

The Philosophy of Force and the Spoken Word in African Metaphysics: Some Critical Insights

Nelson Udoka Ukwamedua, Ph.D
and
Victor Ighekhie Omokpo

Abstract

A cardinal idea that swivels round the discourse on African metaphysics is the idea of force. Ordinarily, in other traditions of philosophy, the idea of force exists but the problem here is that, in African metaphysics, the idea of force is quite unique and interesting especially as it concerns the spoken words. It is this idea of force and the spoken word and how they interface to beautify African metaphysics that this paper is concerned with. In African metaphysics, this discourse on force theoretically originated from Tempels. This research was carried out using the critical analytic model and with it the authors put forward the thesis that the ontology of force is critical to the existence of the various modes of being in African metaphysics. It is also the argument of this paper that this force has very close ties with the spoken words; as under proper condition and with the expected disposition, the spoken word comes with some force that makes it powerful, lively, forceful, creative and also destructive as the case may be. So, it was palpable that the spoken word is not ordinary in African metaphysics and it is rather called *nommo*. And it is the thesis of this paper amongst others that this spoken word makes the various worlds and beings in the African world to relate and associate thereby justifying the anthropologised nature of African metaphysics.

Keywords: Force, Spoken Word, Bantu, Ontology, Metaphysics, African.

Introduction

African philosophy attempts to critically and rationally explain being in African context and through African logic.¹ This is further

¹ Lucky U. Ogbonna, "The Question of "Being" in African Philosophy," *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religious*, 3, no. 1 (2014), Pg. 108.

affirmed by Chimakonam as he holds that “in African philosophy, we study reality of which being is at the center.”² And just like other traditions of metaphysics, being is always the focus of discourse. This is because metaphysics studies anything that is which is what being represent. Now, there are dynamics and models of being, and this puts being in perspective and enables man to interface with other beings too. One of such dynamics of being the force. As a matter of fact, one cannot talk about being in African metaphysics without talking about force. For some scholars, being is force and force is being and one of those scholars is the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels. He is seen as the first person to formulate a system of being and tried to underscore the relationship between being and force and he used this to explain the African world. For Tempels, what underscores this African world by way of being is force and he called it force vitale- vital force.³ Another scholar that has also made some marks and remarks about the relationship between being and force in the African philosophy is Alexis Kagame, using his four categories which are; *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*. However, this work is not just on the analysis of the ontology of being and force⁴ but also its implication for the spoken word. The reason for this is that the spoken words in African metaphysics is not empty or weak but strong, effective, filled with life, sharp and resounding and it is the force behind it that makes it enjoy these attributes. This then is the disposition of this paper which is an appraisal of the ontology of force as it relates to the power or the strength behind the spoken words.

² Jonathan Chimakonam, “Integrative Humanism: Extension and Clarification,” *Journal of Integrative Humanism* 3, no. 1 (2013), Pg. 73.

³ See, Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).

⁴ In traditional metaphysics, ontology ordinarily means the nature, properties and structure of being. So, the ontology of being and of force in this paper simply means the nature, properties and structure of being or force as the case may be.

On African Metaphysics

The very notion and thought of the possibility of African Metaphysics is closely linked to the philosophical debate about the possibility of an African philosophy that is authentic in its nature and objective. The disputation of an African philosophy arose from the lack of substantive written documents of real African philosophical thoughts which was contrary to the western scholarly and documented history. If Africans could not produce evidence of their philosophical thoughts, some of the western philosophers hastily drew a conclusion that Africans were incapable of reasoning. If they were unable to philosophize on the basic concepts and stuffs of their realities, they could not have an authentically African Metaphysics.⁵ Unsurprisingly, prominent African Philosophers have refuted this claim in different way and Ozumba even went further to define African metaphysics as “a more comprehensive, all embracing totalistic view of reality without neglecting the unique place of individual things in the holism of reality.”⁶ This implies that Africans in their daily struggle for survival and meaning in their lives, asks some fundamental questions about their reality, which when answered, constitutes their African Metaphysics as distinct from western metaphysics. From the models, it is blatant that the western tradition and model of metaphysics is different from the African, because the western approach engages metaphysics as a detached intellectual activity to investigate reality, while African metaphysics is an engaged intellectual and human activity of the whole person that is involved with reality. In African metaphysics, a requirement for one to truly know the meaning and cause of reality is that one must interrogate reality with the will and the mind; in fact, the totality of the human person.

