

The Self- A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

The question of the method of investigation in philosophy is important. The self is an abstract reality, and thus, it is amenable to philosophical reflection. The rational method of investigation may be necessary, but may not be sufficient. Which is to say that the rational method of investigation does not rule out the use of other viable philosophical methods of inquiry where necessary. Though an abstract reality, the Self has intricate relationship with the body. In some cultures, the body often stands for the self in their linguistic expressions. And because the human body forms an integral part of the self and constitutes an outlet through which the self manifests itself, the use of phenomenological method may be considered appropriate. In this paper, the phenomenological method is tested on the ontology of the self against the backdrop of Igbo culture and the paranormal experiences of the people.

Keywords: *Self, Phenomenological Approach, Methods, Rationalist, Cosmology*

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Introduction

The various theories of knowledge have shown that no one particular philosophical method suffices in the investigation of reality. To argue otherwise would be to fall into the mistake either of rationalists or empiricists who presumed to exhaust the depth of reality from their respective standpoints. Most contemporary philosophers are agreed that other methods would also help to investigate what rational or empirical means fails to grasp. Personal identity is something essentially intrinsic. And it has also no referential location. By its nature it is not describable. It is the subject of predications as well as the ultimate accounting subject of all human experiences. Interestingly, the self, this subject of predications is often identified with the immaterial aspect of human person: soul or spirit. But is this identification absolute? The Igbo people recognize duality of the human person in its composite of body and soul. However personal identity is usually discussed along moral and metaphysical lines. Thus, personhood is held as an important point of departure in the study of the ontology of the self. Its importance lies in the fact that a person is conceived as a unit of body and soul. To say this, is to acknowledge the intricate relationship of these constituting elements in human personality. Fundamentally there is a relation between body and soul; otherwise it would have been baseless for the two to come

together in the first instance. Being the principle of individuation, the body is relevant in any discussion of personal identity. The body relates or links the self to the outside world. In Igbo culture the explication of reality is guided by the concreteness and concreteness of existence. The body is not only seen as an outlet of the self's activities, it could even stand for the self. What this actually means is that the rational means alone of investigating the self will not do. Phenomenology is just one method to complement especially the rational investigation, because it tries to explore selfhood in its visible manifestations. These visible manifestations constitute pointers to or evidence of the ontology of the self. But if we are looking at the locus for the authentication of the self in phenomenal ways, it is likely to be found in the sphere of human activity. Thus phenomenology would interest itself in how people in their existential circumstances experience this abstract reality. We shall adopt three major approaches. First, we shall expose briefly the import of phenomenology as a method. Second, we shall discuss the cosmological background to Igbo phenomenal self, and third, we shall reflect on the telekinetic dimension to selfhood in Igbo ontology. Then the conclusion of our reflection will follow.

Phenomenological Method Explained

Phenomenology is one essential philosophical method by which the ontology of the self could be investigated. It is an ancillary complementary philosophical method to holism. Every lived human experience in its complexities comes under the purview of phenomenology. Distinguished from lived human experiences are human opinions, beliefs, as well as their interpretations, which do not qualify as truths of phenomenology. One understands here that there are basic truths about beings that may not be grasped by means of rational analysis alone. It would require the direct description of such lived experience in phenomenal ways. It requires that such an experience must have been lived through at a particular moment in the past. This means that the lived experience in question or its descriptions are done retrospectively rather than introspectively. As a matter of fact, phenomenology does not promise absolute truths about those experiences. But what is phenomenology? How do we understand it? What are its characteristic features? From its Greek roots *phainomenon*, phenomenology means 'that which appears' and *logos* meaning study. It belongs to phenomenology to study the structures of human experiences and consciousness. With phenomenology, philosophers must reckon with, not only complex human experiences but also one of the most complicated concepts in philosophy, consciousness. This may partly be the reason why it does not guarantee absolute truth. However phenomenology may be a better alternative to address the shortcomings of the rationalists and empiricists through a perceptive attentiveness that lays bare a person's concrete experience. It is phenomenally feasible to explore the depth, length and breathe of human experience in real life. The phenomenological insights embody elements of fascination, wonder, unexpectedness, and penetrating depth. As noted earlier, phenomenology does not offer absolute insights about a given phenomenon, given the ambiguity and complexity associated with life generally. In the main, phenomenology involves an observer who is in direct contact with human experience. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* enlightens us more on the import of phenomenology as a method:

The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: 2018).

