

EPTAISM: THE INTERPLAY OF THOUGHT AND ACTION IN EDEH'S METAPHYSICS AS FOSTERING HUMAN DIGNITY

Purissima Egbekpalu, PhD

Department of Philosophy
Madonna University, Nigeria

epury@rocketmail.com

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Abstract

*Philosophy critically evaluates man's existential conditions and guides his actions towards a better life. The world of today is confronted by enormous and complex existential challenges. These challenges especially in Africa present a new way of philosophizing that harmonizes thought and praxis to man's concrete life and experiences. This paper examines the interplay of thought and action in Edeh's metaphysics that portrays the concrete way of being of man in Africa as *mma-di* who practically deserves care. Evaluating lived experiences, the paper establishes that this thought pattern encourages practical thoughts that culminate in concrete existential actions for man, with man, through man and in man in union with his ultimate source for dignified life and existence. It then demonstrates how this novel philosophical position of co-occurrence of theory and action launches a new school of thought known as EPTAISM (EPTA-ism) that has greatly helped to shape African philosophy in favour of Africans for good and happy living. It therefore concludes that eptaistic philosophy fosters man's goodness (*mma-di*) through the implementation of healthy programmes that promote his well-being and authentic existence.*

Keywords: Philosophy, interplay, thought, action, Eptaism

Introduction

Philosophy has always been considered as a reflective science due its thoughtful nature. Human life faces a lot of difficulties especially in the recent times. The challenges of today particularly in Africa necessitate a new way of philosophizing; a more practical dimension to concretize man's thoughts in order to better his life and existence. Causality theorists (Honderich, 2005; Railton, 2006; Stuchlick, 2013) have long acknowledged that there exists a strong relationship between man's intention and his actions. An action (Wilson, Shpall, Pineros & Juan, 2016) is a purposeful event that is performed by a person which

was guided by his intention. Wilson et. al (2016) further explain intentions as beliefs and desires, while actions are bodily movements that materializes the intention. However, the volitionists (Stuchlick, 2013) objected that mere intentions and desires are not enough to cause actions. In effect, they argue that the ‘causal gap’ between the person’s intention and its actualization (act of doing) should be fastened by act of the will. This requires the role of the person involved in the execution of the action. This entails again choice, decision and implementation of the agent’s thought in concrete situations (trying out something in real life conditions).

In the course of bridging the existential gap between reflection and action, Edeh advances the philosophy of ‘thought and action’ whereby he harmonizes thinking and doing. In particular, he (Edeh, 1985) demonstrated in his *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics* and other works of his (Edeh, 2007; Edeh & Amah, 2011) the interplay of thought and action. This position of his launched a new school of thought known as EPTAISM. As a philosophical movement, eptatism is conceived through Igbo-African concept of man which in turn was derived from man’s essence of being.

Edeh’s Metaphysics Vis-à-vis African Philosophy of Being

Generally, metaphysics is the science of *quiddity* of being. Edeh’s metaphysics expresses itself fully in the understanding of the being of man as the beauty of life. Edeh is one of the African minds that shaped African philosophy through his articulation of ‘being’ as conceived by Igbo-Africans. His metaphysical treatise that served as his major philosophical work (*Towards an Igbo metaphysics*) which was published in 1985 has been described as “a milestone in the history of thought’ for which he is fondly remembered as the first to articulate Modern African Philosophy through the articulation of Igbo metaphysics, just as Aristotle and others were the first to articulate Western Philosophy, through the articulation of Greek Philosophy. This book (Adigwe, 2011 p.16) has earned him the title, ‘The Father of African Philosophy’. At the very core of his metaphysical work is the Igbo understanding of being. His notion of being is chiefly presented in chapter four of his monumental *Igbo Metaphysics* where he clearly explicated the concept of man as *mmadi* (the beauty of life) which in turn is to be understood within the context of creation. Analyzing this, Egbekpalu (Nze, 2011 pp.10-11) stated,

This concrete way of being of man in the world points to a higher Being that posits him...obvious in the African man's thought is the conviction that everything in the universe, including himself has its origin in the world of the unseen, the eternal world. At the centre of Edeh's metaphysical thought is also God as the Creator (Chineke), provider and sustainer of life (Osebuluwa).