⁵ Apologun Sylvester, “Causality and African Metaphysics: A Meeting Point,” *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, 8, no. 2 (2020), Pg. 12.

⁶ Ozumba, G. O., *African Metaphysics* (Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2004), Pg. 54.

African Metaphysics seeks to give an explanatory identification and role among beings, together with their interactions with each other. It also explains the hierarchical order of beings and forces in reality, a belief reinforced by Placide Tempels in his famous work on Bantu Philosophy.⁷ In African Metaphysics, both empiricism and rationalism converge to give a holistic understanding of reality. African metaphysics, seeks to reconcile African's interaction with the visible and non-visible world and forces around them.⁸ African metaphysics is about the theory of the world and all that is in existence and how each of the existent realities relate to each other. It is the African viewpoint that everything that exists are well ordered and have a causal relationship. For them, the world is ordered in such a way that all events are caused and explicable. For Africans, the realities in the world are causally related, not chemically or mechanically as the western world thinks. For the most part, African metaphysics is anthropocentric and it is also a lived-metaphysics.⁹ It is basically man-centered which implies that everything is interpreted according to its relation to man. What this means is that in African ontology, all forces are related to man and his nature. For Anyanwu, forces are interrelated in African Metaphysics, he stated further that “from the beginning of the world, it is assumed there has existed a life force, created by one God which is always active, spread throughout the universe, dispensed to all animate-life forces, man, animals and the plants, sometimes communicated to things which we consider inanimate.”¹⁰ Placide Tempels calls this life force the vital force. In African metaphysics, beings are in harmonious complementary relationship.

7. Wilfred Lajul. “African Metaphysics: Traditional and Modern Discussions”, In *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*, ed. Isaac E. Ukpokolo (Switzerland: Springer International Publishers, 2017), Pg. 22.

8. Ozumba, *African Metaphysics*, Pg. 54.

9. Nelson Udoka Ukwamedua, Ontology and anthropologised Metaphysics: Revisiting the ontology of deities among the Igbo. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 10 no. 2 (2021), Pg. 111-125. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v10i2.7>, 124.

10. Ayanwu, K.C. “Presuppositions of African Socialism,” *The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy*, 3, no. 1 & 2. (1983): Pg. 60.

The Ontology of Force in African Metaphysics: Tempels and Kagame

The way Africans view force determines the other aspects of their individual and collective lives. It determines what they make of “being” as well as the surrounding universe in which they live.¹¹ However, “African concept of being is force; that what is, in whatever form is endowed with force; that minds and matter have never been apart; that forces interact, intermingle and interpenetrate into one another in an egregious sense.”¹²

Placide Tempels: The understanding of the African worldview of the theory of forces originated from the Bantus. Placide Tempels presented this in his work on Bantu Philosophy. In the views of the Bantus, every being in the universe has some vital force of their own. This includes all species of life on earth: humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects. Each being has been endowed by God, the supreme force with a certain force, capable of strengthening the vital energy of the strangest beings of all creation: man.¹³ Force can also be referred to as the potent life, vital energy and vital force. He wrote that Bantus allude to this vital force in even their greetings of each other, using forks of address like, “you are strong,” or “you have life in you.” Sometimes, they also express their sympathy by using phrases like, “your vital energy is sapped or even lowered.”¹⁴ Thus, at the base of African Metaphysics is force. Force has its source in God, and it is a reality that Africans hold strongly. It might be invisible, but it is inherent in them. Man can renew this force by tapping from the strength of other creatures. Being is conceived within the category of force. For Tempels, force is “a necessary element in being and the

11. Emmanuel Archibong, “A Comparative Study of Force in African and Western Worldview,” PhD dissertation, Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2019.

12. Jim I. Unah, “African Theory of Forces and the Extended Family Relations: A Deconstruction,” *Analecta Husserliana*, LXXIV (2002), 265.

