

A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF AFRICAN NOTION OF TRUTH

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Abstract

One of the things that makes philosophy very interesting is that it is polemical. Polemic is actually what leads to growth in philosophy. This is particularly true in the history of African philosophy especially with the Great Debate. At this time both proponents and opponents of the existence of African Philosophy marshalled out reasons to torpedo the opponent into submission. This arguments and counter arguments was what brought African philosophy to the lime light and birthed African philosophy as an academic discipline. In order words, the Great Debate was the Golden Age of African philosophy because African philosophers through polemic were challenged to prove that Africa has philosophy. With the Great Debate now behind us, the task facing African scholars today is no longer to prove the existence of African philosophy but to philosophize and develop African philosophy. This paper employed the philosophical method of analysis, contributes to this new demand by developing the philosophical element in Igbo concept of truth. The paper compares Igbo and Western notions of truth underlining their similarities and differences. It also outlines how Igbo notion of truth is concretized in the lived experiences of the people. Finally the paper pinpoints some elements in Igbo concept of truth that are irrational that need to be refined in the light of the exigencies of contemporary life.

Key words: Philosophy, African, Truth, African Notion of Truth.

1. Introduction

In Greek Mythology, Homer told us that after Zeus made man, the gods wrote down the secret of life on a tablet but had the problem of where to hide it – on top of the tallest tree, at the bottom of the deepest sea, in the heart of the thickest jungle. The debate was resolved when all the gods agreed to hide the secret inside of man. Since then philosophers, poets and scientists have always asked this question. What is life? Where is it in us?¹ The ‘Homeric Secret of life’ dramatized in the story of the gods, represents mankind’s age-long quest for truth. Aristotle shares this opinion in his submission that “all men by nature desire to know.” And since no man desires to know falsehood, it follows then that all men by nature desire to know the truth. The universality and inescapability of this quest for truth was further manifested in the famous trial of Jesus when Pilate asked him: “What is the truth?”² Did Jesus answer the question? Philosophers of Western origins have made enormous contributions towards the resolution of the problem of the nature of truth. Their efforts have led to various definitions, theories and criteria of truth. While they were doing this, their counterparts in African were not idle. They also have their own notions, theories and criteria of truth.

However, as an African proverb observes: “Unless the lion gets its own story teller, the hunter will always have a better part of the story.”³ The intellectual dominance of Western notion of truth as against African notion is because Africa like the lion has no good story teller. Our aim in this paper therefore, is to tell Africa’s own side of the story. To do this, we shall commence the paper with a philosophical expose and analysis of Igbo Notion of truth. The aim is to understand what the Igbo hold as truth; whether it is distinct from the western notion of truth. It is our hope that this undertaking will help to liberate the Igbo in particular and Africans in general from the almost universal siege mentality of Africans erected on the ground that Africans are bereft of originality in thinking. The paper will especially enable Africans to better accept and appreciate what they have. The outline as presented above will be followed consistently.

2. General Notion of Truth

“Most commonly used terms” as observed by A. F. Uduigwuomen, “often defy standard definitions.”⁴ Truth happens to be one of such terms and has been defined differently by philosophers. Consequent, on this we will only give the etymology of the word at this preliminary stage, before moving quickly to the theories of truth where the views of selected philosophers and schools will be examined. According to C. Chukwuokolo, truth comes from the Latin word *veritas*, meaning “reality”. This for him “implies the actual state or nature of things.”⁵ C. M. Okolo traced the origin of truth to its Greek root, *aleteia*, which translates unhiddenness, uncoveredness, not been concealed, discovery, revelation or to place in contact with naked reality. The summary of this is that, etymologically truth is identified with “what is the case, the state of affair.”⁶

3. Theories of Truth

If philosophy is a project and the goal of that project is “the discovery of truth”⁷ as F. Etim suggested, one can rationally ask: how can we know when we have arrived at our destination? In order words, what symptoms or criteria would suggest to us that we have discovered truth? The question can be extended to include: are there different kinds or one kind of truth? How can we distinguish between a true proposition and a false one? J. L. Mercier submitted that the bid to resolve these and similar questions, three theories of truth have been projected in the course of history: the traditional theory of correspondence, the modern theory of coherence and the recent pragmatic theory of truth.⁸ We shall take these theories in turns.

