

On the Interconnectedness of African Cosmology: A Study of Some Metaphysical Elements in Igbo-African Worldview

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Abstract

An Africa worldview is the African definition of reality. The African believes that there is a metaphysical explanation for everything. Hence the African ontology is ultimately concerned with both the physical and the spiritual worlds as the two are intrinsically related and connected. In fact, indigenous peoples across Africa have traditionally lived in a world that honours life as a deeply interconnected whole. The aim of this paper is to explicate some African concepts of interconnectedness, which is misinterpreted by scholars in order to provide a relevant, local, conceptual grounding for this initiative. This study focuses on Igbo-Africa with special reference to Nsukka cultural groupings. It finds that the fact of interconnectedness informs the definition of life and values in Africa. Life is cyclical as death is never regarded as a necessary end without qualifications. For this reason, there is a soteriological side to life; the ultimate soteriological goal being the aspiration to become an ancestor in the afterlife. Because of its interconnectedness with the tenets of morality, therefore, moral praxis affects the realization of this goal. The identification of ethical values, meanwhile, is influenced by firm belief and practices safeguarding the sanctity of life which, among other things, is promoted by good neighbourliness, truthfulness, and respect. Analytic method of research was adopted.

Keywords: Interconnectedness, African Cosmology/Worldview, Metaphysical, Igbo-African.

Introduction

The idea that a distinctly African thought/worldview exists is supported by several authors. People do not see things in the same way, and the way

they see things is dependent on their cultural beliefs. Ideas, values, conceptions of time and the notion of cause and effect are all culturally learned. The world is differently defined in different places. The origins of the African worldview were found in traditional Africa before the emergence of European influences. Although colonisation and the vilification of Africa by Europeans and Arabs modified Africa to some extent, several writers maintain that the philosophical integrity of traditional Africa has survived among continental Africans. Africa has survived long enough to render Africans a distinct African ethos.¹

According to Van der Walt, African thought exists and differs from Western thought in that Western thought generally ignores the spiritual dimension of phenomena and focuses on the visible, measurable physical reality.² In Western thought supernatural causes are not considered to be plausible explanations for phenomena. However, in African thought supernatural causes play an important role in explaining phenomena. Africa does not ignore the supernatural side of reality. African ontology is concerned with the physical world no less than the spiritual world and the forces that play a role in it. In fact, for the Africans there is a supernatural explanation for everything.

The Igbo indigenous knowledge systems have long recognized the profound interconnectedness of everything, where plants, animals, humans, ancestors and all creation interdependently coexist. In a traditional Nsukka context profound interconnectedness becomes especially evident in such themes as *idikonotu* (oneness), *o jeenamadu o jeenammuo* (comingling of human with spirits),

¹. C.f. A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, (London: BBC Publications, 1986), 56. See also, John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, (London: Longman, 1970), 78.

². B. Van Der Walt, *Afrocentric or Eurocentric? Our Task in a Multicultural South Africa*, (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University, 1997), 89.

nwammadu *megbunanwammuo* (man should not oppress spirit), *nwammuo* *megbunanwammadu* (spirit should not oppress man), *inouwa* (reincarnation), *ndinna-nna* (living dead), *mmekota* (relationships) and, ultimately, non-dual unity (*ofu*). The Igbo universe is thus a relation of diversity. Indeed, in Igbo-African system of knowledge, it seems more appropriate to speak of rather than interconnectedness.

This paper unpacks some of these themes, with particular focus on people, ancestors, ecology, community, spirituality, mutuality, healing and morality. They are all parts of infinite interconnectedness. It should be remembered, meanwhile, that as Edwards rightly observed, “during collective human life cycles, such interconnected wholeness, which is apparent in all spheres, is continually differentiating and integrating as new wholes are included and transcended in an ongoing process.”³ Therefore any apparent reification or absolutizing of this phenomenology is simply an illusion.

