

**BOOK REVIEW:**

**CONVERSATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN PRACTICE**

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A review of [Arguments and Clarifications: A Philosophical Encounter between J. O. Chimakonam and M. I. Edet on the Ibuanyidandanness of Complementary Ontology], 2014. 3<sup>RD</sup> Logic Option: Calabar. Paperback. Pp147

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This piece is a review of [Arguments and Clarifications: A Philosophical Encounter between J. O. Chimakonam and M. I. Edet on the Ibuanyidandanness of Complementary Ontology] by Mesembe I. Edet and Jonathan O. Chimakonam both members of the fast rising Calabar School of Philosophy (CSP). One of the main goals of the CSP we are told is to promote what is called conversational philosophy in African thought. My focus in this review shall be to assess the academic merit of the work and analyze the nature and strength of the new conversational tool as appropriated in the work.

The book is structured into three parts; the first essay entitled “Ibuanyidanda and the Philosophy of Essence (Philosophy, the Science of Missing Links of Reality)” is Innocent Asouzu’s articulation of his theory of Ibuanyidanda philosophy. Some of the key concepts include: missing links, noetic propaedeutic, ima-onwe-onye, etc. His argument can be summed up as saying that every entity exists for others to exist. No being in its particularity is dispensable. Everything has its place in the web of nature. The life-wire of Asouzu’s theory thus seems to rest on the idea of complementarity of beings. *Wholism* therefore is possible only because the complementarity of the parts is obtained. One subtle idea in classical philosophy suggested by Asouzu’s theory is that of dialectic which emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century European thought. Before the German Idealist philosopher Georg Hegel is thought to have given a modern triad presentation of dialectic (EDWARDS 1967, 387-388), the Aristotelian classical logic in the words of Godwin Sogolo had no rival (1993, 68). Apparently riding on the framework of dialectic reasoning, Asouzu weaved his theory of complementary reflection.

It is exactly from this logical premise that his nemesis J. O. Chimakonam takes a swipe at his thought in the second essay entitled “Dissecting the Character of *Danda* the Ant and Neutralizing the Philosophy of Missing Links: An *Egbe N’ugo* Conundrum”. Granted the well known intrusive credentials of dialectic reasoning as developed by Hegel, its weaknesses are not less known either. Writing in his contribution to the [Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol 2.], Roland Hall remarks that the Hegelian dialectic involves the passing over of thoughts or concepts into their opposites and the achievement of a higher unity but that it is a process that arrives at a higher truth through contradictions (EDWARDS 1967, 388). Chimakonam’s conversation with Asouzu capitalizes on this to raise the following objections: Philosophy of Essence and Us: From a Logical Point of View, Inconsistency of a Single-valued (Monistic) Logic Deduced, Complementation Paradox Deduced, Dissecting the Character of *Danda* the Ant, The Complementary Anarchy or the Mob Effect of Missing Links Principle and Neutralizing the Philosophy of Missing Links: An *Egbe n’Ugo* Conundrum. In all, the sum of Chimakonam’s critical conversations with Asouzu is that the latter had culpably neglected that in no way could he have appropriated the gains of the framework of dialectic without inheriting its flaws, and I think he is correct. However, the problem associated with dialectic producing truth through contradiction may not be as ontologically committed as some may suspect, it could simply be a technical burden. For example, that we are yet to reach an epistemological understanding on how a machine could function without a ghost or soul does not vitiate the validity of the machine process and I think this is the focus of the thoughts Mesembe Edet brought to the conversation.

Mesembe in the third essay entitled “Ibuanyidanda as ‘Ezi Okwu’ and the Resolution of Chimakonam’s *Egbe N’ugo* Conundrum: A Response to J. O. Chimakonam’s ‘Dissecting the Character of *Danda* the Ant and Neutralizing the Philosophy of Missing Links” appears to be a promoter of complementary reflection. His critical conversation was with Chimakonam. He attempts to fault Chimakonam’s objections in a point-by-point reaction. I would like to think he did this credibly but for his occasional slope into non sequitur and ad hominem as par his references to Chimakonam’s religious creed (2014, 114-115) and his invocation of a proverb to ridicule Chimakonam as a cat that chases a dog thinking himself a tiger (2014, 121). African philosophers must learn the virtue of avoiding especially *ad hominem* in their criticisms. The presence of fallacies of this nature vitiates the nature of the new tool of philosophical conversations promoted by The Calabar School of Philosophy. On the whole, Mesembe was able to respond to the objections raised by Chimakonam but perhaps, the importance of his conversation with Chimakonam could be highlighted in how much clarity he supplied to Asouzu’s thoughts than in how successful he was in dispelling Chimakonam’s studded criticisms.

The tool of conversational philosophy developed by Chimakonam (2014, 17-22) and promoted by The Calabar School of Philosophy (CSP) as its philosophical beacon is amazing and quite exciting to think about. There is no gainsaying the fact that it promises to be a veritable model of doing African

philosophy and philosophy generally. One can only hope that the promoters increase effort in popularizing this philosophical innovation from Africa. But measures must be taken to clearly differentiate it from say philosophical analysis.

I find the book under review quite interesting to read and above all else, truly original. One is filled with the impression that he is reading African philosophy not some talk about African philosophy. It was the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu who having observed much of the debate on African philosophy felt a wave of dismay and in that feat admonished African philosophers to stop talking and begin doing African philosophy (WIREDU 1980, xi). In this conversational encounter among three prominent members of The Calabar School of Philosophy, I find an example of the actual task of African philosophy.

In conclusion, I would like to single out on objection by Chimakonam which I think deserves a closer attention of the promoters of complementary reflection. It has to do with the suggestion of what Chimakonam calls complementary anarchy or the mob effect of the application of the missing links principle. As he puts it:

The idea of “missing link” which every being necessarily serves in the web of reality is problematic—by this principle, every missing link must have to count in any synthetic process. The question however is, should everything that counts be counted in the dynamic process of synthetic transformation of variables? Is it not rather the case that yes, many may be called but only the few required units would have to be chosen for each dialectical process? This inevitably suggests that some missing links must necessarily be left out in any transformational dialectical process involving requisite variables at least, for logistical reasons. Asouzu probably did not foresee the crisis that would result from blind admission of all missing links of reality in any transformational scheme. Obviously, if every relevant missing link is allowed to participate in a given dialectical complementary process, there would inexorably arise what could be called a “complementary anarchy” or “mob-effect” of the application of missing link principle. What is suggested here is that there has to be some form of “control” in the application of the missing link principle and control, to say the least, implies some form of guided “discrimination”. (2014, 68-69)

I think the advocates of Ibuanyidanda philosophy should take this seriously. It appears quite subtle to be ignored or glossed over with a few shining comments. The possibility of applying the missing links principle (to bring about unity of seemingly opposed ideas/variables within a specific context) in the face of no censorship appears quite challenging even as an abstract idea, let alone in concrete experience.

Perhaps more explanations are required; perhaps a tool of censorship is required as Chimakonam suggests. Promoters must contend with this objection. On the whole, the book is inspiring and the print outlay is excellent. Those searching for a thorough-bred African philosophy should read it.

### Relevant Literature

1. EDET, Mesembe & CHIMAKONAM, Jonathan. [Arguments and Clarifications: A Philosophical Encounter between J. O. Chimakonam and M. I. Edet on the Ibuanyidandaness of Complementary Ontology], 2014. 3<sup>RD</sup> Logic Option: Calabar. Paperback.
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