on the nature of God in Western philosophy to sift what is true from falsehood; reality from myth, certainty from educated guess on what is the true nature of God in Igbo ontology.

2.5. Igbo Ontology

Metaphysics is sometimes called ontology or the study of being. Consequently, African metaphysics or ontology is less ambitious. It is the study of the African world and world view. Such investigations as the nature of ultimate reality for the African, the nature of “forces” or beings in the African universe, the relationship between the seen and unseen, etc. are topics in African metaphysics or ontology (the science of being).

3. Nature of God in Western Philosophy

It is not the task of this article to go into details the works of various representative Western philosophers who examined the nature of God in Western philosophy. If I were to use Russell’s words: (1967: 14) “It is a large and serious question, and if I were to attempt to deal with it in any adequate manner I shall have to keep you here till kingdom come, so that you will have to excuse me if I deal with it in a somewhat summary fashion”. Consequently, our concern is their notions of the nature of God in their philosophies in a summary form as part of their contribution in the God-question debate in Western philosophy. Their contributions will give us a true picture of what God is, that is, the nature of God in Western thought; form the background to our further investigation of the nature of God in Igbo ontology or theory of being. In the end, that is to say, having studied the nature of God in both cultures, namely, Western and Igbo, we would be able to see the contributions of Western thought to Igbo traditional notions of God and vice-versa. It therefore serves as a kind of introduction to our later analysis of the nature of God in Igbo ontology.

3.1. God in the Philosophy of Aristotle

For Aristotle, God is the “the highest and purest substance”. Bambrough (1963: 11) when he was reviewing Aristotle came to the conclusion that “there is only one world and only one God for if there are two or more worlds and consequently two or more Gods, the Gods would have to be differentiated by matter and therefore could not be pure form and actuality”. God is pure spirit and in Book XII in the theological part of his Metaphysics he opts for “one world” and “one God” who is a unifying force of all other beings in the universe both spiritual and physical.

In his hierarchy of beings as he exposed in his Metaphysics his conception of God as the “absolute” (which was later to influence Hegel’s doctrine of the Absolute Spirit); as the highest and purest of substances; as a unifying force behind every other being in the universe both spiritual and physical; and as the Ultimate and towards which other beings aspire as their final end. For him (Aristotle), there exists a hierarchy of beings ranging from God on top, who is the “Supreme Mover”, and “Pure Spirit”. He is followed by other beings in the universe that are also arranged in their hierarchy to the degree they have being nearer to him who possesses it in its fullness or highest degree.

This highest position accorded God, as philosophers also frequently uses the ultimate or absolute by Aristotle “because in theology, God is looked upon as the primordial being from which all things flow”. W. T. Stace (1955: 26) attempting a categorization of beings according to their hierarchy and his own comments on God in Aristotle throws more light on Aristotle’s hierarchy of being. He writes:

Now at the top of the scale of being in Aristotle’s philosophy comes the absolute matterless form. This absolute form is what Aristotle calls God—because form is the source of all existence. This pure form contains no matter, but the form of form. And this becomes transformed into the famous Aristotle’s definition of God as the “thought of thought”. God does not think matter, He thinks only thought. He is thought, and the object of this thought is thought itself. He thinks therefore, only himself. God is self-consciousness. “Thought of thought” is equivalent to the phrase “form of forms”. Form is the universal; the universal is the real, the Absolute. Hence the real, the absolute is thought. And since thought is the essence of mind, we may express this by saying that the absolute is the mind.

Aristotle’s philosophy of God is to be seen as a study of pure form and actuality. The “Unmoved Mover” of his Metaphysics stands at the summit of the hierarchy of substances as the ultimate moving cause whose activity is the source of all motion and change. God is one, pure form, pure moving cause and pure end, the supreme instance of the identity of all the three non-material causes. Such a God exists and there are three main routes to Him, namely, reason, revelation and religious experience. God is at once a “Wholly Other”, a transcendent God, pure thought and he thinks of himself as his activity. In effect the doctrine of the immanent God is foreign to

Aristotle's concept of God. God is completely not aware of anything outside Himself. There is no room for divine providence in Aristotle. Aristotle is unique in his own way. He has of course not said the last word about the nature of God.

3.2. God in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas

In our studies of the nature of God in St. Aquinas, we are going to face a task not quite the same with that of Aristotle. The reason according to Bullough and Elrington (1939: 2) is because it is "the study of a philosophical theologian of the middle ages... The philosophical theologian draws truth from two different sources: Reason and Faith in the truth revealed by God, and its interpreter, the church... and so Aquinas brought together philosophy and theology" for according to him they played complementary roles in man's quest for truth. In his great work *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas examines the question of God's existence, treats the nature and attributes of God, His place and role in created things in the universe. It treats therefore the creation and government of the universe, or the origin and nature of man, of human destiny, of virtues, and vices and laws of all the great problems of speculative and practical philosophy.

About the unicity of God, that is the nature question, Aquinas argues that if God is the Supreme Good, it follows that he is unique. For according to Aquinas as commented by Bullough and Elrington (1939: 105), "it is not possible for two Supreme Goods to exist, since the Supreme Good, being by definition the supra-abundance of God, can exist in only one being. Now God is the Supreme Good. Hence he is unique". St. Thomas argues that we can also arrive at the uniqueness of God by arguing from Divine perfection. Since it has been established that God is absolutely perfect; if therefore several gods existed, several absolute perfect beings, free from all imperfections, would exist. Now, this is impossible, for if one of them were lacking in the slightest perfection and no imperfection of any sort were contained in their essence, we should fail to see how diverse beings could be distinct from each other. It is consequently impossible to posit the existence of several Gods. St. Thomas concludes: There is only one God, undivided and unique, not many gods.

