**PATTERNS OF ONTOLOGICAL CARE, *DASEIN’S* AND THE TASK OF THINKING IN CHINUA ACHEBE’S COSMOLOGY: A HEIDEGGERIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper takes an existential outlook to investigate the ontological structures of care of human Dasein in Chinua Achebe’s philosophy. This is in understanding of Dasein’s mode of being, as ‘being-in-the-world’ (Being and Time, 23), in the existential modification of care, where care remains a paraphernalia for conflict resolution, rising spate of conflict and global peace in 21st Century. The paper demonstrates that within the realm of Dasein’s care structure lies an internal logic: the logic of Negation, and ‘Otherness’ (Being and Time, 150). The argument is that the three basic care structures of: Thrownness, Existentiality and Fallenness foreground the possibility of authentic becoming of Dasein. Thus, Martin Heidegger in raising the question rethinks being in the light of aletheia as the disclosure of truth. However, Achebe’s philosophical thoughts, especially those found in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, experimenting with phenomenological ontology of care revokes Heidegger, to argue that Care is essential in plummeting the rising spate of conflict in our world and in pursuit of conflict resolution and global peace. Therefore, this paper adopts Heidegger’s phenomenological method to investigate indices of care in terms of: Thrownness, Existentiality and Fallenness. The findings of this paper reveal that care is manifest in Achebe’s philosophy and its knowableness is essential in lessening enormous splits, while fostering global peace in the 21st century.*

**Keywords: *Dasein*, Ontology, Care, Authenticity, Phenomenology.**

**Introduction**

There has been a growing concern in the field of social science to wrestle the homeless spirit emanating from societal clash and conflict resolution, social justice and intra/interpersonal relation. Scholarly works from different academic discipline ranging from anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science as well as philosophy have made serious contribution towards peace building, and conflict resolution. However, no critical work has been done on either peacebuilding or conflict resolution from the view point of existential modification of Care as a phenomenological foundation that determines Dasein’s authentic becoming, mutual coexistence and reconciliation of conflict among individuals of heterogeneous history. Notably, the concept of care has garnered critical attention by scholars in humanities and social sciences with patterned directionality on moral principles and social ethics that guide society. In this paper, the notion of Care boycotts multifaceted conceptualisation of care in ethical theory to problematize its homogeneity as an ontological structure that primordially constitute the existential reality of man as human Dasein. On this note, we make certain conjectures; first to establish that the human Dasein is the caller of Care, and the one to whom the call of care is addressed. The dual responsibility Dasein owes to care renders care as an existential maker of authenticity and this has signification in peace building of a given social structure. For clarity of thought, we construe Dasien as expounded by Martin Heidegger in his classics *Being and Time,* where he designates *Dasein* to refer to the kind of being that is particular to humans. Therefore, our point of departure rests on ontological understanding of being, through a phenomenological analysis of the ‘Da- (there or here) of Dasein; which denotes Dasein’s mode of ‘being-in-the-world’ (*Being and Time*, 23) in complex web of relations. The paper has three sections comprising:

1. Crisis of Metaphysical thinking of being
2. Ontological understanding of Dasein as being-in-the-world
3. Philosophical Ontology of Care and Conflict Resolution.

