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Causality in Tiv Traditional Thought System

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Abstract

Tiv metaphysics deals with the ontological world-view of the Tiv people. And one idea that is central in this understanding is causality. The Tiv believe that the universe cannot exist without the causal force at play and this is traceable to the origin of the universe, where the Uncaused Cause, the Supreme Being, created the universe. Using the historical, expository and analytical methods, the study examines the Tiv dimensions of causality, stating the orderliness of the universe and the way events unfold with causal influence as the nature of reality. Unlike the Westerners, the Tiv speaks of causality in terms of metaphysics. Here, the Supreme Being is understood as the source of all that is and sustains all beings in being with the active role of *ujjingi*-spirits, *umache*-humans beings, animate and inanimate beings.

Keywords: Tiv, Supreme Being, causality, spirits, man, animate and inanimate beings.

Introduction

The concept Tiv has three meanings: First, the term designates the people as an ethnic group. Secondly, it refers to their language, and thirdly, to one ancestral father, Tiv to whom all Tiv people trace their common ancestry.¹⁰⁰ The Tiv people are

¹⁰⁰ Ushe, M. Ushe, *Kpor of Tiv Culture*. (Enugu: San Press, 2007), Pg. 5.

located in North Central Nigeria, also known as Middle-Belt in Benue State. They number about 5.9 million and so considered the majority tribe in Benue State. They have a large number of settlers in neighbouring Nassarawa, Taraba and Cross River States. Tiv is the 4th largest tribe to the trio of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria.

Philosophy is an all-embracing subject, based on the peculiar nature and scope of the subject. At the beginning, philosophy was an attempt at unraveling the mystery to all that is in the universe, and so answers to fundamental questions. That is why; it is referred to as the mother of all sciences, and because of this, it is difficult to have a universally accepted definition of philosophy.

An attempt to define the subject is an attempt to limit its scope and content. Oizermann avers this when he said that every definition "is a limitation of the content of a subject."¹⁰¹ This has led to disagreement on the attempts made by philosophers to define philosophy. The discrepancies concerning the definition, nature and scope and method of philosophy have resulted to different philosophies as there are also different philosophers. This diversity has been accommodated and today, philosophy is an unbounded enterprise and unrestricted to a definite person, age and race. That is why there is Indian Philosophy, African Philosophy and Western Philosophy, etc. In Africa today, we have Bantu philosophy, Yoruba philosophy, Tiv philosophy, Igbo philosophy, etc. all of these indicate that not anything can be seen as philosophy. Every school of thought referred to as philosophy must have to do with the search for meaning in human existence, truth and certainty, understanding of transcendent reality and how the metaphysical affect the corporeal, rational explanation of reality and logical analysis of language. It is with this scope that philosophy is said to be meaningful to humanity.

101 Oizermann, Theodor. *The Problem of the History of Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Daglish. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), Pg. 179.

The Tiv word for philosophy is *ieren*, meaning the act of doing something; the way a thing is done; the doing of a thing. According to Anshi, "it connotes the understanding of the facts of a thing."¹⁰² By definition, Tiv *ieren*, philosophy, is "... the system of thought underlying the behaviour of the Tiv people".¹⁰³ It also means the way the Tiv think, talk and act. It captures the Tiv understanding of reality, truth, the metaphysical realm, human relationship and the world at large. Tiv philosophy:

In other words ... can be defined as a way, method and systematic way of doing things and or understanding events reflecting both the mental and experiential capabilities of the person and or the group ... whatever activity we are engaged in, whether at the level of critical thinking, analysis, speculation, and sense experience is all *ieren*. Tiv *ieren* is therefore the fundamental basis of understanding the Tiv people in their metaphysical, epistemological, aesthetical, logical, political behaviour. Tiv *ieren* ... eschews all undue reliance on transcendentalism of the kind that reduces all phenomena to a supernatural being without the accruing benefit for man.¹⁰⁴

The philosophy of a people is the way they perceive reality, that is, their thoughts and actions. Philosophy is basically concerned with right living and this is the concern of Tiv philosophy. Tiv philosophy concerns itself with a synthesis of the good and bad, right and wrong behaviour of the Tiv people, with the aim of projecting the good and emphasising it for the good of humanity.

