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## A HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTION ON AGENT RELIABILISM IN CONCEPTUALIZING THE ONTOLOGICAL IN IGBO WORLD OF BEINGS

<sup>1</sup>Albert O. M. Ogoko

[albertusogok@gmail.com](mailto:albertusogok@gmail.com);

<sup>2</sup>Joseph M. Orji

<sup>3</sup>Donatus O. Chukwu

<sup>1, 2 & 3</sup> Department of Philosophy, Religion & Peace Studies,  
Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities,  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria

### Abstract

The perception and explanation of the sense of the moral in Igbo world arise moral principles perceived as necessarily true. The consciousness of this invariant legislating necessity is consequent upon the virtue of the subjects' cognitive capacity and sense of social responsibility. The question, however, is how to validate the perception and the veracity of the sources of our moral knowledge. What makes the percepts good and how do they legislate? If it legislates absolutely, how do we explain cognitive differences? The moral principle rests on the cognitive capacity in people's perception of what is *Good* in relation to *what* it means 'to be good' or evil in consequence to one's actions. The researcher adopted the expository, analytic and hermeneutic methods. Various moral conceptions are elucidated, their epistemic imports are subjected to critical analysis while most Igbo moral concepts are carefully interpreted to bring out knowledge of their moral value. It is important to realize that the rational Igbo person exercises his or her *noetic* acts towards intentional objects. These acts as it were, are defined, approved or prohibited by a symmetry of understanding that guides society's moral life.

**Keywords:** Igbo, Moral Order, Hermeneutics, Agent Relabilism, virtue epistemology.

### Introduction

The people of the Igbo ethnic nationality inhabit the States of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The region is bound in the North by Benue, in the East by Cross River and Rivers States, in the south by Delta State and on the west by River Niger. The people are egalitarian and enterprising and are well-travelled within and outside Nigeria. They are versatile and engaged in all works of life. The people share deep sense morality expressed as commitment to fellow human beings, the spiritual world -rooted touch with homeland and in deep ontological touch with reality.

The people have a mode of understanding in general and one that also concerns itself with moral

and ethical questions, that is, of what constitutes the moral good or bad, what is right or wrong, acceptable or prohibited, etc and how the moral agent conducts oneself with regard to these considerations. The normative assumption is that man is capable of having 'clear and distinct' 'perception' of what is true knowledge regarding the ordering of the will in all practical considerations. Epistemic habits spin from reliable cognitive powers. It is virtuous of the intellect that it is categorical, definitive and justificatory of claims to knowledge. There must, therefore, be a correlation the veracity of the knowledge acquired and the use to which it is being put to. Living in a relational world therefore, the *Nwaigbo* (Igbo son or daughter) rationalizes the perception of the sense of moral commitment and responsibility not only towards the Self but one that flows towards the larger community of persons. The reality of this consciousness is ever brought to bear on the implications of acting in an inter-subjective world which is conditioned by the social, political and economic conditioning of the mode of being. Thus, reason does interrogate the rationale for the choice of moral standards and evaluating its adequacy for addressing pertinent moral questions. Rationality in this case is not just a principle in the ordering of being. It is the ability to use the intellectual powers to perceive, conceptualize, rationalize, and to evidence in our cognitive capacity to intuit conceptual relations and to induct from common experiences in the Igbo worldviews, that there is moral knowledge that guides human actions in the Igbo world. The reference, therefore, is that the intellect is the very justification of what it constitutes, classifies and regulates in relation to man/ woman does in most of his/her motivations, like others around him/her in matters of practical considerations towards envisaged moral good.

Being rational presupposes intuitive insights into innate principles of knowledge and this includes those of the moral order. Though *a priori*, they are set out as maxims, for explanation and analysis of considerations that guide human conducts in all matters of practical questions. To the extent that this framework constitutes sets of percepts and regulates in what manner one is permitted to act in the Igbo-world and beyond, and that by set of connected arguments to explain, it suffices as a *moral order*. This conception does not imply that there is an absolute, mechanistic regulatory order impacting and imposing on all humans in a causally deterministic manner. Human beings are free moral agents, not automatons. They consciously and conscientiously choose and will to act towards perceived moral good. Thus, adduced moral principles are postulates and remain prescriptive and normative. As a matter of fact the Igbo person is a reflexive and free moral agent who acts within the purview of moral assent and conscientiousness of enabling moral order. Some questions underpin this research. Do we have such cognitive capacity to knowledge of what is morally right or wrong? How do we construe it as moral principles? If a community consists of rationally conscious moral persons, how virtuous is our faculties for such moral knowledge? How do Igbo people arrive at the idea of what is good and acceptable human behaviour as against those acts frowned at as bad or evil? How are

