



SUICIDE: AN IGWEBUIKE PERSPECTIVE



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Abstract

Suicide is an act of the will. It is a despairing of life. Throughout history, suicide has evoked a wide range of reactions like bafflement, anger, sympathy, confusion and concern. Suicide has always been a philosophical problem. This paper looks at the problem of suicide from the lens of Igwebuike philosophy. Igwebuike philosophy is an African philosophy which stresses on the values of interconnectedness, interrelatedness, shared humanity and complementarity as important in the worldview of an African. This piece, therefore, looks at the philosophical problem of suicide from an Igwebuike perspective and gives an African answer to the following questions: Does a person have a right to take his or her own life? Is taking your own life a responsible thing to do? Does life have meaning? Are there things that can give life meaning? In the course of this research, the phenomenological and hermeneutical methods of inquiry were employed. The paper submits that suicide,

viewed from the lens of Igwebuiké philosophy is incompatible with the African worldview of life.

Keywords: Igwebuiké, Suicide, Philosophy, Ethics, Shared Humanity, Complementarity, Interrelatedness, Interconnectedness

Introduction

As far back as the time of the ancient Roman republic, Faustina the wife of the Roman Consul Marcus Aurelius drank a cup of wine laced with poison to escape the consequence of her infidelity and betrayal act with the then governor of Egypt, Cassius, the second most powerful man in the Roman republic. Her action brought about a civil war and she saw suicide as the best way to deal with her problem. Over the years, many people have resorted to suicide as a final statement of their lack of will to live.

Suicide is an act of the will. For a person to choose to take his or her own life raises certain moral questions: does a person really have a right to take his or her own life? Is taking your own life a responsible thing to do? Does life have meaning? Are there things that can give life meaning?

The purpose of this assignment is to look at the question of suicide from the lens of Igwebuiké ethics and to present an African perception of suicide and indeed the meaning of life.

Life As The Most Important Question In Philosophy

Perhaps the most important question in philosophy is the question Does life have meaning? The philosopher and novelist Albert Camus, in fact, argued that it is the only important philosophical question:

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy (Camus, 1955).

People often ask about the meaning of life when death enters their lives: either the death of someone they love or their own imminent death. Death brings everything we are or ever hoped to be to a complete end. What's the point of all our striving, then? The shortness of human life, the insignificance of human life in the face of the great immensity and eternity of the universe, the apparent unconcern and uncaring impersonal coldness of the universe-all these factors can lead people to question whether human life in general, and their life in particular, have any meaning in the face of death.

But for many people, the question of whether life has any meaning arises even when death is not near. Many people seem to reach to a point in their lives when things seem to have no value, when the things they have spent their lives chasing begin to seem pointless, and they feel like Shakespeare's Macbeth when his wife committed suicide and he was imagining what his future would be like. Life for him seemed meaningless

and he said:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Macbeth, Act V, Scene
5, 1623)

The despair that gripped Macbeth is the despair that comes when a person becomes convinced that life is pointless and has no meaning. Perhaps no one has written of such despair more poignantly than the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who felt that life for him- one of the world's most accomplished and acclaimed writers- no longer had meaning. Previously, his family and his writing had sustained him. In his love for family he had found 'the only truth,' and in poetry and art he had found 'reflections of life' that had sustained him. But now that he realized he no longer knew the meaning of life- perhaps had never known it- neither his art nor his family sustained him. Finding no meaning to express in art, he stopped writing and fell into a deep depression (Tolstoy, 2017).

Here we need to note that Tolstoy's need to find meaning in life is a need that all of us have. Events force almost all of us to ask eventually whether the things we have devoted our lives to achieving have any real meaning. This is the question that first brings many to philosophy, and it is the question that we now discuss. Our discussion will be about what the African

philosophy of Igwebuike says about the meaning of life, its perspective on suicide, and if there is a moral justification for suicide.

Suicide

With the rise of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology around 1900, suicide has been more commonly seen as a medical or public health problem. Nevertheless, philosophers have shown interest in conceptual, moral, and psychological questions related to self-killing for thousands of years, and there remain a number of questions regarding suicide that are undeniably philosophical in nature. The central questions addressed in the philosophical literature include the definition of suicide, its moral status, the possibility of its rationality, the nature of suicidal motivation, our moral duties toward the suicidal, and the relation of suicide to life's meaningfulness. Debates about the nature and morality of suicide were reinvigorated in the late 1900s, in no small measure because of shifts in how death occurs in today's industrialized societies. Individuals now are more likely to be afflicted with chronic and degenerative diseases, and thanks to advanced medical technologies, it is now possible to delay death nearly indefinitely. These facts have helped to stimulate an extensive contemporary philosophical literature regarding individuals' right to suicide, as well as reconsideration of the question of whether individuals may have a "duty to die" and our duties toward the suicidal. (Michael, 2010)

Although self-killing is commonly considered to be a form of suicide, the breadth of motivations and behaviors that the term encompasses may not be adequately captured by this definition alone.

