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## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TAOISM AND COMPLEMENTARY REFLECTION (IBUANYIDANDA PHILOSOPHY)**

**Peter Bisong Bisong** ✉; Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

**Abstract:** This work examined the thoughts of Taoism as propounded by Lao Tzu and Complementary Reflection as propounded by Asouzu to discover their nexus and their point of diversion. One basic difference between the two is that complementary reflection is not a religion but Taoism is at once a philosophy and a religion. Notwithstanding the differences in nuances, contents and emphasis, we discovered a striking similarity between the two thoughts – there are geared towards complementarity. However, I believe the major weakness of Taoism over complementary reflection surrounds the concept of Tao, which is a mysterious unverifiable principle of integration.

**Keywords:** Taoism, Complementary Reflection, Ibuanyidanda, Missing Links, Tao.

✉ [pbbisong@yahoo.com](mailto:pbbisong@yahoo.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

There are basic similarities and dissimilarities between these great thoughts – Taoism and Complementary Reflection. This work will attempt an analysis of them to show how different and how similar these philosophies are. The two schools of thought hold a philosophy that encompasses the different aspects of thoughts like Ethics, Epistemology, Metaphysics, etc. Their philosophy is also aimed towards one goal, the harmony of all into a complementary whole. These philosophies are therefore not markedly different from each other. The work is divided into four main parts. The first part x-rays the thought system of Taoism while the second part x-rays the thoughts enshrined in Complementary Reflection. The third part carries a comparative analysis of the two schools of thought. And the last part carries the conclusion.

## AN OVERVIEW OF TAOISM

Taoism is a Chinese thought system founded by Lao-Tzu Robinet. Lao-Tzu is believed to have lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C (Kirkland 2004, p. 61). Not much is known of him because legend has it that he spend much of his life trying to remain unknown which was in tandem with his teachings and thoughts. His teachings and thoughts are reflected in his life. It was reported that unable to understand and cope with the chaos and turbulence in his day he abandoned society and went to the mountains in order to be at one with nature. His main teaching, therefore, centres around being at one with nature which is similar to the teachings of the Stoics.

The world according to Taoism is controlled by a principle known as Tao. Tao is at once a way of life as used by Confucius and also a principle that underlies and controls the world. Tao literally means “way”, but can also be

understood as road, channel, path, doctrine, or line. In Taoism however, it means “the One, which is natural, spontaneous, eternal, nameless, and indescribable. It is at once the beginning of all things and the way in which all things pursue their course.” (Chan 1963, p. 163). It is a fixed, indeterminate and eternal principle that controls the world. According to the Toist, Tao is harmonizes and order the universe. Omoregbe in his words describes Tao thus:

Tao is superior to all things, before all things, and the ultimate source of all things. It pervades all things and is therefore in all things. Tao has no name, no form, yet it flows everywhere, manifests itself in all things and pervades the whole of reality. It is boundless, self-existing, self-actuating, and self-defensive. It is the underlying unity of multiplicity, the harmony of opposites, the undifferentiated ONE, the Real One, the Great One. In fact, Tao is not simply great but is Greatness itself. It is the sum total of which all things are parts, silent, empty, existing by itself, unchanging and inexhaustible (1993, p. 290).

As captured by Mesembe Edet, Tao

May be called the mother of the World. Its name is unknown, I simply call it Tao. If I were to exert myself to define it, I might call it great. Great means extending to the limitless. Extending to the limitless means reaching the extreme distance. Reaching the extreme distance means returning to nearness. Thus Tao is great. The Tao that can be spoken of is not the Tao itself. The unnamed is the source of the universe and the originator of all things. Therefore, oftentimes, without intention, I see the wonder of Tao. I see its manifestations (2011, p. 83).

To the Taoists therefore, Tao is a mysterious principle or cosmic force that determines and controls events in the world. Like water, it loves and nourishes everything but never seeks to possess or dominate anything. It works gently and without effort but accomplishes much. This is exemplified in the seasons of the year, which in a quiet consistency merge one into another and controls everything almost unnoticed. This is how the Taoists believe Tao works; it silently and efficiently presides over all things.