such percepts explained as a set of moral code? The expository, analytic and hermeneutic methods are employed here. Various concepts and conceptions are brought to the fore and explained. Certain moral expressions in Igbo language are interpreted to enhance appropriate moral and epistemic meanings from among the perplexing and symbolic nature of the language. That the Igbo is rational and moral, in symmetry with others is obvious implication of our social nature and moral responsibility towards others. This rationale imposes an obligation that things are not just left to the chaotic state. Thus, there is this over-arching implications of the the sense of moral order.

### Conceptual and Theoretical Review

The concept *moral* derives from the Latin *mores* and Greek *ethos* meaning custom or *habit*, respectively. The concept refers to consistent ways of acting as free, conscious, and deliberative moral agents.<sup>1</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that “virtue is that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise.”<sup>2</sup> In the *Protagoras*, Plato has Protagoras and Socrates argue the constitutive principle of the virtues of knowledge, courage, holiness, moderation, justice, etc as 'unique' or excellent capacities. While for Socrates, each of the virtues are “parts of excellence” Plato must have thought of them in that absolutist sense in which the universal archetype is instantiated in the material world. Hence, *justice* as an absolute reality is “a just kind of thing” participated in by moral agents. Thus, “when men act correctly and advantageously...they are controlling their actions” under the influence of 'self-control'.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to ordering human thoughts to action we must make appeal to the rational principles. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas defines the human person as an “individual substance of a rational nature.” It is definitive of human nature. According to Lillie: “we think of an action as before a judge, (and) when he has passed his judgment” we say it either *right, good, bad, evil*, etc. according to which we perceive them as conforming to or veering off from generally accepted moral norms.<sup>4</sup> The standard of morality does not rest on fleeting states of people's mind in practical considerations. Contrarily, it must be based on principle that is invariable or necessarily true and which is universal in its application.<sup>5</sup> The perception and regulation of this normative principle is characteristically definitive of the human person. Two objections are raised against the question of the existence of moral knowledge. These border on the questions of authority and freedom. The first raises concern over the “role of authority within moral thinking.” The issue presupposes that the existence of moral knowledge is dependent on an authority that imposes itself upon the less epistemic members of the community. But Thomas counters that the question

<sup>1</sup>. John P. Noonan, *General and Special Ethics*. (Chicago: Loyolan University Press, 1947), 1

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle. “Nicomachean Ethics” In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Richard McKeon (ed.). (New York: The Order Library, 2001), II, VI.

<sup>3</sup>. Plato, *Protagoras*. (trans.) B.A.F. Hubbard and E. S. Karsnofsky. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Erich Segal.(ed.). New York: Bantam Dell, 1986), 410, d- 411 e

<sup>4</sup>. William Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics*. (London: Methuen: & Co, 1961),6.

<sup>5</sup>. William Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics*, 247

of the “epistemic authority of morality... only arises when the case for and against moral knowledge has been separately decided. Whether or not there is moral knowledge does not make people authoritarian or tolerant.”<sup>6</sup> Though abysmal exercise of authority negates growth of right moral knowledge, an individual does not easily impose oneself on the community. This understanding anchors on the principle that the child communally owned( *Nwa bu Nwa Oha*). The mother gives birth to one, it is the task of the community to raise him or her appropriately. So, in Igbo whatever one is or capable of attaining draws from the community's resources, and nurturing normative principles, Thus, a worthy son or daughter who has passed through the grills and nurture can say “I am because you all had been there for me.” Since, you are, I am. But then there is a time to give back to the community. Its upkeep, security, well-being, etc requires corporate efforts.

