

IGBO BIOETHICS' MAXIM, *MKPOMKPO NDU KA MKPOMKPO QNWU MMA*, AND AN AFROMODAL CRITIQUE OF EUTHANASIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the Igbo bioethics of *mkpomkpo ndu ka mkpomkpo onwu mma* (a scrap of life is better than a scrap of death) in comparative analysis with Afromodal critique of western practice of euthanasia. Life and death are two extremes with relational intersections. One initiates the other and each one is implicated in the other. Hence, life becomes a coefficient of death. Death becomes what we are anytime that we are not. Approach to each of them matters most. Through such approaches, people react to life and death accordingly. This paper explores methodologically the African byword, and in particular, the Igbo bioethics *Mkpomkpo Ndu ka Mkpomkpo Onwu Mma* in comparative analysis with Western practise of Euthanasia begins with proper appreciation of life as *ndu* and death as *onwu* in their scrap or remnant form. In this comparative analysis, one finds out the value Igbo ethics placed on life as a sacred thing as against western concept of Euthanasia.

Keywords

Igbo bioethics, *mkpomkpo ndu* (scrap of life), *mkpomkpo onwu* (scrap of death), afromodal, euthanasia

Introduction

Bioethics, as an interdisciplinary field within African philosophy and the life sciences, interrogates moral questions surrounding life, health and death. While much of contemporary bioethical discussion has been reshaped by Western models, especially principles such as autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). However, there is an increasing recognition of the urgent need to incorporate indigenous perspectives into global ethical conversations. Within the African context, and particularly among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, moral and value reflections on life and death are deeply rooted in communal values, metaphysical beliefs and cultural maxims. One such of *maxims*, "*Mkpomkpo ndu ka Mkpomkpo onwu mma* (loosely translated as *a fragment of life is better than a fragment*

of death), encapsulates a profound ethical stance that prioritizes the preservation of life under all conditions.

Igbo bioethics is well grounded in a wholistic Weltanschauung that perceives life as *a primary value* with its sacrality, relationality and continuous across the physical and spiritual realms (Iroegbu, 1995). Life is not merely an individual possession but a communal trust, intertwined with ancestors, cob-webbing the living, and future generations. Consequently, perspectives that deliberately terminate life, such as euthanasia, abortion, murder, *et cetera*, are not viewed solely through the lens of individual autonomy but are evaluated in relation to their impact on the broader moral and ontological community. Therefore, maxim *Mkpomkpọ ndụ ka Mkpomkpọ ọnwụ mma*, thus, serves as a standard principle affirming the profound significant worth of life, even in situations of suffering, moments illness, or time of diminished capacity. The ideology, the scrap of life, is a deeply rooted in African ethico-communal outlook that affirms the intrinsic worth of every fragment of human life, no matter how diminished, fragile, or dependent it may appear. It maintains and sustains the fact that life is not valued based on productivity, autonomy, or utility, but on its sacredness, interconnectedness, communality and ontological significance. Within this structure, even the weakest *scrap* of life, such as the elderly, the terminally ill, or the incapacitated, retains full moral dignity and deserves care, protection, and communal solidarity. This conceptual ideology reflects a relational worldview in which life is understood as shared existence, sustained through community bonds rather than individual independence. As a consequence, decisions that deliberately terminate life, such as euthanasia, are often resisted because they contradict the reverence accorded to life in all its conditions. The scrap of life ideology thus promotes compassionate endurance, collective responsibility, and moral continuity, insisting that no stage or state of life is meaningless or disposable within the human community.

In contrast, euthanasia, defined as the purposeful and intentional terminating and ending of a person's life to relieve pain and suffering, has gained various grades of acceptance in Western bioethical discussion, often justified by appeals to personal autonomy and the alleviation of pain (Rachels, 1975). The legitimate increase in legalizing euthanasia as a normal way of life, in certain societies reflects a shift towards individual-centered ethics, where the right to choose death is considered an extension of human dignity. However, this perspective raises critical questions when examined through the lens of African moral thought, which emphasizes interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and the sacredness of life (Metz, 2010). An Afromodal critique of euthanasia desires to pursue this tension by drawing heavily from African philosophical modalities that highlight relationality, foreground belongingness, and establishes the moral obligation to sustain life. However, the conceptual framework of Afromodality, underscores the unique African ethical systems that highlights shared values which resists

reductionist approach or individualistic understanding of human existence. Within this structure, the Igbo maxim, *Mkpomkpọ ndụ ka Mkpomkpọ ọnwụ mma*, under consideration becomes not merely a cultural expression but a philosophical argument against the moral permissibility of euthanasia. *Mkpomkpọ ndụ ka Mkpomkpọ ọnwụ mma* challenges the assumption that suffering diminishes the value of life and instead proposes that life retains its worth irrespective of its condition. Afromodality situates the nature of Igbo people that have that maxim as communal entity with cobweb of interconnectivities. Moreover, the Igbo perspective introduces an ontological aspect often very absent in common man's bioethics. Life is fundamentally understood as a gift from the divine, and its termination is believed to disrupt the natural cosmic order and the moral fabric of the community (Tempels, 1959). This belief system strengthens the idea that humanity remains the custodian rather than absolute owners of life, thereby limiting the moral justification for euthanasia. The emphasis on patient endurance, faithful hope and communal support furthermore strengthens the ethical commitment to preserving life, even in the face of extreme suffering.

In sum, this paper, therefore, places the Igbo bioethical maxim within the broader discussion on euthanasia, offering an Afromodality critique that challenges prevailing and paramount Western narratives. By framing and providing indigenous knowledge schemes and moral intuitions, Afromodality contributes to the ongoing decolonization of bioethics and the search for more inclusive and culturally sensitive ethical frameworks. In doing so, Afromodality affirms that African philosophical traditions possess rich resources for addressing contemporary moral dilemmas and for reimagining the ethics of life and death in a pluralistic world.

