CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CrossMark

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Examining the logical argument of the problem of evil from an African perspective

Jonathan O. Chimakonam[1,2]* [ID] and Amara Esther Chimakonam[2,3] [ID]

[1]Department of Philosophy, University of Pretoria, Hatfield 0002, Pretoria, South Africa, [2]The Conversational School of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria and [3]Department of Philosophy, University of Johannesburg, Auckland Park 2092, Johannesburg, South Africa
*Corresponding author. Email: jonathan.okeke@up.ac.za

Abstract

We argue that the problem of evil, logically, stems from the unequal binary that characterizes the bivalent structure of Western discourses in the philosophy of religion. This structure pits God against the devil, but also the value of good against evil they are believed to represent. The difficulty is that those who subscribe to creationism, for example, hold that God as an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect entity created everything. Ironically, this must include evil or the devil himself. If one says He did not create evil, then one is faced with the challenge of explaining how evil emerged and how an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect God could continue to allow evil in the world. Our strategy would be to dilute the problem by dismantling logical bivalence. With an appropriate logic background like the African truth-glut three-valued system of Ezumezu as an explanatory mechanism, we will demonstrate that the problem of evil is resolvable, even if negatively. Using the principle of value-complementarity, we will argue that the notions of good and evil are not merely opposites but complementary. In this way, God, would be construed, especially from logical ideas inspired by the viewpoint of the African Traditional world-view, as 'harmony-God'.

Keywords: Problem of evil; logic; God; harmony-God; logical argument

Introduction

The logical problem of evil can simply be formulated thus: can God's existence be logically justified amidst evil in the world? This question has lingered on in the Western theistic tradition for centuries. On the one hand are the theists who argue that an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God and the existence of evil in the world are logically consistent (see Plantinga (1974)). On the other hand, atheists claim that evil in the world makes it logically impossible for an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God to exist (see Mackie (1955)).

In this article, we will revisit this logical problem of evil from the African three-valued logic standpoint, in particular Ezumezu logic. We argue that the problem of evil has been a lingering issue in the Western philosophy of religion because, among other things, it is grounded on the Aristotelian bivalent two-valued logic, especially the principle of non-contradiction that excludes one entity from being true and false at the same time in

the same context. However, Ezumezu logic postulates that two diametrically opposed entities could both be true or false at the same time in the same context, thereby demonstrating the possibility of 'both/and' or truth-glut inference (Chimakonam (2019), 61).

What differentiates our approach here from the extant literature on the logical problem of evil within African philosophy of religion, and even Western philosophy of religion, is that we employ Ezumezu logic to solve the logical problem of evil. Our attempt, however, will be to resolve the logical argument in the negative. A negative resolution of the logical argument of the problem of evil does not attempt to justify why God allows evil; it tries to show why the logical variant of the problem might not exist after all.[1] There is scant literature addressing the problem of evil from an African perspective. Also, scholars of philosophy of religion have yet to make attempts at a negative resolution of the logical problem of evil using alternative logics. These gaps necessitate our intervention and make our inquiry here relevant. Our approach will aim to dissolve the logical problem of evil by deploying Ezumezu logic, precisely the principle of value-complementarity, to argue that both the notions of good and evil are complementary. Using this principle, we will demonstrate that God is a harmonious being, what we refer to as 'harmony-God'.

In the first section, we will begin this article with articulation and a brief discussion of the logical argument of the problem of evil. This will provide context for our engagement later in the article. We show that the strength of the logical problem of evil arises from the superlative attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence ascribed to God. In the second section, we will pose the question: is God necessarily omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent? We will critically consider three responses to this question: the Judaeo-Christian response that ascribes these superlative attributes to God. We will also consider the responses by John Bewaji (1998) and Babajide Dasaolu (2019) that deny these superlative attributes to Olodumare (God) within the Yoruba traditional religion. Further, we will consider Aribiah Attoe's (2022a) response, which goes beyond the denial of the attributes to construe God as a 'materialistic and de-personalized' entity. We will show that these three responses are variously limited and unsatisfactory. In the third section, we will argue that the mainstream conceptions of God are undergirded by, at least, three assumptions that account for their lopsidedness. In the last section, we will attempt to address our research question by deploying the Ezumezu logical paradigm and some of the metaphysical principles it grounds. The preceding will enable us to re-examine the logical argument and proffer a new conception of God as a harmony-God in whom good and evil are complemented. Amara Esther Chimakonam (2022) was the first to come to this position in her negative resolution of the evidential problem, using the concept of ejima to argue that God could be both good and evil. Here, we will tighten it further by bringing in the ability to maintain such a balance of good and evil.

Statement of the logical argument of the problem of evil

The problem of evil is usually formulated in three main ways: the logical argument, which states that the existence of evil in this world is inconsistent with the existence of an omnibenevolent God (Mackie (1981)); the evidential argument, which states that the fact of evil in this world constitutes evidence that there exists no morally perfect God (Rowe (1979); Tooley and Plantinga (2008); AE Chimakonam (2022));[2] and the theodicy, which attempts to offer a positive resolution to the problem of evil by allusion to the greater good or any morally sufficient reason to justify God's permission of evil in the world or reconcile the existence of evil with the idea of an omnibenevolent God (O'Leary (1996); Trakakis (2008)). We focus in this article on the logical argument.

