GEOGRAPHICAL DETERMINANTS OF ESAN ONTOLOGY AND THE IMPLIED MORAL CARE FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study argues that the natural environment impinges on the metaphysical worldview of the Esan people and the interplay between geography and ontology influences human moral obligations to the natural environment. Existing literature focuses on how metaphysical worldview influences the life of people and how people manipulate their environment. Without denying this fact, this study engages in the reverse of this dominant view by focusing on how this worldview itself is influenced or dictated by the environment and how the natural environment dictates the life pattern of people. It argues that an ontological understanding of the world is crucial in determining how people meaningfully organize their lives and societies. It then analyses in some detail how the geographical features in Esan land determine the ontology of the Esan people, and in consequence, influence their basic metaphysical beliefs about nature, religion, culture, and the totality of reality. The study argues that since people's metaphysical worldview is intertwined with their everyday living, the interface between nature and ontology draws some affinities between humans and nature. It argues further that nature, or some parts of it, have some relevance in themselves, and play some unique roles such as complementarity, and physical and psycho-spiritual satisfaction, amongst others, which ensure the moral and socio-spiritual harmony of the people, and which would be a veritable foundation upon which human moral obligation to nature can be established. The study adopts

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the expository, conceptual, and critical methods of philosophical inquiry.

Key Words
Esan metaphysics, Environmental determinism, Platial philosophy, Religion architecture, Religion aesthetics, Socio-cultural activities, Moral obligation

Introduction

Geography studies human relationships with their physical environment. In a sense, it also studies human relationships with their natural environment. By the geographical determinant of the ontology of a people, we mean how the natural environment of a place (or its components) dictates the metaphysical beliefs, worldviews, or dispositions of people living in such a place. Although the ontological belief of a people can maximally influence their worldview and ways of life, this ontology can in turn be influenced by the topography or the natural features of the area which such people inhabit. For instance, the physical environment in a place, such as mountains, valleys, weather, climate, vegetation, soil, seasons, rainfall, deserts, lakes, rivers, oceans, savannah, minerals, and wind, among others, determines the kinds of living things (plants and animals) that can survive in that environment, as well as the worldviews of the people living in such environment. This means that the non-living parts of the natural environment can affect and influence the living parts. It also means that the kind of ontological beliefs which people have can in a way be determined by the natural environment of that place.

There are some ontological elements present in nature. Such aspects of nature are believed to have powers inherent in them, which may defy any empirical observation or rationalisation, but may have visible manifestations. The main focus of this article is to reflect on how the Esan geographical environment shapes the ontological beliefs of the Esan people. The main aim of this inquiry is to specifically argue that the Esan natural environment shapes the people's ontological belief;

and generally, that the geographical features of a place can shape the metaphysical outlook of the people living in such place and influence a kind of moral duty to humans and the natural environment. To meet this set goal, the study begins with a brief exposition of the biography of the Esan people and the geography of Esan land. Then, it engages in a general but brief analysis of the concept of ontology and then specifically, ontology in Esan thought. Thereafter, the study explains the concepts of environmental possibilism and environmental determinism to show the mutual influence between man and the natural environment and then attempts to connect geography with philosophy. The study also focuses on explaining the geographical determinants of Esan ontology and the moral implications, that such intersections portend.

A Brief Geography of Esan Land

The word *Esan* has different meanings. It depicts the people, language, culture, and territory of Esan. Esan land is made up of various communities. It occupies the central part of Edo State, Nigeria. In the present Nigerian political nomenclature, it is called Edo Central, and it is one of the three Senatorial Districts in the state. Besides, it is occupied by one of the three major ethnic groups in Edo State (the others being Bini and Etsako). Presently, it consists of five Local Governments Areas (Esan Central, Esan West, Esan North-East, Esan South-East, and Igueben).