Appreciation of Life (*Ndu*)

Life as a living activity is best appreciated and comprehended not merely as a static state of being but as an ever-changing, self-organizing activity defined by continuous interaction, adaptation and transformation. The dynamism in life therefore becomes an identity of a living thing shared by animals, humans and plants, fauna and flora. In both biological and philosophical traditions, life is conceived as a continuum, an ongoing process, an operational and an active unfolding rather than a fixed condition. From a biological standpoint, life is defined with many characteristics¹ through the processes of metabolism, growth, reproduction and responsiveness to

¹ A living thing is any organism that possesses life, exhibiting biological processes that distinguish it from non-living matter. These processes are characteristics that enable it to maintain existence, grow, interact with its environment, and reproduce. The living things share the following fundamental characteristics: *Organization* (Cellular Structure: All living organisms are composed of one or more cells, which are the basic units of life. These cells may be simple-unicellular- or complex - multicellular-, but they exhibit a high level of internal organization); *Metabolism* (living things carry out chemical reactions within their bodies to sustain life. This includes processes such as respiration, digestion, and synthesis of necessary substances); *Growth and Development* (living organisms increase in size and undergo developmental changes according to specific instructions coded in their genetic material); *Reproduction* (all living things have the ability to reproduce, either sexually or asexually, ensuring the

stimuli. These processes underscore that living organisms are not inert entities but systems in constant motion. According to Erwin Schrödinger (1944), life sustains itself by maintaining order against entropy through continuous energy exchange with its environment. This highlights that life is primarily and fundamentally an activity of *negentropy*, an active resistance to disorder. Similarly, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980) describe living systems as autopoietic, self-producing and self-maintaining through internal processes. Life, in this sense, is a continuous activity of self-creation.

The meaningful appreciation of life has been interpreted differently across philosophical traditions, religious institutions, scientific organizations, and cultural establishments, each showing clear dimensions of human existence. From critical view, classical Western philosophy often links the meaning of life to reason and virtue. For Aristotle, life finds meaning in eudaimonia, human flourishing achieved through rational activity in accordance with virtue (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*). In contrast, existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre maintains that life has no inherent meaning; rather, humans must create meaning through free choice and responsibility in an absurd world (Sartre, 1946). Albert Albert Camus likewise perceives life as inherently absurd, yet meaningful insofar as humans revolt against meaninglessness by affirming life itself. From a social and trado-religious perspectives, meaning of life is grounded in transcendence and divine purpose. In Christian theology, an understanding of life within the love of God and neighbor, participating in God's salvific plan, and attaining eternal communion with God (Augustine, *Confessions*; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*). Islamic thought understands life as a test of obedience to Allah, with meaning fulfilled through submission (Islam) and righteous living (Qur'an 51:56). Many Eastern traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, locate meaning in liberation from suffering, moksha or nirvana, through moral discipline, wisdom, and spiritual practice. From distinct techno-scientific and humanistic perspectives, meaning of life is often associated with well-being, relationships and contribution. Modern psychology, especially Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, emphasizes that meaning arises from purposeful work, love, and the courageous attitude toward suffering. Evolutionary biology, while not prescribing meaning, views life as oriented toward survival, adaptation, and continuity of species.

continuity of their species); *Irritability* (Response to Stimuli-living organisms can sense and respond to changes-stimuli- in their environment, such as light, temperature, and sound); *Movement* (living things exhibit movement, either of the whole organism - locomotion- or internal movement -such as circulation of nutrients); *Excretion* (Waste products resulting from metabolic processes are removed from the body to maintain internal balance); *Nutrition* (living organisms obtain and utilize nutrients from their environment for energy, growth, and repair); *Homeostasis* (living things regulate their internal environment-e.g., temperature, pH- to maintain stable conditions necessary for survival) and (over time, living organisms undergo changes that enhance their ability to survive and reproduce in specific environments). These characteristics collectively distinguish living things from non-living entities, making life a dynamic and self-sustaining phenomenon.

Philosophically, life as activity has been appreciated as such in both Western and African thought. Aristotle, in his concept of entelechy, viewed life as the realization of potential through active processes inherent in living beings (Aristotle, *De Anima*). Life is thus an immanent activity directed towards fulfillment. In modern philosophy, Henri Bergson introduced the idea of *élan vital*, a vital impetus driving creative evolution, portraying life as a continuous, creative flow rather than a mechanistic sequence. Within African philosophical enterprise, life is often conceived relationally and communally, as an activity of participation in a network of forces. Placide Tempels (1959) argues that in Bantu ontology, being is force, and to live is to be in active relation with other forces. Life, therefore, is not isolated but an interactive and communal activity. John Mbiti (1969) reinforces this view by asserting that existence is fundamentally relational: *I am because we are*, indicating that life is lived through active participation in community and history. African scholars are very eloquently seen life as form of connectedness which Afromodal² captures with a common strand of belongingness³. From an African philosophical perspective, life's meaning is deeply communal. Personhood is realized through

² Onebunne's afromodal is a neologism used in describing the African communal and metaphysical modality of *to be*; that is, the existential modalities of being in belongingness within the boundaries of African orientation. However, Richard Wright rightly observed that the establishment or verification of a new area for study poses three specific problems: *conceptual definition and boundaries, institutional and academic acceptance*. Afromodals (such *igwebuike, ubuntu, egbeberegobere, onyeaghananwanneya, birikambiri, kwetuism, njikoka, consciencism, ibuanyidanda* and several others) was first published: Onebunne, J. I. (2025). "An Exposition of the Afromodal: Exploring a New framework of Connectedness". In *Nnadiesbube Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, NO.3, 2025. <https://www.acjol.org/index.php/NJP/article/view/6818/6605>

