

# **IGWEBUIKE AS AN IGBO-AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE OF THE MEANING OF LIFE**

IkeChukwu Anthony Kanu

## **Abstract**

One of the questions that loom at the horizon of human existence is the question bordering on the meaning of life: does the universe have any meaning of purpose? Does human life have any purpose of meaning? If my life has meaning, is this meaning dependent on me as an individual? Is it possible that life has no meaning at all? If life has meaning at all, what form or forms does this meaning take? This piece focuses on articulating what makes the life of the human person meaningful from an Igbo-African perspective, and this would be based on what meaningful conditions have in common among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria. This paper will employ the Igwebuiké holistic method of interpreting the reality of the meaning of life; and this interpretation will mediate between the super-naturalistic concept of the meaning of life, which understands the meaning of life from the angle of engaging in the right way with God and the naturalistic perspective, which holds that the human life is meaningful in a world that is merely physical. The Igwebuiké perspective is an eclectic perspective of both positions. It discovered that from the Igbo-African perspective that the human life has meaning, and that this meaning is not detachable from the nature of the Igbo-African worldview.

**Keywords:** *Igwebuiké*, Meaning of Life, Existence, Igbo, African, Super-naturalistic, Naturalistic

## **1. Introduction**

The question of the meaning of life is one of the most profound questions in philosophy, one that everyday stares everyone on the face, and yet one of the most difficult questions to respond to. Metz in his discussion on the meaning of life, made a distinction between the meaning in life and the meaning of life thus: while the meaning of life concerns “what makes the life of the human race meaningful”<sup>1</sup>, and the meaning in life concerns “what could make the life an individual human person meaningful”<sup>2</sup>. The present paper does not intend

---

<sup>1</sup>Metz, T. 2020, 'Life, meaning of' In: Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 April 2022, <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/life-meaning-of/v-2>>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L044-2

<sup>2</sup> Metz, T. 2020, 'Life, meaning of' In: Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 April 2022,

to venture into the argument of what distinguishes the two concepts, neither does it intend to mix up concepts in such a manner that shifts attention from the primary discourse. This is not in any way to undermine the place of conceptual clarification in the philosophical enterprise, but just to say that it adopts a different approach that understands the two concepts within the *Igwebuiké* framework in complementary terms.

This work concerns itself primarily with the meaning of life, which is not disinterested with the question of the meaning in life. While the meaning of life concerns the human race, there cannot be a human race if there isn't first a human person. It is in this regard that Mbiti writes on the basis of African philosophy: "I am because you are and since you are, therefore, I am"<sup>3</sup>. In this, he makes a very strong connection between the universal and the particular; between the individual and humanity as a whole; between a person and the community. Therefore, while Metz's analysis of the two concepts is very fundamental to this study, the two concepts will not be treated as though they are aliens to one another but complementary to each other. It is such that the meaning in life has a connection with the meaning of life, and vice versa. This pattern is possible because individual and holistic or cosmic meaning directly or indirectly impinge on each other.

This notwithstanding, the important questions that arise within the parameters of the question of the meaning of life include: Does the life of individuals have any meaning or purpose? Does the universe have any meaning or purpose inherent in it? Is there any connection between the meaning and purpose of the universe and the purpose and meaning of the life of individuals? If the life of individuals has any meaning, is this meaning and purpose dependent on the individual involved or the community? Is it possible that life is a meaningless existence? If it is meaningless, how should such a life be lived- or is not meant to be lived? If it is meant to be lived, how do we struggle with the feelings of apathy, anomie and despair? If the human life has meaning, how should such a life be lived? How can the human life be made more meaningful? These are the questions that arise within this study that require attention, and also make us to think about ultimate issues about reality<sup>4</sup>. The responses to these questions are the basis of the categorization of the different perspectives in relation to the meaning of life.