Geographically, Esan land is a dissected Plateau, with a height of 390m (1300ft) above sea level. It is located "in the North-Eastern part of Benin lowlands.... The region lies in the tropical rain forest belt and is characterized by high temperatures, rainfall, and humidity" (Segynola, 2011: 17-18). This undulating region lies between latitudes 6^{o} 20'' and 6^{o} 45'' North of the Equator and between longitudes 6^{o} 10'' and 6^{o} 35'' East of the Greenwich Meridian. It has a land area of about 3010 km^2 (1662 square miles). The relative humidity varies between 75% -90% in the rainy season and 50% - 75% in the dry season. The rainfall is evenly distributed, with an annual record of between 2300-3000 mm. The

prevailing winds are the North-East Trade Wind and the South West Trade Wind (Segynola 1987; Ahianba, 2013: 10). The Plateau is bounded on the east by a sizeable portion of the lower Middle Niger Valley and a sizeable portion of the Orle valley in its North-North central section (Segynola, 2011: 18). At its Northern boundary are Etsako East and Etsako West Local Government Areas. Owan West is situated at its North-West boundary; Uhunmwonde and Orhionwon Local Government Areas lie in its West boundaries. While its South has a boundary with Delta State, its Eastern end is bounded by the River Niger at Illushi (Ahianba, 2013: 4).

> "It has a Landmass of 2,730 square kilometers which is approximately 14 percent of... Edo State landmass. The local relief... is about 150m above sea level although some areas are as low as 20m above sea level...." (Segynola, 2011: 18).

Esan land is a rainforest zone. The soil is essentially laterite, rich in clay. Because of these available features, the economy of the region is essentially agrarian. In other words, Esan is predominantly an agrarian society. It favours the growth of trees, tuberous, annual, perennial, and other cash crops. The people practice subsistent agriculture with mainly crude implements and partly modern implements (Ahianba, 2013: 4; Segynola, 1987: 71-82). Since the people are mainly peasant farmers, they have low production and income. Esan is also partly agro-based industrial since it involves the processing and storage of the crops produced. A few persons are engaged in economic activities other than farming such as tailoring and some other economic activities such as cloth weaving, basket weaving, blacksmithing, trading, and hunting. Although Esan is an agricultural society, it would also be correct to say that it is commercial since some of its people involves in the marketing of agro-based products. Such geography inevitably impinges on the ontology of the Esan people.

The Notion Of Ontology In Esan Thought

Generally, ontology is the study or theory of the ultimate nature of things or the study of the nature or structure of being or existence. It is the study of being as such, of being *qua* being. Being in metaphysical cognition is *whatever is.* It could be actual or potential, real or possible, concrete or imaginable, mental or extra-mental, linguistic, extra-linguistic or meta-linguistic, necessary or contingent. It "deals with the essential characteristics of being itself". It asks such questions as: "What is or what exists?" "What kind of thing exists primarily?" and "How are different kinds of being related to one another?" (Bunnin and Yu, 2004: 491). It is concerned with what underlies existence or the fundamental substratum of what there is. Some philosophers use this term as a synonym for *metaphysics*; others use it as the name for one main branch of metaphysics, the other being *cosmology*" (Halverson, 1967: 499), which is the study or theory of the origin and structure of the physical universe. The study of ontology is crucial in philosophy. This is because our ontological understanding and interpretation of the world reasonably determine

> the type of solutions we are likely to proffer to issues of common interest. This is true concerning the way we do science, build society, and relate to our fellow human beings. When philosophy abdicates commitment to a general ontology, it risks losing its foundation, because it would have the outlook of a discipline without a clear-cut subject matter (Asouzu, 2007: 17).

This would defy the inherent character of the self-definition of philosophy which shapes and directs our world outlook.

Given the such general background, this section will now focus specifically on the explication of the concept of ontology as a background to understanding reality in Esan's thought. Here ontology is to be conceived and understood as the study of being and as that which underlies reality. Generally, beings have ontological status. To have ontological status is to belong to the ontological category; "it is to

state in what precise sense it is true to say that that thing *is*" (Halverson, 1967: 499). In the Esan worldview, realities are not ontologically distinct but synchronized. To be ontologically distinct means to belong to a different ontological category such that none is explainable in terms of the other.

