

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF CHI IN IKECHUKWU ANTHONY KANU'S UNDERSTANDING OF IGBO-AFRICAN ONTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Chi is fundamental but a complex element of Igbo-African ontology, explored through various interpretations. While some scholars define Chi as a divine aspect of humanity, a personal guardian, or a determinant of destiny, Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu offers a unique perspective. Without discarding existing views, Kanu conceptualizes Chi as the foundation of intersubjectivity, which, in his Igwebuike ontology, constitutes the African mode of being. This paper critically examines Kanu's interpretation of Chi within Igbo-African ontology and its implications for human existence and cosmology. It argues that Kanu's perspective offers a framework for addressing philosophical debates on identity, personhood, free will, determinism, and causality from an African standpoint. Employing analytic and expository methods, this study deconstructs key concepts and applies logical analysis to enhance understanding, drawing from secondary sources to provide a comprehensive exploration of Chi in African philosophy.

Keywords: African, Philosophy, Ontology, Existence, Spirit

1.0 INTRODUCTION

African ontology encompasses both spiritual and material dimensions of existence, emphasizing their complementary relationship rather than a hierarchical order. Within the Igbo-African worldview, one of the most profound spiritual realities is the concept of *Chi*. While *Chi* can be understood in multiple ways—such as a being or as daylight—this paper adopts its interpretation as a vital force that plays a significant role in human life and the African cosmos.

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, in his exploration of African ontology through his *Igwebuike* philosophy, identifies *Chi* as the foundation of intersubjectivity—the

fundamental relational mode of being in the African worldview. He argues that *Chi* represents the divine presence within each individual, marking every human with a unique connection to *Chukwu*, the Supreme Being. This shared divine imprint forms the basis of human relationships, fostering a sense of interconnectedness that transcends individual existence. According to Kanu, treating others with dignity and respect is not merely a moral duty but a fundamental requirement for maintaining the ontological harmony of the community.

This paper critically examines Kanu's interpretation of *Chi* within Igbo-African ontology and its implications for human existence and cosmology. By analyzing the role of *Chi* in intersubjectivity, identity, free will, determinism, and causality, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of African metaphysical thought. Employing analytical and expository methods, it deconstructs key concepts and applies logical analysis to explore *Chi* as both a theoretical and practical principle within African philosophy.

2.0 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

2.1 *Chi*

Chi is a basic phenomenon Igbo worldview, which is believed to play a critical and central role in the life and fortunes of every Igbo individual. It is arguably considered an influential concept in the Igbo worldview, even with its ambivalent and complex nature.¹ *Chi* is not an ordinary abstract concept but a living reality in everyday life and experience of man; an operative principle that has far reaching effect on individual psyche and self-actualization.² Although *Chi* is generally understood as a personal god which each individual has a special relationship with, it is also understood differently in diverse dimensions and contexts within the Igbo worldview. For instance, Green proffers that “It is difficult to know what the real Igbo significance of the word is.”³ Achebe also later strongly assert that the concept of *Chi* is not translatable,⁴ and that its real meaning might never be revealed.⁵ Due to the ambivalence and complexity of this concept, many philosophers gave names and assertions to make it understandable. For example, Achebe label it using many titles such as god, guardian angel, personal spirits,

¹Onah Oliver, The Ambivalence of The Chi Principle in Igbo Thought: A Ground for Reconciling the Irreconcilable, *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18. no. 4 (2021): 143.

²Marcel I. S. Onyibor, The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 11 no. 1 (2019): 84.

³Green, M. M. (1947). *Igbo village affairs: Chiefly with reference to the village of Umbueke Agbaja*, cited in I. A. Kanu, “Chi: In Search for An Explanatory Principle for The Interrelatedness of Igwebuiké Philosophy”, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 6. no. 8 (2020): 24.

⁴Achebe, Chinua, “*Chi*” in *Igbo Cosmology*, cited in Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, Christian C. Emedolu & Edward U. Ezedike, “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no. 3 (2021): 20.