The study deals with the Tiv (African) understanding of the term causality. It considers the concept causality in Tiv philosophy; causal agents; the form of the word and the power

102 Anshi N. Wang, *Ieren: An Introduction to Tiv Philosophy*. (Makurdi: Obeta Continental Press, 2004), Pg. xii.

103 Anshi M. Wang, *Ieren: An Introduction to Tiv Philosophy*, Pg. xii.

104 Anshi M. Wang, *Ieren: An Introduction to Tiv Philosophy*, Pg. xii.

of the word. This demonstrates the African understanding of the concept causality and its relevance in our holistic awareness of reality.

The Tiv Concept of Causality

Causality is a principle that every event has a cause, *kwagh gbe eren ga*. Tiv principle teaches that there are extraordinary forces in nature that influence events, things and the experiences *umache* - man have. Such extraordinary forces are products of one primordial source, an unseen Being called *Aôndo* - God. The *Aôndo* is the Supreme Cause responsible for all events and happenings in the universe either directly or indirectly. His direct cause of events could be seen in the coming to being of humans in the universe, *Aôndo gba umache*. *Aôndo* exercises His influence indirectly on nature through nature, *gbaaôndo*. *Gbaaôndo* in this case, we are looking at causal agents, *ujijingi* and *umache*. The *ujijingi*, Spirits, are unseen beings made by God to support man in his understanding - *mkav* of nature. They also have the capacity - *tahav* to influence human activities either positively or negatively depending on the way man uses the elements. Man, *umache*, he made with potentials that reflect his power and greatness. Man is loaded with potentials of a procreator or co-creator and demonstrates this illuminating power over nature in an extraordinary way in furtherance of God's great work of creation. This he does with the help of *ujijingi* - Spirits. Man - spirit communion is necessary for the demystification of nature, and stoppage of unguided intrusion of human realm by Spirit Beings.

Gbaaôndo means God's creation, truth - *mimi* and faith - *jighjigh*. *Aôndo* created *umache* - man with the capacity to build and to destroy using the elements in nature, and it is expected by the ideals of *Gbaaôndo* principle that man should embrace truth and faith in his relationship with nature, all of God's creation. A deviation from this makes him a destroyer instead of a builder which he is made to be. All causal events based on *Gbaaôndo* principle bring out the building element, beauty of man which is positive and good in the sight of others, as he

enhances or reinforces the vital force of others through *icigh* - medicine, *mkaanem* - words and *mbamhen* - thoughts. According to the Tiv, this makes *umache* - man a true product of the Supreme Cause, bringing out the human environment peaceful, progressive and joyful place for habitation. A deviation from *Gbaaôndo* makes *umache* a beast to his fellow man. Causal events proceeding from such humans diminish the vital force of other men and make man an ingrate to the Supreme Being. And such abuse leads to poverty, disease, suffering, retrogression and war.

Tiv philosophy teaches that there are various kinds, types, shapes and colours of spirit beings in the universe. These beings and forces though seen as unitary, all come from one source, God and owe their existence and sustenance to Him. What unites them all is their possession of the life-force. For the Tiv, life-force is the essence of every being. It is its innate activating principle or vitalizing power that enables it to function as being. This life-force accounts for the unity or similarity of all beings. It is what makes them forces, which is active, dynamic and influence one another. This influence of being by another being accounts for the "African conception of an orderly universe in which all events are caused and potentially explicable".¹⁰⁵ This causation is a metaphysical act referred to as metaphysical causality. Also meaning, the relationship of forces is ontological. Tempels explained this thus: "in the created force (contingent being) the Bantu sees a causal action emanating from the very nature of that created force and influencing other forces".¹⁰⁶ Such interaction either weakens or reinforces another force. This is not a strictly spiritual thing, it happens according to the created nature of beings.