The African man's knowledge of God as the ultimate cause of being depicts man's 'beholdenness to God' and reveals the religious nature of man who maintains relationship with God who governs, provides and cares for him. Tracing the history of Africans through culture, language, thought pattern and socio-religious practices of the Igbo, Edeh presented to the world the Igbo-African metaphysics that begins with the understanding of being. He (Edeh, 1985 p.70) therefore stated that "Metaphysics can be defined as a search for an understanding of beings in their ultimate causes. It seeks a description and identification of the intelligible nature, structure and characteristic qualities of reality." In another context he (Edeh, 2007 p.144) asked, "what is metaphysics if not one's God-man-world conceptual scheme or relationship, how one understands and interpretes scheme, what this scheme means to one and how one's being, life and existence are determined by relationship involved?" Analyzing Edeh's metaphysical position (Egbekpalu, 2011 p.184), one realizes that "Igbo metaphysics possesses inherently a distinctive character...to properly tease out and discuss the metaphysics of Igbo-African, one must be actually engaged in it with real Igbo consciousness as African philosophy is generally expressed in the people's cultural manifestations." Little wonder does he delineate that African Metaphysics must be done by the Africans themselves to give it the very identity that it deserves. At the very introduction of his monumental treatise, he stated his conviction about shaping African thoughts. Thus (Edeh, 2007 p.147), "the idea of African metaphysics will remain too peripheral, too much of a figment of the imagination, unless it is articulated by a particular people of Africa just as Western philosophy was presented by the Greeks."

EPTAISM Explained

Eptatism is a school of thought that originated from Igbo metaphysics of Emmanuel Edeh. The acronym (EPTA) was derived from Edeh's Philosophy of

Thought and Action, hence, *Eptaism*. Onyewuenyi (2012 p.vii) expressed that eptaism is “an African philosophy which is a co-occurrence of theory and action as espoused by Edeh and demonstrated in Edeh’s philosophy of thought and action.” Explaining this philosophical stance Amah (2015 p.25) writes,

Edeh’s approach to philosophy is by way of thought and action. He does not stop at laying down his ideas in the pages of a book, but he goes ‘the next mile’ to implement and concretize his core philosophical ideas in tangible ways that sustain and enhance the existential quality and the lived experiences of the people. In other words, he matched his thoughts with actions. He knew that ideas that do not translate to concrete actions which enhance the life of man are barren. This has given birth to EPTA-ism- Edeh’s philosophy of thought and action.

According to Udaya (2012 p.20), “Edeh presented a metaphysics of action whereby what you think is what you do with man, through man, in man, for man, to man and in the unity of man’s ultimate source and support.” Explaining further, he (Udaya, 2012 p.20) states thus, “there is a compelling connection between thought and action so much that the former is translated into the latter in concrete existential circumstances. What he says is what he does and what he does is what he says. This is what it means to be *eptaistic*.” In this sense, eptaism encourages thought patterns that acknowledge rational actions. Chukwu (2011 pp.155-156) explains,

Man, who is ‘good that is’ by his participation in the Absolute Goodness of his creator cannot only be thought of or contemplated on as a philosophical thought. He must therefore be marched with action in furtherance of his practical well-being...It is self-evident that thought cannot stand by itself and have merit. It needs to be marched with actions so that the thought process itself becomes fulfilling to the individual and enriching to the society...Eptaism insists on taking into account the means that may be required to transform the thought into action. In so doing, the thought itself will gain credibility and validity.

As a philosophical concept therefore, eptatism propounds that thoughts and actions must harmonize to foster man's goodness through the implementation of healthy programmes that promote his well-being and authentic existence. On this note, Edeh's philosophy (Onyewuenyi, 2010) is considered as an interplay of thought and action which establishes three stages of genuine African thought pattern, namely; theoretical achievement, practical results and involvement in the practical response vis-à-vis positive impacts on the people for the respect of human and promotion of human dignity.

Interplay of Thought and Action in Edeh's Metaphysics in Fostering Human Dignity: An African Perspective

At the beginning of his *Peace to the Modern World* Edeh (2007 p.3) emphatically states,

The distinctive feature of African Philosophy is that it cannot be thought of in terms of an objective, abstract science...In African philosophy we are dealing with a practical theoretical science in the sense that by nature African metaphysics is a lived philosophy rather than a purely theoretical or scientific enterprise.