**I Crisis of Metaphysical Thinking on Being**

In the history of Western tradition, inquiry into Being has remained the fulcrum of metaphysical philosophers with Parmenidian assertion of Being and non being as the precursor. Great thinkers like Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, and Rene Descartes, Jean Paul Sartre down to Martin Heidegger are worth mentioning for their commitment to the study of being. However, their philosophical treatise have a marked dichotomy sidling between Scylla and Charybdis, with great many a number taking the part of Absolutism in their inquiry into being. Parmenides stands out in the vanguard of being categories that gave rise to human conflict and existential crisis. His disjunctive ontology presupposes that there is being and non-being. According to him, ‘Being is and non-being is not’ (*The Fragments of Parmenides*, 8). His idea of ‘what is and what is not’ designates being as an eternal reality. Citing Parmenides, Stumpf S.Enoch in *Philosophy: History and Problems*, portends that ‘being is one, changeless, eternal and indivisible, and anything which fail to conform to that layout is a non-being, nothing, illusion and false; that since being is what is, anything that exist must come out of it…’ (Stumpf, 1994). The logical consistencies of being and non-being by these scholars largely vitiate the possibility of confluence of being; and what is more, there is an emergence of rough beats and split of being. However, Plato’s *The Republic*, diffused with ‘what is and what is not’ unleashed sequence of disparagement among the men in the Ideal city in the manner the dialogue between Socrates and Glauconin Book X placed his metaphysics on the plane of the ideal and identity, thus, heightening the existing tension. Plato argues that the ideal being that creates is only one identical and indivisible whereas other beings are mere imitators: ‘Then, if he doesn’t make what is, he wouldn’t make the being but something that is like the being, but is not being. Although Plato differs from Parmenides in view of world of ideas, his notion of being has chaotic eruption of violence among men in the city, and this has remained the source of dissonance among literary scholars.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle’s treatise on *Poetics* and *Metaphysics* has grandstanding in confluence of being as a composite image. His critique of Parmenides and Plato, released being from the domain of permanence to the horizon of transcendentalism of being qua being. Admirably, his *Metaphysics* changed the movement of philosophical speculation on Being and non-being, thus, wresting the dyad within the domain of phenomenal events. In his words, being is becoming, it is a movement which is why ‘all men desire to know’ (Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book A, 1). In his Philosophic Classics, Walter Kaufmann citing Aristotle asseverates this point by arguing that a thing could be said to ‘be’ in several senses, such as: ‘being per accident, being as true, being per categories, being as act and potency,… being of movement, generation and corruption’ (vii,1026).Therefore, being is a composite entity having the constitutive elements of Form and matter, where the absence of one nullifies the presence of the other. In line with Aristotle, the German philosopher, W.G. F Hegel, influenced by the fragmented, socially, economic situation of his time, came up with a new idea ‘a new science, out of the confusion that preceded it’ (*Logic of Science*, 45) in an attempt to settle disputes about being and crystallised being into relative synthesis through the process of negation. For him, the dissention between being, and non-being, what is and what is not, is not the chief or end of all things. He therefore advocates for a synergic process in which being primarily understood as being for the other makes for the possibility of conflict resolution, social justice and peaceful coexistence of beings. Evidently, his dialectics involves the logic of negation where what is wrested in what has been. And if someone were to assert that the work of the producer of couches or of any other manual artisan is completely being, he would run the risk of saying what’s not true with being’ (*The Republic*: Book X,595c-597b).

The observable collapse of the essence of what is in what is not formed the locus standi in the formulation of the notion of being and non-being wager. The process therefore involves elements of displacement and integration, unity in diversity, disharmony in harmony in the manner both being and non-being negate each other to become in each other. Hegel opines that ‘the Notion is the unity of Being and Essence, because it makes sense of the original observations, the facts of the matter, as well as all the disputes and alternative explanations, in that sense it is a negation of the negation, and immediate perception is reconstructed on the basis of the new conception’ (*Hegel’s Logic*, 46).Thus, the negation of X by Y, extinguishes X as what is not and Y as what is (Y-X=Y), on the other hand, the negation of Y by X relinquishes the being of Y as nothing; and affirms X as what is (X-Y= X). Therefore, Y like X is both being and non-being, but due to synthesis, both elements (X and Y) are to undergo the synergic process I order to become one in XY and not in other element, let us say Z. The synthesis of XY grounds the principle of negation, which permeates traditional metaphysic. Thus, one reads of being as constitutive of all existing beings or entities, while non-being designates a lack, non-extant, meaning none belongingness. The intrigue of discourse on Being and Non-being invariably foregrounds the power of internal logic of negation in resolving conflicting situations in contemporary society. Achebe recognizes this fact as the absolute good in terms of unity.