---

<<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/life-meaning-of/v-2>>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L044-2

<sup>3</sup> Mbiti, J. S. *African religions and philosophy*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Bassham Gregory, Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Expositions. 9. 1. 2015. pp. 142-148

Having studied the different theories regarding the meaning of life which include Robert Nozick's distinction between a pleasure-filled life and a meaningful life<sup>5</sup>; Levy's and Nozick's connection of meaningfulness of life with organic unity or intrinsic good beyond oneself<sup>6</sup>; Trisel's association of meaning of life with the achievement of certain purposes<sup>7</sup>; Wong's emphasis on displaying narrative qualities in the shape of one's life<sup>8</sup> and Kauppinen's perspective on living in ways that merit reactions of esteem or admiration<sup>9</sup>; this piece aims at articulating a theory of the meaning of life that is based on African categories with the hope of developing an Igbo-African concept of a meaningful life. It is in this regard that this piece is titled: *Igbo-African concept of the meaning of life: An Igwebuikwe Perspective*. This notwithstanding, what do we understand by 'the meaning of life'?

## 2. Anthropological Basis for the Evaluation of the Meaning of Life

The question of the meaning of life constitutes the most important question in the life of each person. Thus, Bruno Bettelheim avers that "our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives"<sup>10</sup>. In the contention of Viktor Frankl, the human will to meaning comes prior to either our will to pleasure or will to power<sup>11</sup>. And this question according to Seachris Joshua arises at fundamental moments in our lives:

When struggling to make an important decision about what to do with our lives, when trapped in a job we hate, when wondering if there is more to life than the daily hum-drum, when diagnosed with a terminal illness, when experiencing the loss of a loved one, when feeling small while looking up at the night sky, when wondering if this universe is all there is and why it is even here in the first place, when questioning whether life and love will have a lasting place in the universe or

---

<sup>5</sup> Nozick Robert, *Philosophical explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 571-613

<sup>6</sup> Levy, N, Downshifting and meaning in life. *Ratio*. 18. 2005, pp. 178-180; Nozick Robert, *Philosophical explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 594-600

<sup>7</sup> Trisel, B. A., Judging life and its value. *Sorites*. 18. 2007. pp. 60-75

<sup>8</sup> Metz, T., Recent work on the meaning of "life's meaning": Should we change the philosophical discourse? *Journal Human Affairs*. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2019-0035>

<sup>9</sup> Kauppinen, A. Meaningfulness. In G. Fletcher (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of the philosophy of well-being* (pp. 281-291). New York: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment*. New York: Knopf, 1978, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006, p. 99

whether the whole show will end in utter and everlasting desolation and silence<sup>12</sup>.

Such a question arises in the human heart because of the capacity that the human person possesses: the capacity for self-evaluation and reflection. The human person is able to look at himself or herself in such a manner that the self can evaluate itself. This implies that the human person can go outside of the self to study or evaluate or observe the self. Such a reflection is, therefore, the prerogative of the human person given the capacity for reason. Animals, plants and other dimensions of nature cannot think about the meaning of life. Reasoning, thus becomes the power that helps the human person to discover the meaning of life. This self-reflection involves the questioning of actions and events in relation to the human person. Such questions are sometimes individual and at other times cosmic<sup>13</sup>.

### **3. What is the Meaning of Life?**

Aristippus, a follower of Socrates and the founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy like other Greek ethical thinkers, centered his ethics around the

---

<sup>12</sup> Seachris Joshua, *The Meaning of Life: Contemporary Analytic Perspectives*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/mean-ana>

<sup>13</sup> Fischer, John Martin. "Recent Work on Death and the Meaning of Life." *Philosophical Books* 34 (April 1993): 65-74; Fischer, John Martin. "Why Immortality is Not So Bad." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2 (September 1994): 257-70; Kahane, Guy. "Our Cosmic Insignificance," *Noûs* (2013): 1-28; Landau, Iddo. "Life, Meaning of" in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013: 3043-3047; Landau, Iddo. "The Meaning of Life Sub Specie Aeternitatis." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 89:4 (2011): 727-734; Nagel, Thomas. "The Absurd." *The Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 716-27; Nagel, Thomas. *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament: Essays 2002-2008*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Seachris, Joshua. "Death, Futility, and the Proleptic Power of Narrative Ending." *Religious Studies* 47:2 (June 2011): 141-63; Seachris, Joshua. "From the Meaning Triad to Meaning Holism: Unifying Life's Meaning" *Human Affairs* 49:4 (2019); Seachris, Joshua W. "The Meaning of Life as Narrative: A New Proposal for Interpreting Philosophy's 'Primary' Question." *Philo* 12 (Spring-Summer 2009): 5-23; Seachris, Joshua W. "The Sub Specie Aeternitatis Perspective and Normative Evaluations of Life's Meaningfulness: A Closer Look," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2013): 605-620; Seachris, Joshua, ed. *Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012; Seachris, Joshua, and Stewart Goetz. eds. *God and Meaning: New Essays*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016; Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Doubleday, 1967, p. 27.

