

RELEVANCE OF IGWEBUIKE ETHICAL THEORY FOR AFRICA

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Abstract

Ethical theories are attempts by individuals or schools of thought to provide clear and unified accounts of what our ethical responsibilities are or what we are obliged to do. They help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his or her everyday life. Ethical theories also help in understanding moral dilemmas, in terms of making moral decision at certain points, justifying obligations and ideas, relating morality and also explaining the difference in terms of responsibility. This work focuses on the relevance of Igwebuike ethical theory for Africa. Igwebuike is understood as the modality of being in African philosophy. It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words: Igwe is a noun which means 'number' or 'population', usually a huge number or population. Bu is a verb, which means is. Ike is another verb, which means strength or power. Put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power'. Beyond the literal sense, Igwebuike provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations, and rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It argues that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. Igwebuike as a complementary philosophy understands life as a shared reality, and this complementarity, solidarity, relationality, communality, etc., are the principles that shape the African ethical theory. This relational character that considers the human action in relation to the impact it has on the life of the other rather than on oneself is the major contribution that Igwebuike ethical theory makes to the discourse on African ethical theories. In the course of this research, the phenomenological and hermeneutical methods of inquiry were employed. It discovers that the distinctive character of Igwebuike ethical theory is its communal and relational character, which is relevant to African ethics.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Igbo, Africa, Ethical Theory, Complementarity, Relationality.

Introduction

Much has been written about Igwebuike Ethical Theory. The researcher wonders what could be the relevance of Igwebuike Ethical Theory for Africa. The researcher feels that it is high time that Africa came up with her own African ethical theories to direct individual and communal daily moral life in such a manner that it respects the categories of the African people and attends to the specific needs of the African people within the parameters of morality. Kanu defines Ethical theories as “attempts by individuals or schools of thought to provide clear and unified accounts of what our ethical responsibilities are or what we are obliged to do. They help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his or her everyday life. Ethical theories also help in understanding moral dilemmas, in terms of making moral decisions at certain points, justifying obligations and ideas, relating morality and also explaining the difference in terms of responsibility”¹. The researcher treats the topic: “*Relevance of Igwebuike Ethical Theory for Africa*”.

Kanu writes that, “In the African intellectual movement, in spite of diverse orientations and perhaps contradictions, genius thinkers are striving to revive their original cultural traditions as a genuine response to the condition of discomfort”². Kanu holds that “*Igwebuike* posits that no task is beyond the collective capability of a group”³. In some ways, it means that whatever the situation, when human beings group themselves together, they are capable of performing miracles to achieve any task at hand. In this study, the researcher would present how *The Relevance of Igwebuike Ethical Theory for Africa*. It will try to present reasons what Igwebuike ethical theory can contribute to sound moral decisions in an African context.

The researcher observed that there is a problem with Africa as far as bringing out African ethical theories that may add value to African philosophy is concerned. Nevertheless, Igwebuike ethical theory is already in existence which is typical of the African origin. Is it developed to the point of study within the parameters of African philosophy? This work focuses on the quest to discover how relevant Igwebuike ethical theory is for Africa. The purpose and scope of this study is to access the relevance of *Igwebuike* ethical theory for Africa, and how it can inspire the initiation of more ethical theories in different African ethnic environments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study identified two variables; ethics and ethical theory as possible strategy to understanding better the relevance of Igwebuike ethical theory.

¹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 1.

² Kanu, A.I., et. (Eds.). *African Religion and culture: Honouring the past and shaping the future*, 15.

³ Kanu, A.I. *New Africanism: Igwebuike as a Philosophical attribute of Africa*, 8.

Ethical Theory

Reading from Kipfer to understand better the word 'Theory', he holds that theory simply means “hypothesis, belief, approach, argument, assumption, base, basis, code, concept, conditions, doctrine, dogma, feeling, foundation, grounds, guess, idea, impression, method, outlook, philosophy, plan, position, premise, presumption, proposal, provision, rationale, scheme, speculation, supposition, system, thesis, or understanding”⁴. In this study, the word 'theory' will thus be used in line with the suggested replaceable words as listed by Kipfer. But what is ethical theory? What is the purpose of it? For Talliaferro, in ethical theory, “one seeks to understand the nature, justification, and structure of ethical values”⁵. Therefore, ethical theory's main purpose is to find out the theories behind ethics. In the Dictionary of Philosophy, Mautner defines theory by considering its origin in Greek, “*Gloria*, viewing; speculation; contemplation. A set of propositions which provides principles of analysis or explanation of a subject-matter. Even a single proposition can be called a theory”⁶. As long as you contemplate about ethical issues, you are theorizing, not yet real, though the desire is always to reach the reality.

Under ethical theories, one comes to discover that, in fact, ethical theory can be too general thus the need to consider two approaches to the subject matter. That is personal ethics and social ethics. Kunhiyop states that “personal ethics deals with individual's obligations or duties, or in other words, with what is required of them. Social ethics, on the other hand, deals with community morality and emphasizes communal values and interpersonal relationships at the expense of the individual's desire and decisions”⁷. This is the reality of life; there is always what is personal and what is communal. In the field of ethics people are also encouraged to be ethical as individuals even before they think of the community ethics. It is actually personal ethics that results into communal ethics.

One wonders the origin of morality or ethical actions. For Kunhiyop, “The fundamental aspect of African morality is community. African emphasizes interpersonal relationships more than individual satisfaction. The community shapes and regulates moral life and behaviour”⁸. It is a community responsibility to set what is morally right and wrong. And the individual is answerable to whatever is dictated by the community. Richardson on his part reports that “African thought does not regard ethics as a separate discipline, because morality is indistinguishable from the rest of African social life”⁹. Social life reveals the morality of a certain people

⁴ Kipfer, A.B., (Ed.), *Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus* (2nd Edn.), 802.