⁵Achebe, Chinua, *Morning yet on creation day*, cited in I. A. Kanu, Chi: In Search for An Explanatory Principle for The Interrelatedness of Igwebuiké Philosophy, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 6. no. 8 (2020): 24.

soul and spirit double.⁶ Madu follows the same pattern of designation and asserted that *chi* is personal and thus singular; *chi* is a personal god; It is the author and controller of human destiny; *chi* is the individual spirit-counterpart of a man; *chi* respects human gender, such that a man has a male *chi* and a woman has a female *chi*. *Chi* could be either good or bad.⁷ In a conversation with Gabriel Asuquo, he posited that “*Chi* is fundamentally the nothing that is in something, and the something that is in nothing. *Chi* cannot be made sensible until it is reduced to something, such as God, *Chi-ukwu* (the great *Chi*), or a person *Chi-mmadu* (a person's *Chi*).” *Chi*, therefore, for him is “fundamentally nothingness; the credo, the beginning of being, and the foundation of being and beingness, until it is reduced to something.” This reduction can be theological, philosophical or even scientific.

2.2 African Ontology

African ontology, according to Tempels, is the foundation of African philosophy.⁸ It refers to the traditional African metaphysical convictions about the nature of beings that inhabit the African world.⁹ It is the study of existence, being, and reality from an African perspective. It encompasses the fundamental beliefs, concepts, and categories that shape African thought and understanding of the world, and examines the nature of reality, including the relationship between humans, the natural world and the spiritual realm. In explicating the metaphysical orientation of Africa, Gabriel Asuquo points out that, African metaphysics (ontology) is integrative, in that it is a metaphysics of harmony. He thus asserts, that “Integrative metaphysics simply means the metaphysical system which regards spirit, force, life-force, or vital-force as the primordial principle which permeates all things and is responsible for unity in diversity. It is a metaphysical system that sees spirit (i.e. mind, idea, subject, and all things mental or spiritual) and matter (i.e. body, object, and all things physical) as being equi-primordial and complementary. Since for the African, the primary element that sustains the universe is spirit, then spirit or life force permeates and interpenetrates all things.”¹⁰

⁶Achebe, C. (1998). “*Chi*” in *Igbo Cosmology*, cited in Charles I. O., Christian C. E. & Edward U. E., “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no. 3 (2021): 20.

⁷Madu, R. O. (1996). *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths. The Hermeneutics of Destiny. Studies in African-American Culture*, cited in Charles I. O., Christian C. E. & Edward U. E., “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no. 3 (2021): 20.

⁸Plecid Tempels, Bantu Philosophy, cited in Innocent Ngangah, Vital Force, Personhood, and Community in African Philosophy: An Ontological Study, *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies* (2019): 49.

⁹Greg Ekeh, “African Ontology as a Basis for African Existential Practices: Implications for African Education”, *Journal of Education and Human Development* 9, no. 3 (2020): 89.

¹⁰Gabriel Asuquo, Juxtaposition of Western, Oriental and African Metaphysical Orientations, *Aquino Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (2021): 5.

3.0 IKWCHUKWU ANTHONY KANU'S AFRICAN ONTOLOGY AND VIEW OF CHI

In his popular *Igwebuike philosophy*, in which he emphasized the “principles of solidarity and complementarity” as the nature of reality and existence in the Africa, Kanu established his understanding of African ontology; his notion of being in the African worldview. In translating the English word 'being', he posited that *Idi*, which means 'to be', is the appropriate concept for being in Igbo-African metaphysics. The operative word in *Idi* is *di* (be), which comes from *odi* (it is). Furthermore, everything 'that is', 'is' because it has *ike-ndu*, a 'force of being', and the quality and quantity of this force determine the nature of a being. Kanu's idea of force complements Tempels' conception of being with force (Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force). Force therefore is necessarily and essentially an attribute of being in African ontology. Kanu went on to posit that “although every reality has a force, not all realities have the same amount of force. The variety of the degree of forces is at the base of the categorization of being. In the hierarchy of forces, those with a greater force come first, with God at the apex as the source of all forces.”¹¹ According to Kanu, reality in the Igbo-African ontology will be subsumed into the following categories:

- *Muo* (Spirit) category: God is the apex of this category, and is the source of all forces, followed by divinities (intermediaries who share aspects of the divine) and then spirits (those who after death, become benevolent spirits [ancestors] or malevolent spirits).
- *Mmadu* (Human Being): This is the vital force endowed with intelligence and will. He is the sovereign vital force in the world, ruling the land and all that is in it.
- *Anu* (Animal, tame and wild): these forces not endowed with reason but are ruled by instincts, and are all under the force of man and exist for man.
- *Ife* (things): This force cannot act for itself. They depend on the will of a greater force like God, divinities, spirits and man act on them, on order to become active.
- *Ebe* (Space): this force is the relation of distance between any two bodies or points.
- *Oge* (Time): this force responds to question of 'when?'. It is wrapped around events and activities of past, present and future.¹²

Apart from the above-mentioned categories of being, Kanu asserts that there remains another, which for him is *Igwebuike* the mode of being, *Uzo Idi*. The *Uzo* (mode) of being (*Idi*) talks about the manner, modality or style of being. *Igwebuike*, therefore, is the manner of being in Igbo-African ontology, that is, being in relation to otherness.

¹¹Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, *Igwebuike And Being in Igbo Ontology*, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 5, (2018): 15.

¹²Ibid 15-18.

He emphasized that everything is in relation to the other: existence-in-relation to the other or being with-the other. Being, for him, is communalistic, and it depends on other beings for its temporal flourishing, or what he called, 'contemporary completion', a positive dialectics resulting from their physical and spiritual limitations. Because human beings are not ontologically creators of themselves, they are essentially limited. Because their existence and action, in the midst of communication, are limited by time, place, perception and knowledge, their being is existentially complimentary. Hence, they are naturally candidates for company and co-operations.¹³

Building from his *Igwebuike* ontology, Kanu went into a search for the basis of intersubjectivity, which is the mode of being in the African worldview, and found *Chito* be this basis of intersubjectivity in the African reality. He observed that although the concept *Chi* carries a variety of meanings among the Igbo-African people, he referred to it as the divinity in every human person or the spark of the divine in created things. *Chi*, thus, serves as the thumb print or mark of *Chukwu* in each and every one of us, that places the other in a special place in relation to the self.

For Kanu, *Chi* plays a traditional role in the social institutions of the Igbo-African people. For example, if I and the other have the thumb print of the same *Chukwu*, the spark of the Supreme Being, it then means that we relate in a special way that goes deeper than our individualities.¹⁴ By this, *Chi* provides a central and satisfying framework for the understanding of the interrelatedness and individuality of the Igbo-African reality. Our rootedness in *Chukwu* through *Chi* is what makes the other a part of me. Thus, to treat the other (your neighbour) in a way that is undeserving of the divine mark in him or her, affects not only the person(s) but the ontological structure to which I also belong. *Chi*, therefore, is at the heart of the mystery of human origin, social life and the principles of operations in the social institutions that ensure community and individual identity.

According to Kanu, *Chi* is one of the several elements that occupies a very important place in the understanding of the Igbo speaking African people, who use it to explain or picture the world around them. *Chi* parades the relationship between the corporal and in-corporal worlds, helping us to understand the dynamics of inter-subjectivity in *Igwebuike* philosophy (a philosophy of interrelatedness, inter-subjectivity, complementarity and solidarity).¹⁵

¹³Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, *Igwebuike And Being in Igbo Ontology*, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 5, (2018): 18.

¹⁴Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Chi: In Search for an Explanatory Principle for The Interrelatedness of Igwebuike Philosophy", *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 6 no.9 (2020): 28.