question of what the ‘end’ is; that is, what goal our actions aim at and what is valuable for its own sake. He identified the end as pleasure. Most of the pleasures that Aristippus is depicted as pursuing have to do with sensual gratification, such as sleeping with courtesans and enjoying fine food and old wines<sup>14</sup>. Epicurus holds that the only thing that is intrinsically valuable is one’s own pleasure. However, unlike Aristippus, Epicurus recommends a virtuous, moderately ascetic life as the best means to securing pleasure<sup>15</sup>. John Stuart Mill in attempting to redraw Bentham’s Utilitarianism, moved away from Bentham’s idea that all that mattered was the quantity of total pleasure. Instead, Mill thought that quality of pleasure was also crucial to deciding what is moral<sup>16</sup>. For these, meaningfulness of life is connected to happiness and pleasure.

While these persons have connected the meaning of life to pleasure and happiness in varying degrees, the concept of meaning in this paper is related to importance and significance. Thus, the meaning of life refers to the importance and significance of life<sup>17</sup>. Unlike the positions of Aristippus, Epicurus, Bentham and Mill, Metz argues that a meaningful life must not be identified with happiness or pleasure as a life can be happy but meaningless, or pleasurable and meaningless. Pleasure and happiness do not, therefore, imply the meaningfulness of life<sup>18</sup>. Focusing on the positions of scholars like Aristippus, Metz argues that those who connect pleasure with meaningfulness of life are ‘conceptually confused’ as nothing which belongs to our animal self can confer any meaning whatsoever<sup>19</sup>.

Three concepts are important for Seachris Joshua in the analysis of the concept of meaning: making-sense, “This category is an important ordinary

---

<sup>14</sup> Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Greek and Utilitarian Ethics*. Lecture delivered at Veritas University Abuja, Department of Philosophy on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, pp. 8-9

<sup>15</sup> Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Greek and Utilitarian Ethics*. Lecture delivered at Veritas University Abuja, Department of Philosophy on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, p. 9

<sup>16</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, West Strand, 1863), p. 281; Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "happiness". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/happiness>. Accessed 10 April 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 6

<sup>18</sup> Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p.27

<sup>19</sup> Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 29-30

sense of meaning and connotes ideas like intelligibility, clarification, and coherence. Something has meaning if it makes sense; it lacks meaning if it does not"<sup>20</sup>; purpose, we all want to know if our life has purpose, which is usually a cosmic question; significance, which "tracks a related cluster of notions like mattering, importance, impact, salience, being the object of care and concern, and value, depending on context"<sup>21</sup>.

Within the context of this study, the understanding of the meaning of life makes a synthesis of the different nuances that these concepts bring. Life is meaningful if it has significance; it is meaningful if it makes sense and meaningful if it has a purpose. Any life that lacks any of these becomes meaningless. More so, none of these concepts is to be understood in its relative sense.

#### **4. Perspectives about the Meaning of Life**

Before discussing the *Igwebuike* concept of the meaning of life, it is worthwhile to study the major perspectives on the meaning of life. The perspectives of the meaning of life that will be discussed here are the naturalistic, super-naturalistic and the fundamentalist view of the meaning of life. An understanding of these meanings of life will help the understanding of the *Igwebuike* concept of the meaning of life.

##### **i. Naturalistic Perspective**

The naturalistic view is a scientific perspective that holds that all beings and events in the world are natural. Consequently, all knowledge of the universe falls within the pale of scientific investigation. Although naturalism denies the existence of truly supernatural realities, it makes allowance for the supernatural, provided that knowledge of it can be had in a scientifically detectable way. It posits that nature is in principle completely knowable, and that there are in nature regularity, unity, and wholeness that implies objective laws, without which the pursuit of scientific knowledge would be absurd<sup>22</sup>. It sometimes includes the materialistic perspective of nature.

