

INTERROGATING REINCARNATION IN 21ST-CENTURY IGBO COSMOLOGY

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Abstract

Almost all cosmologies entertain thoughts on the concept of reincarnation. One can surmise without fear of equivocation that reincarnation is a global phenomenon. Although the concept appears to be more pronounced and elaborate in the orient, the West is not devoid of theories on reincarnation. In light of the near-ubiquitous presence of the cosmogony, it is not surprising that the Igbo have a fascinating perception of the concept. The dualistic modal operation of the concept appears to be its unique character in Igbo cosmology. Reincarnation has up- and downsides: ilo uwa and Ogbanje respectively. The paper focused on ilo uwa solely – the positive attribution in reincarnation. The research attempted to explain the phenomenon; endeavoured to proffer a survey of the perception in various cultures east and west and examined the Igbo cultural understanding in pristine communities. The contributions of modern scientific knowledge were appropriated as empirical factors in the study. Finally, a concluding analytical and evaluative discourse was developed to permit more insight into what reincarnation ought to be from both rational and scientific perspectives. The research looks forward to a knowledge-based modification of views that would offer a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of reincarnation in Igbo cosmology.

Keywords: Cosmology, Ogbanje, Reincarnation, Igbo, Africa, Ilo Uwa

Introduction

The phenomenon of deep experiences and the overtly curious intersperse cultural grand narratives, regional worldviews and contextual metaphysics of peoples at different points in human history. Philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology and ethnographic studies

lend weight to the questions surrounding the phenomenon of reincarnation including the thematic problematic such inquiries characteristically generate; for instance, is reincarnation real or imagined, metaphysical or mythological, a mystery or solely a deep cultural experience? The present effort is a case of discourse on our state of knowledge amid a plethora of literary productions and advances in scientific knowledge that remains the hallmark of our time. Can the 21st century shed more light on reincarnation than conventional uncritical surveys?

Although the theme is specific to reincarnation in the Igbo world view, reincarnation is not merely an ethnic or even a regional issue. It is a global, interracial phenomenon cutting across eras. It is also deeply historical, featuring prominently in all periods in the history of thought – the orient and occident especially; and of course, very preponderant in African metaphysics and ethnography. Before further consideration, let us inquire into what reincarnation is all about.

What is reincarnation?

At least, we can decipher in the immediate, incarnation and the prefix: re. Incarnation has to do with the process of a soul or spirit taking a body, becoming flesh; and in this case, usually ‘the human body’, or the human flesh. To this extent, it is general knowledge that the human person is an incarnate being; body and spirit: the body being a requisite and necessary composite. The re-dimension in the understanding would have to do with the repetition of this process. It is simply the possibility of the repeatability of this process by the same person. In reincarnation understood from the history of thought, this process can transcend the person of the human to involve the non-human elements. This is why, according to Flew, reincarnation, as understood in Buddhism and religions of the orient, cuts across domains making it possible that souls can after death, live in the bodies of humans or non-humans or that even living souls may have lived earlier in other humans or non-humans (Flew, 1984, p. 230).

In this mainly oriental comprehension, reincarnation is a process that trespasses the domains of being. This breakdown in domains is, to say the least troubling. There is no clarification so far as to how this becomes possible. Suffice it to say that reincarnation can also be expressed by other terms or concepts such as, ‘transmigration of souls, metempsychosis, palingenesis, rebirth’ (Smart, 1972, p. 122). The transmigration of souls is a quaint reference to the possibility of a breakdown in the domains of being such as the human soul at death being degraded into inhabiting the dog or pig. Palingenesis ‘is a Greek word that refers to a new birth, a second creation, and an unmodified inheritance of ancestral characters (Eneh, 1987, p. 28). Palingenesis, though having something of

interest in associating reincarnation with genetics, seems to introduce more difficulties in making a gratuitous assumption that a soul can undergo a second creation; and if a second, why not a third, fourth and so on? The Christian understanding of creation does not permit the interpretation that what has been created can undergo a second or series of creation processes. For purposes of clarity, the more appropriate terms for the theme under discussion would be reincarnation, rebirth and transmigration of souls.