The passage puts stress on the lived experience, or the appearances of things as existentially observed 'from the subjective or first person point of view.' This is in tandem with T. Okere's

(1983: 35) explanation of Heidegger's phenomenological method as one of letting that that shows itself to be seen from itself just as it shows itself, and where everything to be discussed about the objects of such phenomena must be done by way of direct exhibition. Thus, phenomenology as a method is one devoid of abstraction. It is an experience of what is happening here and now, in the sphere of human existence. The knowledge of phenomenology is real and undiluted. And the relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge is quite natural. And where the observer or knower is in direct contact with the object of knowledge. The knower simply tells what he or she perceives or experiences without imposing an interpretation from outside of his environment. He simply states the raw facts as experienced. The truth that emerges as a result indicates that appearances are not always deceptive. The phenomenological method of enquiry is likened to holism. M. Van Manen and C. A. make the comparison as follows:

with the notion that human beings experience the world by interpreting, or drawing meaning from, what is around them and even if the picture is incomplete, an individual's natural tendency will be to attempt to complete it. This is exemplified in the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. (*International Encyclopedia of Education*: 2010).

Worthy of note here is the fact that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That which is greater than the sum of its parts may point to something ontological that lies beneath what appears. That which lies beneath may refer to the reality we call self. Although human experience does not offer absolute certainty, such an experience, however, is not empty. That such an experience offers partial truth is suggested by the tendency of humans as meaning givers to make complete of what is not. Such a tendency is supported by the principle of holism. Holism as a principle simply states that the 'whole is greater the sum of its parts.' The knowledge gained by the method of phenomenology does not amount to the whole truth, but points up to a reality beyond what appears. Phenomenal knowledge about the world yields some practical results. Such knowledge helps to give direction to the contour of human life amidst life's complexities. Further we should not lose sight of the fact that phenomenology draws a lot of inspiration from the people's life world. The realm of life worlds is the realm of meaning. In his scholarly article on "Myths, Symbols and Other life-worlds: The Limits of empiricism," C. Munda (1987: 99-120) argues that life worlds belong to the realm of meaning, and that the realm of meaning is much more wider in scope than truth. In this way, he indicates how the acquisition of linguistic skill may be necessary, but not a sufficient condition for conceptual thought. The richness of phenomenological insight must be acknowledged, in that it deals with the realm of meaning and substitutes perfectly well for the truth. The phenomenal self has some cosmological background among the Igbo of South eastern Nigeria. To this we shall now turn.

Cosmological background to Igbo phenomenal self

That culture plays an important role in shaping the way a particular people view their personality or self is no longer a matter of controversy. The Igbo culture is no exception either. Belief in the existence of spirits or souls of the departed within the Igbo cultural climate is quite strong. Nature is personal. The human relationship with nature is also personal. The belief in the Earth-goddess is just another instance. The Earth goddess or the female goddess rules the earth beneath. She is responsible for fruitfulness and morality. The Igbo religious climate is so dense to the extent that the living, the dead and the spiritual beings, (God inclusive) cohabit in one physical world populated by humans. This is not a matter of superstition. Religion for this people is a lived experience. The experience is such that every human affair or activity assumes a religious undertone. Human activities such as marriage, naming ceremony, burying the dead, cultivation/planting of seeds and harvesting, masquerading and dancing, and so on, are all done in union with the spirit world. The general belief is that the physical world rests on a spiritual

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foundation. Which is understood to mean that no human activity could be explained without reference to this otherworldly. What this means is that the self has a strong relational capacity. What is more? All that happens in the physical world is revelatory of all that happens in the invisible realm. The association of the physical world with the spiritual world is seen as a duality, that is, two aspects of one world. Let us return briefly to the relationship between the body and the soul. The body and soul constitute a unit. But the body can manifest certain activity of the soul. Thus any determination of the self must have strong ties to personhood in its composite of body and soul or spirit, and where the body phenomenally reveals the self. Okoye speaks quite convincingly

we may say that the activities of the *mmuo* cuts across those of Mkpuruobi thus rendering the seeming difference as a problem of dialect in principle. Despite the very important place given to the *mmuo* in the explanation of the self, the ‘Onwe’-self is not limited to merely a spiritual reality. Referring to ‘Onwe m – myself, I phenomenally point towards not the *mmuo* but to another substance – Ahu (body) which is palapable and visible (2011: 59).