Another important area examined by Aquinas, which is pertinent in this article, is the hierarchy of beings. Thomas believes that God is the Supreme good and that the created things participate in the goodness of God. God is therefore the good of all that is good. And yet everything possesses its own goodness, in as much as it is said to be good by resemblance to divine goodness inherent in it. There is therefore one simple goodness for all things and yet many particular goodnesses, still, there is no contradiction between them. For the goods are ordered in a hierarchy culminating in the universal Good, that is to say, the Good in essence or the Supreme Good, below which the particular and participated goods are arranged in descending hierarchy. Aquinas through the penmanship of [Stumpf \(1977: 196\)](#) therefore lays down his own chain of beings while maintaining that these beings differ in kind and in degree of their being. Thus for Aquinas:

Below God who is at the apex are the angels in their different hierarchy known to exist both by revelation and reason. Below the angels are human beings whose nature include both material and spiritual aspects; then come animals, plants and finally the four elements of air, earth, fire and water. There are no gaps between the various levels of beings; they interlock like links in chain.

With the combination of the two processes of our knowledge of God, namely, reason and faith, Aquinas maintains that God is eternal, incorporeal, simple, perfect, infinite, unique, transcendent, immanent, personal, providence, etc. And from faith and Divine revelation, he posits creation out of nothing, conservation and governance of creatures. God is the ultimate in the categories of being. Certainly, Aquinas does not have all the answers concerning the nature of God in Western philosophy. But before we re-examine Igbo man's concept of the nature of God which is the proper task of this article, let us take a brief look at the modern European philosopher, this time Hegel, the father of German Idealism and rationalist to the core. His extreme rationalists, if not pantheistic approach with regard to the concepts of God will at least show us how far removed the Western views are from the Igbo. The various doctrines of Hegel in this God-question are not an easy task. Our focus however is on his notion of the nature of God since it is the sole object of focus of this work.

3.3. Nature of God in Hegel's Philosophy

God for Hegel is a reality without qualification when abstractly considered somehow. Two basic things Hegel says about God is that he is "thought of thought", and "end towards which all things aspire". Hegel agrees with

Aristotle that God is “Self thinking thought”, and that this self-thinking Thought is the telos or end that draws the world as its final cause. [Stace \(1955: 26\)](#) brought out clearly this Hegel’s concept of God as Self-thinking Thought. He observes that “for Hegel and Aristotle God does not think matter. He thinks only thought. He is thought, and the object of this thought is thought itself. He thinks, therefore, only Himself. God is self-consciousness. Hegel’s Absolute is also self-consciousness, the thought of thought”.

God in Aristotle is Absolute form which is thought of thought because form is the source of all existence. In Hegel, God is Absolute spirit which is thought itself. He thinks, therefore only Himself. This is why [Rosen \(1914: 255\)](#) quoted how Hegel ends his encyclopedia not with a quotation from the New Testament but with a passage from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* describing God as “Thought thinking itself”. Hegel’s Absolute is also self-consciousness, the thought of thought. God in Hegel from what we have seen so far is described as the “Absolute Spirit” corresponding to Aristotle’s “Absolute Form”. He is also “Thought Thinking Itself” or “Self Thinking Thought”. Above all God is conceived as the telos or end or final cause of all things in the universe.

But the self-Thinking Thought of Hegel is not transcendent reality as Aristotle thinks; rather it is immanent in the universe. The whole process of reality is a teleological movement towards the actualization of Self-thinking Thought; and in this sense the Thought which thinks itself is the telos or end of the universe. It is an end which is immanent within the process. Thus Hegel agrees with Aristotle that God is Self-thinking Thought and also the end of the universe but they are not agreed on the mode of God’s being in the universe. This brings us again to Hegel’s teaching on the non-transient nature of God which is the intrinsic and eternal attribute of God. Is God in Hegel essentially Transcendent or Immanent or both?

Hegel maintains that spirit sees itself in nature. It sees nature as the objective manifestation of the Absolute, a manifestation which is a necessary condition for its non-existence. It is in the light of this Hegel’s assertion that [Acton \(1967: 446\)](#) while, discussing about the immanent nature of God in Hegel’s philosophy of God writes:

God is not something grandeur and more powerful than the natural world yet fundamentally like it, nor is he something beyond the world that must remain forever inaccessible to man. God is manifested in the world; and this is the truth that revealed religion has expressed most adequately in the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. Without this doctrine God would still be regarded as beyond the world, and thus as incomplete and finite. Even with this doctrine he is conceived of through the medium of particular historical events that introduce an element of contingency and irrelevance into our conception of him.

By assigning to God the attribute of immanence and denying him his transcendental attribute has led some scholars to accuse Hegel of atheism; others pantheism. Hegel thought God to be the creative principle which is concerned in the world he created and not a mere conceptual abstraction called God. God is not a *dues remotus*, that is to say, a remote or withdrawn God, purely transcendent totally unconcerned with events in the world. He is, according to Hegel immanent and not transcendent in the world.