3.1. Correspondence Theory of Truth

This theory is held by the realists and empiricists and is therefore often referred to as the realist theory of truth. F. Etim noted that it is the first and oldest theory of truth.⁹ According to J. Omoregbe, for the proponents of this theory “truth is the correspondence of the mind with realities. That is if what is in the mind corresponds with what is the case [facts] in reality.”¹⁰ For example, the assertion, there is a clock on the table is true if and only if we see the clock on the table, and it is actually the case that there is a clock on the table.”¹¹ There are some loopholes found in the correspondence theory of truth. It was these shortcomings that led some philosophers to formulate the coherence theory.

3.2. Coherence Theory of Truth

F. Etim traced the origin of coherence theory to the failure of the correspondence theory.¹² Omoregbe saw it as a rival of correspondence theory. He went ahead to define it thus: “Coherence theory holds that a statement is true if there is coherence between the statement and a systematic body of statement(s) already known to be true.”¹³ What Omoregbe is saying here is that a proposition is true if it can be deduced from already established statements in

the same field of knowledge with what it tries to explain. According to A. F. Uduigwomen, “the coherence theory was held by rationalists metaphysicians such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel and A. H. Bradley”, continuing, he said “it enjoyed though briefly, some support among scientifically minded logical positivists such as Otto Neurate and Carl Hempel.”¹⁴

F. Etim developed two categories of coherent theory of truth: simple theory of coherence and complex theory of coherence.

3.2.1. Simple Theory of Coherence

Simple theory of coherence is applicable within a restricted system. It states that a statement is coherent with other propositions of the system when it is logically deducible from them.¹⁵ Corroborating F. Etim, A. F., Uduigwomen maintains that simple, coherence theory of truth is used in evaluating the truth content of statements we are confronted with especially in the physical sciences. He gave the following examples:

For instance, if someone told us that he dropped a ball which instead of falling to the ground remained suspended in mid-air. We would reject his claim because it is not consistent with what science tells us about the law of gravitation and with our common experience of what is possible.¹⁶

Generally, simple theory of coherence is applicable in the fields of Mathematics and the physical sciences.

3.2.3. Complex Coherent Theory of Truth

F. Etim named Plato and Hegel as good examples of complex coherence theorists. Hegel for example tried to develop a system which could explain the whole of reality.¹⁷ Consequently, complex coherent theorists operate within the framework of the assumption that there are necessary connections between all realities and thus, that a theory can be designed which capture this connections and therefore is capable of explaining the whole of realities. This notwithstanding, it is necessary to accentuate that coherent theory is not against the development of new theories as it may appear at first sight. Their position was beautifully captured by Etim: “This does not warrant the rejection of new ideas which may as a matter of principle contradict old ideas. Coherent theorists accepted that new ideas can come to replace old ones but these new ideas must cohere with old discoveries already ascertained to be truth.”¹⁸

Summarily, the main tenet of coherence theory is that facts are expressible in language; however, language being signs and symbols do not represent reality the way it is. The essence of reality is lost in the process of moving from facts to the symbolic representations of fact through the medium of language. Nevertheless, what is lost in the transit from language to reality can be and is recovered when we look for the coherence of propositions rather than their correspondence to reality. Objections raised against coherent theory eventually led philosophers to find alternative in pragmatic theory.

4. Pragmatic Theory of Truth

Pragmatic theory of truth was the dominant force in American philosophy during the first half of the 20th Century. The central figures in this theory include: Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), considered as the founder of the school; William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1952). The pragmatists are thorough-going empiricists. Their aim was to establish a scientific and mathematically influenced approach to investigation that would yield a result of unified opinion like Descartes did in philosophy. Based on this, the test of truth for them is a

test of utility, workability or satisfactory consequences. Whether a theory is believed to be true or false is unimportant, what matters is whether it affects one's actions. Truth as intellectual knowledge is rejected as wrong because according to them our thoughts are not passive mirrors of things and the world is not static, complete and achieved reality, but a laboratory open to experiment. As Udiugwomen expressed it: "The aim of the mind is not to copy, imitate or duplicate but to elevate, create or invent reality."¹⁹