³ Etymologically, the word 'belongingness' is a compound word that can be broken down into constituents thus: *be – (l) on (be on), be – (l) on going, be – long and belonging*. It is equally an apprehension of belongingness as African Metaphysics of *to be*. However, each epoch of human history has had things to decry, and has had issues and problems which demanded urgent attention and remedy just like our own present epoch. Similarly, belongingness has been a fundamental aspect of African philosophical and communalist engagement. Belongingness, we must note, has been a basic cultural trait within the exigencies of African philosophy. In the words of Iroegbu (1994), "belongingness is an abstract term, an ontological one that specifies that a thing is, because it belongs". Put the other way, belongingness is the African Metaphysics of *to be*. That is to say that *being* belongs and this *belongingness* is a fundamental condition for a thing to be considered a reality. To this end, being and belongingness are said to be ontological. Reality, therefore, is better known and understood by the concept of belongingness. In other words, reality, or *being*, in its total manifestation, is a process involving belongingness. In this form of belongingness, reality is a given that needs continuous existential understanding and development. Without belongingness there would be no discussion on being or *to be*. Whatever is part of reality, belongs to something, (Onebunne, 2019a). To understand belongingness, it must be understood in its relation to others. Belongingness, however, overshadows these existential facts of operations. This notion of belongingness is clearly reflected in John Donne's poem: "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee". Belongingness is a fundamental quality in understanding every existential reality. It identifies realities such. However, being's nature is in belonging. Its role is in belonging. Its mode and operations are in belonging. Belongingness, as such, is the ontological value of being. Iroegbu (1994) opines, solidarity of belongingness in being and solidarity of being in belongingness, in the manner in which we exist and relate in the reality of being and belongingness thus: Belongingness holds that our existence as human beings, as well as our integral participation in the society in which we find ourselves, are to be defined by our being given the sense and substance of belonging. *Belongingness* describes properly the modality of any existing reality. Iroegbu (2004) tries to maintain that belongingness specifies that a thing is because it belongs. Belongingness can be variously conceived either as *participation* or *possession*. In the hermeneutics of belongingness the various contents or senses of the concept of belongingness are thus: *be-on, be ongoing, be-long, be-longing, belong*. These four analytic contents according to Iroegbu (1995) substantiate the various contents or senses of the concept of 'belongingness'. Iroegbu calls them the sub-themes of belongingness as:

relationships, solidarity, and moral responsibility within the community, captured more uniquely in Afromodal concepts. Life is meaningful insofar as it sustains harmony between the individual, community, ancestors, and the unborn. In sum, the meaning of life is multidimensional: rational and ethical, self-created, transcendent, relational, and communal, varying by worldview yet universally concerned with how life ought to be lived.

Furthermore, contemporary philosophy of biology sees life as transformative and evolving. Daniel Nicholson (2019) argues that organisms are not things but processes: stable patterns of activity maintained over time. This processual ontology aligns with systems in biology, which views life as emergent from networks of interactions rather than reducible to individual components. In sum, life as a living activity emphasizes dynamism, relationality, and self-organization. Whether viewed biologically as metabolic activity, philosophically as self-realization, or communally as relational engagement, life is foundationally and fundamentally an ongoing process of becoming and emergent. It is through activities, interaction, adaptation and participation, that life is both sustained and meaningfully expressed.

Human Life in as a Living Activity

Human life, in continuity with the general dynamism in understanding of life, is a complex interplay of biological processes, rational consciousness and socio-cultural engagement. It is not merely existence but an active, self-reflective and relational mode of being in the world. At the biological level, humanity shares with all living organisms the fundamental characteristics of metabolism, growth, adaptation and self-regulation. As Erwin Schrödinger (1944) observes, life persists through continuous energetic activity that resists entropy, thus emphasizing that human life is sustained through ongoing physiological processes. Beyond biology, human life is distinguished by rationality expressed in consciousness and self-awareness. Aristotle describes the human person as a rational animal, suggesting that human life is an activity of reason expressed through deliberation, freedom of choice and moral action. In existential parlance, Martin Heidegger (1962) conceives human life as *being-in-the-world*, an active engagement shaped by care, choice and temporality. Thus, human life unfolds as a project of meaning-making.

In African philosophy, human life is profoundly cobewebbed in connectivity that is relational and communally enacted. John Mbiti (1969) and African scholars capture this connectedness in the idea of Afromodals, indicating that life is realized through participation in community. However, Placide Tempels (1959) similarly affirms that life is the active interaction of vital forces. This relational or communal ontology resonates deeply with Igbo wisdom traditions. For instance, the Igbo proverb, *Ndu bu isi* (life is supreme), underlines the primacy and emphasizes

the sacredness of life above all pursuits. Another proverb, *Ndu di, ihe niile di* (where there is life, everything is possible), foregrounds life as an ongoing field of potential and activity. Furthermore, *Onye di ndu ka na-atu anya* (the living still hope) expresses life as a dynamic openness to future possibilities, reinforcing its unfolding characteristics. Such current views also affirm that human life is not static but emergent. Daniel Nicholson (2019) argues that human beings are ongoing processes rather than fixed entities. In sum, human life is an active synthesis of biological vitality, rational agency, relational being and communal belonging. The Igbo proverbs enrich this understanding by portraying life as sacred, hopeful, and full of potential, an ever-unfolding activity of becoming.

Complementarity of Life and Death in Human Destiny

Life is a coefficient of death. Death is a result of life. Life initiates death. Life is complemented in death, and *vice versa*. The complementarity of life and death is the philosophical idea that life and death are not absolute opposites but interconnected and mutually defining essentially the aspects of existence. In this view, life is meaningful because it is finite, and death gives shape, urgency, and context to life. Without death, life would lose its temporal significance; without life, death would have no meaning. Many African philosophical traditions, for instance, see life and death as part of a continuous cycle rather than a strict dichotomy. Life is the visible, active phase of existence, while death is a transition or transformation into another state, often one that maintains relational ties with the living community (e.g., ancestors). The Igbo notion of *Mkpomkpo ndu* (scrap of life) emphasizes the fragility and preciousness of life, while *Mkpomkpo onwu* (scrap of death) highlights the inevitability and relational significance of death, showing how the two are complementary. This form of complementarity can also be understood in ethical or practical terms: the awareness of mortality encourages people to live responsibly, cherish relationships, and contribute meaningfully to society. In this sense, life and death form a dynamic, interdependent pair: both defines and enriches each other, and as well, both are necessary to fully understand human existence. Life and death, rightly put, Life-death complementarity is resolved in human destiny. The complementarity of life and death in human destiny reflects a unified existential continuum in which life finds its meaning, urgency and moral depth in the inevitability of death. Death is not merely an end but a fulfillment and transition that gives closure and significance to life's processes, grounding human responsibility, cultural rituals, and philosophical reflections on purpose, finitude, and transcendence (Heidegger, 1962). Therefore, within the bounds of, and around many African worldviews, death is understood as continuity rather than annihilation, integrating the living, the dead, and the unborn in a dynamic moral community. Thus, life and death mutually interpret each other, shaping identity, ethical conduct, and the enduring quest for meaning beyond mere biological existence (Mbiti, 1990).