Indigenous peoples across Africa have traditionally lived in a way that add value to life as deeply interconnected whole. The African traditions generally recognize a non-duality or oneness, which underlies material existence and interlinks the manifest diversity of forms.⁴ In the African cosmology, the hierarchy of being is extrapolated to include some form of integral, dynamic and systemic holism.⁵ The apprehension of this interconnectedness may emerge as an eternal, infinite moment breaking into everyday awareness, as such events are typically associated with

^{3.} Stephen Edwards, “HeartMath: A Positive Psychology Paradigm for Promoting Psychophysiological and Global Coherence,” *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 25, no. 4 (2015): 367.

^{4.} Edwards, “HeartMath: A Positive Psychology Paradigm,” 368.

^{5.} David Bohm, *The Undivided Universe: An Ontological Interpretation of Quantum Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 25.

contexts such as sleep, dreams, birth, death, sex and/or communal ceremonies, associated with heightened consciousness, insights, morality and ethical behaviour.⁶

The aim of the paper is to explicate some Igbo African concepts of interconnectedness, in order to provide a relevant, local, conceptual grounding for this initiative. *This study focuses on Igbo-Africa with special reference to Nsukka cultural groupings.* While these groups are not representative of African or Igbo-African cultures in particular, the available evidence points to such similar patterns in other indigenous cultural groupings that some similar findings can be assumed.⁷ The circular orientation of indigenous African communities which is exhibited in their material culture and behavior unequivocally lends supports to this fact.

African Cosmology vis-à-vis Worldview: Both Physical and Metaphysical

The traditional African has a holistic view of reality. The traditional African situates her daily occurrences and phenomena within the totality of the scheme of things, which in her conception, are characterized by such factors as unity and coherence. In other words, in the African conception of reality, there is nodistinction between realities which are ordinarily termed to be diametrically opposed. Realities are fundamentally interconnected within the worldview of the African people. This fundamental interconnectedness accounts for the reason why one sphere of life cannot be completely understood at the exclusion of others. This is also why a correct understanding of an African

^{6.} Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1983), 60.

^{7.} Robert Gumedé, *Traditional Healers: A Medical Doctor's Perspective*, (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1990), 30.

phenomenon can only be obtained by a panoramic survey of her reality; hence the necessity to at least have an insight into African cosmology.⁸

Ayemere and Ukaga noted that the African universe is populated with immanent and transcendental realities.⁹ Kwame Gyekye puts it that:

Belief in mystical power is common to all African societies; it is a feature of Traditional African religion and world view. There is a pervasive and resilient belief in the existence of mystical forces or powers in the universe that can be tapped by those human being who have the knowledge to do so for good or evil...It is believed that objects of nature are inhabited by spiritual being or deities who are also thought to exist in the universe as intermediates between God and humans but who cannot be seen by the human eye.¹⁰

This explains why the worship of some of these objects was part of ancient African religion. Any worship accorded these objects of nature is intended for the spiritual beings which inhabit them and not those objects themselves. Ayemere and Ukaga added that because of the presence of spiritual beings, objects of nature take on religious significance and command human respect.¹¹ This pervasive belief in mystical power is due to the fact that:

The African child is reared in a world where ghosts are more real than men, a world in the control of spirits of the dead... The pleasure or anger of the spirits is the causes of all disease, famine, death, and the whole range of natural science.¹²

⁸ Enato Ayemere and Chinyere J. Ukaga, "Some Metaphysical Elements in African Trado-Medical Practice," *Journal of Contemporary Research* 15 no. 4, (2018): 103-104.

⁹ Ayemere and Ukaga, "Some Metaphysical Elements," 104-105.

¹⁰ Kwame Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 6-7.

¹¹ Ayemere and Ukaga, "Some Metaphysical Elements," 104-105.

¹² George Harley, Harley, *Native African Medicine*, (London: Frank Cass, 1970), 197.