According to Pierce, the best test for the truth of an idea is to ask: what would be the effect on the conduct of our lives if the idea is true? For William James truth is determined by consequence. A statement is true if it satisfies the criterion of practical interest. For Dewey, truth is warranted assertibility, that is, truth is what happens to an idea when it is verified or warranted.²⁰In sum, Omoregbe encapsulates the position of the pragmatists on truth in the followings words: "Truth is what works in practice and now. Ideas remain true as long as the work and false as long they fail to work."²¹ There are other theories of truth. However, we would confine ourselves to these basic ones as they have helped us to shade light on the problematic nature of truth and its evolution through the different philosophical epochs. Having examined the various conceptual framework on which the Western notion of truth is based, we shall now try to juxtapose these theories with African notion to see if there is any similarities between them. This of course will enable us a clear interpretation of African view on truth.

5. Who are the Igbo?

Who are the Igbo? Question such as this is not as simple as it may appear at first sight. This is because it would require putting a line of demarcation between the Igbo and the rest of humanity. And such a rigid line cannot be drawn meaningfully without running the risk of being somehow simplistic. Some authors, F. Arinze and C. Chieka for instance have attempted to draw up such a demarcation criteria. Arinze has the following criteria for identifying the Igbo: "Geography, population, division of seasons, linguistic, family ties, decentralized political system and economy."²² Chieka, also made similar categorization: "Geography, humane living, trade, language, industry and hard work."²³Using the above demarcation criteria the way Arinze and Chieka did is problematic. For example, it is not unusual to find non-Igbo living within the geographical zones specified as Igbo land by Arinze. Also it is not uncommon these days to see those who claim non-Igbo origin both within and outside Arinze's geographical specification speak Igbo fluently.

At this juncture, we are left with two options if we must answer our question: who are the Igbo? Firstly, we can either reformulate the criteria presented by Arinze and Chieka or secondly, we can generate new criteria that would be adequate to answer the question. We shall go for the second option. For the purpose of this research therefore, we shall reformulate two of Arinze and Chieka's ideas and use these to interlink their other ideas. Hereto, we adopt as Igbos those primitive people who resided in what is known today as Igbo land and who speak Igbo as their language before the colonial experience and shared the uncontaminated view of the Igbo. This would also include their descendants either in present Igbo land or diaspora who are the heirs of these values.

Seen in this light, the value we shall be reflecting on are those values provided by Igbo novelists and chroniclers, written in Igbo or English especially the works of those who set their narratives in the older provincial environment, which provided useful and detailed information on the history, traditional beliefs system, socio-cultural and political livings among the Igbo in pre-colonial times. Particularly and most importantly, these values have been preserved and transmitted unadulterated from generation to generation in Igbo proverbs and wise sayings. These proverbs and wise sayings form an unbroken link between different

Igbo generations such that through them the voices of centuries past have continued and will continue to speak and mould the worldview of subsequent generations of the Igbo.

In addition to these sources, an overview of traditional Igbo ideas and methods of approach to interminable problems that beset human groups the world over can be derived from other sources like oral tradition, archaeological findings such as the ones found in “Ezi-ukwu Ukpa Rock Shelter, near Afikpo and Igbo Ukwu in Njikoka.”²⁴ Although we will not go into discussing the contents of these findings, nevertheless, it is worthy to note that the findings have shade more light into what traditional Igbo people and their practices where like. The bottom-line therefore, is that in spite of the untold value confusion and the attendant identity crisis visited on African value systems by colonization, it is still possible to talk about and identify unadulterated Igbo values. These values, especially as they are contained in Igbo proverbs are what we will be working on in this paper.

6. The Possibility of African Notion of Truth Through Igbo Culture

As the title of this paper shows, our quest is to discuss African notion of truth and draw some contrast between it and Western concept of truth. Up to this point, we have made it clear that our aim is to investigate Igbo notion of truth and apply our discovery to the whole of Africa under the assumption that what obtains in Igbo culture can justifiably be applied to the whole of Africa. One problem with this method is that it can give the impression that Africa is a region with mono-culture. This would be an erroneous impression. Our intention to transfer Igbo notion of truth to the whole of Africa does not mean that all the states in African, have the same culture. In fact, there are diversities in African culture which means that Africa is not a homogenous society with one common cultural practice.