Human destiny, that is, the fate of humans is structured on life and death. Life and death are destinies and fate of humans. Whoever is destined to live has the fate of death. By some logical implications one questions: what is human destiny? For some it is *death through life*. One may still opt that, it is *life-after-life*. They may not be far from the truth. The problem of human destiny becomes meaningful when one understands and appreciates what fate or destiny has for him or her. Life in this wider appreciation becomes a constant in death reality, *vice versa*. It is only when one recognizes with total resignation the co-efficient of his or her humanity, *fated in death or destined in life*, that one begins to live and die in complementarity of each other. That is, when we turn to our impossibility, only then can one begin to live our possibility. But is our destiny death? Or Life through death, *id est*, life-after-life? What is the meaning of human destiny? This is our investigational task since “man is always reaching for meaning, always setting out on his search for meaning”, (Heidegger, 1962). In different nuances of destiny, which has both secular and religious undertone, one can accept that it is an invincible necessity, fate, a necessity or fixed order of things established, as by a divine decree, or by an indissoluble connection of causes and effect, (Mish *et al* (Ed), n.d.). It is “the end of every creature is its own self-realization, its own fulfillment..., it is a metaphysical monstrosity for a thing to seek its own destruction, a necessity for it to seek its own perfection.” (Vann, 1948). Human beings by nature have destiny. Higgins (1948) is of the opinion that human destiny is the most elementary of causes... that on account of which anything begins to be. It is a principle of human operation as that which gives meaning to human activities. Being an object of human action, it then becomes that towards which, all human endeavours tend to.

Appreciation of Scrap of Life (*Mkpomkpo Ndu*)

Mkpomkpo ndu, literally a *scrap*, *remnant*, or *fragment of life* in Igbo thought and culture, names a profound existential condition rather than a mere biological state. It refers to life lived in its most fragile, weakened and threatened form, yet still affirmed and appreciated as such as life. Within African philosophy, especially Igbo ontology, *ndu* (life) is a primary value, very sacred, communal and divinely grounded. Therefore, even in its *scraps* (*mkpomkpo*), it possess meaning, dignity and moral weight. *Mkpomkpo ndu* describes life reduced to its bare minimum, a life marked by illness, disability, old age, extreme weakness, or social abandonment. It is the kind of life that survives moment by moment, not by strength but by patience and endurance. Such a life often appears unproductive, dependent, or burdensome when measured by utilitarian or economic standards. Yet in African thought, fragility does not negate value. Rather, it reveals the depth of what life truly is: not power, but persistence.

A *scrap of life* means the tiniest, smallest, weakest or most fragile remnant of life that still remains, life reduced to its bare minimum, yet not completely destroyed nor extinguished. Its core meaning is within the boundaries of a tiny remainder of life (life that survives only in

fragments, not in fullness), bare survival (existence marked more by patient endurance than by flourishing) and life on the edge (life that is constantly threatened by death, suffering, or deprivation). It is a life too fragile to be handled. It has a more figurative sense and critical use. Hence, in philosophical or cultural usage, especially in African appreciative thought, a *scrap of life* does not mean life has lost its value. Instead, it shows that: life remains fundamentally sacred even when weakened. Equally, it means existence, however fragile, is preferable to non-existence. Morally, calling life *a scrap* does not diminish it; instead, it foregrounds human vulnerability as it condemns philosophies that treat life as disposable. More, it challenges euthanasia or death-as-solution ideologies. A scrap of life means being alive, even when one barely breathes thereby enduring, hoping, rather than not existing at all. Equally, it entails that such life retains dignity even in pain, poverty, sickness or dependency. This resounds powerfully within the boundaries of Igbo Weltanschauung and broader African worldviews where life (*ndụ*) is primarily cherished not because it is comfortable, but because it is life. In African (Igbo) worldview, a *scrap of life* is equal to expressions like: *ndụ fọduru ntakịrị* (life that remains only a little), *ndụ ka mma karia ọnwụ* (life is better than death). A *scrap of life* shows the unique primacy of life. Hence, life still a gift from *Chukwu* (God), therefore, it still holds communal meaning and allows for hope, intervention and continuity. Hence, the proverb *mkpomkpo ndụ ka mkpomkpo ọnwụ mma*, a scrap of life is better than a scrap of death.

Ahụike (sound health) as a concept in Igbo-African world represents a total well-being beyond physical well-being. It is a synthesis of the material, spiritual, social, ethical and the ecological dimensions of human life. An Integrated view of the human being (*madu*) in Igbo-African worldview is perhaps too intricate; the human being is regarded in many different guises; comprising body (*ahu*), soul (*obi*), spirit (*mmụọ*), destiny (*chi*), and ancestral ties (*ndichie*). As Kanu (2015) explains, the African human person is seen as "a unity of body and soul, with strong links to the spiritual and communal worlds" (Kanu, 2015, p. 44). For in Igbo cosmology, Ahụike also connotes good health, an English concept that does not shrink well-being to a person's physical state. A disruption in any aspect-spiritual imbalance, social isolation-has been read as a commentary on one's health. In Igbo metaphysical reflections is the intricate correlation between health and man's relationship with the divine (God -*Chukwu*, personal destiny spirit-*Chi*, the ancestors-*Ndichie* and the cosmic forces. According to Iroegbu (2005), "the African sees disease and health not only in terms of body malfunction but as a spiritual or moral disorder" (Iroegbu, 2005, p. 84). Therefore, sickness and disease can be the effects of offending the spirits or the taboos or straying from one's *Chi*. Rituals, sacrifices and prayers form a major part of their health provision.

In Igbo-African cosmology, health is communal, not merely individual. It has social and communal dimensions. Mbiti (1969) famously states: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108). Such critical view as this means that the sickness of one person can affect the whole community, and healing often involves communal participation The

health of an individual is thus a reflection of the health of their relationships: with family, village, ancestors, and the land. More so, there ought to be kind of environmental balance. Of course, the environment (ala, earth) is a sacred thing in Igbo cosmogony. As Okafor & Okoye, (2019) emphasizes, the land is not just physical space but a spiritual entity deserving reverence (Okafor & Okoye, 2019). Ecosophy means a lot in this understanding as such. Hence, environmental pollution, disrespects the sacred forests, rivers, or shrines which can, however, leads to environmental and human sickness. Therefore, sound health implies living harmoniously with the nature. More so, every person, in Igbo-African worldview is believed to be assigned a personal destiny (*Chi*). Good health and well-being are tied to living in accordance with one's destiny. Misalignment or deviation with one's destiny known as *chi*, can cause illness or misfortune (Okafor & Okoye, 2019). Thus, alignment with one's destiny fulfill's one's purpose.