For the Tiv, events are determined by *Aondo*-God, the Supreme Being, through the spirit of life. The spirits of life drive the automatic forces in men and animals through their self-willed actions comprehensively and orderly towards the realisation of events, the will of spiritual beings. This means

¹⁰⁵ Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*. (Enugu: Donze Press, 2001), Pg. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 59.

the universe is not subject to complete automatic determination. Natural laws must be respected. For “each created force has its activating principle or vital force, which allows it to function in its specific manner”.¹⁰⁷ However, the Tiv often allow divine intervention. That is, they often make recourse to God, the spirits of life, ancestral spirits, lesser gods and talismanic charms.

Causal Agents in Tiv Cosmology

Spirits *Ujijingi*

The African hierarchy of being demonstrates that there is Aondo-God who is the Supreme Being; he manifest himself in nature through spirits; he also manifest himself through ancestors; he still manifest himself through mankind; his works are also seen in the role animate and inanimate beings enjoy in nature. Spirits called *ujijingi* occupy a special place in the ontological hierarchy of being. In them, knowledge of the Supreme Being is attained by man and they support man and nature to maintain the natural order or destroy it. Hence Tempels¹⁰⁸ contend that in the created force, a causal force emanates from the very nature of that created force to influence other forces. And through this interaction, a force could weaken or re-enforce another force. Each force has an activating principle or vital force which allows it to function in a specific manner. This excludes the Uncaused Cause who creates the created force.

There are kinds of spirits, the evil and good spirits. The former destroys or weaken the vital force in man while the later re-enforces man’s vital force. With the help of good spirits, man masters the universe through a good understanding of reality. However, the evil spirits institute occult practices, witchcraft, through which human lives are destroyed and evil promoted on large scale. Ezenwankwor lucidly attested to this, “...they depend on human beings for their actions they can be manipulated by evil people and therefore used for evil

107 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 59.

108 Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1969), Pg. 59.

purpose".¹⁰⁹ The spirits are the source of the automatic forces of medicine *ichigh* which is either good or bad, destroys or builds and hampers the efficient operation of the vital force in man or builds enhances it. Spirits are also the source of civilization. Man has gotten the knowledge of all inventions through revelations by them. They are in fact, the key to knowledge in reality and indispensable in the sustenance of the universe.

The Spiritualised Beings

Spiritualised beings are ancestral spirits. They bless the well behaved and provide that which is sought.¹¹⁰ These beings also have the power to prevent inimical forces from obstructing the successful unfolding of events. In Tiv ontology, the interference of spiritual forces is often responsible for the misfortune in the universe. That is why during libations the Tiv plead for the non-interference of spiritual forces in the activities of mankind. Libations are often done to sustain ontological order to give no room for such intrusion, and the spiritualised beings too keep to the plea of the community. The compliance of the spiritualised beings is as a result of their disposition to keep to the pact made with the community or the individual as the case may be. Hence, the Tiv lineage always tries to maintain her good relationship with the ancestral spirits to avoid any element of interference as a result of neglect.

The Automatic Forces

In Tiv ontology, some beings operate more automatically than others and a few others operate independent of the actions of personalised beings. Such automatic forces are categorised as either good or bad medicine, *ichigh*. Good *ichigh* is used for healing, treatment of diseases, protection and for the strengthening of one's vital force. This helps man to live quality life and achieve his/her goals. Bad *ichigh* is used to harm other human beings. It can be used to attack someone's health or

¹⁰⁹ Ezenwankwor, Johnsmart. "The Concept of Spirit in African Traditional Metaphysics" in *International Journal of Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1.1 (2013), Pg. 152.

¹¹⁰ Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 59.

fortune so that he or she does not enjoy good health and accomplish his dreams.

Ichigh has taboo. A very good medicine may spoil, if it is brought into contact with a negative force that it is not supposed to. This happens particularly in cases where someone is poisoned and he or she seeks cure or healing. The person responsible or spirit may attack and spoil the medicine that is to cure or heal the sick person by subduing the healing vital force in the medicine. Through this the medicine, *ichigh*, is spoiled. Therefore medicines have taboos. When it fails to work, it means it is overwhelmed by another more powerful medicine. So, some medicines are more powerful than others.