The naturalistic perspective, therefore, holds that nature is the only reality that there is, and in fact the whole of it. The only thing that exists beyond the natural is nothing. The implication is that for the naturalists, the meaning of

---

<sup>20</sup> Seachris Joshua, The Meaning of Life: Contemporary Analytic Perspectives. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/mean-ana>

<sup>21</sup> Seachris Joshua, The Meaning of Life: Contemporary Analytic Perspectives. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/mean-ana>

<sup>22</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "naturalism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-philosophy>.

life is gained within the natural space and not in some supernatural world or in relation to some supernatural being<sup>23</sup>. Life becomes meaningful if it is lived in such a way that accords with the natural capacity of the universe, and that the existence of a supernatural realm is not only unnecessary for the achievement of meaning in life but in fact is an obstacle to the attainment of meaning<sup>24</sup>. The major thinkers that hold this perspective include F. J. E. Woodbridge, Morris R. Cohen, John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, and Sidney Hook.

## ii. Super-Naturalistic Perspective

The super-naturalist perspective on the meaning of life holds that life has meaning if it is lived in such a manner that it is based on the way set by God the creator of the life itself. In this case, God's purpose becomes the only path towards achieving meaning in life<sup>25</sup>. God is absolutely necessary for any form of meaning in life, and the closer a person works towards fulfilling this divine or spiritual purpose assigned to him or her, the more meaningful life becomes for him or her. Augustine expresses the super-naturalist perspective thus: "... you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you"<sup>26</sup>; Blaise Pascal writes further:

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself<sup>27</sup>.

The super-naturalistic perspective always makes a distinction between the present state which is natural and the supernatural state which awaits the

---

<sup>23</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "naturalism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-philosophy>.

<sup>24</sup> Metz, T. 2020, 'Life, meaning of' In: Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 April 2022, <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/life-meaning-of/v-2>>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L044-2

<sup>25</sup> Metz, T. 2020, 'Life, meaning of' In: Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 April 2022, <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/life-meaning-of/v-2>>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L044-2

<sup>26</sup> Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Trans. by Rex Warner. New York: Mentor, 1963, p. 17

<sup>27</sup> Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books, 1995, p. 45

human person and in which the full meaning of life is not only unraveled but attained. The Buddhist religion from its very beginning, established a total distinction between the realm of life and individual (*samsāra*), which it identified interiorly as the arena of pain and suffering, and the goal of the Buddhist way, Nirvana, which is understood in wholly negative terms as a final and total release from *samsāra*<sup>28</sup>. In Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, etc., which emphasize the doctrine of the last things or times in the life of a person make a radical distinction between the old aeon and the new aeon, or this world and the Kingdom of God<sup>29</sup>.

Metz observes that one of the major objections to the super-naturalistic perspective comes from the secularized understanding of the world- which holds that many lives have been meaningful even without reference to the supernatural or God. Reacting to this, the super-naturalistic perspective holds that although some small, shallow and transient meanings could be gotten in life at this level of being<sup>30</sup>, a much profound meaningfulness of life cannot be achieved without the religious dimension of life.

### **iii. Fundamentality Perspective**

The fundamentality perspective was developed by Metz. Having rejected supernaturalist and naturalist theories of meaning on the ground of having fatal weaknesses, Metz defends what he takes to be the correct theory. He presents this theory thus:

A human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she, without violating certain moral constraints against degrading sacrifice, employs her reason and in ways that either positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence, or negatively orient it towards what threatens them, such that the worse parts of her life cause better parts towards its end by a process that makes for a compelling and ideally original life-story; in addition, the meaning in a human person's life is reduced, the more it is negatively oriented

---

<sup>28</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "supernaturalism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/supernaturalism>.

<sup>29</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "supernaturalism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/supernaturalism>.

<sup>30</sup> Metz, T. 2020, 'Life, meaning of' In: Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 April 2022, <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/life-meaning-of/v-2>>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L044-2



towards fundamental conditions of human existence or exhibits narrative disvalue<sup>31</sup>.