Defining Suicide

A more recent definition of suicide includes the non-accidental outcome of a deliberate decision to end one's life. Importantly, suicide must not be accidental; for example, if a person has suicidal thoughts (suicidal ideation), plans to kill themselves in the future (suicidal intent), and is then unintentionally run over by a car while crossing the street, we do not consider this to be suicide. A person must create a particular plan to die by a specific means (suicidal planning) and then really carry out that plan in order for suicide to be the direct result of the prior decision to die. Death need not be caused directly, i.e., a person need not be the physical cause of their own demise. For instance, we would still consider it suicide if the governor of a state decided to demolish a residential building for redevelopment and one of the residents, who was fully aware of the approaching bulldozers, chose to stay in her room. Also, Socrates' death would be seen as a suicide in accordance with this contemporary definition because he made it obvious that he intended to die, drank the hemlock willingly (knowing that it would kill him), and died as a result (Frey, 1978, 106). Although one could argue that in the *Apology*, Socrates purposefully provokes the jury so that they pass a death sentence, it

makes little difference that the original plan to kill Socrates originated from the Athenian court because Socrates' eagerness to comply with this sentence, despite other options being readily available, is still his own (Eckstein, 1981, 48; Ahrens Dorf, 1995, 29).

Highlights Of Historical Western Thought On Suicide

Suicide has been a topic of philosophical discussion in the West at least since the time of Plato. Even though the majority of the ancient city-states outlawed self-immolation, as John Cooper has highlighted (Cooper 1989, 10), neither ancient Greek nor Latin had a single word that accurately translated our modern term suicide.

1.1 Ancient and Classical Views of Suicide

Plato explicitly discussed suicide in two works. First, in *Phaedo*, Socrates expresses guarded enthusiasm for the thesis, associated with the Pythagoreans, that suicide is always wrong because it represents our releasing ourselves (i.e., our souls) from a “guard-post” (i.e., our bodies) the gods have placed us in as a form of punishment (*Phaedo* 61b-62c). Later, in the *Laws*, Plato claimed that suicide is disgraceful and its perpetrators should be buried in unmarked graves. However, Plato recognized four exceptions to this principle: (1) when one's mind is morally corrupted and one's character can therefore not be salvaged (*Laws* IX 854a 3–5), (2) when the self-killing is done by judicial order, as in the case of Socrates, (3) when the self-killing is compelled by extreme and unavoidable personal misfortune, and (4)

when the self-killing results from shame at having participated in grossly unjust actions (*Laws* IX 873c-d). Suicide under these circumstances can be excused, but, according to Plato, it is otherwise an act of cowardice or laziness undertaken by individuals too delicate to manage life's vicissitudes.

Aristotle's only discussion of suicide (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1138 5–14) occurs in the midst of a discussion of the possibility of treating oneself unjustly. Aristotle concludes that self-killing does not treat oneself unjustly so long as it is done voluntarily because the harm done to oneself is consensual. He concludes that suicide is somehow a wrong to the state or the community, though he does not outline the nature of this wrong or the specific vices that suicidal individuals allegedly exhibit.

To contemporary readers, the most striking feature of Plato's and Aristotle's texts on suicide is their relative absence of concern for individual well-being or rights. Both limit the justifications for suicide largely to considerations about an individual's social roles and obligations. In contrast, the Stoics held that whenever the means to living a naturally flourishing life are not available to us, suicide may be justified, regardless of the character or virtue of the individual in question. Our natures require certain “natural advantages” (e.g., physical health) in order for us to be happy, and a wise person who recognizes that such advantages may be lacking in his life sees that ending his life neither enhances nor diminishes his moral virtue.

When a man's circumstances contain a preponderance of things in accordance with nature, it is appropriate for him to remain alive; when he possesses or sees in prospect a majority of the contrary things, it is appropriate for him to depart from life.... Even for the foolish, who are also miserable, it is appropriate for them to remain alive if they possess a predominance of those things which we pronounce to be in accordance with nature (Cicero, III, 60–61).

Hence, not only may concerns related to one's obligations to others justify suicide, but one's own private good is relevant too. The Roman Stoic Seneca, who was himself compelled to engage in suicide, was even bolder, claiming that since “mere living is not a good, but living well”, a wise person “lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can.” For Seneca, it is the quality, not the quantity, of one's life that matters.

1.2 The Christian Prohibition

The advent of institutional Christianity was perhaps the most important event in the philosophical history of suicide, for Christian doctrine has by and large held that suicide is morally wrong, despite the absence of clear Scriptural guidance regarding suicide. Although the early church fathers opposed suicide, St. Augustine is generally credited with offering the first justification of the Christian prohibition on suicide (Amundsen 1989). He saw the prohibition as a natural extension of the fifth commandment:

God's command 'Thou shalt not kill,' is to be taken as

forbidding self-destruction, especially as it does not add 'thy neighbor', as it does when it forbids false witness, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' (Augustine, book I, chapter 20). Suicide, Augustine determined, was an unrepentable sin.

St. Thomas Aquinas later defended this prohibition on three grounds. (1) Suicide is contrary to natural self-love, whose aim is to preserve us. (2) Suicide injures the community of which an individual is a part. (3) Suicide violates our duty to God because God has given us life as a gift and in taking our lives we violate His right to determine the duration of our earthly existence (Aquinas 1271, part II, Q64, A5). This conclusion was codified in the medieval doctrine that suicide nullified human beings' relationship to God, for our control over our body was limited to *usus* (possession, employment) where God retained *dominium* (dominion, authority). Law and popular practice in the Middle Ages sanctioned the desecration of the suicidal corpse, along with confiscation of the individual's property and denial of Christian burial.