¹⁵*Ibid* 21-22

4.0 THE IMPLICATION OFIKECHUKWU ANTHONY KANU'S VIEW OF CHI TO HUMAN EXISTENCE AND COSMOLOGY

4.1 *Chi* and Human Existence

In the Igbo-African worldview, *Chi* occupies a central role in the life and existence of the human person. Life itself, and its meaning, cannot be understood without recourse to *Chi* as a reference point.¹⁶ Thus, *Chi* plays a vital role in the life and existence of the human person. According to the Igbo-African worldview, Human Existence is ontologically communitarian, communal, interdependent, and intersubjective. This can be seen in the philosophies of various scholars of African Relational Ontology. For example, Innocent Asouzo in his *Ibuanyidanda* ontology, emphasized mutual dependence, interdependence, complementarity, and harmony. Following the *Ibuanyidanda* Ontological principle, to exist is to be in mutual complementary relationship (*ka sọ mọ adina*) and its negation is to be alone (*ka sọ mọ di*) and not nothingness. Therefore, one cannot locate the essence of existence in the capacity to be alone (*ka sọ mọ di*), for anything that exists serves as a missing link of reality towards the joy of being.¹⁷ Kanu also expresses similar view in his *Igwebuike And Being in Igbo Ontology*, stating *Igwebuike* is the manner of being (existence) in Africa, that is, being in relation to otherness. Everything is in relation to the other: existence-in-relation to the other or being with-the other. Beings depend on other beings for their temporal flourishing. This dependence, which he calls, 'contemporary completion', is a positive dialectics resulting from their physical and spiritual limitations.¹⁸ Kanu expressed a strong logical and coherent argument to back up his *Igwebuike* ideology of intersubjectivity and complementarity. The argument, which we have paraphrased, thus:

- Premise 1: Since human beings are not ontologically creators of themselves, they are essentially limited.
- Premise 2: Since their existence and action, in the midst of communication, are limited by time, place, perception and knowledge, their being is existentially complementary.
- Conclusion: Therefore, humans are naturally candidates for company and co-operations.¹⁹

Kanu's argument implies that every being exists by belonging. This show that family and community to which the individual belongs, are indisputable and inevitable for their existence. John Samuel Mbiti also affirms this relational mode of existence in his *African Religion and Philosophy*, when he asserts that "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am",²⁰ implying that no man is an Island. Humans, rather exist for the

¹⁶Marcel I. S. Onyibor, "The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology", *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2019): 87.

¹⁷Innocent Asousu, "IBUANYIDANDA" AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ESSENCE (*Philosophy the Science of Missing Links of Reality*), (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2011), 42.

¹⁸Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Igwebuike And Being in Igbo Ontology", *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 5, (2018): 18.

¹⁹Ibid, 18/19.

²⁰Mbiti, John Samuel, *African Religion and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 108.

sake of the other. Thus, I need you; you need me; we need each other in a community. This community, according to Iroegbu, is what gives individuals their existence.²¹ The communitarian existence or existence in relation to others, brings about consistent interaction and influence. When it is promoted, the community survives and flourish, but when it is relegated, the community dies. Thus, man's existence is communitarian, complementary and intersubjective. Having established this, Kanu went ahead to search for the basis of this intersubjectivity, which is the mode of being in the African worldview according in his *Igwebuike* philosophy, and found *Chi* to be the fundamental basis of intersubjectivity in African reality. *Chi* in this sense, for him, is that mark of *Chukwu* in every individual. Since all humans have the mark of the same *Chukwu*, it then means that we relate in a special way that goes beyond our individualities.²³ Therefore, our rootedness in *Chukwu* through *Chi*, is what makes the others to be part of me, and me, part of others. So, to treat others in a way that is undeserving of the divine mark in them, affect them, and the ontological structure to which I also belong to, as well as myself²⁴

4.2 *Chi* and Human Identity: The African View of Personhood and Identity of a Cloned

Identity can be literally defined as a character or personality trait of an individual that distinguishes him/her as a distinct person in the society. It refers to the individual's continuous struggle to define himself, to discover himself and to know himself.²⁵ Identity makes a thing what it is, as distinct from others. In the African perspective, identity have both physical and spiritual dimension. The physical dimension an individual's identity is tied to his community. This is because African identity is collective and relational, and that is why Africans speak in term of “our”, (our community, our land, our law, our morality, our people, etc.) Contrast to this is the Western notion of identity which often emphasizes relativism and individuality, (my ethics, my life, my choice, my law, my feelings, etc.) Like identity, the African perspective of personhood is strongly linked to the community.

According to Kanu, a person is defined by reference to his kinship (family and community name), and as such, the reality of the communal world takes precedence.²⁶ This gives the idea that a person is a person through a person. Ikegbo Arinze also hold that the African view of identity and personhood is in contrast with Western culture, in

²¹Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, (Owere: International University Press Ltd, 1995), 339.

²²Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Igwebuike And Being in Igbo Ontology”, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 5, (2018): 19.

²³Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Chi: In Search for an Explanatory Principle for The Interrelatedness of Igwebuike Philosophy”, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6, no.9, 28.

²⁴Ibid 21.

²⁵Marcel I. S. Onyibor, “The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology”, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2019): 92.

