IGWEBUIKE ETHICS: TOWARDS THE UNITY OF ETHICAL TRADITIONS IN AFRICA

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Abstract

For many years, philosophers have grappled with developing ethical theories that offer clear and coherent accounts of ethical responsibilities and obligations. However, the field of African ethics, along with other areas of African studies, has received inadequate attention, resulting in a dearth of comprehensive analysis and clarification of its philosophical foundations. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating a distinctive African ethic, Igwebuike, which emphasizes the unity of diverse ethical expressions in Africa. While ethics has been extensively studied, African ethics remains underexplored, making this study particularly significant in contributing to a more nuanced understanding of African ethics, particularly the unique ethical framework of Igwebuike. Utilizing the Igwebuike theoretical framework, this study adopts hermeneutic, thematic, and analytic methods of inquiry to explore its philosophical significance thoroughly. Ultimately, the research findings enrich the literature on African ethics and contribute valuable insights into its distinctive character, advancing the discourse on African ethics. The study submits that African societies possess a distinct ethical framework founded on relational and complementary principles.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Ethics, Philosophy, African, Traditions, Complementary

Introduction

Ethics generally, is a field of study which deals with the morality of human actions or the norms of human behaviour. Omoregbe (1993) defines ethics as "the systematic study of the fundamental principles of the moral law; or as the normative science of human conduct" (p. 4). According to Thiroux (1998), it deals with the right and wrong of human

behaviour and conduct. That is the question of what constitutes right or wrong, good or bad in a person's action, and what theories are right or wrong in evaluating human action. Gonsalves (1972) traces the beginnings of ethics to life situations:

> Ethics grows out of life situations in which we are confronted with some sort of perplexity or doubt about what is the right thing to do or the best course to follow, situations in which different desires strive for opposed goods or in which incompatible courses of action seem to be justifiable. Such conflict situations call forth personal enquiry into the reasons for deciding where the right lies. (p. 3).

Ethics is a fundamental aspect of philosophy that seeks to understand the moral nature of human behavior and actions. While the analytic school of philosophy has focused on the analysis and clarification of moral language, some philosophers, such as Lewis (1963), believe that ethics extends beyond linguistic analysis.

Throughout history, philosophers have grappled with the challenge of constructing ethical theories that provide a clear and unified account of ethical responsibilities and obligations. This endeavor seeks to enhance the comprehension of moral dilemmas, facilitate moral decision-making, justify professional obligations and ideas, reconcile ordinary and professional morality, and elucidate the distinction in terms of responsibility.

Therefore, while the analytic school of philosophy has reduced ethics to analyzing and clarifying moral concepts, ethics remains concerned with the morality of human actions and the norms of human behavior. Ultimately, the development of ethical theories is aimed at providing a comprehensive and coherent understanding of ethical responsibilities and obligations.

Despite its relevance and importance, African ethics remains an area that has not received sufficient scrutiny and elucidation. As Gyekye (2013) contends, a thorough and extensive analysis and interpretation of African ethics is warranted. In this vein, this article aims to investigate the nature and dimensions of African ethics, with a particular focus on a distinct African ethic, namely, Igwebuike.

The concept of Igwebuike embodies a crucial aspect of African ethics, as it denotes the underlying principle that unifies the diversity of ethical perspectives within Africa. It serves as a constant factor amidst the plurality of ethical perspectives on the continent, and as such, it can be regarded as the operating condition that maintains a degree of coherence and continuity amid the remarkable diversity of African ethics. By exploring

the intricacies of Igwebuike, this paper seeks to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of African ethics.

The Reality of African Ethics

A contentious issue that has engrossed scholars from ethnology, sociology, and anthropology pertains to the alleged inability of Africans to distinguish between good and evil. Adding to the controversy, some argue that when African societies do consider such matters, it is often in a crude and unsophisticated manner that falls short of the high standards expected of a comprehensive and refined moral system. Echoing these sentiments, Tempels (1959) expounds:

> On the subject of theft, it is generally said that the African does not see the least wrong in it, that the only thing that matters is not to get caught. Lies and deceit, it is said, are, in African eyes indications of the subtlety of mind, countenanced by all moral assessment. They would not regard adultery as any infraction of morality, and it would suffice if anyone caught in the act should agree to pay an indemnity. (p. 54).