The logical argument aims to show that the existence of evil in the world is logically inconsistent with the existence of a morally perfect God. In its strongest form, it attempts

to show that it is logically impossible for both God and any evil to exist; or that the mere existence of evil in the world logically contradicts the existence of a morally perfect God. According to J. L. Mackie, the problem of evil is 'essentially a logical problem' (Mackie (1981), 150). He argues that any one of the statements that an absolute-morally perfect God exists, and evil exists might be true at the same time, and there is no way both of them could be true. For him, since it is not rational to believe logically contradictory statements, theists' belief in the existence of a morally perfect God in light of the evil that the world contains is 'positively irrational' (Mackie (1955), 200).

Similarly, H. J. McCloskey (1960, 97) argues that '[e]vil is a problem, for the theist, in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand and belief in the omnipotence and omniscience of God on the other'. Here, McCloskey is arguing that there is a logical inconsistency involved in the existence of a morally perfect God and the fact that the world contains evil. He seems to argue that the theists offer arguments from which one can directly deduce a contradiction of the form, 'q and not-q'. Antony Flew also argues that '[t]he issue is whether to assert at the same time, first that there is an infinitely good God, second that he is an all-powerful Creator, and third that there are evils in his universe, is to contradict yourself' (Flew (1966), 48).

In this logical formulation, it has been argued that it is a logical contradiction for the theists to believe both of these statements:

(1) The world is a creation of a morally perfect God.
(2) The world contains evil.

The logical problem is often stated as one of the apparent contradictions of holding these statements with two or more additional statements together. Atheists claim that a contradiction can be deduced from (1) through (2) once we consider the logical rules of God's absolute qualities and 'evil'. According to this logic, an omnipotent God would have the power to prevent or eliminate the evil that the world contains, an omniscient God would have the knowledge that the world contains evil, an omnibenevolent God would want or desire to prevent or eliminate the evil that the world contains and create a world that contains only good. But then it follows that if such a morally perfect God exists, the world would contain no evil but only good. Consequently, either God does not exist or evil does not exist (see, for example, La Croix (1974); Horowitz (2020); Schellenberg (2013)).

Our contention is that the seeming strength of the logical argument in the problem of evil lies in the conception of God, which awards it the superlative attributes. In Western literature as well as in African scholarship, a dominant position is that God is omnipotent, by which He created everything; omniscient, by which He knows everything; and omnibenevolent, by which He is morally perfect. The God who is omnipotent is all-powerful and can stamp out evil from this world if He knows about it and desires it. The God who is omniscient knows everything and would not create evil in His world. And the God who is omnibenevolent is all-good and desires to end evil in the universe. But God has yet to respond or behave in this expected manner. Either God is not exactly what He is said to be or evil should not exist at all in the world. But evil exists, so, is God not what He is said to be? This compels us to revisit the conceptions of God that necessitate the problem of evil in the first place.

Three different conceptions of God and their limitations

Is God necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent? This is not a trivial question. As philosophers, we must be able to draw the line at some point between what we know for certain or, at least, what we have grounds to believe and what may

have just slipped into our discourse through the assumptions of the ancillary sciences like theology. Do we have sufficient ground for attributing the qualities of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence to God? In other words, can we reasonably say that God has these attributes? A good number of African philosophers of religion have offered their views on the preceding question. We will briefly discuss three conceptions of God that can be considered mainstream in the context of our discussion and criticize them.

The first is the dominant Judaeo-Christian conception that awards the superlative attributes to God inspired the most in the works of St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, Anselm, Leibniz, and so on. It is the conception that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good (see Rowe (1988); Swinburne (1998)). These indicate that there is no other entity that equals him in power. This is understandable, especially where He is conceived as the creator-God that made or caused all things into existence.

Similarly, no other entity can compete with Him in knowledge, for he made and knows everything. Further, and this is important, He is morally perfect. There is no evil in His nature. One interesting thing about these three superlative attributes is that they are lopsided and pitched as opposites to less desirable traits. There is a binary contradiction here. God is everything that other entities are not, and He is not what others are.

However, some criticisms are in order. If God has all these attributes, why is there evil in the world? This is the question that sparked the debate on the problem of evil. Those arguing from a logical point of view insist that it is inconsistent for evil to coexist in a world in which God enjoys all those attributes. Even though the theodicy attempts to explain evil away by recourse to the notion of 'greater good', it is unconvincing that a morally perfect God would rely on the occurrence of evil to bring about the so-called greater good.

The second is the opposing conception that God lacks superlative attributes. John Bewaji (1998) argues that the superlative attributes do not apply to God in Yoruba conception because even the supreme deity is limited in some ways. He may be the most powerful, but certainly not all-powerful. His explanation is that being the most powerful does not translate to being all-powerful. In the former, one has the power to do a lot of things, but in the latter, he has the power to do all things. The supreme being in the Yoruba tradition might be the most powerful who could do a lot of things, but he is not all-powerful. Similarly, Babajide Dasaolu (2019) reaffirms Bewaji's claim. For him, the attributes of omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience are lacking in the qualities that the Yoruba believe the supreme being to possess. He continues to require the assistance of other lesser deities and has proven to be incapable of doing quite a range of things. Yet, both Bewaji (1998, 8) and Dasaolu (2019, 31) present Olodumare as the Supreme God who sits on top of the pantheon, even though he delegates some responsibilities to other lesser gods (Abimbola (1976), 5). The point that Olodumare is the all-father God is confirmed by both Bolaji Idowu (1962, 39) and Oduwole (2007, 5). No other deity matches Him in power.