Deriving the meaning from the etymological angle, Onywuanyi (1996), posits that reincarnation comes from two Latin words: *re* and *incarnare*. While *re* means 'again', '*incarnare*' means 'to enter into the body'. Reincarnation is simply the theory that when the soul separates from the body at death, it informs another body for another span of earthly life. "The soul may enter its human tenement from the ghost realm, the tree world or the animal kingdom", (Onyewuanyi, 1996, p. 16). In this case, domain breakdown becomes a feature in a widening dimension that includes the human, animal and plant kingdoms besides the metaphysical portal. The convergence of the views of meaning remains a feature of the theory. However, man is at the centre of theoretical development the way no other form of life is. It is the human soul that is degradable, so to say, to the non-human strata of being, if reincarnation is affirmed in its full-scale oriental comprehension. By implication, the non-human if par chance takes on the human species of being can only be regarded as an upgrade.

Edeh understands reincarnation from the African standpoint as a rebirth, a return after exitus, to this world, for another period of life. It is the longing for the continuation of cycles of earthly existence. This longing is deeply rooted in the individual as well as the significant others who had cherished a period of fellowship with the living and the dead. Through the insight of E. G. Parrinder and others, Edeh observed that reincarnation is a return to this sunlit world for a further period of invigorating life' (Edeh, 1999, p. 74). If this return is desired, it can only be because there is this longing possibly on both sides, that is, of the family still alive on earth, and the side of the departed relative, for the continuation of filial relationship: the communion of the beloved that the participants would not want to come to an end. One could see in this the natural desire for eternity – life is eternal; the African however does what's within his capacity to ensure that this continuum becomes a trend in his or her existential reality. From all indications, it appears Edeh's interest in reincarnation is deeper than unceasing cordiality in a family relationship; his main interest lies in using the concept to prove the existence of the invisible world (Edeh, 1999, p. 75). Dualism is a credible concept in Igbo cosmology but in terms of the existence of the visible and invisible worlds, the visible is ipso facto self-explanatory; it is only the invisible that elicits deeper interest, hence the proof of its

existence becomes significant in that it complementarily makes for the re-affirmation of a notion that already makes sense.

Asouzu analyzed the meaning of reincarnation in the above context of rebirth or post-exists return to earth, for the sake of re-existence or the repetition of generational participation in the earthly life. According to him, the idea of reincarnation entails the return, after death, of a human person, to continue their earthly existence (Asouzu, 2004, p. 169). Asouzu's position is insightful in its underscoring of the concept of re-personalization. The person returning to earth retakes their former personality. It is in essence, the repossession of the former self in its totality with the marked presence of continuing evidentialization. It is not just that the dead have returned to earth but that there is abiding and convincing evidence of this in the life of the concerned person. In other words, everything to identify the former personality (pre-exitus) and the new (post-exitus return), becomes palpably evident in a non-transitory manner but subsists in the person as long as the person still has earthly existence in the new coming or re-appearance (Asouzu, 2004, p. 169).

What has been attempted so far is to proffer a definition for reincarnation with explanations to further buttress meaning. Reincarnation cuts across cultures. Before we return to the Igbo perspectivism, let's attempt a survey of the conceptual understanding and theorizations on the theme from an interregional and historical viewpoint.

Reincarnation in cultures – East and West

The historical contextualization of reincarnation would touch almost all cultures of the world. Reincarnation remains a phenomenon of global dimensions. The account in every culture may not be exact but the essential features remain to attest to the ubiquitous experience and encounter in cultural metaphysics. In its varied forms, the concept of rebirth continues to re-occur in the deep experiences of cultural peoples, concerning the relationship between the living and the dead. There is evidence of reincarnation being entertained in ancient Greek culture, medievalism, oriental religions and contemporary European metaphysics (Smart, 1972, p. 122)

Orphism had a great influence on Greek thought. It already existed in Greece in the 6th century B. C., according to Omoregbe, whereas in Kroton, it was dedicated to the god Zagreus. According to this quasi-philosophical, religious and mystical doctrine, the soul lived in another world before it was sent into this world and imprisoned in the body. At death, it transmigrates to another body in continuation of its purification, only that its next prison could be worse, in that, it could be another human body or non-human body, for example, an animal (Omoregbe, 2007, p. 7). Orphism forbade carnivORIZATION by its

adherents on this account, lest one eats the soul of a family member or friend that could by transmigration, reside in the animal. The cycle continues until the soul completes the final purification phase and the process ceases; even as the last phase could be catalyzed through asceticism (Omoregbe, 2007, p. 7).

