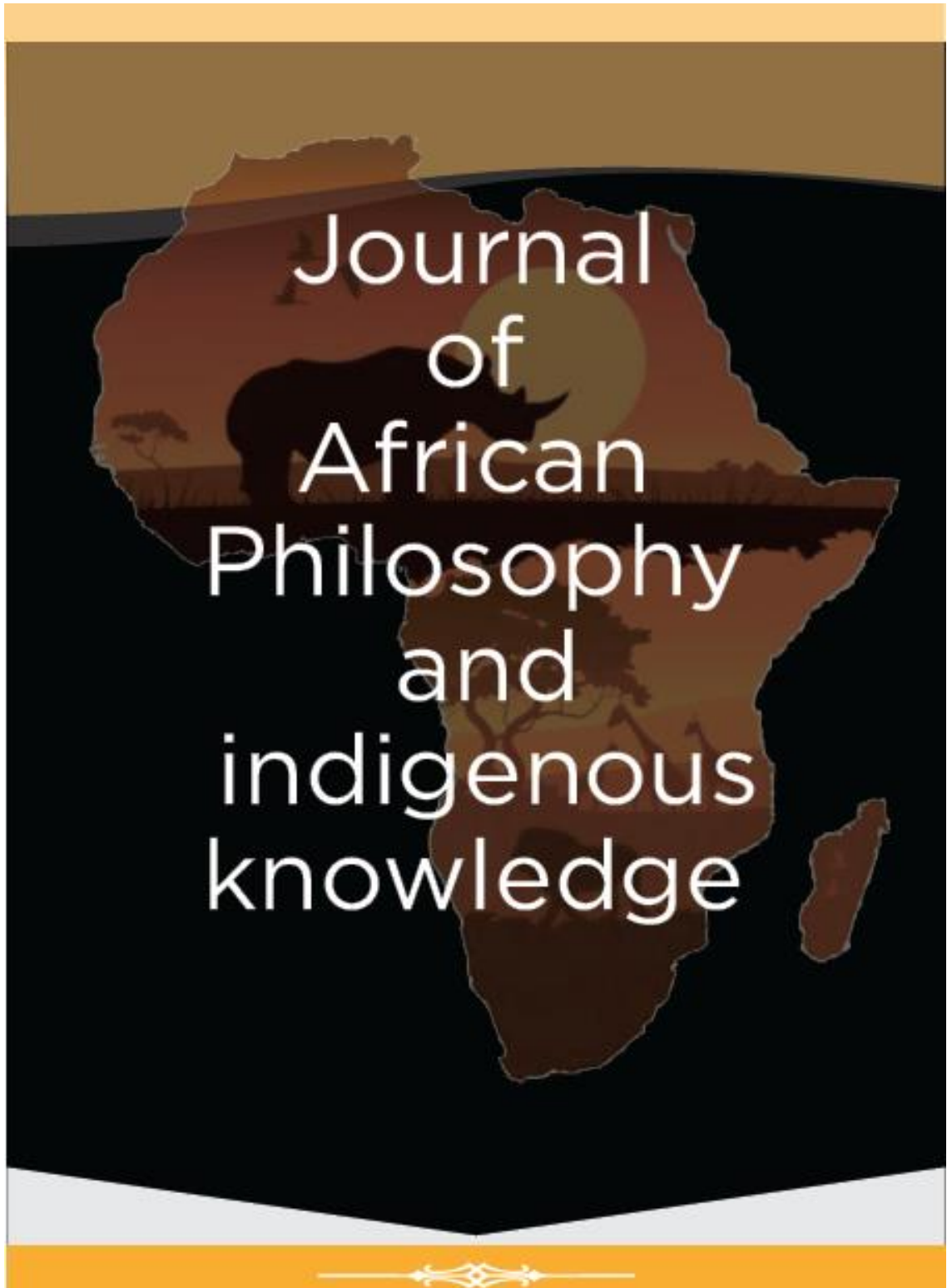




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EDITORIAL NOTE

The articles assembled in this issue collectively advance a compelling argument: that sustainable development in Africa requires a fundamental re-centering of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and philosophical traditions. While the contexts range from disaster risk reduction in Zimbabwe to digital pedagogy in Yorubaland, from inclusive education in Nigeria to agricultural trade resilience across East and West Africa, a unifying thread runs through each contribution the necessity of culturally grounded, context-specific solutions to African challenges.

Esther Ogunwole and colleagues open this issue with a critical examination of culturally responsive inclusive education in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. Their study reveals that while teachers demonstrate some familiarity with inclusive practices, significant gaps remain in pedagogical confidence, classroom management, and cultural sensitivity toward learners with practical needs. The findings underscore a vital insight: inclusivity cannot be achieved through Western-derived models alone; it demands teacher training that is both culturally grounded and responsive to local realities.

Complementing this work, Funmilayo Olu-Ajayi makes a persuasive case for integrating indigenous knowledge into Nigeria's science curriculum. Her argument that traditional practices herbal medicine, local farming techniques, ecological wisdom can enrich scientific education challenges the lingering colonial assumption that indigenous knowledge is antithetical to modern science. Instead, she envisions a blended pedagogy that honours both knowledge systems, fostering environmental awareness and community engagement among learners.

