IGWEBUIKE AS AN IGBO-AFRICAN RELATIONAL ETHICAL THEORY

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Abstract
Ethical theories are attempts by individuals or schools of thought to provide clear and unified accounts of what our ethical responsibilities are or what we are obliged to do. They help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional and personal conduct of a person in his or her everyday life. Ethical theories also help in understanding moral dilemmas, in terms of making moral decision at certain points, justifying obligations and ideas, relating morality and also explaining the difference in terms of responsibility. A cursory glance at the development of the history of Western philosophy reveals a variety of ethical theories: the golden mean ethical theory, rights-based ethical theory, divine command ethical theory, deontological ethical theory, feminist ethical theory, the ethics of care theory, etc. This work focused on the quest for an African ethical theory, one that would capture and express the African basic principles of morality. To achieve this, it studied Igwebuike as the operative condition of Igbo-African ethical theory. Igwebuike as a complementary philosophy understands life as a shared reality, and this complementarity, solidarity, relationality, communality, etc., are the principles that shape the African ethical theory. This ethical theory is hoped to be a systematic cross-cultural engagement with Western ethical theories that are individualistic and non-relational. For the purpose of this piece, the hermeneutic, analytical and critical methods of inquiry will be employed. It discovers that the distinctive character of Igwebuike Igbo ethical theory is its communal and relational character which makes the African contribution to the discourse on ethics.
Keywords: Ethical Theory, Igbo, African, Relational, *Igwebuike*, Complementarity

1. Introduction

A cursory glance reveals that philosophers over the last 2500 years have bordered themselves with the puzzle of searching for an underlying principle expounded by an ethical theory. These theories are attempts by individuals or schools of thought to provide clear and unified accounts of what our ethical responsibilities are or what we are obliged to do. Ethical theories help to create the fundamentals of obligation suitable and applicable to professional

and personal conduct of a person in his everyday life[1]. They also help in the following areas:

a. understanding moral dilemmas, in terms of making moral decision at certain points,
b. justifying professional obligations and ideas, which are binding by a person being a member of such a profession,
c. relating ordinary and professional morality and also explaining the difference in terms of responsibility.

This piece presents *Igwebuike* as an ethical theory worthy of consideration in the journey of solving the puzzles within ethical theory. *Igwebuike* as an ethical theory has been with the Igbo-African people for hundreds of years and have been a basis for the choices individuals make and the decisions that the community takes. This paper is not concerned about showing that *Igwebuike* as an ethical theory is better compared to other ethical theories but rather as a theory, to show how it captures the African spirit within the parameters of morality. *Igwebuike* is based on the principle of *I am because you are, and since you are, therefore, I am[2];* and also the African proverb which says: *a person is a person through other persons[3]*. This will be studied to see how it is applicable to various situations so as to help in solving moral dilemma.

Unlike the South African sister concept Ubuntu of the Nguni language, literally meaning *humanness,* which has been criticized for being vague and lacking in the precision required for human action, *Igwebuike* exhibits a greater level of clarity. It is a combination of three Igbo words. It can be understood as a word or a sentence. 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[4]*. *Igwe, bu* and *ike* put together, means 'number is strength'

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[1] Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories.* Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 1
[2] Tutu, D., *No future without forgiveness*. New York: Random House, 1999, p. 31.
[3] Tutu, D., *No future without forgiveness*. New York: Random House, 1999, p. 31.
[4] 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,

or 'number is power'[5]. However, beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuike,* 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. *Igwebuike* ethical theory grows out from an indigenous understanding which is applicable in our modern time for the promotion of individual and common good.

While the emphasis on community seems to suggest that it is a communal or collective ethical theory that does not promote human freedom, on the contrary it is an ethics that specifies the role of the individual within the group, which would not have been possible if the individual was understood as not having freedom. Complementarity, empathy, communion, etc., are only possible where there is first individuality. On the same note, the traditional or cultural character of *Igwebuike* ethical theory does not imply that it is applicable to small scale traditional communities in pre-colonial era only. It is applicable to addressing present day ethical issues within and outside the Igbo-African society, and its interpretation is refashionable so that its characteristic elements or principles are understood in the light of our best current understanding of what is morally right. This piece will begin from a background on ethical theories in the history of philosophy from which it would study our humanity as the pivot of *Igwebuike* ethical theory and its ontological basis. This will be followed by a hermeneutic of this theory and its moral calculus.