Corroborating this, Onwuejeogwu makes the argument that:

In Africa there are over a thousand ethnic groups, each having its own culture, but these have been broadly divided into eleven culture areas namely: Hottentot, Bushman, East African cattle, Western cattle, the Congo, the Guinea Coast, the East Horn, East Sudan, West Sudan, Egyptian, and Mediterranean. Each of these may be divided into sub-culture areas.²⁵

Although, Onwuejelogwu, did not embark on the categorization of these sub-cultural groups, the point he tries to communicate is that Africa is a continent of many cultural diversities.

Meanwhile, Ihekweazu, thinks that this cultural diversity in Africa is becoming less obvious on account of the influence of western culture. He observes that in this modern period with the coming of Western culture and its religion, African cultures, have become so modernised that sometimes it is difficult to speak of the diversity of African culture. This according to him has become a problem in African culture.

In addition, the problem is compounded by the addition of the Christian religion as part of Western culture. This Western-oriented Christian culture has become so thoroughly rooted in African continent and provides a very effective channel for cultural influence, it is almost impossible to speak of African culture(s).²⁶

Ihekweazu, continues to emphasize that Western religion, education, and so on, have left traces and prints on the cultural body, and they have transformed it to an extent that makes it

impossible to call them foreign any longer. Christianity for example, has been widely accepted and merged into the African cultural context, her habits and modes. Values and standards which were alien to our grandfathers have in the meantime become so familiar that we can claim them as our own property and would not gain anything from denying them "...African culture today cannot be identified as purely traditional culture."²⁷ The point one may think Ihekweazu was not so successful in articulating here is that Africa is heading towards mono-culture as a result of the influence of western education and religions. Whether this means good or bad for Africa is not our concern here. Our interest is to show that before the present move toward cultural unification caused especially by Christianity, it was still possible to speak of African culture which can licence use to transfer what was obtainable in Igbo culture to Africa in general.

According to Onwuejeogwu, Africa is a continent with diverse cultural groups that includes languages and belief systems. In spite, of all these diversities, according to him, we still talk about African culture in the singular sense. Using Nigeria as an example, he maintains that "There are some countries in the African continent, such as Nigeria, with various cultures within the same country, yet we still as a rule speak about that country's (Nigerian) culture."²⁸ Nevertheless, the problem Onwuejeogwu faces at this stage is not to show that it is possible to talk about African or Nigerian culture, he has already demonstrated that we do. His problem is a question of justification. The question is: how do we justify that we are correct in talking about African culture? His response to this question is: "The difference and cultural diversities in African notwithstanding, there are enough similarities among these cultures that legitimizes us to talk about the entity 'African culture'"²⁹ Onwuejeogwu, identifies four areas where this harmony is most obvious which includes: the whole aspects of African cosmology, African communalism, African ethical belief system and burial rites.³⁰ This among other practices are common among all African societies.

Corroborating Onwuejeogwu, Hannah Kinoti argues that, although Africa is a vast continent and much fragmented in terms of languages, beliefs and customs, there is adequate evidence from various studies that where the basics of cultural and moral assumptions are concerned, the bottom line is fairly solid. It is therefore possible according to him, to generalise to a large extent.³¹ In the light of all these, when we talk about Igbo notion of truth in this paper, we are referring to an understanding of truth which cuts across all or almost all cultures in Africa.

7. Igbo Epistemology

F. Didam correctly observed that there is objective truth. He however noted that there are various notions and understandings of truth because of the finite nature of human understanding.³² This implies that human understanding of truth is contextual, and cultural or societal. Nevertheless, the problem created by this multiplicity in the understanding of truth by humans is reduced by developing cannons which allow men to agree or disagree when discussing matters that bother on truth. Through these cannons truth of propositions are evaluated. These cannons and their justification fall under the province of epistemology and logic. Based on this, the notion of truth among the Igbo, will not be properly understood without first of all understanding what they consider to be knowledge (epistemology) and their cannons for justifying this knowledge (logic). This leads us into Igbo epistemology and logic.