The geopolitical dimensions of indigenous resilience are explored in Charles Apokhume and Olileanya Ezugwu's examination of tariff vulnerability in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Their findings challenge conventional narratives of African agricultural vulnerability by demonstrating that external trade shocks, rather than merely destabilising, can catalyse indigenous-led value chain development. This reframing from sites of perpetual dependency to spaces of creative resilience offers a powerful counter-narrative to dependency theory's more deterministic conclusions.

From Zimbabwe, Owen Mafongoya and colleagues interrogate the cosmological approaches to disaster risk reduction among the Ndaue people of Chimanimani. Their documentation of indigenous forecasting indicators, sacred rituals, and cultural practices reveals sophisticated systems of anticipatory action that have sustained communities across generations. Yet these systems face existential threats from climate change, Christianity, and modern science threats that the authors argue must be addressed through genuine integration rather than mere acknowledgement.

This issue presents a groundbreaking study on Másòyínbò (Olálékàn Fábílólá) and the architectures of a decentralised Yoruba knowledge economy. The study reveals how

digital technologies, often viewed as instruments of cultural homogenisation, can be strategically indigenised to foster linguistic consciousness, economic sovereignty, and epistemic repair. Másòyínbò's model transforming Western technological platforms into spaces of Yoruba cultural affirmation offers a replicable framework for African scholars seeking to bridge tradition and innovation in the digital age.

Extending this conversation on epistemic repair, Agbegbedian Anthony Oghenevwoke offers a critical evaluation of the concept of man in Urhobo traditional philosophy. His study directly refutes lingering colonial notions of the "irrational" preliterate African society, demonstrating that the Urhobo, like other African peoples, possess a coherent logical system through which man is understood as both a historical and metaphysical being. This philosophical grounding, the study shows, is not abstract speculation but the very foundation upon which Urhobo norms, values, and survival as a people rest.

Complementing this philosophical inquiry, David O. Ovuede and Agbegbedian Oghenevwoke Anthony examine the impact of modernity on marital dispute resolution within Benin Kingdom, Nigeria. Their research unmasks how the imposition of Native court systems and British morality displaced the traditional Okaegbèe (patriarch) institution, fundamentally altering the power dynamics of conjugal conflict management. By revealing the nexus between modernity and the diminution of indigenous governance structures, the authors demonstrate that contemporary marital discord cannot be fully understood nor effectively addressed without reckoning with the colonial erosion of culturally anchored resolution frameworks.

Together, these articles issue an urgent call: the decolonisation of African knowledge systems is not merely an intellectual exercise but a practical imperative for sustainable development. Whether in education, agriculture, disaster management, or digital economies, the contributors to this issue demonstrate that Africa's future lies not in abandoning indigenous traditions but in creatively reimagining them for contemporary challenges.

We invite our readers to engage deeply with these contributions and to join the ongoing conversation about how African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems can shape more just, resilient, and culturally affirmed futures across the continent.

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Table of Content

1. Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Education in Public Secondary Schools on Learners with Practical Needs in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: Analysis of Teacher Training and Student Perspectives Esther Adebimpe Ogunwole, Folashade Oluwatoyin Olonilua, Ijeoma Genevieve Anikelechi	5
2. Integrating Indigenous Knowledge And Practices Into The Curriculum For A Sustainable Science Education In Nigeria Olu-Ajayi Funmilayo Elizabeth	26
3. Tariff Vulnerability And Indigenous-Led Agricultural Resilience In Africa: Rethinking Trade Shocks And Local Value Chains In Kenya, Ethiopia, And Nigeria Apokhume, Charles Temple, Ezugwu, Olileanya Amuche	47
4. The nexus between indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), spirituality and culture in DRR in Chimanimani district. Mafongoya Owen, Maipisi Albert, Maroveke McCreynald	66
5. Másòyínbó and the Architectures of a Decentralised Yoruba Knowledge Economy John Oluwafemi Daniel	85
6. Impact Of Modernity On Marital Dispute Resolution By The <i>Okaegbēe</i> Institution In Benin Kingdom, Nigeria David O. Ovuede, Agbegbedia Oghenevwoke Anthony	100
7. A Critical Evaluation Of The Concept Of Man In Urhobo Traditional Philosophy Agbegbedia Anthony Oghenevwoke	117

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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN URHOBOTRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Man is seen as a cosmic reality who occupies the apex of the pyramids of existence and contains all their values. This is a reality that needs a philosophical justification. Philosophy involves a rigorous evaluation of the values man has either acquired or inherited from his forebears. It is thus this call for a re-examination of our values that this study analysed the concept of man in Urhobo traditional philosophy. Data were gathered through the use of key informant interviews and secondary sources, which were subjected to analytical cum historical analysis. Findings revealed that the concept “man” exists in the preliterate Urhobo society, against the notion of some scholars, especially the westerners, that what existed in such a society is no less than an “irrational being”. It was made clear in this study that the Urhobos, like other African traditional peoples, are capable of logical reasoning; for their survival as a people is due to their traditional system of reasoning upon which their norms and values are validated. Thus, the Urhobos answered the question on the existence of man from a historical cum metaphysical perspective. They see man as both a historical and temporal being who exists within space and time.