First, the author equates the meaning of *mmuo* to that of soul. He observes that the application of *mmuo* is more extensive than that of the soul. Despite the prominence given to *mmuo* in the conception of the self, equal prominence is given to the body, and also to the extent that the body could stand for the whole person or self. In Igbo cosmology, the ancestors belong to the realm of immortals or spirits or ghosts. The idea of the self is culturally entrenched in belief in the existence of the ancestors. Though they are dead, they are nevertheless believed to be alive in the spirit world. The ancestors are known as the custodians of the traditional values, customs and morals. They heavily influence the destiny of the living in whom they reincarnate. This belief is demonstrated at the funeral of potential ancestors in which valuable objects are put into their caskets. The same belief is behind the practice of offering crumbs of food, cola nuts, and the pouring of libations to the dead at morning invocations. The elaborate burial ceremonies are usually expended to facilitate their reception in the spirit world as well as their possible return to the physical world in their reincarnated forms. This treat is often mistaken for ancestor worship. We often lose sight of the social or ethical dimension to selfhood, a dimension that cuts across all segments of existence: human and divine. This is exactly what happened in China during the missionary days. *The Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia on “Jesuit China Mission”* (Wikipedia: 2004) narrates the successful missionary activity of the Jesuits in China. The Jesuits, especially through Matteo Ricci were instrumental for the introduction of Western science, mathematics, astronomy and visual arts into the imperial court of the emperor of China. This endeared them to the emperor who fully integrated them in his imperial court. However there arose a controversy over ceremonial rites and ancestor veneration. The Jesuits were favorably disposed toward such rites; their being social (ethical) and political in character was influenced by the ethical doctrines of Confucius. However trouble started when the Dominicans and the Franciscans vehemently opposed such veneration and branded it idolatry. Eventually, it was the Franciscans who took the matter to Rome, to the Pope who could not understand Chinese culture, and this affected his unbiased assessment of the situation and judgment. And it did backfire. It resulted in the expulsion of the missionaries from China, thus ushering in a Communist culture that has dominated Chinese life till date. The Catholic Church still struggles today to partner with the Communist government in China in what may be referred to as the most difficult church state relations. The Chinese culture is close to the family, and is ethically based on the Confucian ethical teaching that is rooted in the ancestors regarded as custodians of the moral life of the people. It smacks of culpable ignorance and failure on the part of ecclesial authority to recognize the collective identity of the people that is inextricably bound with the culture of ceremonial rites and ancestral veneration by Chinese people. It is a practical demonstration of the fact that

people's identity externalizes itself in a somewhat set of social relations. Here comes the palpable, phenomenal sphere to which the self belongs. It is easy to see in somewhat 'phenomenal way' in Chinese culture the reincarnated self of their ancestors at that social level. The ancestors are no figments of the imagination. This reminisces the thoughts of Confucius as perfectly summarized by a Confucius scholar D. C. Lau to the effect that there is no individual – no 'self' or 'soul' - that remains once the layers of social relations are peeled away. (Butler-Bowdon, 2013: 81). This background is important as it touches on the continued existence of the ancestors in the world beyond as well as their felt presence at the social level; this being the reason for their veneration by the living. For if there is no belief in the dead who are said to be alive in the spirit land, and whose presence is strongly felt among the living, such veneration would have been superfluous, without content and meaning. The ancestor veneration is equally strong in the life of Igbo who hold to the idea of life as a continuum. It is a strong yearning for an uninterrupted stream of life. For even in death, physical life or individual existence does not suffer annihilation.