⁵ Talliaferro, C., and Marty, J. E., (Eds.), *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion*. 80.

⁶ Mautner, T., *Dictionary of Philosophy* (2nd Edn.), 616.

⁷ Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 4.

⁸ Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 25.

⁹ Richardson, Neville *Can Christian Ethics Find its way and itself in Africa*, 37.

because life and morality are inseparable for a true African. He goes on arguing that, instead, to determine what constitutes moral behaviour one has to “observe and reflect upon the social life of the people, their rituals, customs, practices, events and relationships”¹⁰. Kunhiyop also affirms this when he writes that “our sources of knowledge of African ethics are thus not written records but customs and the rich African oral tradition”¹¹. Truly, it goes without saying that a morality or ethic of an individual should be a reflection of the beliefs and social life of the clan, community or village one belongs to. An individual can only be morally right once what he or she does is critically scrutinized and is discovered to be part of the teachings of the community he or she lives in. Morality is in the way of the life of the community.

Apart from the community, the traditions within the ethnic groups have played a vital role in building up what is called ethical theories today. The “traditions that are passed on from generation to generation become the scriptures of the people, that is, their source of knowledge about what God requires. This knowledge is maintained by the elders, who are the custodians of the rules and regulations that guide the whole community”¹². An African man believes God is the one who handed over the African values to the ancestors or elders. The more reason why people should not take whatever the elders tell them for granted. The elders' voices are the voices of God; their good wishes for humankind are the wishes of God. This is the reason why not every old person is an elder but only the few chosen ones who acts on behalf of God. The elders are selected or appointed partly due to their good reputation in the community, they are seen to be role models to others, and their age does not matter but only their commitment to the common good of the community counts.

The other major source of information about African ethical theories is “the oral tradition, that is, the main stories and legends by which knowledge is transmitted across generations by way of the spoken, as opposed to the written, words. This tradition includes myths and stories, liturgies, songs and proverbs”¹³. A true African person will not joke with any story or legend as told by the elders. In them there is knowledge and wisdom to guide an individual into what he is expected of by the society. Kunhiyop emphasize this point stating that the “myths and legends are traditional stories about something that happened in the past which explains something in the present”¹⁴. Though they are old stories, they are still valid in our present age, they link present events with the past events, and they are a proof that history repeats itself. Though they are not written on hardcopy papers, they are

¹⁰ Richardson, Neville, *Can Christian Ethics Find its way and itself in Africa*, 37.

¹¹ Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 8.

¹² Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 9.

¹³ Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 10.

¹⁴ Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 11.

written in the minds and hearts of the elders. As the consequence of that fact, the more respect people offer the stories, myths, or legends, the more they gain for their ethical living.

Since African ethical theories are not written on hardcopies or stones but in the hearts and minds of the elders, “the context in which young people learn these values is fellowship with older wise persons. In a society in which the spoken word is more important than the written, fellowship with old, experienced persons is an essential task in life, since the young person who is growing up must not only learn how to master life, but must also acquire the art of speaking”¹⁵. These core moral truths gained through the mutual and cordial interaction with the older wise persons “are embedded in the oral traditions, liturgies, stories and proverbs that are the foundations, grounds and motivations of morality among African people”¹⁶. This conviction is also found in the writing of Benezet Bujo as he declares that, “African traditions make it plain that the people considered that thought and intentions, as well as external acts, had a moral character, and deserved to be considered good or bad”¹⁷. Ones' thinking, intention, and acting reflect the morality of that specific individual. It is through his thinking, intention and acting that the person will be regarded to be morally good or bad.

Ethical theories cannot be satisfactorily talked about without touching its special attention to human beings life. Iroegbu realized that while almost all societies have a respect for life, “Africans have a deep reverential deference for life, especially human life. Its beginning is elaborately celebrated in pregnancy, birth, naming and initiation ceremonies. Its growth and continuity is feasted in adulthood, and adolescence rites, family rites and communal festivities. Its end is buoyantly celebrated in death rites, departure rituals, and funeral festivities”¹⁸. An African person has high regard for human life from pregnancy to death. And at every stage of earthly life there is a celebration to mark the importance of the transition taking place in the life of an individual. This reverential deference for life is sustained to the larger extent by the ethics controlling the society in which an individual is born and dies. It is an ethical right to promote and protect life.

Theoretical Framework

This study has opted for the indigenous wholistic theory because it is a theory being propagated by the African philosophers themselves. The collective worldview of Africans concerning man, nature and society are embedded in the “proverbs, myths, folktales, the oral traditions of the people and exemplified in their socio-cultural

¹⁵ Bujo, Benezet, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 25.

¹⁶ Kunhiyop, Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics*, 25.

¹⁷ Bujo, Benezet. *African Theology in its social context*, 37.

¹⁸ Iroegbu, Pantaleon, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*, 84.

practices”¹⁹. To have an authentic African ethical theory, these sources of knowledge would have to be investigated, recorded, and analyzed. Man, nature and society are to be put into perspective to be valid in any ethical argument raised.