But some objections can be raised here against the views of Bewaji and Dasaolu that God is merely the most powerful and not all-powerful. If he is the supreme God who is most powerful among other deities and beings, then it makes little difference that He is not all-powerful. This is because in the zone of existence where He is the supreme being with the most power, He sits on top of the pile just like an all-powerful God would in His own domain. Besides, in the zone of existence where He is acknowledged as the most powerful, it is difficult, if not impossible, for any other being beneath it to know that He is not all-powerful. If He is above all things, He is also above the lesser deities at His beck and call. And like a son would run errands for his father, the assistance of the lesser deities is not ultimately due to 'Olodumare's inability or limitations to do

those things for Himself, but a demonstration that He is the most powerful. So, in essence, the lesser deities whom Olodumare summons to dispatch certain responsibilities are in His service. It should be part of the enjoyment of the stool of godship to have gods among the servants of God. Therefore, it would be an error to assume that Olodumare is not all-powerful merely because he delegates certain responsibilities to other lesser gods. A more plausible explanation would be that as God of gods and all things, He commands the services of other lesser gods. That a servant does the dishes for the King does not mean that the King lacks the ability to do them. It is inconceivable that a lesser god should possess a power that a supreme God lacks. What then makes the latter supreme?

Further, if Olodumare is above all things in the universe of existence, it follows that He necessarily has to be all-powerful, at least in the context of that universe. It makes no logical sense to imagine a supreme God who is also not an all-powerful God in the sphere of His influence. The argument here is that if God is described as supreme, then the sphere of existence which He presides over cannot be larger than Him. If God becomes a square or circle and presides over a square or circle, that square or circle cannot be larger than Him. Otherwise, God would not be supreme in that square or circle. So, if a God is supreme in that universe, it follows logically that He has to be all-powerful, at least, in that universe. Even if there exists a realm in which His powers are limited, that realm is not the present universe He lords over. So, both Bewaji and Dasaolu risk a great contradiction to suppose that Olodumare is both the most powerful God and yet not an all-powerful God in this world. In the context of the universe where He is the most powerful, He is by default the all-powerful. No doubt, both Bewaji and Dasaolu enrich the discourse on God and the problem of evil from an African perspective, but we find their views to be inadequate to our research question.

The third conception is by the Nigerian thinker Aribiah Attoe (2022a) whose argument responds to our question. He conceives God as material, unconscious, and lacking in superlative attributes. He argues that 'the power of the problem of evil lies in the belief, in many major African traditional religions, that God is a personalized entity. This, in turn, ensures a blind misattribution of the properties (mentioned above) to God' (Attoe (2022a), 9). God, for him, is 'materialistic and de-personalized', thus shedding away the superlative attributes while acquiring other attributes such as 'genderless, eternal, first cause, material and unconscious'. By this move, Attoe pushes for a weakened God who lacks the superlative attributes. 'Such a weakened version of God easily accommodates the problem of evil by dismantling a fundamental assumption that props up the problem itself – that is, that God is all-powerful and/or all-good. In this light, we no longer have a God-in-control but God-in-partial-control' (ibid., 19).

The above is the fulcrum of Attoe's metaphysical theory called 'Predeterministic Historicity' (Attoe (2022b)). In it, a trigger event that may be construed as God, sets series of interrelating events in motion. God, thus becomes the First Cause since it is unhelpful to imagine a universe of endless causes. In his words, 'To escape this metaphysical abyss, as it were, we must quickly admit that a foundational entity subsists, from which all other realities emanate' ibid., 30). 'If it is truly the case that nothingness is impossible, and that some-thingness is not only inevitable but eternal, then we can surely causally trace being to God' (ibid., 29). He goes further to argue that:

> If the above is true, then it is not far-fetched to assume that the relationship between an event and a previous state of affairs flows through in such a way that one can speculate that it is possible to trace events from a previous – and perhaps related – circumstance and then finally to a single trigger event (in this case the inception of the universe) and/or to a final cause (what we call God). (ibid., 68)

Attoe goes on to provide his first attribute of this God as: 'The thing which we call God is the, at least, regressively enduring entity from which all other entities emanate' (*ibid.*, 31). He lists three further attributes: that God is material, unconscious, and the expression of 'a being becoming' (2022b, 37). Curiously, Attoe states in the fourth attribute that 'God is not a creator in the intentional sense of the word', which blows his argument wide open.