The summary point of it all is that Aristotle, Hegel and other Western philosophers agree that God exists, he is one, the highest and purest substance, creator and final cause of all things Transcendent and Immanent. The Western conception of God gives us a clearer picture of the God-question debate in Western thought especially the nature of God. More importantly it will also serve as a sound background study to our later analysis of the nature of God in Igbo ontology which is the proper context within which God will be studied in this article. We are now ready to critically examine the nature of God in Igbo ontology to see the views of the pre-modern Igbo on the same issue regardless how widely Igbo ideas might vary from those of the Western minds. The essence of this is because the author of this article has no doubts at all that critical Igbo Ontology is closely tied to Igbo world view, and that the originality of certain metaphysical, cosmological and eschatological beliefs of the pre-modern Igbo is wholly attributed to the Igbo because these assumptions originated with the Igbo and not extraneous to them that is not inherited by them from outside. They are the materials for our eventual analysis and interpretation. They are inarticulate, uncoordinated, unscientific, unproven assumptions and largely mythical and full of educated guesses and therefore not yet scientific or philosophic. In short God will be studied in the Igbo context to see the views of the Igbo on the same issue regardless how widely Igbo ideas might vary from those of the Western minds.

4. Igbo Metaphysical Beliefs

These are the basic assumptions entertained by the pre-modern Igbo about the spiritual world. What are the sum-total of the assumptions entertained by the pre-modern Igbo about the supra-sensible world? The examination of

this section of our work will throw more light on the actual source of the beliefs and thought patterns of the Igbo. It is logically correct that: if their metaphysical assumptions include the existence of God and gods, it is more likely that their conception of the nature of God will likely be different from Western conception and completely outside external influence. Hence the originality of their total assumptions and principles will be attributed more or less to the Igbo depending on whether or not the assumptions and principles originated with the Igbo or were inherited by them from Christianity or Westernism.

Apart from ensuring originality of thought patterns, the non-extraneous nature of these beliefs are very important. They will, no doubt help us to understand Igbo identity. For instance, when scholars refer to the Igbo as an ancient race; a people of their own with centuries of cultural development, or a special set of people with unique characteristics; a people blessed with versatile nature that helps them to harness the resources of nature; we understand what they mean.

A thorough examination of the metaphysical assumptions of the Igbo and their world view will inevitably reveal that their assumptions were not the constructs of the people who were their colonizers or from whom they migrated. Indeed it was through proper examination of the ontological background of the Igbo and their pre-modern assumptions that a lot of valid conclusions will be drawn regarding the Igbo. This brings us to our vital question, what is the sum-total of the metaphysical assumptions entertained by the pre-modern Igbo? These beliefs could be summarized as follows: Belief in the existence of the spiritual world (*Ala Muo*) the abode of *Chiukwu* (the Supreme Being) and other spirits both malevolent and benevolent spirits; Belief in *Chiukwu* (the Supreme Being); Belief in major gods like *Ala* (the earth goddess), *Igwe* the sky god), etc. Belief in other minor gods; belief in Ancestors or “the living dead” or human spirits; belief in *Ogwu* (mystical and magical powers).

Perhaps it will be interesting to wind up this section of our article with a hypothesis, namely, what if the Igbo were to be guided by Marxist world view? If the Igbo were to be guided by such a world view, namely, Marxist world view of the existence of only one world, they will now be talking of only one world, the visible world. And the implication is that the Igbo man’s notion of the metaphysical world and the beings in the same world especially the *Chi-ukwu* (the Greatest Chi) the main subject of our discourse in this paper would be regarded as non-existent or at most a fiction of the mind without any foundation in reality. Possibly, the concept of a “loan deity” might be easily tenable. But the Igbo world is a dual world, namely, the metaphysical and the physical with all the beings therein properly arranged in their hierarchical order with God at the apex. In what follows we shall critically examine one of the contradictory assumptions of the pre-modern Igbo namely one and many.

This concerns one of the question of God in African Ontology and this article contends that of all the phrases coined all through history of African philosophy and the history of mankind, Monopolytheism is the true nature of God in Igbo Ontology.

5. The Nature of God in Igbo Ontology

Monopolytheism which this author contends is the true nature of God in Igbo ontology. Etymologically, is derived from three Greek words: Mono, meaning, One; Poly, meaning, Many; and Theism, meaning, belief in one God or gods. Hence Monopolytheism is the belief in one and many gods. This traditional belief need not sound contradictory or constitute any serious problem to any one who is familiar with the concept of Igbo God as a generic name for the One Supreme Being and the many gods that receive sacrifices, prayers and petitions in Igbo land either on their own or carry the same to *Chi-ukwu* (the Greatest Chi) who is the ultimate recipient of the essence of all sacrifices

The “One” is unique and differentiated from the “Many” by its nature, attributes and relationships. The “Many”, the gods, by their nature are many and are the creatures of the “One” and they relate to Him as a Creator is related to the created. The “Many” cannot but be what they are by nature, for that would go against the principle of identity. The Igbo man is always logical in his techniques of reasoning. He is always aware of the basic principles of being.

He knows that a being is what it is, and he also knows what makes a thing to be what it is. For him, “One” is not “Many” or anything else. He is able to make these distinctions such that when he says that “One” is “One” and “Many are Many”, which is an inevitable tautology but a useful one, he is reaffirming the authenticity and reality of “One as One” and “Many as Many” but not in the sense of creating real distinction in terms. One necessarily is one, it cannot but be one, one is not many. They are two different beings which are different in nature and kind.

In Igbo world view, when the pre-modern Igbo say that God is One and Many, they are insisting that the term or idea god is a generic one in the metaphysical order of being which admits of species. This is because Igbo traditional religion is one that accepts of plurality of gods (polytheism). The species of God are declared existent. Consequently the pre-modern Igbo who are both polytheists and Monotheists regard the concept of god as a genus that accepts a specific difference, in the sense that of all the gods that are in existence one is differentiated from the rest by its nature. One occupies the topmost position in the list of gods. The rest of the gods, many in number, are differentiated from each other by their various characteristics. Thus *Ani* (the earth goddess) differs from *Amadioha* (the thunder god), etc. But each is a god all the same. The combination of these categories of gods, namely, God and the gods which form the essential features of Igbo metaphysical beliefs is what is technically called Igbo God, or “One and Many” or “God and the gods or simply “Monopolytheism”.