With the understanding and firm conviction that philosophy addresses the existential realities of man and serve the need of the people, Edeh engages himself in the philosophical enquiry that supports his belief. So, he (Edeh, 2008 p.40) delineates,

For one to capture and present what is truly an African way of viewing life and existence, beings and Being, one has to come to grips with the interplay of thought and action. For the Africans, philosophy is a way of life expressed in the people's rituals, language and other cultural manifestations.

Nwala (1985 p.35) corroborates this position when he states, "Igbo philosophy is pragmatic, meant to solve practical problems of food, security, peace and the general welfare of the community." In this context of thought and action (eptatism), Edeh demonstrates his genuine commitment by establishing service delivery programmes man as *mma-di*. In his words (Edeh, 2007 p.5),

If we accept man as the good that is, we must establish realities that depict man as such, realities that are metaphysically focused

towards uplifting man from his low state that tends to make man sub-human, that is, the state that categorizes him as the sick, the suffering, the abjectly poor, the handicapped, the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the abandoned, the crippled, the helpless, the uneducated, etc.

His idea of interplay of thought and action is based on the notion that man is metaphysically conceived as 'good that is' and therefore he deserves utmost care for the preservation and promotion of human dignity.

The Existential Impacts of Edeh's Philosophy of Thought and Action on Man

The impacts of Edeh's philosophy of thought and action are concretized in his practical and effective works for humanity. In exposing his philosophy of 'action and doing', Onyewuenyi (2010, p.17) states that "Edeh is a 21st century thinker who thinks in activity; he translates his active contemplation into contemplative action." In this sense, he is said to be doing philosophy. His *mma-di* philosophical conviction is his guiding principle that relates to his various activities as he implements his good thoughts to practical life's events. So, Eneh (2015 p.10) captured it thus:

The ingenuity of Edeh's philosophy is not just the first articulation of African philosophy but most importantly, the worth of such enunciation; its practicability in man's concrete existence...It exhumes how theoretical science is inextricably intermingled with practical experiential existence of man. In this way, it proffers an ideal way of dealing with man's life departing from African experience with regard to respecting human dignity.

This philosophical breakthrough with his systematic "Igbo Metaphysics" makes the impacts of African Philosophy felt world-wide. Giving credence to the ontological fact that man is 'good that is', he demonstrated how systematic African philosophy addresses the existential realities of contemporary Africans by establishing realities that support man as the good that actually is. Examples of such realities include the Pilgrimage Centre of Eucharistic Adoration and Special Marian Devotion now known as the International Sanctuary situated at Elele town in Rivers State of South-East Nigeria, rehabilitation and reconciliation centres, health and academic institutions at various levels. At the pilgrimage centre, innumerable pilgrims from all over the world despite their colour, race or religious differences gather to draw spiritual strength that helps to lift them from

their low state of abysmal existence. The health, reconciliation and rehabilitation centres usher new lease of life to the sick, the troubled, the abandoned and the less privileged in the society, while the academic establishments empower the youths in particular through the two strong pillars of academic and moral excellence as they also provide employment opportunities for many. The private tertiary institutions epitomized in the two noble Universities, namely; Madonna and Caritas Universities, Our Saviour Institute of Science, Agriculture and Technology (OSISATECH) polytechnic and OSISATECH college of education which circumstantially came into existence when the educational system of the country was at its worst, continue to salvage the educational system in the country and in the development of the youth (Edeh & Amah, 2011). A good number of students (Edeh, 2014) have also benefitted from his scholarship scheme and peace charity award especially the physically challenged and the abjectly poor ones. To this effect, Edeh's philosophy of being that harmonizes theory and praxis is said to touch the core existential issues of man towards authentic and meaningful existence.

Conclusion

Edeh's metaphysics that culminates in harmony of thought and action (EPTAISM) fosters man's goodness which serves as a sure path to realization of authentic human existence and promotion of human dignity. This African Igbo metaphysical philosophical neologism has demonstrated how African hermeneutics could avail deeper understanding of the core essence of man (*mmadi*) as the beauty that is, could lead to his well-being in beautiful relationship with others in the society and with his Maker for the realization of the ultimate goal of human existence.

Recommendations

EPTAISM as a philosophical trend is very necessary in fostering human dignity especially in Africa where lives have been so wantonly violated. Therefore, this paper recommends that this philosophical movement be widely explored and be made more known to all even outside formal philosophical setting. It suggests too that such philosophical thought and praxis be incorporated in school curricula down to primary school level so that children imbibe it, grow and live with it for better development of selves and the society in general.

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