The major dimensions of the fundamentality theory of Metz include the following: supernatural conditions can make life meaningful; certain mental states make life meaningful; certain mental states and actions lessen meaning in life; enhancing people's quality of life can enhance meaning in life; certain degrading behaviour undercuts the meaning-conferring power of the good consequences the person has brought about; meaning is enhanced when a person brings about final value like virtue and excellence in himself or herself; meaning in life is a matter of both internal and external factors<sup>32</sup>.

Simplifying his perspective further, Bassham writes that the implication is that "individual lives have meaning to the extent that they positively engage, through active uses of reason, with fundamental values such as truth, goodness, and beauty. On such an account, a deeply and paradigmatically meaningful life would be one of outstanding moral achievement, high-flying intellectual excellence, and significant artistic creation"<sup>33</sup>. From the foregoing, Bassham observes that "Metz's view seems to imply (for example) that babies, the severely mentally challenged, and people with Alzheimer's do not live meaningful lives (or live only minimally meaningful lives) because they cannot actively use their reason to perform acts of moral, intellectual, or artistic significance. It is true, of course, that they cannot perform such acts in this life. This is not acceptable in classical theism given that it holds that the human life has meaningful despite the impairment of reason.

Furthermore, Bassham argues against the argument of Metz on the ground that the meaning of life goes beyond achievements:

Meaning of a human life cannot be measured by actual achievement or worldly "significance" or "importance," for these are all partly matters of luck and all human achievements are smoke and "vanity" from what Sidgwick called "the point of view of the universe." The Christian view, rather, is that of Milton: "They also serve who only stand and wait." And the Christian view is also that of Mother Teresa: Some are called merely "to be faithful."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 235

<sup>32</sup> Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 239

<sup>33</sup> Gregory Bassham, *Metz Thaddeus, Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Expositions. 9. 1. 2015. pp. 146

<sup>34</sup> Gregory Bassham, *Metz Thaddeus, Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Expositions. 9. 1. 2015. pp. 146; Chawla, Navin.

From the foregoing criticisms, it is obvious that the meaning of life is not supplied by a particular factor given the complexity of life itself. There are several human beings who have reason, and yet find no meaning in life. We have also witnessed many who have impairment with reason and yet seem to have a more meaningful life than many who are rationally sound. There must be several factors that make for the meaning of life. If it is argued that it is reason that makes life meaningful, then life itself is not yet understood let alone its meaningfulness. Given this issues, how else can the meaning of life be understood?

### **5. *Igwebuik*e Approach to the Meaning of Life**

An *Igwebuik*e approach towards the understanding of the meaning of life adopts a holistic indigenous approach. *Igwebuik*e is a combination of three words: *Igwe bu ike*. Literally, *Igwe* is a noun which means number or multitude, usually a large number or population. The number or population in perspective are entities with ontological identities and significances, however, part of an existential order in which every entity is in relation to the other. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is a noun, which means *strength* or *power*<sup>35</sup>. *Igwe, bu* and *ike* put together, means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’<sup>36</sup>. However, beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuik*e, it means *otu obi* (one heart and one soul) – *cor unum et anima una*, guided by the principles of solidarity, identifying with others, empathy, communion, complementarity, etc., in our relationship with others. *Igwebuik*e ethical theory grows out from

---

*Mother Teresa: The Centenary Edition*. New York: Penguin, 2008, p. xxv; Milton, John. “Sonnet 19.” In *The Complete Poetry*. Ed. John T. Shawcross. New York: Anchor Doubleday. 1963, 242–243; Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. 7th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1907, p. 383.

<sup>35</sup>Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuik*e as the consummate foundation of African Bioethical principles. *An African journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol.2 No1 June, 2016, pp.23-40; Kanu, I. A. , *ebuik*e as an expressive modality of being in African ontology. *Journal of Environmental and Construction Management*. 6. 3. 2016, pp.12-21; Kanu, I. A., African traditional folktales as an integrated classroom. *Sub-Saharan African Journal of Contemporary Education Research*. Vol.3 No. 6., 2016, pp. 107-118.