The “One” is accepted as the Greatest, the real, ultimate target of Igbo Traditional Religion. The “Many” also exists as gods and messengers of the One Supreme God. Neither are they simply reduced to the status of messengers. Again there is no contradiction in a system that holds this basic outlook in life, namely, “One and Many”. Just as there is no contradiction in a king having many subjects under him or a master having many servants to help him in the day to day administration of his business. One is at the topmost position and the Many fall below Him.

The “One” is “*Ukwu*” that is to say, the Greatest among the “Many”. None of the many in this case, can be regarded as the greatest in the presence of the One Greatest Chi. The word greatest as applied to God or the One in relation to the many gods is therefore not a disturbing superlative as its critics argue from some quarters. It is on record that Arazu made such a statement, namely, that *Chi-ukwu* is the Great Spirit and not necessarily the Greatest Spirit (superlative). It can only be a disturbing superlative if *Chi-ukwu* is placed side by side with any of the gods. In this case, for instance, God or *Chi-ukwu* will be Great God and any of the gods will be *Chi-nta* or small gods. In all cases therefore *Ukwu* does not necessarily mean greatest in all contexts. It is either great or greatest Chi. In either case; it is even not a problem. The great and the greatest mean the same thing in Igbo world view. The Igbo have no comparative adjective for some terms. Consequently the “One” is One, Almighty, Omnipotent, Great, Greatest, Supreme, Absolute, etc. The “Many” are many and they come immediately after God.

If the Igbo were to believe in one and only one God, their unique concept of one and many gods would either be a fiction of the mind or probably elude them. We will now be talking of only one God (Monotheism) as the true nature of God in Igbo Ontology. And the implication is that the Igbo man’s notion of the concept of one ultimate being *Chi-ukwu* in Igbo ontology will be regarded as what its critics say it is: a foreign import. Thanks to God the Igbo conception of the nature of God embraces the one Supreme Being who is served by gods “Monopolytheism” or “One and Many” and not simply “One”.

This concept of “One” or Monotheism represents an advanced stage in human development, in man’s evolutionary concepts of God which the white man strongly believes cannot be attained by any traditional or primitive cultures. “Deity” is a philosophical concept which the “untutored” are incapable of framing. Again, it is believed by the West, according to Jahn (1961: 110) that:

Through the influence of Europe, it is believed, Africa is adapting herself, giving up her traditions and adopting foreign ideas, methods of work, forms of government and principles of economic organization...Europe is held to be the teacher and Africa the pupil, Europe is to decide when Africa is ripe: ripe for faith, ripe for action, ripe for freedom. Europe is thought to know what is good for Africa, better than Africa herself.

Consequently for the West, anything that conforms to their own accepted ideas and ideals is misappropriated, it is their own. Those that do not conform are regarded as “primitive”. For instance, Africa or Igbo brand of the nature of God, because it does not conform to the Western pattern of Monotheism or Polytheism is branded “Primitive” in the derogatory sense of the word. While in actual fact, African or Igbo brand of the nature of God (theism) is purely traditional and natural to the African as it is to the Igbo.

The nature of God in Igbo Ontology is “Monopolytheism” “One and Many”. The one is the ultimate, a unifying factor among the many gods. His nature is absolute, namely the principles of absoluteness, creation, and continued existence and dependence of the many gods that are subordinates and mediators; designated to serve various needs in their areas of authority and power and influence. This concept is unique to the Igbo. It differs essentially from the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic thought-categories of pure Monotheism or Polytheism. And

this concept alone, namely, Monopolytheism or one God that is served by many gods disapproves of the foreign nature of the concept of the one ultimate being in Igbo ontology. It is traditional, indigenous or natural. It is Igbo man's brand of theism.

5.1. Proof from the Hierarchy of Spiritual Beings in Igbo Metaphysical World

B. Russell when seeking the basic kinds of entities in world order, posed a question: What basic kinds of beings are there? Put in another way: What types of things make up the Ultimate furniture of the world? An attempt to delve into this question will be very ambitious for an article of this nature. What concerns us here is a question that will embrace the most important spiritual beings in the invisible world of the Igbo and how they are arranged in their hierarchical order. Questions of this sort will serve as valid background to an overall identification and elucidation of the nature of God in Igbo Ontology. Here we insist on a classification and order that is traditional, detailed, and rational to give scientific meaning to our investigation and secure sufficient grounds to substantiate our thesis that the nature of god in Igbo Ontology is Monopolytheism. Igbo ontology is unique in the sense that it is an anthropocentric ontology, that is to say, an ontology that is centered on man. This ontology can be classified into two broad categories: *Ihe Ndi Anaghi Afu Anya* (invisible beings) and *Ihe Ndi Ana Afu Anya* (visible beings). There may be other categories and sub-categories but these are the two main categories in Igbo Ontology to be studied here. All beings, all essences, in whatever form it is conceived, can, be subsumed under one of these categories. Nothing in Igbo Ontology can be conceived outside them. The highest degree of being is a privilege of spirit or invisible beings, particularly benevolent spirits. They are characterized by immateriality, and autonomy. They are not bound by space and time and know immaterial, intelligible essences and will immaterial ends, their essential functions are to know and to will. With this brief characterization of spirit or invisible spirits we go on to lay down the hierarchy of invisible beings, spirits, in Igbo Ontology.