In the absence of good health one is understood to be ill or unhealthful therefore needs healing. However, there are traditional healing practices in Igbo-African worldview. One must note that, healing in Igbo society is both medicinal and spiritual. Herbalists (*Dibia-ogwu*) and diviners (*Dibia-afa*) diagnose not only the physical symptoms but also the underlying spiritual or moral causes. The treatment ought to involve herbs, spiritual cleansing, confession, rituals, and re-integration into the community (Okafor & Okoye, 2019) so as to restore to restore balance, not merely cure symptoms. This is why the remedy involves herbs, spiritual bath, confession and finally, rituals, re-entry into society. Both the medicine is "bitter" and healing itself is bitter, meaning, we do not heal symptoms; we are restoring balance. In sum, *ahũike* (this is a world view term in the Igbo -African cosmology) – connotes state of well being: robust healthy body, tranquility of mind, membership of society, moral uprightness, respect for environment, which rest on transcendental being(self), whom one is connected to with purpose. It's a way of life in tune with self, community, nature, ancestors and the divine and therefore is conducive to health.

Understnding of Death

The meaning of death has been understood differently across philosophical, religious, scientific, and cultural traditions. Such misapprehension reflects humanity's attempt to interpret the end of biological life and its existential significance. From a philosophical perspective, ancient Western philosophy often viewed death as a natural and rational event. Plato regarded death as the separation of the soul from the body, potentially liberating the soul to attain true knowledge (*Phaedo*). Epicurus, however, argued that death should not be feared, since where death is, the self no longer exists; thus, death is the absence of sensation and meaning (*Letter to Menoeceus*). Modern existentialists such as Martin Heidegger interpret death as the ultimate horizon of human existence; awareness of one's mortality (*Being-toward-death*) gives life authenticity and urgency (Heidegger, 1927). From a religious point of view, death is rarely seen as absolute annihilation. In Christian theology, death is the consequence of sin but also a passage toward resurrection and

eternal life with God (Romans 6:23; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*). Islam understands death as a transition from earthly testing to judgment and eternal destiny in the hereafter (Qur'an 3:185). Eastern traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, see death as part of a cyclical process of rebirth (*samsara*), with its meaning lying in spiritual progress toward liberation (*moksha* or *nirvana*). From a scientific perspective, death is defined biologically as the irreversible cessation of vital functions. Science explains how death occurs but remains silent on its ultimate meaning, treating it as a natural endpoint of life governed by entropy and biological limits (Kübler-Ross, 1969). From an African philosophical perspective, death is not the end of existence but a transition to another mode of being. The dead continue life as ancestors, actively involved in the moral and spiritual affairs of the living (Mbiti, 1969). Death gains meaning through communal remembrance, continuity of lineage and participation in the *living-dead-unborn* cycle. Thus, death is tragic yet integrated into the moral fabric of life, never celebrated but ritually domesticated. In sum, death may be understood as liberation, transition, biological cessation, or existential boundary. Across perspectives, its meaning lies not merely in ending life but in shaping how life itself is valued and lived.

Death, a universal and inevitable aspect of human existence, has been interpreted differently across philosophical, religious, scientific and cultural perspectives. Biologically, death is the cessation of vital functions (heart activity, respiration and brain activity) marking the end of existential life. Medically, understanding of death involves processes like cellular breakdown and organ failure, then brain death, often contextualized within the framework of life expectancy and terminal illness. Philosophically, death raises profound questions about the meaning and purpose of life. Epicurus argued that death should not be feared, as it is simply the end of sensation; while existentialists like Heidegger view death as a central structure of human existence, giving urgency and authenticity to life (Heidegger, 1927). African philosophical traditions, such as Igbo and Akan thought, perceive death not merely as an end but as a transition to ancestral or spiritual realms, emphasizing communal remembrance and moral legacy (Mbiti, 1969). Religions offer diverse interpretations. In Christianity, death is a passage to eternal life, with moral consequences determining one's destiny. Hinduism and Buddhism understand death as part of the cyclical process of reincarnation, influenced by karma, aiming for liberation (*moksha* or *nirvana*). These beliefs shape mourning practices, funerary rites, and ethical attitudes toward end-of-life care. Culturally, death evokes rituals, symbols, and social norms that reinforce collective memory and community cohesion. Psychologically, it inspires grief, existential reflection, and coping mechanisms. Modern bioethics debates topics such as euthanasia, assisted suicide, and palliative care, balancing human dignity, autonomy, and the sanctity of life. In sum, death is simultaneously a biological event, a philosophical puzzle, a religious passage, and a cultural reality. Its multifaceted understanding encourages ethical reflection, fosters communal bonds, and challenges humans to confront their finitude, ultimately prompting deeper engagement with the meaning of life itself.

A Scrap of Death in African Philosophy and Igbo Bioethics

The expression *a scrap of death* does not merely denote physical dying or biological cessation. However, within the boundaries of African philosophical worldview, scrap of death signifies death in fragments where death is anticipated, invoked, flirted with, or partially embraced as a solution to human predicament expressed in pain and suffering. Unlike *a scrap of life*, which still participates in existence, *a scrap of death* participates in negation, rupture, and moral disorder. In African metaphysics, death (*onwu*) is not a mere neutral or private event. It is a cosmic and communal rupture that affects the living, the ancestors and the unborn. Mbiti (1969) insists that death is “the removal of a person from the human community,” even though the dead may continue in ancestral existence. To deliberately seek or hasten death, however small the justification, introduces death prematurely into the moral order, thereby creating what may be called a *scrap of death*.

Metaphysically, *scrap of death* refers to essentially making a choice of non-being over existential being at all cost. Especially with regard to negative innuendoes thereby introducing death as remedy and reducing human dignity to functionality or comfort. As well, it means treating death instrumentally in disregard to other benefits of *death and dying*. In African metaphysics, death is not something to be sampled, managed or controlled rather it is something to be feared not merely because it ends life, but because it breaks continuity, disrupts destiny and weakens communal bonds (Gyekye, 1995). Thus, even the thought of a *scrap* of death is a moral and metaphysical failure.