The rediscovery of numerous texts of classical antiquity was one of the spurs of the Renaissance, but for the most part, Renaissance intellectuals generally affirmed the Church's opposition to suicide and were not sympathetic to the more permissive attitudes toward suicide found among the ancient pagans. Two intriguing sixteenth century exceptions were Thomas More and Michel de Montaigne. In his *Utopia*, Moore appears to recommend voluntary suicide for those

suffering from painful and incurable diseases, though the satirical and fantastical tone of that work makes it doubtful that More supported this proposal in reality. In his *Essays*, Montaigne relates several anecdotes of individuals taking their own lives and intersperses these anecdotes with quotations from Roman writers praising suicide. While his general skepticism prevented Montaigne from staking out a firm moral position on suicide, he gives only a nod to the orthodox Christian position and conceptualizes the issue not in traditional theological terms but as a matter of personal judgment or conscience (Minois 1999, 89–92).

The Protestant Reformers, including Calvin, condemned suicide as roundly as did the established Church, but held out the possibility of God treating suicide mercifully and permitting repentance. Interest in moral questions concerning suicide was particularly strong in this period among England's Protestants, notably the Puritans. Nonetheless, the traditional Christian view prevailed well into the late seventeenth century, where even an otherwise liberal thinker such as John Locke echoed earlier Thomistic arguments, claiming that though God bestowed upon us our natural personal liberty, that liberty does not include the liberty to destroy oneself (Locke, 1690, ch. 2, para.6).

In all likelihood, the first comprehensive modern defense of suicide was John Donne's *Biathanatos* (1608) not intended for publication, *Biathanatos* drew upon an array of classical and modern legal and

theological sources to argue that Christian doctrine should not hold that suicide is necessarily sinful. His critique is in effect internal, drawing upon the logic of Christian thought itself to suggest that suicide is not contrary to the laws of nature, of reason, or of God. Were it contrary to the law of nature mandating self-preservation, all acts of self-denial or privation would be similarly unlawful. Moreover, there may be circumstances in which reason might recommend suicide. Finally, Donne observes, not only does Biblical Scripture lack a clear condemnation of suicide, Christian doctrine has permitted other forms of killing such as martyrdom, capital punishment and killing in wartime (Minois 1999, 20–21).

1.3 The Enlightenment and Modern Developments

The Thomistic natural-law stance on suicide came under increasing attack as suicide was examined through the lens of science and psychology. Where Christian theology has understood suicide as “an affair between the devil and the individual sinner” (Minois 1999, 300), Enlightenment philosophers tended to conceive of suicide in secular terms, as resulting from facts about individuals, their natural psychologies, and their particular social settings. David Hume gave voice to this new approach with a direct assault on the Thomistic position in his essay “Of suicide” (1783). Hume saw traditional attitudes toward suicide as muddled and superstitious, rooted in confused understandings of God's relation to the created human

world. (Lecaldano 2016) According to the Thomistic argument, suicide violates the order God established for the world and usurps God's prerogative in determining when we shall die. Hume's argument against this thesis is intricate but rests on the following considerations:

1. If by the 'divine order' is meant the causal laws created by God, then it would always be wrong to contravene these laws for the sake of our own happiness. But clearly it is not wrong, since God frequently permits us to contravene these laws, for he does not expect us not to respond to disease or other calamities. Therefore, there is not apparent justification, as Hume put it, for God's permitting us to disturb nature in some circumstances but not in others. Just as God permits us to divert rivers for irrigation, so too ought he permit us to divert blood from our veins.
2. If by 'divine order' is meant the natural laws God has willed for us, which are (a) discerned by reason, (b) such that adherence to them will produce our happiness, then why should not suicide conform to such laws when it appears rational to us that the balance of our happiness is best served by dying?
3. Finally, if by 'divine order' is meant simply that which occurs according to God's consent, then God appears to consent to *all* our actions (since

an omnipotent God can presumably intervene in our acts at any point) and no distinction exists between those of our actions to which God consents and those to which He does not. If God has placed us upon the Earth like a “sentinel,” then our choosing to leave this post and take our lives occurs as much with his cooperation as with any other act we perform. (Lecaldano, 2016)

Furthermore, suicide does not necessarily violate any duties toward other people, according to Hume. Reciprocity may require that we benefit society in exchange for the benefits it provides, but surely such reciprocity reaches its limit when by living we provide only a “frivolous advantage” to society at the expense of significant harm or suffering for ourselves. In more extreme situations, we are actually burdens to others, in which case our deaths are not only “innocent, but laudable.”

Finally, Hume rejects the thesis that suicide violates our duties to self. Sickness, old age, and other misfortunes can make life sufficiently miserable that continued existence is worse than death. As to worries that people are likely to attempt to take their lives capriciously, Hume replies that our natural fear of death ensures that only after careful deliberation and assessment of our future prospects will we have the courage and clarity of mind to kill ourselves. In the end, Hume concludes that suicide “may be free of imputation of guilt and blame.” His position is largely

utilitarian, allied with a strong presumption of personal liberty.