However, this study moves beyond traditional metaphysic to a modernist approach that drives its theoretical framework from Martin Heidegger’s vision of care *Sorge* (*Being and Time*) as a negation of the possibility of the crisis of modern man. It also makes reference to other secondary texts from existential view point to support our argument that the being of human Dasein is *priori* conditioned in ‘*thrownness*’ (*Being and Time*, 400), and this renders human existence inseparable from crisis and conflicting situations. Thrownness is one of the existential structures of care that defines Dasein being-in-the-world, as an unwilling character or unchosen Dasein.

**II Dasein as Being-in –the-World**

The first point of inquiry in this paper is to examine Heidegger’s idea of being, but specifically the existential mode of being of human Dasein. But before delving into the task of being, it is imperative to establish the meaning of Dasein as a philosophical concept. The concept of Dasein remains an essential feature of traditional phenomenology. In truth, without the mention of Dasein, there could be no Metaphysics. Dasein is a German word that found expression in Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology, where in raising the question about the meaning of being designates Dasein as both the inquirer and the inquired. He argues that: “this entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term, Dasein” (*Being and Time,* 27). In Heideggerian parlance as in this study, we use the term Dasein to express the basic ways of being that is particular to humans, because “the human Dasein is distinguished from all other beings in that it is ontological being which alone has understanding of Being’ (*The Basic Problem of Phenomenology,* xxiv).

Dasein literary means that which describes the Da- here or there of Dasein by way of uncovering the activity of Dasein’s‘being –in-the-world’ (*Being and Time,* 23) in complex web of relations. Being, writes Heidegger, “is of all concepts the one that is self-evident, whenever one cognizes anything…whenever one comports oneself towards entities, even towards oneself, some use is made of Being”… (23). It is obvious that the very act of being itself is something that happen independent of Dasein’s wishing or willing. That is why Dasein’s being *a priori* has the pre-ontological constitution of care as Dasein’s coping tool in a given thrown situation. Thrownness, in this paper suggests the facticity of its being delivered in unsettledness. Heidegger designates the being-in-the-world of human Dasein as thrownness *Geworfenheit*. He avers that thrownness is one of the existential structures that describe the *Da*- (there or here), of Dasein, which denotes Dasein’s mode of “being-in-the-world” (*Being and Time*, 23). The essentiality of thrownness lies in the fact that Daseinis always already griped in the world in a certain frame of mind coloured by angst or anxiety. Since Dasein did not consent to ‘be’ in a given thrown condition, his being is ‘ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being, this very being is an issue’ (Heidegger, 10). By reason of existential thrownness that characterise every human Dasein and being in general in the face of this world, ‘anxiety then arises. What is rather thecase is that the world as world is disclosed first and foremost by ‘anxiety, as a mode of state-of-mind’ (232). Thrownness is a non-volition act in which Dasein discovers that its existence has already been wrought without its wilful consent. Placed at the level of *existentiale,* the paper argues that the first instance of human crisisprimarily operates at the level of existential thrownness. As a thrown subject, Dasein is always already gripped by circumstances of his past of having been, (who he was) as an antecedent that discloses his state of mind in the present (who he is) towards the futural projection of possibilities (who he will be). Considering these three ecstase unity, Heidegger’s asserts that “the human being is in thrownness” (*Letter on Humanism*, 260) and this draws our attention to the basic nature of human essence or truth of being as grounded in conflicting circumstances ranging from the self to Dasein’s otherness. Thus, the non-chosen character of Dasein is the first point of human crisis which everyman has to contend with. But then, Dasein has the understanding of the world as a range of possibilities, considering the fact that the existential modification of care provenance the entity with the possibility to live resolutely in understanding of alterity as what brings about social justice and conflict resolution. This understanding renders thrownness as an unfinished fact, that is, something that unfolds the dynamic movement of human existence in average everydayness of human Dasein.

