

## **A REVIEW OF IKECHUKWU ANTHONY KANU'S "IGWEBUIKE AS A TREND IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY"**

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After conquering the question of whether there is an African philosophy, emphasis of African philosophers shifted to what constitutes African philosophy. Sequel to this development, African philosophy began to be categorized into trends and schools by some African scholars. In furtherance of this development, Kanu categorized the trends or schools of African philosophy into the universalist trend, particularist trend, eclectic trend, national ideological trend, sage philosophy, literary school and hermeneutic trend, each of which he highlighted in the paper under review with the aim of establishing *Igwebuike* as an eclectic ontologco – Existential Trend in African philosophy.

In the introductory part of the paper, Kanu, referring to his earlier work "The Trends in African Philosophy" published in the *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Religion and Culture*, explained that "the universalist or professional school of African philosophy argues that philosophy is the same everywhere and uses the same methodology, and thus, African philosophy should be critical and not a descriptive record of African beliefs" (p. 108). Bodunrin was identified in this paper as a strong member of this school. Uduigwomen's criticism of this school was acknowledged by Kanu on the grounds that until philosophical problems are contextualised to have local and concrete relevance, they will remain plain and in the abstract. The consequence of this universalist school is therefore, that philosophy remains an abstract discipline without concrete historical experience (p. 109).

The particularist school or ethno-philosophy according to Kanu in this paper, was championed by scholars like Tempels (1969), Mbiti (1969) and Senghor (1964; 1973) who argue that properly speaking, African philosophy is constituted

by the different African world-views as they would define African philosophy as the philosophical thought of Africans as could be derived from their various worldviews, myths, proverbs etc. It is therefore, the philosophy indigenous to Africans, unadulterated by foreign ideas (p.109). For Kanu, this particularist school was criticized by Hountondji (1995) and Segun (1995) on the basis of its definition of African philosophy in exclusively traditional and particular terms (p. 109).

The third school highlighted by Kanu is the National Ideological School which considers African philosophy basically in terms of the discourses of African political thinkers like Azikiwe, Nyerere, Awolowo etc, which was a theoretical offshoot of the African anti-colonial struggle. The Sage School was also identified and explained by Kanu as being developed by the Kenyan philosopher, Henry Odera Oruka (1944-1995) who interviewed sages from traditional groups and identified philosophical sages in different cultures who were more of the fountains of cultural wisdom. According to Kanu, Oruka (1991) categorized these sages into 'Folk Sages' who embodied community wisdom and 'Philosophical Sages' who maintained critical perspectives to towards that wisdom, thereby demonstrating the existence of philosophy in traditional Africa as against the views of Hountondji and others in the West that Africa has no philosophy (p.109).

In addition to the above schools, the last set of schools/trends in African philosophy identified and explained by Kanu are the Literary/Artistic school and the Hermeneutic school. For him, while the literary trend emphasizes the philosophical contributions of African thinkers through their artistic or literary works, the Hermeneutic school considers the primary task of African Philosophy as interpretation (p.109).

After identifying and highlighting the various schools/trends in African philosophy, Kanu in this paper, raised a fundamental observation that a glance at these various schools in African philosophy reveals a tension between particularity and universality which still remains unsettled, arguing that there is

a thesis and an antithesis in these schools necessitating the need for a synthesis (p.109).

Kanu argues in this paper that *Igwebuike* considered as a school in African philosophy will introduce the synthesis between the thesis and anti-thesis of particularist and universalist schools of African philosophy for a more balanced doing and development of African philosophy (p. 109-110).

The next part of the paper is a demonstration of the complementary nature of the African reality as a basis for an eclectic school. Here, Kanu argued that the fundamental principle which describes the core of the African spirit is harmony and that although reality exists as individuals, they converge at the point of reasonableness (p. 110). In consolidation of this point, Kanu cites Asouzu's complementary philosophy of *Ibuanyidanda* which presents African reality as an all embracing whole, in which all units form together a dynamic play of forces, which are in harmony with each other, by completing and supporting the other (p. 110). This understanding of reality for Kanu, is the ontological foundation and justification for an eclectic school of African philosophy that would help the particularist and universalist schools harness their positive strengths into a complementary matrix for the development of African philosophy.