However, with the acknowledgement of the existence of an African philosophy, the existence of African ethics cannot be denied, given that African ethics is an aspect of African philosophy. Thus, the affirmation of African philosophy is also an affirmation of African ethics. Tempels (1959) defends the existence of African ethics thus:

> The Bantu likewise reject lies, deceit, theft and adultery, on the same fundamental grounds of the destructiveness inherent in them. They also condemn, as Bantu, various very widespread usages such as polygamy, child marriage and other sexual abuses. In short, they know and accept Natural Law as it is formulated in the Ten Commandments. (p. 56).

One of the most persistent challenges facing Western scholars is the difficulty in recognizing that Africans possess a rich and complex system of morality. This difficulty is primarily rooted in the profound differences between Western and African moral frameworks. While Western moral theory emphasizes conformity to socially conventionalized behavior, African moral systems are anchored in ontological beliefs and unshakeable principles that are held as convictions.

However, a careful examination of the history of Africa reveals that from ancient times to the present, African societies have consistently crafted values, principles, and rules to regulate human relationships. These codes of conduct were established to promote orderliness, peaceful co-existence, and security, and evolved over time to incorporate socio-religious sanctions to ensure compliance. This dynamic process highlights the

resilience and adaptability of African moral systems in response to changing social and historical contexts.

Ethics of a Shared Humanity

In the realm of African ethics, Igwebuike stands out as a unique and all-encompassing concept that embodies the very essence of African moral life and thought. This distinctive ethical theory is rooted in African moral language, social structure, and life, and is deeply embedded in the beliefs and ideas of the African people regarding what constitutes right or wrong, good or bad character.

At the core of Igwebuike ethics lies the fundamental principle of compassion, which is the ability to empathize with others and act for their well-being. This principle is closely intertwined with the values of reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity, which are all geared towards promoting social harmony, cooperative living, justice, and fairness in African societies. Unlike Western ethics, which tends to emphasize individual rights, Igwebuike ethics places greater emphasis on the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of human beings, and the responsibility we have towards one another.

In essence, Igwebuike ethics is a community-based and oriented morality, which underscores the importance of ethical behavior in relation to others. In African ontology, an individual is considered ethical only insofar as their actions and behavior contribute to the well-being and happiness of others. Thus, love, understanding, and compassion are considered key indicators of good character, while moral failure is seen as the absence of good character.

Overall, Igwebuike ethics offers a compelling and insightful perspective on the nature of morality and ethical behavior in African societies. It reminds us of the importance of fostering strong social bonds and relationships, and of our inherent obligation to care for one another and promote the common good.

Among the Akan of Ghana, when a person wants to say, "You are unethical", he would rather say, "You have no character" (*onni suban*). Among the Ewe, the word is *nonome mele* (he has no character); among the Yoruba, Shona and Igbo the words used for morality are *Iwa, hunhu* and *agwa* respectively, which means character. This makes character very central to Igwebuike ethics because its quality is the basis of relation. Closely linked 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. Therefore, Igwebuike ethics is learnt and not innate.

In addition to its emphasis on interconnectedness and reciprocity, Igwebuike also highlights the integral connection between moral rules and the communal kinship relationships that are prevalent in African societies. As noted by Kanu (2015), a crime such as theft is not simply viewed as an offense against an individual victim, but rather as an affront to the entire kinship group. The stolen property is often considered the possession of a member of the kinship, perhaps even a relative of the thief. Thus, the offense not only impacts the immediate victim, but also has implications for the entire community, which must bear the shame of the transgression.