Pythagorean philosophy is suffused with Orphic elements for which reason the Pythagoreans eschew meat consumption. Attesting to this, Copleston maintains that, 'There is certainly common ground between Orphism and Pythagoreanism' even if one could not be precise about this (Copleston, 2006, p. 29). One of the common grounds is that the Pythagorean religious and philosophical community held to 'the doctrine of the transmigration of souls' (Copleston, 2006, p. 30). The later persecution of the religious community by the state was not so much linked to politics of perceived strategy to overthrow the existing government in Kroton in Southern Sicily as in its religious views, for when, according to Stace, as captured by Copleston (2006), they (the Pythagoreans) forbade the common citizen to eat beans and their own dogs, the state decided that they have crossed the line (Copleston, 2006, p. 30). Diogenes Laertius, quoting from a poem of Xenophanes, 'relates how Pythagoras, seeing somebody beating a dog, told him to stop, since he had recognized the voice of a friend in the yelping of a dog' (Copleston, 2006, p. 31). This goes to demonstrate the depth and tenacity of the belief in reincarnation whereby one could identify the soul of a one-time human friend in a living dog.

The issue here remains the dichotomization of the soul and body such that each began its existence separately. This leaves a loophole whereby the soul can freely transit in space, with the capacity to take on material bodies at different times as need be. Implied in this are the loss of personal identity and the possibility of taking on an amalgam of non-descript identities.

Aspects of Orphism also found a place in Plato's philosophy. Plato conceived of the soul as essentially separate from the material body. The soul-body and spirit-matter dichotomy is quintessentially Platonic theorization; the former is regarded as real, substantial and essential while the latter was always a reflection of the former as unreal, shadow and quite non-essential componential. According to Eneh, Plato explicitly affirms in one of his dialogues, *Alcibiades*, that 'the soul is the man'. The Orphics likened the body to the tomb, while for Plato; the body dwells in this tomb (Eneh, 1987, p. 14). In Rome, Marcus Aurelius, a Stoic, in his *Meditations*, affirmed the concept that man is the soul. Other such descriptions include: the soul as a spark from God which came to stay in the body and at death is reabsorbed in God (the Stoics); 'the body is a house of detention in which the soul is imprisoned' (Philolaus); man is a poor soul shackled to a flesh (Epictetus); you are not mortal, but this body (Cicero) (Eneh, 1987, pp. 14 – 15). The two interesting

observations here include the emphasis on epitomizing the unilateralism of the soul as reality while the body or matter is opposed to it. The fact that the allegiance of the soul is to its origin, to God, is emphasized to which it returns eventually and not to the flesh, which remained a temporary abode. These are undoubtedly centric issues.

There is also a need to point out that the spirit-body/spirit-matter relation persists as a knotty problem in Western philosophy; not only as underscored in antiquity but well into the theorizations of modern philosophy. Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology, for instance, are essentially defined by this dichotomy leading to the mind-body problem in Cartesian thought (Stumpf, 2003, p. 232). The western view, from the spectrum of this paper, should be approached more from the exaggerations and unnecessary accretions assigned to the body and not in terms of the need for equality assignments of soul and body. The issue at stake is identifiable more in the temporalization of initial relations between the soul and the body: do the two occur together and at the same time in the human person or are they roaming entities in space that can be assembled as constituting the subject as occasions demand? The former appears to garner more merit!