Justina Ehiakhamen seems to allude to the above claim when she argues that "to be real for the Esan is to be fused to or entangled within a community of forces whether active or passive…. *Etin* or *ahu*, which... translates as "energy"..., is the primary principle that any being needed to partake of to exist in the Esan world of beings" (Ehiakhamen, 2014: 98). According to her, Esan metaphysics envelops

> all sorts of beings into its fold. Humans, lower animals, invisible but experienced forces, trees, stones, water bodies, and so on are all part of the Esan world of being because they in some form or the other emit or absorb energy or force…. Thus, in whatever realm of existence a being is found in Esan – visible or invisible – what remains common to all beings is that they possess force in one form or another (Ehiakhamen, 2014: 98).

Isaac Ukpokolo substantiates this claim by arguing that

> [i]n the conception of reality in indigenous Esan thought systems, there exists a duality of realms – material and immaterial, separable but not always separated. This duality constitutes a whole, a unity, or a one. Beings existing in these realms of the material and the immaterial are animated or vitalized by the ontological principle of "forces" called *ahu* or *orion* or *etin*. All these translate as "energy," "strength" or "power" (Ukpokolo, 2014: 93).

According to Ukpokolo (2014: 93), there is a network of relationships that exists among beings - living beings, spirits, including the dead or ancestors, and the community - through the category of forces. This

network of forces is sustained in a harmony. The harmony constitutes a whole reality or ontology. Any act performed generates or emits a quantum of energy. Acts that emit vice-carrying energy destabilize the order of reality by altering the state of equilibrium of the network of interactions among forces or beings. This results in a metaphysical dislocation and the consequent disharmony, which manifests in the physical life of the individual and his community. Evil, therefore, violates moral codes; it breaks the bond of integration of the self by corruption. It also breaks the order of the reality of forces. Evils that alter the harmony of forces can result in death. What this means is that evil is capable of bringing (and does bring) grave metaphysical injuries to the sinner and his community. This explains the connection between metaphysics and morality. Evil or wrongdoing disconnects the wrongdoer's moral state and his ontological state of being, as well as the collective sanctity of the existence of members of his society.

The metaphysical gravity of immoral acts and the gravity of the inevitable outcome of such acts make it imperative to urgently address them to restore harmony and order. In the belief and concrete practices of indigenous Esan people, this restoration procedure ranges from rituals and sacrifices to sanctions. Once the individual atones for the injury done, not only that he is restored to harmony with reality (Ukpokolo, 2014: 94), but his community or affected members of his society are also restored from the dislocation due to his sin. The fact that the evil act of an individual does have negative consequences on other people, the community, and other non-human beings or realities suggests that there is an ontological connection among beings. As the human being can influence other beings, including the natural environment with his actions, so the natural environment can influence his beliefs and actions. Put simply, there is a bidirectional influence between the human being and his environment.

Environmental Possibilism And Environmental Determinism

Although man can, and had in fact, significantly alter his natural environment to meet his needs, there are times when the natural

environment of a place determines the belief system and the life pattern of the people living in such a place. Whereas the control of man by the environment is referred to as *Environmental Determinism*, the influence or control of the environment by man is referred to as *Environmental Possibilism* or *Environmental Positivism* (Maduka, 1994: 202-203; Iboaya, 2018: 1; Iboaya, 1990). Although the focus here is on how geography determines Esan ontology, it is pertinent to reiterate that geographical factors, that is, the natural environment in a geographical place such as vegetation, topography, weather, climate, river, desert, and so on, can also influence or determine the material lives of the people who inhabit such place - their ways of life, socio-economic activities, socio-cultural organisations, their material culture, tradition, settlement pattern, marriage, festivals, as well as their building, dietary and dressing patterns, and their understanding of realities generally (Ahianba, 2013: 11-12, 16, 31). For instance, while cold regions would require that the inhabitants of such regions put on thick clothes such as cotton or wool to keep them warm; the hot weather in a place would determine that the people living in such places put on the light, silky clothes to avoid excessive heat and all its inconveniences. It is in the same way the environment can determine peoples' various ontological beliefs about religion, including the kind of gods they worship, (sacred activities), marriage, aesthetic values, as well as the power or forces inherent in nature. It also informs other beliefs about the environment as the abode and passage of the divinities, objects of animation, totem, and so on. These eventually serve as guides and as ways of life for the people; in other words, they inform their concrete practices. From the foregoing, it is evident that the natural environment of a place can shape and direct the worldview of people living in such a place, including their philosophy.