Taoism calls on all to imitate the working of Tao; to be gentle, work unnoticed; not to dominate others, not to interfere in the events of the world. Doing this makes one be at one with nature. Taoism holds the belief that interference with the world is bad; what is needed is a humble understanding of the way the world functions – which means understanding the workings of Tao. The Tao we are made to understand takes no action but leaves nothing undone. It does not compete but skillfully achieves victory. It never desires extreme. To be at one with Tao, therefore, requires non-action, non-competitiveness, moderation and maintenance of equilibrium in things. According to Taoist ethics, non-action is stronger and achieves greater things than action. It also believes that gentleness overcomes strength; kindness overthrows harshness; inaction is superior to action; meekness is strength; to have little is to be rich. Taoism, therefore, advocates inaction, quietness, passivity, shunning society and returning to nature or the way of Tao. The Taoists contend that everything will order itself and come out right if we allow nature to take its course without interference. Taoist ethics, in general, emphasize action through non-action, “naturalness”, simplicity, spontaneity, and the Three Treasures, p. compassion, moderation, and humility. To attain the naturalness they claim, one has to identify with the Tao; which involves freeing oneself from

selfishness and desire and appreciating simplicity (Fowler 2005, p. 122).

According to Taoism, the wise man cultivates and seeks tranquillity and equilibrium in his life. He frees himself from wrong desires and unnatural expectations. He strives for peace and not strife. He is gentle, quiet and lowly. A good example for a wise man to follow is the operation of water. It benefits all men, yet still remain gentle acting quietly, overcoming obstacles and always tending towards the lowliest of places.

Lao-Tzu sees his principle of non-striving as a component of good leadership. He wrote as quoted by Mesembe “govern the state with correctness ... administer the empire by engaging in no activity” (2011, p. 88). He believes a ruler should not rule by force or coercion, for the use of force brings requital action which leads to more violence and hostility. He believes that a good leader avoids problems by anticipation; he understands that society cannot exist where there is force or coercion; he remains calm and gentle in the resolution of problems and difficulties which brings eventual victory with ease. The wise leader he asserts does not seek to dominate others; he is rather open-minded, cautious and reserved.

Taoism also holds the belief in the existence of five agents in the world: water, fire, wood, metal and soil. Two principles which are the *fin* and the *yang* operate to integrate these elements into the various things of the world. The *fin* is negative and feminine. It is cold, dark, soft, moist and changeable. The *yang* on the other hand is positive and masculine. It is warm, bright, firm, dry and steadfast. The *fin* and the *yang* are seen as two complementary extremes that constantly play against and with each other and cannot exist without the other (Robinet 1993, p. 9).

## AN OVERVIEW OF COMPLEMENTARY REFLECTION

Complementary Reflection is a philosophy developed by Innocent Asouzu from Nigeria. It is a philosophy that sees complementarity as a fundamental principle of nature. Everything that exists shares a complementary horizon that must be maintained and upheld for an individual to have a meaningful existence.

Asouzu believes that ontology cannot be articulated properly, without a clear and stable horizon upon which that ontology could be built (Bisong et al., 2016; Onyemachi 2020; Mendie 2020). He argues that the failure to provide this horizon has been the root cause of the failure of most ontology in the past. With this in mind, he chose the Igbo aphorism – *Ibuanyidanda*, as the horizon, upon which his philosophy is anchored. *Ibuanyidanda* is a composite of three Igbo words, *ibu* (load), *anyi* (insurmountable for) and *danda* (a species of ant) (Mendie 2020). These three words are conjoined by Asouzu to arrive at the construct – *Ibuanyidanda*, which etymologically translates to ‘no load is insurmountable for danda the ant’. The nearest English equivalent of the synthetic-analytic construct (*Ibuanyidanda*) Asouzu avers is complementarity (2013, p. 70).