Therefore, some criticisms are in order here. First, Attoe's escapist strategy that appeals to our emotions to accept God as the first cause or the foundation of existence simply because he does not want to do the hard labour of proferring a convincing argument is untenable. That each cause leads us to chase after its cause to a possible infinity does not justify the leap of faith that lands on God as the first cause. His attempted negative resolution of the problem of evil rests on this assumption. Second, If God is the first cause and source of all things, then it may not be the case that He is not all-powerful. The relational and causal chain He triggers must commit each consequent to genuflect to its antecedent cause in reverse order. If E, for example, genuflects to event D as its immediate cause, D would do the same to C, which in turn would genuflect to B, and then B to A. Since A is the first cause, every other variable genuflects to it directly or indirectly. It becomes that singular existent that does not genuflect to any other. If this is not what it means to be all-powerful, at least, in a sense, then what is? The emergence of a specific state of affairs from causal relationships is necessarily determined since Attoe himself grants that any change in this pattern would lead to a different state of affairs that is necessarily related to the preceding one. In his words:

> What this loose example implies is that each event is necessarily related to a previous event(s) or state of affairs, which in turn is necessarily related to other previous events and so on. It is necessarily related because, like I said in the previous chapter, any alteration to the defining event invariably leads to another outcome (which is necessarily related to that state of affairs plus the alteration). (Attoe (2022b), 67–68)

In the above, Attoe strongly indicates that a preceding event shapes its consequent, showing the range of power it has over it. It is not unconvincing to suppose this relationship Attoe describes as interactive or direct relationality to be a form of power relation in which the antecedent lords over the consequent. If we take this iteratively to the first cause, which Attoe refers to as God, there is little doubt that the face of this God that would be unveiled would be that of an all-powerful God to whom every other entity in this long chain of existents genuflects. It seems pointless to deny this God, this first cause, its due. If God is the first cause, whether it is conscious or unconscious, it means that it can be read as 'the' rather than 'a' creative agent, thus contradicting Attoe's claim that it is not a creative agent.

Even though Attoe claims that He is 'not *a* creator in the intentional sense of the word', He is undoubtedly *the* creator in the metaphysical sense of the word since every other being emanates from Him. It makes no difference if Attoe thinks that He is unconscious in our mundane understanding of the word. The entity that is the source of every other thing does not necessarily have to be bound by the existential limitations and characterizations of its consequents. In other words, to say that God is unconscious might just be Attoe's humble way of saying that the constitution of this first cause is beyond our comprehension. Attoe's theory makes a novel contribution to the discourse on God and the problem of evil from an African perspective, but we find his response to our research question inadequate, thus necessitating our own intervention.

The three conceptions we presented above cannot be the only ones in the literature, but for the purpose and context of our inquiry, they suffice as representatives of the mainstream ideas. These conceptions of God and responses to the problem of evil are lopsided,

showing that the problem of evil might be due mainly to a problem of the logical language in which it is formulated. In the next section, we will investigate the logical grounding for the above lopsided conceptions of God's that necessitates the problem of evil.

The assumptions in the lopsided conception of God

Epistemologically, the three conceptions above are lopsided. The first presents God as all-knowing and opposed to others who are not all-knowing. The second presents Him as most knowing as opposed to others who are not. And the third presents Him as the first knower as opposed to others who are His consequents. Metaphysically, the first conception presents God as all-powerful, which draws a line between Him and others who are less powerful. In the second, He is presented as the most powerful in the face of others who are less powerful. For the third conception, God is presented as the first cause, different from others who are His consequents. Similarly, in ethics, the first conception presents God as all-good against others who are not. The second conception presents Him as the most good compared to others who are less good. For the third conception, He is presented as the first good compared to others who are His consequents.

These lopsided conceptions are in keeping with the bivalent structure of two-valued logic that promotes binary contradiction. The implication of this underlying logic for the discourse on God and evil is a set of dangerous assumptions. Because two-valued logic strictly sets all judgements on two polar values (true and false), every episteme is forcibly subjected to this bivalent structure. It is needless to say that the preceding comes with a heavy price for knowledge as a whole. We will briefly discuss the dangerous assumptions that underlie the lopsided conceptions above.

These lopsided binary conceptions are present in Western epistemology and Abrahamic religions and promote certain assumptions in the various arguments on the problem of evil.

(a) There is an assumption that God is opposed to something or another deity, an anti-God. The Abrahamic religions have different names for this anti-God. They also hold that their abodes are opposed. Existence, for them, is also carved into two opposed realms, spiritual and mundane. Even in the spiritual realm, Christianity draws a further line between Heaven, God's abode and sanctuary for believers, and Hell, Satan's abode and torture chamber for the unbelievers. This assumption also implies that moral values are two and opposed, God being good and Satan being evil. Few actually question whether this assumption is true or not because it makes sense from a two-valued logic lens to have it. Yet, the moment we challenge this bivalent structure, the assumption collapses. For example, it is inconceivable that a morally perfect God would create Hell and banish people there for eternal torture. The Roman Catholic Church found the assumption that anyone with sin inevitably goes to Hell after death, and that Heaven is strictly for those without sin, nonsensical, and created purgatory as a transit point to heaven for those with certain kinds of sin. Otherwise, it would be difficult to imagine that anyone would actually enter heaven since all have sinned, and continue to sin.

(b) There is an assumption that God is morally perfect. He is thought to be pure and without dent. This enables those who hold this conception to follow the two-valued logic structure and create an anti-God, who would be impure and corrupt in equal measure. This assumption imagines that God needs an adversary to complete the two polar points of binary opposition. Yet, this is a baseless assumption. If God created everything, it means that He also created evil and evil actors. A

creator of evil cannot be unsullied. If He did not create everything, He cannot be thought of as all-powerful, let alone all-knowing.