Moreover, in some cases, the punishment for the crime is not limited to the perpetrator alone but may extend to their close relatives as well. This communal approach to justice underscores the importance of maintaining harmonious and cooperative relationships within the community, as well as the understanding that each individual's actions have an impact on the broader social fabric. In this way, Igwebuike serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all individuals within African societies and the importance of maintaining social harmony through adherence to shared moral principles. The community has a responsibility in rooting out evil, and more so, the responsibility in helping the person concerned. There is an African proverb that says that *a kinsman who strays into evil must first be saved from it by all, then, afterwards be questioned on why and how he dared stray into it to start with*. According to Edeh (1985):

> The most important point here is that evil, be it committed by an individual or group, is the concern of the whole community… the community does not leave the delinquent in isolation. He is always recognized as an indispensable part of the whole. Yet the evil is not condoned, and the culprit is not hidden away or helped to escape. Rather, the whole community comes out to eradicate the evil. (p. 106).

African ethics is centered around the importance of creating and abiding by taboos to safeguard the well-being of the community. It is believed that the community's survival is dependent on the strict adherence to these prohibitions, and every member of the community is expected to be committed to maintaining their integrity. Violating a taboo is not just a breach of an individual or group but an attack on the community as a whole, with even a group of individuals violating it likely to face retribution from the natural world. Sacrifices were offered to appease the gods in case of the violation of a taboo to mitigate the potential harm caused and maintain a harmonious relationship between humans and the divine.

Igwebuike Ethical Principles

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

   a*. Respect for Persons*

A fundamental dimension of *Igwebuike* is respect for persons. This is because *Igwebuike* maintains that the other person is a part of the whole ontological order. To harm the other is to harm oneself, and to preserve the other is to preserve oneself. Moreover, the human person is also understood as a gift from God. The nexus between God and human beings makes the human person a theomorphic being.

   ***b.** Beneficence Principle*

The fundamental tenets of *Igwebuike* philosophy revolve around the interdependence of beings, whereby the other is viewed as an integral piece of oneself. This perspective underpins the philosophy's emphasis on respect and love towards others, which is manifested in the ethical principle of beneficence. In simple terms, beneficence encompasses acts of kindness, active goodness, and charity towards others, representing the antithesis of maleficence. Essentially, the other is accorded love and kindness owing to their status as a constituent part of the greater whole, reflecting the underlying interconnectedness of all beings in *Igwebuike* ethics.

   c. *Non-Maleficence Principle*

Two words are involved here: none and maleficence. Maleficence means active wrongdoing or hurt. It is the opposite of beneficence. The words put together as non-maleficence would mean keeping away from harming or hurting the other. Shannon (1993) writes that "nonmaleficence is a technical way of stating that we have an obligation not to harm people. One of the ancient technical principles derived from the Hippocratic tradition is 'First of all, do no harm' (*primum non nocere*). If we cannot benefit someone, then at least we should do him or her no harm" (p. 6). Beyond the prohibition of direct harm to someone else, the duty of non-maleficence also includes avoiding exposing people to harm.

Igwebuike Ethical Values

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

a. *Human dignity:* The dignity of human life is based on its relationship with the divine. Life is understood as coming from God. This makes the human person a theomorphic

being and explains why the Igbo say, *ndu sina chi* (life is from God). When a child is born it is taken to be a gift from God. The life of children is not attributed to the mere biological fact of conception because every child has existed in an antecedent world of a Divine Master. In this relationship with the divine, we discover that *Igwebuike* does not just emphasize relationships among human beings, but also a metaphysical relationship.

b. *Human Equality:* The African idea of human equality is directly linked to her concept of God as the father of all. God, according to Dozie-Okafor (1992) is a common root. However, Anaulogho (1997) avers that he also has a very strong sense of justice. This conception of God leads to the idea of equality, justice and fairness among Africans. This is despite the emphasis on the concept of hierarchy. In African ontology, the idea of hierarchy does not conflict with equality; for equality is not placing everyone on the same level but giving everyone his due place. This sense of equality, accompanied by love, cooperation and solidarity is experienced and inculcated first in the family.