But Enlightenment philosophy was not univocal in its comparatively permissive attitudes toward suicide. The most noteworthy opponent of suicide in this period was Immanuel Kant. Kant's arguments, though they reflect earlier natural law arguments, draw upon his view of moral worth as emanating from the autonomous rational wills of individuals (Cholbi, 2010). For Kant, our rational wills are the source of our moral duty, and it is therefore a kind of practical contradiction to suppose that the same will can permissibly destroy the very body that carries out its volitions and choices. Given the distinctive worth of an autonomous rational will, suicide is an attack on the very source of moral authority.

To annihilate the subject of morality in one's person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world as far as one can, even though morality is an end in itself. Consequently, disposing of oneself as a mere means to some discretionary end is debasing humanity in one's person... (Kant, 423)

Suicide continued to be an important topic in post-Kantian German philosophy. Like Hume, Arthur Schopenhauer rejected virtually all moral arguments for the moral objectionability of suicide. Surprisingly though, Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophical outlook nevertheless led him to condemn suicide. The desire to end our lives, according to Schopenhauer, arises from our will's unceasing but ultimately futile

pursuit of our desires. Hence, rather than denying this striving or extricating us from the fundamental predicament of human existence, suicide ends up affirming this striving and so represents a misguided grasp at freedom. Friedrich Nietzsche, in contrast, shared Schopenhauer's rejection of pious moralizing about suicide and his belief in the striving of the will, but concluded that suicide is at least sometimes rational. For Nietzsche, suicide can be a praiseworthy assertion of one's will, a way to lend one's individual life meaning in an otherwise meaningless world. (Nietzsche, 1883)

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also brought several developments that, while not explicitly philosophical, have shaped philosophical thought about suicide. The first was the emergence, in novels by Rousseau, Goethe, and Flaubert, of a Romantic idealized 'script' for suicide, according to which suicide was the inevitable response of a misunderstood and anguished soul jilted by love or shunned by society (Lieberman, 2003). The second was the emergence of psychiatry as an autonomous discipline, populated by experts asserting their ability to diagnose and treat melancholy, hysteria and other ailments sometimes thought responsible for suicide. Lastly, largely thanks to the work of sociologists such as Durkheim and Laplace, suicide was increasingly viewed as a social ill reflecting widespread alienation, anomie, and other attitudinal byproducts of modernity. In many European nations, the rise in suicide rates was thought to signal a cultural decline. These latter two developments made

suicide prevention a bureaucratic and medical preoccupation, leading to a wave of institutionalization for suicidal persons. All three conspired to suggest that suicide is caused by impersonal social or psychological forces rather than by the agency of individuals.

Life In African Philosophy

In an article for the South African Journal of Philosophy, Thaddeus Metz who is of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Johannesburg wrote an article about the *African theories of meaning in Life*. In this article, he expounded on two theories of meaning in life informed by the indigenous sub-Saharan African philosophical tradition. According to one view, a life is more meaningful, the more it promotes community with other human persons. According to the other view, a life is more meaningful, the more it promotes vitality in oneself and others. For him, the vitality approach is more promising for it captures a wider array of intuitions about what confers meaning on a life. Since we are looking at an African Philosophy *Igwebuike* and its perspective on suicide, it will be good to at least have a bird's eye view of the theories of the meaning of life as held by the sub-saharan African philosophical tradition and see how they relate to the perspective of *Igwebuike* on the issue of suicide. It is important to note that when African philosophers have addressed meaning in life, they have tended to draw on three distinguishable intellectual sources, which are well-known for being prominent in the field much more

generally. They are, in catchwords, imperceptibility, vitality, and community. Let us now look at the various theories of life in Africa based on the three catchwords, imperceptibility, vitality and community.

Life as Imperceptible

Many African philosophers believe that there exists a realm of agents who in principle cannot be perceived through the senses, including God, ancestors, the “living-dead” (those whose bodies have recently died), and, then (with more variation depending on the particular culture) potentially also the not-yet-born and other “spirits” with greater powers than us but lesser powers than God. These persons are thought to be in constant interaction with human beings in the perceptible realm, and, indeed, at least ancestors and the living-dead are thought to continue to reside on Earth with us. It is common for African philosophers to maintain that God is the source of norms about how to live and that they can be conveyed to us principally by ancestors, who are in closer touch with God than we can be. And, then, in order for us to know the mind of ancestors, we must use a diviner specially trained in receiving messages from them through trances, dreams, signs from throwing bones, and the like. Some African philosophers have indeed conceived of meaning in life centrally in the light of such considerations (Makinde 1987; Balogun 2008; Igbofen 2017; Okolie 2019; cf. Wiredu 1992).

Life as Vitality

Traditionally, Vitality has been conceived as being an imperceptible energy that has come from God and that inheres in everything in the universe in varying degrees and complexities. It can be seen as a “liveliness”. This liveliness is often exhibited by humans and animals, but is lacking in rocks. Thus, when it comes to life's meaning, the prominent thought is that the more one promotes vitality, whether a divine vital-force or a physical liveliness, the greater the meaningfulness of one's life.