It is for this reason there is a strong human attachment to the supernatural. This attachment is expressed through sacrifice, ritual, prayer and other forms of worship.

In African explanation of reality, physical elements are not excluded. But they do not constitute sufficient explanations in themselves. This is because as Iroegbu observed, “the natural turn of events has a supernatural side to it.”¹³ In simple term, every physical occurrence has an underlying metaphysical cause. Against this background, that African universe is made up of both the physical and the metaphysical worlds.

The metaphysical world just like the physical one is constituted of activities. But not all humans have the ability to access this realm. There are special men – native doctors, witch doctors, diviners, medicine-men, herbalists or in any other name they may be called – who by their ability or special favour from the spiritual, have privilege to access and intersect the activities of the two worlds.¹⁴

These special persons communicate the knowledge they acquired from the metaphysical world to others. Such knowledge which humans have of the non-physical world influences their activities. Human beings have a general tendency to rely on forces beyond themselves for protection. It is, therefore, not surprising to see human beings offering libation to these supernatural beings as a form of worship, as a form of appease or in thanksgiving for favours received. In this way a constant link is maintained between the two worlds.

In this relationship too, a hierarchy is maintained. The beings at the

^{13.} Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, (Owerri: International Universities Press, 1995), 296.

^{14.} Ayemere and Ukaga, “Some Metaphysical Elements,” 106.

higher rung of the ladder can exercise influence on those who occupy the lower rung of the ladder. At the same time those at the lower rung of this hierarchy can also influence the higher beings but not through control but through appease, request or supplication. The higher ones can mediate in favour of the lower ones against intermediate malevolent forces. But the habitation of lower species (for example animals, plants, inanimate objects) by a higher one (for example deities, or divinities) elevates the lower species to the status of the being which inhabits it.

This is the reason humans who are ordinarily believed to be higher than plants, animals and inanimate objects worship them when they recognize the presence of a divine being in them. From a standpoint of traditional Africa, there is the metaphysical possibility of a being to suffer ontological diminution from a superior force, and not vice versa. Placid Tempels puts it with respect to the Bantu people that:

Every anomaly, defects and physical monstrosity and all illnesses are involved in some way... and may have a maleficent influence by reason of the trouble which they cause in the normal order. Against all these evils there are purificatory practices, rites, prohibitions, ablutions etc.¹⁵

This submission of Tempels on Bantu is also applicable to most other African communities.

Communal Relationships

The slogan, *anyibuofu*, (we are one) conveys a realization of the oneness (*idi n' otu*) that can result from people's problem solving in Igbo-African society. Despite ongoing political struggles, corruption and crime, transformation continues in the experience of new generations of people growing up together from childhood forming a beneficial communal

¹⁵ Placid Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 146.

bond of relationship. The mutuality underlining such essential human relationships is aptly conveyed in the idiom “*onyeaghananwanneya*,” which means be your brothers' keeper. For Nsukka people interconnectedness is being human. No one is truly human, deserving the respect, in isolation of others. Without the giving, receiving and sharing of human care, support, companionship, help and healing the fundamental structure of being human is meaningless.

This is the essential theme of all the Igbo caring and helping professions such as nursing, medicine, psychology, social work and theology. It is also the basis of all other Igbo academic and professional disciplines, from biochemistry through law to sociology, and so forth. It follows that for the African, meaning in life is only possible through human relations. For him, a person is a person through others. **'I am because we are'.** **'Only through you do I become an I.'** Thus, meaning in life is dependent upon the quality of human relationships as revealed in everyday lived experiences.

In addition to what has just been said, it should be noted that even the individual is ontologically relational in African cosmology. It is believed, for instance, by Akan people – a matrilineal tribe in Ghana – that during conception, the woman transmits her blood, the man transmits the spirit, and God gives the soul. In the Akan anthropology and cosmology, these three elements simultaneously constitute the “individual” person: the spirit from God, the community from the woman, and individuality from the man.¹⁶ The individual is, thus, ontologically relational. The introduction of Western mentality in Africa has created fundamental tensions in this cultural perspective, at the level of national, local community, and the self-understanding of individual persons.

