

# Igbo metaphysics in Chinua Achebe's assignment

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Metaphysics is a derivative of this Greek phrase meta TA physics, and it is the name Andronicus of Rhodes gave Aristotle books that appeared after the books on physics; but metaphysics later became the proper name of the discipline which Aristotle would have called " first philosophy" or " Wisdom. " Metaphysics for Aristotle is the study of being as being; it is the final degree of abstraction, where things could be conceived independently of matter. Metaphysics, as the very term indicates, rests on the assumption that the mere appearance does not include its justification, that it requires a foundation" (Duper 1). Things are not intelligible because they exist, for existence itself requires justification. Accordingly, the search for foundation of the mere appearance resulted in many schools of thought, and especially by underscoring the relationship between the physical and non-physical beings, by assuming that reality is both physical as well as the non- physical.

Plato held that physical reality participates in the non-physical. Aristotle argued that non-physical causes the physical. This structure of reasoning informs Western epistemology, particularly, Christian religion, the idea of Chain of Being, and the concept of human existence as dependent on one non-physical and transcendent cause, namely, God. However, the focus of metaphysics changed in the course of history. The metaphysical investigation of the ultimate foundation of appearance turned into a search for epistemic foundation.

In this connection, a schism surged between being and knowing-for metaphysics lost its focus as a study of being as being-especially calculated.

2 (2002) 559-566 CALL-ALLOW through the principles of 17th-century mechanistic causality and through Heidegger metaphysics. Heidegger

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metaphysics which began with the interrogation of " Being" is merely a philosophical anthropology; it is existential analytic of human existence (Disdain), by way of prescribing the authentic form of existence-that is living one's life to its possibilities.

But it is not enough " to analyze [only] the epistemic characteristics of symbolic processes," or focus on the existential ecstasies of human being, to find meaning (Duper 11). Gobo metaphysics does not dissociate " being" from " knowing," nor does it isolate " knowing" from " being" and " acting. " Gobo metaphysics is a " thoughtlessly which recognizes the reality and independent existence" 2 of non-physical beings and their interaction with physical nines in the material world.

Therefore, when I speak of Gobo metaphysics, I am evoking the question of being as being, which is also a question of being as knowing and as acting, and by using the modalities of Heidegger investigation-that is, the existential-analytic of human existence-I will focus on the analysis of Gobo human personality. Accordingly, speaking of Gobo metaphysics in Things Fall Apart, I intend to recognize Achebe's exploration of this thought system and his inscription of Gobo dualism. Dualism is a principle of Gobo metaphysics, which underscores the interaction of the physical and non-physical beings in human personality.

This dualism, which is not anything like Cartesian, is well revealed in this vernacular: Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it. This statement, which is pervasive in Gobo thought, even to the level of the reality of all things, means that nothing is sufficient by itself. In this

connection, to use Achebe's words, "I am the truth, the way, and the life would be called blasphemous or simply absurd.... The world in which we [Gobo people] live has its double and counterpart in the realm of the spirits [chi]. A man lives here and his chi there.

Indeed the human being is only one half (and the weaker half at that) of a person" (161-62). There is implicit in Achebe's observation a definition of human person in Gobo thought, that a human being is half of a person without the chi, which guides an which is an invisible divinity, a manifestation of Chi-UK/Chukka, individual in life and draws the individual to Chi-koru Chukka(Great chi or God). As Elsewhere Knack asserts, " This idea of Constitutions the Gobo to focus his mind on the religion of man and not of Chukka, because it is man who has needs....

Man can build no shrine to satisfy Chukka. He is the greatest and nothing but the greatest can fit him. And no man can supply that greatest [thing].... All chi are Chukka's sustaining essence" (30 italics mine). We can say that chi is a person's best proximity to Chukka. So, the statement " Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it" means literally that nothing stands by itself: when a human being stands, something else, chi, stands next to him/her; that no human being stands without the essence of Chukka.

