

IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY AND TRUTH-CLAIM IN AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract

For sure, the desire for knowledge is innate in human beings. The human person is always in search of truth. The pertinent question now is: How do we justify truth-claims? Or put differently: How do we achieve a wholistic understanding of truth of reality? These and the related questions constitute the thrust of this paper. Therefore, in a bid to achieve the goal of this paper, we shall first of all analyze the concept of Igwebuiké philosophy as understood in I. A. Kanu, and also present a general notion of truth and African epistemology. The paper focussed on Igwebuiké philosophy and truth-claim in African epistemology. Thereafter, it ends with a conclusion.

Keywords: Igwebuiké, Philosophy, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, African, Epistemology

Introduction

A story was told of a tortoise who wanted to be the only wise person on earth. He went and gathered all the wisdom from various parts of the world and put them in a calabash. He wanted to be the only custodian of knowledge. And so to achieve this aim, he decided to hide this calabash of wisdom on a very tall palm tree. He hung the calabash in his chest as he attempts to climb the palm tree. All his effort to climb the palm tree to hide the calabash of wisdom proved abortive. He was frustrated each time he attempted to climb the palm tree. There was a wine tapper close by who has been watching the tortoise as he attempts to climb the tree. The wine tapper asked him what he wanted to do but he refused to tell him so that the man will not know where the calabash of wisdom is kept. After sometime, the tortoise reluctantly and grudgingly told the wine tapper that he wants to climb the palm tree. The man then told him that if he wants to climb the tree, he should hang the calabash behind him to enable him climb the tree with ease. At this observation by the wine tapper, the tortoise said to himself: "I thought I have all the wisdom and knowledge in this calabash; how come this knowledge from this wine tapper is not in this calabash". He realized himself and then broke the calabash saying: "no one can claim to have all the knowledge in the world". This story explains the fact that the human person will always

need the other in life. This is the backdrop of this paper. This paper is set to analyze the notion of Igwebuiké philosophy as propounded by I. A. Kanu with a view to situating it as one of the basic structures for the justification of knowledge and truth-claim in African epistemology.

For sure, the desire for knowledge is innate in human beings. The human person is always in search of truth. The pertinent question now is: How do we justify truth-claims? Or put differently: How do we achieve a wholistic understanding of truth of reality? These and the related questions constitute the thrust of this paper. Therefore, in a bid to achieve the goal of this paper, we shall first of all analyze the concept of Igwebuiké philosophy as understood in I. A. Kanu, and also present a general notion of truth and African epistemology. The paper shall also focus on Igwebuiké philosophy and truth-claim in African epistemology. Thereafter, it ends with a conclusion.

Igwebuiké Philosophy in I. A. Kanu: A Brief Exposé

Renowned and world-class philosophers and scholars are known for one thing or the other. Some scholars propound new theories and inventions; others build on the already existing theories. This is the dynamism in the community of knowledge. Today, the notion of igwebuiké as championed by Professor Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu has now become a household word especially among African scholars and all those interested in African studies.

Kanu is a contemporary African philosopher and theologian. As a sound and vibrant academic, he has published over 200 articles in both local and international journals where he portrayed his strong convictions in igwebuiké. His published books are numerous. Prof. Kanu is the founder of *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*; *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*; Association for the Promotion of African Studies (APAS) among many other academic foundations.

As an ideology, igwebuiké captures the philosophical, religious, political, economic and social life of the African people. It is an all-embracing philosophy. One can simply say that it is a type of philosophical thought that is anchored on the fact that a part cannot be greater than the whole. This explains why Kanu posits that igwebuiké is a philosophy of togetherness; it is a philosophy of unity and love (Kanu, 2016a, Pp. 1 – 9).

Etymologically, the concept, *igwebuike*, is derived from three Igbo words: *igwe bu ike*. This can simply be understood as 'multitude is strength', 'strength in number', or 'strength in many'. One can say that there is strength or power in multitude or large number of people. *Igwebuike*, as propounded by Kanu underscores the value of otherness. In his words: "when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability" (Kanu, 2016a, p. 3). This means that the human person will achieve more as a group than as individuals. This is amplified by a popular African proverb: "If you want to go fast, walk alone; but if you want to go far, walk together". More so, Igbo adage has it that a single broom stick cannot be used to sweep but when they are brought together as a bundle, the bundle of broom can be used to sweep. The above proverbs are to further explain the notion of *igwebuike* philosophy.

As an ideology, *igwebuike* 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. 'To be' is 'to be with the other' in a community of beings. This is based on the African philosophy of harmony and complementarity, which is the underlying principle and unity of African Traditional Religious and Philosophical experience (Kanu, 2016a, p. 3).