13. Tempels, *Bantu* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), Pg. 31-32.

14. Tempels, *Bantu*... Pg. 32.

concept of force is inseparable from the definition of being, for without the element of force, being cannot be conceived.”¹⁵ The category of force includes all necessity of “beings;” God, humans both living and deceased, animals, plants and minerals. Thus, since being is force, all being appear to Bantu as forces. From Placide Tempel's assessment, Bantus do not believe that any human being can have any real existence outside the hierarchy of forces.¹⁶

Alex Kagame: The class of a word can be recognized by a sound or group of sounds which preceded the stem and this Kagame calls determinative. Kagame stated that the stem is ineffectual without the determinative in Bantu language. It was from this that Kagame brought out the four categories of African philosophy. All that exist in the universe of being and becoming is summed up under any of these categories. 'Everything there is must necessarily belong to one of these four categories and must be conceived of not as substance but as force.'¹⁷ The stem is Ntu but, it is not particular without the determinatives which gave the categories their distinctive characters and understanding. Alexis Kagame understood the idea of force from another perspective. For him, there are four categories of African Philosophy. And they are;

Muntu - 'Human being' (Plural: *Bantu*)

Kintu - 'Thing' (Plural: *Bintu*)

Hantu - 'Place and Time'

Kuntu- 'Modality.'¹⁸

Everything that is, must of necessity belong to any one of these four categories and must be viewed as force. With this light, man (*muntu*) and horses (*kintu*) are forces, north and today are forces

^{15.} Temples, *Bantu...* Pg. 33.

^{16.} Temples, *Bantu...* Pg. 34.

^{17.} Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture*, Marjorie Grene (trans), (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1961), 100.

^{18.} Nelson Udoka Ukwamedua, "A Critical Review of Alexis Kagame's Four Categories of African Philosophy." *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies* 8, (2011): 250.

(*hantu*) and short and handsomeness (*kuntu*) are also forces. These four categories of forces are related to each other in the *Ntu*. The *Ntu* is the central force in which all the categories are united and express their being. Ordinarily, it is quite difficult to define force rather force and/or forces can only be described based on their ontology. Force has a metaphysical connotation. The reality of force cannot be divorced from being. Being is force and force is being. Both are inseparable from each other. Without force, being cannot be discussed. The concept of force is tied to the concept of being even to its most abstract thinking about the notion of being. Force is not an adventitious reality, and not just necessary attributive quality of being, but force is the nature of being. The understanding of force accounts for Africans belief in witchcraft, magic, and mystical powers. The notion of force corresponds to the notion of being in western philosophy. It is not an attribute of being. It is being and being is force.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that unlike the notion of being in western thought which is static, the idea of force of African metaphysics is dynamic. It means that vital force can either increase or diminish. For instance, misfortune can make one's vital force to be depleted. On the other, increment in status and social power can make ones vital force to increase in his human nature.²⁰ What this means is that everything is connected so that some things increase the vital force or diminish it and this goes to show that these forces interact and move in around us. They are closely aligned to man and man's models and mode of operation.

Some others do not agree with Tempels, but exposed his errors. For them, it is contradictory to substitute force for being, since the identification of the two is not conceived dialectically, which presupposes a process of identification that cannot be assumed. By postulating that the Bantus distinguishes the visible thing from

^{19.} Nelson Udoka Ukwamedua, "A Critical Review of Alexis Kagame's Four Categories of African Philosophy.",... Pg. 75.

^{20.} Aliko Songolo, "Muntu Reconsidered: From Tempels and Kagame to Janhein Jahn, // *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 10 no. 3 (1981): Pg. 93.

the being of it, that is from the invisible, living force, and yet attempts to see in the equation of being with force the fundamental conception of the Bantus, this can only lead to contradiction. He discards the sensible being, which is supposed to be identical with the invisible, occult force, and considers what falls under sensibility as a simple appearance, a visible phenomenon of being or force.²¹

The Hierarchy of Forces in African Metaphysics

In the African thought, there is a hierarchy in the notion of forces. Forces possess a hierarchical order from the supreme to the lowest form. At the apex is God, followed by divinities and deities. Next is man, both living and dead. Then comes the animals, plants and non-living things. The need for a hierarchy is because force is very much relational. It relates with other forces.²² They have a symbiotic relationship with each other. Forces differ in their essences. There are divine forces, celestial or terrestrial forces, human and animal forces, plant and inanimate forces. The belief in forces helps to maintain order both in the visible and invisible world. It maintains equilibrium and balance in the universe. Every force is related to one another in a fluid and seamless manner.