<sup>36</sup>Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuik*e as an Igbo-African philosophy for Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria. In Mahmoud Misaeli (Ed.). *Spirituality and Global Ethics* (pp. 300-310). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars, 2017; Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuik*e as an Igbo-African philosophy for the protection of the environment. *Nightingale International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 3. No. 4. , 2017, pp. 28-38; Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuik*e as the hermeneutic of individuality and communality in African ontology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. , 2017, pp. 162-179.

an indigenous understanding of life which is applicable in our modern time for the promotion of individual and common good.

God occupies a fundamental place in the Igbo-African search for meaning. We, therefore, cannot talk about the meaning of life in exclusion of God who is *Chi na eke* (the God that creates). It is in the continuous sense because he is a God that continues to create through his creatures. An African proverb says: “When you lose on the drum beating of the gods, you lose on the rhythm and pace of life”<sup>37</sup>. Aristotle observes that by the very nature of the universe that there is a cause: “Whenever anything which has several parts is such that the whole is something over and above its parts, and not just the sum of them all, like a heap, then it always has some cause”<sup>38</sup>. This consideration is within the question of the purpose of life, which is cosmological in character, and to a great extent within the parameters of the consideration of the significance of life.

This is not to say that it is only God that is necessary for the meaningfulness of life. If only God were necessary for the meaningfulness of life, then the human person will not be free and if he or she is not free then there will be the problem of responsibility. Thus, while God is necessary for the meaningfulness of life, there is the role of the human person in the actualization of the meaningfulness of his or her life. On this basis, I agree with Metz that the meaningfulness of life involves both internal and external factors. At the first level, while the human person is the internal factor, God is the external factor; at the second level, while the human mind is the internal factor, his environment or background is the external factor.

At the cosmic level, in terms of the purpose of the cosmos, God has a fundamental place in the formulation of the meaning of the human life, but at the level of appropriating this cosmic purpose for the purposefulness of the life of individual persons, the human person has a fundamental role for the meaningfulness of his or her life. It is in this regard that Metz and Seachris make a distinction between the meaning in life (which is individual) and the meaning of life (which is cosmic). Even here, these two dimensions of meaning are interrelated. There are African proverbs<sup>39</sup> that point to the interrelatedness of these dimensions of purposefulness.

---

<sup>37</sup> Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike: An operative condition of African philosophy, religion and culture- Towards a thermodynamic transformation ontology*. Maiden Inaugural Lecture held at Tansian University, Umunya. Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021, pp. 22-23.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. 1045a 10f.

<sup>39</sup> Kanu, I. A. Igbo proverbs as embodiments of Igbo-African philosophy. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 4. 1. 2014, pp. 164-168.

- a. He that helps himself is who God helps
- b. When a diviner is doing divination for you, you also need to use your mind to evaluate outcome
- c. God chases flies for the cow that has no tail
- d. When you agree then your God will agree

There is a connection between the divine and the human in the achievement of the meaning of life. Thus, within the *Igwebuike* context, the supernatural dimension of life is fundamental to the meaning of life, as it complements the existence of the human person in this worldly universe. The reality of meaning goes beyond that which can be seen and felt, it is transcendental in nature and therefore beyond what the material can offer. It is the supernatural dimension that gives basis to its transcendental character.

The human reason and sense of feeling help the human person to discover that life is a relationship, and that a sense of community and relationship is indispensable for the achievement of the meaning of life. This relationship goes beyond the meaning of the individual human life to include questions about the meaning of the life of humanity as a whole, without excluding all biological life and all of space and time existence. It is within the context of relationships that the human person finds his or her completeness and makes his or her contribution to the human community and world as a whole. This is what gives meaning to the human life. There is no meaning outside of the discovery of this completeness and his or her contribution to the world that holds him or her.

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. The purpose of this attraction is to relate. This takes us back to the cosmic purpose of creation, which speaks of the divine role. The human person was created to relate- that is, to be human. The human person cannot be human and still not relate. It is at the point of fulfilling this purpose that the human person finds meaning for his 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 this natural capacity for relationality.

The idea of relationship is not only limited to the human world or among human beings but the spiritual forces and the other dimensions of nature. The human person must relate to nature in such a manner that shows respect, solidarity, love, etc. While nature provides a temporal home for the human person, the human person must respect nature and treat it as a part of himself

or herself. There is a strong connection between the way the human person sees nature and the way he or she sees himself or herself. A healthy understanding and relationship with nature promotes a better understanding of the self and relationship with the self. The African world is one with forces of varied degrees, including spiritual forces with God at the apex of these forces. There is so much nihilism and meaninglessness in many lives because of the relegation of the force that is spiritual to the background. This leaves the human person with a missing link that only the spiritual can satisfy- a satisfaction that brings about a balance. The denial of a fundamental aspect of his or her being does not make life meaningful.