In what follows, Kanu reveals how *Igwebuike* is an eclectic ontologico-existential trend in African Philosophy. This he begins by an etymological explanation of the concept of *Igwebuike*. According to him, *Igwebuike* is an Igbo word which is a combination of three words. Thus, it can be understood both as a word and as a sentence. As a word, it is written as *Igwebuike* and as a sentence, it is written as *Igwe bu ike* with the components words being relatively independent in terms of space. In an explanation of the three words involved in the sentence form of the word, Kanu explained: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population. *Bu* is a verb which means *is*. *Ike* is a noun which means *strength* or *power*. Put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power, meaning, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force (p. 110).

This, according to Kanu, provides an ontological perspective that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. *Igwebuike* as an ideology, Kanu argues, is founded on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. The argument is that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity. In other words, 'to be' is 'to be with others' in a community of beings and to live outside this framework, is to suffer alienation (p. 111). This, for him, is based on the African philosophy of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African Traditional Religious and philosophical experience (p. 111). From the foregoing, *Igwebuike*, Kanu argues, is ontological in character as it emphasizes the universal character of philosophy and existential in character as it respects the regional character of African Philosophy, that is, its Africanness, with Africa being the setting for the philosophical activity (p. 111). As *Igwebuike* means "there is strength in unity", it believes that the coupling of the positive strengths of the universalist and particularist schools would foster the development of African Philosophy. To further clarify this point, Kanu writes:

The *Igwebuike* school of African philosophy would define African Philosophy as the combination of the universalist and particularist approaches to African Philosophy. This would involve sifting the philosophical thoughts of Africans as could be gotten from their various worldviews, myths, proverbs, etc and reflecting on them by an African genius, that is, the African Philosophers. At the point of romance between the professional and unprofessional, authentic African Philosophy is realized. Although the different schools are already doing African Philosophy, they will do better if they join heads together (p. 111).

Concerning the possible positive outcome of the *Igwebuike* school, Kanu citing Uduigwomen (1995) argues that "the universalist approach will provide the necessary analytic and conceptual framework for the particularist school and since this framework cannot flourish in a vacuum, the particularist approach will supply the raw materials or data needed for the universalist approach thereby delivering the universalist approach from mere logic-chopping and abstractness. In this case, there will be fruitful exchange of categories and concepts" (p. 111).

Consequent on this argument, Kanu argues that the *Igwebuike* school of African philosophy can be referred to as an eclectic school or moderate trend which he considers a balanced and safe path to thread in doing African philosophy.

In the concluding part of the paper, Kanu mounts a solid defence of some of the criticisms levelled against the eclectic school by some scholars. He singled out the criticism of Mangena (2014) who argued that the move towards an eclectic school of African philosophy is “a disservice to our very own philosophy called ethnophilosophy”, interpreting the move as running away from my burning house only to seek refuge next door. In response to this criticism, Kanu raises the following pertinent questions:

Is it reasonable to remain in a burning house and die in it simply because the house is yours? Is it not safer to take refuge in a safe place? If a human being clings onto something simply because it is his own and not because it is reasonable, does it not degenerate into emotionalism? At this level, is it still philosophy? African philosophy is not static and must not be eternally anchored on folklores, proverbs and myths (p.112).

In summary, Kanu argues that “no school of African philosophy is complete and growth begins when we begin to seek completeness and the different schools of African philosophy complete the other” (P.112).

This paper, in my assessment is logically tight piece with hardly any room for serious contention and criticism. After a careful reading however, the gap I find is with the concept of *Igwebuike* itself. From the etymological rendering of *Igwebuike* to its philosophical interpretation as “number is strength”, there seems not to be anything to explicitly show whether it is positive number, negative number or just any kind of number that translates into strength. For instance, when armed robbers gather in their number to complement one another in their robbery operations, such operations become more formidable than an operation carried out by one or a few armed robbers. In a similar manner, when scholars in their number engage in their scholarly activities in complementarity, they are likely to produce greater quality in their enterprise than just a single or fewer

scholars doing their own thing. In each of the above cases, number translates into strength. But while negative number in the earlier case translates to negative strength, positive number in the latter case translates into positive strength. Based on this, I think that the concept and philosophy of *Igwebuiké* should be redefined to clearly indicate what kind of number that translate into what kind of strength. It is only then that *Igwebuiké* as a school of African philosophy can truly be considered to be eclectic.

The above gap however, does not negate the fact that the particularist and universalist schools of African philosophy are not in a form of tension which requires an eclectic mediation which *Igwebuiké* as a school of African philosophy is capable of providing. Re-echoing the author's position, I also dare to assert that this eclectic ontologico-existential school embodied by *Igwebuiké* is the safer route to doing and developing African philosophy.

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