Mkpomkpo Onwu, literally “a scrap, fragment, or residue of death”. It is a deeply evocative concept in Igbo philosophy. Unlike *mkpomkpo ndu*, which still affirms life even in its weakest form, *mkpomkpo onwu* represents the threshold where life has collapsed into irreversible negation. It is not merely biological dying. It is the condition in which death is accepted, chosen, or normalized as an answer to suffering. In African and Igbo worldviews, this is a state to be dreaded, resisted, and averted at all cost. Therefore, in Igbo worldview death is not about annihilation as there is concepts like *after death* and *ancestors*. Though people fear death and dread it at all cost and wants to live at all cost, hence, death never spells a total closure nor is it the last-card-check-up of life. However, In African-Igbo metaphysics, *onwu* (death) is often seen as a rupture, not merely a solution. However, *mkpomkpo onwu*, therefore, signifies the final closure of actively earthly participation in life, community, moral agency, destiny (*chi*) and all forms of Afrimodality. This is the evil of death. While death is acknowledged as inevitable, it is never celebratively hastened to. But life is celebrated in life and after life. A scrap of death is, therefore, non meaningful because death has no degrees of value. Death seems to simply

annihilate life's afromodalism. Thus, where *mkpomkpo ndu* retains potentialities *mkpomkpo onwu* abolishes such. In sum, the Igbos revolutionary and dreadful fear of death is not out of cowardliness but out of cosmic reverence for life. To dread death is to honor *ndu*. In this intelligible appreciation, as against death with many expressions of resistance to *mkpomkpo onwu* thus: sickness is treated aggressively, even when hope is thin; elders cling to life despite pain and families exhaust resources to keep a dying member alive.

Death is still not proposed as an answer even when life becomes fragile and weakened, ravaged by chronic illness, crushed by poverty, dependent on fate and unpredictable goodwill, dominated by pain and humiliation. Death is dreadful as it ends relationship and breaks communal bonds by removing the person from the *communal* and *Afromodal* space where care and solidarity operate. Thus, *mkpomkpo onwu* is viewed as absolute loss. Even in suffering, life remains life. Death, nevertheless, abolishes even suffering's meaning. Pain can be shared, interpreted, endured and transformed but death cannot because it forecloses everything that makes humanity human. Even a life lived *for pain and suffering* still participates in being, presence and community. Death is preferable to any form of living because what degrades humanity is the choice of death over life. Igbo philosophical trajectories absolutely reject this ideology. Death may come, but it must come on its own terms, not as a human solution to human suffering. It is an ontological violence to choose death over life for any reason. This is why Igbo traditional institutions and their worldviews question and completely disassociates itself from suicide, which is simply an abomination. Rather, human life is worth sustaining at all cost. That means the value of life is independent of its quality.

Appreciating the Idea of Euthanasia

Euthanasia is derived from the Greek words *eu* (good) and *thanatos* (death), literally means *good death*. It refers to the intentional and deliberate act of ending a person's life to alleviate intractable and relief uncontrollable pain and suffering, especially in cases of terminal illness or irreversible medical conditions (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). In modern-day bioethical discussion, euthanasia raises profound significant questions within ethics, bioethics, and medical ethics. Euthanasia is commonly classified into several forms. *Voluntary euthanasia* occurs when well-informed and or competent patients expressly permits and consents to the termination of their life. *Non-voluntary euthanasia* has to do with cases where the patient is incapable and unable to give consent, such as individuals in comas or with severe cognitive impairments. Involuntary euthanasia, by contrast, is carried out against the patient's wishes and is widely condemned as morally unacceptable (Singer, 2011).

Another important distinctive classification of Euthanasia is between *active* and *passive* ones. *Active euthanasia* involves engaging one with immediate moves to effect death. That is, it has to do with taking direct steps to cause one's death such as administering a lethal injection. *Passive euthanasia* refers to withdrawing and or withholding life-sustaining treatments, allowing the patient to die gradually and naturally. While some scholars especially bioethicists and medical-ethicists argue that this distinction is morally significant, others, notably James Rachels, contend that the difference is not ethically decisive since both may lead to the same outcome and intention (Rachels, 1975). The ethical debate surrounding euthanasia centers on key principles. Advocates emphasize autonomy, arguing that individuals have the right to decide the course of their own lives, including the manner and timing of death. This view is supported by the principle of respect for persons articulated by Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress (2019). Advocates also appeal to beneficence and compassion, suggesting that ending unbearable suffering may be a morally justifiable act. Contestants of this diehard position, however, stress the primacy and sanctity of human life, maintaining that human life possesses intrinsic value that must not be intentionally destroyed. Religious traditions, particularly within Roman Catholic Church, strongly reject euthanasia as morally impermissible. Critics also raise concerns about potential abuses, such as the *slippery slope* argument, which warns that legalizing euthanasia could lead to non-voluntary or involuntary cases (Keown, 2002). Legally, euthanasia remains controversial. Some countries, such as Netherlands and Belgium, permit certain forms of euthanasia under strict conditions, while many others prohibit it totally and entirely. In sum, euthanasia is a complex and multifarious issue pertaining to medical aspects of human life, legal dimensions of human living and moral facets of human existence. Its full meaning extends beyond the mere act of ending life to encompass debates about human worth and dignity, pain and suffering, autonomy and communal relationship and the participatory limits of bioethical concerns in human intervention at such grievous moments of dying and death.

Afrocentric Scrap of Life in Contradistinction with Eurocentric Euthanasia

The African appreciation of life, often expressed through communal idea described as and embedded in *scrap of life*, oftentimes reflects a profoundly rooted ontological and moral strong belief that life, in whatever form or condition, retains intrinsic value and community significance. This perspective stands in marked contrast to the Eurocentric discussion on euthanasia, which, within the frameworks of bioethics and medical-ethics, frequently upholds personal liberty and the relief of pain and suffering even in the face of intentional death. Within African worldviews, life is not merely a biologic occurrence but a sort of divine continuation, that is a sacred continuum that links the living and the ancestors. Philosophers such as Mbiti, J S. and Iroegbu, PO. emphasized that “to be is to belong,” signaling that life is inherently communal and relational (Mbiti, 1969; Iroegbu, 1994). Within these models, even an existential fragility, what may be termed a *scrap of life*, is still meaningful because it takes-part in the wider cobweb

of communal as well as spiritual existence. Thus, the quality of life is valued, not merely assessed by productivity, independence, or absence of pain.