c. *Universal Brotherhood/Sisterhood:* The concept of brotherhood/sisterhood in African ethics is a moral principle that underscores the interconnectedness between human beings. According to this ethical framework, all human beings are brothers and sisters by virtue of their shared human nature, common origins, and cultural heritage. The idea of universal brotherhood and sisterhood is rooted in the African worldview which recognizes the interrelatedness of human beings in terms of language, race, culture, feelings, values, and historical experiences. This understanding of the human person as being fundamentally linked to others fosters a sense of kinship and community that transcends geographic or cultural differences. Ultimately, the principle of brotherhood/sisterhood in African ethics calls for the recognition of our shared humanity and the promotion of mutual respect, care, and concern for one another as members of a global human family.

Ontological Foundation of Igwebuike Ethics

In the African universe, harmony is the governing spirit that shapes a coordinated system of forces between the physical and spiritual worlds. The human person, situated at the center of this universe, is intricately linked to every aspect of this world, and the harmony present in the universe means that events occurring in other dimensions, such as the world of Chukwu and the world of spirits, can have an impact on the human world. This consonance is believed to be summoned into existence, strengthened, and preserved by God, and it underscores the interconnectedness of all things. Therefore, to thrive in this universe, the human person must attune themselves to the diverse dimensions of their surroundings. Madu (2004) avers:

> Health for the Igbo means a harmonious existence between the different spheres of the cosmic order in which man is a member. For a man to say that he is healthy or alive therefore means that man should tune himself with the other forces of the cosmic order (p. 25).

In African moral philosophy, the basis for objective moral law is grounded in ontology. This means that what is considered to be good or evil is determined by the nature of reality itself. Actions that are deemed to be ontologically good are also considered morally good and legally just, while actions that are ontologically evil are regarded as morally evil and legally unjust. For instance, murder is considered an ontological sacrilege and a conspiracy against God, who is seen as the giver and protector of all life. Thus, it is morally reprehensible and goes against the African ethical and legal principles that are founded on the ontological order. Gyekye (1987) writes that "*just as the good is that action or pattern of behaviour which conduces to well-being and social harmony, so the evil is that which is considered detrimental to the well-being of humanity and society*" (p.133). The social order is founded on the ontological order; to renounce the ontological order is to renounce African ethics and law.

Igwebuike Ethics of Reciprocity

The 'ethic of reciprocity' is a cross religio-cultural ethical principle 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 (Kanu 2009). It is also relatively simple and addresses an enormous range of human behaviour (Kanu 2017). One can feel the pulse of reciprocity so strongly in the following selected Yoruba and Akan proverbs:

1. One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts (Yoruba).
2. When one falls a tree in the forest, one should apply the matter to oneself (Yoruba).
3. Whenever one does something to another, one should put oneself in that person's shoes (Yoruba).
4. If one sees the corpse of a wicked person on the ground and kicks it, there are then two wicked people (Yoruba).
5. As the young of birds hurt, so the young of humans hurt (Yoruba).
6. What you do not find acceptable if it were done to you by another, do not do to him or her (Yoruba).
7. If you do not allow your neighbour to reach nine you will never reach ten (Akan).

8.   Somebody's troubles have arrived; those of another is on the way (Akan).
9.   It is a fool that says, "My neighbour is the butt of the attack, not me" (Akan).
10. The stick that was used to beat Takyi is the same one that will be used to beat Nyankomago (Akan).
11. One person's path will intersect with another's before too long (Akan).

The meaning of the ethic of reciprocity lies in three fundamental dimensions: We must do that to our neighbour which we acknowledge to be fit and reasonable: the appeal is made to our judgment, and the discovery of our judgment is referred to that which is our own will and expectation when it is our case; we must put other people at the same level as ourselves, and reckon that we are as much obliged to them as they are to us. We are as much bound to the duty of justice as they, and they are as much entitled to the benefit of it as we; we must, in our dealings with others, suppose ourselves in the same particular case and circumstances with those we have to do with, and deal accordingly (Henry 2007).