The East

The Orientals hold a similar view on reincarnation, in its aspects, with the West. In the Upanishads, a Hindu work dating to the seventh century B. C., the theory of reincarnation was first developed, but this concerned those who lived good lives and submitted to austerity, charity and piety (Eneh, 1987, p. 33). Reincarnation goes with the doctrine of karma (deed). The law of karma is similar to *lex talionis*: the ill one met out to other people in this present life awaits one in the next, when the same will be measured out to one who first visited others with it. The way one lives one's life determines whether one would eventually come back as a poor or rich man even as the present life is determined by previous existence (Eneh, 1987, p. 34). The law of Karma and rebirth is appropriated from Hinduism into Buddhism. Karma is the law of eternal retributivism (Omogbe, 2006, p. 119). Karma plays a determinant role in reincarnation (*samsara*). 'Until a person stops performing evil actions and purifies himself from the effects of his previous misdeeds, he will continue to reincarnate and be reborn into this world to suffer', (Omogbe, 2006, p. 119). It is curious to note that Buddhism does not believe in the immortality of the soul; though it believes in reincarnation. The soul does not survive death but karma does – the misdeeds take on a life of their own and can only be extirpated with the attainment of *nirvana* – when adequate atonement has been made and the karmic effects dissolve into eternal bliss (Eneh, 1987, pp. 34 – 35). Understood in this way, Buddhist reincarnation is consequentially a moral necessity. Its continuum or cessation depends on the degree one has attained in morals; therefore, it is as well an instrument of

human behavioural control and an incentivization towards the development of the moral sense. Even within the range of pseudo-philosophical religions influenced by Hinduism, views about reincarnation differ.

The general Indian perception of reincarnation is that ‘men could be reborn as animals or plants. Reincarnation breaks down specie-barriers. This is possible not just here on this planet but also in “a multiplicity of heavens and purgatories” (Eneh, 1987, p. 35). Understood in this way, reincarnation becomes cycles of intermediate purgation till the soul attains the fitness needed for eternal reward. The message here is clear: misdeeds have to be redressed; evil has to be atoned for; the quest for perfection as a condition for eternal bliss entails the necessity of purgation without which the attainment of this bliss would be a contradiction.

The Jews

It appears, from all indications that the Jews did not develop a theory on reincarnation; nor did they believe in it. Let’s examine a few instances. Before Elijah parted with his student Elisha, the latter requested a double share of the master’s spirit (2 Kgs. 9 – 13). On having fulfilled the conditions given by his master Elijah, Elisha’s request ought to be granted. Does it imply, according to Eneh, that two souls of Elijah then did dwell in Elisha? Arguing in the affirmation of the above postulation is not tenable. Again, Herod, on hearing the mighty works of Jesus, concluded that Jesus is no other person but John the Baptist, long dead (Mt 14:2). This is the sure explanation for the extraordinary deeds that came from him. In another instance, at Cesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that the son of man is?’ Some answered Elijah, some John the Baptist or any of the great prophets. As we know, it was Peter who made the great confession of Christ’s Son-ship of God (Mt 16: 13 - 16).

What do the few examples above imply? In the case of Herod’s remark, the sense was not the reincarnation of John but the resurrection from the dead. It is a common belief of the Sadducees that there is the resurrection of the dead. In the drama of Elisha and his master, the comprehension is more in the spark and influence of Elijah and not the literal inheritance of two souls. Elijah was never expected to reincarnate in any of the prophets of old, but to come down to earth one day, whole and entire, and indeed, as if in attestation to the truth of this belief, he was let down to earth, along with Moses, during Jesus’ transfiguration narrative (Mt 17: 2 – 3). Finally, in the great Petrine confession, everything points negatively to the acceptance of reincarnation. The people’s opinions were sampled, whether pointing to reincarnation or resurrection; and dismissed. Even extra-biblical Jewish literature could not yield anything of significance in this regard

(Eneh, 1987, p. 73). Reincarnation among the Jews is a misnomer; what conceptually equates with their worldview is resurrection.