Indigenous Wholistic Theory

The indigenous wholistic theory is the theory that encompasses all areas of great concern in the promotion of the indigenous ethical theories. There is an indigenous form of knowledge that is unique to every tribe in the African continent. The idea is to see how these indigenous forms of knowledge can be used to come up with an African ethical theory. They “refers to the understanding, attitude of mind, logic, and perception behind the manner in which Africans think, act or speak in different situations of life”²⁰. This is because every person has a unique way of understanding life influenced by his or her attitude of mind, logical and perception level of the world around. The fact remains that “if you try to unite beliefs which do not agree, then you must change some things and be unfaithful to one”²¹. In the journey to the promotion of African ethical theories, due to peoples' different understanding and perception of sometimes the same reality, there will be some difficulties to reach the consensus on what is ethically right. And truly, experiences of faithfulness and unfaithfulness to one's belief for the sake of African ethical theories cannot be avoided.

Here, the researcher treats indigenous forms of knowledge, not only as topics for African ethical theories, but also as presuppositions of the philosophical activity itself within the African continent. This approach is very important because it recognizes indigenous ways of thinking, frees Africans from the influence of any outside African dominant forms of knowledge, and produces the knowledge and criteria to determine the ethical norms that suit the Africans. African ethics is to be found “in the religions, proverbs, and oral traditions of the society concerned”²². These are the sources of true African indigenous knowledge. These African indigenous knowledge approaches will not only reduce the dominance of the western ethical teachings but also stop it in the long run to favour a balanced and informed African knowledge and experience. The indigenous forms of knowledge will reinforce a cultural answer that responds to the challenges in the multicultural and ethnically diverse African continent. The indigenous forms of knowledge will promote and protect the values of interconnectedness, situatedness and relationality peculiar to the Africans. These three words: interconnectedness, situatedness, and relationality lay the foundation of the indigenous forms of knowledge. They are to be embraced in the formation of the African ethical theory.

¹⁹ Olusegun, Oladipo, *Thinking about Philosophy: A General Guide*, 66.

²⁰ Mbiti J.S., *African Religion and Philosophy*, 8.

²¹ Gehman, R., *African Traditional Religion in the Light of the Bible*, 256.

²² Mbiti J.S., *African Religion and Philosophy*, 12.

Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony holds that “The organic and departmental nature of reality calls for a method of research that both respect the organicness and departmentalness of reality”²³. It is in this regard that this work introduces the *Igwebuike* research methodology, the methodology that respects the organicness and departmentalness of reality in an attempt of widening the scope of research methodologies. *Igwebuike* research methodology is an indigenous methodology, “first because it has its origin in an African word, *Igwebuike* which literally means 'there is strength in number' but speaks more of the philosophy of complementarity. Second, because it appeals to the African spirit while not limiting its use to the African environment or problems”. It is a universal principle from a unique world. It puts into consideration not just the universally accepted research conditions but also the local categories that peculiarizes a people.

The present work is, therefore, an attempt at developing an indigenous method of research that can help in the search for knowledge in a wholistic and exhaustive way with a view of developing valid knowledge which would be applied in addressing peculiar and universal problems. It has, therefore, discussed research “as a basic feature of our humanness; meaning that 'to be' is to want to know and to find solutions to the problems of the human society”²⁴. The major dimensions of *Igwebuike* research method is that it is wholistic, begins from the known to the unknown, it is interdisciplinary, complementary and non-dominant. This research emphasizes the necessity of a synthesis of methodologies if wholistic solutions to fundamental ethical problems wrecking society are to be found.

THE DIMENSIONS OF IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY

IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY

Igwebuike philosophy tries to unify the concepts that guides one's universe and explains the puzzles of human daily life. It is essentially, “a transcendent complementary comprehensive systematic quest to penetrate the structure and dynamics of reality ultimately for the purpose of giving honest answers to fundamental questions or opinions to questions that arise within the arena of asking questions and questioning answers, for selfless enlightenment and furthering of human happiness”²⁵. It is not about self-interest fulfillment but the promotion of human happiness through true enlightenment that helps individuals apprehend better the reality of life within their environment.

²³ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike Research Methodology*, 1.

²⁴ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike Research Methodology*, 1.

²⁵ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike Research Methodology*, 1.

In this search for truth, “*Igwebuike*, within an integrated systematic framework, strives beyond all forms of particularities, peculiarities, paradoxes and contradictions and espouses the path of complementation, therefore, showing how realities can relate to one another in a mutually harmonized non-absolutistic mode”²⁶. *Igwebuike* philosophy believes that all realities relate to one another and that the harmonization of these realities can bear more fruits. Thus, “*Igwebuike* explores methods and principles for the mediation, coalescing and comprehension of the different units of reality: ideal and real, universal and particular, progressive and conservative, necessary and contingent, transcendent and immanent, essential and inessential and other units of reality within the same framework”²⁷. It treats all units, fragments or components of reality, no matter how minute as units and combinations, or missing links that are necessary for the conceptualization of reality as a whole.

Nobody starts philosophising or wondering from the blues. There should be always a cause for philosophising. For that matter, *Igwebuike* philosophy too should have a cause for its existence. *Igwebuike* philosophy to have started is because there was a long-standing problem that needed to be resolved or an issue to be properly interpreted since philosophy at the same time is an “interpretation of interpretations”²⁸. Kanu's wonder about the Igbo culture and traditions led him into critical thinking that penetrates what is unique about the Igbos and what has sustained their traditions from time immemorial till date. He had to give his own interpretations even on the interpretations of other thinkers.

The researcher discovered that *Igwebuike* philosophy “is at the heart of African philosophy, and in fact, the inner or underlying principle of African philosophy”²⁹. This is due to its approach which is totally African and after the promotion of what is African. *Igwebuike* philosophy believes that “Life is a life of sharedness, one in which another is a part thereof”³⁰. This stand is both cultural and historical and it is found in almost all African ethnic traditions. There is an unavoidable thirst for participation in the total life of the continent, the insistence that the individual should be seen in the light of the whole. People believe that within the group they are able to experience more strength and be energized as compared to when they stand-alone.