Metz contrasts between Western and African approaches to morality. He says the former is reflective, that is based on the principle of 'self-realization' in the regulation of one's mental faculties (as we find in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachian Ethics*). The Contemporary African, on the other hand, he says, rests on the sense of “valuable nature” or “humanness” that is realized in being in communion “with other humans...and with ancestors, the morally wise progenitors of a clan who have shed their bodies.... with animals or other facets of nature.”<sup>7</sup> But this is an echo from the worn-out *Great Debate* on the existence of African philosophy. It is generally being argued in Igbo Land that what is morally good is what benefits human beings and that brings him or her happiness and contentment, dignity and respect, and prosperity. Things that bring misery, misfortune, bad name, scandal and disgrace are morally evil or bad. Basden concedes that “a very clearly defined code of moral exists theoretically” among the Igbo people and that infringement of any of the laws were severely punished.<sup>8</sup>

But how does such idea of a moral code arise among the people? Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* encapsulates sets of percepts intuitively drawn, *a priori* as form guide conducts of free moral agents in practical or moral uses.<sup>9</sup> The intellect legislates absolutely. Angeles defines 'categorical imperative' as “ the necessary and absolute law believed to be the ultimate rational foundation of all moral conducts.”<sup>10</sup> Hanna in *Kant in the Twentieth Century* explains that the concepts categorical imperative:

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<sup>6</sup>. Alan Thomas, *Value and Context The Nature of Moral and Political Knowledge*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12

<sup>7</sup>. Thaddeus Metz, An Overview of African Ethics. In Isaac E. Ukpokolo (ed.), *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*. Macmillan: Palgrave, 2017.

<sup>8</sup>. G.T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Seerly Services, 1938),34 in T.U., *Igbo Philosophy, The Philosophy of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*. Second Edition. New York: Triatlantic Books, 2010,272

<sup>9</sup>. Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, (rans.& ed., (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1998. 678

<sup>10</sup>. Peter A. Angeles, (ed.), *Dictionary of Philosophy*.(London: Harper and Row. Co. Publisher,1981), 35

...provides a universal unconditional non-instrumental reason for human action (as specified in particular unconditional non-instrumental reasons, constructed by us in particular act-contexts) in the form of a rational command.... in and of itself, does not tell us which maxims or act-intentions to form but rather only how we must form maxims in order to be morally good.<sup>11</sup>

### Conceptualizing the Good (*Qma/Nma*) in Igbo Moral Order

How do we understand the form of knowledge constitutive of the Igbo moral Order? The Igbo people make up one of the major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. The essence of interpretation is to ease understanding. The problematic is not just a complex that requires analysis. The complexes that require interpretation arise from the problem of semantic enigma of multiple meanings of symbols in used in our discourses. *Making reference to Aristotle's conception of hermeneia* as “mediating through signs our relation to things”, Ricoeur amplifies that interpretation is the “process which is at work in the text.” We would understand the *text* in the broad to include verbal statements, texts and non-verbal communicative signs. To interpret a text is to place oneself within the *sense* indicated by the relation of interpretation supported by the text.<sup>12</sup> Interpretation seeks to elucidate philosophical complexes that are ambiguous to understand. Clarifying such enables understanding. There are sets of Igbo concepts and expressions that need to be interpreted, analyzed and synthesized to bring out their meaningful relations and their normative function.

The concept *order* implies a set of ideas that define, guide, regulate, evaluate and justify responsible human actions pursuant of perceived moral good in the Igbo world. Two conceptual expressions are relevant here. The first is about the 'good' itself (*Ìhe zỌQèzỌ*). The second, (*ỌzỌ zỌQèzỌ*) is about the 'right way' to attaining the realized, objective good. Literally, the *Ìhe* means 'a thing' or 'the thing.' The *ỌzỌ* (means 'the way', and here it defines the 'manner' and 'pattern' of doing, or 'approach' to going after or about something). The *zỌQèzỌ* qualifies the former (that is, the 'thing' and 'manner of doing' or 'acting' that is right or that is acceptable). Following from the second we come up with a third concept, *àtQmatQ* which broadly but loosely defines as 'conceptualization', a thoughtful and distinct conception that relates principle to practical experience about one reality or other. Etymologically, the noun concept comes from the verb *ÌtQ*, means to put in place 'a set of valid perception of ideas and 'scope of reference' to something in relation to practical consideration. Hence, the *àtQm'atQ* articulates *a priori*, principles and justificatory conditions of how to go about moral object. The *àtQmatQ* implies a process, (*Qoro*) and which presupposes 'order' (*NhazQ*). That which is ordered comes from the

<sup>11</sup>. Robert Hanna, “Kant in the Twentieth Century” In Rutledge *Companion to Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, 2008), 156.