¹⁶ Hyginus Chibuike Ezebuilo, *African Identity and the Quest for Decolonization, Sapientia journal of Philosophy*, vol 12, 45.

Death-life Relationship: The Concept of Ancestors

In Africa ancestors are addressed in many different ways, and they are highly respected and revered. Generically they are typically referred to as spirits, the living dead, forefathers. Sacrifices are sometimes offered to them, example, for thanksgiving, for appeasement, for supplication. Prayers are also offered to them, for it is believed that there is an unbroken line that links all ancestors directly to the Supreme Being, *Chi-Ukwu* (God). Long life and good health (*ogologonduna ahu ike*) are signs of healthy relationships with the source of being (God), ancestors, other people and the natural environment/world. There is thus a collective responsibility to harmonize such relationships as Edwards observed, by finding the right path towards the ideal of beneficial humane relationships filled with dignity and respect.¹⁷

Igbo-African views on survival, life and health are inextricably related in the emphasis on ensuring proper relationships with the body of ancestors and the Creator. The Nsukka people promote this relationship through ceremonial and ritual gatherings to prevent illness and promote health, like libation to the ancestors (*oguNna*). Such gatherings generally constitute invoking of the dead spirit of the ancestors, who had communal and spirituallabours of love in order to appropriately remember revered ones as well as facilitate their provision of spiritual protection and social support for the collective good of the living.

Thus, in Igbo cosmology, there is a special regard for the inextricably interlinked and continuous relationship between life and death. Symbolically, the burial of the Igbo person is a rebirth to the other world. The actual burial service/process called *akwamozu* (*funeral*) signifies the beginning of a new life as an ancestor who will always be present in

¹⁷ Edwards, "HeartMath: A Positive Psychology Paradigm," 275.

guiding the living. This provides the rationale for the continuity of life in the Nsukka context, which is metaphorically likened to sowing and watering of seeds of corn which will eventually produce crops to feed both family and community. For the African, therefore, death is not a necessary end but a beginning of a new life.

For this reason, care is often taken to ensure that the living are in good terms with the living-dead. There is in every traditional Nsukka man some form of ancestral consciousness. This ancestral consciousness, ancestral visitations and/or communications may be as threatening or reassuring as these personages had been, or perceived to have been, in their former physical existences. Such consciousness may therefore be amplified and corroborated by familial and socio-cultural belief systems and, after the death of such elders, may assume gigantic proportions. It is thus not a pleasant thing to hear or perceive that the gods are angry, or that the ancestors have turned away. This may require appropriate appeasement rituals in order to restore peace. In any case appropriate ceremonies are believed to ensure continued health, protection and prosperity have been performed.

Ancestors are typically regarded as custodians of the lives of future generations. They usually occupy a position of dignity and awe among their descendants. As living-dead, they are perceived as omnipotent, omniscient and omni-present.¹⁸ Spiritual relationships with ancestors thus provide a sense of security, anchoring and confirming their descendants' identity, sense of belonging and purpose in life.

Ecological Relations

The traditional African society raised questions through the centuries on how humans ought to live in the society to foster a sustainable ecological

¹⁸ Edwards, "HeartMath: A Positive Psychology Paradigm," 275.

community. As unsophisticated as the African society may seem there were attempts to avert some perceived ecocatastrophe in the community to keep harmony between the individual entities and the cosmic totality. Although, there is general believe among indigenous Africans that the universe was created and man became the dominant being within it, but it does not mean that man can misuse the earth; hence, it is within the purview of the indigenous African belief that humans are to act as friends and stewards of nature, respect the moral order in the universe, and prevent any form of ecological destruction.¹⁹

Perhaps, one thing should be clear, the African cosmic knowledge is not based on mythical imagination, it emanates from African experience of the universe, and has indeed enabled Africans to navigate through their environment in a sustainable manner.²⁰ This view succinctly expressed the traditional ecological knowledge; a knowledge which helped Africans in time past to preserve water supply sources, control erosion, preserve grooves and shrines, rehabilitate endangered animals, overcome drought and famine, etc.