Igwebuike Theory of Happiness

We can speak of two levels of happiness: happiness at the hedonistic level, which is momentary and transitory, and the *Igwebuike* theory of happiness which understands happiness as life satisfaction based on the overall evaluation of a person's life. The hedonistic theory of happiness lies in the current state of a person's emotional state. For instance, a person eats a good meal and says that he or she is happy or buys a new car and at the moment of the presentation he or she is seen excited. Or a person gets a new job and feels excited or is admitted into the seminary and shows some joy. This kind of happiness focuses on the current emotional state of a person borne from a particular event or thing. It sees happiness as an immediate and in-the-moment experience. It is enjoyable, however, ultimately fleeting. It comes from what we are pleased with like when one is pleased with a new cloth, a watch, a holiday, a new shoe, etc. Happiness in this case is viewed simply as the opposite of unpleasantness, depression or anxiety (Haybron 2020).

The Igwebuike theory of happiness adopts a holistic approach to understanding happiness, evaluating not only a person's current emotional state but their overall life satisfaction. This concept is referred to as Igwebuike because it encompasses a broad evaluation of one's life and is not solely based on events or possessions. It is rather concerned with how we feel about ourselves as individuals, taking into account various aspects of our lives such as relationships, personal growth, health and wellness, and our connection with nature.

According to the Igwebuike theory, the quality of life that we lead determines the quality of happiness that we experience. It is not possible to live a life that goes against our

human nature and still expect to achieve genuine happiness. Examples of lifestyles that are unworthy of our humanness, such as ritual killing, yahoo scamming, and prostitution, cannot give true happiness.

The words of Victor Frankl (1985) are very instructive:

> …success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. (p. 17).

The cause greater than oneself includes our relationship with the God and the human person and the quality of this relationship. This is why it is *Igwe (*number*)*, *bu* (is), *ike* (strength). In another text, Frankl (1985) adds:

> … being human always points to, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself- be it meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter… In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side effect of self-transcendence. (p. 133).

This ontologically links happiness with the nature of the human person. Among the Igbo, the human person is called *Mmadu,* which has been interpreted, among other perspectives to mean *there is beauty.* It is through virtue that the beauty within us becomes visible or seen and felt. Even as virtue reflects that beauty within us, it is also the instrument for the communication of that beauty to others. Conversely, indulging in vice is believed to dull the beauty within, creating a disturbance in the ontological balance of the self and hindering the attainment of genuine happiness. Examples of such vices include alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, prostitution, and ritual killing. Those who indulge in such vices are, therefore, deemed incapable of accessing the happiness that is truly deserved by the human person.

Our Humanity as the Pivot of *Igwebuike* Ethical Theory

Igwebuike is based on the nature of our humanity, and as Aristotle observes: "Nature does nothing without purpose or usefulness" (pp. 20-21). The human person among the Igbo is called *Mmadu,* which has been interpreted, among other perspectives as *there is beauty.* Beauty is by its very nature attractive- it attracts the other to itself. If every human being is an embodiment of beauty, it then means that each human person attracts the other to himself or herself, and vice versa. What does this say about our humanity? The human person was created to relate- that is, to be human. The human person cannot be human outside of the parameters of relationality. Aristotle holds that "He who is unable to live in

society (that is to relate), or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god" (pp. 27-29). In another text, he writes: "Man is by nature a political animal" (pp. 2-3).

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. The human person, therefore, finds meaning and gives meaning within his or her 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 Africans emphasize the community on several fronts is to echo into the mind the need for detachment, especially from those things that most people consider topmost in the agenda of their lives. The happiness of the human person depends on the quality of one's detachment from vulnerable goods.