<sup>12</sup>. Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics Method and Reflective philosophy”, in *Phenomenology and Existentiality*. (ed.) Richard Zaner and Don Ihde. (New York: G.P. Putan's Sons, 1973), 333

verb, '*Ìha zi*', 'to arrange', or to put something or things into discernible pattern. The idea encapsulates the constitutive and regulative principles. Thus, in the conscious frame of mind about orderliness, certain actions or behaviour will be qualified as right or wrong. It can be said of one's behaviour (*agwa*), that it is good, *agwa ya (his'/ her's) di nma (is good)/ 'akparama agwa ya di nma*, (where *akparama* also means 'behaviour', 'manner of conducting oneself).

Perception of the sense of moral virtues are embedded in music, folklore, customs and festival, etc. Treasured in cultural institutions, protected by the relevant authorities and transmitted by pedagogical and legal frameworks, right use of their knowledge produce virtuous acts in men and women in the society. The moral code not only constitutes and regulates good actions, it also defined how breach of any of them are sanctioned and punished.<sup>13</sup>

What constitutes the taboos and totems in the land, offence, rewards and prohibitions are defined by the *Omenala*. The *omenala* is conceptualized to ensure that the harmony of the natural order is not violated. It is therefore, a regulative principle of action. The principle ensures reciprocity and proper balance obtains in the relationship among spirits in the spirit world, between spirits and human beings, among human persons themselves, and between them the animate and inanimate beings that constitute the Igbo world. Specifically, the *omenala* regulates conducts between men and women, between the adult and the young ones, between husband and wife, between the child(ren) and his/their parent(s), among and between the kinsmen and the outsiders. The ambience of consideration of the natural order spans from such principles relating to the ontological, existential, moral, economic and social world as webbed into the belief system. It is from the consideration of justice, balance and propriety that one accepts what one cannot change, changes the course of things that one can, being careful not to breach the natural order. Such perception will guide the reason for respect and good behaviour, diligence and hard-work, etiquette, sanitary observance, etc, knowing that things are interconnected in the ontological understanding we have of the Igbo-world-of-beings.

The *OfỌ* (from wooden *OfỌ* stick) is a symbol of justice. It is held, hence exercised and dispensed by the elders of the land, Priests, initiates and titled persons. In this dispensation all holders of *OfỌ* are the guardians and custodians of the culture, customs and traditions of the land which are articulated as the *Omenala*. Its exercise go instill justice, unity and balance in the cosmic, moral, social, natural world.

The concept *omenala / Omenani* in Igbo philosophy is a cultural matrix. Unpacking the concept is germane for understanding Igbo moral, metaphysical, and epistemological philosophies. For

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<sup>13</sup>. T.U.Nwala *Igbo Philosophy, The Philosophy of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*. Second Edition. (New York: Triatlantic Books, 2010), 275

Nwala, the concept *Omenala* or *Omenani* encapsulates as “the totality of the lore”, customs and tradition of the land held together as a “complex of beliefs and practices” which is inculcated in and imbibed by every Igbo person “as a guiding philosophy and code of behaviour.”<sup>14</sup> By means of the *Ome n' Ala* the society articulates and defines the social norms, sets of values, guiding principles to action, prescribes rewards and punishments to encourage good human behaviour and as prohibition against undesired human behaviour. What is morally good is that which receives the community's approval. What it defines as bad or evil is what she prohibits. Areji and Anyaehie understand *Omenala* as a 'social custom.'<sup>15</sup> By it the moral code of the Igbo people is constituted and defined and society enforces conformity to its rules and approval of certain behaviour. The *good* is right because the community approves of it. Is it because it is good or right that the community approves, or its rightness depends upon the approval. This is an obvious implication of a sociological definition of the moral good. However, it must be determined how it is that individual persons drive towards universalizing objective knowledge of what is right or wrong among the people? The logic of dialectics is at once at rescue against attendant view that anything cultural, customary is traditional, hence, static and unsystematic.