²⁶Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, *African Philosophy: An Ontologico-Existential Hermeneutic Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*, (Jos: Augustinian Publication, 2015), 170.

which the individual can assert his own existence, like the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. He further asserts that in the West, the individual can live a solitary life, life of noninterference. But in Igbo-African culture, the community plays an important role in asserting the personhood of anyone. This, for him, goes with the Igbo saying “*Nwa bu nwa ora*” which was succinctly captured by Raditlhalo to mean “A child is held to be the property of the community, and it is the community who are going to see to it that the individual child becomes a significant member of the community, an asset to all.”²⁷

More so, Ikegbo also avow that, the status of the person goes beyond individual identity but is attached to the family, clan and the larger community. People are identified with their family and community name not with the individual name. For instance, Okeke is not known as an individual without attaching and identifying Okeke as the son of Onuora from Umudike clan in Oka community. Wherever Okeke is seen, he is seen in connection to his family, clan and community without which he is not a person. It is the community which makes the individual what he is, to the extent that without the community, the individual has no existence.²⁸

In the spiritual dimension of identity in Africa, on the other hand, individuals' identity and personhood are influenced by their relationship with the divine. The Igbo-African worldview expresses a strong existing relationship between *Chi* (which is a divine aspect of man) and the identity of every individual. In analyzing *Chi* as a being, Abanuka holds that “*Chi* is first of all the principle of identity. In this regard, *Chi* performs the metaphysical function of making a particular thing stand out as itself and not another thing.”²⁹ For Anyanwu, *Chi* is the principle of selfhood and individuation because it is that which makes every person unique.³⁰ This description is applied to a human being, for he/she possesses intellect and will. The *Chi*, as a force, gives the essence of selfhood and personhood, directing a person's will, and helping him generates wishes, goals and desires.³¹

Okoro further explains that the full meaning of Igbo personality is tied to the *Onwe* (the Igbo word for the self) and the *Chi*. While the *Onwe* (self) supplies the will, the *Chi*, which illuminates and guards the individual, supplies the vision for *Onwe* to be something spiritual.³² Speaking on how *Chi* influences identity and personhood, Achebe averts that “*Chi* is an individual personal god which accounts for the fortune or the

²⁷ Ikegbo Chukwuma Arinze, “Human Cloning as The Antithesis of African-Igbo Notion of Death and Ancestral Veneration”, *An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Concerned African Philosophers* 12, no. 1 (2024): 85.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Abanuka *Philosophy and the Igbo World*, cited in Onah Oliver, The Ambivalence of The Chi Principle in Igbo Thought: A Ground for Reconciling the Irreconcilable, *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 4. (2020): 145.

³⁰ K. C. Anyanwu, “The idea of art in African thought”, cited in Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, Christian C. Emedolu & Edward U. Ezedike, “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no. 3 (2021): 22.

³¹ Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, Christian C. Emedolu & Edward U. Ezedike, “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no. 3 (2021): 22.

³² Okoro, Emedolu & J. Godwins, *Relations between Self and Vital Force in Igbo Context*, cited in Ibid.

misfortune that one experiences in life. Hence, the meaning of a person's life is only realized as a collaborative venture, *mu na chi'm so*, between the person and his *Chi*.³³ Odimegwu calls this collaborative venture “a form of absolute-relative dialogic”, in which if a man says 'yes' his *Chi* also say 'yes'.³⁴

Considering the current issue of genetic engineering in which humans can now be or are now been cloned, would cloned humans have same identity with others following the African perspective of identity? Before exploring this, note that human cloning, being one of the most controversial scientific endeavors facing our world today because of its influence in the genesis and core of our being, is an alteration to the natural process of procreation, which for the Igbo-African, is a gift of the divine given to man. The term cloning generally describes any (artificial) procedure that produces a precise genetic replica of a biological object, including a deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) sequence, a cell, or an organism.³⁵

Therefore, according to Ikegbo, “since sex is not involved in the production of clones, and African-Igbo believes that sex is the normal and 'traditional' means by which new genetic material is introduced during procreation, clones have no choice but to have exactly the same gene as their single parent.”³⁶ This implies that the cloned individual does not have any unique identity, but a replica identity of the single parent (cloner). The reason for this, beyond reasonable doubt, is that the feasibility and the moral and ethical permissibility of human cloning in Africa will be both technically and ethically challenging to us, based on how we Africans hold our cultural values with high esteem. Values such as the value of individual's uniqueness (not a replicated individual), and even the value of death which according to Ikegbo is one of the qualifications for one to become an ancestor which requires veneration,³⁷ in that where the dead has a clone, his departure will not be seen as death in the first place. And since he has an already replacement here on earth, he is not qualified to become an ancestor so as to be venerated or to talk about being reincarnated. He is lost in his clone.