(c) There is an assumption that God created everything or is the source of everything. This enables those who hold this view to maintain the binary structure of two-valued logic that characterizes their reasoning. Once this assumption is accepted, it makes perfect bivalent logical sense to group every other thing into the category of God's creation. God would then be eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and everything else that the rest are not. In this way, the bivalent structure would be complete. But this is hardly reasonable. If God created everything, we must then ask, who created God and from what did God fashion everything? Some theologians and philosophers gloss over this important question by indicating that either God created everything from nothing or by simply saying that it is important to have a first cause in order to avoid eternal regression. The truth, however, is that no one can explain how existence emerged. We can only explain how existents relate to produce new existents, but no more. So, why don't we simply admit our limitations and stop at where our reach ends?

Our main argument is that these assumptions fall away alongside the logical argument of the problem of evil, the moment we adjust the logic at the foundation of such conceptions of God. This will be our concern in the next section.

Examining the logical argument of the problem of evil: an African perspective

There is, perhaps, no other finer statement of the logical argument of the problem of evil than the one credited to Epicurus, a Greek philosopher. Famously, he is said to have stated, 'Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?' (quoted from Hume (1779), 186). This argument establishes the inconsistency in the coexistence of God and evil in the universe. It is powerful insofar as God's conception is considered from the perspective of two-valued logic as we have in an earlier section above. A shift to a three-valued logic would immediately reveal its weakness. Here, we would reconsider God's conception from a variant of three-valued logic called Ezumezu that was developed in Africa and from the African world-view and system of thought (Ani (2019); Metz (2020); Hu (2021); Ofuasia (2021a); *Idem* (2021b); Enyimba (2022)).

The Ezumezu propositional logic expression promotes a complementary binary conception of God and moral values. It adds three supplementary laws to the traditional laws of thought to bolster its expressive power. The three supplementary laws are njikọka, nmekọka and ọnọna-etiti. These correspond to three metaphysical principles, relationality, contextuality, and complementarity, that explain realities involved in logical reasoning. In this logic, there are three values, true (T), false (F), and the intermediate value that is the complementation of both (C). But despite having the identity C, the values of T and F are not lost in it. So, it is better to think of it as TF. This is because the intermediate value is a mode of relationship between the polar values called the complementary mode, just as the polar values occupy a distinct mode called the contextual mode (JO Chimakonam (2019), 99). Using this variant of three-valued logic, we can produce the following conception of God.

Proposal: Every existent has a certain relational capacity.[3] The higher the degree of one's relational capacity, the more powerful the entity is. Humans have more relational capacity than animals, which in turn have more than trees, which have more than stones, etc. A being who is able to maintain the balance of good and

evil and sustain such complementarity is sufficiently powerful to command the worship of humans, and is thus a god. God has a very high relational capacity, in that He is assumed to be able to relate to every other type of existent in ways that no other being could, which means that God is very powerful, but not all-powerful, and may not be the most powerful in all contexts; vastly knowledgeable but not all-knowing, and may not be the most knowledgeable being in all contexts; very good, but not all-good.

Implication: If God is not all-good, then it implies that he has relational capacity for some evils, at least. A god who has capacity for both good and evil, and knows when to do good and when to do evil is a Harmony-God. Harmony, thus becomes the main attribute of God. This harmony is about maintaining the balance of good and evil and sustaining their complementarity thereof. No human can do that for long.

In the above conception, we have overlooked the primordial question that seeks to establish the ultimate source of existence because it is foolhardy to speculate on what is clearly beyond our capacity as knowers. As a result, we have not attempted to establish God's godship by planting Him at the beginning of existence, as first cause, alpha, author of the universe, etc., as various scholars have struggled to do. We have rather established God's godship on His relational capacity. In this way, God is a member of the existence family, who has more relational capacity than most of the others. It falls to philosophers to prove that God has a higher relational capacity than every other entity in existence. This latter challenge may be difficult but not impossible.

It is necessary that evil and good coexist because the elimination of evil, as theists suggest, will automatically trigger the elimination of good. We cannot know good, much less experience it, without evil. A morally wholesome world is impossible just as a morally perfect God is impossible *in* and *for* the universe. Imperfection is one of the most important features of the world. Value-complementarity rather than value-contradiction and value-singularity is the character of the best possible world. We, therefore, argue that God would not exist *in* and *for* a morally perfect universe. If He existed, He would not be conceivable. If He is conceivable, he would not be God, at least, for us because he would not command the awe and worship of any human. What the preceding implies is that the idea of God makes sense because of the existential conditions of humans that make it relevant. If the world were perfect, humans would be perfect. No one would have the senses of imperfection, lack, and need that make the idea of God relevant, whether small or big, conscious or unconscious. Thus, the God that can possibly exist in and for an imperfect world has to be an imperfect God – harmony-God. We can merely imagine a perfect God, but it will have no stool to sit on in an imperfect universe. This is probably why *the* perfect God has remained elusive for all who imagine and invoke it. There is no empirical proof to date of any devout whose life has been made whole.