The statement, however, could also be interpreted as underscoring the ontology of the unman (community) over the individual, and as emphasizing the interconnection in all things. The following Gobo platitudes show the significance and the manifestation of chi in the life of Gobo people, hence

the duality in Gobo human personality: CALLOW Kenyon achy = If you are greater than one you are also greater than one's chi. Chi way skewer= His chi does not agree. Chi way equably Ekberg= His chi deformed him. Be none dual aka chi way actually= Where one falls there his chi pushes one down.

Off NNE ma'am ma off chi gnashing eke= Individuals have their respective chi in spite of parentage. Bob et any an chic is SKU= That's the agreement he reached with his chi. None eke chi way eke= If you say yes, your chi will say yes. None aka chi way? = Who is greater than his/her chi? These are full philosophical statements; the translation, of course, does not carry adequate semantic extension. In *Morning Yet on Creation*, Achebe uses one of them to articulate the inferiority of a person to his portion in life generally-before he comes into the world.

It seems there is an element of choice available to him at that point, and that his chi presides over the bargaining: once the saying Bobbed any an chic is SKU, which we often hear when a man's misfortune is somehow beyond comprehension and so can only be attributable to an agreement he himself must have entered into, at the beginning, alone with his chi" (165). This passage seemingly exudes determinism, and may challenge the freewill of an Gobo person in his/her action.

Such a position would be dispelled if one understands that human action/being/knowing in Gobo thought has a spiritual valence because the result of a person's action-good or bad-could visit another generation in the person's heritage. In addition, the statement, Bob et any an chic is SKU, could be made when something, which is not a misfortune, but what is not

expected, befalls a person; it could also be presented in the presence of an event that has befallen a profligate. As such, the statement evokes spiritual Justice.

You can see that a human person in Gobo thought is not just a composition of body and soul. His well-being does not depend solely on a rapport between the body and the soul, on showing how effectively the soul influences the body, or on how the body manages without the soul. The well-being of a person depends significantly on his relationship with his chi, on how his choice of action is influenced by his chi, on how much he displeases or appeases his chi. Gobo " philosophy of the human person is more existential and practical than theoretical.

It is based on the conviction that the metaphysical sphere is not abstractly divorced from concrete experience" (Unbiased 184). Achebe adopts this metaphysics in his narrative imagination in *Things Fall Apart*, for the text is filled with allusions to chi. Such allusion is not excess or resentfulness of language; it is, rather, a provocation of Gobo metaphysics. Ginkgo's fluctuating fortune, his exile, and his suicide provide a good illustration. If we plot the dynamics of Ginkgo's existence, we could say, to use a cliché, that he lived from grace to grass, that his life is a fluctuation between joy and sorrow.

As the narrative shows, using one of the platitudes I mentioned above, particularly, *None eke chi way eke*, [if you say yes, your chi will say yes], Awoken says yes when his chi says yes. Such agreement 561 reflects optimism, and it is not merely psychological, but also ethical and practical,

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for Ginkgo's agreement with his chi resonates in his success and achievements, and in is people's recognition of his integrity. In another aspect, the narrative adopts the platitude Bob et any an chic is SKU to show some misfortune in Ginkgo's life. In this aspect, the dualism in human existence is well underscored.

Ginkgo's misfortune is not attributed to his humanity alone, but to his chi: "Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things" (121). Many critics, however, have rationalized Ginkgo's misfortune as a symbol of Ginkgo's " refusal of the a new order, as well as the collapse of the old order (Reel, Introduction African ad that Ginkgo's misfortune, which culminates in his suicide, cannot only be rationalized as such, for as his situation is underscored in the text, " Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things" (121).

This statement is made when Awoken is in exile because of the boy he inadvertently killed during the burial of Queued. The White man has not come to Muffin at this time. Later, when Annoy abandons the " traditional sanctity" for " the poetry of the new religion" (1 37), Awoken ruminates thus: " Why should he, Awoken, of all people, be cursed with such a son? He saw clearly in it the finger of his personal god or chi" (142). These statements are made extraterrestrials through the voice of the narrator, who explains every bit of the incidents in the narration.