Keywords: man, philosophy, Urhobo, tradition, human existence

Introduction

The Urhobo people of Delta State in Nigeria and Black Africa generally have been described as savages, irrational, illogical and primitive in their way of life by some Western scholars and philosophers. These scholars have gone to the extent of disputing the rationality of African people. Hence, some argue that Africans lack the capacity for critical thinking. The truth of man’s being and the goal of his existence have engaged the attention of philosophers for

centuries. According to Heidegger (1987:140), what man is, was first manifested in Polemis in the separation of gods and men, in the eruption of being itself, because, for philosophy, what man is, is not written somewhere in heaven. The Urhobo share the same notion with Heidegger as far as the existential aspect of man is concerned. Man as an existential entity encompasses the temporal and transcendental. This calls for both a historical and metaphysical study of man.

The question about the existence of man confronts everyone, and what makes this anthropological question unique and interesting is that man acts as both the questioner and the questioned. Worst still, the question has been furnished with several competing theories, some of which are mutually inconsistent. This, according to Scheler (1970:8), is as a result of the fact that man is a being so vast, so varied, and so multiform that every definition demonstrates itself as too limited. Thus, no epoch has had as ours have had, notions so numerous and varied of man. According to Izu (1995:130), the human being is discussed as a person, that is, an individual substance of a rational nature. He has a physical mortal body that is united to a spiritual immortal soul. His existence must be as a composite of soul and body, never separated from each other. He has reasons to understand, to think and to judge; he has a will that decides and chooses; he can love; he is mortal.

Furthermore, the religious theory sees him as a creature of a divine being called God; the Darwin theory sees him as the product of competitive forces of nature; the behaviorist theory sees him as nothing but the entire range of his behavior; for the existentialists, man's existence precedes his essence, an entity whose being consists not in what it is already, but in what it is not yet. That being the case, where lies his true identity in the face of these conflicting views? It is a dilemma that encapsulates man. This man Bogliolo referred to as the contact point of reality when he noted that we find in man the highest realization and most meaningful interpretation of being. The human person recapitulates ontology,

the point of encounter of all realities (Bogliolo, 1987:120).

Regarding the concept of man, the opinion of the Urhobo traditional philosopher may appear at first satisfactory. Nevertheless, one must ask certain questions such as can a man who is created by God and endowed with reason, be at the same time irrational? To appreciate this view, however, there is the need to first understand the people, their psychosomatic dimension, beliefs and their whole life system. It is based on this reason that this study examined the background of the Urhobo, the nature and destiny of man in order to make their idea of man more comprehensive most especially to those outside the Urhobo socio-cultural worldview. More so, the study re-established the existence of Urhobo traditional philosophy, which will serve as the basis for the analysis of the concept of man in Urhobo traditional thought. The concept 'man', like philosophy itself, is an ambiguous word which is subjected to varied interpretations, meanings and usages. Thus, the study exposed and analysed the general concept of man and showed whether the concept of man is a fact or a false among the preliterate Urhobo.

Brief history of the Urhobo people

The Urhobo speaking peoples occupy an area bounded by latitudes 6° and 5° 15' North and longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' East in the Delta State of Nigeria (Otite, 1982:9). Their neighbours are the Isoko to the Southeast; the Itsekeri to the west; the Bini to the North; the Ijaw to the south and the Ukwani (Kwale-Aboh) to the Northeast. The Urhobo numbered over half a million people, about 542, 915

and occupied an area of 1,417 square miles (about 2% of the whole country) in Delta State, classified among the first ten ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The Urhobo territory consists mainly of ever green forests with many oil-palm trees which provide the source of palm produce from which the Urhobo have some technological preserve. The territory is also covered by a network of streams and rivers which volumes of water flow are directly connected with two climatic seasons: the dry season (November to March) and the wet season (April to October) with a short dry period in August referred to as “August Break”. These physical and natural resources play important role in the social and economic lives of the people. The main economic mainstay of the people is sustained mainly by agricultural subsistence farming and fishing. In addition, there are few commercial business and education centers like Warri, Ughelli, Sapele, Orerokpe, Abrake to mention but few.

They are heterogeneous people whose socio-political organism is based on a cultural unit. There are, at present, twenty-two of such autonomous units termed sub ‘tribes or clans’, namely; Abraka, Agbarha-Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Ewvreni, Ewu, Idjerhe, Oghara, Ogor, Okpe, Okparabe, Orogun, Ughelli, Udu, Ujevwen, Uvwie, Ewvro-Otor, Uwheru, Agbasa and Okere (Urhobo) Warri. Emekpe (1980:9-10) stated that each of these clan is headed or ruled by an Ovie or traditional clan head. Today, the Urhobo territory is grouped into about eight administrative local government areas with headquarters respectively at Ughelli, Otughievwen,

Orerokpe, Isiokolo, Sapele, Udu, Effurun and Oghara.

The concept of man in Urhobo philosophy

The term *ohwo* is the Urhobo word for man or human being. Etymologically, it means, “let goodness be” or “there is goodness”. In a general context, *ohwo* signifies goodness, beauty, order, and peace to mention but a few (Vhouphen, 2020). But in this context, it means “goodness” *re or ruo*, which means come into existence or exist or is. Man is seen as a biological and social being. He is sacred among other creatures. Man is therefore seen as the most beautiful of God’s creature (Ohwotuemuhor, 2020). *Ohwo* (person or man) in Urhobo is believed to be a creature of the supreme deity knowable among other things to the Urhobo through his functional attributes-*omaromohwo*; the moulder-who moulded a person (Erinvwo, 1985:31).