The basic concepts of human autonomy have defined through the ages a cultural boundary that echoes strictly human triumph without due consideration of interdependency of all other existence, as they relate within the environment. The breakaway of the ecological standpoint from this tradition has historical antecedents, which saw various environmental rights and ethical movements within various cultures of the globe that seek to preserve the ecology. On its part, deep ecology breaks from the supposed 'shallow' ecological thought that seemed to impose anthropocentric boundaries, which obliged the relevance of the environment so far as all that concerns it strictly benefits humans.

^{19.} Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 56.

^{20.} Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought*, 234.

Beyond this anthropocentrism is the contemporary interests that seek to demonstrate the importance of nonhuman biological entities and the environment that make up the entire ecosystem.

Traditional Nsukka cosmology is permeated with beliefs and practices related to ecological influences on community life. As such effort is often made to avoid ecological hazards and various forms of social conflict. Indigenous healers, including diviners, doctors and faith healers are extensively consulted in order to balance and order the environment. Ordering and harmonizing ecological relationships are viewed as critical for preventing illness and promoting good health. Specific examples of disordered environmental relationships include ecological health hazard such as lightning or thunderstorm. No one must flout the cultural norms relating to the ecology. People who do not respect such norms stand much greater chance of illness and death.

This South African poem serves as a summary of what has been said. It goes thus:

Reality
A thing is itself.
But it only exists,
In relation to something else,
Therefore, life's search
Is one of relation.
In the beginning
There is relation,
In the middle,
May be integrity
At the end,
Another beginning

*Begins.*²¹

Therefore, the African position on the connection that exists between the physical and spiritual forces that embodies man's reality does not exist among humans alone. It transcends humans and ancestors to include all nonhuman animals, plants, and every other inanimate object in the universe. In the African worldview, everything is interrelated and interconnected. This is very evidence in the phenomenon of healing practices in Africa. Personal and collective healing occurs in a world of profound spiritual, communal, human interrelations and interconnectedness of everything; where plants, animals, humans, ancestors, and all creation interdependently co-exist.²²

Soteriological Concerns and Moral Praxis

A careful study and analysis of the religio-cultural practices of most tribal groups in Africa reveal that there is usually interconnectedness between the notions of salvation, morality and the conceptualization of evil. It is thus believed that the ethical values and moral practices of such societies are sustained mainly by this interconnectedness of the concepts of the afterlife, morality and evil. As such, salvation among Africans in general can be said to have been greatly influenced by the ethical value systems of indigenous African societies from the perspective of their conceptualization of evil.²³ An investigation into the worldviews of the Nsukka people reveals that this interconnectedness is firmly grounded in the beliefs and practices of the people. Ahortorthus concludes that the intersections of notions of salvation, morality and evil are couched in

²¹ Stephen Edwards, "Intuition as a Healing Modality: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 23, no. 4 (2013): 148.

²² Edwards, "HeartMath: A Positive Psychology Paradigm," 277.

²³ John Ahortor, "Salvation and Morality: The Interconnections in African Thought," *European Scientific Journal* 12, no. 26 (2016): 1857.

two moral principles: living a good life and avoiding evil.²⁴ These two moral principles must be observed simultaneously in life for they constitute the foundations of the soteriological concerns and moral praxis of the African people as the Nsukka worldview reveals.