THE SOURCES OF IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY

The word, 'philosophy', “is derived from a Greek expression meaning the love of knowledge. Philosophy is thus the search for knowledge of, and about, the cosmos or

²⁶ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*, 20.

²⁷ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*, 20.

²⁸ Madu, Okechukwu Raphael, *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths*, 287.

²⁹ Kanu, I.A., *Sources of Igwebuike Philosophy: Towards a Socio-Cultural Foundation*, 1.

³⁰ Kanu, I.A., *New Africanism: Igwebuike as a Philosophical Attribute of Africa*, 95.

the universe”³¹. You have to fall in love with the cosmos or the universe before you can start searching for knowledge in it. For it is only what you dearly and heartily love that will entice you to discover more. The more you love the cosmos the more you will be driven towards achieving more knowledge about it. However, even before falling in love with anything, there should be something that provokes the love in you. And that something is what is called the 'source'. As a result, *Igwebuike* philosophy has her own unique sources. The sources of *Igwebuike* philosophy “include the works of professional African philosophers, African proverbs, African folktales, African myths, African symbols, African songs, and African names”³². These mentioned and unmentioned various sources uniquely contributed towards the development of *Igwebuike* philosophy.

IGWEBUIKE AND RELATIONALITY

Igwebuike provides “an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations”³³. *Igwebuike's* relationality is not limited to self-consciousness but extends to relational character of mutual relations with others. Kanu argues that, “‘To be’ is ‘to be with the other’, in a community of beings”³⁴. *Igwebuike* understands life as a shared reality. And it is only within the context of complementarity that life makes meaning. Life is a life of *sharedness*; “one in which another is part thereof. A relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole”³⁵. A relationship in which case the two or more coming together make each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. Thus, to put the other away removes the balance of being. Kanu avers that “this presupposes a tailor-made-cloth, measured, cut and sewn to fit into the curves, contours, shape and size, peculiarities and particularities of a being. Therefore, every being has a missing part and is at the same time, a missing part”³⁶. Relationality in the sense of *Igwebuike* philosophy is maintained by the spirit of complementarity since every person completes the others and is being completed by the others.

Igwebuike believes that there is relationality in the way people live. They always try to relate to one another. In fact, relationality is something natural or inborn. From the time a baby is born you see it clinging to the mother and as it grows up its view of relationality is widen and is able now to relate with others apart from the mother. Relationality is also expressed in proverbs like “A person is a person because of other people; Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken; When spiders unite they can tie up a

³¹ Tam, David-West, *Philosophical Essays: Reflections on the Good Life*, 148.

³² Kanu, I.A., *Sources of Igwebuike Philosophy: Towards a Socio-Cultural Foundation*, 1.

³³ Kanu, I.A., *Complementary ontology*, 10.

³⁴ Kanu, I.A., *African Philosophy: An ontologico-existential hermeneutic approach*, 7.

³⁵ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as a philosophical attribute of Africa in portraying the image of life*, 27.

³⁶ Kanu, I.A., *African philosophy, globalization and the priority of 'otherness'*, 36.

lion; If two or more people urinate in the same place at the same time, it would produce more foam”³⁷. There is an advantage in being united or relational for much can be achieved when two work together than an individual effort. This simply tells us that people should always see the importance of solidarity and the relevance of a humanity that is bent towards the other.

IGWEBUIKE AS AN AFRICAN ETHICAL THEORY **AFRICAN ETHICAL THEORY**

The researcher considers Kanu's approach who believes that African ethics would refer to “the salient features or ideas of the African moral life and thought generally as reflected in, or generated by, African moral language and social structure and life”³⁸. This implies that African ethics is not only limited to the spoken word but also in the social life of an individual in the community. It is all about ones' daily moral conduct and the choices made between what is good and bad. Kanu went further stating that “the purpose or task of ethics is to analysing and clarifying moral concepts”³⁹. Meaning that being moral is not enough but that people should understand why one thing is morally right and the other morally wrong. That is the work of ethics, to dig deeper in the content of moral concepts established by the African peoples. This helps people to understand that for the African, “Morality and moral laws are based on belief and unshakeable principles that are tied to ontology and held from conviction. The African like all peoples have a sense of good and evil, which is not left in the air but taken from philosophical concepts and the knowledge of God”⁴⁰. It deals with the right and wrong of human behaviour and conduct, it analyses and clarifies what constitutes good and bad in person's actions, and scrutinises the theories that are right or wrong in evaluating human action.

An examination of the African society reveals that from the traditional times to the contemporary period, “African society has always developed values, principles and rules that would help in the organization of human relationships. Here were times when the need for this code of conduct was borne out of the search for orderliness, peaceful co-existence and security. This thought in the minds of African forebears gave rise to socio-religious sanctions, developed over time as the situations presented themselves and required solution”⁴¹. Because of that desire for orderliness, peaceful co-existence and security to humankind, some behaviours or acts were forbidden, principally, for the maintenance of law and order. Some of these “acts or behaviours were articulated and integrated into the social and religious value systems of the community by the foremost religious and philosophical thinkers of the

³⁷ Kanu, I.A., *On the Origin and principles of Igwebuike philosophy*, 7.

³⁸ Kanu, I.A., *Disciplines of African Philosophy*, 159.

³⁹ Kanu, I.A., *Disciplines of African Philosophy*, 158.

⁴⁰ Kanu, I.A., *Disciplines of African Philosophy*, 157.