*Igwebuiké* concept of the meaning of life holds that the meaning of life does not come from a thing like pleasure or happiness. It is beyond a thing. Circumstances or events could give us pleasure or happiness but cannot confer meaning of life. Thus, one may have particular experiences that gives him or her pleasure and happiness and yet might not have found meaning of life. Put in another way, a person could have strings of pleasure and happiness and yet live a meaningless life. Such a person who depends on pleasure and happiness for meaning in his or her life will have to be in continuous pursuit of events and things for the sake of having meaning as each meaning he has found will elapse as soon as the circumstance or thing gives way. He will have to find another thing, or another event. He is like a patient who is on a pain killer drug. He will keep taking pain killers one after another to maintain a sane moment. However, once the problem is solved, such a person will need pain killers no more.

The meaning of life is transcendental, in the sense that it transcends the present. I cannot make a claim to meaning in an evening simply because I have been taken out by my friends and we are eating and drinking and laughing. It does not come from a particular event but from a series of events that has a connection to the future. It is this connection between the past and the future that makes the present meaningful. The present cannot be meaningful if it is not grounded on a particular past and positioned towards a particular future. The connection with the future is what gives the meaning of life its boundless and limitless character. The discovery of meaning of life is a taste of immortality: boundless and unlimited by particular circumstances; such that a person could find meaning in life in spite of being in a horrible circumstance.

The quality of life that a person lives either gives meaning or takes away meaning. The quality of life that gives meaning must have a bearing on the very nature of the human person- meaning that there is need for an ontological link. A human person cannot live like an animal and expect to find meaning in life. In the same way, a human being cannot live like a spiritual being and

expect to find meaning in life. True meaning comes from living out your being and the purpose of your being as a human being. Our nature and the meaning we make out of it has got to do with who we are: *mmadu*.

## **6. Conclusion**

This work has focused on articulating the *Igwebuiké* concept of the meaning of life. However, it began with an understanding of the various perspectives on the meaning of life which includes the naturalistic, supernaturalistic and the fundamentality theories of the meaning of life. Fundamental to these theories is the understanding of the meaning of life in relation to a particular thing like God, nature and reason. *Igwebuiké* approach to the question of the meaning of life brings in a new perspective, indicating that the meaning of life goes beyond a thing or an event, but from several factors that are complementary to each other. In fact, it understands the meaning of life as something that is transcendent- not in the sense of the exclusion of things that are material but in the assertion that one thing or event is not enough for one to find meaning. The *Igwebuiké* perspective could be referred to as an eclectic perspective in the sense that it combines the fundamental aspects of the concept of the meaning of life in the supernaturalistic, naturalistic and fundamentality perspectives and tries to understand them within African categories. It is within this context that it can be referred to as an indigenous approach or perspective. From the foregoing, the meaning of life comes from a community of factors that complement each other. These factors include: relationships with the supernatural, the human community and the natural world. Such a relationship must be qualitative in character.

**Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, PhD**

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State

Email: [ikee\\_mario@yahoo.com](mailto:ikee_mario@yahoo.com)