Reincarnation in Igbo cosmology

Igbo cosmology is the agglomeration, and the account thereof, of the Igbo vision of the world. It is a regional corpus of comprehensive attempts at making meaning of the Igbo metaphysical, epistemological, phenomenological, existential and physical environment. This endeavour at circumscription and articulation of what can be known about a geographical and cultural entity, such as the Igbo, permeates other regions of the African continent, with sometimes, similarities in the phenomenalization of the realities that are part and parcel of the cultural experiences. Without claim to exactitude in specificities, there is a sense in which these deep experiences can be regionally generalized. Pristine-era beliefs and practices were unquestioned largely, as such, uncontested realities. Reincarnation is one such phenomenon. What else can we say about reincarnation in the Igbo world?

Reincarnation is a pristine Igbo mystification in which the dead returns to life within the family, that is, the family where one is very well recognized, in the form of a newborn to continue real existence with the living in that family. The dead ancestor has a second chance to re-live at least another cycle of a generation in the family. The association of the newborn with a dead ancestor has pointers, which may be regarded as evidentialization realities; that is, these pointers remain with the newborn through adult life and indeed the whole life span. There are at times physical resemblances between the newborn and the dead ancestor who is said to have been reincarnated in the child (Iroegbu, 1994, p. 145).

Asouzu would agree no less. He stated that ‘the person returning to life shows concrete signs of his former person in the form of body marks, discernible character and personality traits and the ability even to remember events in a previous life’ (Asouzu, 2004, p. 169). Iroegbu would have Mbiti argue that reincarnation is partial in Africa because only some features recognized in the ancestor said to have taken the body of the newborn are decipherable in the child; and again, only some children are the reincarnation of the dead ancestors. This view is said to be not true in the Igbo case, since in Igbo cosmology, reincarnation is an encompassing phenomenon: all children are the reincarnation of dead ancestors (Iroegbu, 1994, p. 147). In Igbo understanding, reincarnation means *Ilo uwa*: *ilo*, as per one who returns after a journey; *uwa*, as per being, existence: hence, coming back into existence; a metaphysical repossession of being manifestly in the physical world after one had attained the status of existence in the invisible world following one’s physical demise. At the birth of a child, there is usually

excitement towards curious ascertainment of the ancestor that has come back in the newborn!

The question that needs to be asked is why this phenomenon is ubiquitous in Igbo families. The first reason is that reincarnation appears to be the fulfilment of a wish: this deep longing for life, to enjoy unceasing existence (Iroegbu, 1996, p. 21). Igbo names are replete with names that remind one of the realities of the continued communion with the long or recent death in the family. Examples of such names in Iroegbu's view include Nnenna (the father's mother come back to life), Nnanna (grandfather incarnate), Nnem (my mother, as in the dead grandmother re-personalization of the newborn), etc. In each case, the implication is that the referred ancestor has taken on life in the newborn to continue to remind their cherished relation of their presence in their midst.

The second reason is that reincarnation is desired, since, as in Indian cosmology, only those who have lived good lives reincarnate in their families. Beyond the restoration of cherished cordiality, reincarnation subsists in the attempt to replicate the good deeds for which the ancestors are known. Abanuka put it succinctly: '... the fundamental significance of the ancestors is that they are those who have immortalized themselves in their extraordinary deeds; and so, they are concrete imperishable models who influence the living' (Abanuka, 1994, p. 53). Ancestors are thus regarded as models or canons of human conduct morally and are there as immortal yardsticks!

Another similarity to the cosmology of the orient here is reincarnation as a model and factor for incentivization: there is a model out there for the living that can be emulated if one desires to achieve immortality and admittance into the abode of the ancestors. The Igbo are never in want of prototypes of good living. The Igbo live essentially for the future, towards a successful eschatology and the desirable opportunities such an achievement offers.