Muo (Spirit) Category

The Igbo, like other Africans traditionally recognize the existence of a Supreme Being whom they call *Chi-ukwu* (the Greatest Chi) or *Chineke* or *Ezechitoke* (the God of creation) or *Osebuluwa* (God, carrier of the world). Below *Chi-ukwu* the Igbo also acknowledge the fact that this Greatest Chi has at His service, many ministering spirits whose sole business is to fulfill His commands. Thus in the invisible world of the *Igbo* we have so many spiritual beings of differing qualities and roles, namely, *Amadioha* (the thunder god); *Igwe* (the sky god); *Anyanwu* (the sun god); *Ala* (the Earth goddess); *Amosu* (Witches or sorcerers or wizards); *Ekwensu* (Devil); *Ogwu* (mystical and magical forces); *Akalogheli* (disgruntled dead men); *Ogbanje* (spirits born to die); *Ndi-Ichie* (the living-dead or ancestors); etc.; to name but a few. These and many more spirits are within the category: spirits.

The *Muo* (Spirits' category) also fall into three sub-categories, namely, *Chi-ukwu* (The Greatest Being), *Muo* (Non-Human Spirits) and *Ndi-Muo* (Human spirits). These are spirits strictly speaking whether human or non-human because they have no bodily form permanently associated with them. Although they may have a shadowy bodily form, yet they assume different shapes, such as human, animal, plant, etc; but without any bodily forms permanently attached to them.

Spirits such as God, other non-human and human which populate the invisible world of the Igbo are also arranged in their hierarchical order. And as we said earlier we begin the order of hierarchy in an ascending order that is from the least to the highest being. Thus the order reads: Human spirits, namely, *Uluchi* (Bad dead like those who die by accident or those not given full rite of passage, etc); *Ndi Ichie* (the living dead); Non-Human spirits, namely, *Ogwu* (mystical and magical powers); *Ekwensu* (Devil); *Chi* (personal gods); Minor and major gods and *Chi-ukwu* (the Greatest Chi) in Igbo Ontology, in that order.

The last being in the spirit category is *Chi-ukwu* (the Greatest Chi). He has something which others do not have. He comes last according to the hierarchy in an ascending order. But He is the Ultimate, the Absolute, that is the topmost in the list and the wholly "other". There is none like Him in the hierarchy of beings. He is not within the rank and file of the divinities or deities or gods. He stays alone in His exclusive domain, *Eliuwe* (Heavens) but He is also everywhere in the world.

5.2. Proof from the Nature and Concept of God in Various Igbo Localities

Northern area Group: EZECHITOKE; Central and Southern Area Group: CHINEKE; Western Group: OSEBULUWA; North West and Eastern Group: CHI-UKWU.

5.2.1. Northern Area Group: *Ezechitoke*

In my study of the nature and concept of God in various Igbo localities, I observe that the principal nature of the Supreme being among the Nsukka, Amuba Enugu Ezike; Umunne-gwa; Obukpa Asadu of the Northern Area Group of the Igbo is *Ezechitoke*, a term of certain etymology and with one universal meaning among these people. According to these people themselves, they say that *Ezechitoke* is derived from four Igbo words: *Eze* (King), *Chi* (Spirit), *Te* (Who), and *Oke* (to share, a share or to create; creation; creating). *Ezechitoke* the contraction of *Eze-chi-te-oke* is therefore the king-spirit who “shares” and “creates”. Primarily, the term means “the distribution of gifts or those things which belongs to a person by lot”.

This primary connotation of *Oke* (sharing or distributing) finds its support when one considers some names of God connected with *Oke*, namely, *Oke Chukwu* (God’s portion), the contraction of *Oke Chukwu Kelu* (lot or destiny distributed by *Chukwu*, God Himself). While the secondary meaning is “creator” and is supported by Horton’s view. According to him (Horton) *Ezechitoke* would mean lord (King) *Chi* creator. Taking these two possible explanations of them *Oke* as a point of departure, *Ezechitoke* brings out the idea of Supremacy, Ultimacy and absolute nature of this *Chi* (Spirit) over other spirits. He is the “King spirit”. Above all it conveys the function and role of this *Ezechi* (Supreme Spirit or King of the spirits), namely, sharing and creating. Other praise-titles of *Ezechitoke* among the Northern Area Group of the Igbo throw more light on the meaning of *Ezechitoke*. In Obukpa-Asadu, God is known and worshipped as *Ezechitoke Abiamura*. This connotes that God is the creator who cares and nurtures his creation. He is also worshipped as *Anyanwu Ezechitoke* (the sun, the king spirit, the creator).

Further researches which the researcher carried out among these people reveal also that creation among these Nsukka Area Group of the Igbo is to be understood in the traditional sense, that is to say, “make” or “produce” from some existing thing and never in the classical sense as exemplified in Judaeo-Christian tradition where creation means the act of bringing things out of nothing (*ex-nihilo*). This is the manner by which God creates as in the case of Genesis where he commands and one object after another leaps into being. In contradistinction to this classical meaning of creation is the case in the Babylonian traditional thought where chaos is a force opposed to the gods. But these primary principles had to vanish in mighty conflict by the higher gods before the universe was fashioned from them. Here creation is understood to mean an act of bringing things into existence from something or pre-existing matter. It is on this secondary sense or traditional sense that the Nsukka Northern Culture area conceives creation such that when they say: *Ezechitoke Abiamura* there is no doubt that they are emphasizing first, the absolute nature of this spirit. Secondly, His role and function, namely: bringing other creatures into individual and separate existence from pre-existent reality and simultaneously allotting to each individual his personal *Chi* (god) and destiny. They also see the providential care of the King Spirit. He cares and nurtures His creation which is what is meant by the term *Abiamura*.