We hear Ginkgo's thought through the consciousness of the narrator, and his consciousness portends, at these junctures in the narrative Ginkgo's tragedy, to show that his misfortune is his agreement with his chi, Bob et any an chic

is SKU. However that may be, the apparent phenomenon is Ginkgo's interaction with non-physical beings, that his life is not his alone, but something he shares with his chi. One would tend to dislodge the efficacy of this analysis for the seemingly contradictory relationship of the two principles advanced here, the optimism in None chichi way eke and the determinism of Bob et way an chic is SKU.

Such a contradiction, one would also say, exists in Ginkgo's life, and therefore, his life cannot be adequately accounted for; such a person might also say that Achebe's representation is paretic and ambiguous. Such a recognition would be proper in the face of postmodern nihilistic rendition of language. I would argue, rather, even though there appears to be a cognitive contradiction between the two principles, that there is no contradiction between them. These two principles are founded on the superiority of the chi to Awoken, and because the well-being of a person depends on his being/action.

What we need to do at this Juncture is search for the quality of Ginkgo's action to see whether there is an infringement on the dualistic construction of human personality in Gobo thought. The narrative presents Awoken in different lights: he said yes when his chi says yes; yet, he infringed the laws of the gods: he broke the week of peace; he killed Shameful. In the narrative instances of these events, the elders, Cezanne and Beriberi, warn him about the moral turpitude of his action, and tell him how the gods could wipe him out on account of his action (32, 64).



This warning shows that Ginkgo's agreement with his chi is dissipated; his action is not in accordance with the will of the 562 gods, nor even with the will of his people. Accordingly, it would be improper to say that Ginkgo's life represents a contradiction; his life represents one who has arrogated to himself the power of the non-physical being and who has forgotten the power of chi. Awoken excised himself from that complex community, from the interconnection of things, to pursue his aggrandize individual ego. Achebe following words: " Nothing is absolute [I]s it not well known that a man may worship Gouges [a god] and be killed by Dud[another's of god]?" (161). Ginkgo's fall cannot be explained away by focusing on the culpable presence of the white man. A fuller understanding of his fall comes from exploring the metaphysical nature of Gobo person's existence. To put it in another way, that you said yes when your chi said yes is not a reason for you to suffocate another person; that you said sees when your chi said yes should not be the basis for a defiant attitude towards other gods.

Saying yes with one's chi is only an entrance into that community where one's well-being is dependent on how one lives in that community; for wherever something stands, something else stands beside it. Another principle that reflects the interaction of physical and non-physical beings in human existence in Things Fall Apart is causality. Human beings operate with the idea that every event has a cause; but not every event has explainable and verifiable causes. The principal presentation of such a physically unverifiable incident, which is, however, admissible in Gobo metaphysics, is Soil's death.

The only thing we know about Kilo is that he joined the new religion, that he “brought the church into serious conflict with the clan by killing the sacred python, the emanation of the god of water. The royal python was the most revered animal in Ambulant and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as ‘Our father,’ and was allowed to go wherever it chose” (147). When the people learned that Kilo had killed the python on account of his new religion, they were infuriated; yet, they believe the gods will fend for themselves: “It is not our custom to fight for our gods.... Let us not presume to do so now.

If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and the god” (148). And surely enough, Kilo fell ill and died. “His death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles” (150). There is no empirical causal connection between the killing of the python and Soil’s death; it is neither association of idea, nor a coincidence, for the narrative voice here is not satiric nor pretentious. The voice is very categorical regarding the death of Kilo, and what it wants the reader to understand is that Kilo died because he killed the sacred python.

His existence affronts the gods; the people are no longer in support of his action/being, and they believe the gods will avenge themselves. In the existential analytic of the Gobo person’s existence, Ginkgo’s and Soil’s lives are representatives of inauthentic existence, or improper existence. They have uprooted themselves from the ontological level of existence to the antic, ordinary existence, where their presence is not respected. Awoken was not buried by the people of Muffin; and the text does not tell whether Kilo was buried.