Asouzu offers another reason for reincarnation; it is for him the anonymous African philosopher(s)' search for immortality. Life is premium and is so supreme that the Igbo want to grasp it for all eternity (immortality). That is why the pristine Igbo philosophers conceptualized 'the idea of an eternal transcendent space, (...) co-joined with the idea of corporeality to arrive at an idea of the living dead, land of spirits or the ancestors' (Asouzu, 2004, p. 169). The idea of reincarnation does justice to the concept of immortality as realized re-personalization. Reincarnation here is conditioned because as rightly pointed out the modus of reincarnation is determined by the earthly quality of life of the reincarnate (Abanuka, 1994, p. 169). However, Asouzu's position, in a twist assumed a new teaching which appears curious and controversial. Hear him, a person can reincarnate punitively in lower creatures as a result of his inability to keep to the

contractual terms joining him and the totality of reality (Asouzu, 2004, p. 169). Up until now, reincarnation in Igbo cosmology has remained within the domain of humans. In Asouzu, this trespasses; again, another semblance of oriental mysticism. What appears rampant and believable in pristine Igbo cosmology is that living humans can transmute into animals via a mixture of juju and mysticism; a phenomenon that has nothing to do with reincarnation. This is the work of highly involved medicine men – involved in voodooism or the deep workings of the esoteric. If reincarnation is above all, the Igbo philosopher's search for justice, Asouzu's position begins to make sense. Abanuka supports this claim when he connects reincarnation to the quest for justice and fair play (Abanuka, 1994, p. 51). Since only ancestors reincarnate, and one must have lived well to join the rank of the ancestors, then in a sense, reincarnation is a reward for good living. The relationship between reincarnation and the cultivation of moral values is implied for only those who have genuinely aspired for worthy values and lived them to attain ancestor-ship status.

In another perspective quite revealing, reincarnation was for Edeh, an academic proof with a theological underpinning. This does not conclude with any modern affirmation of the existence of the concept although its utilitarian function for the pre-modern Igbo is understandable. Igbo cosmology envisions the existence of two worlds: the physical visible world of humans (*ani mmadu*) and the corollary non-material, invisible world of spirits comprising pure spirit beings and the spirit of dead humans, such as the ancestors (*ani muo*). The two worlds relate to each other and the beings there transact and commune among themselves. If the beings in one plane of existence can relocate or transit to the other plane in order to continue their existence there, then there can be no better proof of the existence of the invisible realm than this observed phenomenon (academic proof of the existence of *ani-muo*). Secondly, this theory can be a factor in the discourse on realities and the implications in the invisible world (theological underpinning) (Edeh, 1999, p. 75)

It is clear from the above why the Igbo developed an unusual interest in reincarnation. The world of the Igbo revolves around this pervading experience. Every facet of Igbo existence has some influence from reincarnation. Reincarnation serves a role in fulfilling their desire for a firm grip on the unceasing existence of a good relationship with the kindred; achieves immortality for the deserving; provides examples of models for emulation; becomes an incentive for the development of moral values thus ensuring the stability of the community; remains a tool for social behaviour modification; constitutes a standard for justice whereby human conduct is rewarded or punished and even provides the proof for the concretization of the link between the two worlds of the living and the

dead ancestors. It lets in the vision of a horizon for possible theological discourse concerning the assumptions between the realities and inter-influences of the two worlds.

This other dimension of reincarnation appears inescapable if the argument of reincarnation as a search for justice is sustained. This warrants the recognition of reincarnation in its two presentations: one is the positive affirmation as in *ilo uwa*, and the negative but real deep experience in the phenomenon of *Ogbanje*. ‘*O gbaa*’ ... (the master [runner]), and ‘... *nje*’ (repetition of errands). *Ogbanje* would rather translate as a master repeater of errands. This errand repetition is negative as it brings a vicious cycle of sorrow for the families involved. The other side of this punitive reincarnation is in the degradation of the non-human status, due to wrong done. Because this paper cannot do justice to the two without exceeding the required volume, the focus meanwhile will be solely on *ilo uwa*.