Linking Geography With Philosophy

This section reflects on how philosophical ideas are generated from different geographical places. In other words, it is an attempt to locate a point of intersection between geographical places and philosophical thinking. Bruce Janz (2017: 155-156) would want us to see philosophy's

engagement with its geography with specific reference to African philosophy. He argues that African philosophy has a relationship to geography, place, and space. Among others, he reflects on how philosophy differs in different places, and how African philosophy has reflected on its places. He argues that geography is not just about land or location on a map. It is about what happens and can happen on that land, how thought emerges and forms concerning issues such as location, migration, narratives from the place, and the specific traditions of thought which have emerged to create and activate concepts that are adequate to a place. Thus, the engagement of philosophy with geography can offer fertile soil for thoughts. This partly implies that places can inform how thought becomes instantiated, encoded, and practiced in space along with how materiality, institutional structures, and social and cultural influence, serve to define the paths and limits of thought in places (Janz, 2017: 161). He avers that one of the ways African philosophy has reflected on its places, both in a physical and intellectual sense is that it shows "…. some interest in the natural environment in Africa" (Janz, 2017: 161-162).

What the preceding argument partly indicates is that the geographical environment of a place can be a source of philosophizing. The natural environment of a place can generate some outlooks, which can stimulate the people of such a place into philosophical reflections. This can result in the creation and evolution of concepts to capture the ensuing beliefs and influence the concrete practices of the people. This simply means that the natural environment of a place can be a source of wonders and its aftermath curiosity, reflection, and the resultant philosophical worldview.

Joseph Omoregbe argues that it is through the wonder that men begin and originally began to philosophize. This wonder may result from the environment or inner experience. Plato and Aristotle are also of the view that wonder is the beginning of philosophizing. Plato echoes this view in The *Republic* when he states that "there is no other beginning of philosophy than this "wonder" that accompanies man's experimental

contact with himself or the world around him. This wonder gives rise to some fundamental questions...." When he "begins to reflect on these fundamental questions in search of answers..." he "is philosophizing...." This presupposes that the human experience of himself or his experience of the world around him is the source of the reflective activity known as philosophy (Omoregbe, 1985: 1). Similarly, Isaac Asimov (1965: v-vi, 3-5, 12) argues that man has the curiosity to know the laws that govern the ceaseless, consistent pattern of the heavenly bodies, the ultimate particles with which the universe is constituted and their source. He would also want to know whether life exists elsewhere in the universe, outside the planet earth. These are some of the many issues, which man in his insatiable curiosity, raises about himself and the universe in which he lives, and which he attempts to probe into. S.H. Mellone seems to corroborate this view (on wonder, curiosity, reflection, and philosophical knowledge) when he argues that

> [t]he curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought, and is eager for a new and varied experience. It carries us far beyond what the practical situations or difficulties of life demand. Curiosity at length becomes *wonder*... Curiosity becomes intellectual when it takes the form of purposive and systematic interest in *questions* or *problems* set by the observation of things and the accumulation of experience. To the alert and open mind, nature and social experience are full of varied challenges to *inquire further* (Mellone, 1954: 191-192).

The foregoing arguments also indicate that environment can inflame a kind of philosophizing, and this authenticates the vision of this work that the environment of Esan place determines the worldviews of the Esan people including their ontology.