Generally, epistemology deals with the possibility, sources and justification of knowledge claims. Igbo epistemology concerns itself with how to sift out truth from error in our various claims to knowledge. "The basic problem of knowledge regarding traditional [Igbo] thought is that of ascertaining whether or not what is claimed as knowledge is actually knowledge

rather than mistake opinion.”³³ How then do the Igbo justify knowledge claims to be true or mistake or opinion? How may correct or sound reasoning be defined in terms of Igbo *Weltanschauung*? Igbo logic provides this missing link.

8. Igbo Logic

Propositions are judged in terms of their truth or falsity content. Logic generally studies and provides cannons for evaluating the truth content of propositions. Consequently, Igbo logic studies and provides principles on which Igbo worldview can build the capacity for coherent system of thought. It seeks to provide the relationship between many ideologies and concepts in thought with rationality. Now, unlike the stereotyped and naturalistic logic of the West that is disjunctively exclusive and which divides reality into “it is either this thing or nothing else”, Igbo logic is based on what I. I. Asouzu called “Conjunctive complementary reasoning”, which according to him “takes into account all aspect of reality in the bid to present to the mind a true representation of what is the case.”³⁴ “This type of logic”, continues Asouzu, “finds rationality in elements like myths, proverbs etc., since its aim is to provide meaning and explanation to present human experiences by uniting them to past and future references in connection to an absolute reality which harmonizes all human experience.”³⁵

Based on this, the Igbo man uses all epistemic faculties, including ordinary senses. He also appeals to forces and working of nature in the cause of ascertaining truth. He even comes to know through extra-sensory perception. Consequently, G. O. Ozumba avers “It is Igbo view or approach to reality which characterizes Igbo logic, Igbo logic in turn characterizes Igbo notion of truth which is both existential and transcendental.”³⁶

9. Igbo Notion of Truth

The Igbo have truth as “*eziokwu*”, which is a compound word. Splitting the compound word, “*ezi*”, meaning “good”, “right”, and “real” and “*okwu*” meaning “word”, truth linguistically for the Igbo implies saying the fact of what one heard or saw. As such, truth for the Igbo is both correspondence as well as coherence to reality. However, as already explained on our discussion on Igbo logic, truth among the Igbo is more than correspondence of statements to facts or coherence of ideas. Truth is ultimately connected with meaning and such meanings for the people have super natural and absolute dimension.

Hence, the issue of truth among the Igbo by far transcends the region of Western notions epistemology and logic; there is an intricate relationship between ontological truth and truth as lived experience. For something to be true it has to supersede the mere claim concerning the harmonization of our perception of it with the actual state of thing in question. Here the search for truth turns out to be an ontological commitment that has grave consequences for existential living. And since it is not merely an epistemology and logical question, it is a question that has to do with reality in general. It means that any truth claim must relate to the totality of existent realities in all its operation such that the epistemological, logical, ethical, aesthetic, psychological, metaphysical, etc., cohere with one another in a harmonious complementary manner. This understanding commensurate with I. I. Asouzu’s submission that:

The truth of statements is more than the evidence or reason adduced to support it. Truth consists rather in the sum total of all the facts needed to demonstrate that a thing is what we claim it is. It is not enough to prove that a person did not commit a murder in producing physical evidence based on spatio-temporal inferences.... In this

case, they must be assessed within a more comprehensive complementary framework of which the transcendent supernatural plays prominent role. Here truth or rational prove in the final analysis can be articulated within a wider framework of an unchanged transcendent dynamic, complementary unity of consciousness made evident in the judgement of the community which is anchored on the infallible pronouncement of the gods.³⁷

10. Carries of Truth among the Igbo

Among the Igbo, truth is often discerned or found in the following elements:

10.1. Myth

According to G. O. Uzumba, “Myths are unreal representations of the empirical word.”³⁸ However, for F. Etim, “Myth is a narration of sacred stories of events that took place at the beginning or primordial time.”³⁹ Myth among the Igbo is better explained by the latter’s definition. This is because for the Igbo truth is not only a story told but a reality lived. This understanding is based on the fact that myth helps the Igbo not only to understand their origin but also enable them to live in the present as well as looking forward for the future with optimism. It makes life meaningful. In this regard, an average traditional Igbo man does not see myth, the creation story or the origin of the Igbo race for instance, as an unreal representation of empirical truth but as an event that actually occurred in primordial times.