Thought and Words

Thoughts and words are powerful in Tiv metaphysics and bring to pass what they symbolise. They go hand in hand with what they represent. Aja affirms that "Evil thought or hatred causes harm on others."¹¹¹ Because of this, the concluding part of libations focuses on harming evil doers. The Tiv believe, if a man hates a person, he uses bad medicine to reduce his vital force by way of charming him or cursing him. He/she also blackmails him before others so that he will be seen as a bad person. Though, verbal or non-verbal, the desired state is achieved through the word. They are symbolic when signs are used or objects are used to express feelings. For instance, a broken pot and feathers of a chicken with rope are used to make charm. This charm is used by the owner of a farm to communicate danger to whosoever attempts to steal from the farm or spoil the farm.

Like Placide Tempels, Tiv causal theory could be reduced into three ontological laws:

1. Man, (living or deceased), can directly influence or diminish the being of another man. This is effective only when it is between the progenitor, a superior vital force and his progeny an inferior force. Where a man is strong,

¹¹¹ Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 60.

such attempt from an enemy may even result to the enemy's death. For the attack may boomerang to the sender.

2. The vital force of a man can directly influence force beings, animal, vegetable and mineral, in their being. This means, man has the capacity to influence the being of plants, animals and other inferior forces.
3. A rational being (spirit, mane or living) can act directly upon another rational being by communicating his vital influence to an inferior force like plant, animal or mineral, through the intermediacy of which it influences the rational being. This entails a man through medicine made of plants, animal parts, etc. influencing the being of another man. The fact is that the magic must be strong for it to be able to subdue to the other person.

From the foregoing, the Tiv causal theory has no room for chance occurrence. That is, in Tiv ontology, nothing happens by chance. According to Aja, "the concept 'chance' or 'luck' defined as "uncaused event" in the explanation of phenomena, is unknown or rather foreign to the African."¹¹² Things do not just happen in African metaphysics. For the Tiv, *kwagh gbe eren ga*. Tiv laws of causality holds that an event that happens by chance is the type that the cause is yet unknown; that is, not one which does not have a cause. In Tiv causality, therefore, things do not happen by chance. A being or force must be responsible for any event that happens. To say something has happened by chance amounts to self-ignominy. Lack of knowledge of the cause of an event does not amount to non-existence of a cause. This belief system is based on the fact that the spiritual beings influence the physical beings. In Koko family in Mbagwaza council ward of Ushongo Local Government of Benue State Nigeria, it is believed that accidents do not just happen. If a member of their family is involved in an accident, it means the elders, custodians of Tiv tradition and culture must

¹¹² Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 61.

have permitted it to happen. This belief has made them to make a pact with spirits of life that no one in Koko family will die of accident. And even if a member of the family has accident, it will not result to death. If he/she dies, it means the elders will summon a meeting to know why the spirits allowed such to happen and the crack in Koko ontology will be mended to avert the reoccurrence of such.

Forms of the Word

The word, *mkaanem*, is either verbal or nonverbal. The verbal is the utterance from the human mouth. It manifests as poetry, incantations and prayers. The nonverbal forms include symbols such as leaves of special plants, libations, medications and gestures. Through *ifan I hamber*, using water to spit in a particular direction, the Tiv claim their innocence before the gods and authorise that cleansing should go on. *Mkaanem* refers to all forms of language, symbolic or spoken.

The Tiv understanding of the word is similar to that of the Igbo conception of the word, "Okwu". According to Tiv, the word, *mkaanem*, is a life-force that transforms even latent talents into worthy blessings that bring good and quality life to humanity. It empowers an ordinary human being to operate at the level of a supernatural being. It brings healing to ailing bodies and cleanses it into a gracious person that attracts only good things. The Igbos share a similar understanding, the word is "the physical-spiritual life-force which awakens all sleeping forces and gives physical and spiritual life".¹¹³ For them, the word becomes flesh everywhere in the form of human beings. It goes on creating and procreating even gods.¹¹⁴ If a human being says let there be water, there will be water. The Tiv too say a similar thing with the same effect. The Tiv elder is lord over everything, including spirits, animals, plants, moon, stars, hammer and stones. Like the Tiv, the Igbos believes if one

113 Edeh, Emmanuel. *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), Pg. 77.

114 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 64.

commands the sun to fall, it will. The Tiv demonstrate same by commanding rain to fall and commanding it does. One thing that must be noted is that the force humans demonstrate differs in degrees of effectiveness, depending on one's spiritual development.