God, Ancestors and Divinities

At the top of the hierarchy of forces in the African view point is God who is held as the great Muntu. He is the Supreme being and creator of everything, the source of all forces and the uncaused caused of everything at rest or in motion. God is a spirit that has force in himself, and he grants power and existence to all other forces. God is also viewed as the supreme sovereign who has other divinities to serve him in his theocratic government. The divinities and ancestors are set up as intermediaries between him and man. The belief in God has a firm root in the minds of the African Man,

^{21.} Fabian Eboussi-Boulaga, *The Bantu Problem*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1968), Pg. 35.

^{22.} Temples, *Bantu*, Pg. 5.

and is tied to the entire fabric of the lives of the African. God cannot be separated from the political, economic, moral, scientific and intellectual lives of the African Man. This is the reason why the African man is deeply religious. He is the creator and mover of everything that is. God is not a stranger to the African people, and in traditional Africa, there is no atheist.²³ In the second step of this first hierarchy is the belief in ancestors, called the living-dead. The belief in ancestors is a belief in the African notion of force which leads to the practice of ancestral rituals which serves to preserve good relations with the departed kin. In the African view, the ancestors are never worshipped but are just services through the offering of slaughtered animals, pouring of libations while simultaneously asking for their blessings and good fortune.²⁴

The second layer is belief in divinities. These are demigods, gods, nature spirits and the likes. Mbiti argues that the divinities were created by the Supreme Being in the ontological category of the spirits. They are associated with him, and often stand for his activities or manifestations wither as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature.²⁵ Divinities are either spirits or human beings of distant past who by their heroic activities were deified. They are created by God and are largely the personifications of natural objects and forces in the universe. The ancestors are believed to have taken a spiritual form and are closer to God, serving as a link between man and God. The African man believes that they can assist him in difficult times. The ancestors are those who have died physically but still believe to be alive in the memory of those who remember them when they were in the community. They are seen as ever present and interested in the affairs of the family. That is what informs the decision to venerate and appease them through

23. Mbiti J. S. *African Religion and Philosophy*, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), Pg. 198.

24. Jele S. Manganyi and Johan Buitendag, "A Critical Analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity," *Theological Studies*, 69 (1) (2013), Pg. 2.

25. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Pg. 75-76.

sacrifices and libations. These beliefs are occasioned by the belief in the interconnection of forces between the living, living dead and God. The ancestors in the Traditional African view are those who lived a good life, had children and died at a ripe old age. Those who lived a bad life are not admitted into the ancestral world, and they become ghosts haunting the living. These shows the African belief in afterlife.

Man

Man takes the next position in the hierarchy of forces in the African world view. Man is a paradox and an enigma in that he is both strong and at the same time weak; and both intelligent and at the same time foolish. Man is created by the supreme being and is the creator's priceless creation. The individual man in Africa is seen within the context of the collective. People are connected to their relatives, living and dead and to the natural environment. Since man is the center of existence in African World view, he is a bridge between God and the environment. Man plays a role in nature and he is the image of the creator. Man is a living force and is the most powerful among created beings. He participates in the force of God. Man's vital force can either be strengthened or weakened by other men either living or dead. Man can grow, acquire knowledge and increase his force and vitality, but he is still very dependent on God which is the greatest force in the world. Man cannot be independent of God because man needs knowledge and wisdom from God. The destiny of man is controlled either by God, fate or himself.²⁶ These powers control the activities of the individuals in unexplainable ways. Thus, for African, "nothing occurs in the physical which does not root itself in the spiritual (metaphysical).

²⁶. Nelson Udoka Ukwamedua and Victor Omokpo, "The Ontology of Destiny and Freedom among the Igbo African: A Discourse in Existential Metaphysics," *Idea XXVIII/2*, (2016):Pg. 274.

The spiritual dimension of reality holds at the foundation of the physical world”²⁷.

