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EDO ESCHATOLOGY AND THE SCIENTIFIC COSMOS

A.G. ALAMU

Introduction

There is no gain saying the fact that from timeless period in Edo Religion, the people are unique and matchless species with a propensity for relationship with God in the ever emerging cosmic history. These humans possess both the material and immaterial components; i.e. the physical, the finite, the created, the visible, tangible in concrete descriptions; and invisible, intangible, uncreated, pre-existent entity respectively. Thus, the physical, created and visible part is *Egbe* – the body while the soul, or spirit is referred to as *Eti*. The *Eti* is the spirit, while *Ehi* is the guardian spirit. It is thus believed that *Ehi* resides in *Uhonmon*. It is interesting to note that when the part of *Egbe* is damaged, it can be replaced. But when the *Eti* which is embedded in *Ehi* is lost, it is believed to have transited to another mode of existence. This idea brings us to the fact that when the material entity of the body dies, it decomposes while the immaterial aspect which is the spark of God in the human being returns back to its source – the Creator. No doubt, the essence of humans comes from the source of all things – God. This essence of human person cannot be kept at consummation of time.

To this end, this paper is set to show the position of Edo Religion as knowing that the beginning of humans cannot be divorced from their end. In the same vein, the beginning is the nucleus of former existence, and the end is the commencement of another better existence. The composition of humans is both scientific and spiritual. They have body, which is referred to as matter or soul- the seat of consciousness and will, the metaxy between part and whole.

Worthy of note is the fact that human life is a continuum. There is no abrupt halt to human existence, as well as, matter in science which

describes the cyclical and continuous creation. Death in Edo Religion certainly does not put an abrupt end to life. It opens another animating power of life and continuity. Edo eschatology and its essence to the scientific cosmos are interrelated. The scientific cosmos and its structure are not static. It re-creates, re-invents, likewise eschatology in Edo theology is cyclical and unending. Therefore, it is established that both eschatology and cosmos having been seen as continuous creation is part of God who can as well alter the course of natural and theological cosmos. All these we set out to explore in this paper.

Eschatology in Edo Religion

It seems appropriate as a matter of fact to state that eschatology really bears on the future, that which is still to come in a very ordinary empirical sense of the word time. It is also certain that eschatology depicts the finality of events that will occur. Eschatology is the event of the last things and also "that region ... in which we ponder the last things".¹ In Edo Religion, some related final events would take place after death. Also, these related events of the last things remain curious to the Edo, which to them defy explanations.

The Edo people of Nigeria are found in the southern region of the nation. Edo people can be identified as the Afemai, Etsako, Akoko-Edo, the Bini, Owan, and the Ijan. Thus, the belief of the Edo especially relating to the nature of God has been explicitly explained by Awolalu and Dopamu.² According to them, the Edo call God *Osanobua* or *Osanobwa*. Osa implies "the source of all beings" "No" means who or which, "B" mean carries or sustains" and "wa" or "Uwa" means "the world or the universe".³ In respect of the foregoing, humans derive their being from *Osanobwa*. Man is not only created by God but has a relationship with God who puts the *Eti* into him. The essence of *Eti* which resides in *Uhonmon* is also the seal of man's destiny. Thus, there is a relationship between man and God. For man, before and during his birth, through life and at his death is not separated from God.⁴ In this case, throughout the passage of life God is the pivot of human essence. The question that is asked is what happens to man at death? The complexity of this problem has resulted in philosophical confusion for ages among the Edo.

According to Edo belief, death is the supreme sacrifice man must pay. Death is a *sine qua non* for another better existence which everybody would have to undergo. C. O. Oshun is apposite when he buttresses what Edo believe about death.

Death in actual fact is not the end of man; it is a passport to new lease of life. (They) ... believe also the death is a creation of deity. It is heaven's messenger or deity's bailiff. It is the debt everyone will pay. It cannot be prevented, although sacrifices may be offered to defer it.⁵

The belief that death is not the end, but a transition of another life dates back to the early times. It existed in Egypt and as adopted in Greece until Plato in his *Phaedo* also cultivated it.⁶ In sum, it is certain to see death as a compulsory end without which the life after death cannot begin in earnest. It should be seen as the end of an era, the beginning of another era which holds a better promise than the first.⁷