The connection between life and death is further revealed by the beliefs of Nsukka in the 'hereafter' and other soteriological concerns. Thus, there are certain crimes, abhorred vices, and human conditions that deny the individual and perpetrators of such crimes from being buried with the ancestors or in the normal cemetery. There have in fact been instances where corpses were exhumed from the cemeteries by members of the deceased's family in order to expiate the souls of the dead and avoid the wrath of the ancestors through the haunting of the dead person. The dead of this kind are not only a threat to the living, particularly the family members, but they are not even accepted or welcomed by the ancestors to their part of the world without expiation. In other words, they are denied salvation.

As Ahorator noted, the notion of salvation is interconnected with cosmological belief in the duality of human life and this salvation can be realized in both the mundane and the hereafter.²⁵ Like the Mafi thought of Ghana, the realization of salvation in Nsukka thought is understood and explained in terms of the moral praxis of the people. Both the notion of salvation and ethical values of the Nsukka people are not explained without reference to the concept and reality of evil.

The details of the concept of evil in African thought may vary but include what in Western formulation is classified natural or physical and moral evil. Roger explains that “Natural evil occurs in the form of elemental

²⁴ Ahorator, “Salvation and Morality,” 1858.

²⁵ Ahorator, “Salvation and Morality,” 1858.

disasters and scourges, which may affect any of us and over which we have limited control.”²⁶ On the other hand, “Moral evil refers to actions undertaken to harm or exploit others in contravention of accepted moral principles or statutes within a society. These actions are subject to judgement and punishment; mitigation and aggravation; as well as repentance and remission.”²⁷ By these definitions, the bulk of what constitutes evil in society can be labeled moral evil and attributed to human agency.

Hence, most of the rituals and other daily practices of the people are meant to deal with the threat ever posed by evil to the human society. One can therefore say that the Nsukka experience confirms the postulation of Martin Riesebrodt that the core claims of religion are to “avert misfortune, overcome crises, and provide salvation.”²⁸ In traditional Nsukka worldview, the challenge of evil must be avoided if possible and all efforts are geared towards this goal; but when the people are faced with the challenge the required rituals or prayers are performed to overcome the crises; and a society free of evil is believed to abound with abundant life as expressed in the ancestral world or heaven.

In Nsukka thought, evil is generally expressed in action. However, in Nsukka metaphysics, thoughts and emotions can also be classified as evil. In this regard, ill-feeling and living in enmity with neighbours, particularly relatives, are considered evil acts. This negative behaviour could manifest as “disease of animosity” and if remedies are not provided timely, it could lead to destruction of life. While punishment can serve as corrective and deterrent measures in moulding good

²⁶ Ahoror, “Salvation and Morality,” 1858.

²⁷ E. Dovlo, “Ancestors and Soteriology in African and Japanese Religions,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 3, no.1 (1993): 53.

²⁸ Ahoror, “Salvation and Morality,” 1859.

character in society, reconciliation of estranged parties is encouraged to ensure peaceful and harmonious coexistence in the society.

The notion of salvation cannot be described as a straightforward concept in the Nsukka traditional religious and philosophical worldview. Salvation is understood to be a blissful and perfect state of humankind after death guaranteed for those who adhere to the ancestral cult and worship. The goal of the Nsukka and most Africans is to join their ancestors after death.²⁹ But the conditions that qualify the individual into ancestorhood find expression in their daily ethical behaviour and other forms of mundane existence. Indeed, there is the common belief in African traditional societies that not every person qualifies to become an ancestor after his or her death. This belief explains the different sections allotted for different categories of spirits in the hereafter.

In contrast to the ancestral home is the space for wandering spirits, the spirits of persons who could not make it to the ancestral home, mainly constituted by persons who suffered accidental deaths and those who by the cultural and moral standards of the society are considered evildoers. The image of restlessness in this part of the spirit world can be deduced from the invasion of the spirits into the mundane world for urgent expiation rituals in order for their souls to experience peace. They are reckless in threatening the lives of others, particularly their family members with the very acts which sent some of them into the predicaments they find themselves in the underworld. The notion of soteriology in African thought is therefore seen as individual and communal efforts to find place with the ancestors after death.³⁰ The significance of the ancestors and their attraction comes clear in religious,

²⁹ E. Dovlo, "Ancestors and Soteriology in African and Japanese Religions," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 3, no.1 (1993): 56.