2. Ethical Theories in the History of Philosophy

During the ancient era, the golden mean ethical theory was proposed by Aristotle. According to this theory, the solution to a problem is found by analyzing the "Mean value of solution" which will be between the extremes of excess and deficiency. The golden mean virtue can be understood as the virtue of reaching a proper balance between extremes in conduct, emotion, desire and attitude. This theory phrased by Aristotle states that virtues are tendencies

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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.

[5]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.

to find the golden mean between the extremes of too much (excess) and too little (deficiency) with regard to particular aspects of our lives[6].

Divine command theory also known as theological voluntarism is a meta-ethical theory that dates back to the medieval ages. It proposes that an action's status as morally good is determined by if it is commanded by God. Thus, what is moral is determined by God's commands; to be moral is to follow God's commands. Followers of both monotheistic and polytheistic religions in ancient and modern times have often accepted the importance of God's commands in establishing morality[7]. Also related to this is the natural law theory in ethics that has been traced to scholars like St Thomas Aquinas in the medieval ages. It holds that human beings possess intrinsic value that governs their reasoning and behavior and that the rules of right and wrong are inherent in people or natural to them and are not created by society or court judges[8].

The Rights-based ethical theory was proposed by John Locke during the modern epoch. According to this theory, the solution to a problem is by realizing that every person has a right to live. "Live and let live" is the philosophy behind this theory. The rights of a person towards life, health, liberty, possession, etc., are taken care of under this theory. It recognizes human dignity at its most basic form and holds that everyone has a right to live, liberty and the pursuit of happiness[9].

The duty-based ethical theory was proposed by Immanuel Kant. According to this theory, every person has a duty to follow particular laws or categorical imperatives which are accepted universally, with no exceptions as absolute rules[10]. Kant observes that everyone is bound to follow some moral laws. By following these moral laws, we make the choice to be morally sound even though we have chances to do anything or make other choices contrary to the categorical imperative rules. This theory is also called as deontological theory or the absolutist theory. The categorical imperative law states that "Act only

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6 Aristotle, *Nichomechean ethics*. 26. 15; 26.4; Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories*. Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 2

7 Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories*. Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 7

8 Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories*. Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 8

9 Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories*. Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 3

10 Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories*. Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 4

according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[11]

Very important in the history of ethical theories is Utilitarian theory. It was proposed by Jeremy Bentham and later developed by John Stuart Mill so as to help the theory overcome the criticisms of scholars. According to this theory, the happiness or pleasure of a greatest number of people in the society is considered as the greatest good. Thus, an action is morally right if its consequences lead to happiness of people, and wrong if they lead to their unhappiness[12].

Another ethical theory is virtue ethics, which has been traced to Plato. It is person rather than action based ethical theory: it looks at the virtue or moral character of the person carrying out an action, rather than at ethical duties and rules, or the consequences of particular actions. Virtue ethics not only deals with the rightness or wrongness of individual actions, it provides guidance as to the sort of characteristics and behaviors a good person will seek to achieve. In that way, virtue ethics is concerned with the whole of a person's life, rather than particular episodes or actions. It is interested in assessing the character of a person rather than assessing the goodness or badness of a particular action[13].

Feminist ethics is a contemporary approach to ethics that builds on the belief that traditionally ethical theorizing has undervalued and/or underappreciated women's moral experience, which is largely male-dominated, and it, therefore, chooses to re-imagine ethics through a holistic feminist approach[14]. Traditional ethics prizes masculine cultural traits like independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, etc[15], over and above the feminine qualities of love, care, emotion, etc.