Provincializing Heidegger’s notion of being no doubt has a grandstanding in crisis of modern man who primarily engages in this experience. But the human Dasein does not just have experiential knowledge of conflict; its mode of being in care provides the human Dasein with the passageway for leveraging off conflicting zones. This is on the ground that Dasein’s being-in-the-world is spelt-out in the existential modification of care.

 The idea of Ontological care differentiates Heidegger from other existentialists, Hegel, Husserl, Rene Descartes, Nietzsche who privileged being on the ground of objectification and nothingness. Heidegger strikes the chord of human becoming in posing the question of being, ‘what does it mean to be’. This remains the point of departure in traditional thought of being as something that is other related. Therefore, by way of phenomenological ontology, the understanding of the mode of being of human Dasein opens up the horizon that foregrounds the origin of crisis of modern man as an existent being. The argument is that the natural phenomenon associated with the act of being or human becoming ontically occurs in a nod of conflict and the human desire to conquer. Overly, to gainsay that human crisis and conflict resolution are independent of human existence is to negate the ultimate violence against truth. This is because Dasein’s existence equi-primordially unfolds within the primacy of conflict, which is one of the structural elements that foreground Metaphysics in traditional philosophy. Thus, Heidegger’s phenomenological method opens up Dasien’s mode of being environmentally, it configures and drags the movement of thrownness, but then, Dasein in answering the call of care circumspectly concerns itself with other entities with which it shares the world by way of living resolutely or authentically.

**III Philosophical** **Ontology of Care and Conflict Resolution**

Inquiring into the essence that foreground what Amechi Akwanya terms the ‘art-being’ (No Longer a Tribe, 5) in Achebe’s oeuvre, one discovers a world patterned on existential constitution of care. Therefore, the universe one soars into in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is Care, *Sorge.* But then, the idea that guides our investigation is aimed at the meaning of care in the work world of the texts and the act of being in care in general. Care as earlier noted is an existential constitution that defines Dasein’s being-in-the-world. But the phenomenological rendering of care in the text ontologically describes how one concerns oneself with the other. In order words, any negation of the other as in alterity is ontically a violation of Dasein’s call of care. Alterity firstly opens up a space for anxiety, crisis or conflicting situation. The world we enter in *Things Fall Apart* and Arrow of God ontologically answers the call of care in the manner of concern for the self as Dasein’s mineness and for each other, concern for societal harmony in answering the ‘call which summons Dasein to its own most potentiality-for-Being –guilty’ (Heidegger, 335).

In *Things Fall Apart*, existence ontologically has a phenomenological construal of care. The movement of care is realised in Okonkwo’s kinsmen who, answering the call of care offers Okonkwo yam seedling, since his father Unoka concerns himself with flute playing than economic enterprise. Prior to Okonkwo’s rise to fortune, the father/son relationship was marked with intense conflict, as a result, he neither cares about his aged and sick father, nor concerns himself with the affairs of his first son Nwoye, who later hears the call of care in the advancement of Christian missionaries. This internal conflict is juxtaposed with external turmoil between Mbaino and Umuofia, when Mbaino in guilty conscience calls out to care in their decision to give Ikemefuna as a Peace embryo to Umuofia for killing the wife of OgbuefiUdo. This singular act triggers off anxiety and homeless spirit in view of self -alienation and estrangement of Ikemefuna from the concern and affects of his immediate family. Later, ‘Ikemefuna came to Okonkwo’s household and was provided with care by Okonkwo’s senior wife, but he belongs to the clan’ (*Things Fall Apart,* 12). Care in the context of our discourse rests in the capacity to be concerned about the other’s well-being. Thus, Okonkwo’s fortune is not separated from his responsibility of nurturing and caring for Ikemefuna, prior to the decision of Umuofia to kill the boy. Although Okonkwo’s name was not mentioned as the executioner, his participation downturns the narrative sequence to a tragic plane. This excludes the movement of care in the narrative, not because Ikemefuna is to die, but the consequence of negation of care by Okonkwo, who despite Ezeudo’s caution: ‘that boy calls you father, do not bear hand in his death’ (45), did strike the blow. Okonkwo’s act, unleashes chains of conflicts. Firstly, he suffers emotional breakdown, his friend Obierika reprimands his action, he becomes estranged in his immediate environment (family members) and finally was alienated by the earth goddess as his gun misfires and kills a kinsman.