Good is an absolute concept. Articulation and perception of regulatory moral principles in the Igbo world arise from reliable and stable intellectual process commonly shared by all. The reliable process generates true beliefs, enables belief only of true propositions among others in the field. This reliable mechanism or process generates and maintains true belief; it amounts to cognitive virtue.<sup>16</sup>

A virtue is a habit and stable disposition to act. It is a “principle of operation.”As residing in the intellect it confers “an aptness for a good works, namely, the consideration of truth.”<sup>17</sup> The intellectual virtues are: understanding, science, wisdom, prudence and justice. Understanding is concerned with the first principles of knowledge, that is, how to attain moral knowledge. Science is concerned with the truth as known through demonstration. Wisdom helps us understand how knowledge of all truth related to and depended on the ultimate truth (that is, God attained Theology as revealed truth or in philosophy through human reason). Prudence presupposes right ends and goals and justice is guide to “human activity in choosing means to an end and making decision.”<sup>18</sup> Justice is a social moral virtue; it is the principle of proportionality. The cardinal moral virtues are: Prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Prudence perfects

<sup>14</sup>. T.U.Nwala *Igbo Philosophy*, 76

<sup>15</sup>. Areji, A. C., & Anyaehie, M. C. (2015). Igbo Traditional Morality as a Panacea to Nigerian Security Crises. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 102-108. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2015.52012>

<sup>16</sup>. John Greco, “Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology.” In *Epistemology, An Anthology*. (eds.) Ernest Sosa and Jaegwon Kim. (Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 468-469.

<sup>17</sup>. Edward, J. Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa. An Introduction and Interpretation*. (New York: Alba House, 1985), 107

<sup>18</sup>. Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa*. 107

the intellect; justice, the will; fortitude, the irascible appetite; and temperance, the concupiscible appetite.”<sup>19</sup> (108).

### **Knowledge and Igbo Sense of Morality**

An epistemological percept is a cognitive *sense*. By *sense* we understand that irreducible datum of cognitive experience. Common understanding of what propositions mean and implicate for the moral community. Choice norms of a moral community define and articulate what general conducts are to be acceptable and prohibited. The cognitive virtue arises from the categorical role of the intellect and sense organs are common cognitive capacities in normally developed human beings. The Igbo African holds no exception to this. Existence of penal law and sanctions means that the Igbo people's theoretical idea of moral code related to practical issues of what, why and how we do what we needed to do.

The quality of moral knowledge depends upon epistemic norms, moral agents' cognitive habits and intellectual response to epistemological, existential, and moral problems of the society, etc. Ultimately, these depend on the veracity of the cognitive capacities of the Igbo human person, namely: (a) *Akpa Uche* ( comprises all the intellectual abilities- to think and to think about, and to render judgement on objects of thought (*Uche*), thought itself (*EchQche*), memory, imagination and power of creative thinking, and estimation (*AkQna Uche*),etc ) and (b) *IghQa Ihe ndi OzQn' eme n'Qwa na gafe agafe* (Perceptual powers by which to experience the material world: (i) *anya* (eyes to perceive and differentiate between colours, (ii) *NtQ*(ears to perceive sounds, (iii) *Ire* (tongue to perceive tastes), (iv) *Imi* (Nose, to perceive ordour, scents),and (*AkpQkpQahQ*(Skin to receive percepts of coldness, dryness, hotness, etc). That each of the perceptual organs do receive correct or appropriate cognate senses when so applied is aptly captured in the saying: *AdQhQsQ onye QQna nnQadQhQn' ofe* (you don't tell the blind that there is no salt in the soup. The blind is only deficient in the ability to perceive colours, but not in that about the saltiness of the soup. The verb *I ghQa* literally means “to pluck”. Sense percepts are like 'plucks'. These constitute our perceptual experience of the world around us. On the other hand, critical thinking can harp on our memory experience to give knowledge. Our concern here is to explain that these cognitive powers are virtuous in generating human knowledge.