Related to the feminist ethics is the ethics of care. It is a normative ethical theory that holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relationships and care or benevolence as a virtue. It was developed by feminists in the second

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[11] Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories.* Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 4
[12] Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories.* Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 5
[13] Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, *Ethical Theories.* Lecture Note delivered at the Department of Philosophy, Veritas University, Abuja. 7th February 2022, p. 6
[14] Tong, R. and Williams N., Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Feminist Ethics, First published Tue May 12, 1998; substantive revision Mon May 4, 2009.
[15] Jaggar, "Feminist Ethics," 1992

half of the twentieth century[16]. While consequentialist and deontological ethical theories emphasize generalizable standards and impartiality, ethics of care emphasizes the importance of care and response to the individual[17].

A cursory glance reveals that these ethical theories are majorly Western theories of ethics. This pieces believes that the time has come to develop an ethical theory which will be based on African categories, and which will give a comprehensive account of right and wrong, a specification of what immoral actions have in common and the reduction of various moral duties just to one, which will also serve as an ethical principle that can be used to solve controversial issues in such a manner that ambiguities and abstractness are avoided.

3. 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"[18]. 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"[19]. In another text he writes: "Man is by nature a political animal"[20].

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 own capacity of existence.

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[16] "Care Ethics" Maureen Sander-Staudt, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ISSN 2161-0002, http://www.iep.utm.edu/, 22/3/2016.

[17] Gilligan, Carol. "Moral Orientation and Moral Development." The Feminist Philosophy Reader. By Alison Bailey and Chris J. Cuomo. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008. N. pag. 469 Print.

[18] Aristotle, *Politiks* Book 1, 1256b, pp. 20-21

[19] Aristotle, *Politiks* Book 1, 1256b, pp. 27-29

[20] Aristotle, *Politiks* Book 1, 1253b, pp. 2-3

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. This has been addressed already at the beginning of this paper. However, worthy of note is that one of the reasons why the African emphasize the community in several fronts is to echo into the mind of the African the need for detachment especially from those things that most people considered topmost in the agenda of their lives. The happiness of the human person depends on the quality of ones 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 community with others[21]. This sense of community that distinguishes *Igwebuike* ethical theory is a combination of two interactions- identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them[22]. In identifying with others one treats himself or herself as a member of a group such that I become 'we' in my identity rather than 'I' and work towards achieving shared ends. Exhibiting solidarity involves helping others and being beneficial to them in such a way that my actions, emotions, motives, attitudes becomes oriented towards the good of others. It flows from my concept of the other as a part of me who now becomes 'we'. In this case, in *Igwebuike* friendship, harmony, community are indispensable[23]. This does not in any way mean that the self is demeaned in *Igwebuike* ethics. It is through sacrifice and commitment towards the other that the self finds meaning and happiness, but first, it must be selfless to achieve the ends of the self. This is meant to guide

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[21] Mnyaka, M., & Motlhabi, M., The African concept of ubuntu/botho and its socio-moral significance. *Black Theology*, 3, 2005, pp. 221–228; Shutte, A., *Ubuntu: An ethic for the new South Africa*. Cape Town, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2021, p.30.

[22] Nkondo, G. M., Ubuntu as a public policy in South Africa: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 2, 88–100., 2007, p. 91; Metz, T., Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 11, 2011, pp. 532–559; Metz, T., & Gaie, J., The African ethic of ubuntu/ botho: Implications for research on morality. *Journal of Moral Education*, 39, 2010, pp. 273–290.

[23] Paris, P., *The spirituality of African peoples.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995, pp. 129-156; Gyekye, K., "African ethics." In E. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, 2010.

the choices that individuals make and influence the decisions taken by the community as whole.

4. Virtue, Human Fellowship and Happiness

There are two colleges of human action that either builds fellowship or destroys 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"[24]. These human virtues arise in us a result of our human capacity for them. Therefore, every human being has a capacity for virtue by virtue of him being a *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"[25]. 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

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[24] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. Book 1. 1098a. 16

[25] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. Book 2. 1103a. 30

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 particular 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	Cunny	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 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 brings happiness, vices which destroys fellowship takes 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 willing for the good 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. The human will is therefore trained. This knowledge of the good is gained through the community into which the human person is born. This explains why the Igbo-African trains the child on the way of virtue through parables, proverbs, wise sayings, taboos, etc. This takes place in the evening of the day, meaning that the evenings are meant for evaluation and the day for practicalizing what has been learnt as one encounters others. Thus morality is taught and perfected through practice. No one becomes virtuous automatically.