Among the Nsukka Area Culture group therefore, the principal name of their Supreme Being is *Ezechitoke*. His other praise-title names are *Azechitoke Abiamura* and *Anyanwu Ezechitoke*. These names point to a universal belief when analyzed etymologically. It all means that God is the Ultimate Spirit or Being, the creator of both heaven and earth and all things therein; the king unique identified with the sky to which both the divinities and men depend upon. *Ezechitoke* is the greatest spirit or king of all the spirits who gives life to all and is associated with the sun. In this case He is conceived as *Anyanwu Ezechitoke*. This connection with the sky or sun should not be understood as deistic or pantheistic tendencies. The immanent activities of *Ezechitoke* (the king spirit that creates and shares) is immediately implied when the natives say that *Ezechitoke* is *Abiamura*, that is to say, he cares and nurtures all His creatures. God is at once both a transcendent and an immanent spirit or king. In some parts of the Northern Area Group, for instance, where He is conceived as *Ezechitoke Abiamura*, His providential care is highlighted in conjunction with his conception as the principle of creation.

5.2.2. Central and Southern area Group: *Chineke*

Principal characteristics and praise-titles qualities are assigned to the Supreme Being among the various central and Southern area groups of the Igbo so far studied by some Igbo scholars. The term *Chineke* is the principal nature of God among this group under study. And according to these natives themselves, namely, Owerri dialect group it is made up of three root words: *Chi* (spirit). *Chi* as a concept among the Igbo has equivocal nature: God or personal deity but also its other extensive or traditional meanings, namely, destiny package or lot and personal God symbolized. Let us now determine the traditional meaning of the terms: *Na* and *Eke*. *Na* is a conjunction, literally and simply it means “Who”. *Ke* root in all its known uses refer to the act of dividing and sharing. Its

linguistic analysis shows that: *Oke* means share; *Okike* means the act of sharing; *Eke* means one who shares; *Kee* means divide. *Eke* in its traditional standard meaning refers to one who shares or divides or apportions. Etymologically, *Chi-na-eke* means Chi who shares out destiny package or lot and apportions to each individual person his personal god or deity.

The most important meaning of *Eke* in Igbo traditional world view when used in conjunction with *Chi-na* (Chi who/that) as in *Chi-na eke* “the spirit who/that creates”. This is deducible not explicitly from all known uses of the *Ke* roots especially from *Eke* (One or spirit who shares or divides or apportions) but from the various traditional names and qualities given to God. When the Owerri Igbo want to distinguish the Greatest *Chi* from the *Chi-nta* (personal deity and the destiny package or lot or even from the rest of the spirits that populate their metaphysical world, they do this by adding *Eke* to the *Chi-na* (Chi who/that) to read *Chi-na eke* (the Chi who/that creates. *Chi-na eke* for the Owerri dialect group of the Igbo has therefore two possible meanings, namely, Chi who shares, divides or apportions and the Chi who creates. The following examples testify to our stand: *Madueke* means, human beings are not the Creator; *Onyejieke* means, no one controls the creator; *Onyebueke* means no one is creator; *Obueke* means, is he the creator?

In all these names with the *Eke* attached, God is never understood as one who divides, shares or apportions but as one who creates or the creator. Other praise-title qualities assigned to *Chineke* which the Owerri speaking areas use, clarify their ideas about Him. He is called *Eke Kere Mmadu* (the creator who created man). *Ekejiuba* (the creator responsible for all population increase or wealth), *Ekejike* (power belongs to the creator) *Ekejindu* or *Ekenwendu* (life belongs to the creator), *Ekejinma* (the creator responsible for all goodness), *Ekenweuwa* (the world belongs to the creator). It is in the light of *Chineke*'s concept as the spirit who creates and as the Ultimate being of the Owerri dialect group of the Igbo that Edeh (1985: 121) after his research findings came to the conclusion with some scholars of Owerri dialect area of Igbo land. He observes and correctly too, that for these people: “*Onye-Okike* therefore means a being that creates. This is more profoundly in the name *Chi-na-eke* (Chi who creates) *Onye-Okike* and *Chi-na-eke* are specifically reserved for the Supreme Being who alone can make out of nothing, the maker of all entities”.

We agree with Edeh that the term *Chineke* is reserved for the Ultimate Being among the Owerri dialect Igbo but certainly we disagree with him in his other view that creation as is understood here means to create out of nothing or to make in the sense of producing things out of nothing. This is a cultural import. Certainly, creation in Igbo context is far from its classical meaning or Thomistic conception of creation, the act of creating things out of nothing. This idea of creation is not within the thought category of the Igbo as people of other traditional cultures. Creation here is understood to mean the act of bringing things into existence from eternal matter. *Chineke* derives from the verb *Okike* or *Ike* (to make, to produce). The verb is used exclusively for the act by which God “created” the world. *Onye Okike* literally would convey the meaning of cause to rise up, make to sprout. *Chineke* conveys the meaning of “the creator”, the maker of all things or producer of all things.