Interestingly, *Igwebuike,* unlike what we find in the ethical theories of Jeremy Bentham, Aristippus, Epicurus, Sextus, etc., does not emphasize the place of pleasure and happiness for the self or any other selfish interest, but sacrifice and commitment to the other. It is not about the self; it is about some transcendence beyond the self for the good of the other and entering more and more deeply into the community with others (Mnyaka and Motlhabi 2005; Shuttle 2021). This sense of community that distinguishes *Igwebuike* ethical theory is a combination of two interactions- identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them (Okondo 2007; Metz and Gaie 2010; Metz 2011). In identifying with others, one treats himself or herself as a member of a group such that one becomes 'we' in my identity rather than 'I' and works towards achieving shared ends.

Demonstrating solidarity entails providing assistance to others and contributing to their well-being in a manner that directs one's actions, emotions, motives, and attitudes towards the welfare of others. This stems from the notion of regarding others as an extension of oneself, thereby transforming the individual "me" into a collective "we" in the context of Igwebuike's philosophy. This philosophy highlights the indispensability of friendship, harmony, and community. (Paris 1995; Gyekye 2010). Such an ethical framework, however, does not diminish the worth of the individual self. Rather, it is through acts of sacrifice and commitment towards others that individuals find significance and joy, albeit on the condition that they practice selflessness in pursuing their goals. This guiding

principle is intended to inform the decision-making process of individuals and the larger community alike.

Virtue, Human Fellowship and Happiness

There are two colleges of human action that either build a fellowship or destroy 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. Aristotle writes that: "The good man is the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue" (1. 1098). 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 him being *Mmadu*- a human being. Aristotle writes that: "Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; nature gives us the capability to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit" (2. 1103). These virtues, among others, are in the table below:

Table 1: *Showing human virtues that build fellowship*

No.	*Igwebuike* Virtues	*Igwebuike* Implications
1	Sympathy	Promotes communion
2	Compassion	Promotes communion
3	Benevolence	Promotes communion
4	Altruism	Promotes communion
5	Sacrifice	Promotes communion
6	Mercy	Promotes communion
7	Love	Promotes communion
8	Patience	Promotes communion
9	Tolerance	Promotes communion
10	Respect	Promotes communion
11	Politeness	Promotes communion
12	Kindness	Promotes communion
13	Peace	Promotes communion
14	Empathy	Promotes communion
15	Friendship	Promotes communion
16	Endurance	Promotes communion
17	Magnificence	Promotes communion
18	Temperance	Promotes communion
19	Gentleness	Promotes communion
20	Sincerity	Promotes communion

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 specific episodes in the life of a person.

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. The virtues that take away fellowship, among others, include:

Table 2: *Showing human vices that destroy fellowship*

No.	*Igwebuike* Virtues	*Igwebuike* Implications
1	Deceitfulness	Kills communion
2	Indifference	Kills communion
3	Malevolence	Kills communion
4	Stinginess	Kills communion
5	Cunningness	Kills communion
6	Rude	Kills communion
7	Hate	Kills communion
8	Arrogance	Kills communion
9	Ill-will	Kills communion
10	Disrespect	Kills communion
11	Gossip	Kills communion
12	Cowardice	Kills communion
13	Boastfulness	Kills communion
14	Vanity	Kills communion
15	Wastefulness	Kills communion
16	Greed	Kills communion
17	Violence	Kills communion
18	Corruption	Kills communion
19	Jealousy	Kills communion
20	Envy	Kills communion

The pursuit of happiness which is naturally human except for the deformation of our natural capacity for this pursuit is destroyed when a human person is possessed by vices. Wherever such vices are present, fellowship is affected. And since happiness flows from a healthy fellowship with others, it then means that the value of happiness is also affected or detracted from. Thus, while virtues which preserve fellowship bring happiness, vices which destroy fellowship take away happiness.