For the Urhobo, man is a special creature, the most perfect of God’s creatures, the one who best manifests God’s goodness. It is in this light that man is conceived as a child of God (*Omo R’Oghene*) or (*Ohwo R’Oghene*). What the above signifies is that names among the Urhobo are living records. This is in conformity with what Uzodimma (1985:16) said of the Igbos that they attach more to the original name of the inhabitants.

It appears somewhat ridiculous that the Urhobo concept of man has a terminal inclination, but judging from the idea man, it is not easy to define him, that is why the Urhobos see him as an existing phenomenon. This ontological affirmation re-echoes

Martin Heidegger's view that the task of nay philosophical investigation today should be the reaffirmation and rediscovery of being eclipsed by the trapping of modern science and civilization (Heidegger, 1962:175). Man, indeed is full of life and vitality, but he is unique in the cosmos, he is a person.

For the Urhobo, man is both temporal body (*Ugboma*) and transcendent spiritual (*Erhi*). This belief originated from the view that the *Erhi*-spirit subsists after the death of *Ugboma*-body. Thus, there is the general notion that there exists a principle solely responsible for the activities of man. The Urhobos not only think that man is merely a physical and component subject of scientific enquiry only, man for them, as well, is a spiritual being and of ontological and religious significance. It is here that the study of man reaches its full heights and man attains his dignity as a unique being and person.

The existence of Urhobo traditional philosophy

The existence of Urhobo traditional philosophy has been a controversial issue in some quarters, not because it is not a genuine philosophy, but mainly because of the erroneous perceptions of what constitutes philosophy. It will be pertinent to remark here that *Homo sapiens is Homo sapiens*, be it in Africa or Europe. Due to this fact, every person, language and culture have a worldview of the ultimate reality. To negate this fact is to affirm certain unexamined assumptions, such as, that Africans are primitive and savages; that they are genetically and

intellectually inferior to the Western race.

Philosophy could be regarded as the folk thought of a people. Whether the African or Urhobo thought is codified or not does not make it less philosophical. According to Mbukamma (1980:2), it is naïve to consider only those conceptual thoughts, which are put down in writing. Mbakamma went further to state that, what should be understood is, as long as a people have language, proverbs, myths and stories, they have philosophies which are in the 'womb' of these languages, proverbs, stories and myths. For instance, Plato's philosophies are no less philosophical because they are told or reported by another person. Philosophy, whether it is understood narrowly to be a theoretical discipline devoted to detailed and complicated argument or as a folk-thought, any of these could be essentially written or unwritten, but it would be no less philosophical because of being codified on paper or otherwise. The only challenge is the limited in scope for change and growth within the unwritten thought system. One can therefore deduce from the above that the argument is not whether Urhobo philosophy exists but rather on the absence of literature on Urhobo traditional thought. To support the existence of traditional philosophy, Hountondji stated that:

African
philosophy
exists,
but it is
not what
it is
believed
to be. It

is
developi
ng
objectiv
ely in
the form
of a
literatur
e, rather
than as
implicit
and
collectiv
e
thought,
but as a
literatur
e of
which
the
output
remains
captive
to the
unanimous
fallacy
(Hountondji,
1983:55
).

While Hountondji's first statement that 'African philosophy exists', is accepted as being correct, his view that this philosophy is developing objectively in the form of literature can be dismissed outrightly on the ground that philosophy does not have to exist in literary form before it can be called philosophy. This prompted Tempels to conclude that attitude can be neither earthly nor constant unless it is based upon connections of thoughts, a logical system of perceptions, a complete positive philosophy of the world, of man and his environment, of existence,

life, death and life after death (Tempels, 1969:19).

Hegel underscored the cultural and relative aspect of philosophy when he noted that:

But men
do not at
certain
epochs
merely
philosophise in
general;
for there
is a
definite
philosophy
which
arises
among a
people
and the
definite
character,
which
permeates all the
other
historical
sides of
the spirit
of the
people,
which is
most
intimately
related
to them,
and
which
constitutes
their
foundations. The

particular form of philosophy is thus contemporaneous with a particular constitution of the people amongst whom it makes its appearance, their social life and their capabilities, customs and enjoyments of the same (Hegel, 1968:53).

The notion of philosophy for Hegel is a factor in the life history of the human experience, of the individual mind and it is subject to the conditions of race, culture and civilization. Therefore, one can admit that there are both individual and cultural approaches to philosophizing. A further support to the issue of philosophical relativity was

given by Uchendu in his writing on the Igbos of South East Nigeria that:

To know how much a people view the world around them is to understand how they evaluate life, and a people's evaluation of life, both temporal and non-temporal provides them with a 'character' of action, a guide of behaviour (Uchendu, 1965:12).

Conclusively, it could be inferred from all that have been said that the Urhobo in particular and the African in general have an unwritten timeless code of behaviour, which is derived from their

worldview, and their behaviour or attitude to life have survived till today because it is in a way logical and articulated in their language, proverbs and culture.