Death as a commencement of another mode of existence presupposes a continuum of life in one context or another. Like Edo, "Yoruba *Oba w' aja* (the king has gone into the sky heaven) meaning that he has entered a life of matchless bliss incomparable to earthly existence",⁸ holds sway. To really assess and ascertain the place of the Edo dead, it is imperative to note that at death *Ehi* as an immaterial entity of the human being which survives death and is separated from *Egbe*. No doubt *Eti* is endlessly, indestructibly and essentially permanent. Therefore, *Eti* is the spark of God in human being with divine origin couched as the essence of humans. This *Eti* returns back to the creator when the person dies. Meanwhile, *Ehi* which is guardian spirit with residence in Uhonmon-head renders an account to the creator for his/her deeds in this world. Edo believe that God is the judge in situations warranting an arbiter. The wrong doer is punished here on earth mainly in the form of illness or other calamities.⁹ The same punishment or matchless life of bliss is extended to man's deeds at death. Edo believe that during the burial of a deceased, invisible divine beings are released to undertake the task of gathering people's views concerning the dead. Although, opinions vary, it is, however, said that if those who hold good views of the dead outweigh those who have negative views, it means that the journey to the life of matchless bliss becomes smooth and serene.

This random sampling by the invisible divine beings forms the "Swarm" of cloud of witnesses" and thus becomes the "insurance cover" or "permit" into this new mode of existence. In the same vein, if otherwise holds, it means the dead will wander permanently in the above of the damned. This is a pointer to the divine process of correcting evil works in the human society. The concept of life after death is not different from the Yoruba concept of the worldview of the *Orun rere* (good heaven) and *Orun Apaadi* (the heaven of potsherds).¹⁰

Among the Edo, the death of a person actually attracts elaborate burial which enables the dead go into another life where he/she will be transformed into an ancestor vis-à-vis reincarnation. In Edo theology, burial is very symbolic and significant, hence it has theological, environmental and spiritual imports. It is thus theological because admission into the communion of the ancestors hinges on proper burial except people want to be haunted by the dead. The environmental import revolves around the fact that if the dead is not properly buried, it will have cultural and social effect. Family of the dead will be stigmatized if proper burial is not accorded the dead. At the spiritual level, it is believed among the people that when the deceased is properly buried both the immediate and extended family of the dead live in peace. In which case, the dead is not roaming about while the living will have succour. In a nutshell, burial goes beyond the physical realm, it has eschatological influence among the *Afemai* people especially. This eschatological science has causal connection with reincarnation.¹¹ Thus, this eschatological influence which is cyclical, drives us to the importance of burying the dead with white cloth. The white cloth is important and it is causally tied to reincarnation. It is believed that when any other colour apart from this white cloth is used during burial, it is not only an anathema on the living especially the children, but also portrays the belief that the dead is suffered not to enter into the communion of the ancestors. Significantly, the white cloth is a symbol of purity and identification of the dead in the spirit world of the *Owan* people.

In Edo theology, judgement is one of the apocalyptic elements which is located at the point where this parting of the soul occurs and this is followed by everlasting life *Oghumu erin mi* (heaven of bliss) or the abode of the damned-*Okpigen*. This life of matchless bliss is the declaration of justness at the arrival of the eschaton. This is further buttressed by Peters who describes the wheat and tares as having been

growing, and within history, one can catch only occasional glimpses of the difference between them. The final separation needs to take place so that one can see clearly what has been the case all along.¹² According to Edo theology, the abode of the ancestor is solely based on good works. Good works are repeatedly emphasized. To them, only the one who does good works has done the will of God. The judgement on the basis of good works is indeed an evidence and genuine condition for God's heaven. Between death, and after life, there is no act of grace for redemption. Thus, the idea of purgatory is not entertained. Summarily, death is irreversible and it is finality of life on earth.

The main point about reincarnation is that the *Ehi* (the guardian spirit) of the family ties never dies. This *Ehi* is real to the Edo which is some spark of God in the human person. The family ties become a continuum without break ceaselessly. However, the concept of death and after life fulfils the universal belief that death is another transition to another mode of existence. Thus, death is appreciated as the transition from this physical earth to a spiritual existence or from various choices of life experiences to the attainment of human vocation.

The Scientific Cosmos

The rise of scientific exploration and its corresponding interpretation in the light of philosophical re-awakenings has suddenly brought a new dimension to creationism. The cosmos became a wide field of explorations for the Copernicans, Newtonians, Darwinians and the rest of the scientific and philosophical minds.¹² This emerging call has indeed built safeguards on the vulnerable and interminable reversals of fortunes as the cosmos undergoes a process of rapid change.