The Geographical Determinants Of Esan Ontology

As indicated already, the natural environment can shape, determine or influence world outlooks. Specifically, this section attempts to x-ray

how geography imparts on ontology, with maximum attention on Esan ontology. The intention here is not to argue for a peculiar ontology of Esan people, but to make evident how the palatial geography, that is, the natural environment of Esan place, influences the ontology of Esan people. Since the natural environment of a place can determine the worldview of the people living in such a geographical location, it can, as a necessity, also influence their ontology, culture, tradition, religion, as well as occupation, and other economic activities. Such an environment constitutes, delimits, or creates the universe of discourse of such people, particularly the traditional people, *ceteris paribus*. In addition, it can also determine the people's linguistic universe. For example, the natural features available to the people in a place constitute the world they know and interact with and the world they capture with indigenous language. Although these parts they know are not all there is in the universe since they do not know those other parts, they do not constitute the parts of the world they interact with, nor do they influence their ontology and purposive and purposeful activities. For instance, those in forest regions are acquainted with vegetation, timbers, animal and plant species that are found in that region, and the kind of existent weather and climate amenable to their survival or thriving; just as something else could be for those living in mountainous, riverine, desert, and savannah regions. These features influence the ontology of the inhabitants of such regions, and their aftermath beliefs about the world, as well as their way of life, their conception of the universe, the part of nature to reverence, and what they do for a living. While some people may know the energy preserved or inherent in parts of nature available to them, that is, the parts of nature, which they know, they may not in any way, even imaginatively be aware of those elsewhere, which they never thought to exist or which are outside their universe of discourse. Hence it is only the beings in the part of the universe they are acquainted with, that can constitute their totems, objects of animation, the structure of being, objects of reverence, and objects to be used for worship and appeasement to divine beings. It is also only such beings that can constitute objects suitable and acceptable for different ceremonies such as marriage, burial, naming,

and initiation festivals, and also acceptable to the respective forces or beings in charge to ensure the efficacy of the engaging activities. Very importantly, it is only within such existent reality or universe of discourse their language can capture regarding nature. In this sense, their environment can determine their scope of language (their linguistic universe), just as it can determine their universe of discourse. It is necessary to reiterate for the sake of clarity for the immediate purpose here that since Esan land is essentially a plateau with fertile soil for both food and cash crops, the people are mainly farmers, especially at the subsistence level. It has few rivers in some places; while in some other places, rivers are absent. Mountains and igneous rocks are visibly absent, while valleys and hills are relatively small. Such an environment, undoubtedly, affects their general worldviews, including their informed ontological beliefs, practices, and religious life. For example, since mountains are absent, there are no gods that pertain to mountains; but there are gods of rivers, fertility, earth, iron, thunder, and so on, connected to agriculture and its associated professions. This suggests that the kinds of gods they have and worship are reflections of their environment. In this way, it can be affirmed that geography affects the religious practice of the Esan people. This signifies some religious infusion with Esan ontology.

The position of Christopher Okojie supports the claim that the geographical location of the Esan people influences their cosmological and ontological perception of the universe. Okojie argues that geography and environment partly decide the types of gods the people worship. He submits that

> [i]n Esan, with no hills and stones, there were no gods of mountains or rocks. Uromi for instance, which had no water other than intermittent ponds, knew no river gods; the scarcity of water particularly on the Esan Plateau, gave extra importance to comparatively small sources of water. For example, Irrua had *obienmen* – the goddess of the lake... What was strictly forbidden for this goddess was sexual relations during daylight. Emu had, like

> Ohordua, *ilaa*, while Ugboha worshipped the goddess of *oha* and Ewohimi paid yearly respect to *odu*. Ewu had *omobo*. As could be seen these districts that worshipped rivers are outside the water-less plateau (Okojie, 1994: 219-220).

