

**A REVIEW OF KANU'S "IGWEBUIKE AS THE ONTOLOGICAL
PRECONDITION OF AFRICAN ETHICS"**

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The need for African ethics is very important now that onslaught of modernism and its allies have influenced what is left of African values and morals. So there is need to take again a critical survey for proper re-interpretation, re-construction and re-situating African ethics to suite Africans in their world view. This is against the view of some foreigners who visited African continent especially during the colonial era, with the view that Africans do not have any sense of morality. But Okafor (1974) strongly argued against this,

The ancient African was far from being an abode of laissez-faire morality. There were strict moral principles and determined code of conduct. Customs laid down the code of law which established the nature of right-doings and custom established penalties and taboos against malefactors. Moral sanctions were mainly religious sanctions and these metaphysical sanctions were truly effective. (p. 25).

Having seen what morality is in Africa and how it forms integral and inseparable part of the African culture, one cannot say that there is no morality in Africa.

On the paper under review by Kanu, he is asserting that the concept of *Igwebuike* which is a newly Igbo-African humanistic philosophy of interrelatedness and interconnectedness, places communalism as the "*kpim*" or hob of African ethics or to put it in his own way, "*Igwebuike* places communalism at the heart of African ethics".

The paper is divided into five basic parts: introduction, African ethics, *Igwebuike* as an ethics of a shared humanity, *Igwebuike* and the essence of being human and Conclusion. In the introduction of this paper, one obviously found out that African ethics unlike European ethics has not received elaborate attention, investigation and clarification. This according to Kanu "makes it an area of study that requires an in-depth analysis and interpretation" (p. 1). This is very important in order to project African ethics to the world just like others. Though efforts have been made by African thinkers to articulate and integrate some acts

or behaviours in African culture for maintenance of law and order. Kanu here adopts the *Igwebuike* concepts to affirm and enhance the idea that the indigenous people through their world views places the life communalism as the way to advance and situate better the African ethics.

A working definition of ethics is giving in this part of paper by many authors relating to the subject matter being morality, which is also being used interchangeably with ethics. In all the definitions posited by many authors about human conduct, Kanu aptly posited one question which in a way summarized all the definition given on the subject matter, which is “what theories are right or wrong in evaluating human action? (p.2). This is very important because what is right attitude or character may be wrong in another place or at another time. But Kanu immediately avers that through the relationship between ethics and epistemology, which establishes that the purpose of studying ethics is to ensure that human behavior confirms to the norms of social behaviour. For harmonious relationship is required in a community.

Kanu, therefore came up with African ethics which is an ethics “that is embedded in the ideas and beliefs of the African people as regards to what is right or wrong, what is good or bad character” (p. 2). This right attitude or character will be the one that bring about social harmony cooperative fairness among the people in the community. African ethics that is based on salient features of African world view certainly is different from Western ethics. According to Kanu, the Western ethnologists, Sociologists, anthropologists and even missionaries argued that Africans do not have a sense of morality because in their moral theory, the social order is mere conformity with conventionalized behavior while for the Africans, morality and moral laws are based on belief and unshakable principles tied to their world view.

Igwebuike as an ethics of shared humanity is a virgin area of study which are being explored by few scholars. Kanu explained in detail the meaning of *Igwebuike*, its origin and formation both as a word or sentence. It is deeply rooted within the African indigenous epistemology culture and tradition. *Igwebuike* as a new concept reveals a kind of dynamics found in African reality which is based on the relationships and interconnections. *Igwebuike* being wholistic in nature encompasses reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintain human community. It reflects a community based morality; this makes character very central to African ethics, for character is learnt and taught in the community for harmonious living. Without this harmonious living there will be discovering in the community because one has

character can bring disorder in the society. Hence, this is why it is strongly believed, practiced and expressed proverbially in *Igboland* thus: *when one finger touches oil it spreads to all the rest fingers*. Sequel to the above, the community has the responsibility of rooting out evil done by an individual or group. Kanu posited an African proverb to support the above which says: 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. With this above, it means that taboos have a strong community dimension; hence all community joins hand in fighting against it for the survival of the community.

The fourth part is *Igwebuiké* and the essence of being human; here Kanu recognises three attributes of being human namely: human dignity, human equality and universal brotherhood/sisterhood. The dignity of the human life is based on its relationship with the divine because all life comes from God. The Igbo thus will give their children names indicating that life comes or belongs to God. The African idea of human equality is directly linked to her concept of God as the father of all. Equality in Africa perspective is not placing everyone on the same level but giving everyone his/her due place, hence there exists in Africa sense of respect. Universal brotherhood/sisterhood is a moral concept that points to the relationship between human persons with common interests and goals. This perception of human person being related to the other makes one to see the other as his or her brother or sister. There is respect and love among Africans because of, universal family of humankind.

In conclusion, having seen *Igwebuiké* as the key to the interpretation and understanding of Africa ethics, one may be afraid that since *Igwebuiké* is new concept in the field of research, can its principles be sustained or will it fade out like other developed principles or concepts in the future. In developing African ethics, can we hinge everything about African ethics to *Igwebuiké* bearing in mind that majority or crowd does not always have the answer to solutions to problems.

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