10.2. Proverbs

According to Chinua Achebe “proverb is the palm oil with which the Igbo use in eating words.”⁴⁰ Thus, just as no one cooks a descent food in Igbo land without oil, so also are statements without proverbs regarded among the Igbo as having no adequate true value without proverbs. Proverbs represent the wisdom, life experience and injunctions of the ancestors. For instance, the proverb, “*Egbe bere, ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela nku akwaa ya*”, which literally means “let the kite perch and let the eagle perch, whichever refuses the other to perch, let its wings wither”, is used to explain the truth about the need for tolerance”, since everybody knows the joy of living, no one should be an obstacle to the life of others.

10.3. Songs

Songs are also sources and medium of transmitting truth among the Igbo. This informs why most traditional songs, especially those sang in Igbo language are combinations of beats and wise sayings. These songs have powerful effect on Igbo society and are regarded as ways of teaching the younger generations, the wisdom of their ancestors. To this day, younger Igbo musicians are still condemned by the older generation for using their profession to corrupt and promote immorality rather than to educate and promote morality.⁴¹

10.4. Elders

The Igbo have a saying that “*okenye nwuru anwu dika akpa uche eriri n’ ala*”, a dead elder is like a buried library or a pack of wisdom. Elders are held in high reputation among the Igbo. Every elder is therefore an effigy of truth since his utterance of wisdom is regarded as necessarily true. Because of the closeness of the elders to ancestors and consequently the gods, their knowledge is taken to be prior rather than a posteriori. Elders are generally seen as the custodians of truth, they direct the motion of the society.

10.5. Sign

Signs as vehicle of truth are fundamental for communication between man and his neighbour. The meanings of signs are often conventional to particular people. For the Igbo, certain signs communicate certain truth. For instance, the proverb, “*Awo adighi agba oso eghighie n’ efu*”, “a toad does not run in the day time in vain”, conveys message of alertness to get ready to kill a snake that in most cases pursues the toad or the toad is going after a prey. It also depicts an event or a situation which says more than what is immediately visible to the eyes. Consequently, a person or group of persons to whom this proverb is directly to is indirectly asked or advised to go beyond an occurrence in search of the cause of such occurrence.

10.6. Symbols

A symbol is an object or sign that represent a fixed meaning in a cultural milieu.⁴² Symbols among the Igbo are used to express truths that concerns things beyond physical realities. For example, “*omo*”, the yellowish and most fresh part of the palm frond indicates sacredness when tied at a place. It symbolizes injunctions preventing one from entering a particular place. Thus, to meet a man on a lonely road with a piece of “*omo*” in his mouth, is an indication that the man is on a sacred mission and therefore should not be bothered with greetings. Also to have “*omo*” tied over a piece of land or a tree with fruits is a danger sign telling would be trespassers to keep-off, that the property in question is protected by the gods.

10.7. Testimony

This source of truth is highly recommended by the Igbo in social matters. Testimonies given by witnesses and insiders are inevitably accepted as true. Other persons or groups of persons whose testimonies are regarded as truth are the analysts or critics who help judges especially to be more cautious in their judgements. Finally, the testimonies of well-travelled persons are regarded as true because the people believe that “*onye njem n’aka onye isi awo ama ibi*”, a traveller is often wiser than a grey haired person.

11. Criteria for Truth Among the Igbo

Criteria are standard or means of judging anything. The criteria of judging truth among the Igbo can be broadly placed into two categories: the divine and the mundane.

11.2. The Divine

Under the divine we have the following:

10.1.1 The Consent of the gods

In Igbo land, the idea of seeking the consent of the gods on matters of truth is a strong and irresistible criterion. In time when all human efforts to ascertain the truth proves futile, consultations are made of the gods and whatever the gods affirm remains accepted entirely. The wish of the gods is known in matters through divination done by a specially gifted person who communicates what the gods want. A case in point is Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*⁴³, where Okonkwo even in his justifiable anger of beating his younger wife who misbehaved had to appease the gods for violating a rule—the week of peace—set by them.