Since Esan is also an agrarian region, it becomes inevitable to have gods or goddesses connected to agriculture and its accompaniments. Hence, there are among the people, a plethora of gods, such as gods of the earth (*iyan-oto*), fertility, and tree. There are also the gods of thunder (*isango*), winds and storms (*eziza*), iron (*Ogun* or *idigun*), and so on. These gods and goddesses are worshipped through various natural objects that can be infused with spirituality by incantation or other means, partly to make them acceptable for the purposes and to the divinity they are intended. From its available vegetation, some parts of nature such as *ukhinmin, ekhimin, aghenmen, akuobisi* and *unoko* plants, and so on, are believed to be charged with power or independent energy. For instance, while *ukhinmin* has the ontological significance of sealing pacts, *akuobisi* has the power to arrest thunder. Some animals and even plants are totems, some with covenant pacts with humans, communities, and divinities. These explain the inseparableness of divinities from the environment, and *vice versa,* in Esan ontology. Humans recognize this presence and inseparability, and the objects of the natural environment in consequence become the medium that intersects the relationship between man and divinities. He also employs their powers for his well-being while recognizing that their powers could exceed his power. These explain the fact that there is an ontological connection between divinities, humans, and the environment.

According to Joseph Ahianba, "Esan as part of tropical Africa is very rich in sacred ceremonial and communal activities,... most of them do not have buildings specifically built for them" (Ahianba, 2013: 12). One of the reasons is that since the location has very warm weather and rain is predictable, many activities can take place in the open space. Ahianba thus avers that indigenous African religions in most cases do not

require specialized buildings for worship. "Where there are religious buildings such as shrines, they are usually small in scale and... unit space. There are some others owned by communities that need buildings to accommodate them and the citizens are by tradition compelled to settle close to them" (Ahianba, 2013: 10-11, 13). These shrines, built or unbuilt, are made and decorated with local materials available in her environment, some of which in the belief of the people, may enhance prayers and worship or make them more efficacious.

The preceding depicts the architectural, and to some extent, the demographic elements of religion, and thus ontology in Esan land. It reveals that the natural features, that is, the contents of the natural environment of a place, (including that of the Esan place and people), can influence the architectural elements of the indigenous religion of such place and the pattern of settlement of people present in such place. The raw materials available in their geographical environment or their finished products are used for construction, - roofing, and as the permanent or lasting contents of their shrines. They are also used to decorate shrines and as a medium of worship. Such raw materials and other elements derived from them include clay, bamboo, thatch, neuboda, animal parts such as skulls and skin, live tortoise, iron, cowries, maracas, drums, beads, and so on. Sometimes they are drawn on or engraved on the wall of the shrines for aesthetic purposes, such as beauty and symbols. These are possible only to the extent the geographical place of the people permits.

Esan people "believe in supernatural forces and try to device some ways of contacting them" (Ahianba, 2013: 18). The people's beliefs in these supernatural forces and the means with which they reach them are also influenced by the natural environment. The resources and the weather condition available in the region determine how their shrines are built and the materials used to build them, as well as the resources used to reach the ancestors and deities. Since the agrarian environment (with favorable weather, soil, rainfall, sunshine, and so on) permits the growth of some food items, such as rice, maize, yam, palm oil, kola nut,

and so on, and since animals such as goats, sheep, dogs, rabbits, tortoise, and so on, can be reared, grow and survive in the region, these living objects of nature (or their processed forms) are used to reach the supernatural. Non-animate things such as white clay and cowries are also fundamental in this regard. Local gin, palm wine, and products of other agricultural accompaniments, such as cottage industries and commerce, associated with agriculture, like pieces of clothes, particularly red or white, local knife (*elo* or *ukpelo*), and condemned iron (particularly cutlasses) are also objects found in shrines, used to evoke, invoke and reach deities and ancestors.

Some Ethical Imports

The interface between Esan geography and ontology has some implications for environmental ethics. Etymologically, geography can be defined as the description of the earth. While geography studies the interrelationship between man and his environment, environmental ethics studies human moral relations with the natural environment; it considers the extension of morality from human beings to the non-human aspects of the natural environment and the justifications of such extension. The geography of Esan land does not only influence the ontology of Esan people; it also, among others, concretely influences and enriches the people's religion, socio-cultural and political lives, the pattern of settlements, as well as the architectural character of residences, whether for human habitations or shrines. This connectedness partly imposes a kind of moral obligation to protect and respect the environment, for it is not only connected with man, but also with supernatural beings, and serves as a medium with which humans can reach them. If the environment or parts thereof are destroyed or carelessly used, abused, and misused, people may not only find it difficult or impossible to see these items which help to organise their socio-cultural and spiritual life. They may also be offending the supernatural beings that are reached through them, and that may use them as their passageway, temporal or permanent abode, and as objects of incarnation or animation. This implies that the environment is not meant only for human utility, and so, its moral consideration is not, and