The Igbo understanding of the concept *Nma / Qma*, the good draws from perception of the nature of the God-head, *Chi Ukwu*. He is understood to be the ultimate end and supreme moral good. According to Eluwa, God is the supreme Being, *Chi ukwu* (*Chukwu*) who is also the active creative spirit, the *Chi n'eke* (*Chineke*). He creates all things and apportions to them their attributes. As creating *Chi*, “God is a sort of sculptor or potter and in his capacity as *Eke* he

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<sup>19</sup>. Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa*. 108

apportions to the created things the spirit which gives them life, character and destiny.”<sup>20</sup> The God- head, *Chi- Ukwu* endows each person a personal *Chi*. He is regarded as *Eke kere Chi*, namely, “a protective spirit, God's essence” in man which also acts as pack of destiny and as guardian angel. By the personal *eke* every Igbo person shares in the rational and 'wisdom' of divine attribute. This endowment, Eluwa attests, makes an “innocent Igbo man not to stand in awe before any deity or man.”<sup>21</sup> But then there are deities, heavenly and earthly gods and goddesses. The heavenly ones are the good spirits and share in God's attributes of benevolence. They are believed to “have influence with God for good.” Conversely, the earthly gods “are mostly regarded as capricious, mischievous and sometimes acts wickedly. Sacrifices are made to sustain the benevolence of the former and to ward off the mischief of the malevolent ones in the course of life.”<sup>22</sup> From God the temporal considerations about the self and others' flow. The concept *Uwa* as the second metaphysical concept encompasses the spatio- temporal, the conscious, material and moral domains of segmented but radically inter-penetrative and interactive world of beings. There are three spheres, the *Elu (Elu Igwe)*, the sky (atmosphere, hemisphere and stratosphere); *Ala (ani)*, the terrestrial; and *Ala Nmuo*, the spiritual, psychic and mental world. It thus makes sense that the world exists and provides the existential plane on and in which the rational and non-rational animates, inanimate and spiritual beings interact according to natural order. Morality is a social and personal function and in this respect goes beyond the perceived limitation of *customary morality* to reflective morality.<sup>23</sup> It is by acting and conducting oneself as members of a conversationally reflective moral community that the individual's moral consciousness sprouts and is incisively defined. Metz in “An Overview of African Ethics” characterized a “sharing way of life.” People engaged in cooperative projects, sought to help and cared for the others' good. For Metz these are often carried “out of sympathy” and for one's own sake.<sup>24</sup> This is explained and justified in an intrinsically interactive and symbiotic sense of moral responsibility that hold between individuals and the community to which they belong.

Conventional practices attest that there exists objective senses of the ontological and moral good, among others. The following concepts reflect this: good as right, as 'ezi *agwa/ Omume*', good conduct/behaviour, or *agwa Qna* which comes from *Qma* or *Nma*, (Goodness), *Qma* (Beauty), etc as opposed to *QjQQ* (Evil/bad), or *Ihe ruruaru*, an evil thing/ act, etc. The ideas of right, good and bad, evil exists and perceived by all that have attained the age of reason as when it said that: (a) his/her character is good (*Agwa ya di nma*), Or (b) that his/her behaviour is good or is well-behaved (*Omume ya di nma*). It contrasts with the adjective: *QjQQ* (evil, bad, etc) as in (c) his or her character is bad, (*agwa ya di QjQQ*) or still: (d) he or she is evil or that he or she is a 'bad' person:

<sup>20</sup>. B.O.N. Eluwa, *Ado-na Idu, History of Igbo*. (Owerri: De-Bonelsons Company Limited, 2008), 586

<sup>21</sup>. Eluwa, *Ado-na Idu, History of Igbo*, 587

<sup>22</sup>. Eluwa, *Ado-na Idu, History of Igbo*, 587

<sup>23</sup>. Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108f

<sup>24</sup>. Thaddeus, Metz, “An Overview of African Ethics.”, 64

*Ọ Wu/bu Onye ỌjỌỌ* A person's right or wrong acts characterize and qualify such actions as good or bad, good or evil. Such characterization stems from the moral values that the society has put in place.