Telekinetic dimension to selfhood in Igbo ontology

Does the term phenomenal suggest that the self is something that is accessible to the naked eye? This is far from being the case. The term 'phenomenal' in our context refers to the strong indicators in human telekinetic experiences of the presence of the self. This approach constitutes a helpful guide to the search for the reality we call self. It shows that although the body does not constitute personal identity per se, personal identity would not be discussed without it. According to Igbo traditional thought, even though the spirit remains the primary focus in personal identity discussions, it is believed that its activities do not take place in a vacuum, that is, in the sense of functioning independently of the body. In the passage above, the author is emphatic on the phenomenal function of the body as that palpable substance that points to the unity of body and soul in one indivisible entity called 'Onwe m (myself).' In this way the author acknowledges the indissoluble union of body and soul or spirit. He equally sees the spirit as capable of performing dual functions relative to the physical and spiritual nature of the human person. Further in his reflection, he identifies the Freudian ego with the Igbo *ako na uche*, which points up to the term of 'consciousness' in Igbo treatment of personal identity, and which demonstrates that the ego (personal identity) can be conscious to the depth of the 'superego and id,' and which ultimately refers to the whole person. We must stress at this juncture that personal identity as conceived by the Igbo is not reducible to the Freudian psychological procedural self. Personal identity as conceived by the Igbo is rooted in ontology. What the phenomenal self does is to complement and to facilitate the understanding of the self's ontology. The idea of the phenomenal self features also at the motivation given to pupils at school. For instance, an elementary school class experience demonstrates this. Some teachers appreciate the learning skill of their pupils at good performance. They usually tell them to applaud themselves by clapping. The pupils do so gladly as they strike their chests at the end of the applause, and thus ending with the chorus, 'myself.' Actually what they strike is something physical, chest or body, but what that stands for is their real self. Here the phenomenal performs a dual function: first, by making the body stand for the self, and second, as a pointer to the other component of the self, which, of course, lies beneath the palpable body. People in every culture have unique ways of selling off the idea about themselves, which is first and foremost ontological, but with strong manifestations that connect the self to the experiential world. The Igbo world bristles with such experiences. The phenomenon of witchcraft is a case in point. Though this appears to be more metaphysical. With D. Ilega (2009: 209), it is easy to perceive in the African Witchcraft the persistent manifestation of the individual's being, a part of his innermost self. The name of witch encapsulates every activity that is essentially evil. Witchcraft derives from its Anglo-Saxon roots, *willecrat* meaning craft and witch. While the former means strength, power, force and skill, the latter deriving from the Latin root, *Vincere*, means to conquer. Put together, witchcraft means to conquer by force or power or strength. And this corresponds exactly to its meaning in Igbo language called *Amusu-*

Odagbu. I. Obilor admits that the universality of the concept of witchcraft as *Amusu* in Igboland is contestable. (2003: 39). Characteristically, witches have supernatural powers, and with identities that are not easily discernable. Such supernatural power or quality is said to be 'inherent' in the personality of the person of a witch according to Albert Mosley. (2004: 136). The word 'inherent' means that such power is not learnt. As a spiritual activity of a human agent, it belongs to the 'spirit element' to leave the body of the witch while asleep, with the intent to unleash harm on their victims. However while such power remains occult, and the identity of the witch may or may not be known, the evil that is unleashed on their victims is there for all to see. Such evil or harm caused by a witch may be either spiritual or material. Now let us reflect briefly on the nature of this spiritual power and its relation to the spiritual component of a normal human being who does not have this power, as well as its relation to the spirit of the possessor of this power.

Pertinent to ask here is, 'what distinguishes the spirit of a witch from the spirit that belongs to a normal human person?' How do the human spirit and the power of the witch relate one to another? When the witch's spiritual power leaves the body during sleep at such operations, does the human spirit also go with it? And what is the difference between the spirit that leaves the body of a normal human being in dream experiences and the one that leaves the witch's body also during sleep at witch operations? Do witches reincarnate? If not, how do they perpetuate their kind? Our response is this: while leaving the body, a witch is said to assume the form of a bird or the form of any other animal of choice. Also, people with occult powers brandish such prowess. Now after its operation, life returns to witch's lifeless body in bed. If this same power does not return to the witch, it would mean death for the human agent who engages in witch-hunting. For a normal person who does not possess this power, when he dreams his return is quite natural. It is plausible to conclude then that since the human agent who engages in witch operation does not return to life – assuming the bird it took its form were to be killed in the process of witch hunting – it is highly probable that the spirit component of a human being functions in conjunction with the power of the witch such that were the 'witch power' not to return, the human spirit does not return as well. And the result is death. Essentially witchcraft belongs to the category of evil, which is amenable to philosophical reflection, but however, falls short of experimentation. This does not mean that its reality should be dismissed for that reason. For to do so would be to deny the reality of evil, with the consequence of finding oneself in a lethal embrace in the arms of the undeniable forces of evil. But, what does all this deliberation amount to? Are there some individuals who have such powers residing within them to inflict evil on or even kill their victims? As is said a person is part spirit. It is part of the understanding of this spiritual side to a person's constitution that is at work in witchcraft. The spiritual element that leaves the body during which witches operate obviously points to the reality of self or personality of the agent. And what can we say concerning the phenomenal side to this experience? The phenomenal is the form that the witch takes: it could be in the 'form of a bird or any other winged creature.' Experience has shown this to be true. If the bird that the witch assumed is caught, or its movement restricted, the witch would remain in sleep. It would wake up only when it is let off the hook.