Even though every human person born has the natural capacity for virtue because he or she is *mmadu,* the human person must complement this natural capacity with knowledge of good and build a strong will through constant willingness to do the good so as not to act against our better judgement through weakness of the will; and thus ensure that the human person is constantly disposed to feel the right way and act the right way. In this way, the human will is therefore trained. This knowledge of the good is learned through the community into which the human person is born. This explains why the Igbo African trains the child on the way to virtue through parables, proverbs, wise sayings, taboos, etc. This takes place in the evening of the day, meaning that the evenings are meant for reflection and appraisal, whereas the day is for the practical application of acquired knowledge in social interactions. It follows that moral instruction is imparted and honed through experiential learning as no individual attains virtue by default.

A Hermeneutic of *Igwebuike* Ethical Theory

The utilization of proverbs is a distinctive characteristic of African communication. Invariably, Africans supplement their statements with at least one proverb to underscore the gravity of the matter. It is widely acknowledged and empirically observed that proverbs add a flavorful nuance to our words, bridging the gap between novel concepts and familiar experiences, thereby enhancing the intelligibility and significance of our discourse. Given the centrality of proverbs in African communication, it is pertinent, in a discussion on Igwebuike ethical theories, to examine African proverbs that undergird the fundamental principles of this native ethical theory. Noteworthy among the Igbo-African proverbs that corroborate the tenets of Igwebuike ethical theory are:

a. A person is a person because of other people
b. Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken
c. Cross the river in a crowd and a crocodile will not eat you
d. Two ants do not fail to pull a grasshopper
e. A single stick may smoke but it will not burn
f. When spiders unite they can tie up a lion
g. If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together
h. If two or more people urinate in the same place at the same time, it would produce more foam
i. When a bird builds its nest, it uses the feathers of other birds
j. Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch

The emphasis on community, relationship, solidarity, identification, sympathy, etc., is to help the human person to become fully human by becoming more communal for the good of the other rather than the self. This is because any behaviour short of this makes the person more of an animal than a human being. Onah (2006) avers that:

> At the centre of traditional African morality is human life. Africans have a sacred reverence for life. To protect and nurture their lives, all human beings are inserted within a given community. The promotion of life is therefore the determinant principle of African traditional morality and this promotion is guaranteed only in the community. Living harmoniously within a community is therefore a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of life (n.p).

The fact that a human person enters into a relationship with others through community, friendship, solidarity, empathy, etc., implies that the human person has a moral status, that is, has a moral significance or a being of value and thus is owed some moral obligations or duty in their own right in terms of how he or she should be treated or what is permissible or not permissible in relation to the person. Thus, there is a manner of treatment that would be considered morally wrong given the moral status of the being.

The act of entering into a community with others should not be conflated with a superficial form of morality characterized by conforming to the actions of the majority. Rather, this principle is anchored on the promotion of the collective welfare, which may occasionally run counter to the accepted norms of the community or the individual's personal convictions. Therefore, the primary focus is not on uniformity of behavior, but rather on the upholding of community integrity and the pursuit of the common good. This communal ethos is engendered by a strong sense of identification with and solidarity towards the group, which motivates individuals to labor assiduously for the betterment of the community. The communal bond facilitates mutual support, enabling group members to help one another recognize moral distinctions that they may have overlooked. Consequently, in the realm of morality, individuals complement each other. While this approach may occasionally provoke crises in the community or for the individual, the ultimate outcome is the enhancement of the communal welfare. It is a dialectical process that moves from crisis to dialogue and ultimately towards consensus.

Igwebuike ethical theory shares several similarities with virtue ethics. Like virtue ethics, it is a person-centered ethical theory that focuses on the moral character of the agent rather than on ethical rules, duties, or the outcomes of specific actions. *Igwebuike* ethical theory is not solely concerned with the rightness or wrongness of individual actions but rather provides guidance on the type of conduct and qualities that exemplify a virtuous person. This direction is given through the virtues necessary for fostering communal living and

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social cohesion. Unlike ethical theories that deal with particular actions or episodes, *Igwebuike* ethical theory is concerned with the entirety of a person's life. It is, in a sense, an ethics of care since it holds that moral action is rooted in interpersonal relationships and the cultivation of virtues such as benevolence and compassion. While consequentialist and deontological ethical theories underscore universal principles and impartiality, *Igwebuike* ethical theory stresses the significance of responding to the particularities of each individual.