4.3 *Chi* and Human Destiny: The African notion of Free Will and Determinism

The concept of destiny is one phenomenon that is given great attention in African philosophy. Madu sees destiny as the belief that every individual has a unique life packed with a series of good and bad fortunes by *Chi*. This package is supposedly prepared before the person comes into this world. The person's *Chi*, therefore, is meant

³³ Achebe Chinua, *Chi in Igbo Cosmology*, cited in Marcel I. S. Onyibor, The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.11 (1), 2019, 90.

³⁴ Odimegwu I., *Okonkwo: Construction of an African Identity in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*, cited in Marcel I. S. Onyibor, The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.11 (1), 2019, 93.

³⁵ Ikegbo Chukwuma Arinze, “Human Cloning as The Antithesis of African-Igbo Notion of Death and Ancestral Veneration”, *An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Concerned African Philosophers* 12, no. 1 (2024): 81.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid, 90.

then to monitor and oversee the unfolding of the package.³⁸ *Chi*, thus, play a vital role in matters of destiny, determinism and freewill, to the extent that Anyanwu labels it as a “dynamic self-regulating and self-directing force”,³⁹ implying that *Chi* is the source and origin of human freedom and autonomy.⁴⁰

According to Okere, it is through the gift of the *Chi* that the Supreme God, *Chukwu*, determines the destiny of each person. Once the Supreme has determined a person's destiny through his/her *Chi*, it cannot be changed.⁴¹ Since the influence of *Chi* over the destiny of an individual seems to be decisive, does this lead to determinism? If yes, where then is the place of freedom and responsibility?

Oliver Onah's answer to the above question is that, although the Igbo people believe that destiny is negotiated before the birth of an individual, one can renegotiate his destiny. For this to happen, one needs to maintain a cordial relationship with his *Chi*.⁴² The idea of renegotiation here suggests the concept of freedom, in that, one has the ability to make choices of the kind of life and destiny he desires through renegotiation with his *Chi*. It also supports the popular Igbo expression, *Onyekwe Chi ya ekwe*, which simply means, “if a man says yes, his *Chi* also says yes”. This saying implies that *Chi* expresses itself differently in different individual. That is to say that one's *Chi*, according to Igbo belief, is always at the side of the person if he/she is fully determined to succeed.⁴³ Although *Chi* influences individuals, it does not alter their freedom and responsibility chart the course of his own success or failure, fortune or misfortune.⁴⁴ So, an individual's *Chi* serves as a pathfinder that keep reminding him/her of the need to faithfully actualize the destiny package agreement; the meaningful existence for him and others in the community.

The influence of African communities on individuals, appears as if man is solely determined, since it is the community that gives him his existence, name, identity, etc. However, in analyzing the relation between the community and individual freedom,

³⁸Madu R. O., *Problem of Meaning in Philosophy and Theology: The Hermeneutic Solution*, cited in Onah Oliver, “The Ambivalence of The Chi Principle in Igbo Thought: A Ground for Reconciling the Irreconcilable”, *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2020): 147.

³⁹K. C. Anyanwu, “*The idea of art in African thought*”, cited in Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, Christian C. Emedolu & Edward U. Ezedike, “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no 3 (2021): 22.

⁴⁰Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, Christian C. Emedolu & Edward U. Ezedike, “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no 3, (2021): 22.

⁴¹Okere T., *Can There Be an African Philosophy?* Cited in Onah Oliver, “The Ambivalence of The Chi Principle in Igbo Thought: A Ground for Reconciling the Irreconcilable”, *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 18, no. 4 (2020): 147.

⁴²Onah Oliver, “The Ambivalence of The Chi Principle in Igbo Thought: A Ground for Reconciling the Irreconcilable”, *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 18, no. 4 (2020): 147.