The rationality of Urhobo traditional philosophy

The Urhobo thought system is a rational one, as Hountondji and others have testified. This is not only because it satisfies the contextual criteria, but because a race cannot exist within an irrational thought system, as has been pointed out. Nevertheless, this does not exonerate it from the rules of logic and the dictates of science. Besides, that a thought system like the Urhobo is deficient in some of these does not mean it is a meaningless and irrational thought system. Rather, the system should be seen as being in her evolutionary process, a stage which all philosophies went through. Another question which crops up here is to ascertain whether this rational thought pattern of the Urhobos in particular and the Africans in general qualify for a philosophy per se. Some scholars, however have claimed that the issues cannot be resolved since human beings are all interpreters of the world and there is no monopoly of truths. Werner (1981:47) supported this view when he noted that it is scientifically justifiable to say that what 'I cannot measure or perceive or understand does not interest me as a scientist...it would be dogmatic to declare that it does not, indeed cannot exist'.

As for Werner, the wise knows the limit of his knowledge. It is on this note one can say that all the discourse about the existence of philosophy in Africa entirely is non-philosophical,

for the argument is biased, subjective and politically motivated. In the absence of all these inclinations, the Urhobo traditional thought, like all other African traditional thoughts, qualify as a philosophy; though, it is still growing in all ramifications.

Nature and components of man

Man in his existential situation encompasses the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. Thought alone cannot grasp fully these two aspects of man's temporality and transcendence, nor can it combine these two seemingly apposed aspects in a unitary whole. This dual constitutive nature of man was well enunciated by Kierkegaard (1944:39) that man is a synthesis of the soul and body, but a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third factor, this third factor is in spirit.

Awolowo (1981:5), like the Urhobos, sees man as, a manifestation of three phenomena. "The first is the *Erhi*, (soul), which is the indwelling of God. The second is the subjective mind, which is the seat of man's reasoning facility. The third is the objective mind which can see, hear, smell, touch, that is the body of man". It is thus clear from the above characterization that the Urhobos conceive man as being a composite of soul and body. They do not, however, think that man is either two beings, as the dualist asserts of composed of only one principle, as the monists say. For them, prime matter and substantial form unite as two principles to form one being. Man, thus, is composed of two principles, not one. Royce puts this clearer when he observed that the soul is simply the substantial form of a thing or that by which we live. It is that

which makes this matter living efficiently one (Royce, 1961:53).

Soul and body relationship

Our treatment of Urhobo component of man is, however, incomplete without discussing their views on the soul-body problem. The debate began to shape up when Plato proposed a doctrine of an immaterial, immortal and pre-existing soul that is imprisoned in a body (David, 1993:92). Aristotle and Aquinas made a great attempt at a synthesis, but were however challenged in the 17th century by Descartes who was the first to develop a systematic theory of the soul and the relationship between mind and body. Both mind and body are for him distinct substances. But while the soul is thinking and unextended, the body is unthinking and extended in space and time (Descartes, 1968:56). This means in effect that the body, in spite of its cosmic extension does not affect or influence the soul with its activities; it is an autonomy which does not share any mental activity. And of course, the mind, being unextended, does not influence the body also. Each entity is on its own.

The body and the soul are not the same thing. What then is the link between them? This posed a serious problem for philosophers as they tried to reflect deeply on the structure of man. Man is the measure in which body and spirit together form one single being. It is one of these elements or constitutive principles that constitute the existence of *ohwo* (man) (Vhouphen, 2020). To say that they constitute principles does not mean that we exclude one of them (the spirit in the case of man) that is, the determining principle from being also

a substance. To understand how these two principles constitute one single existence, we must not think of them as things but as principles of the thing, which is man. Thomas Aquinas put this clearly when he stated that matter and form exist but are principled by virtue of which the existent is a cosmic being (Bogliolo, 1984:62).

The Urhobo do not follow Descartes' dualistic notion of the concept "man", either do they intend to judge a priori the question whether in the specific case of man; the spirit can subsist independently. Like Descartes, Aristotle and Aquinas depart from the principles of the unity of the human being and person. According to them, there exists a relationship between soul and body. This relationship is two-dimensional; it is mutual and reciprocal. Sometimes, the dialectical relation is intense, for struggle often ensues between them; therefore, the word *ohwo* (person) for the Urhobo signifies a whole being, an entity which could be referred to as a complete substance of rational nature. The Urhobos, however, uphold the control and superiority of the soul over the body. As they put it, "the soul is the principle and source of all activities in man". This conclusion stems from two grounds. The first is the nature of the two entities themselves. It is the soul which has life *arho*, and not the body *Ugboma* in which it lives. The second reason is that by nature, the soul is spiritual, transcendental and autonomous. *Erhi na owhe bede* that is, the soul never dies (Ohwotuemuhor, 2020). It is a fact among the Urhobos that *Erhi* (soul) is a life-giving principle bestowed from above by the supreme *Oghene* (God) to give man life and keep him in existence.

For the Urhobo, the *Erhi* (soul) cannot exist as an independent substance, so also the *Ugboma* (body) exist without the principle that gives it life. It therefore implies that these two things are to be seen not as separate substances, but as entities that form man. The body cannot survive without the soul. Wallace (1977:61) supported this view that “the soul is the primary principle whereby we live, sense, move and understand.” Therefore, what it amounts to, by that fact, is that, the soul is the life principle and activity in man. It is nevertheless held among the Urhobos that at death, there is the separation of the *ugboma* (body) from the *Erhi* (soul). Thus, after the dissolution of the body, the soul persists (Ohwotuemuhor, 2020).