Such lack of cultural finality creates not only a metaphorical gap between them and their people, but a narrative silence that can be read meaningfully from an Gobo cultural context. Put simply, to die without a burial is the worst thing that could happen to an Gobo 563 ancestors; burial sets one off on the ancestral Journey among the spirits. To die without one implies that you have lost all connections with the ancestors, with the people, and the land. This is the kind of image Achebe invokes with his presentation of Kilo.

For killing the python, Kilo not only dissocializes the land, he is perpetually “ostracizes.” To be expedient, I will briefly underscore more of this metaphysical thought system, this interaction of the physical and non-physical. Chisel’s transfiguration is a good point to note now. I have used transfiguration here to evoke the biblical account of transfiguration of Jesus, which is not completely dissimilar (Matthew 17: 1-13; Mark 9: 2-13), and to show the incredible, yet real nature of Chisel’s change. Her change, to use Seersucker’s words, “lies in the inherent nature of spiritual powers” (520).

The transformed Chisel is not the ordinary Chisel, yet the transformed Chisel inhabits the ordinary Chisel; she is a double in unity, for the ordinary Chisel lives always in recognition of the spiritual Chisel (101). Her people understand her as such, and this understanding shows that Chisel is not a schizoid or a grotesque (one might see in Dickens’ novels), but a real human being who only manifests that interaction of the physical and non-physical. The narration does not offer any physical action that could have caused Chisel’s transformation; it only sets forth evidence that illuminates a metaphysical transaction.

This sort of transaction is illuminated in what Chide Amanda calls “Governance’s in Things Fall Apart (that is chapter nine of the novel)” (19). Subbasements literally something that returns; it is also translated as reincarnation. This scene represents a child who returns to life after a series of deaths. The narrative voice tells here that dying is not the end off person; that a person has the capacity of coming back to life. Such a process underscores that human beings have strong affinity with their spirits [Chi]. The narrative aesthetics of this scene ensures the credibility of the theme. The tale of Sabotages an embedded narrative; “ it has the status of a self-contained short story with a beginning, middle, and an end” (Amanda 19). Neurologically, embedded narratives evoke realism, and such a technique reveals what Gilles Delude calls repetition: “ a technique that is grounded in a solid archetypal model.... The assumption of such gives rise to the notion of a metaphoric expression based on genuine participative similarity” (cited in Miller 6). The Gooseberry is an individual plot that participates in the plot of the main story and ensures a discursive authenticating process.

Accordingly the main narrative tells of the Sabotages an authentic event. Is this technique not Achebe’s way of saying that his story is true? There could be a multiple answer to this question, but Amanda, with whom I agree, has a position that illuminates Achebe’s obedience to Gobo metaphysics and to the reality of Cabbage. He argues that, even though Achebe mixes ironic, comic and tragic modes in his representation, he “ has not represented the phenomenon satirically” (22). I am not constructing a metaphysics from Achebe’s narrative imagination. What he has done is a corollary of Gobo metaphysics, which, as

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Checked asserts, “ cannot pass the simple test of systematic anthropological reasoning, which should spring from well-founded empiric evidence ... (521), nor could it fit into the structures of 564 rationalist logic. The principles of Gobo metaphysics are far beyond empiricism and logic. They cannot be explained with a theory of causality that is limited to sensory beings” (Cooperation, because both visible and “ invisible anthropomorphic weaker 520) play a significant role in the lives of human beings, and because within Gobo cosmology there is a reality of things happening without a verifiable cause.

We would not now discuss metaphysics without considering Gobo metaphysics or pointing at Things Fall Apart. Gabbling is a “ metaphysical landscape. ” What I have done here is locate some Gobo metaphysical principles in Things Fall Apart. These principles should not be denied as mythic, fantastic, or as mere figments of narrative imagination. These principles, to conclude with Jules Checkmate, “ obviously” force “ us to confront the ‘ Oarswoman’ aspect of experience- that things look different to different observers, and that one’s very perceptions are shaped by the social and cultural context out of which one operates”(3).