⁴¹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and African Ethics*, 1.

time”⁴². They continue leading humanity aright to date.

Igwebuike reflects a community-based morality. Thus, “a person in African ontology is said to be ethical only in relation to his or her relationship with the other. This explains why the concept of ethics in African ontology refers to character, how a person relates. If someone behaves in such a way that he or she advances the being and happiness of the other person, such a person is said to be ethical”⁴³. This implies that if a person shows love and understanding and compassion, he or she is regarded as having a good character. However, when there is a moral failure, meaning love and understanding and compassion are lacking, it is seen as the absence of good character. Added to this, “is the idea that character is learnt: it is learnt and taught in the community. It is the society that raises a child and teaches the child good character. Everyone is involved in the training of a child”⁴⁴. The involvement of every person in the training of the child is due to African understanding that a child is a child of the community and not limited to its biological parents.

Furthermore, “*Igwebuike* emphasizes the strong connection between moral rules and the type of communal kinship relationships that exist among African societies”⁴⁵. Kanu observes that “a crime committed by a person, say stealing, has implications not only for the thief but also for the kinship relations; for what is stolen is first of all considered to be a thing of the member of the kinship, perhaps of one related to the thief in one way or the other”⁴⁶. The implication is that the offence not only affects the victim of the theft but the whole community, and the shame as well goes to the whole community. Because of that, even the punishment received not only affects the thief but also the close relatives, “as in the case where a person is asked to leave the village with his entire family”⁴⁷. There have been some experiences also in which a law breaker is being cursed by the offended, let say he is being told that 'you shall die for the wrong done', if the offender does not ask for forgiveness the whole family suffers by dying one after the other and usually ending with the offender.

It is a common conviction that if the community keeps the taboos, then she has a chance of survival, but if she fails, her collapse is nearby. This explains why everyone in the community is fully involved in trying to see that taboos are not violated. Kanu avers that “to break a taboo is like fighting against the survival of the community and, thus, it is taken seriously by all the members of the community. Even if humans were united in breaking the taboo, it was strongly believed that

⁴² Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and African Ethics*, 1.

⁴³ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and African Ethics*, 1.

⁴⁴ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and African Ethics*, 3.

⁴⁵ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and African Ethics*, 4.

⁴⁶ Kanu, I.A., *African philosophy: An ontologico-Existential hermeneutic approach*, 5.

⁴⁷ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and African Ethics*, 4.

physical nature, comprising the sea, the earth etc., would avenge the broken taboo”⁴⁸. This explains why sacrifices are offered when a taboo is broken for the purpose of appeasing the gods. The gods are to be appeased if life is to return to its normal operation and people are to start experiencing blessings.

Despite ethical theories being normative and universally binding, the context in which they are to be lived matters a lot because they are meant to “create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his or her everyday life”⁴⁹. They help in the understanding of “moral dilemmas in terms of making moral decision at certain points, in justifying obligations and ideas which are binding by a person being a member of such a situation or context, and in relating personal and communal morality and also explaining the difference in terms of responsibility”⁵⁰. Situations of moral dilemmas are quite tricky, especially for those people who are not well rooted in their cultural obligations and demands. The presence of an indigenous ethical theory like *Igwebuike* can help enlighten the mind of the person found on the crossroad of making a morally right decision.

HUMANITY AS A PIVOT OF IGWEBUIKE ETHICAL THEORY

Igwebuike African ethical theory is based on the nature of our humanity. The human person cannot be human outside of the parameters of relationality. You do not expect a political animal to live in isolation but in associations where his nature can be fully realized. Prof. Kanu emphasized that “A person who fails to relate becomes uncharitable to himself or herself for such a person becomes less human and refuses to develop the valuable aspect of his or her human nature. It is at the point of fulfilling this purpose that the human person finds meaning for his or her existence. At this point, he or she not only finds meaning but by relating gives meaning to existence”⁵¹. The human person, therefore, finds meaning and gives meaning within his or her own capacity of existence.

The emphasis on “communality in African ethics is not in any way to relegate the individual to the background to the advantage of the community. Scholars of African and non-African origin have raised concerns about this on the ground that the personality of the individual is affected negatively. However, worthy of note is that one of the reasons why the African emphasize the community in several fronts is to echo into the mind of the African the need for detachment especially from those things that most people considered topmost in the agenda of their lives. The happiness of the human person depends on the quality of ones detachment from

⁴⁸ Kanu, I.A., *A hermeneutic approach to African traditional religion, theology and philosophy*, 1.

⁴⁹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 1.

⁵⁰ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 1.

⁵¹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 6.

vulnerable goods”⁵². For when one is so much attached to vulnerable goods his life can never be straightforward or morally correct.

IGWEBUIKE AND THE COMMON GOOD

Kanu clarifies that “Entering into community with others does not mean a bandwagon kind of morality, doing what others are doing or what the majority are doing. It rather emphasizes the common good which could sometimes negate what the entire community holds as true and at some other time opposed to what the individual holds as true for himself or herself. Thus it is not about uniformity in action but about the good of the community or the integrity”⁵³. The effort towards the pursuit of the common good comes from one's identification with the group and solidarity with the group. If one thinks of himself or herself as a member of a group, then one works hard towards the common good of the same group. The “sense of solidarity helps individuals in the group to help the others or other to see what they might not have seen in terms of right or wrong. In morality, one therefore becomes a complement to the other”⁵⁴. This might sometimes lead to crisis in the community or in an individual, but the end result is the common good. It is a dialectical process that moves from crisis to discussion and then consensus.