This concept of God as “the maker” or one who produces things among the Owerri dialect people of the Igbo brings out the basic difference between creation as is conceived in Thomistic philosophy and Igbo conception. In the Thomistic or Scholastic tradition, creation is immediately understood as producing things from nothing (creation ex nihilo); while in Igbo conception creation is understood to mean “to make” or “to produce” things out of pre-existing matter which is the unique act of *Chineke* (the *Chi* that creates or apportions) who may accomplish same through the deities though they themselves, the deities are God's creatures. This Igbo conception of “creation” is perfectly in line with Plato's view: Plato believes that matter and motion are eternal. The universe must be the product of a Demiurge or the craftsman who makes things out of pre-existing materials. Thomistic explanation of creation springs beyond the bounds of Platonic and Igbo ideas of creation. For him (Aquinas) God created the world from nothing.

Chineke is therefore another term for the Supreme Being in Igbo Ontology. It emphasizes specifically the creative nature of God and is found among the Igbo who live in the central and Southern portions of the Igbo tribal universe. These are popularly referred to as the Owerri dialect Igbo, that is, those who speak Owerri Igbo. The etymological analysis of *Chineke* reveals strong imagery as well as aspects of Igbo concept of divinity. All known researches which this author carried out on the word *Chineke* show that *Ezechitoke* and *Chineke* are the same concepts meaning “King”, *Chi* or “Greatest Chi” who creates or the creator God. Ilogu (1985: 7) has fewer doubts in thinking that: “*Chineke*...means ‘the God who creates’, and indicates the people's belief in a supreme beneficent source of creation. He is the author of Heaven and earth; he sends rain and makes life grow”.

The same principle of creation and division as is expressed in *Ezechitoke* (King spirit who creates), “shares”

“divides” or “apportions” is also expressed in *Chineke*. The only difference is in their conception of God as *Eze* (King and *Chi* (spirit) respectively).

Ezechitoke and *Chineke* are therefore different terms for the nature of God or the ultimate being and they mean the same thing, namely, the one, the “King *Chi*” or spirit that creates, controls, governs and sustains the world. They neither represent for the Igbo the dual Supernatural gods which Chinua Achebe and C. U. M. Ezekwugo suggest are responsible for man and his destiny, namely, *Chi* and *Eke* or *Chi* alone responsible for one’s share (*Oke*) or fortune in life. *Ezechitoke* and *Chineke* convey the notion of Supremacy, Ultimacy, Infinity and Absoluteness of God among the Nsukka Northern area culture and Owerri grouping particular and among the whole Igbo people.

A careful analysis of these terms and their meanings among the Northern Area Group and Southern Area Group certainly demonstrates that belief in *Ezechitoke* and *Chineke*, are concepts so ingrained in the culture of these people under study and not borrowed concepts. Rather, the concepts originated in their remote past. These terms and their meanings are purely the traditional conceptions of the forebears of these cultural groups couched in typical traditional imagery and their local and indigenous characteristics show that they express concepts with which the people are familiar with. Consequently these characteristics and their meanings were not thought them by the Europeans not even by any known religions of the world.

5.2.3. Western Group: *Osebuluwa*

Having examined the nature and meaning of God among the Northern, Central and Southern area groups, we cross over to the Western Igbo area, namely Asaba, Ika, Ndokwa and some areas of Onitsha to examine their concepts of God. Arinze, Metuh, Ilogu, Edeh, etc.; observe that the nature of the Supreme Being among the Western Igbo group and some parts of Onitsha is *Osebuluwa*.

Osebuluwa is another principal quality for the Supreme Being, in Igbo world and world view. Etymologically, it comes from three Igbo words; *Ose* or *Olisa*, *Bulu* and *Uwa*. *Ose* means supreme being or God, *Bulu* or *Bu* is a verb indicating a continuous act of carrying; *Uwa* is the universe, visible and invisible. *Osebuluwa* therefore means God who is carrying the world or “God, carrier of the world”. According to Edeh (1985: 130) “*Osebuluwa* as a name for God used to depict Him as a providential Father among the Western Igbo indicates that the Igbo recognize that God has a plan for the world and he supports and directs his creatures to a realization of this plan”.

In my research findings I was able to confirm that the Igbo terms: *Olisakwe* (if God agrees) *Belu-Olisa* (except for God) are derivations from *Osebuluwa* and they authenticate the fact that *Osebuluwa* is the principle of continued existence and dependence. Thus the concept of divine providence which has no place in Aristotle’s philosophy of God is thus highlighted in Igbo traditional philosophy of God, a philosophy of god which certainly suggests the Igbo deep-rooted conviction of sustained divine providence in creation. This providential nature of God as deduced from *Osebuluwa* among the Western Igbo finds its support in the research findings of C. Obiego, where he argued that the Igbo call the creating *Chi*, *Osebuluwa* who is carrying the world including man; and were the creating *Chi* to release his hold, the world would relapse into “nothingness”

Osebuluwa therefore emphasizes the providential nature of God among the Western Igbo group when considered in relation to the world He created. While the Northern, Central and Southern areas emphasize more of His creative nature, The Western group stress or highlight more of his providential nature such that He is a Supreme Being who created the world and has been providing for it since “creation” to ensure its continued existence. The Igbo also express this in their regular saying: (*Chukwu Selu Aka Uwa Agwu*). If God were to withdraw His supporting hand the whole world would collapse rather than relapse into nothingness which is a foreign concept. *Osebuluwa* implies also that the Igbo recognize that God has a plan for the world and that He is immanent in the world. He provides for it, sustains it, controls and governs every event in it.

With this concept of God, as an immanent God, the theory of a *Deus absconditus* or *Otiosus*, the so called withdrawn God is foreign to Igbo traditional world-view. Neither can the Igbo be described as deists. God as the absolute being is simultaneously understood as an immanent being who is concerned with what is happening in the world created by Him.