Animals, Plants and Inanimate Things

The natural environment is an abode for all life on earth; man, animals and minerals. Man co-exists with the environment and forces permeate everything in the natural habitat. The African man has a respect for nature, reverence for hills, forests, animals and rivers. The African man has respect for certain animals because they believe that the ancestors communicate with the living through them. Spirits are believed to operate in the human world of animals, birds and fishes. Some animals are sacred and are totemic. In the same light, the African man sees mountains, tress, rivers as representatives or embodiment of deities or spirits. They hold the belief that spirits dwell in the woods, bushes forests, rivers and plants. Thus, most plants have healing potencies and can increase the life force of man or diminish it. Plants are infused with potent life forces that are beneficial to man and the entire cosmos. Trees, animals and insects are all approached with the greatest caution and consideration, for it is believed that most aspects of nature are perceived as kin, and are endowed with consciousness and the power of ancestral spirits. This worldview holds true even concerning mineral deposits. Minerals are seen as the creation of God and a manifestation of his benevolence. Africans are convinced that the minerals contain life forces. They explain these minerals as being a determinate act of God. They do not classify them into periodic tables as the westerners do. Rather, the African man is content knowing that

²⁷. Patrick Iroegbu, “*IGA N' AJU: Three Igbo Modes of Mobilizing Extra Human Forces to Heal Illness in African Societies*”, *Essence: International, Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy (Philosophy and African Medicine)*, 3(2006), Pg. 69.

“every being radiates a life force, a sort of wave-particles which are used by people to bring the universe to its fulfillment.”²⁸

The Interaction of Forces in African Metaphysics

The universe is like a spider's web in which all beings are linked together by a network of relationship and interaction.²⁹ Harmonious interactions and relationships can lead to the increment of forces of beings, while bad influences lead to the depletion and disintegration of forces.³⁰ There is an interaction of forces because separate substances do not exist independent of each other in the African view. There is an interaction of forces as forces flow into each other and have an intimate ontological relationship with one another. Tempels wrote that “the world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single tread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network.”³¹ Forces influence other forces through a causal relationship. The deities influence human beings and vice versa. Man is a causal agent and is active, and he influences other forces especially those lower than him in the hierarchy of forces. This is because man cannot be a lone being, but knows that he is a vital force and an active part of creation.³² Man as an object, is the center of attraction of all other forces. Every force seeks to work and maintain man for he is at the center of the universe.

According to Iroegbu, “man is the object that attracts the most attention for it is he who is in dialogue with all the other worlds.”³³ The African man believes that his world is populated by men and

^{28.} Leopold Sedar Senghor, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century” Fred Lee Hoard and Jonathan Scott Lee (eds) *I am because we are: Readings in Black Philosophy*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), Pg. 49.

^{29.} Temples, *Bantu Philosophy*, Pg. 61.

^{30.} Obiajulu Mulumba Ibeabuchi, “The Theory of Forces as conceived by Igbo-Africans,” *Filosofia theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 2no. 1, (2013): Pg. 293.

^{31.} Temples, *Bantu*, Pg. 60.

^{32.} Oguagua, P. *Igbo Understanding of Man* (Nigeria: Double Pee Communications, 2003), Pg. 88.

^{33.} Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*. (Owerri: Internatiional Press Ltd., 1994), Pg. 143.

spirits, and these are intimately connected, and the inhabitants of the physical and spirit world interact in a very deep sense. The spirits have a profound influence on man, for though they inhabit the land of the dead, they have an unlimited access to the land of man. Such forces interact, interpenetrate and intermingle with each other. The spirit world and the physical world are in marriage. The African man does not just think of the physical but also of the spiritual and invisible as well. The life line in this theory of force is that causality cannot be rationally or empirically verified, but can be spiritually intuited through the consultation of the supernatural. The world of entities are altered by the dynamic of force. That is why witches can affect one physically and other seemingly superstitious practices. The African believes that events are determined by the wills of spiritual beings, which are God, divinities and spirits. At the occurrence of an event, there is a question of how and why which seeks to describe all that has happened. As God exerts his power on all beings, so does the divinities also exert power on the universe.