³⁰ Ahorator, "Salvation and Morality," 1859.

cultural and social practices of the people. They have living memory; their names are mentioned in libation, prayers are directed to them, requests are directly made to them, and they are believed to be reborn into society.

This soteriological belief is captured in Dovlo's writing that “salvation also consists of joining the ancestors after death. The ancestors form a community and inclusion in that community implies salvation. In this ancestral community, individual human identity is not fully lost but through becoming part of the community, one's identity is, in a sense, preserved.”³¹ It is also in this context that attempts are made by the living to get rid of memories of persons who do not participate in the ancestral community. There is the belief that people who do not join the ancestors are condemned to 'hell' and as such are restless.

From the discourse between the living and the dead through the diviners, one can discern that the spirits outside the ancestral home experience restlessness. These disembodied spirits or 'wandering spirits' especially of victims of accidental deaths pose harm to the living until the rituals to expiate their souls are performed. Similarly, evildoers such as witches, murderers, sorcerers and those who cause abortion into the ancestral home. They also become 'wandering spirits' and even more fearful than the victims of accidental death until their souls had been expiated. Therefore, in order to maintain this unavoidable connection between the living and the dead, there is need for each individual to avoid evil and seek for the good.

Some Ethical Ideals of the Igbo and the Soteriological Goal

The key ideals of the Nsukka people are expressed in almost all cultural and social practices. They are mostly inculcated into the people mainly

³¹ Dovlo, “Ancestors and Soteriology,” 56.

through socialization processes. From childhood and about the stage of adulthood, the youth would be expected to internalize the key ethical values of the society. The initial education on ethical issues starts with parents and the family. But as the children interact in social activities, they internalize what they have been taught at home and at the same time learn others at first hand. The cultural and social practices serve as platform for exhibition and adding to the knowledge on ethical issues. The key ethical ideals of the people thus stress the need to live a good life.

The explanations of what informed the cherished values are couched in the cosmological conceptualization of life. What comes to the fore is the fact that human life is the highest value. The identification of any key ethical value is therefore conceptually influenced by firm belief and practices safeguarding the sanctity of life. The sanctity of life is primarily protected through the elimination of evil, or at least, reducing it to its barest minimum in the society. The need for any ethical value is considered on the basis of how it helps reduce evil and by so doing to promote good life.

To be sure, good neighbourliness is one of the most important ideals of Nsukka people. As a community that thrives on personal interdependence, it is normally expected of everyone to demonstrate good neighbourliness. The communal spirit or solidarity thrives on good neighbourliness through social interactions. In Nsukka thought, good neighbourliness covers the expression of love. It is also suggested that love can be directed to a particular person but good neighbourliness is a communal requirement. With good neighbourliness, one will not envy, harbour ill-feelings or have evil thoughts against others in the community. Therefore, the notion of avoiding evil and protecting life in general can be guaranteed in demonstrating good neighbourliness.

Another key ethical value of the people is truthfulness. Truthfulness is inculcated into people from infancy. The consequences of not speaking the truth can be disastrous and at times could lead to death. As such, there are different ways to exact the truth from persons suspected not to be truthful. One form is the ordeal. But in most cases persons are made to swear to prove their truthfulness. Swearing or *inu iyi* can have its own disastrous consequences. Some of the things or objects that people swear by include God, the deities, ancestors, etc. The belief is that if you swear falsely, you will be held responsible for the consequences even if it is death. Truthfulness is mostly cherished and as such lying is detested. If a person is known to be truthful person and is later accused of lying, it is very common for the family and society to jump to his or her defence. On the other hand, known or notorious liar is never taken seriously even if all evidence, for once, points to the fact that he is true.