The idea of *scrap of life*, therefore, can be interpreted as moral position that rejects the abandonment of life at any stage, no matter how fragile or weak its functional capacities may appear. The elderly, the terminally ill and the incapacitated are still regarded as bearers of human dignity and as integral members of the communal existence. Care, solidarity, patience and endurance are civic responsibilities that ought to be emphasized over termination. This resonates with the moral orientation found in African communal practice, where the value of life transcends individual preference. However, contrary to position of Afrocentricity on the appreciation of life, the Western concept of euthanasia, articulated by some thinkers like Peter Singer, often emerges from a more individualistic moral model. Here, the right to die is linked to personal autonomy, rational choice, and the minimization of suffering (Singer, 2011). From this perspective, when life becomes irresistibly unbearable, when life is empty of what is considered *quality*, euthanasia may be viewed as a compassionate alternative and rational option. The emphasis shifts from the *sanctity of life* (as a result of the primacy of life) to the *quality of life*, presenting a mere standard measure that can justify its termination. A critical assessment reveals both strengths and tensions. The African perspective robustly safeguards against the dehumanization and reductionism of human life as mere instrument and resists utilitarian reductionism of human value. Rather, such Afrocentric view fosters resilience, communal care and reverence for existence. On the other hand, the Eurocentric patterns of euthanasia framework is on the contrary though it promotes personal dignity understood as self-determination, but it risks normalizing the idea that some lives are no more worth living. This raises ethical concerns about vulnerable populations and the potential erosion of unconditional respect for life. In conclusion, the African appreciation of life as a profound enduring value, even in its, however, offers a profound counterbalance to Western euthanasia ethics. A more integrative approach may lie in upholding the sanctity of life while compassionately addressing suffering, without hastily resorting to its termination.

Scrap of Life Ideology within Afrmodal Ontology

Afromodalism⁴ is a moral canopy capable of foregrounding ethics in mediethics and bioethics, education and social philosophy in African worldview. Afromodality, informed by

⁴ The connection between Afromodalism, Afromodality, and Afromodals is both conceptual and methodological within African philosophical thought. Here's a structured explanation: Afromodalism is the overarching framework. It is a philosophical movement and method that foregrounds African modes of knowing, being, and relating. It emphasizes belongingness, communal values, and the harmonization of diverse African epistemologies into a coherent framework. Afromodalism is like the umbrella theory or approach under which Afromodality and Afromodals operate. Afromodality is the mode or manner. Afromodality refers to the specific modes, patterns, or ways through which African thought, culture, or practice expresses itself. Afromodals are the

Afromodalism is the African mode of knowing, valuing and interpreting reality through relationality, communality, spirituality and moral endurance. Afromodals, however, are the concrete instances. They are the specific manifestations or entities that embody Afromodality in real life. In Igbo philosophy, life (*ndụ*) is the highest ontological good, while death (*onwụ*) is the most radical form of negation of this good. This hierarchy is not based on comfort, pleasure or productivity, but on being itself. Consequently, even a scrap of life (*mkpomkpo ndụ*), reduced to weakness, suffering, dependency or near hopelessness, remains infinitely superior to death in any form. Igbo metaphysics affirms that to exist (*ịdị adi*) is better than not to exist (*ighara ịdị adi*). Life, even scrap of life, is participation in being and belonging. Death, nevertheless, is a withdrawal from it. As Mbiti (1969) explains, life in Igbo thought flows from *Chukwu*, is mediated through *chi*, and is sustained within the community. Because life is ontologically grounded in the divine, no degree of weakness can strip it of value.

Within the bounds of African philosophy versed in Afromodals, scrap of life refers to a condition in which human existence is severely diminished, fragile and burdened by suffering, yet retains full ontological, moral and communal value. Scrap of life, therefore, denotes a life reduced to its minimum threshold of vitality, marked by illness, poverty, dependency or pain, without forfeiting its primacy, sacrality or worth. Scrap of life is not a defective form of being and belonging, but a diminished mode of existence that still fully counts as life. Within Igbo philosophy, a scrap of life is always better than scrap of death, even death as such, in any form because life participates in being, belonging, destiny, community and the divine order. Death, even when made a choice to escape suffering, represents ontological negation, moral collapse and communal rupture. Hence, the Igbo insistence on life, even fragile life, is not gullible optimism, but deep ontological wisdom.

The scrap of life within Afromodal ontology is deeply rooted in Afromodalism as moral umbrella. Afromodalism may be understood as the African moral-existential structure that interprets reality through relational being, communal responsibility and moral endurance. In Afromodalism: life is categorical, not conditional; weakness does not negate being and diminution does not cancel dignity. In proper appreciation of scrap of life (*mkpomkpo ndụ*) within the boundaries of Afromodal existential condition, life, though gravely diminished, retains unassailable worth, invulnerable value and commands communal solidarity rather than mere

concrete instances. Afromodals are specific manifestations or entities that embody Afromodality in real life. They are the “building blocks” of African modes of thought and practice. Afromodals are the specific cases or practical embodiments of Afromodalism via Afromodality. While Afromodalism is the overarching philosophy/method, Afromodality is the mode or pattern through which Afromodalism is expressed. Afromodals is the tangible expressions, examples, or entities that enact Afromodality. Analogically and linguistically, one thinks of Afromodalism as the *language* (linguistics); Afromodality as the *grammar* (structure); and Afromodals as the *words* (units) or *sentences* (composition) forming meaningful communication.

termination. Scrap of life (*mkpomkpo ndu*), therefore, names an Afromodal state of existence where life persists under extreme erosion, illness, poverty, dependency or suffering, yet remains fully human and morally binding. Afromodalism refuses to translate fragility into worthlessness. As a moral umbrella, scrap of life performs three integrative roles in Afromodalism:

- It establishes the baseline principle that no living person falls outside moral concern, regardless of condition.
- It reframes suffering not as a problem to be eliminated by death, but as a call to communal action
- It restrains technological, medical and utilitarian impulses that rank lives by autonomy, pleasure or productivity.