A harmony-God is one who has the capacity for the opposing values of good and evil, and represents a being in whom both polar values complement each other. To those who worship Him, He rewards good deeds with good, and punishes bad ones with evil. He brings the rain, but also brings the sun. He raises a forest only to blaze it down with fire. He gives a child to a mother and takes it the next day. He creates and destroys not just for the fun of it but for the overarching need to maintain the balance of good and evil. What is the point of having so much power if you would not use it? He is *the* harmony-God, and His ultimate concern is to balance the use of his good and evil relational capacities, which is what makes Him command the awe and worship of humans who could not sustain such a balance.

The harmony-God is probably best supported by panentheism since (a) it shares the same attribute of imperfection with the universe and (b) it is in the universe that it

finds its relevance. The preceding view rivals both theism and pantheism. In the first, for God(s) to be divinities separate from the universe, but intervene(s) in the universe, suggests a form of ontological variance with the universe, which can constitute grounds for its conception as a perfect being. In the second, for God to be mixed in everything or present in everything or have multiple manifestations, makes the conception of God as a separate entity difficult, if not impossible. Our idea of the harmony-God is that which influences the universe and is, in turn, conditioned by the universe. The preceding point and the question of whether the harmony-God can be conceived as conscious or unconscious call for further investigation, which we do not have space for in the present inquiry. But the point on prominent relief is that there is a mutual interaction between the universe and the harmony-God. This relationship that can be explained with the notion of the interaction of values is undergirded by the three metaphysical principles with epistemological and ethical variants.

Metaphysical principles

1. Variables necessarily interrelate irrespective of their unique contexts, all things considered, because no variable is an ego solus (relationality).
2. The relationships between variables occur within specific contexts because context upsets facts (contextuality).
3. Seemingly opposed variables can have a relationship of complementation rather than merely contradict (complementarity).

Epistemological variant

a. Truths necessarily interrelate irrespective of their unique contexts, all things considered, because no truth is in isolation from others (epistemic-relationality).
b. The relationships between truths occur within specific contexts because context upsets truths (epistemic-contextuality).
c. Seemingly opposed truths can have a relationship of complementation rather than merely contradict (epistemic-complementarity).

Ethical variant

i. Values necessarily interrelate irrespective of their unique contexts, all things considered, because no value is in isolation from others (value-relationality).
ii. The relationships between values occur within specific contexts because context upsets values (value-contextuality).
iii. Seemingly opposed values can have a relationship of complementation rather than contradict (value-complementarity).

The relational principle explains the necessary relationship between the polar values T and F, in that while T affirms, F negates. Each enables us to make sense of the other. On their own, they seem only like binary opposites, but this opposition is a form of relationship. Without one, the other would be difficult to comprehend. So, they define each other. The contextual principle explains the uniqueness of each value in their different contexts. T occupies the affirming context and F occupies the negating context. When each maintains its unique context, we say that a 'relationship of difference' by which it sets itself apart from the other is taking place. But when they come together, we say that a 'relationship of solidarity' is taking place. These are the two main types of relationships in the traditional African worldview.

But in Ezumezu logic, there is a third type of relationship called 'creative struggle' (JO Chimakonam (2019), 118–119). This is founded on the understanding that two variables that occupy opposing contexts can easily form a binary opposition. So, the relationship

between them could hardly be easy. In traditional African societies with their communalist ethos, relationships of opposed variables come out as solidarity. Consensus rather than divergence of views was the cornerstone of all communal interactions (see Njaka (1974); Nwala (1985); Wiredu (1996)). Those days are gone with the colonial incursion and decimation of the quietude of the African traditional life. Nowadays, relationships of solidarity are harder to come by, especially with the dominance of modernity and its capitalist economic system. For this, recent studies of the African lifeworld have identified 'creative struggle' as a new form of relationship that trumps solidarity (JO Chimakonam 2019, 2021). Under this frame, the principle of complementarity marshals the relationship between T and F such that they struggle through their opposition to create new ideas and open new vistas for thought.

So, their complementation is not without scruples, that is why their identities are preserved in the complementary mode. And complementation of opposing variables or values is not a permanent state. Complementation is always threatened by the forces of difference. And every now and then, complementary relationships collapse and variables through a disjunctive motion return to their unique contexts, but only to initiate a new conjunctive motion towards complementation. This is so because no variable is an ego solus or self-sufficient. Each constantly needs and yearns for the complementation of the others. For this, Innocent Asouzu (2007) argues that being is a missing link of reality. This gives us a fair idea of the interpretation of the truth-glut in Ezumezu propositional logic.[4] The harmony-God is the highest ontological manifestation of truth-glut valuation in that He is able to maintain the balance necessary for the sustenance of value-complementation without which humans might not be cowed into considering Him worthy of worship and praise. A God that carries no threat can hardly compel worship. An Igbo proverb states that 'agwọ emeghị ihe oji bụrụ agwọ, ụmụ nwanyị ewere ya kee nkụ'. This roughly translates as 'if a snake does not strike as it should, women will gather it like a rope and tie a bunch of firewood with it'. In this way, Udobata Onunwa citing Kalu Ogbu (1978, 42) explains that among the Igbo, 'A votary would variously plead with patron gods, placate the angry and evil spirits, and end up by threatening any deity that if he failed to perform, his grove and shrine would be overgrown with weeds' (Onunwa (2011), 46). The point here is that a non-performing god is powerless, and a powerless god cannot threaten anyone. It will, therefore, suffer ignominy and be abandoned.