The analogy of musical instruments can be helpful in this context. When the instruments sound independently, they will be devoid of musical melody; but when they sound together in harmony, the melody will be excellent. When Mr. A., Mrs. B. and Miss C. come together in one accord, there is a very high probability that they will achieve more compared to when they work separately. This is also in line with the popular saying: two good heads are better than one good head. Kanu (2016b) buttresses that "*igwebuike* is an indigenous philosophy of the modality of being for the realization of being ... it is the Igbo-African's search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning" (p. 5). In sum, Kanu's perception of *igwebuike* is such that is all-embracing: it is a philosophy of inclusiveness.

Therefore, having given a brief highlight on Kanu's notion of igwebuiké philosophy, the next subtopic shall focus on a general understanding of truth as a backdrop for our discourse on African epistemology thereafter.

Truth: A Concise Understanding

It is a truism that the goal of philosophy is truth. Philosophy searches for the truth of all reality. Also other aspects of human inquiry make effort to search for truth. However, philosophy is the only discipline that searches for the truth of all reality; it is only philosophy that searches for the totality of truth of all reality. Philosophers down through the ages have occupied themselves with this search for truth. They are concerned about: What is truth? What are the criteria for establishing a truth-claim? How can one distinguish truth from falsity? These and the related questions have burdened the inquisitive minds of philosophers. Eboh (1995) observed that "what we are as human beings is, to some extent, determined by how much we are able to penetrate the truth of reality with our thought. Man's being is diminished or increased depending on the 'quantity' and 'quality' of truth he possesses" (p. 49). The value of truth cannot be overemphasized. Philosophers are varied in their views about truth. In a bid to understand the concept of truth, there arose different theories of truth, namely, correspondence theory, coherence theory, pragmatic theory, dialectical theory, semantic theory, redundancy theory and relativistic theory (Eboh, 1995, Pp. 40 - 51; Omoregbe, 2003, Pp. 39 - 47).

The proponents of correspondence theory hold that truth is the correspondence of what is in the mind with what is in reality. The coherence theorists hold that truth can only exist when there is coherence with the existing body of established truth. In this sense, consistency becomes the yardstick to measure truth. The pragmatics are of the view that the only way to know the truth is in its workability. The adherents of dialectical theory of truth are of the view that truth is in the process of becoming. The point here is the fact that the concept of truth is viewed differently by different philosophical groups. Alvira, Clavell and Mellendo (1991) have this to say in this regard:

Truth is something principally attributed to judgments of our understanding. We say, for example that a person has spoken the truth or that a statement is true. Truth belongs to those acts of the intelligence which conform with reality and express it faithfully. A judgment is true when it asserts that something which exists does exist, or when it asserts that something which does not exist really does not exist (p. 151).

From the above quotation, one can say that truth is that which is. What is, is true; what is not, is not true. Therefore, having given a brief general understanding on the concept of truth, and in line with the logic of this paper, the next subtopic shall dwell on African epistemology and thereafter establish the nexus between igwebuiké philosophy and truth-claim in African epistemology.

African Epistemology: A Brief Overview

As a major branch of philosophy, epistemology is concerned with human knowledge. It has to do with the study of the origin, nature, basis and limit of human knowledge. Omoregbe (2003) observes that epistemology is “the study of human knowledge, the study of the nature of human knowledge, its origin, its scope, its limits, its justification, its reliability or otherwise, its certainty or otherwise” (p. vi). For Eboh (1995), “epistemology is the branch of philosophy that examines the validity or truth of human knowledge” (p. 2). Epistemology is concerned about the justification of truth-claim. African epistemology, therefore, can be understood as the ways and manners Africans make effort to justify truth-claims in the African world. It has to do with the categories of knowing and understanding realities in the African world. African epistemology “is the concretization of what is known in the African world. It is all about the way the African reflects on the reality within the African world. It also has to do with the ways and manners the African makes effort to justify what he claims to know” (Ndubisi, 2015, p. 65). The point here is that African epistemology is concerned about the peculiar way or ways the African employs to establish a truth-claim. According to Udefi (2014), the notion of African epistemology is hinged on the “acceptance that such concepts as knowledge, truth, rationality, etc. can be interpreted using African categories and concepts as provided by the African cultural experiences without a recourse to Western or alien conceptual framework” (p. 108).

In sum, African epistemology is a branch of African philosophy concerned with the justification of truth-claims. It is important to note here that there are different forms of knowledge in African epistemology, namely, perceptual knowledge, common sense knowledge, old age knowledge, inferential knowledge, mystical knowledge, oral tradition and wholistic knowledge (Ndubisi, 2015, Pp. 66 - 67). However, a detailed discussion on the forms of knowledge in African epistemology is not the major concern of this paper. For the purpose of this paper, the above can suffice as a conceptual understanding of African epistemology.