The Power of the Word

In Tiv ontology, human thinking and language go hand in hand and results in deeds and actions. These three are all fundamental elements in human relationship in the environment. The word is "fundamental to the theory of thinking and in the last analysis to all human activity and science".¹¹⁵ Language can shape the innermost thought and at length our actions and deeds. A study of this tripartite relationship made Aja to come up with the following two hypotheses and an inference:

First, that all higher levels of thinking and acting are dependent on the word or language. Second, that the structure or nature of the word or language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands or manipulates one's environment. Consequently, the picture of the universe and the effects of the word shift from tongue and from symbol to symbol.¹¹⁶

This accounts for the Tiv belief that man's control over the word makes him capable of controlling the other forces and he always uses them as he wants. Through the word, everything can be transformed including the human person. With this understanding, the Tiv emphasises that when a person sees his fellowman he must greet him or her first, *kwagh hembra ishughun ga*. For them, nothing is more important than greetings. Greetings are blessing and a sign of peace. When people fail to greet each other, it means something is wrong between them. There is no peace between them. For the Tiv, what a human

115 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 65.

116 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 65.

being says shows his disposition, *mkaanem tesen awashima*. Words move the body to demonstrate one's disposition towards the other one comes in contact with. Through greetings, the Tiv give and receive blessings. Like water and heat, the word is a source of life force. The word emanates from human mouth, demonstrates the power of the human person. It builds and destroys, blesses and curses. When a father says, *wan wam za bem bem*, he means that his child should go well and successfully. When they say, *wan wam u ndoo a lu u ndoo*, it means my son progress, progress. When a parent says, *u yar u wuaga*, it means the child will work but not get anything from it. Parents use such words to curse children that do not respect them and bless those who behave well.

When a child is born, what transforms him into a human being is the word that pronounces his name. The name which is given by the father or the eldest man transforms the child from a "thing" into a "he" or "she". This naming exercise also incorporates the child into the lineage, where he/she becomes part and parcel of the family. This is not just a mere exercise; it is a spiritual transformation that makes the child part of the family, kindred, clan and lineage. The name which he/she was given indicates his personality.

In Tiv arts, both at the beginning and end of a particular work of art, the potter or smith recites incantations, sings and dances around the work. This is necessary to invite spirits for blessings and protection of the work of art. The incantations and the dancing that is done at the end of the work of art are consecrative. They transform the work into a masterpiece. But one thing that happens after all is that still not every person can touch the product, only men who have the witchcraft power to touch sacred instruments. The power in the art work complements the words and enhances their life-force communicating what they symbolise. The Igbos like the Tiv teaches that "In poetry, the word creates images ... and transforms them together with the poet. This is because the poet, being a force, never approaches things that are unchanging and since he is by nature a force among forces he

changes with the word and from the word too".¹¹⁷ In Tiv music and dances, the melody is listened to and danced to in response to the word. The melody speaks not just to the dancers but to all the people present who respond responsibly. Such songs depict the experiences of the people and their belief system. In fact, they are in line with ontological disposition of the people and source of encouragement to the spirits and an appeasement for any wrong done and a pledge to never repeat such again.

In Tiv traditional medicine, man is understood as the crown of creation, around him revolves all the good things in life. All these things work for his good. But without the word, nothing works for his good, no medicine, not even poisons, are effective without the word".¹¹⁸ The Tiv believe some illnesses have supernatural or non-supernatural aetiological causes. The illnesses that are attributed to supernatural causes are those that explain the origin of an ailment in supra-sensible forces, agents or acts that cannot be directly observed or have no manifest cause. The cause of such illnesses is sorcery, witchcraft or spirit intrusion.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, the non-supernatural explanations of illness are based on observable cause-and-effect relationships. This is however determined by traditional medicine practitioners, who diagnoses through *ishor*, and treat illness. This knowledge has been passed down from generation to generations.