Phenomenally also, we can learn something from the way a mother treats her sleeping child. Sometimes it can happen that a child may go to sleep without consuming any food. The mother ensures that the child eats. She must wake the child up to eat. How does she go about this? What does the mother do? Does she go straight to carry the child? The answer is no. What then does she do? First, the mother taps the child, and then lifts it up. Have we ever asked, 'why does the mother not carry the child straight away, that is, without first waking him up?' Here is our answer: there is this belief among the Igbo that in sleep the spirit of the child might have wandered away. And so, if the child is not awakened first, there might be the danger of disconnecting him from its spirit or self. And this might result to death. Should we label this treat by the mother superstitious? We gain similar understanding by studying accounts of paranormal

events in ordinary human experiences. In their co-authored book, *Emergent and Contentious Issues in African Philosophy* B. Nwigwe and C. Emedolu (2004: 150) have maintained that the inclusion of phenomenal realities such as ghosts and all forms of telekinesis should not be dismissed as fetish and occultic on account of lack of scientific support. They even cited Aristotle's inclusion of such issues as basis for their argument. In a typical traditional Igbo society, children are told that ghosts operate at night, and that they can make sounds like human beings. Because of this, they are instructed not to answer calls at night for fear that such calls might come from the ghosts. Adults also observe this as well. The belief is that anyone who answers the ghostly call at night will die. There are even 'concrete' cases of the appearance of ghosts. At times we hear about strange stories of dead persons masquerading as ghosts. Some philosophers may not be comfortable with this kind of story. But they are worth reporting. In August 2003, a friend of mine, Amaka Ogbuka recounts an incident of a young girl by name Ijeoma, who in her twenties was sojourning in Ebonyi State. She hails from Isiekenesi in Ideato orlu in Imo State, Nigeria. She reportedly got involved in a ghastly car accident and died. This girl lived in a rented apartment with others. On that fateful day, she travelled, but unfortunately got killed in an accident. As though in a flash of thunder, that is, before the news of her death could be made public, an eyewitness said, she was seen around her apartment with some personal effects. This supposedly happened immediately after her death. She hurriedly visited her apartment, carried off certain items and left without uttering a word to anyone. Later on in the evening fall of that same day, the news of her death filtered into the ears of all who knew her, including those who saw her disappear with some personal belongings. Or again, consider this other story, also coming from the same person, Amaka Ogbuka. This incident happened while she was a student at Ebonyi State University. It is all about a young man in 2008. He died and was buried by family members, relatives and friends. But unknown to them his spirit (embodied?) went somewhere in Ebonyi and took up residence. He engaged himself in Okada rider business and was doing well. There also he gave birth to children after his marriage to a young woman he met there. After some years, his wife got worried. She nagged him into going home to see family members. After much persuasion, the man gave in to his wife's request to take them home to see family members. Meanwhile his wife and children did not know he was dead. So on that fateful day, they set out for the home journey. But something spectacular happened as they were some distance away from their family house. He disembarked, dropped his wife and children, and pointed out to them the house belonging to his family members. He told them to identify themselves as belonging to him. And that should anyone ask them about him, they were to tell him that he has gone to purchase something and would be back soon. At that instant he vanished from their sight as they could not spot which direction he has taken.

This kind of story is peculiar with people who die young. One basic reaction will be to dismiss it as mere cock and bull story, fantasy or daydreaming. Similar experiences equally dominate our dream world with their paranormal elements constituting as 'pointers' to the "world beyond" as well as evidence of "personal immortality." For R. Onwuanuibe (1984: 191), these paranormal elements render them "philosophically tenable and scientifically open." Let us take a look at the instance of the phenomenon of dream. In bed we see the dreamer's physical body lying motionless, while the active part with the spiritualized body operates in the dream world. According to Onwuanuibe, some cultures identify this active part as the soul or spirit and that this constitutes the immortal self. (1984: 190). Certain things that appear to be real in dream are replicated in the waking life, while others are not. Life is said to be larger than logic. In a traditional Igbo setup, death does not obliterate the reality of self. U. Steinworth (2009: 55) in his *Rethinking the Western understanding of the self* claims in fact that even in philosophical circles the authentic self is revealed through the acceptance of death in the quest for immortality. But the Igbo speak about another kind of death. An Igbo proverb helps us throw some light on it. It says: *O nweghi ihe ura mere anya*, (sleep is not detrimental to the eye). In this culture sleep is said to be a twin sister to death (*Ura bu nwanne onwu*). And so, Rafael Madu explains that