Praise-title names of *Osebuluwa* reflect popular conceptions of God among the Western Igbo areas. He is sometimes addressed as *Olisabueze* (God is King), *Orisadinma* (God is good) and *Oseloka* (God has planned or thought well).

When all other mediators-gods have failed, the last resort is *Osebuluwa*. At this point the petitioner will be

asked to *rio-Olisa* (appeal to God the creator and carrier of the universe who is the ultimate in existence). Edeh (1985: 130) adds a corollary which throws more light on the meaning of *Osebuluwa*. He is categorical that providence applied to God in this sense (carrier of the world) he says “involves his knowing plan for each creature and for the universe as a whole, and his carrying out his plan, his directing of creatures to their ends.”

The concept of *Osebuluwa* as the carrier of the world among the Western Igbo conveys a general concept of a Supreme Being who is the creator, eternal, merciful God who is interested in the affairs of His creatures. He is also omnipotent. This is deducible from the term “*Osebuluwa*” (God carrier of the world). The Igbo believe that the world is so heavy and too big that nobody not even the most powerful of the spirits can carry it. But this anomalous entity, (the universe) which no created being can lift up is conveniently being carried by God in His hands.

6. Conclusions

The theory and praxis of the pre-modern Igbo provide a good example of the inconsistency or discrepancy between thought and practice. The Igbo are a people who have a concept of One Ultimate Being, however naïve or vague they express it. The same people are also seen in practice to make this Ultimate Being somehow irrelevant to everyday life, in the sense that His Ultimacy is always in question vis-a-vis other gods. The gods who are conceived as His messengers are made to appear as Supreme gods in their areas of influence and operations.

Actually man takes advantage of the position of these gods, namely, their nearness to God, and uses them for his necessary ends through the sacrifices, prayers and petitions sometimes made to God through them in most ritual practices. But in the end God remains the Ultimate in power and influence in Igbo ontology. He has the absolute power. That of the gods is relative at all instances. The gods may compete among themselves but it is always clear that they are no rivals to God who made them and assigned powers and authority to them in the day to day administration of the universe. They are God’s ambassadors. He (*Chi-ukwu*) is *Okasi Akasi* (the Highest Highest) or the ultimate Being in Igbo ontology while the rest *Chi-Nta* (Lower gods) whether Major or Minor gods all arranged in their hierarchical order with the Absolute Being (*Chi-ukwu*) at the apex, then come the rest of the gods in their categories and sub-categories. There is no way such an arrangement in Igbo ontology about the nature of God can fit into Western thought category of either monotheism or polytheism. Our analysis continues to yield both theories, namely, monotheism and polytheism which many scholars of African traditional religion and cultural anthropologists refer to simply as “One” and “many”. This theory about the nature of God in Igbo ontology as one and many this author believes is what is meant by Monopolytheism.

Atheism is un-African, that is Africans believe that “there is a God” or “there are gods”, or “that there is God and gods” who stand in some kind of direct or personal relationship with human being, such that belief in one ultimate supreme being with different names in different Igbo localities is an indigenous concept among the Igbo, in the sense that these names of the supreme being are coeval or natural with the Igbo from time immemorial.

Igbo names of God have a high cultural content, namely, they establish the particulars of the Supreme Being and gods. They describe the place, role, nature and characteristics of God and gods. More importantly, Igbo names of God point to almost a universal belief in or faith of man in the Supreme Being, namely, the fact of his real or actual existence. The whole of reality in African world view is arranged in a hierarchical order. At the apex of this hierarchy is the Supreme Being or God, who is the principle of absoluteness; creation and continued existence and dependence of all things in the universe both spiritual and material. After Him, come the major and minor deities commonly called gods, human beings and things in that order.

Polytheism and monotheism are the two classical theories of the nature of God in Western thought. In Igbo traditional ontology or theory of forces, they form part of the basic metaphysical assumptions entertained by the pre-modern Igbo. Consequently, none taken singly can be used as the best appropriate term to describe the true nature of God in Igbo philosophy. Polytheism needs to be qualified. Although the Africans worship many gods, there is the existence of a unifying and transcendental ultimate which characterizes their belief. The gods are subject and subordinate to the supreme God. The Supreme Being and the gods are neither equal in kind nor in quality or status. The domain of the African Supreme Being is radically differentiated from and higher than that of the gods, to mention but a few qualitative characteristics. Monotheism also needs to be modified. Although the Igbo believe and worship one Supreme Being, yet there is no definite denial of other gods. They also believe in gods.

There is no way Igbo theism can fit into any one or the other of the two theories of the nature of God characteristics of Western moulds, or thought categories, namely monotheism or polytheism except the work argues, by modifying or qualifying any of the two terms or combining both terms to embrace the one unifying ultimate being and the subordinate gods to whom he delegates His powers and through which He is indirectly approached. God remains the ultimate being in Igbo Ontology. The precise nature of the Igbo God is Monopolytheism which scholars of African/Igbo Traditional Religion and thought seem to take for granted, as “one and many”, a fact which needs no proofs no examination, no further argument whatsoever. Philosophers, rather philosophy on the contrary subjects every assumption to critical scrutiny or analysis until all doubts are removed and certainty assured. Thus this issue associated with the God-question debate, and indeed, the most controvertible among scholars concerns the precise nature of Igbo God or the brand of theism which Igbo profess both in theory and practice is, as this article argues is Monopolytheism, a theory of their belief in God and gods.

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