Traditional medicine goes with incantations and the use of herbs as necessary ingredients. Traditional medicine is humanistic and is aimed at the total healing of the person, psychologically, socially, physically and spiritually. According to Aja, "the concern is not only limited to the material elements of the physiology."¹²⁰ Divination and healing of illness is a communal thing in Tiv society. The individual does not have

117 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 66.

118 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 69.

119 Moti, Shagba&Wegh, Shagbaor. *An Encounter Between Tiv Religion and Christianity*. (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2001), Pg. 42.

120 Aja, Egbeke. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Pg. 69.

the powers to make decision in such a matter. The kin group decides the therapy. It must be noted here that there is no medicine in Tiv tradition without the pronouncement of powerful words of incantations.

Moti and Wegh¹²¹ narrated a story of a chief priest by name Akem Shenge in Mbaanyam in UkanUshongo Local Government of Benue State. Akem's supernatural power to heal was given to him by the *ityo*, patrilineage. The aim of empowering him was to serve the community, not for money. According to Moti and Wegh, while they went to see Akem in 1995, a young man who was directed from Vandikya Local Government by another native doctor to see Akem came and was asked his problem, he said that he was no longer sexually strong, his farm no longer has good harvest and his business is not flourishing. For him, the enemy is behind his problems. Akem told him that there are five *akombo* that could cause such problems: *wuhe orkpen* - the chill of a dead person is associated with coming in contact with the dead. *Ichongo* - This means circumcision. It is a phallic reference and related to male potency. *Megh* - This means poison. It is harmful and can make a person unfortunate. *Twer* - This means treatment. It causes infertility in all that one lays his hands on. Animals fall sick and die. *Igbe mbatugh* - This means the trap of witches and wizard. This shows one is under the demonic influence of witches and wizards. After highlighting the above *akombo*, the *ortumbun*, chief priest sits down beside medicine pots. He dipped broom in ritualized pot and sprinkled on the patient saying *ibo sen* (evil go down) *isho kondo* (innocence flow up). The words mentioned during cleansing are very fundamental and without them there is no cleansing. It is actually the words that summon the healing power of spirits and bring about the desired result. This act of ritual cleansing is referred to *wuhe kuran*. The words cleanse the patient from all badluck and misfortune. Akem continued by taking a piece of metal and with it carried out a symbolic removal of all evil substances which may have been

121 See Page 46-47 of Moti and Wegh's *The Encounter Between Religion and Christianity*.

planted on the patient's body. He cuts the patient's nails on the hands and feet. He cuts some *ayande*, ancestral leaves, twined it and encircled the legs, hands, chest and neck of the patient, he cuts each twine in the process. This symbolises freedom from all evils that made him the *atakpa*. It is a potion made of various roots and barks of trees which is usually prepared for six days before it becomes a healing pot of medicine.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that: First, there is a Tiv philosophy of causality according to which the universe is ordered and all events are caused and potentially explicated. These events are metaphysically caused through the ontological relationship of forces. All events are determined by *Aondo-God*, the Supreme Being, through the spirit of life. The spirits of life drive the automatic forces in men and animals through their self-willed actions comprehensively and orderly towards the realisation of events, the will of spiritual beings. This means the universe is not subject to complete automatic determination. Natural laws must be respected. Therefore, each created force has its activating principle or vital force, which allows it to function in its specific manner. However, the Tiv often allow divine intervention. That is, they often make recourse to God, the spirits of life, ancestral spirits, lesser gods and talismanic charms. Second, there are causal agents responsible for the realization of causation in reality. These causal agents are the spirits, spiritualized beings, the automatic forces - medicine *ichigh* thoughts and words. Third, thoughts and words are powerful in Tiv metaphysics and bring to pass what they symbolise. We therefore conclude that the Tiv have a deep knowledge of reality and nothing happens by chance, all events are caused through the causal agents of the supreme being-Aondo. And man needs the metaphysical understanding of reality in order to attain his existential being.