sleep like death is by its nature momentary, refreshing, and a harmless relaxation. He maintains that the “recurrence of sleep in the physical life span” by which one sleeps and wakes up refers to the “cyclic nature of birth, death and rebirth in the economy of Igbo concept of human transcendence” (1996: 223). From this, one sees that the concept of sleep evokes the thought of death. This gives vent to the popular saying that in the ‘midst of life we are in death.’ It means then that sleep that is synonymous with death is momentary and transitional, and is not detrimental to the eye. Similarly death by extension does not obliterate the self in its wake in much the same way that sleep is not detrimental to the eye. Consequently the sleep analogy with death may be something phenomenal and symptomatic of the enduring sleep in death.

To sum up, the foregoing shows that the self is inextricably bound with life and death. In life the self spans through the various strata of human existence, the biological, social and religious. In relation to death it (self) equally sustains the inherent power of continuity, the evidence of which is immortality that plays out in Ilo Uwa or Reincarnation or Witchcraft. The thought of reincarnation is very strong in the life of Igbo so much so that it is considered the ‘crown of existence.’ It is the belief that bodily death is not the end of one’s life, for the soul lives on in a different plane of existence. Stories of reincarnated parents or grandparents are often shared. In February 2020 my cousin sister, Cynthia Chigozie Nwoke shared with me her experience of what seems to give credence to the veracity of reincarnation. Thus she began: one day I received a call from my mother. My mother was frantic over the phone. According to her, my grandpa who was aged 90 demanded that I come back home to see him with a bottle of Whisky. At first, said she, I did not take the message seriously, as my family and I were living far away from home. However a day after, the message came again through my mother, this time she was much more frantic on the phone. At last I obeyed, bought a bottle of Whisky, and came home to meet my grandpa. Then a week later my grandpa died. After sometime I conceived and bore a male child, which was later confirmed through a diviner to be a reincarnate of my grandpa. Could this be true that her grandpa who now becomes an ancestor came back to life? Does this make any sense? A full development of the intricacies associated with reincarnation is beyond the scope of this article. Be that as it may, the self is a continuum. There is as yet no convincing proof establishing, phenomenally, the near or exact identity between the deceased and its reincarnate at birth. (Okoro, 2020).

Conclusion

Our search on ‘The self: A phenomenal approach’ is a big eye opener concerning the mystery that is part and parcel of human life. A visible reality may be a carrier of something immaterial, which is beyond the grasp of the human intellect. The Igbo do not necessarily see any dichotomy between the visible and invisible realities. What seems to be a problem is the difficulty we experience trying to have a full grasp of reality in one phenomenal glance. Part of the reason may be due to the poverty of human language and the limitedness of the power of human perception. This brings with it sometimes the arbitrary imposition of concepts on reality in a bid to facilitate its understanding. On this problem B. E. Nwigwe and C. C Emedolu explain as follows:

In Igbo understanding, whatever happens is an aspect of an organic reality, which on account of the limitations of the language we use and the concepts we arbitrarily impose on the world result in our cutting up reality into bits and parts in order to comprehend it. (2004: 153).

The passage helps us to admit the integral unity of body and soul in Igbo conception of personal identity. It is a human predicament that there exists no unanimous concept to designate the one corporate human entity. Hence we use various concepts, say, body and soul, *Onwe*/Self, and *Onweonye*/Personhood to help us understand a bit of the reality we talk about. At times such concepts are confusedly used interchangeably. The same difficulty shows up in our use of the phrase ‘intricate relationship’ when referring to relations between body and soul. We must admit

that the epistemological depth of this intricate relationship eludes us. It may require certain humility to admit that we are not all-knowing beings. Part of this acknowledgement is to have some kind of ‘philosophical faith’ to accept that mystery is part of human experience, and that the physical world may even be the operative sphere of this mystery. Thus we hold that these paranormal elements in human experience are but one aspect of the study that complements the gamut of understanding about the self in Igbo ontology. Therefore it may not be wise to throw overboard any reality that lies beyond our intellectual grasp. What constitutes reality may be more than what is immediately perceptible.

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