African Philosophy of the Spoken Word

Word is a unique characteristic of man. It is a distinguishing fact between man and other living animals that sets man apart from other animals, and the rest of nature. Although other species of life are capable of making noise and sounds, none can be able to make or form words. The word is exclusive to man and is a hallmark of his abilities to communicate through language. Narrowing it down to human, all humans speak, but they all have a different conception of the spoken word. In some cultures, the word is nothing more than a medium of communicating feelings and thoughts to another person. To others, like the Africans, the spoken word has a huge value and significance. The word in African ontology is a being and forces with huge causal powers.³⁴

³⁴. Socrates Ebo, "The Word in African Ontology," *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2014): 2.

The word is first and foremost an African Language. It is that part of man which is ontological to them. As a language, it is an invention of the African people. There are a number of languages in Africa which are peculiar to different tribes. None of those languages are superior to each other, and it is through it that the African man expresses the cosmic realities which he perceives around him.³⁵ The word is also an art in the African setting. The African people beautifully laces their words with masterful and intelligent proverbs which makes their speech sublime. It is not surprising that the young Africans listen attentively to the elderly to learn wisdom and the masterful art or oratory from them. They also accompany their fathers to meetings where they listen and learn this art of wonderful word construction and use.³⁶ The word is also an expression of the intelligence of man as well as an African history via oral tradition.

Down to the point of interest, the Africans believe that the word possesses a causal force. As seen before, in the African view, being is force, and force is being. The word plays a vital role in the interaction of forces. It orders the forces and restores their equilibrium whenever there is an imbalance. As seen in Tempels work on the *Bantus*, the *Bantus* have four categories of forces which are encoded in the *Bantu* language. Their universe is encoded in the structure of their language. For them, the *Kuntu* is a modal force. As a modal force, certain words which are uttered are forces existing independently in the African ontology. Words, like beauty, wealth, and greatness are forces which exist independently. But the most prominent of all in their world view is the *Nommo*. The *nommo* is the word, but which does not directly mean speech or utterance. It is an intelligence and a force. It is creative force exercised by the *muntu*. It is a creative and seminal force. It is the powerful African word and force. It is the force which makes an African medicine very potent. It is the potent word of African magic, and a vital force. The word is very

^{35.} Socrates Ebo, "The Word in African Ontology," ...Pg. 2.

^{36.} Socrates Ebo, "The Word in African Ontology," ... Pg. 2.

necessary in the identity of the African person. When a child is conceived, it must be named so that it can be identifiable. The act of procreation and biological birth cannot make one a person. What makes one a person is the pronouncement of the word over the creature by giving it a name and accepting it as a part of the community. Only when this is done, can the person be regarded as a human being.

It is important to note that words can either be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal words use sounds, while non-verbal uses gestures, libations, writings and special objects. Both are very effective in the African usage. Thoughts and words have the ability to bring about what they symbolize. The curse of a parent to an offspring is believed to be binding, while good words bring about blessings. The African agree that words are very powerful and efficacious. For example, if one commands something to happen, it must surely happen unless a higher power decrees otherwise. This implies that the words of individuals do not carry the same power, but each according to his hierarchy of force, has more or less power than the other. The effects of words vary from culture to culture. For some African philosophers like Ogotommeli, the word is a source of life. What he means is that the good word enters into the body through the ear and goes to the sex organ to the uterus. Later, *Nommo* brings about procreation as it is used to heal, bring things to life and also revived persons or things that no longer have life in them.³⁷ Also no Medicine can be deemed potent if it has not been validated with the word and the efficacy of the word pronounced by the medicine man makes it very strong and powerful. A herb given by an ordinary man might not cure the man, but a herb given and made potent by the words of a medicine man will work well for that person.

The implication of this is that not all words come with force and not all forces display themselves in words. Some forces come in

³⁷. Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture*, (New York: Groves Press Inc., 1961), 125.

other forms apart from words. Some words are still empty as there are conditions and proper disposition that are to be met and attended to before a word becomes forceful or before force is imputed or imbued in the words. And when the wrong persons or those without the expected capacity use words, those words cannot come with force, they only remain ordinary, normal and usual words used by ordinary people. This actually explains the nature or what this paper prefers to call the ontology of the spoken words. The spoken word indeed is under the needed and expected circumstances laced with guts and force and it goes to achieve whatever it was put out to achieve by the person who puts it into reality to go and act. The discourse on whether the spoken word has a distinct force from other forces can be gleaned from the above discourse on the nature of the spoken word. There are forces and that of the spoken word is one of the forces in African metaphysics. Together all the forces make the African reality a wholistic. This paper is strictly on the spoken and not on the unspoken words and its dynamics within the community of being.