Harvey Sindima, a Malawian philosopher of religion, says of a sub-Saharan worldview, “the African world is concerned with fullness of life, since it is in its fullness that life's meaning is realized. Fullness of life is realized when human potential and possibilities are allowed to reach their maximum (1998, 544; 546–548).

Noah Dzobo (1992, 227, 230), a Ghanaian philosopher, is the most detailed about how vitality might be relevant to meaning in life: there is an urge or dynamic creative energy in life...which works towards wholeness and healing, towards building up and not pulling down... Our people therefore conceive human life as a force or power that continuously recreates itself and so is characterized by continuous change and growth which depends upon its own inner source of power... Since the essence of the ideal life is regarded as power and creativity, growth, creative work and

increase have become essential values. Powerlessness or loss of vitality, unproductive living, and growthlessness become ultimate evils in our indigenous culture. For many Africans one of man's chief ends... is to multiply and increase, because he is the repository of the life force... The second greatest end of man is to live productively, i.e. to work, because work is considered as the only way of realizing one's creative potential... Life becomes meaningful and worth living because of the dynamic creative energy that is lodged at the heart of human existence.

Simply put, the vitalist theory of meaning states that a human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she promotes liveliness in herself and others.

Life as community

The following passages express the view that communal relationship constitutes (and does not merely cause) meaning in life: Speaking of his Yoruba people in Nigeria, Segun Gbadegesin (1991, 58) remarks, the crown of personal life is to be useful to one's community. The meaning of one's life is therefore measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence. The question, "What is your existence for?" (Kíni o wà fún?) is not always posed. It is posed when a person has been judged to be useless to his/her community. It is therefore a challenge, a call to serve. It presupposes a conception of human existence which sees it as purposeful, and the purpose is to contribute to the totality of the good in the universe.

This is achieved by a life of selfless devotion and sacrifice to the communal welfare. Here selfishness and individualism are abhorred.

Monday Igbafen, taking a broader view of sub-Saharan cultures, speaks of “the general African belief that man is created for the purpose of fellowship and mutual help” (2017, 250), and there is, similarly, the Nigerian Igbo Philosopher Pantaleon Iroegbu's view that “the purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness” (2005, 442).

What precisely is involved in fostering community or living a communal existence? Gbadegesin appears to focus exclusively on promoting other people's good, particularly their well-being. However, while Nkondo, Igbafen, and Iroegbu do mention caring for others' quality of life under the headings of “commitment to others' good”, “help”, and “service”, they mention an additional, distinct way that meaning can come from relating to others. Specifically, they also consider experiencing one's life as bound up with one's community, fellowship, and belonging to be sources of meaning in life. These concepts suggest the importance of enjoying a sense of togetherness with others and participating with them on a trusting and voluntary basis, where sharing a life in these ways is plausibly part of what makes a family and collective labour meaningful. On the basis of these considerations, the communal theory of meaning, put simply, is this: a

human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she cares for others' quality of life and shares a way of life with them.

Furthermore, from our understanding of this African communal theory of meaning in life, we can say that things like, miserliness, solitary confinement, and suicide lack meaning plausibly because caring and sharing are absent; instead, there is indifference or isolation. (Metz, 2020)

***Igwebuike*: a Philosophical adventure**

The essence of *Igwebuike*

We begin our discussion on *Igwebuike* by noting that the word can be broken down into *Igwe bu ike*, which is both a common Igbo name and a proverb. *Igwebuike* is a compound word made up of three Igbo components. It can be written as either a word or a sentence, with the component words having some space independence. As a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*. As a sentence, it is written as *Igwe bu ike*. *Igwe* refers to number, this is a number of individuals with ontological identities and importance who are all connected by an existential order. *Bu*, which means is, is a verb. *Ike* is a term that denotes power or strength (Kanu 2016). *Igwebuike* signifies "number is strength" or "number is power" (Kanu 2017). *Igwebuike* also implies *otu obi* (one heart and one soul), or *cor unum et anima una*, in addition to its literal meaning.

Igwebuike, at a philosophical level offers an ontological worldview that shows being as having a relational

character of mutual relations. (Kanu 2016). It is metaphorically used to describe relational involvement in the world that is carried out in solidarity and complementarity, as well as the strong and unstoppable force therein (Kanu 2017). *Igwebuiké* closely resembles the English phrases complementarity, solidarity, and harmony.

Underlying Principles of *Igwebuiké*

At the core of *Igwebuiké* are its underlying principles, that is the framework that shapes *Igwebuiké*. These principles are the values on which *Igwebuiké* stands. While these principles guide *Igwebuiké*, they also justify *Igwebuiké*. These principles include:

- a. The Principle of Identity: this principle makes it clear that it is our uniqueness that makes it possible for us to have a meaningful complementarity. Our *Chi* is God's thumb print on us through which we relate to the world.
- b. The Principle of Hierarchy: this principle stresses that the classification of being is based on the variation of the degree of forces. God is at the top of the hierarchy of forces since He is the source of all power, hence those with more power come first in the hierarchy. A being's *Chi* defines its force and, hence, its position in the hierarchy of beings.
- c. The Principle of Contrariety: this principle presents the universe as made up of opposites. For instance, in the same universe, we find both

good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, hot and cold, wet and dry, love and hate, unity and diversity, short and long, substance and accidents, act and potency, fortune and misfortune, male and female. These are contraries to each other, and are indispensable realities of the universe (Kanu 2018). However, it is the *Chi* of a being that individuates it and thus makes it contrary to the other.