⁴³Marcel I. S. Onyibor, “The Role of Chi in Self-Actualization in Traditional Igbo Cosmology”, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2019): 93.

⁴⁴Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, Christian C. Emedolu & Edward U. Ezedike, “Exploring the Concept of Chi in Igbo Ontology: A philosophical Inquiry”, *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 6, no 3 (2021): 23.

Kanu posits that “Although the community gives man a name which spells his individuality; he makes his own contribution to the kin as an individual. Although his community name defines him, his successes and failure based on the use of his freedom hugely defines him. While the community has rules and regulations, the individual has a right to keep them or not to.”⁴⁵ This point reflects Kanu's stance that the human person is free. For although the community has great influence over a person, it does not take away his freedom.

Kanu gave an instance stating that when God (*Chukwu*) or the divinities such as *Chi*, punish or reward a man for performing an action, they are reacting to an action that was performed freely and conscientiously, and that is why there is reward and punishment. Although it is to the *Chi* that every ability, good or bad fortune, success, failure, weakness etc., possessed by a person is all attributed, Kanu states that while we may accept the idea of destiny in the life of the African, his life is not completely predetermined. A man can better the conditions of his life through prayers and sacrifices. In this case, a person is not changing his or her destiny but trying to do something about his human condition. In fact, even when a man has a good destiny and he does not work hard, there is no guarantee of good fortune coming his way.⁴⁶ This claim supports Abanuka's postulation that “it is not just enough to offer sacrifices and prayers and to work hard, one also has to make proper use of his God-given theoretical and practical knowledge *ako na uche*.”⁴⁷

4.4 *Chi* and the African Views on Causality

Causality is a universal problem in philosophy which many scholars have attempted to address. Although there is a universal doctrine of causality, Africans have their own unique view of it, as distinct from that of the West. For Africans, things do not just happen by chance. Something, whether physical or spiritual, must have caused it. This African perspective of causality is the pure opposite of some Western philosophers such as David Hume, who believe that “things happen by chance”, implying that things could happen without any caus^{e.48}

The African man does not accept or believe in the idea of chance, he rather believes that there is always a reason why things happen. For example, when one is bitten by a snake, it is not just understood as the product of chance, but could be interpreted as result of

⁴⁵ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Freedom and Determinism in African Ontology”, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 48.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 50-51

⁴⁷ Ibid, 52.

⁴⁸ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Causality in African Ontology”, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

sorcery or witchcraft. When one sneezes, it is believed that someone is somewhere gossiping about the person in question. When one's transit is delayed, it is believed that *Chukwu* through the person's *Chi*, is protecting the person from a danger that lies ahead. These few examples express how Africans believe that there is always a reason or cause to every situation.⁴⁹

Gyekye emphasized that Africans pay greater attention to extraordinary events and not natural events or regular occurrences when issues of causality are discussed. According to him, extraordinary events such as, a woman being pregnant for more than nine months or drought during rainy season, are mind disturbing based on the fact that they are infrequent and hence are considered abnormal; they are discrete and isolated; they appear to be puzzling, bizarre, and incomprehensible; and they are not considered subsumable under any immediate known law of nature.⁵⁰ Since the causes of such events are deemed insufficient to explain, the ultimate cause of the event is sought with more focus not on what has happened but why it happened, and little consideration of how it happened.⁵¹ The how question is empirical and it requires a description of the place, time and situation of the occurred event. After knowing the how, the African begins to assess the why, even to the extent of consulting a sacred-scientists to look into the spiritual world for a deeper understanding of the event.⁵²

Although the African view of causality differ from that of the West, it has certain connections with Aristotle's classification of the causes of things into four: material cause (what a thing is made of); formal cause (the form or essence that makes a thing what it is); efficient cause (who/what made the thing); final cause (the purpose of that thing).⁵³ The link between Aristotle's and African causality, the Igbo particularly, can be seen in the way African philosophy conceptualizes causality and the universe in relation to man. For example:

1. **Efficient Cause:** Following Aja, who asserts that Africans believes that the world is an ordered universe in which all events are caused and potentially explicable,⁵⁴ one can say that both man and the universe are effects of a cause. Since all events, including the universe and everything in it, are caused, it therefore implies the existence of a First Cause, which the Igbos call *Nkem Mbu*, or what Aristotle classifies as the efficient cause. This *Nkem Mbu* or efficient cause can be seen in two dimensions. Iroegbu in his classification of causes in African ontology

⁴⁹Ibid 59

⁵⁰Gyekye, K., An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme, cited in Ibid, 55.