5. The Ontological Basis of *Igwebuike* Ethical Theory

Igwebuike ethical theory, which emphasizes complementarity, relationship, communion, etc., is anchored on the following basic human conditions[26]:

   a. The world in which we live is one in which we encounter several needs, however, with very little resources to take care of the needs. This limitation calls for the mobilization of other forces outside of the self, a social fellowship for the satisfaction of particular needs[27].
   b. Nature has placed in us the alikeness for fellowship. This is based on the fact that we were created by God in His own image and likeness[28].

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[26]Njoku, F. O. C., *The philosophical grid of Igbo socio-political ontology: Ibu anyi danda.* 147th Inaugural Lecture of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2015; Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikeconomics*: The Igbo apprenticeship for wealth creation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* (IAAJAH). *5. 4.* pp. *56-70*; Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikecracy*: The Igbo-African participatory Socio-political system of governance. *TOLLE LEGE: An Augustinian Journal of the Philosophy and Theology. 1. 1.* pp. 34-45; Kanu, I. A. (2019). On the origin and principles of *Igwebuike* philosophy. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations.* Vol. 11. No. 1. pp. 159-176; Kanu, I. A. (2019b). An *Igwebuike* approach to the study of African traditional naming ceremony and baptism. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations.* Vol. 11. No. 1. pp. 25-50.

[27] 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 18th February 2021, pp. 22-23.

[28] Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike: An operative condition of African philosophy, religion and culture- Towards a thermodynamic transformation ontology.* Maiden Inaugural

c. Although we are equal essentially, we have different gifts and abilities. What I may be able to do another may not be able to do, meaning that my relationship with the other completes what is lacking in me[29].

d. Collaboration with the other is a ground for becoming, as everything takes a bit of another to make itself. It is a ground for staying alive and transforming the universe[30].

Human fellowship and cooperation is a reality that is rooted in the human nature and to keep away from relating is to place a limitation on our being. It is, therefore, a unit of order inscribed in the human nature for survival. The more a person relates the more he or she lives out his or her being to the full. Mutual cooperation and fellowship in the society increases protection, assistance, etc[31].

6. A Hermeneutic of *Igwebuike* Ethical Theory

African people are proverb people. Africans can hardly make a serious statement without accompanying it with at least a proverb. It is believed and also observed that proverbs sauce our words. It brings what is said closer to what people already know, and therefore, makes what is said easily acceptable and meaningful to the listeners. In a discussion on *Igwebuike* ethical theories, it is not out of place to discuss African proverbs that stand as basis for the principles of this indigenous ethical theory. Igbo-African proverbs[32] that support the content of *Igwebuike* ethical theory include:

a. A person is a person because of other people

Lecture held at Tansian University, Umunya. Thursday 18th February 2021, pp. 22-23.

[29] 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 18th February 2021, pp. 22-23.

[30] 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 18th February 2021, pp. 22-23.

[31]Kanu I. A., *A hermeneutic approach to African traditional religion, theology and philosophy.* Nigeria: Augustinian Publications, 2015; Kanu, I. A., *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues.* Nigeria: Augustinian Publications, 2015.

[32] Kanu, I. A., *Collaboration within the ecology of mission.* The Catholic Voyage. Vol. 15. pp. 125-149; 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 18th February 2021, pp. 33-34.

b. Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken
c. Cross the river in a crowd and 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

These proverbs are not merely empirical claims that point to the fundamental place of relationality in the human world but capture a normative account of how we ought to behave in relation to the other person or persons so as to become a complete person, a true person and a genuine human being. The misunderstanding of this ethical theory begins from the literal concept of it rather than focusing on the values that flow from it that has the capacity for the shaping of sound decision or choice.

The emphasis on community, relationship, solidarity, identification, sympathy, etc., is to help the human person to become fully human by entering more into community with others for the good of the other rather than the self. This is because any less of this makes the person more of an animal than a human being. Godfrey Onah 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[33].