Complementarity in the sense of *Ibuanyidanda* is not limited to the world of atoms as in Niels Bohr, neither is it limited to the world of humans as in ubuntu; it is very comprehensive, capturing three main categories of relationship. There are:

*Intra-personal complementarity (complementarity in a human person)*. Asouzu believes, “a human person can never be conceptualized in a fragmented mode but as a complementary unit that form a whole” (2013, p. 150). For Asouzu the human person is a complementarity of the diverse elements, which must work together harmoniously and complementarily to ensure the

continued existence of the human person (2013, p. 148). This is how to understand his argument that substance and accidents must be grasped in a mutually complementary relationship, for any of them to stand a chance of being grasped.

*Inter-personal complementarity (complementarity amongst humans)*. Asouzu believes that individuals remain indebted to other members of the society for the services they receive from them, because of their relativity and insufficiency. Thus, no achievement, invention or idea, he argues is thinkable outside a complementary network of relationships. This is how to understand his statement that to be, is not to be alone but to be in a mutually complementary relationship of joyous service (2007, p. 156).

*Inter-being complementarity (complementarity of the whole of reality)*. Asouzu believes that all reality forms an all-encompassing complementary whole, where all units form a dynamic play of forces, which completes and support one another. This means that no being exists in isolation but in a complementary relationship with others. This is how to understand his assertion that “everything that exists serves a missing link within the framework of the totality” (1990, p. 83).

Asouzu’s idea of complementarity is anchored on his doctrine of missing links or integration which states, “anything that exists serves a missing link within the framework of the totality (1990, p. 83). Missing link according to Asouzu is the “mode through which being can be grasped within any given framework of finite determinism, as it can only be grasped through relations” (2007a, p. 266). Missing links are all conceivable ways being expressed itself in history and all possible future mode of expression of being as far as there can be grasped as forming a complementary whole.

Thus, all modes of expression, existence and experiences of being in history according to Asouzu are missing

links which, maintain their being so far as there can be conceived in a complementary relationship. This means, that missing links could be understood and explained when there are conceived in a complementary future referential, whole and comprehensive manner. Though being expressed itself in a fragmentary way, it could only be grasped fully in a complimentary comprehensive whole and future referential dimension. No missing link, therefore, can uphold and affirm its being in isolation, implying that to be is not to be alone but in a complementary whole. This is because each missing link is insufficient and relative and therefore expecting the best service from other missing links. Each missing link serves each other to complement the mutual insufficiency of each other. If there fail to give the best service to each other, there lose their meaning and can thereby tear each other apart. To serve a missing link of reality is similar to taking the position of a bridge. Serving a missing link, therefore, implies serving as a bridge to others' imperfection. Thus, every missing link bridges the insufficiency, relativity and imperfection of each other and thereby giving each other the capacity to have full meaning and authentication. The denial of service, therefore, could be seen as a deep incursion to the character of being and an indirect way of negating all things that have existence (2007, p. 10). Thus, whenever humans deny service to others, they indirectly deny service to themselves, since they owe their being to this mutual complementary service. Asouzu describes this as the 'boomerang effect'; "all acts that have the character of the negation of the right of mutual service in complementarity always boomerang" (2007, p. 392). When humans negate the right of mutual complementary service to others by negating their being, it boomerangs on them, because they indirectly remove the bridge that could lead them to full realization of themselves (Onyemachi 2020). An act

directed at an individual indirectly boomerangs on the self, because all share the same complementary horizon. Thus, those who act in a manner that is aimed at harming others, invariably put themselves at risk of getting a rebound of their actions, because of the interconnectivity in service of all missing links. This is why Asouzu, cautions that we should "never elevate a world immanent missing link to an absolute instance" (2007, p. 394). Any mind that elevates itself to absolute instance leads to strife, discontentment, prejudices and dysfunctional conflicts in an interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup and interstate relationship.