should not be anthropocentric. This requires that we treat the natural environment with care not merely for human interests, but for its own sake, the sake of other beings, or at least for enlightened self-interest.

Also important is the fact that nature is the source of human livelihood and well-being: food, healthy living, treatment of diseases, rectifications of some human defects, and so on. If the environment is mismanaged, humans would lose the benefits which accrue from it and deprive future generations of these benefits, as well as many other benefits that would have been discovered or invented through research investigations, including cross-breeding. The awareness of this would encourage human careful use of nature at least, for its sustainability for these purposes. If we believe that the environment is for common good, and are committed to this belief, we will neither destroy it nor exploit it for selfish interest. Rather, we will take care of it for its own sake and the sake of others co-users and co-inhabitants of the earth.

In Esan's worldview, the natural environment, or at least, some of its parts, has some ontological significance, which human beings do not have; and perform some independent functions for the well-being of beings. The people believed that some specific parts of nature such as plants, rivers breeze, soil, space, sun, rain, particular time or season, and so on, have some powers that can be tapped or manipulated solely or in combination either for harm or good, vengeance, redress, appreciation; to establish, seal or validate pacts, and they continue to exploit them for their benefit. This suggests that they have independent energy, which can impel a kind of moral obligation to respectfully treat the environment. In other words, the belief that some parts of nature are charged with independent energy partly compels the moral duty of the people to care for them and reverence them. The affinities between the human being and the natural environment in Esan ontology discourage the conception of nature merely on instrumental grounds, encourage a moral relation with nature, and propel the obligation to protect it for its own sake. Such affinities include complementarity, interdependency, and relatedness among beings. This can encourage moral concern and

the eventual attribution of moral status to nature, or to at least, some parts of it, and the conception of nature as a possessor of intrinsic value.

The capacity and relevance of some parts of nature in influencing concrete human actions is not a mere figment of imagination. For instance, the architectural elements of religion, which ensue from Esan place, and which inform and colorize a kind of trade-religious worship are fundamentally informed by the geographical features of the natural environment of the people. Since metaphysics suffuses the Esan existential situations, it is, in a way connected with aesthetics in the Esan worldview. The aesthetic conception of nature can induce an obligation to preserve and protect the natural environment. From the Esan metaphysical worldview, aesthetic connections with ontology influence the socio-economic, spiritual, and moral life of people, just like the connectedness among environment, ontology, and humans. Such interfaces warrant human moral (pre)disposition and obligation to the natural environment as sources of sustenance and well-being, for its inherent worth, and then promote harmony of the totality of reality.

Conclusion

This study focuses on how geography imparts ontology. It is evident in the study that although man at times alters his environment to meet his needs, at other times, the environment dictates the beliefs and the pattern of life of people. The primary preoccupation in this inquiry is the projection of how geography determines ontology. The argument has been that the geographical elements (that is, the natural environment) of a place can influence the metaphysical outlook of the people living in that geographical location. The study attempted to establish these with specific attention to Esan place and people, but without indulging in any claim to peculiarity.

The study also analyses how some parts of nature influence concrete human actions. The natural environment can decide the way of life of a people such as their building pattern, occupation, social life, the type of food they eat, the type of clothes they wear, their worldviews, belief

systems, and their ontology. For traditional people, it can, and had determined their religion, the kind of gods they worship, and the mode of this worship. Some parts of nature are believed to possess independent energy. In *a résumé*, this study analyses the influence of the natural environment on the metaphysical worldviews of the Esan people and the kind of moral obligation that can arise from such an interface.

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