Cosmology is the study of the structure, the emergence and evaluation of the entire universe. The universe has evolved through both chance and necessary processes which intertwine and bring about the universe with life in it. The universe is packed with the opportunity for the development of life.¹³ Cosmic evolution has always had one goal. From the rudimentary beginnings of the universe as a result of the Big Bang, evolution has followed a line – drifting and turning back on itself and then drifting a billion fold more, but a line nevertheless – leading to the emergence of human life.¹⁴ Cosmic history explains the random or contingent events that allow gullibly for evolutionary novelty, an essential

feature of any universe open to new creation. The entire fifteen billion years of cosmic evolution now appear to be determinate. "From its very beginning this extravagantly experimental universe has been bursting with potential for surprising future outcomes."¹⁵

Before now, the cosmos used to mean the solar system which was accounted for by first the Ptolemaic coupled with Copernican methods, but as the range of astronomy increased the spark of *totality of fixed stars as galaxy*, the Milkyway and birth of ten thousand new stars. The universe brought forth our star, the sun. The sun in turn brought forth mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.¹⁶ This strand became clear that our galaxy was only one amongst multifarious millions of galaxies and nowadays the term cosmos generally means the universe of galaxies.¹⁷ This shows that such motive of the universe of galaxies was not only uniquely compatible with the idea of homogeneity of the universe but also demanded by *ontological understanding*. As a matter of fact, this theory agrees both on this resemblance in space and on the universe motion of recession.¹⁸

The most widely studied model of the cosmos is the "Big Bang". According to this, new motion of recession began in sporadic explosion when all the content of the cosmos was densely packed.¹⁹ Most scientists remarkably affirm that cosmic evolution began in a hot Big Bang, after which the universe began to expand and cool, giving rise to atoms, stars and galaxies.²⁰ Eventually element and compounds components cooked up in some now burnt-out stellar ovens came together to form our planet. More over, in another billion years, the Earth's surface cooled sufficiently to allow primitive forms of life to appear.²¹ Also, biological evolution on earth began according to recent studies about 3.8 billion years ago, but like most other episodes of cosmic process, it was obviously not a farce.²² In this unfolding scenario, complex forms of life eventually blossomed out into plants, reptiles, birds, and mammals. This presupposition gives room for more quests for the process of *creatio continua* – continual creation of matter.

Despite the universal motion of recession, the mean density of matter remains stable. One of the most essential platforms of utmost interest between science and theological reflection is the concern for the origin of the universe. Arising from our examination of the universe of galaxies and the theory of the Big Bang, it is important to note that there was a unique time in the history of the universe. The paradox that

Scientists have failed to account for is the concept of beginning which is a source of much scientific speculation and thought.²⁴ Kepler Johannes ponders over this same beginning when he asserts that

... astrology was universally accepted as a legitimate source for insight into the terrifying reality of day-to-day life. And, to be fair, before the discovery of gravity, the influence of the tides certainly validated the notion that there were mysterious influences coming from heaven.²⁵

The foregoing concept of the beginning reveals that certain mysterious influences associated with heaven or God must be responsible. The theologians can also corroborate that it was God's creation and cleverly skip the question of what there was the origin of God. Thus, the early kinetic energy of the "Big Bang" explosion had to fit in the material more closely than one part in a million in order for the universe to both be long-lived as it is and also to advance galaxies and stars.

It is interesting to look at the close affinity between life and nature of the planet earth. Many planets are cycling other stars, therefore, life may not be rare. Notwithstanding, when we take a look at the planets within the solar system, the earth looks special. Jupiter Saturn, Mars, Venus among other components of the earth are too chilled, too gassy.²⁶ Albeit life may have existed in the past on Mars, but nowadays it has become chilled and without an appropriate atmosphere.²⁹

The most significant implication is the avowal of the truth that scientific discovery drives one to a feeling and hypothesis that the course of providence of cosmic history is at least guided in part by an intelligent and a purposeful designer, who made intelligent universe. This intelligent designer maintains the course of natural history's forward movement. Thus, the naturalists have propounded ground work of interest to theologians as they make more quest for the origins and nature of the cosmic laws.³⁰ No doubt, scientific cosmos is based on the symbiosis of scientists and theologians submissions that God is behind the cause of the universe.