The three metaphysical principles are grounded in the axioms of Ezumezu logic, otherwise known as the three supplementary laws of thought. Below is as stated in JO Chimakonam (2021, 24):

- **Njikọka:** An arumaristic proposition[5] is true if and only if it is true in *Relation* to its opposite that is false.[6]
  (T) Ax ↔ [(T) Ax » (F) ∼Ax], which reads that 'Ax is true if and only if Ax is true in *Relation* to *Not* Ax is false'. The notation (») functions as a relationship indicator.
- **Nmekọka:** If an arumaristic proposition is true in a given context, then it cannot be false in the same context.
  (T) Ax $\vert \rightarrow$ ∼(F) Ax, which reads that if Ax is true in a given context, then Ax cannot be false in the same context. The notation wedged-arrow functions both as a material implication and a context indicator here.
- **Ọnọna-etiti:** An ohakaristic proposition[7] is both true and false in a complementary mode of thought.
  [(T) Ax ∧ (F) Ax] ↔ (C) (Ax ∧ ∼Ax), which reads that Ax is true and Ax is false if and only if Ax and not Ax are complements.

While njikọka and nmekọka ground relationality and contextuality, respectively, ọnọna-etiti grounds complementarity. In njikọka, we see the interaction of two opposites

and the values T and F. Variables, truths, and values necessarily relate, even if they are opposed. While variables can change values from one context to another; values and truths can change in different contexts. In nmekọka, we see the uniqueness of contexts as the zone of identity. In a context, variables have definite values, but only in that context. Truth is fixed upon a fact within a context alone. The value T remains T and can never change to F in the same context, and vice versa. For ọnọna-etiti, opposed variables, values, and truths can converge and complement. There is a recognition of mutual self-insufficiency and the yearning for complementation among opposed variables. No value or truth is absolute. Each one is relative to some contexts.

From the above trivalent logical structure, we can make sense of our conception of God as the harmony-God with relational capacity to maintain a balance of the opposed values of good and evil and sustain such complementarity. So, in deploying the Ezumezu logical structure and the principle of value-complementarity, we are able to resolve the logical argument of the problem of evil even though in the negative. A negative resolution of the problem stipulates that the problem might not exist after all without a lopsided conception of God strung up on the bivalent structure of two-valued logic.

Critics may raise some objections. First, they may argue that our trivialization of the primordial question is unacceptable because the fact that we are yet to place our finger on the ultimate source of things that is indubitable does not mean that we are incapable of doing so. Our response would be that it is not so much about our incapacity but about the impossibility of the task itself. For something to be the ultimate source of everything, it has to have a source too. So, nothing that exists can be the ultimate source of everything. And since existence cannot come from nothing, the futility of the quest stares us in the face.

Second, they may argue again that our conception of God as harmony-God is a poor attribute for God to have. Adherents of the Judaeo-Christian theology would wonder what makes Him different from Satan. Our response would be that the Judeo-Christian conception is not so much inspired by deep insights into God's true nature as it is by a deterministic bivalent logic that makes it sensible to create a rival to God and distribute opposite attributes to both. Under the two-valued logic reasoning framework, God necessarily has to be all-good in order to necessitate an all-evil rival to form binary opposition. This conception has never been about God's true nature, but about fulfiling the requirement of a given type of reasoning framework we prefer.

Third, they may argue that our proposal is similar to the theodicy that attempts to explain away the problem of evil and would be liable to the same set of criticisms marshalled in the literature against theodicy. Our response would be that such is not the case. The theodicy offers a positive resolution while our proposal, call it the 'relational argument', offers a negative resolution of the problem of evil.

In all, we have no doubt that there may be other disagreements and criticisms to our proposal here, but those should inform further debates necessary for the fine-tuning of ideas and discourses in African philosophy of religion.

Conclusion

We have shown in this article that the logical problem of evil is premised on the Aristotelian bivalent two-valued logic and that dismantling this problem requires a logical shift to a three-valued logic such as Ezumezu logic. This logical shift does not consider the existence of good and evil as contradictory but as complementary. Thus, we construe God as a harmony-God, making Him a God who has the quality of both good and evil. In this way, we hope to have offered a negative resolution that dismantles the logical argument and enriches the discourse on the problem of evil from an African perspective.

Conflict of interest. None.