In African metaphysics, there is no extant philosophy of word as it is not a problem or a concern as it is normal, it is the spoken word that comes with a force and that also makes the interaction of all the beings in the African world a reality. This is based on the premised that spoken words are the expressions of thoughts and sentiments and these thoughts and sentiment does not bring anything alive on its own. The force of life and in life comes alive when these internal dispositions and expression as in the case of logos, the word becoming flesh. The reality of force also explains the reality of being and the hierarchy of being also syncs with the hierarchy of being as espoused by Iroegbu³⁸ and Edeh.³⁹

It is interesting to note here that this word being talked about could be in verbal or non-verbal form. In Igbo world, this logos

^{38.} See Pantaleon, Iroegbu. *Metaphysics. The Kpim of Philosophy*. Owerri: International University Press, 1995.

^{39.} See, Emmanuel Edeh. *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1995).

could be said to resemble *okwu*. In Igbo thought, consequently, this very 'word' becomes flesh everywhere in human; and this process of creation via the word is a continuum even to the extent of creating and procreating even gods. This *okwu* is not just the physical but also the spiritual life force that stimulates and arouses all the sleeping forces, and this is geared towards giving both spiritual and physical life. The Igbo-African believes that he can lord it over all created beings just with the power of the spoken word (*okwu*). It is a common belief among the Igbos that nobody is without a name because that would make the person unidentifiable. The act of procreation, biological birth does not make one a human being; it is when the word is pronounced on this creature. With this, a name is given and the person is accepted as part of the community that he becomes a complete human being.⁴⁰ Apart from the verbal word, non-verbal forms of word could be used, and they are as effective as verbal forms of word. These include symbols such as gestures, libations, special objects, etc. Verbal acts could consist of songs, poetry, incantations, prayers, and many more. The Igbo-African agrees that words are powerful and efficacious and believes that if one says let there be rain, it must happen unless someone or some powers with a higher and greater force ordains the contrary.

This explicates further the nature and phenomenon of the hierarchy of forces. So, words uttered by persons differ in degrees of effectiveness. It is not surprising then that the Igbos recognizes. The positions of kings, elders, *dibia*, *eze ani*, this accentuates how words relates with the community of being. This also explains the variety of names that the Igbo-African makes use of like; '*aha ana akpo onye*' - which is, the name a person is called; '*aha echiechi*' -the title name; and '*aha otutu*' - the nickname or pet name.⁴¹

40. Ukwamedua, Nelson Udoka. "Ontology and anthropologised Metaphysics: Revisiting the Ontology of Deities among the Igbo". *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 10(2), (2021): 111-125. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v10i2.7>.

41. Ukwamedua, Nelson Udoka. "Ontology and anthropologised Metaphysics: Revisiting the Ontology of Deities among the Igbo", Pg. 118.

Though the last could be lost and yet the entity does not diminish in its being. The central place of name among the Igbos shows why children are not given any sort of name. Indeed, the name given to someone is not just for external courtesy, but it smacks the very nature and reality of the person concerned. Names express the character of being concerned. This duly explains the central position and the role that language plays in aligning our thought system. Through the power of the word and by the word everything is changed and/or transformed. The spoken word remains the source of life force.⁴² Flowing from this, Jahn citing Ogotommeli writes:

The good Word, as soon as it is received by the ear, goes directly to the sex organ where it rolls about the uterus just as the copper spiral rolls about the sun. The Word of water brings and maintains the moisture necessary to procreation and by this means *Nommo* brings about the penetration of the uterus by a germ of water... It transforms into a germ the water or the Word and gives it the appearance of human person through the essence of a *Nommo*.⁴³

It is also very typical in Igbo medicine that no medicinal concoction is deemed effective without the input of the word. This is hinged on the fact that both their dances, songs, rites, incantations, and all that concerns their traditional medicine are important and indispensable ingredients. Interestingly, Igbo medicine is centered on humanism, and it is with this power of the Word (*okwu*), that man gives name to forces and/or deities and makes them identifiable. In naming, man influences the deities, for there is something in a name. It (name) can condition a being

^{42.} Ukwamedua, Nelson Udoka. "Ontology and anthropologised Metaphysics: Revisiting the ontology of deities among the Igbo" ... Pg. 118.