⁵¹Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Causality in African Ontology", *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid 54.

⁵⁴Aja E., *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, cited in Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Causality in African Ontology", *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

into ontological and functional causes, posit that the ontological cause produces the being of the effect. Thus, without the ontological cause there is no effect.⁵⁵ *Chukwu* (the great *Chi*), whom the Igbo-African believe is the creator, *Chineke*, and sustainer the universe (*Oseluluwa*), can be said to be the efficient and ontological cause of man and the universe. *Chukwu* is the Uncaused Cause who causes other things to be. However, on the other hand man who is the product of *Chukwu*, and the effect of the Uncaused Cause, could also be considered as a secondary efficient and ontological cause of another man by producing his own kind (children).⁵⁶

2. **Material Cause:** According to Tempels, a causal force emanates in the very nature of the created force, and it makes it influence other forces. God is not a created force, but is the creator of force.⁵⁷ Man, therefore, is a created force that has the ability to cause other being, such as his fellow man (offspring) and other tangible entities, into existence. Since the material cause of a thing is that which a thing is made of, man could be considered as a material cause of man of some realities. Tempels supports this claim when he asserts that “We shall regard as effect, all reality outside the Supreme Being, who himself is never caused by another. For he is the supreme cause of all else, including the gods and spirits. These effects can, either concurrently or separately, also be causes of things. In this case they will be regarded as both cause and effect in different perspectives.”⁵⁸
3. **Formal Cause:** Since formal cause is that which gives things their structure and make them what they are, *Chi* could be seen as a formal cause, for it is the divine essence or mark of the divine in every individual that gives each individual his identity, and shapes their nature, identity, purpose and destinies. No wonder Abanuka calls it the “first of all the principle of identity”, since it performs the metaphysical function of making a particular thing stand out as itself and not another thing.”⁵⁹ Kanu also posit that, Ojike and Ekennia present *Chi* as a unique life force which each person possess as a principle of individuation. Based on the principle of authenticity, no two persons have the same *Chi*.⁶⁰

⁵⁵Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, cited in Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Causality in African Ontology”, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

⁵⁶Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Causality in African Ontology”, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 56.

⁵⁷Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, cited in Ibid.

⁵⁸Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Causality in African Ontology”, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 56.

⁵⁹Abanuka *Philosophy and the Igbo World*, cited in Onah Oliver, “The Ambivalence of The Chi Principle in Igbo Thought: A Ground for Reconciling the Irreconcilable”, *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2020): 145.

⁶⁰Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “Chi: In Search for an Explanatory Principle for The Interrelatedness of Igwebuiké Philosophy”, *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 6, no.9, 25.

4. **Final Cause:** Living a good life (ndu'oma), could be seen as the end, purpose and final cause of man. Remember that in Africa life does not just end after death. There is a continuation of life in the world after, where the ancestors are believed to be living. To live a good life is to be in harmony with the cosmos, community, and divine order. Thus, man ought to respect the Afro-ontological structure of the society, as explicated in Asouzo's *Ibuanyidanda* ontology, Kanu's *Igwebuike* ontology, Tutu's *Ubuntu* philosophy, etc.

Having presented the link between Aristotle's and African causality, it should be noted that Africans does not just speak of mechanical, chemical and psychological interactions like the Western, but of a metaphysical kind of causality, which binds the creator to the creature.⁶¹

6.0 CONCLUSION:

This paper has been able to achieve the goal of explicating the concept of *Chi*, which is said to be an ambiguous and ambivalent concept that have been given various interpretations diverse scholars. Particularly, the paper has expounded the unique perspective of Kanu's view of *Chi* as the basis of intersubjectivity in the Igbo-African worldview, as conceptualized in his *Igwebuike* philosophy, and explored the implications of his view to the African perspective of human existence, which is ontologically communitarian and intersubjective; identity and personhood, which is tied and derived from the family, clan and community; destiny, freedom and determinism, which is one basic aspect role of *Chi* in individuals' lives; and causality.

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⁶¹Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Causality in African Ontology", *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

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