Notes

1. In African philosophy of religion, AE Chimakonam (2022) was the first thinker to attempt what could be regarded as a negative resolution of the evidential variant of the problem. Attoe (2022a) is another thinker who attempts a negative resolution of the problem of evil.
2. AE Chimakonam (2022), in particular, has recently provided an African perspectival discourse on the evidential argument.
3. This is the capacity to relate with the other, whether in one's own ontological category or outside it.
4. One interpretation that is similar to this is the one promoted by Graham Priest in paraconsistent logic. It is best described as truth contradictions or dialetheism and holds that there are propositions which can be evaluated both true and false (see Priest (2018)).
5. The concept 'arumaristic' comes from the Igbo word *arumaruka* and is framed to mean a 'critical and creative engagement that follows the conjunctive motion without an expectation of a synthesis' (method); 'a reasoning or argument structure that proceeds from the periphery to the centre' (inference). As a proposition, it is one that expresses one thought but which has different values in two different contexts. (See JO Chimakonam (2017), *Idem* (2019), *Idem* (2021)).
6. This was earlier formulated as: 'An arumaristic proposition is true if and only if it is true in a given context and can be false in another context; i.e. (T) Ax $\updownarrow$ [(T) Ax $\mid$ → (F) Ax], which reads that Ax is true in a given context if and only if Ax is true in that context wedge-implies that Ax is false in another. The notation wedged-arrow functions only as a context indicator here.' The latest adjustment is the same except for being clearer and more precise with the introduction of the Relation function '»'.
7. The concept 'ohakaristic' comes from the Igbo word *ohakarasi* and is framed to mean a 'critical and creative engagement that follows the disjunctive motion without an expectation of a synthesis' (method); 'a reasoning or argument structure that proceeds from the centre to the periphery' (inference). As a proposition, it is one that expresses two different thoughts that can both be asserted simultaneously in a complementary mode (see JO Chimakonam (2017), *Idem* (2019), *Idem* (2021)).

References

Abimbola W (1976) *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
Ani AE (2019) The methodological significance of Chimakonam's Ezumezu logic. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 8, 85–95.
Asouzu I (2007) *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions*. Zurich: Lit Verlag.
Attoe AD (2022a) Redefining the problem of evil in the context of a predeterministic world: new conversations with the traditional African worldview. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 11, 9–26.
Attoe AD (2022b) *Groundwork for a New Kind of African Metaphysics: The Idea of Predeterministic Historicity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
Bewaji JA (1998) Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief and the theistic problem of evil. *African Studies Quarterly* 2, 1–17.
Chimakonam JO (2017) What is conversational philosophy? a prescription of a new doctrine and method of philosophy, in and beyond African philosophy. *Phronimon* 18, 114–130.
Chimakonam JO (2019) *Ezumezu Logic: A System of Logic for African Philosophy and Studies*. Cham: Springer.
Chimakonam JO (2021) On the system of conversational thinking: an overview. *Aṛumaṛuka: Journal of Conversational Thinking* 1, 1–45.
Chimakonam AE (2022) Why the problem of evil might not be a problem after all in African philosophy of religion. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 11, 27–39.
Dasaolu B (2019) A Yorùbá reflection on the theodicy embedded in Prince's *Sign o' the Times*: implications for scholarship on African theology. *Journal of Philosophy and Culture* 7, 26–33.

Enyimba M (2022) Ezumezu: a system of logic for African philosophy and studies. *History and Philosophy of Logic*. doi:10.1080/01445340.2022.2065620.

Flew A (1966) *God and Philosophy*. London: Hutchinson.

Horowitz A (2020) Intentionality, evil, God, and necessity. *Religious Studies* 56, 436–446.

Hu P (2021) (Original title in Chinese) 'Re-othering and reshaping the philosophical picture of the world – reading Ezumezu: a logical system of African philosophy and research'. *World Journal of Philosophy* 8, 104–123.

Hume D (1779) *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. London: Penguin Books Limited.

Idowu B (1962) *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. London: Longman Group Limited.

Kalu O (ed.) (1978) *Readings in African Humanities*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishes.

La Croix R (1974) Unjustified evil and God's choice. *Sophia* 13, 20–28.

Mackie JL (1955) Evil and omnipotence. *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 64, 200–12.

Mackie JL (1981) *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCloskey HJ (1960) God and evil. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10, 97–114.

Metz T (2020) Recent work in African philosophy: its relevance beyond the continent. *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 130, 539–560.

Njaka EN (1974) *Igbo Political Culture*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Nwala U (1985) *Igbo Philosophy*. London: Lantern Books.

Oduwole E (2007) The dialectics of Ire (goodness) and Ibi (evilness): an African understanding of the philosophical problem of evil. *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy* 36, 1–13.

Ofuasia E (2021a) Review of Ezumezu: a system of logic for African philosophy and studies. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 16, 242–245, online March 11 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2021.1889926.

Ofuasia E (2021b) Review of logic and African philosophy: seminal articles on African systems of thought. *History and Philosophy of Logic*, online 9 December 2021. doi:10.1080/01445340.2021.1988431.

O'Leary S (1996) The problem of evil revisited: theodicy argument as forensic rhetoric. *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 29/2, 122–146.

Onunwa U (2011) Humanistic basis for African traditional religious theology and ethics: a challenge to the church in Nigeria. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 1, 39–61.

Plantinga A (1974) *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Priest G (2018) Dialetheism. In Zalta E (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dialetheism/.

Rowe W (1979) The problem of evil and some varieties of atheism. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, 335–341.

Rowe W (1988) Evil and theodicy. *Philosophical Topics* 16, 119–132.

Schellenberg JI (2013) A new logical problem of evil. In McBrayer JP and Howard-Snyder D (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 34–48.

Swinburne R (1998) *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tooley M and Plantinga A (2008) *Knowledge of God*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Trakakis N (2008) Theodicy: the solution to the problem of evil, or part of the problem? *Sophia* 47, 161–191.

Wiredu K (1996) Democracy and consensus: a plea for a non-party polity. In Wiredu K (ed.), *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, pp. 182–190.