10.1.2. The Act of Swearing

This is the common and simplest criterion of truth among the Igbo especially when veracity of a statement is in doubt. The person involved swears in the name of the god(s) of the land accepting death or life when he tells truth or lies respectively. This may seem superstitious or fetish, but this is what the Igbo people believe and it works for them.

11.3. The Mundane

11.3.1. The Consent of the Majority

According to the Igbo "*agwo otu onye huru aghahi ibu eke*", a snake seen by one person is always a python. This shows that there is always the tendency of exaggerating or distortion in a witness given by one person. Based on this the consent of the majority is a veritable criterion as held by the Igbo for the standard of ascertaining truth. This expresses vividly the Igbo communal way of living and there believe that where the majority is there lies the truth.

11.3.2. Testimony of Authority

Among the Igbo, certain authorities are given credence as regards matters of truth. The Igbo hold diviners, priests and elders as highest authorities and custodians of truth. This is rooted in their conception that the gods are perfect and those closer to them; that is, their agents must not err as regards matters of truth. However, to be an authority in this sense, one must be honest, reliable and of good repute.

11.3.3. Concrete Evidence

"*The agba n' aka anaghi eji onyo ele ya*" is a proverbial saying among the Igbo. This means that one does not need a mirror in order to see what one is wearing on his wrist. Concrete evidence means that which is obvious, manifest, and clear to the sight or understanding. This is used as standard in judging the truth found in cases of boundary disputes, when certain plants are used for land demarcation.

12. Existential Implication of Igbo Notion of Truth

When we noted above that Igbo notion of truth does not consist merely of logico-epistemological questions in the Western sense, but demands the unity of being and consciousness in all existential situations, that is, a condition of unity in all statements and assumption that seek to have speculative, practical, theoretical and technical relevance, we are only stating a partial truth. Truth is not consistently pursued this way in practical life, otherwise life would be impossible and impracticable in Igbo land. While pursuing this ontological notion of truth, practical ways of handling matters of truth are derived to allow for harmonious day to day existence. Consequent on this we will in what follows try to draw the existential implication of Igbo notion of truth.

This task is better approached with both linguistic and conceptual analysis of the word truth in Igbo language. As already observed, truth in Igbo is designated "*eziokwu*", which does not give the full meaning of the word. Literally, "*eziokwu*" is a hybrid of two independent words: "*ezi*" and "*okwu*", meaning "good" and "word". The opposite of "*eziokwu*" is "*ajokwu*". "*Ajokwu*" means an "unfair word" addressed to someone." This does not in any way mean "*asi*", which is the literal interpretation of falsity, the antithesis of truth. However, "*eziokwu*" notion of truth lays a stepping stone for the conceptual analysis of truth in as practised in Igbo culture. We consider another version of the word: "*eziuka*". Here "*ezi*" acquires a deeper meaning "real" and "*uka*" means "statement." Thus, truth is translated as "real statement in contrast to false proposition." This view of truth is akin to Western correspondence understanding by which truth is the correspondence of mind to reality.

To ascertain the truth value of a statement the evidence of two or more persons suffice to attest to the validity and vindication of whoever is been accused as the case may be. Real statement can also be seen as statements that are consistent with other statements. Thus, to ascertain the truth of a statement made by a diviner an Igbo man need to consult other diviners in other to compare the consistency of their statements with one another. This

understanding is similar to Western coherence theory. It is not only the ideas of correspondence and coherence that are about Igbo notion of truth. There is truth even when two or more witnesses do not collaborate with the statement. This leads us to the relationship between what a person thinks and what he says. To say the truth is to let your speech reflect your thought. In other words, moral truth in Igbo culture does not depend as such on testimony of others. It is rather a personal certainty of the conscience. Thus, whenever the veracity of one's statement is in doubt, he is challenged to take an oath or swear by "*Ala*" the "Mother" earth as means of authenticating his statement. "*Ala* is the overseer of morality in Igbo culture. Individuals swear in *Ala*'s name and such oaths have binding force."⁴⁴

It is not to be forgotten that Igbo race share a great deal of the pragmatic notion of truth. Igbo nation believe that some people possess some "innate" abilities that enable them to manipulate the spirit world in favour of the mundane world. "The act as intermediaries between curious inquirers and the spirit world and messages received from the spirit world are treated with reverential fear."⁴⁵ But among the Igbo whenever the message gotten from these oracles do not solve the problem, such knowledge is disregarded for a workable one that will solve human problem. The same is applicable and explains why there are pluralities of deities found in Igbo land. The epistemological trends explained above can be found in other African cultures.