### **The *AkỌna Ọche* in Reflexivity of Knowledge**

The noun concepts *akỌ* refers to 'thoughtful consideration of a material object of thought with a view to acting, *Ọche* means 'thought' in terms of manipulable 'content of the mind, the memory, while *na* is a conjunction. Thus, the conception *akỌna Ọche* reflects the sum total of one's reflective consciousness in terms of the rectitude of actions, that is, how values are to be applied to things and what implications that negative actions hold. The expression personal memory, definitive principles of reality, cogency of existential experience and the deductive torchlight of critical self-reflexivity. As such it must be distanced from *ỌnkpỌ* which means "to imagine things." The Will must be informed of the right intention, situation and means by which to carry out the desired action. About these moral determinants there should be no room for conjecture or assumption. Thus, "uprightness of moral conscience constitutes the dignity of the human person. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is noted that:

Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods: and finally judgement about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed. The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the prudent judgement of conscience.<sup>25</sup>

Moral conscientiousness is imparted through education. The family is the cradle of every moral society and the font of this education. By stern look, coercive commands, didactic folklore and other stories courage, honesty, justice, etc is taught and good character is molded. Gradually, the child is brought up to consciously apply oneself to what the parents, immediate family, kindred, and the larger society have defined as moral or immoral. Conscious reflective approach to moral questions are latter development on what were earlier accepted as moral or immoral. It is successively reflected upon and continuously re-evaluated for the truth it holds as guide to people in their daily struggle to live meaningfully. The moral percepts are enshrined in custom and tradition and under the custody of political and Spiritual leaders, Clan, Village, Community and political Heads, and the leadership in the Diaspora, Age grades, Town Union and Family Heads, etc. Everyone is subject to the regulations of the moral laws. There re laws against: murder, sexual relations- incest, defilement, rape, adultery, premarital sex; stealing and various criminal activities, OBT, fraud, embezzlement, etc. As such the virtues of integrity, honesty, hardworking,

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<sup>25</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (2015). Second Edition. Ibadan: Society of St. Paul, Part 3, Sec.1, Ch 1, Art.6., no 1780

justice, peacefulness, truth, trust, good neighbourliness, etc are encouraged and rewarded among the citizenry.

According to Nwala discourse on what one understands of expressed values are richly condensed and encapsulated in idioms, proverbs, folklore, even myth.<sup>26</sup> Thus, encased in these frames of dialectical discourse, attesting to the power of orality on text, of the priority of speech to writing, one who has come of age of reason and is nurtured by experience competently flows in the runs and logic of daily discourse. That is why a social misfit is usually chided: (i) *Onye atQ-QQu kQwara ya, ego eji luQonne ya fQ-QQhia'*. This means "when one is told a proverb and needs its meaning interpreted for him/her also, then the dowry on his or mother is wasted." The Igbo child was taught and trained early enough into reasoning age by immediate parents or forester parents, elder brother and sisters, relations, kinsmen and kinswomen. He or she was taught by discipline and exemplary behaviour what it means to be disciplined and have self-control (towards objects of interest), respectful (to all especially the elderly), responsible (in handling issues and things), dutiful, diligent and hardworking, truthful, honest, sincere, etc. It was at each stage of life an individual and communal responsibility. At each time and season this task was pursued with high sense of altruism in relation to customs and tradition of the land. It is generally said according to universal principle of common good: (ii) *Onye hQfQ OkukQn'avQQ/bQQnshQya chQQya n' QQ na amaghQonye g' ata agbQQba ya*. This means 'whoever sees a fowl scavenging on human feces should drive it away for no one knows who will eat its legs.

Commitment to the moral order is further enhanced in personal traits of responsiveness and exemplary behaviour in the society. Aristotle did observe that it is neither by nature or contrary to it that "the virtue arise in us." Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* explains that human persons are perfected by naturally "doing particularly good things and are made perfect by habitual acts."<sup>27</sup> Thus, experience provides us knowledge of the material world. We act on and crave for intentional moral objects for envisaged values. Life is full of such experiences. We learn from them and induct workable moral principles. Such inductive knowledge rests on power of emulative learning. Thus, in Igbo it is said that: (i) *Nne eghu n'ata agbara, nwa ya ana-ene ya anya n' onu*. That is, "as the she-goat chews cow-itch, the young one watches her mouth." It is a moral obligation upon the adult to teach, guide and lead by good examples and to give timely corrections to the young. Again: it said that the adult must avoid giving scandal, for: (ii) *Okenye adighi anQn' ulQewu a muQna-QgbQQ*. This means that an adult should not be there and the she-goat gives birth in tether. The moral implication therefore, is: (iii) *Ahu akaghi n'egbu Okenye, ma anu ekweghi n'egbu nwata*. What 'kills' adult is refusal give prompt correction to the young but

<sup>26</sup> Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, 276-277

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Richard McKeon (ed.). (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), II, I, 1103<sup>a</sup>, 24-25

what 'kills' the young is refusal to heed instruction or advice from the elders. 'Killing' in this case has moral undertone as unaccepted moral conduct.