The strands of event towards care moves beyond the familiar to the involvement of the metaphysical being (immaterial) in exercise of care,or concern to the material world. According to Heidegger, ‘even the ontical approach with which we have tried to Interpret Dasein ontologically as care, may appear farfetched and theoretically contrived, to say nothing of the act of violence one might discern in our setting aside the confirmed traditional definition of man (*Being and Time*, 227). In point of fact, the reprisal of the gods of the land to Okonkwo who thought to be exercising a great deal of care to the Oracle is one of the existential puzzles about the call of care in the text. He had told Obierika ‘the earth cannot punish me for obeying her message…a child’s fingers are not scaled by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm’ (53).

Conversely, a walk into the world of *Arrow of God*, presents us with two structures of care proposed by Heidegger, namely, care as Concern *Bersorge* and care as Solicitude *Fürsorge.* While concern deals with things that matter to Dasein in its average everydayness, solicitude is more circumspect in that it deals with the capacity of knowing ‘other minds’ (Dryefus, 150), meaning, *Dasein’*s knowledge of the other in the manner it knows itself factically. Heidegger is clear-cut in his distinction between concern and solicitude as aspects of care. This is because these two elements aptly govern issues of social justice, peace and conflict resolution in a given social order. He writes: ‘even ‘concern’ with food and clothing, and the nursing of the sick body are forms of solicitude, but we understand the expression ‘solicitude’ in a way which corresponds to our use of ‘concern’ as a term for an *existentiale.* For example, ‘welfare work…as a factical social arrangement, is grounded in *Dasein's* state of Being as Being-with’ (158).

The movement of care

The trouble with Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu in answering the call of care refiles Okonkwo’s homeless spirit and unsettledness. As one who carries his society on his shoulder, his exercise of care rest largely on his undifferentiated character in construal of ‘who’ of Dasein in terms of concern and solicitude. The crisis in Umuaro society started with a structural breakdown of tradition and custom that failed in their duty to care, since Umuaro understands care in terms of circumspective concern and societal progression. Care calls out in the demand of the elders that Ezeuleu eats the two sacred yams and announce the New Yam festival. Prior to this call was a crisis arising from Ezeulu’s refusal of the position of warrant chief imposed on him by the colonial administration and the subsequent imprisonment for two months during which the sacred yam remain uneaten. The priest of Ulu turns down the offer because his call to care does not include that of the colonial administrators. This episode of inclusion and exclusion of being negates the movement of care.In the text, the movement of care circumnavigates between two worlds; the physical and metaphysical world. Placed at the level of metaphysical, Umuaro is a structural society that interprets being from the perspective of religious standing of Ulu, a reason Ulu has the construal of Dasein as an absolute being which is ‘always already care’(240). On the other side, Ezeulu being half man, half spirit of Ulu has a dual responsibility in exercise of care, in terms of his desire to care/ attend to Ulu and his concern in mediating between Ulu and Umuaro. In the context of metaphysical, Ulu’s essence is worked out in the phenomenon of care by way of ‘concretizing the ontological foundations that makeup human existence. At the level of physical world, care is manifest in (Ezeulu) being-with Ulu, mediating between the deity and Umuaro society. His existential mode being with the other potentially problematizes care within the threshold of concern as doable action. Thus, being is ontically construed in ‘being socialised into practices that contain an interpretation…in the mental state of individuals’ (*Being in the World: A commentary on Heidegger Being and Time*, 17). This is because, care as Dasein’s mode of being-in-the-world has temporality as the point of departure in understanding the realm of being. But then, Ezeulu lacks the knowableness of Dasein in the existential constitution of temporality as what gives the human Dasein space for different ways of being, and this lack renders his mission of care unproductive.Care, therefore discloses the necessity of life at every present age in the manner ‘conscience manifests itself as the call of care; (Heidegger,322) whereas the ‘ontological sense of care is temporality’ (Dreyfus,245) and authenticity is the object of care’ (348). The trouble with Ezeulu rests on his self-constancy in the sense of taking stand with Ulu at a point in time when Umuaro experiences famine. Although deep in conscience, he sympathises with Umuaro, yet, he could not decipher the temporal realm of entities in terms of historical happenings. Thus, his flight in the face of thrown condition and in-disposedness towards the call of care renders him Heidegger’s inauthentic Dasein. According to Heidegger, time ‘is the transcendental horizon for the question of being’ (39). Therefore, time decides what matters to Umuaro as group that pursue a common goal. When they were in dire need of food as one of the necessities of life, Ezeulu Akwanya reasons is also ‘full of care for Umuaro, but his god is on his way’, ‘care probably demanded that they get around Ulu or put him out of play’ (*No Longer a Tribe*’, 36). In truth, Ezeulu’s self-consistency in Ulu defies his religious commitment of care to Ulu and Umuaro. His action excludes Ulu from the domain of care, thereby rendering the factical commitments of Ulu non-existent. Citing Achebe in the ‘Writer and His Community’, Akwanya did note that fulfilment is other-centred, a giving or subduing of the self, perhaps to somebody, perhaps to a cause; in any event to something external (30). This other-centred activity refers to human presence, and its lack culminates in total destruction of Ulu and his subjects.