13. Evaluation

The notion of truth among the Igbo is greatly influenced by their culture. One would ordinarily expect no criticism on this topic as is often said that no culture is better than the other. However, this should not be the case in matters regarding an essential concept in human existence like truth. From this perspective, we shall proceed to point out some shortcomings in Igbo concept of truth.

The first argument against this system is that its mode of understanding can easily be abused or misused. On this, Asouzu asserts:

Thus, the many oracles of Igbo land were used as final courts of appeal. To underline the efficacy of the Agbala of Awka, the policy of frequent executions was zealously upheld lest the idea should spread abroad, that the power of the Agbala was waning. The case of the so called Long Juju of the Arochukwus is still worst— eight hundred Western Iju went to consult it in the 1890s and only 136 returned.⁴⁶

Another abuse that could arise from this system is a situation where different atrocities are committed in the name of upholding "*omenala*"— tradition or the pronouncement of the gods. Instances of these atrocities abound in Igbo culture, including: the outcast system, killing of twins, abuse of widows, headhunting for burying kings and for personal glory and the prestige of the community, etc. All these are done in the name of tradition which is held as absolute truth.⁴⁷

Also problematic is the consent of the gods discerned through diviners, oracles, priests and priestess. This raises the problem where human elements could in some cases fabricate, distort or dilute the original message of the gods. Thus, the question could be asked how are we certain that the message relayed by the diviner is actually what he was given by the gods? There is certainly no way of verifying this. The consequence of this is the blind acceptance of everything said by the diviner or the priest.

Furthermore, the problem of interactionism could arise, when we consider the possibility of the empirical truth arbitrated by spiritual beings (gods). Take for instance the case of swearing using oath, one could ask using Hume's argument of causality: does it necessarily follow that the death of any of the people that swore is caused by the swearing. What of if none of the persons or groups dies? What would be the judgement of the truth in that situation? Additionally, the use of the consent of the majority as a criterion of truth should be weary of the possibility of connivance for communal selfish interest. A good example of this is in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, where "Ezeulu", the chief priest of *Ulu*; the deity of Umunaro was the only one who testifies that the land under dispute belongs to Okperi and not to his clan Umunaro.⁴⁸

Finally, we should not forget that total dependence on the wisdom of elder is dangerous in dictating truth especially as old age is known to depreciate the reasoning ability of the elders. It supposes that it is better to subject issues to philosophical analysis and criticism without in any case undermining the respect that is due to elders.

14. Conclusion

We have been able to analyse the notion of truth as it is understood and lived in the western world and in Igbo land which by principle of transference we assumed to include the whole of Africa. In the West, truth is understood in terms of the three classical theories of truth (correspondence, coherence and pragmatic theories of truth) already discussed in this work. We have also seen that Africans have versions of correspondence, coherence and pragmatic theories of truth. Africans believe that true statement is one that states a fact; is one that is subject to verification. It is also the case that in Africa, knowledge that serves in applicability is regarded as reliable and true knowledge. What can be said to be common to both cultures is that they conceive truth as a universal need of man in every age. The need for truth is always unchanging, and common to all human persons irrespective of culture. However, it has been clear in the course of this paper that the major difference between western notion of truth and African notion lies in the epistemological system from which each evolves their approach to truth. Whereas western approach is characterized by the problem of knowledge of the universal involving abstraction on one hand and data of immediate experience on the other hand, Africans exercises their thinking on concreteness of existence, the problem of living and life itself.

This is why there is no separate word for truth and truthfulness in most African cultures. Both concepts go by the same tongue. There is no dualism of substances in African mode of thought but duality in which case concepts such as truth and truthfulness enjoy harmonious continual and complementary relationship. In the final analysis, it is obvious from our study in this paper that Africans were not idle while their western counterparts were developing their theories of truth. Our forebears also developed their notion of truth which in a way is even richer and in touch with reality much more than their counterparts in the western world.

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