Man and his divinely ordained destiny

Man on the historical plane is born to fulfill his God- given destiny. It is a strong belief among the traditional Urhobo people that the context of one’s destiny is always written in one’s palms. At birth, the first utterance of cry and the palms of the newborn are always the first to be listened to and opened by expert diviner (*oboepha*) or through an oracle for interpretation. This provision is made early enough so that parents and relatives of the newborn are adequately furnished from the onset with the knowledge of how to arm and protect the child from the harm of malevolent spirits and evil men if the destiny reads prosperity or to work to convert or reverse an ill or sad destiny in the child utters is not good.” This goes to confirm the saying that *ofovwi re nyo nu, ohw’ogba-a*, that is, to be foretold is to be forearmed (Riamela, 1994:15). However, what Metuh

(1985:102) said of the Igbo is also very true of the Urhobos as it becomes reasonable to assume that it is an ancient and basic concept in their religious system.

As mentioned earlier, the Urhobo believe in the duality of man, having both *ugboma* (tangible body) and *Erhi* (spirit-double) like associated with a child from the moment of its conception. At conception, “*Oghene*” (God) assigns the *erhi* (spirit) to each person and places before the *erhi* (spirit) several parcel of fortunes. Whichever the *erhi* (spirit) chooses becomes the destiny of the child entrusted to his care. This parcel of destiny, which is referred to as *otarhe* or *urhievwen* contains the total luck or misfortunes the child will have in life. According to Nabofa (1982 cited in Otite, 1982:228), the Urhobo believe that it is *Erhi* (spirit) which declares man’s destiny and pilots’ man towards its full realization. It also ensures *ufuoma* (peace-total well-being) for man through its intercession with all other spiritual forces. “*Oghene*” (God) is believed to play a major role when *Erhi* (spirit) predestines man. It is *Erhi* that spells out man’s destiny and the role which *Oghene* (God) plays in this exercise is like that of a constitutional monarch, who sets his seal on the declarations made by man’s *Erhi* (spirit), hence, it is man’s *otarhe* (self-predestination). This is why man is often held responsible for most of the occurrences in his life, because self-predestination presupposes freedom and responsibility.

It is pertinent to note here that man’s destiny is ratified at *Erivwin* (the spiritual world) before *Erhi* incarnates. It appears as if such divine ratification

cannot be changed when man comes to life. However, the Urhobo believe that, given certain conditions, man's destiny could be transformed in various ways. Thus, there are traditional rituals which are believed to ameliorate, change or reverse a bad destiny for good, and these are performed under the guidance of an *oboepha* (diviner).

Furthermore, the issue of predestination and human responsibility cannot be left out in this discussion. As pointed out earlier, it is *Oghene* (God) who must set his seal on the declarations made by man's *Erhi* (spirit), hence, it is man's *otarhe* (self-predestination) and that this is why man is often held responsible for most of the occurrences in his life because, self-predestination presupposes freedom and responsibility. Even if one is resourceful, one does not fully exhaust executing the whole content of the destiny packaged. No one reaching the limit set to life will have carried out all his plans or fulfilled all his hopes. Life will always be unfinished when it comes to its irreversible (Schmaus, 1997:200). Hence, the Urhobo state that *oshare v'iroro vw'evu, oyen ghi ghwe* that is, a man dies with many plans or thoughts in mind (Vhouphen, 2020). Thus, unlike the Western conception of predestination, Urhobo view, like most of other Africans, does not imply that what is predestined by God must come to pass irrespective of whatever the individual does. Rather, to use the words of Metuh (1985:100) it is like an award by God to the individual and held in trust for him by his spirit double (*urhievwen*). The responsibility of obtaining the benefits of the award rests on him. He can get the entire award or may lose a good part of it; depending on how hard he

worked and how skillfully he managed his affairs under the guidance of his *Erhi* (spirit). But try as he would, he cannot get anything that is not included in the award.

From the above therefore, we may have to state that whereas in western thoughts these two visions of predestination and freedom are irreconcilably opposed, they are combined in a dynamic vision of man in the African thoughts. The human person in the African thought is both subject to fate and free. He is at the same time, a victim of restriction imposed by destiny and the architect of his future. Hence, the Urhobo saying *ov'oko royen ghi bie or ov'akpo royen gbe rhe* that is, each one has his or her own mission to fulfill since each comes to life individually and differently too. Human destiny in African thought, generally and in Urhobo particularly, therefore, is both unalterable and alterable. Viewed as a package sealed by God and given to a human person, it is unalterable, but viewed as a resource to be exploited, it is alterable (Metuh, 1985:101).

Man with fellow men.

Westernman (1949:65) declared that African society is classified by the importance of the thought of community. This is also peculiar of the Urhobos. "The whole existence from birth to death" according to Westernman "is organically embodied in a series of associations, and life appears to have value only in those close ties." Mbiti (1969) described this thought of community as "one of the most vital features of the African heritage." Chinua Achebe concurred to this when he stated that:

The one
 who
 invites
 his
 kindred
 to a
 celebration
 is not
 doing it
 to
 prevent
 hunger;
 whenever
 we
 come
 together
 when the
 moon is
 shining
 is not
 doing
 that as
 result of
 the
 shining
 moon.
 Every
 person
 can view
 the
 moon in
 his own
 house;
 we
 gather
 due to
 the fact
 that it is
 appropriate
 for
 kindred
 to do so
 (Achebe
 ,
 1959:15
 5).