Being-in-control for Asouzu entails all the requirements needed to grasp being within a complementary comprehensive framework. Thus, when the mind grasps being in its complementary framework, it is said to be in control of all its existential conditions. A subject is being-in-control if he/she is in charge of the ambivalent tension-laden existential conditions and the phenomenon of concealment. To be in-charge here means more than being a boss or a dictator, who lot it over others, dictating for them in the form of an all-powerful being. The mind rather can be aware of the fact that it shares the same horizon with other missing links. It refers to the consciousness of the mind of the mutual relationship that exist between all missing links in a future referential dimension. This consciousness leads the mind to affirm the Ibuanyidanda imperative "allow the limitation of being to be the cause of your joy". The limitation of being is not a cause for concern for a mind that is in control, because it is aware that all that exists serves a missing link and therefore other missing links would serve to complete its limitation in mutual complementation. A subject is said to be in control if he/she affirms the right of others to be and understands that he/she affirms his/her existence by affirming the existence of

others and by understanding the right of other missing links (2007, p. 349).

Asouzu argues that every human being (educated and uneducated, religious and irreligious) is subject to an ambivalent tension which, is occasioned by our rationality being prised apart by our instinct of self-preservation. This means that the world presents itself to us in a double capacity. For instance, humans can be good and bad, to do and undo, to tie and untie, to preserve or to destroy, to smile or to frown et cetera. But because of the operation of *ihe mkuchi anya* (the phenomenon of concealment) Asouzu argues, we are blinded from seeing the world in this double capacity. We rather see the world in a unilateral mode instead of the bilateral mode it presents itself; and thereby we fall prey to the irrational judgement of our experiences, interest, choices et cetera (Aboh 2015; Aboh 2016). This is why according to Asouzu, people tend to pursue only those things that interest them, concealed to the fact that those that do not interest them are also important and could impact negatively on them if not attended to (Bisong, Ogar & Asira 2016). The phenomenon of concealment would blind some politicians to loot public treasury to foster their prized interest, ignoring the ambivalent side (negative impact) of this action to himself.

Asouzu believes that the moment humans are conscious of the fact that their being has both a relative and absolute determination (being-in-control) that is the moment virtues like tolerance, truth, justice, patience, love, kindness, mercy, peace, honesty, etc would be cherished and aspired for by humans (*Ibuaru* 233). He argues that the moment they realize that reality presents itself in ambivalences and understands the operation of the phenomenon of concealment that is the moment they would begin to see each other as sharing the same horizon of meaning (Akpan 2011a, 2011b; Bisong 2019). He however argues, that this does not come by chance

but through a noetic propaedeutic pedagogy. The constraining mechanism (the ambivalences of human existential conditions and the phenomenon of concealment) that beclouds the mind impeding and distorting can, therefore, be removed through this process of noetic propaedeutic pedagogy. A noetic propaedeutic is a self-imposed act of conscious experience of realities as missing links (2013, p. 74). It is a form of positive personal awareness of the capacity of the constraining mechanism to inject fear in an individual regarding the dangers we are facing and thus instigating the instinct of self-preservation to lead the mind in a one-directional and polarized manner. Noetic propaedeutic, therefore, subsists in the efforts we make to affirm the mutual complementary relationship of all existent beings. It subsists also in the consciousness of the boomerang effect of our actions - the realization that when we undertake actions that harm or hurt others, we are indirectly hurting ourselves. Noetic propaedeutic opens our eyes to see the world in a broader way, by becoming aware of the risk our ambivalent existential condition is capable of leading us into (Bisong & Apologun 2014, p. 38). Thus, through the process of noetic propaedeutic, an individual is better equipped to overcome the tension-laden ambivalent condition of our existence which, is concealed from us by the phenomenon of concealment (*ihe mkpuchi anya*). Through noetic propaedeutic pedagogy "our power of circumspection is rekindled and revitalized, thus igniting the flame for more positive action towards all missing links of reality" (2013, p. 74). It opens the mind-eye to the limitless opportunities that would accrue to it if we were to act in complementarity.