- d. The Principle of Unity: Even though there is contrariety in reality, there is a universal element. There is unity in the midst of diversity. *Igwebuike* sees every individual reality as a component of and the fulfillment of the whole (Kanu 2019). *Chi* is the foundation for both the individuation, identity, and contrariety of being, as well as the oneness of being. *Chi*, which is a "thumb print" of *Chukwu* in everything He has created, offers a foundation for communication and cooperation as well as for the unity of being. (Kanu, 2016).

***Igwebuike* ethical code of shared humanity**

Igwebuike stands out in the world of African ethics because it is a unique and all-encompassing concept that embodies the core of African moral life and philosophy. Regarding what defines right or wrong, good or bad character, the African people have strong views and concepts based on this particular ethical framework. It is firmly rooted in African moral

discourse, social organization, and lifestyle. *Igwebuike* ethics is based on the central principle of compassion, which is the ability to sense another person's suffering and act in their best interests. This concept is closely tied to the values of fairness, justice, reciprocity, and humanity, all of which promote social peace, community cohesiveness, and justice in African societies. *Igwebuike* ethics, in contrast to Western ethics, which tends to place greater emphasis on individual rights, places more focus on the connectivity and interrelatedness of human beings as well as the obligation we have to one another.

Igwebuike ethics offers a persuading and insightful perspective on the nature of morality and ethical behavior in all African communities. It acts as a reminder of the need of forging strong social bonds and relationships as well as of our intrinsic duty to watch out for one another and advance the common good. (Kanu, 2016).

***Igwebuike* Ethical Principles**

The *Igwebuike* ethical principles that are relevant for the evaluation of right and wrong include respect for persons, none-maleficence, and beneficence:

a. Respect for Persons

Igwebuike is fundamentally about respect for others. According to *Igwebuike*, the other individual is a part of the overall ontological system. Damage to another person is self-defeating, and one achieves self-

preservation by safeguarding others. It is also thought that God endowed humanity with the capacity for existence. Due to our relationship with God, humans are theomorphic beings.

b. Beneficence Principle

One of the main tenets of *Igwebuike* philosophy is the interdependence of beings, whereby the other is considered as an integral part of oneself. This point of view serves as the foundation for the ethical concept of beneficence, which is demonstrated by the philosophy's emphasis on respect for and love of others.

The interdependence of beings, whereby the other is seen as an essential component of oneself, is one of the central pillars of *Igwebuike* philosophy. The ethical principle of beneficence, which is shown in the philosophy's emphasis on respect for and love of others, is based on this viewpoint. Simply said, acts of charity, kindness, and active benevolence toward others are all examples of beneficence, which is the antithesis of maleficence. The other is fundamentally treated with love and respect since they are an essential part of the bigger whole, reflecting the underlying interdependence of all beings according to *Igwebuike* ethics.

c. Non-Maleficence Principle

Maleficence and none are the key terms in this sentence. Malice is the intentional wrongdoing or injury. It is the complete antithesis of goodness. The

phrase "non-maleficence" relates to not harming or creating harm to other people. According to Shannon (1993), "non-maleficence is a technical way of saying that we have an obligation not to harm people." One of the oldest technical maxims to come from the Hippocratic tradition is *primum non nocere*, which means "do no harm first." At the very least, we ought to refrain from injuring someone if we are unable to assist them (p. 6). The duty of non-maleficence includes not just banning physical injury to another person but also guarding against exposing people to harm. (Kanu, 2023).

Igwebuike Ethical Values

Igwebuike philosophy is based on the following values: human dignity, human equality and universal brotherhood/sisterhood.

Based on our connection to the divine, human life is worthy of respect. It is believed that God created life. The Igbo proverb "ndu sina chi" (life is from God) can be understood as meaning that the human being is a theomorphic being. People consider children to be gifts from God when they are born. Due to the fact that every kid has previously existed in a realm ruled by a Divine Master, the life of children cannot be solely attributed to the biological fact of conception. We find that *Igwebuike* emphasizes a metaphysical relationship in addition to ties among humans in her relationship with the divine.

The African conception of human equality is closely related to her belief that God is the father of all people. The emphasis on the concept of hierarchy in African ontology does not conflict with the idea of equality; equality is not placing everyone on the same level but giving everyone his due place. This sense of equality, accompanied by love, cooperation, and solidarity, is experienced and instilled first in the family.

In African ethics, the idea of brothers and sisterhood serves as a moral tenet that emphasizes how interconnected all people are. By virtue of their shared human nature, shared ancestry, and similar cultural heritage, this ethical paradigm holds that all people are brothers and sisters. In the African worldview, which acknowledges the interconnectedness of people in terms of language, race, culture, feelings, values, and historical experiences, the concept of global brotherhood and sisterhood has its roots. This comprehension of the human being as essentially interconnected with others develops a sense of kinship and community that goes beyond geographical or cultural barriers. The ultimate goal of the African ethical principle of brotherhood/sisterhood is to promote mutual regard, care, and concern for one another as members of the larger human family and to acknowledge our shared humanity. (Kanu, 2023).