Thus, scrap of life becomes the litmus test for communal morality. A community that abandons scrap of life abandons its own communal conscience and moral faculty of the soul. Aligned with Afromodalism, scrap of life yields a distinct bioethical posture. Within Afromodalism, scrap of life (*mkpomkpo ndu*) functions as a moral compass, a value-based principle, affirming that life, however diminished, retains full metaphysical value and worth. This nique conceptual appreciation of scrap of life simply intensifies communal responsibility rather than justifying rejection and consequent death. By aligning scrap of life with Afromodalism, African philosophy offers a counter-modern ethical grammar, one that resists the quiet violence of *compassionate elimination*, *mercy-killing* and insists instead on solidarity with life at its weakest point and moment.

Afromodalistic Critique of Euthanasia

Afromodals are understood as integrative African models of thought and practice that synthesize indigenous moral values, pragmatic responses, communal ontology, and practical effects on human existence. Deeply rooted in African philosophical traditions, Afromodals underscore relationality, the sacredness of life, interdependence, and holistic well-being, drawing from the broader fields of African philosophy. They are not merely theoretical constructs but lived modalities that shape moral judgments, inform healthcare decisions and instil proper attitudes toward life, accommodates illness and excuses death as limit of human existence. Inside this structure, the Afromodal critique of euthanasia appears as a powerful statement of life's integral and communal value. Life is perceived not as an individual possession but as a shared existential trust, linking the living, the ancestors and future generations. Consequently, euthanasia, understood as the deliberate ending of life to alleviate pain and suffering, is by and large spurned and rejected. This stance aligns with a wider value orientation that privileges care, endurance, patience and communal response-ability and responsibility over individual autonomy; a principle

echoed in the works of John S. Mbiti, who underscores the communal nature of African existence (Mbiti, 1969).

The strength of the Afromodal critique lies in its robust defense of the primacy and sanctity of life in the Afrocentric model of Igbo trado-cultural dispensation. It resists the reduction of human value and worth to functional capacity and or allows a subjective quality of life, thereby, safeguarding vulnerable individuals: the elderly, disabled, or terminally ill, from being perceived as burdens. In contrast to strands of Western bioethics that emphasize autonomy and may justify euthanasia under any certain conditions, Afromodals highlight belongingness and moral responsibility. This unique view and moral perspective foster compassionate care-giving and discourages abandonment, reinforcing a culture of solidarity amidst sympathy and other patient attitudes. However, the critique is not without limitations. One major concern is its potential insensitivity to extreme individual suffering. By prioritizing communal values over personal autonomy, Afromodalistic thought may inadvertently marginalize the lived experiences of those enduring unbearable pain who might rationally desire an end to their suffering. Critics argue that this could lead to a form of ethical paternalism, where the community's valuation of life overrides the individual's considered choice. Nevertheless, proper Afromodalistic communal attention and responsibility override such views.

Furthermore, the Afromodal rejection of euthanasia may struggle to engage adequately with advances in modern medical ethics, particularly debates on patient rights and dignity. Thinkers like Peter Singer argue that moral reasoning must consider the reduction of suffering as a central criterion (Singer, 2011). From this viewpoint, the Afromodal stance may appear overly rigid, lacking flexibility in pluralistic and technologically advanced healthcare contexts. Rather than being seen from such perspective, an Afromodal critique of euthanasia offers a valuable moral counterweight to individualistic and utilitarian approaches by affirming life's primacy and sacredness, communal presence and essence. An Afromodal effectiveness depends on its ability to dialogue with contemporary ethical challenges, particularly the tension between communal values and individual autonomy. A balanced approach simply integrates Afromodal reverence for life with compassionate sensitivity to human suffering. Life, however, is a state of being, not an action. It is the condition that makes actions possible. You do not choose to be alive in the moment-to-moment sense; rather, you find yourself living, and within that life, you perform acts. Classic thinkers like Thomas Aquinas distinguish between *actus humanus* (human acts) and *actus hominis* (acts of man). Life is the ontological foundation (the "given condition") of human existence. Thus, life enables human acts.

Conclusion

In sum, the Igbo bioethical maxim: *mkpọmkpọ ndụ ka mkpọmkpọ onwụ mma*, loosely rendered as *the fragments of life are better than the completeness of death*, offers a profound hermeneutic and significant reference for understanding human existence as intrinsically valuable, even in its most fragile, diminished, suffering or painful states. Life, within this structure, is not merely a biological occurrence but a *sacral* continuum embedded in the tapestry of relational, communal and spiritual matrices. Thus, its preservation is not only a personal concern but a moral obligation that resonates within the wider fabric of the community as well as the ancestral order. However, from an Afromodal perspectives, this maxim grounds a strong critique and robust review of euthanasia by confrontationally challenging the reductionist assumptions that equate dignity solely with autonomy, utility or the absence of pain and suffering. While the Eurocentric model of euthanasia, is often justified on the basis of individual rights and the alleviation of pain and suffering, the Afromodal binoculars reestablishes orientational discussions toward interdependence, meaningful existence and the profound worth as well as an enduring value of life irrespective of the human existential condition. Pain and or suffering, though unsuitable, is not devoid of existential significance; rather, it can serve as a *locus* for solidarity, care and moral responsibility and response-ability.

What is more, the Afromodal critique, however, does not merely turn down euthanasia. Rather, it is simply an invitation to a redesign and reshaping of Carol Gilligan's *ethics of care* which places accompaniment over elimination, prioritizes compassion over expediency, and pushes for holistic healing over terminal finality. In this respect, the reconfiguration of the primacy of human life, the preservation of life, even in its fragmented form, becomes a confirmation of shared humanity and a resistance against instrumentalization of human existence. In the end, the overlapping of this Igbo maxim and Afromodal thought advance a life-affirming bioethics that maintains the dignity and upholds the sanctity of the human person as inviolable and non-contingent. This simply calls for a deeper moral imagination; one that sees in every spark of life and flash of human existence not a burden to be doubted and extinguished, but a value to be cherished, protected and meaningfully engaged until its natural end.

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