#### **A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT TAOISM AND COMPLEMENTARY REFLECTION**

Taoism and complementary reflection have different origins,

founders, places of birth, orientations, contexts and ideologies which surely implies that there are two different theories. However, when looked at closely their similarities will clearly be discerned. For instance, Taoism is a philosophical, ethical, epistemological, metaphysical, political and religious theory developed by Lao-Tzu which emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao. Complementary Reflection is also a philosophical, ethical, epistemological, metaphysical, political and cosmological theory developed by Innocent Asouzu and emphasizes complementarity. From this, it could be discerned that both theories (apart from the religious content that is missing from Asouzu's theory), are all composed of the same components. The theories are at once ethical, metaphysical, epistemological, political and cosmological and there both emphasize harmony. Asouzu emphasizes a complementarity of all missing links to form a harmonious holistic complementary framework. Taoism emphasizes the connection of all to Tao through a harmonious and peaceful coexistence. Taoism however differs from Complementary Reflection in seeing the principle of integration (Tao) as an entity. The principle of integration for Asouzu (which states; "anything that exists serves as a missing link of reality" (2004, p. 273) is not a personified entity; it is only a guide of actions towards the harmony of differences. For Taoism the principle of integration (Tao) consciously orders the world into harmony.

The two philosophies Taoism and Complementary Reflection both emphasize complementarity as a principle that holds everything. For Taoism the yin and yang are two extremes that cannot exist apart but in a complementary relationship through which they integrate the various elements of the world (Robinet 1993, p. 9). Asouzu on his part always drums this dictum to those who are willing to listen, "everything that exists serves a missing

link within the framework of the totality" (1990, p. 83). This means that everything complements the other. Nothing can exist in isolation from the complementary horizon. He advises all to work to maintain the complementarity that exists in the world. An action to him is right if it does not interfere with the complementary relationship existing among missing links. This is akin to the emphasis of the Taoist. To them, it is wrong to interfere with events. Allow nature to take its course. One way of allowing nature to take its course is to allow human beings to live their unique lives. This also is a resounding dictum of Asouzu; he believes in 'live let's live' syndrome. To harm, destroy or interfere with the meaningful existence of the other is to put a knife to the complementary web that binds all things.

Asouzu believes that anybody that negates the existence of the other receives the boomerang effect (Bisong 2018, p. 62). This ontological boomerang effect according to Asouzu stipulates that

Within any framework of action and interaction, when any of the units constituting the whole undertakes to hinder the realization of the interests of others, the offending units make the interest of the actor difficult if not impossible. On account of this ontological boomerang effect, those whose interests remain unattended to, within any framework of action and interaction would always strive to get what they want through other means open to them, and in the process, they are bound to make it difficult, if not impossible, for all stakeholders constituting the whole to operate optimally (2007, p. 101).

Taoism also holds this view; it believes that the use of force or coercion brings about retaliation, which brings more hostility. Treating the other badly has a way of coiling itself back at the perpetrator. This could be captured by the Nigerian scenario; looting of common funds meant for development leads to poverty which also leads to violence. This is what leads to the Niger Delta

insurgence, Boko Haram, and other insurgencies in Nigeria. Whether the leaders like it or not they experience the boomerang effect of their negative actions either directly or indirectly. These spates of violence and crises if it does not affect them directly will affect their relations. It is a vicious cycle that no man runs away from. This is the thesis of the two philosophies (Taoism and Complementary Reflection).

Another common feature of the two philosophies is that they believe achievement is not through an individual effort. Thus no individual needs to take credit for achievement or success. Every success comes as a result of a complementary effort. Many forces interplayed to bring about an achievement; man does not need to take sole credit for it.

## CONCLUSION

This work surveyed the philosophies of Taoism and Complementary Reflection intending to extract the common features and dissimilar features between them. Our survey reveals that Taoism and Complementary Reflection differ from the point of emphasis but they share a common yearning for the institution of complementary living. We are concluding here that the differences in these two philosophies are merely accidental and not essential. They are employing different methods to aim at the same goal.

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