Interrogating reincarnation in the 21st century

The theory of reincarnation began to be examined as early as the era of the Greek thinkers and the Romans (Plato, Pythagoras, the Stoics, Cicero, etc). The 21st century is a long way off from Greek philosophical antiquity, yet interest has not waned concerning the phenomenon of reincarnation. The field of human knowledge has not only widened but also deepened in the long period under review. Fortunately, the 21st century is heir to dramatic and quantum leaps in human epistemological search for general understanding especially of the two preceding centuries. Science has taken a different turn and has indeed thrown many lights on the vast fields of preceding centuries of human gnoseological endeavour. Man has grown on all fronts, and so is the knowledge base. Technology remains a breakthrough in its contemporary sense, whereby man has come to appreciate facilitations in the things he tries to execute including scientific advancement. Reincarnation in the 21st century largely remains a rational science but this can no longer shy away from any light that could be glimpsed from the empirical sciences. In this light, an effort would be made to relate reincarnation to the facts that can be raked in from the science of evolution and genetics, to which we now turn.

The theory of evolution

The theory of evolution can be explained both in its broad and narrow sense forms. If we comprehend that that which evolves is that which first shows forth; followed by continual manifestations in an increasing nature; in other words, there is further enlargement in the initial manifestation over time. If this is true, then evolution must in a sense be related to development. Evolution is even understood, in the general sense, in terms of development,

for in a broad sense, it is an ‘a synonym for development (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 2010). In the narrow sense, however, evolution is movement upwards, thus a manifestation of the development process. In evolution, each new state of the object has, in comparison with the previous state, a higher level of organization and differentiation of function’ (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 2010). The evolutionary theory is a dynamic event. It concerns movement in one direction; that is, in the linear upward trajectory. The change is continuous and the range of subjects involved includes plants and animals. As a process of gradual, continuous change from previously existing forms, the theory is also known as descent with modification; that is, in the organic form (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2010). The modification here would be better understood in terms of refinement, improvement or a higher form of development.

The above notwithstanding, at least, an aspect of organic evolution poses difficulty in its opposition to the generally held ‘belief in special creation of each species as an immutable form’ (Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 2000); especially when it posits ‘simple protoplasmic mass’ as that which over time gave rise to all of the life-forms (Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 2000). This is encapsulated in the ‘theory of the eternity of the present conditions’ (Nwalozie & Nwoke, 2000, p. 53). The issue with the empirical postulate is the question it begs. That is to say that the logic is conclusively vacuous; and as such, leaves a lacuna in the ascertainment of that behind the emergence of the protoplasmic mass, for instance, and again, there is gratuitousness in the assertion that ‘all subsequent living’ might have emerged from this from mere temporality cause.

Charles Darwin posited a theory of evolution in which natural selection plays a significant part. Competition is the rule of the game in nature. Those species which could not compete favourably are eliminated by nature; the fittest survive (Nwalozie & Nwoke, 2000, pp. 55 – 56). This view is opposed by those who hold the view that mutation which is another process in the evolution theory, can occur as a random process (Columbia Electronic Dictionary, 2022). This charts two courses to evolution: as a product of competition and again, as a random process via mutation. Mutation would be a function of spontaneity in which there is no traceable logical process to its development. The mutation is by far a rarer phenomenon compared to gradualism in the dynamic process. Evolution is always a linear process that makes development possible.

Evolutionists hold that higher and more complex forms of life have evolved from simpler forms; microscopic forms may have developed spontaneously from decaying matter. This in effect sounds more like a myth than scientific postulation. We conclude this section by recalling that the French bacteriologist, Louis Pasteur proved in 1864, that spontaneous generation of life is impossible; but that microbes, such as bacteria would grow in favourable conditions (Nwalozie & Nwoke, 2000, p.53) The work of Leeuwenhoek with

the microscope led him to doubt the theory that living creatures could be born from dead matter but felt that microbes like all others are produced from their likes (Nwalozie & Nwoke, 2000, pp. 56 – 57). These scientific proofs lend weight to the conclusion that some of the evolutionary process claims are vacuous and as such unsustainable scientifically.

The theory of genetics

Genetics is the science centring on genes, which is said to be ‘any of the basic elements of heredity, passed from parents to their offspring’ (Kernerman English Multilingual Dictionary, (2006 – 2013). Genetics seeks to link parents with their offspring such that an explanation is offered as regards certain features passed from the former to the latter. Genetics studies the mechanism of heredity by which traits are passed from generation to generation (Nwalozie & Nwoke, 2000, p. 48). Genetics deals with heredity – the science of transmission of inherited characteristics from one generation to the other (American Heritage Dictionary of English Language, 2016).