The Urhobo values spirit of communalism not only as a result of its appropriateness but due to the fact that life itself is a paramount concern for him and that life can only develop in relationship. This implies that life does not exist outside the community. To recuse oneself from the community entails death. The traditional Africans as well as the Urhobo do not recuse from people to a lonely place just to renew himself or herself. Thus, there are no much traditions of recusal in Africa as indeed Urhobo (Ehusani, 1973:221).

The Urhobos like any other Africans are regarded world-wide for their spirit of oneness and togetherness. The categorized Urhobo family referred to as an “extended family” is an institution whereby “everybody is somebody.” It creates social security against untimely deaths, misfortunes, crop failures and natural disasters. The comparatively low suicide rate in Urhobo community in particular and in the African continent in general can be associated to the kindness of the Urhobo as well as the African family. They are of the opinion that a person is important to the level that others think about his or her desires, assists every one through the challenges of life; makes life more meaningful and renders the thought of suicide meaningless. Those who belong to the traditional Urhobo community are guaranteed protection from violent acts of neighbours.

The purpose of man’s existence

The Urhobo idea of the reason for life is mainly influenced by their changing view of the earth. For them, according to Kaki, the created world is to be controlled and directed by man to

attain his goal (Kaki, 2020). This man has to achieve by fighting against spiritual, social, and natural forces that militate against his well-being. To stress this fact, we could say that what Uchendu says of the Igbo is also true of the Urhobo. According to him:

This earth is a changing one, an earth of rotating equilibrium. But the Igbo believe that these social forces (famine, epidemic, continuous drought) and the cosmic forces which affect their world are controllable and should be directed by them for their own use (Uchendu,

1965:12
 -13).

It is this motivating force in their lives that explains their industrious, courageous and optimistic characteristics since all their efforts are geared towards the preservation of their life and healthy living. We can thus conclude that the primary aim of life for the Urhobo is “good living” (*Omamorakpo* or *Akporoma rho*); life is most important or life is greater than any earthly possession. Experience has ascertained that such an opinion is manifested externally in the names individuals bear in Urhobo land. For instance, a name like *Arho ro vre Efe* (Life is greater than wealth) is given to a person.

Another purpose of life, which is closely connected to the above one could be described in the following words of Mr. Akpomena ‘The purpose of life is having children, wealth and being happy here and after death, reaching God’s home (Akpomena, 2020).’ However, the Urhobo traditional attitude towards wealth should not be misunderstood as a sign of materialism, nor should the people be accused of being motivated in their attempt to acquire wealth by the Machiavellian principle of the “end justifying the means”. When a person acquires wealth through wrong means, automatically, he incurs the wrath of the spirits. One can acquire wealth inasmuch as it leads him to reach God’s home or the ancestral abode.

Immortality of man (soul)

One question that stands out in the discourse about man is that of the immortality of the soul. The soul as earlier stated can survive after the death

of the body. This act of continuous existence of the soul has been the overriding calamity that befalls materialists, who thus conceive man as completely corporeal. But then, come to think of it, is man completely material? Has the soul any potentiality to exist alone? The Urhobos attempt an answer to these questions from the experience of common sense that man exercises dual activities. Thus, through the body man expresses actions like feeding, procreation, communication, and socialization. Via the mind, man exercises thinking and abstracting metaphysical realities. This last account sees man as a rational and metaphysical being. So, it is this conception that informs the Urhobos firm belief in life after death.

According to Agbede, when a person dies, his soul or spirit wanders till it is received into the blessed company of his forebears on the condition that the relations on earth celebrate the full funeral ceremonies (Agbede, 2020). In some places, this belief also requires that the person must have been a good man on earth or at least that a cleansing rite be performed for the corpse before burial. Otherwise, without these ceremonies, “the restless ghost of the deceased would return and haunt and harass his merciless relations (Arinze, 1970:17).” The fact of the immortality of the soul is partly justified by their idea of reincarnation. Reincarnation is the act of people coming back into existence in form of another person. People are said to be born again of the same or another mother. There is also the belief that children who die young are believed to have decided beforehand in their group when they would die, especially if they do not like the family. These children

are called *emo r’ erivwin* (children of the spiritual world).

It is also proved partly by their cult of ancestors. Among the ancestors, the good ones are believed to reincarnate. This is verified when a child is born in the Urhobo community, and it soon becomes noticeable that he or she possesses the resemblance of some deceased member of the family. The child is immediately said to bear the resemblance of that deceased person, and this fact is eventually confirmed by a fortune-teller (Akpodiete, 2020). This expression is justifiable when we consider the place and the function of the ancestors in the Urhobo community, especially as expressed by Jenson (1973:114) that human ancestors may be agents of salvation only by living continually with the *primaeval* deities. As to the question of whether the ancestors create the child, Tempels (1979) makes his observation known that “it is explicable by the philosophy of forces”. The ancestors do not create the child. Africans do not hold that, for they know that God does this. It is not strictly the ancestral spirit that is reborn but the child is supposed to come under this particular influence and receive part of his vitality and qualities.