Ted Peters corroborates this when he writes:

The whole cosmos with all its magnificent grandeur is understood to be the creation of God's word. Yet, there is a special divine 'delight' taken in humanity... the

vastness and complexity of the natural world does not prevent the heavenly sovereign from paying particular heed to the human creature.³¹

Sequel to the above, it is evident that God designed the natural universe intelligently to permit humanity. This is obvious as the will of God for ordering it is extant. The avowed truth is that sciences and all religions can grow together co-operatively so that humanity can have insight into the origin, extent, and tenability of the universe. Likewise the limitless created creator's responsibility and the role of mankind in the scheme of things. Although, scientific abstractions appeal tremendously to the various ideas of Newton, Kepler and Cartes on the complete and immediate clarity which gave us enormous power to analyze and manipulate our natural milieu, but the full, actuality of the natural universe had in the meantime slipped through the wide meshes of scientists' mechanistic nets.³² The theory of the Big Bang is reminiscent of the biblical concept of creationism, which is also similarly shared by Africans, Edo in perspective, in their cosmic understanding. In that, the cosmic story is both prominent, in sciences and theology's explanation. This theology's conversation with contemporary science is helpful to think of God as the infinitely generous ground of new possibilities for the universe becoming than as a designer who has mapped out the cosmos in every detail from some indefinitely remote point in the past.³³

Edo Eschatology and the Scientific Cosmos

Edo Eschatology lays emphasis on the influence the "living" dead³⁴ have on the living. This helps to appreciate the fact that human life *Ehi* is not terminated by death. In other words, death is a total liberation from the present life experience to the experience of new life. Edo eschatology pictures life as a continuity that is ceaseless. However, the result is the cessation of old familiar relations and the decomposition of the *Egbe*. Therefore, life is a passport which permits and transfers humans from the physical world to the spiritual world. Death is a passport to new lease of life. The soul remains indestructible. This belief thus enhanced the reverence accorded funeral rite and the corresponding belief in ancestral veneration.

In Edo eschatology, ancestral belief and worship are borne out of the fact that the dead have acquired a prominent status for themselves.³⁵ These ancestors are the departed spirits who are honoured as a result of their long, good, spectacular and extraordinary lives they lived here on earth, and at death are being remembered subsequently with great festivals. U. Etuk asserts in the affirmative that the ancestors have great deal of influence over the affairs of their lineage, and play a great intermediary role in their lives with respect to the relationship with the spiritual world.³⁶ In addition, this ancestor worship is a manifestation of filial piety and "an unbroken relationship between the parent who has departed from this world and the offspring who are still here".³⁷ This belief is ably demonstrated by Edo who perform rites in respect of passage of life. The rites of passage connote ceremonies during birth of a child, puberty, marriage and death. By extension, it brings about the concept that has to do with re-incarnation. This is equivalent to Hindu *Samsara* - the transmigration of the soul which is determined by one's *Karma* - cause and effect in his re-incarnation. This *Samara* depicts a cyclical life which is also prominent in Edo belief. The Edo are convinced that the dead relation has reincarnated in the child when the child exhibits human features similar to that of the "Living". The Esan call reincarnation *Iroso*, which means "retouch".³⁸ The Owan call reincarnation *Eimi*. This reincarnation is often supported by the constant occurrences of child prodigies. In Edo, there are occasions in which marks are put in the body of the dead for identification when he/she comes back. At the birth of a baby it is possible to find such marks on the body of the child and such child will be judged to be reincarnate of the dead.³⁹ However, Edo like African people believe that life in God's earth is temporary and is not interminable. Hence through the "living" dead Edo see the spirit world as "personal to men"⁴¹ In other words, the rebirth of the dead in the living does not alter his existence in the spirit world. He becomes a man of both celestial and terrestrial world - a continuum.

Edo believe that death only ushers in another mode of existence, and at death, man passes from the terrestrial world into the celestial world where the moral conduct of men in the physical world will be judged. These moral conduits thus prepare themselves for the lured cosmos of the physical end. Therefore, human life is an endless, continuous, ceaseless gyration within the body and the spirit.

The Future of the Scientific Cosmos in Edo Perspective

Edo eschatology gives cosmic form to the future in the sense that the spirit world which the ancestors inhabit, and through which life continues cyclically help to explain the weight to scientific discovery on genetic and DNA coupled with the possibility of extra-terrestrial and celestial lives.⁴¹ This will enhance continuity between our DNA and *Ehi*-destiny. The future thus will not alter our past and present. Our spirit will not escape, rather the new creation will fulfil, not replace, the old creation. The hope is that there are new expectations, "an epigenesis that will take us beyond where our evolutionary history has brought us thus far ..."⁴² This means that it is envisioned that humans will look forward to a future that will transcend their long and complex past. In the meantime, life as a continuum allows metaxy which in its own way is quite creative as well.⁴³ This metaxy – the tension between what is and what is beyond, soul and spirit, earth and heaven, past and the future, knowable and mysterious – is a sign of developmental and scientific continuity in the cosmos. The new child coming to the earth biologically will partake in it because he/she has a place both in the mundane and in the spiritual cosmic world. Thus, the spiritual world is best explained here by Ted Peters when he stoutly avers that:

What spiritual means here is that the connection of our present moment to ... eschatological future is one God will establish; it will be a dramatic divine action that will both cancel and affirm our contribution to human race Biological inheritance on earth is but a prelude to our spiritual inheritance in heaven. To live proleptically is to allow our earthly life to be influenced by this heavenly vision.⁴⁴

Edo eschatology will become pertinent to humans in their quest for deeper insight into theological and scientific reflections on the source of all things in the realization of the cyclical nature of human existence, the life, and death *ad infinitum*. Thus, the scientists can help in exploring the planetary earth for the discovery of the universe, and Edo eschatology on its explanation will help in the recovery of acclaims for extra physical intelligence. The view that life exists in the planets speaks of the belief in God who may have created life-both physical and the celestial world of

the dead: the universe of the ancestors. This is the position of Edo in eschatology.

In consonance, the scientists have been able to explain the gene as a hereditary factor in the newborn baby. Since the beginning, life has remained continuous on earth. Life has thus been a perpetuity on earth through reproduction, a process by which living organisms biologically produce their types.⁴⁵ This fact reveals that new organisms arise only through previously existing life which Pasteur (1822-1895) and Tyndall (1820-1893) experimentally proved that life could not emerge without existing life.⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, continuity of life is sustained by procreation arising from the development of an organism through mysterious vital influences. Not only that, Lamarck explained as cited by Morakinyo that gemmutes (genes) or vital forces

had extraordinary ability to respond directly to the environment by assuming that each had a spiritual conscious-like property that could absorb and interpret messages from the surrounding environments.⁴⁷

In the foregoing, it is clear that this spiritual conscious-like property informs the continuous union of parental gametes (sex cells) in reproduction. This accounts for a never-ending continuity between DNA and *Ehi* – personality-soul. The growing future “ancestrological traits” in Edo cosmos, is the freedom for responsibility of “like begets like” which is firmly accepted in virtually all human culture. The DNA in part is fundamentally the physical and functional unit of heredity as expressed by Gregor Mendel as carrying information from one generation to the next,⁴⁸ a continuum believed to be influenced by reincarnation in Edo among all descendant generations which accounted for the many biological resemblances that were inherited and observed among relatives.

Furthermore, the cosmos exerts energy for perpetuity displayed by matter. The energy of the universe flows through humans, embracing the scientists and theologians alike. This energy can be manipulated by both scientists and theologians to their advantage, advancement and otherwise. In Edo, death can be deferred with the aids of the medicine-men, while the scientists have developed better medical management strategies to prevent infant death, too, for the sake of reproduction and continuity. Corroborating this statement, Ted Peters writes:

The energy of the cosmos flow through us.... In this flow, we concentrate the energy in the order of life and temporarily escape the decay into atomic chaos. The cosmos as an entirety may be winding down according to the second law of thermodynamics, but as a far-from-equilibrium subsystem within the cosmos we as living things, are experiencing a temporary but exciting advance in the order of things.⁴⁹

Conclusion

It can be deduced from the foregoing that Edo is not opposed to scientific method of verification as well as divine providence which is a *sine qua non* in their cosmos enquiry. This is because the Edo are natural in their worldview, and they stoutly believe that through this nature their problem in the billow of life can be hand-cuffed. No doubt, the terrestrial and the celestial world are not viewed as separate. Thus, the celestial cosmos in Edo is seen as a reality. Equilibrium between the two worlds is always sought by the people. This life and continuity paves way for another mode of existence. Arising from this, there are always healthy, cordial and unbroken nexus between the present and the past spilling over to the future. This worldview permits a sense of commitment positively between the people and their corresponding environment.

Our excursion, so far, has shown that Edo eschatology and the scientific cosmos are similar in outlook. There is life of continuity in Edo eschatology. There is perhaps *creation continua* evolving in science to such an extent that the abrupt decay of one ushers in another mode of existence as has been depicted in death being the beginning of another life. This is an impression built in man that there is perpetual continuity of life in Edo Religion.

This is also supported by the scientific cosmos that creation continues as humans explore their environment with the opportunity for the development of life. Meanwhile, the *Ehi* – the essence of human life is a reminder of eschatological destiny which is incontestable in Edo Religion. The *Ehi* is fed by the closeness with other humans and God which is an openness to finding continuity of unbroken family ties in solidarity with the two worlds – the physical and the spiritual world. To this end, the point of convergence between Edo Eschatology and the

scientific cosmos is the perpetual, ceaseless, endless, and permanent continuity of life and creation between the physical and spiritual world.

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