## Bibliography

- Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Trans. C. D. C. Reeve. Carendon Aristotle Series: Oxford
- Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Trans. by Rex Warner. New York: Mentor, 1963
- Bassham Gregory, *Metz Thaddeus, Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Expositions. 9. 1. 2015
- Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Doubleday, 1967
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment*. New York: Knopf, 1978
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "naturalism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-philosophy>.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "supernaturalism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/supernaturalism>.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "happiness". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/happiness>. Accessed 10 April 2022.
- Chawla, Navin. *Mother Teresa: The Centenary Edition*. New York: Penguin, 2008
- Fischer, John Martin. "Recent Work on Death and the Meaning of Life." *Philosophical Books* 34 (April 1993): 65-74
- Fischer, John Martin. "Why Immortality is Not So Bad." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2 (September 1994): 257-70
- Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006
- Gregory Bassham, *Metz Thaddeus, Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Expositions. 9. 1. 2015.
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*. London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, West Strand, 1863
- Kahane, Guy. "Our Cosmic Insignificance," *Noûs* (2013): 1-28
- Kanu I. A., *Greek and Utilitarian Ethics*. Lecture delivered at Veritas University Abuja, Department of Philosophy on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022
- Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike: An operative condition of African philosophy, religion and culture- Towards a thermodynamic transformation ontology*. Maiden Inaugural Lecture held at Tansian University, Umunya. Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021, pp. 22-23.
- Kanu, I. A. Igbo proverbs as embodiments of Igbo-African philosophy. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 4. 1. 2014, pp. 164-168
- Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike as the consummate foundation of African Bioethical principles*. *An African journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol.2 No1 June, 2016, pp.23-40

- Kanu, I. A. , *ebuike* as an expressive modality of being in African ontology. *Journal of Environmental and Construction Management*. 6. 3. 2016, pp.12-21
- Kanu, I. A., African traditional folktales as an integrated classroom. *Sub-Saharan African Journal of Contemporary Education Research*. Vol.3 No. 6., 2016, pp. 107-118.
- Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African philosophy for Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria. In Mahmoud Misaeli (Ed.). *Spirituality and Global Ethics* (pp. 300-310). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars, 2017
- Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African philosophy for the protection of the environment. *Nightingale International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 3. No. 4. , 2017, pp. 28-38;
- Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike* as the hermeneutic of individuality and communality in African ontology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. , 2017, pp. 162-179.
- Kauppinen, A. Meaningfulness. In G. Fletcher (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of the philosophy of well-being* (pp. 281-291). New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Landau, Iddo. “Life, Meaning of” in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013: 3043-3047
- Landau, Iddo. “The Meaning of Life Sub Specie Aeternitatis.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 89:4 (2011): 727-734
- Levy, N, Downshifting and meaning in life. *Ratio*. 18. 2005, pp. 178-180; Nozick Robert, *Philosophical explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Mbiti, J. S. *African religions and philosophy*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1970.
- Metz Thaddeus, *Meaning of life: An analytic study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014
- Metz, T. 2020, 'Life, meaning of' In: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 April 2022, <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/life-meaning-of/v-2>>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L044-2
- Metz, T., Recent work on the meaning of ‘‘life’s meaning’’: Should we change the philosophical discourse? *Journal Human Affairs*. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2019-0035>
- Milton, John. “Sonnet 19.” In *The Complete Poetry*. Ed. John T. Shawcross. New York: Anchor Doubleday. 1963
- Nagel, Thomas. “The Absurd.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 716-27
- Nagel, Thomas. *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament: Essays 2002-2008*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010
- Nozick Robert, *Philosophical explanations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981



- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books, 1995
- Seachris Joshua, *The Meaning of Life: Contemporary Analytic Perspectives*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/mean-ana>
- Seachris, Joshua W. "The Meaning of Life as Narrative: A New Proposal for Interpreting Philosophy's 'Primary' Question." *Philo* 12 (Spring-Summer 2009): 5-23
- Seachris, Joshua W. "The Sub Specie Aeternitatis Perspective and Normative Evaluations of Life's Meaningfulness: A Closer Look," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2013): 605-620
- Seachris, Joshua, and Stewart Goetz. eds. *God and Meaning: New Essays*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016
- Seachris, Joshua, ed. *Exploring the Meaning of Life: An Anthology and Guide*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012
- Seachris, Joshua. "Death, Futility, and the Proleptic Power of Narrative Ending." *Religious Studies* 47:2 (June 2011): 141-63
- Seachris, Joshua. "From the Meaning Triad to Meaning Holism: Unifying Life's Meaning" *Human Affairs* 49:4 (2019)
- Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. 7th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1907
- Trisel, B. A., Judging life and its value. *Sorites*. 18. 2007
- Wolf, Susan. "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (December 1997): 207-25
- Wolf, Susan. "Meaningful Lives in a Meaningless World," *Quaestiones Infnitae* 14 (June 1997): 1-22.
- Wolf, Susan. *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010