The fact that a human person enters into 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

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[33] Godfrey Onah, "The meaning of peace in African traditional religion and culture"; available at: http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/goddionah.htm (accessed December 4, 2006); Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, esp. pp. 2, 52, 62, 66, 88; Francis Deng, "Human rights in the African context," *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Wiredu, pp. 499–508.

relation to the person. Thus, there is a manner of treatment that would be considered morally wrong given the moral status of the being.

Entering into community with others does not mean a bandwagon kind of morality, doing what others are doing or what the majority are doing. It rather emphasizes the common good which could sometimes negate what the entire community holds as true and at some other time opposed to what the individual holds as true for himself or herself. Thus it is not about uniformity in action but about the good of the community- integrity. The effort towards the pursuit of the common good comes from ones identification with the group and solidarity with the group. If one thinks of himself or herself as a member of a group, then one works hard towards the common good of the same group. The sense of solidarity helps individuals in the group to help the others or other to see what they might not have seen in terms of right or wrong. In morality, one therefore becomes a complement to the other. This might sometimes lead to crisis in the community or in an individual, but the end result is the common good. It is a dialectical process that moves from crisis to discussion and then consensus.

Igwebuike ethical theory has something in common with virtue ethical theory. As in the case of virtue ethics, it is person based ethical theory rather than action based: it looks at the virtue or moral character of the person carrying out an action, rather than at ethical duties and rules, or the consequences of particular actions. *Igwebuike* ethical theory does not only deal with the rightness or wrongness of individual actions, it provides guidance as to the sort of characteristics and behaviors a good person will seek to achieve. This guidance is provided through the virtues necessary for communion and fellowship among people. It is concerned with the whole of a person's life, rather than particular episodes or actions. In a certain sense, it is also an ethics of care as it holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relationships and care or benevolence as a virtue. While consequentialist and deontological ethical theories emphasize generalizable standards and impartiality, *Igwebuike* ethical theory emphasizes the importance of response to the individual.

7. *Igwebuike* and Consequentiality

Igwebuike ethical theory on the basis of the belief in the inter-connectivity 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 on the person who receives the action but on the person who is carrying out the action. 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 from the joy that you give that echoes back to you. The peace and happiness that we get from the world is dependent on the quality of peace and happiness that we give to the world.

This leads to an understanding of happiness as being about carrying out the activities that constitute human wellbeing. This establishes the connection between happiness and virtue. Happiness is achieved by those who pursue virtue. Everyone wants to be happy, however, those that find happiness are those who find the link between happiness and virtue. Why many seek happiness and never find it is because they seek it in the wrong things like money, power, wealth, etc. In this, they bypass happiness and remain in misery even though they have wealth and power. The knowledge of virtue then becomes the knowledge of knowledge as all that one possesses leads to doom or ends in misery without virtue.

8. 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 honor relationships.

Those who promote humanness, self-realization, the common good, fellowship among people and honor relationships possess a dignified existence. In African ontology, the dignity of people spring 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.

9. Conclusion

Having studied the ethics theories in the history of philosophy such as the golden mean, utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue ethics, ethics of care, divine command ethical theory, among others, one discovers the flow of ethical theories that though plausible, have not been constructed along categories that are common to the African people. This piece has therefore taken up a challenge to articulate an ethical theory that is African in character. It has not interested in articulating an ethical theory that is comparable to the western ethical theories or one that would compete with them, but one that speaks to the African and the African situation. More so, in a world that is globalized and that is globalizing, this piece becomes a contribution from an African perspective to the global space on ethical theories. While it may not represent the entirety of an African perspective, it captures the broad lines of African perspectives on ethical issues.

As already observed, *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African ethical theory, even though possesses a traditional or cultural character, does not in any way imply that it is only applicable to small scale traditional communities in pre-colonial era only. It is applicable to addressing present day ethical issues within and outside the Igbo-African society, and its interpretation is refashionable and flexible enough so that its characteristic elements or principles are understood in the light of our best current understanding of what is morally right within and outside of Africa. Thus, while it is a cultural construct, it possesses a universal appeal.

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