Igwebuike and Truth-Claim in African Epistemology

The nature of the human person is such that he can only perceive an aspect of reality from a particular standpoint at a time. Also, it is an existential fact that no one knows it all in life. This explains the place of igwebuike philosophy in African epistemology. It means that the African does not claim to know something in isolation; there is always that sense of igwebuike in trying to establish or justify what one claims to know. For instance, one person alone cannot claim to know all the medicines that can be used to cure a particular disease. But when Mr. A brings his idea, Mr. B. brings his idea, and Mr. C comes up with a complementary idea, then there will be a wholistic idea or near-wholistic idea. Kanu (2017) explains: "Every field of human inquiry is limited and fragmented. And as fragments, no field of knowledge adequately satisfies the human hunger for truth. As fragments, they only provide answers that are fragmentary and limited" (p. 103). So, because of the limited and fragmentary nature of individual claim to knowledge, there is need for collaboration to be able to have a wider and a more comprehensive knowledge of reality. The basic principle of Igwebuike with reference to truth-claim is: Get truth wherever it is found no matter whoever is in possession of it. It means that as far as the search for truth is concerned, everybody is important and valuable. For instance, in Nigeria, the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and indeed all the tribes of the country need each other to fully comprehend the truth of reality in Nigeria. Possession of truth is not necessarily measured by age (though it can be a contributory factor), gender, status, power, religion or political affiliation. No one person can claim to possess the truth of all reality. Kanu (2017) elaborates:

From the perspective of Igwebuike, knowledge is too wide to be captured by just a person or a school of thought or just an age or epoch; knowledge is wholistic and not perspective ... Igwebuike emphasizes that every field of human inquiry is complementary, and to complement means an ability to add something to another in order to improve it or make that which is being added to, more attractive. In this case, no field of knowledge works without the other; to arrive at truth, it must cease to be non-monopolistic within the complementary whole. No field of human inquiry has the monopoly of knowledge but, as a unit, must complement the ideas of the other in a whole universal system of inquiry (p. 109).

The understanding of Kanu as cited above indicates that Igwebuike serves as an essential factor not only for the African epistemologists, but also to all human beings in search for the truth of reality.

Experience has shown that, in search for truth, the African would always go for the popular and general opinion. This does not negate the fact that there can be independent and personal views about a particular position. The emphasis is that it is much safer and better to seek for truth from varied points of views. This explains the dialectical nature of Igwebuiké in African epistemology. Dialectics “has to do with the process whereby two or more opposing views are resolved through rational arguments” (Ndubisi, 2015b, p. 30). It is a method of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. This implies that the application of Igwebuiké philosophy in search of truth of reality is not just the conglomeration of opinions. It means that different ideas and opinions have to be accommodated in search for truth with a view to synthesize the contradictory views. Igwebuiké philosophy as conceived by Kanu and also in the understanding of this paper is an all-inclusive approach to knowledge acquisition.

The African believes strongly that an individual cannot have wholistic knowledge of reality if the individual detaches himself from the community. This amplifies the complementarity nature of Igwebuiké philosophy. Asouzu (2004) and (2007) corroborate this point in the complementary reflections. Igwebuiké philosophy is complementary in nature. This is in line with Igbo adage: *Ikwu amaghi ibe ezi ya* (if a person does not know, others will teach/direct him/her). Igwebuiké philosophy can be said to be at the centre of the basic structure of African epistemology. Whenever we want to establish a truth-claim and to have a wholistic knowledge of reality, the best approach is to adopt igwebuiké philosophy.

Conclusion

Igwebuiké philosophy as propounded by Kanu can be said to be African way to view and understand truth of reality. Kanu’s philosophy of Igwebuiké is quite commendable. It reechoes the existential fact that the human person is a relational being; a being that cannot fully understand himself or the world in isolation. This also means that the African should not limit himself to the things in the African world alone. There is more to reality than can be found in African world. So, in line with Igwebuiké philosophy, this paper maintains that the human person in general and the African in particular can achieve a lot if we can join forces together.

Every day, we make truth-claims about one thing or the other. One of the best ways to justify truth-claims is through the proper application of igwebuiké philosophy. In as much as this paper does not discourage personal ingenuity, it

emphasizes the importance of synergy and collaboration in human affairs. The position of this paper is that Igwebuike philosophy constitutes an essential structure of African epistemology. More so, igwebuike philosophy can serve not only as a way of establishing truth-claim, but also as a way of life of the African.

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