IGWEBUIKE AND DUTY

In African communities, “there are recognized family roles and relationships that define the obligations, rights, and boundaries of interaction among the members of a self-recognizing group. This creates a network that gives its members a sense of belonging”⁵⁵. There is no way an African man can live in the community without performing his duties starting from his family to the larger community. Upon having being born, the person starts learning the obligations and rights of every individual in that specific community. These rights and obligations does not just end in being learnt but goes further to each individual to realize that it is his duty and responsibility to enforce them in the society. Man's duties are to be performed within the framework of the community. As a result, each person is obliged to perform his duty towards the other.

IGWEBUIKE AND RECIPROCITY

According to Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, “The 'ethic of reciprocity' is across-religio-cultural ethical principle that is found in virtually every religious and cultural background. It simply states: 'Do to others what you would like done to you'. It is also called 'The Golden Rule' and provides a ready precept for the handling of conflicts and promotion of harmony among peoples”⁵⁶.

⁵² Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 7.

⁵³ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 12.

⁵⁴ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 12.

⁵⁵ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as the Consummate Foundation of African Bioethical Principles*, 7.

⁵⁶ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Ethic of Reciprocity*, 1.

It is derived from human feelings and behaviour; it is also relatively simple to articulate and understand, and yet, addresses an enormous range of human behaviour. This rule of conduct is an African value of reciprocity. One should treat others the same way he would like to be treated.

Kanu narrates that “The point of connection between *Igwebuike* and the ethic of reciprocity is very easily noticeable. While the ethic of reciprocity teaches that you do unto others as you would want done unto you, and the philosophy of *Igwebuike* provides a philosophical foundation for such a perspective in relation to a fellow human person, more fundamentally, the other is perceived as a part of the self. If the other is a part of the self, one with this understanding would treat the other as one would like to be treated”⁵⁷. Kanu further states that “The philosophy of *Igwebuike* is not just a philosophical foundation for the ethic of reciprocity, but it is the ethic of reciprocity. It presents the ethic of reciprocity not just as a moral principle, but as a duty that one owns to himself or herself, everyone owns himself or herself of treating the other in a way that one would like to be treated”⁵⁸. This is because *Igwebuike* “sees a very strong relationship between every reality, an intricate web. To treat the other, that which is different from the self in a way that accords with honour is to treat oneself in a way that is honourable. However, to treat the other in a way that is dishonourable is to dishonor oneself, because everything we do to the other has a way of getting back at us”⁵⁹. Thus, in *Igwebuike*, the ethic of reciprocity is not just a moral principle, but a moral obligation one must have towards the other. In fact, from the above understanding, it is not just a moral obligation one owns the other, but an obligation to oneself.

IGWEBUIKE AND VIRTUE

Rev. Prof. Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony found out that “There are two colleges of human action that either builds fellowship or destroys fellowship. The actions that build fellowship are referred to as virtues; these are actions that the human person must have to be truly human and to contribute to the human community through concrete action”⁶⁰. Every human person is expected to pursue virtues in all he does because they build the community, and refrain from all that destroy community living. These human virtues arise in us as a result of our human capacity for them. Therefore, every human being has a capacity for virtue by virtue of him being a human being. It is natural for a person always to seek what is virtuous, and the more the person grows the more he wants to do things aright. Every human being is granted this capacity for virtuous life and the opposite could simply be categorized as personal wish.

⁵⁷ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Ethic of Reciprocity*, 6.

⁵⁸ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Ethic of Reciprocity*, 6.

⁵⁹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 8.

⁶⁰ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 8.

Igwebuike virtues that promote communion include “Sympathy, Compassion, Benevolence, Altruism, Sacrifice, Mercy, Love, Patience, Tolerance, Respect, Politeness, Kindness, Peace, Empathy, Friendship, Endurance, Magnificence, Temperance, Gentleness, and Sincerity”⁶¹. A person is not considered virtuous because he or she randomly performs any of these virtues. The focus is wholistic, the entirety of the person rather than on particular episodes in the life of a person. You, therefore, cannot just choose to be peaceful and think is enough to be a virtuous person. You have to try to be sympathetic, compassionate, merciful, friendly, magnificent, empathetic and so forth.

While human virtues build fellowship, vices take away from or destroy fellowship. And these are the actions that the human person should not venture into so that such a person can be truly human and contribute to the growth of the human community. *Igwebuike* found the following vices as the ones that kill communion, “Deceitfulness, Indifference, Malevolence, Stinginess, Cunny, Rude, Hate, Arrogance, Ill-will, Disrespect, Gossip, Cowardice, Boastfulness, Vanity, Wastefulness, Greed, Violence, Envy, Jealousy, and Corruption”. Nobody who is involved in these acts can be called a virtuous person. His intention consciously or unconsciously destructs human structures; it does not build but destroy fellowship. Wherever you find people who are moved by one vice or the other things seems not to go well. As a result people experience division, distrust, insincere, jealousy, envy, and all that makes community living unhealthy.

RELEVANCE OF IGWEBUIKE ETHICAL THEORY FOR AFRICA

Igwebuike ethical theory is an indigenous ethical theory proposed and propounded by Professor Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony in his article '*Igwebuike as an Igbo-African relational ethical theory*'. In it he defines ethical theories as “attempts by individuals or schools of thought to provide clear and unified accounts of what our ethical responsibilities are or what we are obliged to do. They help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his or her everyday life”⁶². Kanu believes that through the Igbo culture, just as any other culture, an individual should be able to discover his or her moral responsibilities, his or her cultural obligations for his or her professional or personal conduct. Kanu went on stating that ethical theories also help in “understanding moral dilemmas, in terms of making moral decision at certain points, justifying obligations and ideas, relating morality and also explaining the difference in terms of responsibility”⁶³. There are complex situations at times that people find difficult to deal with. Making a moral decision becomes a challenge at this point in time. Only proper knowledge of ethical theories can rescue someone found on the crossroad as to which direction is right to take.