Critical evaluation of the Urhobo concept of ‘man’

From the above discourse, a critical evaluation of the Urhobo concept of man is without doubt a necessity due to the fact that there are some obvious problems with regard to the Urhobo anthropology. First and foremost, one should know that the Urhobo philosophy is a traditional,

customary, unwritten, unsystematic, mythical, highly ritualized and bulk of unanalysed imagery. However, whether the Urhobo thought pattern is codified or not, does not make it less philosophical. As pointed out by the Urhobos, philosophy does not have to exist in historical form before it could be regarded as philosophy, hence they conclude that the order or unity which the person of a given culture establishes, is their order, and relative to their conception of life becomes meaningful. We can therefore talk of Urhobo philosophy since the Urhobo have their method of establishing order and harmony. It is then obvious that they have an authentic philosophy.

The issue nevertheless, is not whether Urhobo philosophy exists but rather the absence of literature in Urhobo traditional thought. What the conventional Urhobo need is to produce a systematic philosophical text that contains some of the proofs and views of their people about life and the nature of things. This effort will rescue the dented image of Urhobo philosophy as an object of scorn. The Urhobo also talk about the composited nature of man as an embodiment of body and soul. On this ground, they are found guilty of inconsistency. They sway between the Greecan dualist description of mind and body and the Judaic tripartite description of mind/body and spirit. From this characterization, it is evident that their division of man is suspicious. If the mind or the soul or spirit as the Urhobo belief can perform the function of the intellect, what role would they attribute to the intellect? The soul is immaterial and cannot be created in the body either through biological process or experimental method. Again, if the

intellect is the mind, Descartes would not have landed himself into an illogical conclusion by asserting that the point of contact between the body and soul is the pineal gland.

The soul according to the Urhobo is the only life wire of the body. They added that at death, the body dissolves and the soul survive. Therefore, it implies that the soul is immortal. The question is thus, whether the soul after man's death will have a personal existence or lose its identity as a spiritual and immaterial entity and exist only as part of the absolute or fused into one finite spiritual being. The Urhobos are guilty of unreflecting in this regard, for they did not consider it appropriate to make any further enquiry as to what becomes the nature of the soul outside the body. But it can be asserted that the soul by its nature is spiritual and therefore simple. Thus, it cannot assume such a modification as to survive personally as a person. It will only retain its essential identity as a spiritual substance.

Concerning the idea of man, many scholars of different schools have deliberated on the issue of why man should suffer from evil if he is completely good. The Urhobo idea of man stressed vehemently the fact that man implies 'goodness'; and should such interpretation be valid and correct, why then are men seen manifesting evil actions? The possible solution the Urhobo proffered to these questions is that, it is man's quest to achieve happiness in the world that informs such unjust actions. However, this position is arguable based on the fact that what is good cannot yield evil deeds unless they can as well state that

man possesses some bad qualities which could propagate unjust actions.

In addition, one can say that it is not within the domain of anthropology that the complete understanding of man could be sought. The contribution of anthropology is to give the historical movement in the life of man, that only will give us information on the when, how and what man lives at each of the stages of his existence. Other aspects of philosophy ought to be employed to make arrive at a comprehensive study of man. This will settle the quest that has never been satisfied-the zeal to grasp everything about man.

CONCLUSION

In this work, the various notions of the Urhobo to illustrate their concept of man have been presented. The study also enumerated the various arguments raised in order to refute some of their points. In fact, there is no “doctrine or philosophy” without a flaw. However, this does not mean that the Urhobo position is without its strength and significance despite the fact that the presence of inadequacy, illogicality, and conservatism are prominent in their philosophy about man. Some of the achievements of the Urhobo could be spelt out as follows: First, they made it clear that God is the creator, planner, controller and the force behind the existence of the universe. Secondly, crucial point

worthy of note with regard to the anthropology of the Urhobo is the dignity of the human person. For the Urhobo, every person is treated with dignity and respect as a person and not as an object or instrument. This is a crucial point, which this work emphasized. One important element of it is that it is contrary to some manipulative ideologies or to some utilitarian notions of man as expressed in some materialistic communities. The lesson which the Urhobos bring to limelight is the vital question, which they consider primary. What concerns the traditional Urhobo is not so much what a “man can do, but rather what a man is”. Thus, it is this belief, which enjoins the Urhobos to accord respect in the value and dignity of a human person from the womb to the grave. Finally, whatever shortcomings there are in the Urhobo concept of man, what is more important is the fact that they have in a way contributed to the discipline-philosophy, by giving us a clue on how to go about the discovery of who man is. This certainly should serve as an impetus for more work in this area.

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ORAL INTERVIEW

Ohwotuemuhor, P. Oral Interview, 98 years old, Okparabe town, Delta State, September, 2020.

Akpodiete O. Oral Interview, 75 years old, Ughelli town, Delta State, July, 2020.

Akpomena D. Oral Interview, 85 years old, Ovwian town, Delta State, July, 2020.

Kaki S. Oral Interview, 80 years old, Aragba town, Delta State, August, 2020.

Ogboru S. Oral; Interview, 68 years old, Abraka town, Delta state, August, 2020.

Agbede G. Oral Interview, 77 years old, Okparabe Town, Delta State, September, 2020

Vhouphen A. Oral Interview, 80 years old, Okwagbe town, Delta State, September 2020.