Moral Action and Consequentiality

Igwebuike ethical theory based on the belief in the interconnectivity and inter-relatedness of reality holds that every action has a corresponding consequence. Good action leads to good and bad action leads to bad, not only for the person who receives the action but for the person who is acting. It is a view of causality in which good thoughts, deeds, and words, may lead to beneficial effects, while bad thoughts, deeds, and words, may lead to harmful effects. Everything is energy, including your thoughts and emotions, which are energy in motion. So, in essence, everything you do creates a corresponding energy that comes back to you in some form.

For instance, if you want love, then you need to give love. It is from the love that you give that you get love. If you want peace, then you should be able to give peace. It is from the peace that you give that you get peace. If you want joy, then give joy yourself because it is the joy that you give that echoes back to you. The peace and happiness that we get from the world are dependent on the quality of peace and happiness that we give to the world.

This perspective leads to a comprehension of happiness as being associated with engaging in activities that promote human well-being. This serves to establish a relationship between happiness and virtue. Individuals who pursue virtue are able to achieve happiness, as opposed to those who seek happiness in the wrong places such as money, power, wealth, and other external factors. Despite possessing wealth and power, such individuals bypass happiness and remain in misery. The understanding of virtue thus becomes a form of knowledge, as possessing material possessions alone may lead to negative consequences or misery without the guiding principles of virtue.

The Moral Calculus of *Igwebuike* Ethical Theory

The moral calculus of *Igwebuike* ethical theory is to help individuals arrive at moral decisions easily without any form of ambiguity. Thus, within *Igwebuike* ethical theory, an action is considered morally good if:

1. it promotes humanness;
2. it promotes self-realization;
3. it promotes the common good;
4. it promotes fellowship among people;
5. it prizes and honors relationships.

An action within the context of *Igwebuike* moral theory is considered immoral if:

1. it does not promote humanness;
2. it does not promote self-realization;
3. it does not promote the common good;
4. it does not promote fellowship among people;
5. Which does not prize and honour relationships.

Those who promote humanness, self-realization, the common good, fellowship among people and honour relationships possess a dignified existence. In African ontology, the dignity of people springs from their network of relationships and solidarity with others in the pursuit of the good common to all. No one within the African traditional societies attained great heights because of what he or she has been able to do for himself or herself but because of what they have been able to do for others. Some warriors, hunters, kings, priests, medicine men, etc., were referred to as men and women of dignity simply because of the quality of their relationship with the community or with others in relation to the pursuit of the common good. Those who are deceitful, arrogant, ill-will, violent, corrupt, jealous, envious, deceptive, etc., are referred to as men and women without dignity.

Conclusion

The present study on Igwebuike ethics has provided an overview of the varied ethical traditions of Africa, with a focus on the primary ethical perspectives that are widely shared by African societies, in line with the African worldview or ontology. Based on the foregoing analysis, the following key observations can be deduced concerning Igwebuike ethics:

> a. Given that it has the African complementary ontology as its foundation, it is a complementary and relational ethics. It is borne from a relationship, lived within a relationship and evaluated within the context of the same relationship.

b. It is an ethical perspective that puts the other person or reality into consideration before undertaking a moral action. It is other-oriented, and also puts the state of the other into consideration while evaluating the quality of moral action.

c. Igwebuike is grounded on three major ethical principles: respect for persons, non-maleficence and beneficence. This is based on the metaphysical understanding of the other in relation to the self.

d. The primary values of Igwebuike ethics include human dignity, human equality and universal brotherhood.

The major contribution of this work to ethical reflections is not only that it responds to the question of the capability of the African people of morality or moral principles, but it has also decolonized ethics by presenting a unique African ethics.

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