⁶¹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 9.

⁶² Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 1.

Igwebuike as an ethical theory has been with “the Igbo-African people for hundreds of years and have been a basis for the choices individuals make and the decisions that the community takes”⁶⁴. So when the researcher talks of *Igwebuike* ethical theory in fact is not talking about something new or strange but the theory that has been sustaining a certain people for long. People as individuals or community have been making correct moral decisions for years. However, the time for *Igwebuike* theory has come to be put on the world map where it will not only have influence on the Igbo people but the whole world.

While *Igwebuike* ethical theory's emphasis on community seems to suggest that “it is a communal or collective ethical theory that does not promote human freedom, on the contrary it is an ethics that specifies the role of the individual within the group, which would not have been possible if the individual was understood as not having freedom”⁶⁵. Complementarity, empathy, and communion as emphasized by *Igwebuike* ethical theory are only possible where there is first individuality. It begins with individuality before it graduates to communitarian. On the same note, “the traditional or cultural character of *Igwebuike* ethical theory does not imply that it is applicable to small scale traditional communities in pre-colonial era only. It is applicable to addressing present day ethical issues within and outside the Igbo-African society, and its interpretation is refashionable so that its characteristic elements or principles are understood in the light of our best current understanding of what is morally right”⁶⁶. *Igwebuike* ethical theory is not imprisoned within the Igbo culture or African arena but goes beyond to the universal appeal. It is not limited within a specific period of time but capable of responding to future occurring ethical situations.

The establishment of *Igwebuike* ethical theory is a confirmation that the time has come to promote the ethics that is purely African and speaks to our cultures and not out of African cultural values. It would be stupid indeed if “we allowed the development of our economies to destroy the human and social values which African societies had built up over centuries”⁶⁷. Many are the people who are ready to sale their African morality just because of the benefits they can get from the Europeans. Because of their interests in economic developments, some African leaders are ready to permit same sex marriages, which is against African ethical theories. Someone has

⁶³ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 1.

⁶⁴ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 1.

⁶⁵ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 3.

⁶⁶ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Relational Ethical Theory*, 3.

to speak up as if everyone keeps quiet our African moral values will be washed away by the European influence. We should be proud that “African heritage has something to offer the world today”⁶⁸. Africans should not just accept whatever comes their way. They are to show the world that they have something to offer also by refusing what is foreign and immoral and promote what is local and moral. Until as Africans we promote the wisdom of our ancestors and show the world that we can live by those traditional moral values will non-Africans stop pouring dirty stuff on our continent.

Prof. Kanu's contribution is so dynamic as summarized in this statement: “*Igwebuike* is the moving spirit and the pivot upon which African philosophy, religion and culture revolve, thus, the key to the understanding of African Traditional religion, culture and philosophy. It is thermodynamic because of the interdependence and complementarity of the elements of the African universe, which characterizes the African way of thinking, feeling, talking and responding to various human conditions”⁶⁹. With the introduction of *Igwebuike* ethical theory, people have come to a better understanding of African philosophy, African religion, and African culture. It has added value and clarity to the African way of thinking, feeling, talking and treating African issues.

Igwebuike philosophy, considering all what has been written by the proponent Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, what other thinkers have written about it, and of course, the presentations made about *Igwebuike* philosophy, the researcher finds that the contribution done is so vast even to be mentioned here. However, the traces of all *Igwebuike* contributions can be found on media as this piece of work dealt only with the minute of it as you could see in the bibliography of this research. That is one of the limitations of the research because it respects its perimeters based on the topic being treated. What is clear is that *Igwebuike* has transformed many thinkers especially in the life of African philosophy with emphasise on solidarity and complementarity, the principles that make African people unique. The researcher has read a lot of *Igwebuike* philosophical books and articles, and the result is just so enormous.

Igwebuike ethical theory is an ethical philosophy that is described with an Igbo word but with a universal relevance and appeal. *Igwebuike* as a word “captures and communicates the Igbo-African world. *Igwebuike* is the form (and symbolic) of the Igbo-African mental being, and thus, the gateway to Igbo-African philosophy”⁷⁰. The mental being is not limited to Igbos only but also to non-Igbos that includes all Africans. The relevance of *Igwebuike* ethical theory for Africa cannot be questioned.

⁶⁷ Nyerere, Julius K., *Man and Development*, 10.

⁶⁸ Ehusani, George Omaku, *An Afro-Christian Vision 'Ozovehe'*, 28.

⁶⁹ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*, 18.

The relevance of *Igwebuike* ethical theory for Africa is observed in the way it contributes to the developing of African ethical theories since it is taken as a role model. This is very important, as *Igwebuike* ethical theory, which is an indigenous ethical theory that has emerged from a unique socio-cultural context has had a good influence on both young and old thinkers. It is a source of inspiration for the African thinkers to work hard and come up with what is purely and truly African. The existence of *Igwebuike* ethical theory is an added advantage that opens many doors to other ethical theories in Africa like *Ng'umbo* or *Bantu* ethical theory. The sources of *Igwebuike* ethical theories include “the works of professional African philosophers, African proverbs, African folktales, African myths, African symbols, African songs and African names”⁷¹. All African ethnic groups have these sources of ethics, the reality that makes it easy to establish African ethical theory taking *Igwebuike* ethical theory as a model.