Gregory Mendel (1822 – 1884), laid the foundation for the theory of genetics. Mendelism led, much later, to the discovery of the chromosomes and genes directly concerned with the transmission of hereditary characteristics. Today, geneticists can, with considerable accuracy, construct molecular models of genes, atom by atom (Nwalozie & Nwoke, 2000, p. 52). The bottom line is that heredity is a scientific fact. According to genetics, the gene is defined as a unit of inheritance responsible for passing on the trait. The genome or gene set contains the total genetic information of the person or thing (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2022).

Genetics is the science that accounts for resemblances in human appearances and constitution. The genes carry the specification (blueprint) for the potential development of the organism. Genetic codes are species-specific (so that breeding cannot take place between species), but allow for individual variation among members of a species (Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 2000).

Reincarnation in 21st century Igbo cosmology – an analytic-evaluative conclusion

The clarification of issues on reincarnation in 21st-century Igbo cosmology will involve the problematic of thematic reflective understanding bordering on what reincarnation is not and of course what in fact, it represents. Some issues outside the concept have been incorporated in the development of the concept in the course of history in an attempt to explain, deepen or even embellish the conceptual expansion. References have been made to some of these redundant inclusions in a rather unsystematic manner; what needs to be

done is an attempt to organize the analysis to ensure consistency, systematization and coherence. Encrustations to the reincarnation conceptual scheme have to give way for the phenomenon to begin to reveal and assert itself. Reincarnation has been made not just solely a problem within philosophy but also developed into an intervening process within theology and mysticism. Reincarnation has found a respectable place in oriental transcendentalism where it becomes the determining and intervening factor in the effort to resolve the ethical quagmires in the conflict between deed and misdeed, right and wrong, good and evil in human life and their aggregate influences that may remain issues for life and the after-life. We can trace nuances to this conception in non-oriental cultures as well.

The mind-body interactionism in philosophy continues to pose fundamental problems of the relationship between the body and the mind and how both function in coordination to make possible the various activities for which the human person is known in the course of history. With reformulation, this easily translates to the philosophical problematic of body and soul interactionism or inter-relationship. Reincarnation could never have had mixed perceptions if this relationship was properly viewed. Beyond body-mind interaction, reincarnation poses the challenge of soul-body inter-relationship. Can this relationship be fundamentally grasped in the ontologico-materialist fact of it?

The position of philosophical psychology that the soul and body are created simultaneously (a classical Christian view), comes to the rescue in making possible the theoretical indefensibility of creating multiple identities from the identity-uniqueness that solely pertains to this soul-body formation that could happen once only at a given point in time. This formation seeks to exclude considerations that detract from entertaining the principle of identity and indeed the laws of thought.

Concerning what the concept entails, science would contribute to proffering explanations of what reincarnation represents. Genetics points to the possibility of passing on hereditary characteristics from parents to offspring – making valid the understanding that the newborn inherits certain factors from the parents/ancestors that need to be developed further in the course of growth. Developmental processes make these inherited factors more pronounced in the newborn through adulthood whereby these features match more with that of a known ancestor. This is parametric essentialization of the presence of the ancestor in the person that is said to be incarnate of the ancestor.

Darwinism with the theoretical problems inherent in its postulation tends to contribute something of value to the establishment and sustenance of ancestors. According to Darwin, evolution is a function of competition in which only the fittest survive. Ancestorship in Igbo cosmology is undoubtedly an existential-generational competition in the

quality of human life. Although perhaps this may come about unconsciously but only with the determination to be true to the demands of authentic existence, the issue is that ancestor-ship raises the bar to the quality of life in all dimensions. The implication is simple: ancestors have out-competed and out-performed others. The classic category represents the model and incentivization of the community's realistic ideal as a challenge to present and future generations towards an aspiration to the building of a culture of quality and value-laden human existence.

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