Despite the lack of trust in untruthful persons, the society usually deals with them patiently. There are proverbs to explain the resilience of truth. One is “the truth does not hide”. The belief is that one can suppress the truth only for a period of time. The truth without any human interventions will surely come out. The truth is not imposed on people but the community is equally aware that untruthfulness can destroy life. If the untruthfulness of a person, especially bearing false witness, leads to the death of another person, the witness would be held responsible even after his or her death. The false witness could not go to the ancestral home.

Another ethical value of Nsukka people is respect. There must always be respect for the ancestors, chiefs, elders, parents, dead persons, other persons and for oneself. Apart from persons, the individual or community must have respect for sacred places and objects, authority, custom and tradition, and the rules or moral codes of the society. In the

past, persons who show gross disrespect were considered incorrigible and should be eliminated from society.

There are some of the forms of disrespect that attract fines and ritual atonement. To assault, either verbally or physically, your parents, elders, the chief or religious figures are forms of disrespect. An assault on any of these persons is considered an assault on the ancestors. Parents could disown their children for assault. If the differences between parents and children are not solved, the children at death will not have the support of the parents to be buried in the family. This development can obstruct the transition of deceased children into the ancestral home.

Another form of disrespect is the use of offensive language. Using disabilities as insults is unacceptable and regarded insult and disrespect to the disabled. The most offensive language in Nsukka thought is that making reference to genitals especially of women. It is considered not only disrespect to the individual woman but a disgrace to the dignity of womanhood in general. There are other ethical values considered very important and are seen as reinforcing the first three of good neighbourliness, truthfulness and respect. These are obedience, being responsible and industriousness. These last three are interconnected. Disobedience is the first indicator that an individual will grow to be irresponsible person in the society. Being irresponsible also means that one is not industrious.

The important ethical values of the Nsukka people are a reflection of their cosmological views on life. Human beings are believed to be participating in cosmic patterns and to keep the position in balance there should be a balanced relationship between humans and other cosmic forces. As part of keeping the balance, humans are to follow their established custom and tradition believed to have originated from the

ancestors. The efforts of the individual or the community to live a good life are geared towards fruitful living in the mundane world, which is applicable to the world of spirits. The moral codes and praxis stress this goal and to achieve this goal, one must avoid evil in all his or her endeavours. The ultimate soteriological goal is however the attempt and individual's aspiration to become an ancestor, or at least, join the ancestors in the afterlife. In the same way, moral praxis affects the realization of the soteriological goals of Nsukka people because of its interconnectedness with the tenets of morality.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the idea of interconnectedness of African world. The fact remains that the world is differently defined in different places. Therefore, African thought exists and differs from those of other parts of the world. For example, Western thought focuses generally on the visible, measurable physical reality, ignoring much of the spiritual dimension of phenomena. In Western thought, supernatural causes are often not considered to be plausible explanations for phenomena. However, in African thought supernatural causes play an important role in explaining phenomena. This is because the divine being is believed to be constantly present and acting in the universe and being manifested in different forms and resident in various created things.

Granted, the Creator has endowed man with the intellectual faculty and other powers to seek for temporal solution in the corporeal world. Yet, the knowledge of certain phenomena is beyond the reach of man. In order to penetrate it, therefore, spiritual intervention must be sought. This is why we said that African ontology is concerned with the physical world no less than the spiritual world and the forces that play a role in it. Meanwhile, the sanctity of life is the driving force in African cosmology.

Life is not totally terminated by the reality of death. To safeguard it, however, one must uphold the ethical values; one must strive to do good and to avoid evil in one's relation with the divine beings, with other human beings, and with the ecosystem. In this way, one is able to attain the soteriological goal of life, namely the attainment of ancestorhood in the afterlife.

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