Sequel to Ezulu’s action is the taking hold of Umuaro society by the Christian missionaries who establish the provenance of yam offerings to the Supreme Being whose being is essentially care, concern and solicitude. This alternative changes the movement of care in the text and for which Ezulu flees from the self, gets lost in aloofness, becomes homeless and inaccessible to himself and others. Hence, the need to concern himself with the affairs of his society without compromising Ulu’s standard makes him unhomelike Dasein. Thus, he suffers alienation and ‘closes off from Dasein its potentiality’ (Heidegger, 222). To close off one’s potentiality is a mark of Dasein fallenness, the one das-man. This is an aspect of inauthentic Dasein, which occurs only on the ground of existential exclusion of care. Okonkwo and Ezeulu share the same bad fate in their existential exclusion of care as custodian of their cultural ideology and sense of otherness in their society.

**Conclusion**

In *Arrow of God* care, care runs in the aftermath of authenticity as Dasein’s mode of being in its fullest possibility and potentiality. Care invites Ezeulu to the concern of Ulu, the things that matter to Umuaro society who equally answers the call of care to their ancestral deity Ulu. Thus, we have tripartite structure that must respond to the call of care: namely; Umuaro Ezeulu and Ulu. The trio formed the confluence of being having ontico-ontological disclosure and responsiveness for the exercise of care in the text. In T*hings Fall Apart,* human existence is already pre-given in the existential constitution of care. Thus, to be is to be for the other without negation of any form. Given their inclusive mode of being in understanding of care for the other, being in the Achebe’s cosmology primordially has phenomenological rendering of otherness of Dasein, not in terms of alterity, but in confluence of being and fusion of horizons. Thus, negation of being is a trigger resulting in rough beats of violent eruption, and what is more, there is an emergence of crisis among the members the community. It is on this account that Ezeulu’s flight to the call of care from the elders to eat up the sacred yam has disclosure of *Redes,* than logos. Thus, he was somewhat circumspect in his comment. Achebe saw this inner logic of the gods when he exonerates Umuaro society by reminding Ezeulu that ‘we make the gods we worship’ (AOG, 1964). Using phenomenological method as the only approach that could give the being of human Dasein ontological precision, the findings in this paper reveal that the first foundation of human crisis and conflict are primordially ontological. But the phenomenological understanding of being and non being reveal that Dasein is, because the other is, and the exclusion of the other gives rise to existential leap, wars, crisis and conflict in society.

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