The researcher concludes that *Igwebuike* ethical theory has numerous benefits for Africa. It helps Africans in their better understanding of ethical theories from the African perspectives and acts as a mark of a major progress in the articulation of African ethical theories. *Igwebuike* ethical theory enables philosophers, African politicians and policy makers to come up with ethical policies and programs that encourage everyone to lead an ethical approved life system in the society. It contributes to the efforts other African philosophers are making in establishing well-articulated and balanced African ethical theories. It is a source of knowledge that helps individuals who are daily faced with the challenge of making ethical decisions.

Igwebuike ethical theory is found to be a help for the Africans to contemplate more deeply on what they are, get in touch with some deep aspects of their being and what guides whatever they do or say. It enables them be empathetic with themselves, grow in the way they face ethical issues, and explore fully their being, inner conflicts, and potentialities. It helps them explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to reach a clearer self-understanding. Those confused ethically are assisted in rediscovering their traditional values and goals. They explore thoughts, feelings, values and general behaviour to reach a better understanding of how to relate to oneself, to others, to the environment, and to God. They learn how to be open, authentic, and to grow into the person God wants them to be by examining their ideas, doctrines, and methods of their life approach.

The researcher concludes that the most effective strategy to the promotion of African

⁷⁰ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike and Language: In Search of an Ontological Toolbox for Igbo-African Philosophy*, 1.

⁷¹ Kanu, I.A., *Sources of Igwebuike Philosophy: Towards a Socio-Cultural Foundation*, 1.

indigenous ethical theory is *Igwebuike* ethical theory. The great numbers of young and old philosophers are happy with *Igwebuike* ethical theory. *Igwebuike* is an Igbo-African ethical theory; it possesses a traditional or cultural character, and is applicable to addressing present day ethical issues within and outside the Igbo-African society. Its interpretation is refashionable and flexible enough so that its characteristic elements or principles are understood in the light of our best current understanding of what is morally right within and outside of Africa. Thus, while it is a cultural construct, it possesses a universal appeal, and it is on this universal appeal that reflects the African way that needs to be emphasized on.

This piece argues that the key to understanding African indigenous ethical theories is *Igwebuike* ethical theory. This is because “*Igwebuike* is based on or captures the African worldview which shapes African philosophy”⁷². Its sense of harmony, community, complementarity and solidarity makes it easy to formulate African indigenous ethical theories. This is due to the fact that *Igwebuike* is based on the African worldview which shapes African philosophy.

This work also considers *Igwebuike* ethical theory as one of the solutions to African ethical problems. It argued that “its sense of harmony, community, complementarity and solidarity have been expressed in virtually all the perspectives of African philosophers”⁷³. *Igwebuike* ethical theory is an eye opener that African ethical theories should have their own foundations from the ethnic ethical teachings which are purely African. The African ethical theory is to be determined by the strategies employed by the African ethical philosopher. If the strategies are consistently employed, the African ethical theory will become a reality, and if not, the theories from ethnic groups will remain within with less impact on the African continent.

It was observed that people have duties to fulfil in the society they belong to. The two main obligations that every man has in life are: his obligations towards his family, parents, wife, and children. The other obligation is his responsibility towards his people, community and country. Every human being has a human moral obligation to himself, as well as to other beings, both human and sub-human, to treat each with dignity and respect, as every being is an integral part of the cosmic whole. This moral obligation goes beyond ones' territories; it has to be practiced in African continent at large. You cannot manage to live without executing any duty in an African community because everyone whether knowingly or unknowingly is always doing something for the other. That good thing you do for the other is your duty, your obligation or your responsibility.

⁷² Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as the key to understanding African Philosophy and Religion*, 1.

⁷³ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike as the key to understanding African Philosophy and Religion*, 1.

Talking about ethics or virtues indirectly or directly is talking about the different characters of individuals. The good character includes traits like loyalty, honesty, courage, integrity, fortitude, and other important virtues that promote good behaviour. A person with good character chooses to do the right thing because he believes it is morally right to do so. Character defines who one is. So when they judge someone, they often judge him or her based on character. For example, when someone always seems to do the right thing, they classify him as a person of high ethical standards. In Africa, there are morally upright indigenes, people worthy of admiration, their characters are exceptional, it is what is within these special personalities that needs to be promoted in the African continent to make African character that will have positive impact on all the natives.

The relevance of *Igwebuike* ethical theory in the larger community of the African continent cannot be understated. This indigenous ethical theory makes Africa safe to the majority people, provides an avenue whereby the Africans will get to encounter themselves and others, thus enabling them to take ownership of their ideas and to exist as unique beings in the world. It promotes the formation of conscience that is in touch with the actual life experienced by people to solve the crucial problems experienced. The African ethics takes careful attention to the cultural sensibilities and philosophical assumptions emanating from ones ethnic unique traditions. African ethical theory will become an empowering tool when the Africans are deeply aware of where they come from and how their communities influence their understanding of the world and the interpretation of their own experiences. They will know who they are, how to act in different situations, and how to solve their problems.

Igwebuike ethical theory “falls within the parameters of the art of the African mind. It shapes the African thinking as it is the basis of the African logic”⁷⁴. It is this African logic and wisdom that provokes the indigenous people to do something about their life situations. Indigenous people become empowered when their unique contexts are acknowledged and respected. The empowerment makes room for indigenous forms of knowledge to be points of departure towards African ethical theories. *Igwebuike* ethical theory is the main point of reference and the source of much of its assumptions, the system of information that provide individuals with knowledge and resources for living a life of purpose and direction.

⁷⁴ Kanu, I.A., *Igwebuike Philosophy of Science and Technology*, 1.

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