The Igwebuike Ontological Foundation

According to African moral philosophy, ontology is the basis of objective moral law. This implies that what is considered good or bad is determined by reality itself. From a legal perspective, activities that are regarded to be ontologically good are seen as morally righteous and unjust, whereas those that are deemed to be ontologically evil are seen as morally wicked and unjust. For example, murder is considered as a plot against God, who is believed to have created and to be the protector of all life, and as an ontological sacrilege. As a result, it violates African ethical and legal values and is morally abhorrent.

Rejecting the ontological order is equivalent to rejecting African ethics and law because it is the basis of the social order. (Kanu, 2017).

***Igwebuike* Reciprocity Ethics**

This ethics of reciprocity can simply be put as doing to others what you would want done to you. This underscores a mutual obligation between myself and the other. We are all both bound to the duties of justice and to the benefits of it. (Kanu, 2023)

The thoughts of *Igwebuike* on human Happiness

According to the *Igwebuike* philosophy of happiness, we can only find satisfaction when we lead morally upstanding lives and refrain from leading lives that are not commensurate with our humanity. A hedonistic lifestyle that is unworthy of our humanity—one that

involves ritual killing, yahoo scamming, and prostitution—cannot bring us true happiness. A life of love, compassion, empathy, and the like, on the other hand, is more in sync with happiness. (Kanu, 2023)

The Foundation of Igwebuike Ethical Theory: Humanity

Igwebuike is built on the premise that people are inherently good. The Igbo word for a person is *Mmadu*, which has been variously translated as "there is beauty." By its very nature, beauty is seductive and pulls people to it. The notion that every individual is the pinnacle of beauty indicates that every individual attracts others to themselves and vice versa. What does this tell us about the humanity of man? The human person was created to relate. Being human means having the ability to relate. (Kanu, 2023).

Morality, human connection, and happiness

As much as connections serve to validate a person's existence, *Igwebuike* ethics also urges people to pursue happiness by acting morally, doing good deeds and abstaining from doing bad deeds. With the knowledge that while human virtues encourage fellowship, vices sabotage or undermine it, this is done. Every human being is obligated to act in a way that promotes the growth of the human community because *Igwebuike* ethics is founded on complementarity and shared humanity. It's important to always keep in mind that although vices that undermine fellowship steal

happiness, virtues that promote fellowship offer delight.

Because they are *mmadu* (beautiful inside), all people have the potential to be good from birth. However, in order to avoid acting against their better judgment out of a weak will, people must supplement this potential with knowledge of good and develop a strong will through persistent willingness to do good. This makes sure that everyone has a persistent tendency to act and feel morally upright. In this way, the human will is trained. (Kanu, 2023).

Using Igwebuike's Moral Calculus as an ethical guide

The goal of Igwebuike's moral calculus is to make it simple and unambiguous for people to reach moral conclusions. Therefore, according to Igwebuike ethical theory, a deed is ethically right if it: 1. promotes humanity; 2. promotes self-realization; 3. promotes the common good; 4. fosters human fellowship; and 5. values and honors connections.

According to the Igwebuike moral theory, a behavior is deemed immoral if it fails to advance any of the following: 1. humanness; 2. self-realization; 3. the common good; 4. inter-human fellowship; and 5. the value and honoring of relationships.

People who value interpersonal connections, humanity, self-realization, the greater good, and fraternity among other things lead honorable lives.

African ontology holds that one's network of relationships and solidarity with others in the pursuit of the good that is common to all are what give rise to one's dignity. No one achieved tremendous success in the traditional African societies because of what they were able to achieve for themselves, but rather because of what they were able to achieve for others. For no other reason than how skillfully they engaged with their communities or with others in the pursuit of the common good, some warriors, hunters, monarchs, priests, medicine men, and other personalities were referred to as men and women of dignity. Those who are dishonest, haughty, ill-willed, angry, corrupt, jealous, envious, and deceptive men and women lack dignity (Kanu, 2023).

An Igwebuike Ethical Perspective On Suicide

Igwebuike Philosophy as presented by Kanu “is anchored on the **African worldview**, which is characterized by a common origin, common worldview, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Life is a life of sharedness.” Thus, it pays attention to togetherness, collegiality, closeness and sharing. In its merit, it focuses on people, and that no member of the same group can exist or function well without support from others. It also gives encouragements to people to stay and work together in unity for progress. *Igwebuike* thus presents an ethics of shared humanity which is based on the values of

reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity, and these are all geared towards promoting social harmony, cooperative living, justice, and fairness in African societies. (Kanu, 2023). For a philosopher schooled in *Igwebuike* ethics, there is, in all its discussions on the morality of human actions or the norms of human behavior, a disposition towards the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of human beings, and our responsibility towards one another. In its ethical principles, there is respect for persons, beneficence and non-maleficence; thus human actions should encourage respect the other, should bring about good for the other and shouldn't in any way try to harm the other. This is because as human beings we all are interdependent and interconnected.