^{43.} Janheinz, Jahn. *Muntu: An Outline of the New African Culture*. Marjorie Grene. Trans], Grove Press Inc: New York. Paperback, 1961, 125.

Culminating Reflection

Though the concept of vital force originated primarily from Placide Tempels' work on the Bantus, it is the foundation of the notion of force in Africa, and it has far reaching influence on all the African scholars that have offered their views about it. It set the stage for other African thinkers and triggered many views on the topic. Through Tempels ontology, Kagame wrote within a scope through which he explained the forces in reality through four categories. Tempels equated being with force; a statement which was received with mixed reactions by various African Scholars. The impression is topical and why scholars like Senghor affirm this as it was constantly relevant to him. In the context of negritude, he carried out the equation of being and force as an eternal constant of black culture. For him, the theory of vitality contains the foundation of the African worldview. However, Kagame replaced the term force with ntu. He considers the term force to be wrong, but nevertheless erroneously substitutes ntu for Tempels' term force. For Mulago, force is a property of being and not a quality, for force does not encompass the categories of created being.⁴⁴

In all, Tempels' view on force has been criticized on the grounds that it is modelled after the Aristotelian view on substance and accidents, and that he made the African notion of being an accident, rather than an essence which leads it to magic bereft of all abstract value.⁴⁵ The ontology of the spoken word is not just relevant in African Metaphysics, but it is also a tool used in religion. In Christianity, we believe the word (*logos*) is personified in Jesus Christ. It is also believed that the word is efficacious and powerful. In Catholicism, it is believed that once the priest pronounces the words of consecration over bread and wine, they are immediately transformed to the body and blood of Jesus

^{44.} Vincent Mulago, *Un visage Africain du Christianisme*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1965), 157.

^{45.} Innocent Chijundu Ngangah, "Vital Force, Personhood, and Community in African Philosophy: An Ontological Study," *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 7, no. 10 (2019): 50.

Christ. Thus, it can be seen that the power of the word in African metaphysics is not one that is farfetched, but one which is rooted even in our basic religious beliefs. For the African man, even though words have power, the power has to be “unlocked” through the power of the individual. A herb might be an ordinary leaf for a man; but in the hands of a herbalist, it becomes a potent medicine once some words of power are pronounced over it.

The African worldview is hierarchical; there is a hierarchy of being which is made up of God, divinities and spirits, ancestors, man, plants and animals. These beings interact with God at the apex, and man at the centre. The reality in Africa is anthropocentric for everything exists for the good of man. The spoken word is believed to contain a causal force that is potent and efficacious. The Bantus believe the *nommo* is the creative force behind the word. There is an interaction between the ontology of force and the spoken word, for being, which Tempels refers to as force must be competent, power wise, to activate the force behind the word. In the critique, though the notion of force was modelled after Aristotle's substance, they are not totally of the same nature. Tempels' description of force was a fitting match for accidents, rather than substance. But despite the reservations and discords in the reception and acceptance of the submission of Tempels on the ontology of force in African metaphysics, it is apt to reiterate the fact that it was the background for further discourses on the ontology of being and force in African metaphysics then and now.

Thus, there arises a question if words have power on their own, or the powers of the word are activated by someone. This can be answered in the *Nonmmo*, the force behind the word. But the answer is simply that the spoken word and the speaker are connected; the speaker has to be competent to utter the words, while the word ought to be potent. The meeting of the competent interlocutor and the efficacious word makes a thing to be potent. Thus, there are some effects a herbalist words carry which an ordinary man's words do not. This is due to the *nommo*, the force behind the word. Force does not just work in a haphazard fashion,

but operates through certain established and pre-established. The African universe have been established as a universe where forces are constantly at play. Everything in the universe is force and all belong to a category, and in one way or the other interacting with other forces.

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