To act rightly, justly, peaceably, etc, shows responsibility, usefulness and value, as it is pragmatically of the individual that he or she must, first be responsible to the self, and concomitantly to the immediate and remote community. Thus, one's moral worth in virtuous acts first, adds value to the self and then to the larger segments of the society to which the person is a member. The following expounds this: '*Madu I baru onwe ya Q̣Q̣* (one being responsible, valuable, useful, etc unto oneself). *Onye bara onwe ya Q̣Q̣bara umu Nna ya Q̣Q̣* One who acts morally responsible adds worth to self and by extension to the entire society to which he/she is a member. So, *O me nma n' emere onwe ya*, (who ever that does good does it to own moral credit). (Lillie, 64). It is by the habit of doing good acts that we learn to do good. First, doing good is good, acquiescence of its pragmatic value is next a relational \ functional value. This is the very implication of our sociability, our communalism.

The human person is an autonomous self, an ego and subject to whom responsibility of free and volitional actions can be imputed and one capable of self-reflexivity. Blackburn defines *ego* as the "thinking, active self...conceived of as the organizing and continuing subject of experience and the author of action."<sup>28</sup> The human person is not only rational in nature, s/he is embodied and is infused with an immortal nature, the soul. Extended by the *body*, he or she materially relates and interacts in the world of beings and is conscious of his or her actions and experiences in it. The Soul is the immaterial, conscious self essence of the subject that survives mortality. If a subject is to be held morally responsible, then the soul must not be held down by corruption. Igbo concept, *Obi madu* is the soul and must be differentiated from *Obi*, the mind. When qualified as "*Mkpuru obi' is the heart*". The Holy Bible does say that the soul that sins shall. The soul must be immortal to be responsible for the subject's actions and inaction in tending towards his/her temporal and supreme good.

### Conclusion

The above general epistemic principle '*Q̣ha mazQ̣Q̣*', is that generally, the 'public knows'. The conception refers to what amounts to 'common knowledge', that which is at everyone's epistemic reach. It makes sense that rationality, that definitive essence, is a necessary and sufficient condition for being human persons. As generic epistemic matrix within the Igbo world we talk about "*The doro ehQ̣na Q̣kQ̣kQ̣anya*", figuratively, that which clear and distinctively perceived even by the goats and fowls. The minimum assumption here then is that: '*The Otu Onye ma, Ibe ya makwazi ya*', meaning that *what* one person knows, another (implicitly or explicitly) knows as

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<sup>28</sup>. Blackburn, Simon *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Second Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 110.

much. This does not argue universal cognitive ability. Given variations in epistemic capacity, there is this epistemic cooperative principle among peoples. This makes sense in the case of one wise man in this midst of majority of uninformed persons. Of what value will his or her knowledge be that it cannot be shared? The assumption is that there is inter-subjectively and mutually shareable and communicable knowledge among competent cognitive agents. Thus, given this common font, every cognitive and moral agents in Igbo communities will have moral knowledge of any moral question, that it is permissive or prohibited. As a matter of fact, the expression: “Ìbe zi m ak?”, 'may my fellow enlighten me on the part of knowledge and wisdom' encapsulates the whole idea.

Thus, one is defined according to collective moral estimation in what he or she is seen do or say as mark of responsible moral agency. This responsible action contributes to building the community which, in turn, nourishes the individual. Helping to morally educate or assist individual members of your immediate family and others and you will be contributing to raising the moral tone of your community.

It can therefore, be said that operative moral principle in Igbo communities consisted of formal legal, epistemic, cultural and moral framework. This regulates things by the very efforts of individual and corporate persons that belonged to the society. The society invests in persons the sense of moral order, of value, aspiration, endeavour, responsibility, legality, etc. However, the moral agent may give up observance of moral rules, become self-centered and restrains as society moves away towards critical self-reflexivity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics*. London: Methuen: & Co., 1961), 69

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