Looking at *Igwebuike* ethics from the perspective of its ethical values of human dignity, human equality and the universal brotherhood/sisterhood of man, we see that actions which belittle the sacredness of life, demean it or ignore our interconnectedness as human beings are antithetical to *Igwebuike* ethics.

Furthermore, *Igwebuike* ethics of reciprocity which speaks of doing to others what you would want done to yourself frowns at suicide for it is not a just and beneficial act.

Suicide is also not an action leading to happiness and this goes against the *Igwebuike* theory of happiness. It

is something unworthy of our humanness.

In African ontology, an individual is considered ethical only insofar as their actions and behavior contribute to the well-being and happiness of others, with the sense of a shared humanity. Given that suicide doesn't contribute to the well-being and happiness of others in African ontology, *Igwebuike* ethics sees it in terms of a taboo, an act prohibited and unacceptable, given its position on the sacredness of life and our shared humanity as Africans.

Suicide As a Departure From Our Shared Humanity As Africans

As an African Philosophy, *Igwebuike* is based on the nature of our humanity. Given that the ethical framework of our African societies is founded on relational and complementary principles, suicide is fundamentally un-African. Among the Igbo people, the human person is called *Mmadu*, which has been interpreted, among other perspectives as *there is beauty*. Beauty is by its very nature attractive-it attracts the other to itself. If every human being is an embodiment of beauty, it then means that each human person attracts the other to himself or herself, and vice versa. Since suicide is often based on a solitary act, which jettisons the African worldview of the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of human beings and despairs of attracting the other to myself or allowing myself to be attracted to the other, it goes against the expressions of *Igwebuike* ethics.

When *Mmadu* engages with the world, this engagement springs from a respect for the divine gift of life and the understanding that life is a beautiful gift that needs to be nurtured, shared, cared for and not wasted or abused. As such, any vice against life, alcoholism, prostitution, sexual abuse, drug abuse, ritual killing or suicide, disturbs the ontological balance of life from an African perspective. *Igwebuike* ethics holds the position that the human person was created to relate-that is, to be human. Hence, the human person cannot be human outside of the parameters of relationality. Since suicide in a sense is anti-relationality, a selfish act done mainly for the interest of the self, since it is not a virtuous act that encourages fellowship, but a vicious act which sabotages or undermines fellowship, it is a departure from our shared humanity as Africans.

The act of suicide is one that raises moral questions. In seeking to answer these questions, it was important to look at the meaning of life. While the Philosopher Albert Camus saw life as a fundamental problem of philosophy, Shakespeare spoke of it as a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. For the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, he saw life as having no meaning. These perceptions of life were mainly western, hence the need to look at the African view of life.

In the African theories of meaning in life, we saw that

life for an African has a divine origin, is dynamic, creative and productive (vitality). Also, life for an African is a communal relationship and a shared humanity. With this idea of life for the African, we saw that it is not stale, neither is it lived in isolation or allowed to deviate from its roots of interconnectedness and interrelatedness.

We then focused on the moral problem of suicide and tried to look at it with the lens of *Igwebuike* ethics. From the point of view of *Igwebuike* ethics, suicide is un-African, a departure from our interconnectedness, interrelatedness and shared humanity. It is a vice against the beauty that is at the depth of the human person, *Mmadu*. It is a disturbance of the ontological balance of life from an African perspective, and it is often a solitary act which steals from the beautiful gift of life which needs to be nurtured, shared, cared for and not wasted or abused.

In *Igwebuike* philosophy whatever affects the whole also affects the individual. If humanity is destroyed, the individual is also destroyed. Since every part plays a fundamental role in the universal human scheme, it also means that every part, no matter the colour or tribe, needs to be protected for the preservation of the whole. This again shows the negative perception of suicide in *Igwebuike* ethics.

From the perspective of the African worldview, is there

really any advantage in a suicide act? The answer is an obvious no. Because, for Africans, to be human is to participate in life and respect the conditions that make life possible. To participate in life means ultimately to participate in the fellowship of the community. Hence, "to be" for an African entails living in solidarity and complementarity. Living outside of these bounds results in alienation. For Africans then, the definition of "to be" is "to be with the other." This is founded on the African philosophy of community, which serves as the fundamental idea and unifying thread throughout African traditional religion and philosophy. (Kanu, 2015)

Conclusion

An African Traditional Society is a society where the individual is always considered a free, integrated member of his community, a communion person. It is a society where individualism is considered a taboo, where each member takes the interest of the community as his own. The community in turn protects the interest of the individual.

Igwebuike philosophy is an aspect of African philosophy that emphasizes our shared humanity. In this vein, the perspective of *Igwebuike* philosophy on the moral problem of suicide coincides with its views on every other ethical issue. An individual is considered ethical only insofar as their actions and behavior contribute to the well-being and happiness of others, with the sense of a shared humanity. Given that suicide doesn't

contribute to the well-being and happiness of others in African ontology, *Igwebuike* ethics sees it in terms of a taboo, an act prohibited and unacceptable, given its position on the sacredness of life and our shared humanity as Africans.

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